

Dhalgren Study Guide

Dhalgren by Samuel R. Delany

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Plot Summary

The man and woman meet in a cave. She considers him to be very worldly and educated since he has traveled so much. When she asks what he would like to change in the world, he says nothing. He wants to go to Bellona. She tells him that he doesn't know who he is and that he has to be older than twenty seven if he was born in 1948. After they make love they leave the cave. She tells him to go away, so he turns and runs.

Dahlgren, by Samuel R. Delany, is billed as a city book and science fiction novel. The city of Bellona is located somewhere in the middle of the United States. It was a city of two million people until something happened. As a result, there were riots and fires and most of the population fled. The remaining one thousand people live in a lawless and anarchic society under a grey clouded sky in air that is thick with smoke. There are frequent fires and mysterious lights in the sky. One night there is both a full moon and a crescent moon.

The lack of government attracts a variety of flower children and other people to Bellona. These are people who basically have no long term goals in life and wander around living for the moment. The only kind of enforcement in the city is a criminal gang called the scorpions. People take what they want from deserted stores and houses and live in whatever deserted houses they want to live in.

This is the city that a young man with no memory of his name arrives in. Before he enters the city, he is given an orchid, which is a weapon that he wears on his wrist. He meets a man named Tak and learns about a group of people that live in a park commune. The man with no memory of his name is given the name of Kidd and the novel basically follows his explorations and activities in the city.

Kidd finds a spiral notebook in the park and always carries it with him, writing in it whenever he feels like it. Eventually his book of poems, called Black Orchids, is published in Bellona. Like almost everything else in Bellona, it is available free of charge to anyone who wants it. By this time he is a member of the scorpions and is living with them. He continues his writing with the help of Lanya.

Dahlgren is a book that is described as the groundbreaking piece of American marginal realism. The novel is lengthy and would be of interest to people who like to read science fiction.



Chapter I, pgs. 1-54

Chapter I, pgs. 1-54 Summary

The man and woman meet in a cave. She considers him to be very worldly and educated since he has traveled so much. When she asks what it is that he wants to change in the world, he says nothing. He wants to go to Bellona. She tells him that he doesn't know who he is and that he has to be older than twenty seven if he was born in 1948. When they finish they leave the cave. She tells him to go away, so he turns and runs.

He walks along the highway and finally hitches a ride from the driver of a truck full of artichokes. They don't talk much during the drive but the driver is going to Bellona. They meet other people and they talk about it being restricted in Bellona but there is not much on the news about what is happening there. They give him a weapon, a metal wrist band with blades called an orchid. They part.

He is in an alley looking for food when he hears voices. He meets a man named Tak Loufer. He tells Loufer that he doesn't know his name and that he was in a mental hospital. Loufer gives him the name The Kid. He follows Tak, an ex-con, to a park and they find his friends huddled around a bonfire and is introduced to them as Kidd. Mildred explains how they survive with their park commune. John and Tak walk off talking, leaving Kidd with Mildred. She explains how they are working on many different projects and the routine of the life they lead.

Kidd asked Milly if she was here when it happened, not saying what "it" is. She says she was a student then and decided to stay. They find a student notebook and it triggers a deja-vu experience in Kidd who asks about students riots. When Tak returns, Kidd says that he is leaving. While walking with Tak, Kidd asks about the protection racket of the group, known as the scorpions. There are plenty of empty houses where Kidd can live since there are only about one thousand people remaining in what had once been a city of two million. Kid accepts an offer to stay at Tak's house and tells Tak the story of his hospitalization and travels as they are walking.

They reach the building where they first met and climb to the roof. Tak lives in what was probably once a maintenance shack. The shack is well stocked with books, food, liquor and a short wave radio that doesn't work. Kid knew what was coming when Tak told him to undress. The next morning he dresses and leaves.

Chapter I, pgs. 1-54 Analysis

The book opens with a man who doesn't know his own name and his meeting with a woman in a cave. The reader knows that something is strange with the city of Bellona because of the innuendo. Throughout the chapter, the reader wonders what happened in Bellona. The city that once had two million people now only has about one thousand.



The houses and stores are deserted so people live wherever they want and help themselves to whatever they find in the stores. However, Mildred and Kidd talked about student riots and explosions.

Tak and the group at the park commune seem to be trying to establish some kind of society. There are talks of plans and building. There seems to be no kind of government or law enforcement.



Chapter II, pgs. 55-109

Chapter II, pgs. 55-109 Summary

As a child, he was considered an Indian. He is wandering around the neighborhood wailing and crying. He finally finds his street and his mother. His father is home for the first time in two weeks.

Back in the present, he keeps thinking that he doesn't want to be sick again. Kidd goes back to the park commune. He talks to the girl who was sleeping bare breasted the night before. She tells him that he can learn a lot from the people of the commune. She visits every few days like Tak does and says her name is Lanya Colson. Lanya tries to help him remember his family's name. Lanya gives him directions to the house of Calkins who published the newspaper and he leaves.

Kidd meets a man named Joaquin Faust who tells him about riots by blacks. Calkins had published pictures of a rape and interviewed the rapist. The riots began after the shooting of a black and a white kid. Kidd walks with Joaquin as he delivers papers and then takes a paper and wanders around the area on his own. While wandering around he meets a gang of scorpions and is knocked down by them. He is found by a Mr. Fenster and his associate and they tell him he is in a bad neighborhood and to go to the downtown area.

Lanya greets him when he returns to the park. She takes him to a bar. Tak asks him about his encounter with the scorpions and introduces him to a man named Jack. George Harrison, the rapist, is also at the bar. The group eventually went to Tak's house for a party. Kid spends the night with Lanya.

Chapter II, pgs. 55-109 Analysis

This chapter reveals more about the life in Bellona and what happened in the city. Kidd learns that there were racial problems which sparked the rioting. Some of the people came after the rioting, as Kidd learns in the bar. It is dangerous to wander around certain areas of the city because of the scorpions, as Kidd learns when he is beaten up by them. He is also warned about asking too many questions about the people and where they came from. The impression from the scene at the bar is that people come to Bellona for the same reasons that Tak did. There is no law and people can do what they want. They are people who are not interested in laying down roots.



Chapter III, pgs. 109-170

Chapter III, pgs. 109-170 Summary

The next morning, the red headed woman, Madame Brown, from the bar offers Kidd a job helping the Richards family at the Labry Apartments. Kidd washes up at the fountain then looks at the paper with its story of strange lights and the skies of Bellona along with sightings of both a full moon and a crescent moon. He tells Lanya about the job.

Kidd goes to the Labry Apartments. The Richards want an apartment on the nineteenth floor cleared. They want to move into the apartment and there is no efficient management. Mrs. Richards introduces Kidd to her family. Mr. Richards works for a systems engineering company.

They go to the nineteenth floor to see the apartment and what needs to be done. The Richards leave and Kidd begins to clean. He always carries a spiral notebook with him and he places it on a chair. As he is working, the daughter, June, comes in with a sandwich and a Coke. She had been at the bar the night before and begs him not to tell her parents.

When he finishes his work for the day, he has dinner with the Richards family. He bathes before dinner. The talk during dinner includes a discussion of colleges. As Kidd is leaving, he asks about his pay and Mr. Richards hands him a five dollar bill.

Kidd walks with Madame Brown after leaving the Richards'. She tells him about the night of the first and how she and others tried to get the patients out of the mental hospital. They go to the bar but neither Lanya nor Tak are there. Mr. Newboy, the visiting poet is there and remembers Kidd from the day he was beat up by the scorpions. They sit and talk and Kidd describes himself as a pot and then says he's only been a poet for a few days. Kidd spends the night with Madame Brown.

Chapter III, pgs. 109-170 Analysis

Kidd seems to be making an attempt to be self-sufficient when he takes a job with the Richards. This allows the reader to learn more about life in Bellona. Mr. Richards goes to work every day but there is no place where he literally works—there's just a building without any staff. They are afraid but don't leave the city. When Kidd tells Lanya that he has a job that pays five dollars an hour, she asks him what he needs it for. They don't really use money in Bellona as is shown at the bar that night. They don't accept money for drinks.

The people who remained in Bellona seem to accept the kind of life they lead, like the Richards. There is no work for him to go to, but he still goes everyday. There is little electricity in the building, but they don't leave. They just seem to be going through the motions of living without thinking.



Chapter III, pgs. 170-241

Chapter III, pgs. 170-241 Summary

Kidd arrives at the Richards the next morning to work. On the nineteenth floor, Kidd shows Mr. Richards how he put the furniture into another apartment. When Kidd asks why they remain in Bellona, Mr. Richards says his wife won't leave. After Mr. Richards leaves, Kidd resumes his work. He is upset that they are not paying what he was promised, when though they feed him.

When he finishes, he explores the floor below the Richards' apartments. The Richards are moving because of the noise. He finds a group of young people living there and they complain about the noise from upstairs. Kidd finds Joaquin Faust in the group. They talk about how there are no doctors in the city for the sick woman that is there. Kidd eats with them. The man's name is Thirteen and Nightmare from the park is also there. He is a scorpion. Faust leaves when they begin to smoke hash. Kidd picks up a poster of George Harrison on the way home.

The next day when Mrs. Richards asks why he didn't eat dinner with them, he says she doesn't have to feed him, just pay him what he was promised. She had re-worked the poem he wrote and gives him a copy. June is the girl who was photographed being raped by George Harrison, but she is still seeing him. Kidd gives her the poster and begins moving the furniture into the new apartment.

Kidd goes to the park looking for Lanya. He finds Milly and Lanya talking about George Harrison. They had talked to him about the rape. Kidd walks with Lanya after her discussion with Milly and George.

The next day Kidd returns to the Labry to complete the moving job. He confronts Mr. Richards about his wages and Mr. Richards says he will have the money that evening. Mrs. Richards is upset about the noise from downstairs. While they are talking, Bobby falls down the elevator shaft. Kidd runs downstairs to ask for help. The scorpions help retrieve Bobby's body. In the apartment downstairs, they can all hear Mrs. Richards' wailing.

Chapter III, pgs. 170-241 Analysis

Kidd is naturally curious, not nosy just curious. He is always asking people questions about their lives and what happened in Bellona. This is how the reader learns about life and events in Bellona.

Kidd talks to Mrs. Richards about leaving Bellona since she is so afraid. She won't even go out in the hall alone. Her answers don't make sense since she talks about entertaining her husband's business associates. She rambles about the lack of guards at the apartment building and how bad management is and how she is waiting for the

guards to return and take care of things. She clearly isn't thinking clearly or facing the problem of what happened in Bellona. The death of Bobby may change things.



Chapter III, pgs. 242-280

Chapter III, pgs. 242-280 Summary

Kidd finishes the moving. He writes in his notebook. Mrs. Richards wants Kidd to stay. She doesn't know how to tell her husband about Bobby's death. They are in the new apartment and he suggests that she lay down and rest for a while but she declines. She says she doesn't believe that he really works any more. She feels he wanders around an empty building. Both Kidd and Madame Brown are there when Mr. Richards arrives.

Kidd discusses what happened with Lanya. They talk about the possibility of June shoving Bobby into the elevator shaft because of the poster. Richards didn't pay him but he felt he couldn't bring up the subject then.

Lanya and Kidd walk to Calkins' house. Lanya wants him to show Newboy his poems but Kidd just wants to see where Calkins lives. They arrive at Calkins house and meet with Newboy. They see the house and discuss poetry.

Madame Brown walks into the bar when Kidd is there. He explains the new poem he is working on and asks about the Richards.

When Kidd visits the Labry, he finds the group in the apartment gone. Only the girl who was sick remains and she says the others won't be returning. He goes upstairs to visit the Richards and is introduced to some of Mr. Richards' business associates. When he asks for his money, Richards tells him he doesn't have any money to give him. He leaves without being paid.

Kidd tells Lanya what happened at the Richards' and how he gave Richards the five dollars back. They are walking to the park commune.

Chapter III, pgs. 242-280 Analysis

Kidd is upset at being swindled by the Richards. They never had any intention of paying him because they have little money. Kidd finally gives back the five dollars that they gave him and leaves. He should have been more forceful in discussing the wages with Richards before he began to work and the situation wouldn't have occurred.

Kidd wonders if giving June the poster was responsible for the death of Bobby. Did June shove him down the elevator shaft intentionally because of the poster? He discusses the situation with Lanya. There is really no way to know unless they talk to June.



Chapter IV, pgs. 281-321

Chapter IV, pgs. 281-321 Summary

Tak finds Kidd staggering in the street and takes him to the bar. They meet Fenster in the bar and they discuss the situation in Bellona. Fenster says he is no longer living with Calkins but is now living on Jackson. He tells them there are real problems on Jackson. Fenster tells them that George Harrison is the only one he's met who has read the articles about the riots. Kidd adds that the Richards read them but didn't recognize June.

Kidd is introduced to Jack, who also writes poems. Frank also writes poetry and they talk about writing and publications. Kidd has lost his notebook and they thought the one they found in the park was his, but it wasn't. As they leave, Newboy enters. Newboy has told Calkins about Kidd's poetry and Calkins wants to publish them. Kidd says he wants to call his poems Brass Orchids.

Later, Kidd talks to Lanya about the discussion in the bar and tells her that he saw John cut Milly's leg with his orchid. Lanya tells Kidd about her days in New York and her mental block against painting. She finally destroyed all of her paintings. They eventually fall asleep and when they awake, a group of scorpions is there. Lanya had a relationship with Kidd. The scorpions eventually leave. Kidd puts on his orchid and his chains. Lanya was already gone when he left.

Kidd goes to the public bathroom and finds Pepper, a sick scorpion. He tells Kidd about a fight between Nightmare and Dragon Lady. Kidd tried to find out what is wrong with Pepper. He finally leaves the restroom and looks for Lanya and can't find her so he tries to help Pepper find Bunny. They find Bunny and Pepper introduces them.

Chapter IV, pgs. 281-321 Analysis

From the discussion in the bar, it is obvious that not too many people in Bellona have read any outside information about the riots. They don't seem to talk much about the riots or seem too interested in them or the problems in Bellona. They just go on with their own lives.

There is the possibility of Calkins publishing Kidd's poetry. Publication was the last thing he was thinking of when he wrote the poems. The poems were just a way of his expressing himself. It was Newboy who told Calkins about Kidd's poetry and how it related to Bellona. This is what caused Calkins to become interested in the poems.



Chapter IV, pgs. 322-384

Chapter IV, pgs. 322-384 Summary

Kidd meets Bunny and sees where she and Pepper live. There is a black curtain that separates their quarters from the bar. They talk about the scorpions, which Bunny says is the only enforcement organization in the city. They think that Nightmare and the scorpions are going to hit a downtown department store.

Kidd walks around looking for Lanya. He hears a sound and finds it is a bus. The driver lets him on without any money. He looks at the scenery as the bus drives, having no idea where he is going. He gets off the bus when he sees the sign, Emboriky's, the department stores where the scorpions were supposed to be. Kidd finds Nightmare who shows him a man with a rifle in an upper story window. When they find he learned from Pepper that they might be there, they decide to let him come with them.

The group enters the store. Kidd loses his remaining sandal in a scuffle with a woman with a gun. He saved Denny's life. Denny finds a pair of boots for Kidd. They grab a few other things and jump on a bus to leave.

Kidd goes to Reverend Taylor's to eat and finds Newboy there. Newboy says he is leaving Bellona in the morning and shows Kidd a sample of Kidd's Black Orchids book. The poetry is printed in black ink on black paper and must be held up to the light in order to read it. Kidd has to proofread the pages. The book contains the journal sections from the spiral notebook that Kidd found and he tells Newboy he didn't write them. They discuss poetry for a while and then Kidd says he doesn't think he will write again.

After Newboy leaves, Kidd finds George Harrison in one of the rooms. They talk and George tells the Kidd to visit him in Jackson sometime. Lanya arrives as George leaves. Kidd tells Lanya about his days and learns that she has found a house to live in. It has been five days since she has seen Kidd. The commune has moved to a safer place Lanya says then were all looking for him. Kidd has had a memory lapse of several days.

Kidd talks to Tak about his missing five days. When he leaves Tak, he walks to the bridge and thinks about leaving Bellona.

Chapter IV, pgs. 322-384 Analysis

While looking for Lanya, Kidd meets Pepper and Bunny and joins the scorpions in robbing a department store. When he finds Lanya, he learns that he has been missing for five days and people have been looking for him. He has no memory of those five days. Lanya is not sure that she wants to continue their relationship. She doesn't like his involvement with the scorpions and won't tell him where she has moved to. She was the one constant in his life and she may be gone now. Kidd has to deal with this in addition

to the memory lapse. He begins to wonder if he is crazy. He knows that he has broken a link.



Chapter V, pgs. 385-443

Chapter V, pgs. 385-443 Summary

Kidd wanders the streets wondering if he is hallucinating. He is terrified that he is mad again. He wanders into Denny who tells him that everyone has moved around. They go into the house to Denny's room where Kidd spends the night. He awakens and goes out to talk to the scorpions. The scorpions have found a warehouse of coffee so there is hot coffee for everyone.

Lanya arrives and wants to talk to Kidd so they go to Denny's room. She has his notebook. Denny and another girl come in and they have a group sex session. Kidd awakens before the others and begins to write in his notebook. When Lanya awakens they sit and talk. Denny shows Lanya the items he has found when robbing various stores and houses.

When Lanya and Kidd go outside, the sky is full of smoke. The other scorpions join them outside and they all try to figure out what they are looking at in the sky.

They have to roam the streets and break into the house, chasing the occupants out. Lanya is upset with them. She asks Denny to walk her home.

Chapter V, pgs. 385-443 Analysis

Kidd is afraid at the beginning of the chapter. He wonders if he is hallucinating and going crazy. When he runs into Denny, Denny takes him home to where some of the scorpions live. Lanya finds him and gives him his notebook. After group sex, they break into a house and have another session and Lanya asks Denny to walk her home. These are people with no structure or purpose in life. They don't have anything to work for and wander from place to place. The reader has to still wonder what happened in Bellona.



Chapter V, pgs. 414-503

Chapter V, pgs. 414-503 Summary

Kidd returns to the scorpion's house with them. Denny returns and tells Kidd of his experiences with Lanya. Nightmare and the others tell how they watched the fire in the city as they eat. Kidd wants Denny to show him where Lanya lives but he won't. Kidd goes to the bar looking for Lanya.

AT the bar, people are talking about what they saw in the sky. None of them knows what it was. They are talking with Captain Kamp who used to be with the space program. Kidd tells them how the light awakened him. He mentions the possibility of radiation. They all agree that something happened that day.

Kidd leaves the bar with Tak. They go to a deserted bookstore but all the shelves are bare except for the copies of Black Orchid that have been placed on the shelf. Tak has Kidd autograph a copy of the book for him. They part outside and Kidd goes to Jackson Avenue.

Kidd sees a group of people including a man named Glass and learns about a sniper shooting. At the Reverend Taylor's, they find a group of people. They talk to George Harrison about June and say that she killed his brother for him. Some of the people there are familiar from the department store robbery. When Kamp arrives, Kidd introduces him to Glass.

Back at the next, Kidd and Milly talk about a fight that occurred. After talking with some of the others, he decides that he wants to write another book of poems. When he sits down to write, he finds he has nothing to write. He wakes Denny and says he wants Denny to take Kidd to Lanya's Denny agrees.

Chapter V, pgs. 414-503 Analysis

Kidd is obviously very upset about Lanya, especially when Denny returns from Lanya's and won't tell him where she is living. Lanya didn't break it off completely with Kidd but she made it clear that she makes up her own mind and will see others when she wants to. This seems hard for Kidd to accept.

Lanya brought him the notebook that he had left behind at Reverend Taylor's. He decides that he wants to write another book of poetry but when he tries, he finds he has nothing to say.

There is a lot of talk about the strange celestial event. Nobody seems to know what it is and whether or not it is dangerous. Kidd is the one who mentions the danger of radiation. The air is always smoky and the sky is grey. It is unclear why there is no communication with the outside world.



Chapter VI, pgs. 503-551

Chapter VI, pgs. 503-551 Summary

Kidd and Denny are walking to Lanya's, Denny points out where Lanya is living. Madame Brown answers the door when Kidd knocks. Lanya is sleeping and they wake her. They talk about different things like poetry and capital punishment. Lanya decides she wants to go out for a walk. She has the galleys of Kidd's book that she received from Newboy and gives them to him.

While walking to the school where Lanya teaches, they see the blond Mexican who Kidd had met by the bridge. He is deaf and dumb. They talk about what it is like to be blind. The school Lanya teaches at used to be a clothing store. Lanya takes them inside. She teaches children age seven to nine. She has taped herself playing the harmonica and lets them listen to the tape. Lanya is thinking of calling the piece 'Diffraction.'

They go back to the house and find Madame Brown doesn't even know they went out. Kidd invites them to the party Calkin's in giving in honor of his book. The people from the nest will be there. Madame Brown tells Kidd that Lanya has told her about Kidd's problems and asks if he wants to have a professional session with her. He agrees.

After Madame Brown leaves, they look at the notebook with the list of names. Then Lanya asks them to leave because she has things to do.

Denny and Kidd meet some of the scorpions carrying some of their belongings. They say they have to move because the whole block burned. They saved what they could. Denny finds one of them has some of his belongings. The group finds a house and moves in. Kidd has his own room. He asks Denny to describe the place where they were living because he can't remember it.

They cook dinner and eat, and Pepper joins them for dinner.

Chapter VI, pgs. 503-551 Analysis

Kidd, Lanya and Denny seem to have a strange relationship. Kidd seems to push Denny on Lanya and Lanya seems to taunt Kidd when she is with Denny. In some ways, Kidd seems to be trying to cling to Lanya. He is interested in Lanya and her work, yet he doesn't say that he wants her back.

Madame Brown has heard of Kidd's memory problems from Lanya and invites him to a therapy session which he agrees to. Kidd doesn't want any long terms therapy even though he probably needs it. Since he was so worried about being sick again, he should try to work with her.

The block where the nest was burns and the scorpions move to another house, much bigger and nicer than the other one. The move doesn't seem to set well with Kidd. He suddenly can't remember the old house. His memory problems seem to be increasing in severity.



Chapter VI, pg. 551-594

Chapter VI, pg. 551-594 Summary

Tak tells Kidd that he won't be going to the party. He is out trying to find a dress for Lanya. Tak mentions that he was up early and saw the fires again. They find the Maitland Systems Engineering Warehouse where Mr. Richards worked and walked in. They roam around looking at the contents of the different cartons. They help themselves to what they want, including material that can be used to make a dress for Lanya. The two men leave the warehouse and go to Tak's for a drink.

Back at the nest, Kidd breaks up a fight between some of the scorpions. When Kidd goes outside he finds June who is looking for her brother Edward. Kidd brings her inside the house so she can look at the people. She finds her brother. June says she is worried about her parents. Her mother is sick and her father disappears for several days at a time. She wants Eddy to come home and take them away. He refuses, saying that he likes being a scorpion.

Lanya arrives as June leaves. She tells Kidd that she will do his laundry. They sit around and talk and he tells her about the June Richards visit and the fight. Lanya doesn't like the new house and feels that it is too crowded. Lanya, Denny and the Kidd have group sex again.

One of the girls from the park arrives to tell them where she and a bunch of girls are living. Where she leaves, the three eat. Thirteen arrives to tell them where he is living. Denny and Kidd go out with Lanya and spend the night at her place.

Kidd joins the scorpions in breaking into a bank which they vandalize. The act was reported in the newspaper. It is the day of the party honoring Kidd and he is asking different scorpions if they will come to the party.

Chapter VI, pg. 551-594 Analysis

Kidd still has the strange relationship with Lanya and Denny. He has become a scorpion now and goes on raids with them. Kidd changed after ending his relationship with Lanya. They now seem to be friends but their sex always includes Denny. It can be said that Kidd is doing what he has to to survive with the scorpions. He has to have a place to live and a way to eat. He has adopted their life style and become one of them.

June Richards realizes her family is in trouble and tries to get her older brother Eddy to help. However, Eddy is a scorpion and likes the lifestyle. He too had to find a way to survive in Bellona.



Chapter VI, pgs. 594-651

Chapter VI, pgs. 594-651 Summary

On the way to the party, Kidd and the scorpions stop to pick up Lanya and Madame Brown. They talk as they walk to the Calkins house. The house is bright with lights and Kidd wonders where they get the electricity from. Inside they are introduced to Ernestine Throckmorton and others. Kidd wisied that Tak was at the party. Kamp tells them about some experiments he was involved in on sensory deprivation. It was part of the space program.

They walk around the gardens and talk with different people. A man named Frank had lost a spiral notebook and somebody showed him Kidd's notebook with all of the poems in it. He keeps bringing up the fact. Kidd begins to wonder if he wrote or rewrote the poems when they hear a scream in the garden. A fight had broken out and they separate them and settle everyone down.

The party hose, Roger Calkins, never appeared at the party. As the group leaves, Kidd tells the staff to thank Calkins for the party. The scorpions return to their nest. Kidd goes to check out a fire he had seen from Calkins' house. He meets George Jackson there and learns the fires were set by blacks. They wander around looking for people trapped in the fires.

Chapter VI, pgs. 594-651 Analysis

The party for Kidd's book takes place and many of the scorpions attend. The host of the party, Roger Calkins, does not attend. The party goes off rather smoothly except for one incident where a fight occurred. It was quickly broken up. A man named Frank had lost a notebook and somebody had shown him a copy of a notebook full of poems. He recognized them in Black Orchids. He doesn't accuse Kidd but very strongly suggests that maybe the poems weren't Kidd's. Kidd's memory is so bad that he begins to wonder if he wrote the poems or reworded what he found.

Apparently, many of the fires are being set by black gangs. Kidd learns this from George Jackson who says that they will all end up starving.



Chapter VII,. Pgs. 651-701

Chapter VII,. Pgs. 651-701 Summary

This chapter begins with edited versions of a journal. The journal selection discusses the scorpions and Lanya returning the notebook to Kidd. She takes the poems he writes and keeps them at her home. The other scorpions are reading the paper. The articles is about the popularity of Black Orchids.

A letter discusses why a resident of Bellona says he will not read the poems. The writer of the letter says he knows he will meet the author. The letter is signed by Roger Calkins. Kidd goes on writing and remains living at the nest. The scorpions are sitting around talking with Tak about the kind of people that can and can't live in Bellona. They discuss sex.

The next morning, the scorpions talk about who they slept with the night before.

The editing reaches the writing of the last full blank page. Kidd has filled all of the pages and empty spaces in the book. Sometimes he remembers writing the passages. There are some passages that he doesn't feel he wrote.

The scorpions fix the plumbing in their house.

Chapter VII,. Pgs. 651-701 Analysis

This is a strange chapter to read. There are clips with contents from a journal with letters and other item. The lines of the story are printed along side the edited journal transcripts. This occurs on and off throughout the entire chapter. These are also notes, poems and thoughts from the author.

The other part of the chapter, the non-excepts, is just about conversations of the scorpions. The reader learns that Lanya frequently visits to collect the writings of Kidd. Kidd still has his memory problems. He remembers writing some of the passages and doesn't remember others.

All of the characters seem to have settled into their routine of life.



Chapter VII, pgs. 702-751

Chapter VII, pgs. 702-751 Summary

In the excerpts, the author discusses his problem of deciding which incidents occurred at what time. He talks about visiting the museum with Lanya. Kidd is impressed by her knowledge and says she is a real person to him. They had an argument with Denny.

Frank comes to talk to Kidd. He wants to join the scorpions. The situation at the park commune is changing and he is looking for a place to go. Kidd says that he is too busy to talk to him. There is a commotion outside the house that attracts Kidd's attention. He breaks up a fight between the scorpions. He comments on how Copperhead always seems to be involved in the altercations.

Kamp asks a group of people if they know the date. He says the date coincides with the position of the planets. They are viewing the sky with a telescope. The group discusses other countries and who has visited which countries. Kamp, the former astronaut, describes being on the moon as like being in Bellona. You don't know anything about it even when you are there. He says that it is time for him to leave Bellona.

Kidd tells Lanya and Denny that Calkins asked him about the authenticity of the poems. Lanya says she showed Frank the notebook when he came to visit. She tells Kidd that there are some people in Bellona who consider him to be important and are interested in him.

Kidd keeps telling himself that he has to find something else to do, but he doesn't. He does say that most of the poems were written before he moved in with the scorpions.

Kidd rides the bus to the monastery. He finds that people aren't encouraged to wander around there. Calkins is there and Kidd wants to see him. Calkins agrees to see him and they talk for a while.

Chapter VII, pgs. 702-751 Analysis

This section also has pages with excerpts and poems. From one of these excerpts, the reader learns that Kidd's relationship with Lanya is changing. He is impressed by the knowledge she exhibits at the museum and now says he views her as a real person. The impression is that he didn't view her as a real person but as an object up until this time.

Kidd learns that he is viewed as an important person in Bellona. Lanya tells him that there are many people who are interested in him. Kidd doesn't feel that he is important and he doesn't feel that he is the leader of the scorpions, even though that is the impression the reader gets. They seem to listen to him, especially when he breaks up

fighters. For Kidd, things changed when Bobby Richards fell down the elevator shaft. That was the only time that he felt he was a leader.



Chapter VII, pgs. 751-801

Chapter VII, pgs. 751-801 Summary

There is a discussion of Kidd and his leadership role over the scorpions. The book he has supposedly written is popular. Kidd says his life in Bellona is like a book full of mysteries that will be revealed at the end.

Kidd learns of a sniper shooting at the bank and that Paul Fenster was shot. They don't know if he is dead. He also learns that all of his latest writing were destroyed in a fire. He says it doesn't matter because he didn't like them anyway. They know there will be riots because of the Fenster shooting.

Kidd is calling out for Lanya. He arrives at Madame Brown's for his appointment. She asks about his hospitalization and he begins to cry. He tells her that he thinks he is going crazy and that he doesn't want to and that he is scared. They discuss his memory lapses and she explains the physiological reactions that cause these problems. She tells him that since they are in Bellona, there are no hospitals for him to go into as there would be in other places.

On the way out he takes some of Newboy's works, saying Lanya will return them. He returns to the nest. Denny has been helping Lanya at the school. The three of them watch the fires then to to Tak's. There are a lot of people running in the streets. Somebody is shouting about planes. There were no bombs, just gunshots. They run toward the bridge. While leaving Bellona, they meet other people who are entering the city.

Chapter VII, pgs. 751-801 Analysis

This chapter reveals Kidd's session with Madame Brown. He says he is afraid of going crazy but he doesn't want more hospitalization. She tells him that isn't possible in Bellona and explains the physiological reasons for his problems. When he leaves, he takes some of Newboy's works with him. He wants to read Newboy.

Because of the shooting at the bank, they know there will be more riots. Kidd is with Denny and Lanya when they being and Lanya makes the comment that the place won't be there in the morning. Kidd is somehow separated from them and meets some of the scorpions. The group of scorpions runs toward the bridge and out of Bellona. They meet a group entering Bellona and given them their weapons. Most of them have plans of where they will go.



Characters

Kidd

Kidd was born in upstate New York in 1947. He has no memory at the beginning of the book. He was released from a mental hospital and went to Bellona. While wandering the streets he meets Tak Loufer who gives him the name Kidd. His mother was a Cherokee Indian who dies when Kidd was fourteen. He received a scholarship to Columbia University, which he lost after his first year. He suffered a nervous breakdown before the end of his first year.

His father had been in the Air Force and then a private pilot. After his release from the Hillside Hospital he traveled around working to pay his way. Kidd had traveled to Mexico, Japan, Australia and Central America. He is still more or less wandering and is in fear that he will become sick again. Kidd lived in the park commune for a while with Lanya. When she moved into a house and wouldn't commit to him he moved in with the scorpions and began making hit runs with them. He writes a book of poetry that Roger Calkins publishes and he becomes well known in Bellona. When he began to have anxiety attacks and memory lapses, he has a session with Madame Brown who explains the physiological aspects of it to him. He is with Denny, Tak and Lanya at the end of the book when the riots begin. He apparently becomes separated from them, meet some the scorpions, and runs across the bridge and out of Bellona.

Tak Loufer

Tak Loufer is a young black man who meets Kidd on a street in Bellona. He gives him the name of Kidd when he discovers the young man has been in a mental hospital and doesn't know his name. Tak takes Kidd to his group in the park and introduces him to the other people. Tak who is an industrial engineer lives in a former maintenance shack on the roof of the building where they first met. Tak is a homosexual who is into sado-masochism. He doesn't live with the group but visits every few days. His shack has a collection of books and a short wave radio that he can't get to work. He works with John and the group on a variety of projects and designs plans for them.

Tak is known as the Iron Wolf. He came from Helmsford which is about twelve miles from Bellona and came to Bellona after the riots. Loufer likes it there because there are no laws to follow or break. Because of this, it represents freedom to him. He considers the danger of the city to be a form of protection. He had served time in prison for public indecency and left the project he had been working on in Helmsford to come to Bellona. Take explains the scorpions protection racket to Kidd and a little about life in the city. Tak, Denny and Lanya are separated from Kidd at the end of the book when the riots being.



Lanya Colson

Lanya Colson is part of the group at the park commune. She goes there every few days. Lanya is twenty-three years old and attended Sarah Lawrence and had a scholarship to the Art Students' League in New York. She has a relationship with Kidd which evolves into a threesome with Denny. She begins a school for children in Bellona after she moves in with Madame Brown. At the end of the book, she is separated from Kidd during the riots.

Madame Edna Brown

Edna Brown is a vacationing psychologist who Kidd meets at the bar. She arranges a job for him at the Labry Apartments where she has her office. Madame Brown eventually becomes Lanya's roommate and sees Kidd in a professional session when he has memory lapses.

Ernest Newboy

Ernest Newboy is a famous poet who visits Bellona and stays at the house of Calkins. He had been born in Auckland, New Zealand in 1916 and educated in England and had taught in New Zealand and Australia. He had received three Nobel Prize nominations. He had traveled widely. Newboy eventually leaves Bellona.

Denny

Denny is a member of the scorpions. He talks them into letting Kidd come with at the department store robbery and Kidd saves his life. Denny is a homosexual but becomes involved in threesomes with Kidd and Lanya. He is with Lanya and Tak at the end of the book.

Mildred Fabian

Mildred is a red head in her twenties. She lives with the group in the commune in the park and is introduced to Kidd by Tak. She is originally from Ohio and came to Bellona to attend the state university. She loves music.

Nightmare

Nightmare, whose real name is Phil, is a member of the scorpions. He also stays at the park commune at times and then moves into a house which Kidd eventually moves into.



Joaquin Faust

Joaquin Faust works at the newspaper. He tells Kidd what he knows about the riot. He had come to Bellona from Chicago and San Francisco where he sold newspapers.

George Harrison

George Harrison is a black man who was photographed raping June Richards during the riots. He is somewhat of a celebrity in Bellona.



Objects/Places

Bellona

Bellona is a city in middle-America.

The Park

The park is the place in Bellona where a group of people live communal style.

Tak's House

Tak lives in a former maintenance shack on the roof of a deserted building.

Jackson Avenue

Jackson Avenue is in the area of Bellona where the majority of blacks lived.

The Bar

The bar is a gathering place in Bellona, where all drinks are free.

Labry Apartments

The Labry Apartments is a high rise apartment building in Bellona where Kidd works for the Richards.

Calkins House

Calkin is the newspaper publisher and has a house where visiting 'dignitaries' stay.

Emboriky's

Emboriky's is a downtown department stores that Kidd and the scorpions rob.

The Nest

The Nest is the name given to the houses where a group of scorpions live.

Lanya's House

Lanya shares a house with Madame Brown and it is a place where Kidd and Denny visit.



Themes

Curiosity

Curiosity is one of the most relevant themes of the book. What happened in Bellona? This is what Kidd is trying to find out as is the reader. Kidd is naturally curious about the city and the people he meets. He wants to know the background of the people he meets and why they came to Bellona. Several times he is warned about asking too many questions, such as during his meeting with Joaquin Faust. Faust tells him that the kind of people who come to Bellona don't like people who ask too many questions. However, Kidd remains curious about the city and its people. He wants to know what happened in the city and what experiences the people had.

When he works for the Richards, he wants to know why they don't leave the city, Mrs. Richards is too afraid to go out into the hall of their apartment building alone. Kidd is curious enough to talk to her about why. Kidd's curiosity is strong enough to cause him to wander around the city viewing the devastation that has occurred. He wanders on foot asking directions to the places he wants to go to or by bus, when he finds one. This is how he is first beaten up by the scorpions and then joins them in robbing the department stores. The curiosity is evident in the many discussions that occur throughout the novel.

Anarchy and Lawlessness

Another theme of the book is anarchy and lawlessness. Whatever it is that happened in Bellona, there is no government or government services of any kind. The infrastructure of society has broken down. There is no law enforcement, fire department or anything else in the city. For the most part, there is little money in circulation as there is not much need for it. The remaining people help themselves to what remains is the deserted stores and houses. They find a place they like, they move in. The few businesses that remained are robbed frequently and have armed guards with rifles. The bar functions without the use of money.

When people need something, like when Lanya needs a dress for the party, they rummage through the deserted buildings looking for what they need. When a building burns, people grab whatever belongings they can and find another place to live, as the scorpions did. They don't have to worry about paying rent. The remaining population that had jobs before the event, still report to those jobs, like Mr. Richards does, even though there is no work and no salary. They are basically acting mechanically, not being able to accept the situation. There is no contact with the outside world in anyway. The radios and television sets pick up nothing but static. Most of the people, like Tak, associate anarchy with freedom.



Survival

Survival is another dominant theme of the book. Those living in Bellona must find a way to survive. There is no functioning government and no services of any kind. Since almost all of the population has fled, there are many deserted buildings and stories. People live where they want. Those wanting to live out of doors, live in a park commune. Food, liquor and other things come from deserted stores and buildings. The people help each other with good, offering to share what they have with others. When Kidd had his five day memory lapse, he showed up at Reverend Taylor's saying he was hungry and asking for food. She didn't hesitate to feed him.

Survival in Bellona meant carrying a weapon for protection. Kidd was given his orchid by a group of people before he entered the city. He always carried it with him and used it when he had to because it was the way to survive. People never knew when they were going to be attacked. They never knew when there would be fires and they would lose the few belongings that they had. Survival meant helping one another and doing what they had to do to stay alive.

Style

Point of View

Dahlgren is written in the first person point of view. The narrator is the main character, Kidd and the reader sees and experiences Bellona through Kidd. Since Kidd is naturally curious, the reader learns a lot about the city, characters and their experiences from Kidd's questions and experiences and discussions. The reader is really not limited by the use of the first person. The usual limitation of the first person is that the knowledge of the reader is limited to the knowledge of the narrator since the reader is not privy to knowledge of events that happen away from the narrator. While this is somewhat true in Dahlgren, Kidd's curiosity basically overcomes this problem. There is also plenty of dialogue in the novel which allows the reader to become acquainted with the main characters. The use of the first person is appropriate for the novel because it contributes to the atmosphere of marginal realism which the author is trying to create.

Setting

The setting for the novel is the mythical city of Bellona. There is no state given for the location of the city except that it is located in the middle of the United States and it is entered by a bridge. Except for the opening scenes of the novel, where Kidd is traveling to Bellona, all of the action takes place in various locations in the city. There is Tak's house which is a converted maintenance shack located in the roof of a deserted building. The park is also a setting for some of the action since there is a commune with a group of people living there. There is the Labry Apartments where Kidd works for the Richards and meets a group of scorpions. The Bar is a meeting place for many people and the drinks are free. The scorpions live in various houses that are known as the next. There are also scenes at Calkin's house as well as Lanya's residence. There are also scenes at the department store, bank, bookstore and the Maitland Warehouse. Other settings are Jackson Avenue and other places in the city as Kidd travels around.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of the novel is everyday English but the novel is full of similes and metaphors. There are many places where there are various constructs like looking through a red veil, blood colored light and a sky as thick as cheese. Terms like these occur on almost every page. These constructs add to the atmosphere of marginal realism in the novel. They give the reader the eerie feeling that the realism of the city feels like in a city with a sky that is always thick and grey and the air is always smoky. There are also the mysterious lights and all of the fires that the people talk about. The language of the book helps create this feeling of mystery and eeriness that the people of Bellona live in and this is the author's purpose in using these kinds of constructs and



his style of writing. The reader would experience the same feeling without the use of these kinds of terms.

Structure

The structure of the book is rather complicated. The book consists of seven chapters. This is many divisions for a book over eight hundred pages. The chapters all have titles and there are many different sub divisions within the chapters which jump around from topic to topic. This makes the book difficult to follow in some places. The final chapter of the book has a very strange arrangement with edited galleys, poems and other correspondence presented side by side with the text of the story. The reader basically has to read them separately and it breaks the continuity of the story. In spite of this, this strange structure fits the book and adds to the mood of the novel.

There is a Table of Contents and Foreward at the beginning of the book. In the Foreward, William Gibson states that Dahlgren was not written to be understood or solved and this is definitely the feeling that the reader has.



Quotes

Very few suspect the existence of this city: it is as if not only the media but the laws of perspective themselves have redesigned knowledge and perception to pass it by. Rumor says there is practically no power here. Neither television cameras nor on-the-spot broadcasts function: that such a catastrophe as this should be opaque, and therefore dull, to the electric nation! It is a city of inner discordances and retinal distortions. (Chapter I, pg. 14)

What we are concerned with is more insubstantial. I do not know. It is as simple as that. For the hundredth time, I do not know and cannot remember. I do not want to be sick again. I do not want to be sick. (Chapter II, pg. 60)

And what have I invested in interpreting disfocus for chaos? This threat: the only lesson is to wait. I crouch in the smoggy terminus. The streets lose edges, the rims of thought flake. What have I set myself to fix in this dirty notebook that is not mince? (Chapter III, pg. 156)

I've got to tell them, he thought, that I know it. At least ask them why they're not paying me what they said. Of course they didn't say it to me. Not that I need the money, even... That made him angrier. (Chapter III, pg. 177)

That means it's the landscape: the bricks, and the girders, and the faulty wiring and the shot elevator machinery, all conspiring together to make these myths true. And that's crazy. (Chapter III, pg. 249)

Thus God-damn city. If you wanna stay drunk, it sure is the place to come. You can buy drinks at the God-damn bars and you don't have to pay no money. Or anything. And anyplace you go, people always got stuff to smoke or to drink. (Chapter IV, pg. 249)

I really think scorpions are perfectly fascinating. You're the only really effective enforcement organization in the city. (Chapter IV, pg. 221)

I am mad again, he thought. Tears brimmed. He swallowed in a tightened throat. I don't want to be. I'm tired, I'm tired and horny, I'm so tired I can't make sense out of any of it and my mind won't work right half the time I try. (Chapter V, pg. 385)

Maybe it was our sun, hurtling by, on its way somewhere else; and all that's left to use now is to grow colder and older, every day in every way, gracefully as possible. How long did this light last? Oh, my poor, sick, doomed, and soon to be obliterated children, ask instead how long is the darkness that follows it! (Chapter V, pg. 470)

Lanya's told me about some of the things you were feeling, and how upset you'd been. And about your memory problems. If you'd like to talk about them with someone, I'd be very happy to. (Chapter VI, pg. 527)



I come. I go. Rather than going, though, I'll stay. This cage seems too easy to flee. Is that what keeps us here? To leave the city: That is the thought that makes me weak in the small of the back and watery in the mind, so much so that it is easier not to remember it once the thought is past. (Chapter VI, pg. 572)

You know, guys who come to parties like this in berets and talk about liberating the furniture: Now I'm pretty into that. But I guess that type all had sense enough to get out of Bellona while there was some getting. (Chapter VI, pg. 612)

It is not much consolation that the powerful are most successful as patrons when least in evidence. I am concerned with what I presumptuously consider by City. I have always felt every society must have its art; and for that art to have ultimate use, it must be free of intimidation from the centers of power. (Chapter VII, pg. 658)

The illusion of an ordered social matrix is complete, but it's spitted through on all these cross-cultural attelets. It is a vulnerable city. It is a saprophytic city - It's about the pleasantest place I have ever lived. (Chapter VII, pg. 668)

I've lost a name. So? If the inhabitants of this city have one thing in common, it is that such accidents don't interest them; that is neither lauded here as freedom nor wailed as injury; it is taken as a fact of landscape, not personality. (Chapter VII, pg. 699)



Topics for Discussion

How does Kidd get the name of Kidd? Why didn't he know his name or who he was?

What is it that attracts people to Bellona? Why do they stay?

What was the cause of the problems in Bellona? How did the riots begin that created the situation in Bellona?

How does Kidd become a scorpion? How does this affect his relationship with Lanya?

Throughout the book they refer to the lights and the fires. What do they mean?

Explain the role of symbolism in the book. What is the meaning of the orchid at the beginning and the end of the book?

How does Kidd get separated from Tak, Lanya and Denny during the riots? What does Kidd do?