

Dirty White Boys: A Novel Study Guide

Dirty White Boys: A Novel by Stephen Hunter

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Plot Summary

Dirty White Boys is the sixth novel from acclaimed author Stephen Hunter and follows the escape from a state penitentiary by Lamar Pye, his cousin Odell, and artist Richard Peed. Lamar is an intelligent criminal who leads his gang on an adventure across Oklahoma and into Texas, leaving bodies in his wake. Bud Pewtie is a state trooper assigned to the collection of cops looking for the escapees. Bud becomes determined to catch Lamar after he kills a fellow trooper and leaves Bud injured. Dirty White Boys is a novel about crime, intelligence, and fear that will keep the reader guessing until the final showdown.

Lamar Pye has just murdered a member of a rival gang and knows he must get out of the prison before nightfall or he will be the next victim. Lamar arranges a prison break with the help of an old guard, escaping with his cousin and fellow inmate, Richard Peed. Lamar and his newly-formed gang immediately begin seeking out weapons to keep them protected while on the run. They break into the home of an older couple who reportedly like to hunt. Lamar keeps the couple hostage overnight while he collects the guns and feeds his gang. At the same time, Bud Pewtie has been called to team up with fellow state trooper, Ted Pepper, and join the search for Lamar and his gang. During this search, Bud learns that a regular customer at a local diner failed to come in for his morning coffee. Bud and Ted decide to do a welfare check while awaiting news on Lamar.

Unbeknown to them, Bud and Ted walk up to the front door of the home in which Lamar and his gang have taken up residence. Lamar ambushes them, shooting down Ted immediately. Bud is able to get a few rounds off at Lamar, but Odell cuts him down. As Lamar and his gang prepare to leave with their hostages, they shoot Ted in the head and turn the shotgun on Bud. Luckily, however, the rifle was filled with bird shot and left Bud injured, but alive. Ted was not as lucky.

Lamar and his gang need a place to hold up now that they have doubled their trouble by killing a state trooper. Richard remembers a letter he received from a woman who lives on a remote farm. Lamar takes his gang to this farm and discovers that quiet farming life is rejuvenating. Lamar settles quickly into the hard work of the farm, enjoying a sexual relationship with the young farmer's daughter. However, a need for money soon spurs Lamar into action once again. Lamar plans to rob a Denny's in Texas.

Richard is point man inside the restaurant but fails to see a state trooper who came in through the back door. The robbery goes wrong from the moment Lamar and his gang walks into the restaurant. The trooper is killed immediately and a parole officer who tries to take control of the situation is also gunned down. Within moments, the police arrive. A gun battle ensues. Several more cops are killed as Richard, Ruta Beth, and Odell escape out the front while Lamar is forced to make his escape out the back.

Bud arrives at the restaurant after the fact and finds a group of drawings Richard had done while watching the restaurant. These are the second set of drawings Bud had



found among Richard's things which gets Bud thinking, but it will take some time before he realizes what they are for. In the meantime, Bud is part of a group who is dispatched to find the getaway car based on tire tracks left near where the getaway car was dumped. Bud has no luck. However, he finally realizes what Lamar plans to do with the drawings. Lamar wants Richard to design a tattoo.

Bud begins checking out tattoo parlors and happens on one while Lamar is in the middle of receiving his tattoo. Another gun battle begins. Odell is killed; Lamar loses several fingers, and Bud is injured. Lamar falls into a dark depression as a result of his grief over Odell. Lamar decides to punish Bud for what he has done. Odell and his gang discover the identity of Bud's son through local newspaper articles and attend one of his baseball games. Afterward, Lamar and his gang follow Bud home. However, Bud does not go home but to the residence of his lover, Holly Pepper. Lamar kidnaps Holly, believing her to be Bud's wife, and starts Bud on a wild goose chase that will end with Lamar's torture and murder.

Bud calls an old retired colleague and asks for his help. This colleague discovers the identity of Ruta Beth through old news articles and is able to send Bud to her home. Bud sneaks up on Lamar and his gang and is able to separate them. Ruta Beth is killed almost immediately by cross fire. Bud then chases Lamar into the woods. Bud and Lamar battle in the trees and it appears for a short time that Lamar is going to get the better of Bud. However, Bud eventually gets the upper hand and kills Lamar. The cavalry arrives shortly afterward. Unfortunately, Richard appears and shoots both Bud and his retired colleague in revenge for them killing Lamar. Bud survives, but his colleague does not.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Lamar Pye and his cousin Odell are serving life sentences in a maximum security prison for the murder of a man associated with an organized crime group. Richard Peed is an artist who is serving time for stabbing his mother in the eyes. Richard is due to be moved to a minimum security prison in a few weeks. Richard has befriended Lamar for the protection this friendship provides. Richard is drawing a picture for Lamar of a lion and a naked woman for Lamar to use for his own purposes.

In chapter 1, Lamar Pye is showering alone at McAlester State Penitentiary when a member of a rival gang enters the room. Lamar is supposed to be alone because of a deal he has with some of the guards. Lamar soon learns that his cousin Odell has offended the leader of the rival gang and they plan on taking their punishment out on Lamar since Odell is mentally disabled and it would not make sense to punish him. Lamar, however, does not intend to sit still and allow this man to abuse him. Lamar fights back, killing the larger man. Lamar knows that the rival gang will now come after him again, this time to kill him. Lamar plans a quick escape with the help of a guard he knows is participating in drug trafficking within the prison. This guard helps Lamar, Odell, and Richard Peed get to a part of the prison from where they can slip out a window and steal a Hostess delivery van. Lamar kills the guard before they make their escape.

In Chapter 2, Bud Pewtie is awakened in the middle of the night and told to join a group of fellow state troopers in the search for some escaped convicts. Bud is told that all the troopers will be teaming up for safety; therefore, Bud is to go pick up fellow trooper Ted Pepper. Bud does not relish the idea of spending what could be days with Ted because Bud has been having an affair with Ted's young wife, Holly. Bud gets out of bed and dresses, stopping to speak to both his wife and his youngest son before leaving. Both ask Bud to wear his bullet proof vest, but Bud refuses. However, when Bud picks up Ted, he forces Ted to don his vest. At the headquarters of the search party, Bud and Ted attend a briefing informing officers of the escape and their duties in the search. The briefing is given by notorious state trooper, C.D. Henderson.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The action begins immediately in chapter 1 as the reader witnesses Lamar Pye murder a fellow inmate and plan an escape. Lamar, as a prisoner, is part of a civilization where punishment is given out in harsh and violent ways. Lamar kills a fellow prisoner to keep himself from being raped, a situation that not only illustrates the degradation inside American prisons but also shows how tough Lamar Pye can be. When Lamar plans and executes an escape in a matter of minutes, the reader is also given some insight into Lamar's amazing intelligence. In this chapter as well, the reader is introduced to



Lamar's mentally disabled cousin who is serving time for the same crime as Lamar, and Richard Peed. Richard is a weak, sad little man who is marking time until he is moved to minimum security. Richard has befriended Lamar to protect himself from the other inmates. Lamar is not the type to be interested in Richard but becomes so because of the drawings Richard makes for him. These drawings are of a lion and a naked woman that are below Richard's normal style of art but excite Lamar to no end. At this point Richard has no clue why Lamar wants these drawings, but the reader suspects they are for a tattoo Lamar hopes to have added to his collection of harsh, vulgar body art.

Bud Pewtie is introduced in the second chapter. Bud Pewtie is a straight-laced cop who does nearly everything by the book. However, Bud is stuck in a boring marriage to a woman to whom he no longer feels any attraction. Bud has two children, both teens in their final years of high school. One boy is a bookworm with whom Bud has little in common. The other boy is an athlete whom Bud adores, as the reader can see from his conversation with the boy before he goes to join the hunt for Lamar. To contradict this straight-laced impression of Bud is the fact that he is having an affair with the young wife of a fellow trooper. This affair goes completely against Bud's character which is perhaps what makes it so exciting. Finally, this chapter introduces Ted Pepper and his wife Holly. Ted is Bud's partner for the duration of the search for Lamar. Ted is a dull young man who lacks courage. Holly is a beautiful, exciting woman who promises to be a source of both anguish and excitement for Bud.



Chapters 3-6

Chapters 3-6 Summary

In chapter 3, Lamar instructs Odell to kill the driver of the Hostess delivery van after learning the identity of a man who is rumored to be a hunter and therefore a safe source of weapons for Lamar and his gang. As soon as the man is dead, Odell goes happily back to munching the Twinkies in the back of the truck. In chapter 4, C.D. Henderson finds himself telling a story about the heyday of his career about how he found the man who blew up an airplane based on the books the man checked out of the library, while sneaking drinks from a bottle of whiskey. Everyone is aware of C.D.'s drinking problem, but C.D. figures it was either become an alcoholic or eat his gun barrel after everything he has seen in his career. At the same time, Bud is trying to get a few hours of sleep before hitting the road again. Bud cannot sleep, however, because he is thinking about Holly. Bud met Holly while he and Ted were teamed up during Ted's provisional period. A few weeks later Holly sought Bud out and the affair began. Now they were both trying to find a way to tell their spouses so they can get divorces and make a go of their relationship together. After a while, Bud gives up on sleep. Bud and Ted hit the road again. While they drive around, Ted tells Bud how he pulled over a couple of guys one night and let them go despite clear drug law infractions because they pulled a gun on him. Ted has lost his nerve and is thinking of leaving the department.

In chapter 5, Lamar, Odell, and Richard break into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stepford in order to steal their guns. Lamar is cruel to the couple, allowing Odell to beat the man until the wife finally tells them where the guns are. Lamar then makes the woman cook for them while he and Odell saw off the barrels on the shotguns. Richard is sent upstairs to work on the drawing he is creating for Lamar. In chapter 5, Bud and Ted have stopped at a diner for breakfast. Bud spends most of the time on the phone, calling both his wife and Holly. Back in the diner, a waitress tells Bud about a regular who failed to come in for his coffee that morning. The woman is concerned because the farmer has never missed his morning trip in, even in bad weather. Bud agrees that he and Ted will go check out the farm if they are not assigned to another task first.

At the same time, Richard is working on his drawings and watching the front of the property from an upstairs window. Suddenly Richard sees the police car pull to a stop in the front yard. Richard warns Lamar who takes the front while he sends Odell around to the back. Lamar ambushes Bud and Ted, whose minds were elsewhere as they walked up to the front door of the farmhouse. Ted goes down first. Bud manages to get off a few shots, but Lamar and Odell have the element of surprised. Lamar comes out into the yard and kills Ted with a bullet to the head. However, Lamar's revolver is out of ammunition and he is forced to shoot Bud with a rifle, leaving him to bleed to death on the ground. Lamar and Odell then take the weapons out of the police car and drive off in the old couple's SUV, the old couple still held as their hostages.



Chapters 3-6 Analysis

Lamar, Odell, and Richard kill the driver of the Hostess truck and then break into the home of an old couple whom the driver told them were hunters. Lamar needs guns, but he knows better than to go to a gun store because the police will be watching them. Lamar takes the couple hostage and is cruel to them while making himself comfortable with their property. At the same time, Lamar has Richard continue work on the drawings. This one-mindedness about the drawings suggest to the reader that the drawings will prove to be of some importance later in the novel.

A new character is introduced in these chapters. C.D. Henderson is a cop from a time when cops were more gunslingers than law enforcement. C.D. is famous within the Oklahoma police network because of his amazing cases early in his career. However, C.D. is long past retirement age and has become an alcoholic due to the terrible things he has seen and his disappointment in the politics that have taken over the leadership of most police departments. C.D. likes to tell stories about his heyday, but fewer and fewer officers are impressed with these stories. C.D. tells a story in this chapter about a time when the third piece of evidence proved to be the most important, illustrating his belief that cops do not investigate deeply enough anymore. This advice is sure to come back as the plot develops, proving important at some point.

Bud and Ted stop for breakfast. Bud has Holly on his mind and the trouble he is having supporting both his family life and his affair. It is this that is on his mind when Bud and Ted arrive at the Stepford home and are ambushed by Lamar and Odell. This ambush leaves Ted dead and Bud possibly dead. Lamar has once again shown his ruthlessness and disregard for the life of others, leaving the reader fearful for the old couple whom Lamar has continued to keep as his hostages.



Chapters 7-10

Chapters 7-10 Summary

In chapter 7, Odell, Richard, and Lamar drive through the countryside with the Stepfords, until finally they pull over and drag the old couple out. Lamar takes Richard and marches the Stepfords across a field. Lamar then gives Richard a gun and orders him to kill the Stepfords. Lamar is testing Richard and is relieved when Richard pulls the trigger. However, the gun was not loaded. Lamar lets the Stepfords go. Back in the car, Lamar says they need to find a place to lie low. Richard offers a place he knows. In chapter 8, Bud wakes in the hospital. Bud was shot at close range with a shotgun, but the gun was loaded with birdshot, leaving Bud with many tiny wounds, but nothing lethal. Bud learns that Ted is dead. Bud insists on going to Ted's funeral despite his wounds and the pain they cause him. The funeral is solemn. Ted is awarded a medal for bravery even though the position of his body revealed his cowardice to all who saw him. Bud speaks to Holly briefly at the funeral, apologizing for not being able to save her husband. A few days later, Bud is released from the hospital. A few days later, Bud dresses and tells his wife he is going to visit the farmer who saved his life by walking to a phone and calling the police. Bud spends a few minutes with the Stepfords where he learns some of the details of their ordeal with Lamar and his gang, as well as learning about the lions Richard has been drawing for Lamar.

In chapter 9, Lamar, Odell, and Richard settle on the farm that belongs to Ruta Beth Tull, a young woman who wrote to Richard in prison. Ruta Beth welcomed the men with open arms when they arrived the night before and is enjoying the work that Lamar and Odell quite willingly have begun to do for her around the neglected old farm. Lamar and Ruta Beth hit it off from the beginning. Richard knows the moment they become lovers, jealous that Lamar stole this woman from him even though he did not find himself overwhelmingly attracted to her. Lamar begins to plan their first big job a few days after arriving at the farm. In chapter 10, Bud spends a few hours in a motel with Holly. Holly wants to move out of the trailer she shared with Ted and wants Bud to help her find a home they can share. Holly begins pressuring Bud to tell Jen about them. Holly sees Ted's death as the first step to fulfilling their plan of being together. Bud puts Holly off on when he will tell Jen but agrees to look at houses with her. Later Bud goes to the hospital for a checkup and is chastised for having sex so soon after his injuries were inflicted. The doctor is concerned Bud will reopen his wounds. After this, Bud meets Jen at Jeff's baseball game where he becomes so excited by a hit his son makes that he reopens his wounds while celebrating.

Chapters 7-10 Analysis

Lamar tests Richard by forcing him to kill the Stepfords. The gun is empty, but Richard pulls the trigger and proves to Lamar that he will do whatever Lamar asks of him. This is important because the reader knows that Richard was days away from moving to a



minimum security prison; therefore, he is the person with the most to lose from this escape. Richard could easily escape and turn on Lamar by telling the police where he is. However, Richard has not attempted to escape yet, and now he has proven to Lamar that he will kill on his orders, leaving both the reader and Lamar convinced that Richard is too afraid of Lamar to go against him.

Bud lives thanks to the fact that Lamar allowed the Stepfords to live. Mr. Stepford got to a phone and got help to Bud before he bled to death from the tiny wounds Lamar gave him with birdshot in a sawed off shotgun. Bud goes to Ted's funeral and the reader sees the depth of his guilt in his decision to go despite the horrible pain he is still experiencing. Ted's death changes things for Bud, putting his affair with Holly into a new perspective. At the same time, Holly is pressuring Bud to find a house with her and to divorce his wife. Bud puts her off because he is no longer sure destroying his family is something he really wants to do. This places Bud in the middle of a moral dilemma, touching on a theme of the novel.

Lamar, Odell, and Richard settle at the farm of a young woman who wrote a letter to Richard. Richard had thought the woman would be interested in him, but instead she hooks up with Lamar. At the same time, Lamar begins planning their next big heist. At the same time, the reader sees Bud attend a baseball game in which his son is playing. Jeff makes a big hit, causing Bud to become excited and break open a few of his stitches. This is important for two reasons. First, it shows Bud's attachment to his son. Second, it opens up a space of vulnerability that Lamar will exploit later in the novel.



Chapters 11-14

Chapters 11-14 Summary

In chapter 11, Odell and Richard dress as women as they travel to Texas to stake out a Denny's restaurant with Lamar and Ruta Beth. Lamar and Ruta Beth go into the restaurant to check it out for a possible robbery while Odell and Richard wait in the car. A police officer approaches the car while the men are alone, thinking they are old women trapped in a hot car with the windows closed. Ruta Beth comes out and convinces the cop that her old aunt is senile and rolled up the window by accident. Lamar got enough information from the incident, however, to feel safe in planning the robbery for the following weekend. In chapter 12, Bud is back in the hospital having his wounds closed again. Bud's colonel comes to see him and explains that he knows about the affair he has been having. Bud's colonel advises him to end the relationship to avoid ruining his own career. Bud agrees, but when Holly calls him some time later, he is unable to make himself end the relationship. Instead, Bud meets Holly the following day and takes her with him when he goes to search through Lamar, Odell, and Richard's things at McAlester. Bud finds little of any help at the prison except for evidence of a drawing Richard did for Lamar of a lion.

In chapter 13, Lamar continues to plan the new robbery by stealing a couple of cars to use as a series of getaway cars. Lamar takes Richard with him to pick up the third car, forcing him to practice his role in the robbery as they drive. Lamar then has Richard pull off at a movie theater where Lamar steals a car and tells Richard to follow him back to the Tull farm. Richard knows he could run off then, but he decides to return to the farm. In chapter 14, Bud goes to the local library to search through art books to find what he can on drawings of lions. Bud believes the lion is something of importance but cannot figure out its significance yet. On Sunday, Bud goes to church with Jen and Jeff where he finds himself agreeing to take Jeff to the batting cages even though he has a date with Holly. Bud quickly visits Holly, telling Jeff and Jen that he is going to shoot a friend's guns to see which one he might like to buy. Bud then takes Jeff to the batting cages where they talk about guns, with Bud lying and telling his son that he enjoyed firing the Baretta, although it is more expensive than the other gun. On the way home from the batting cages, Bud hears a report on a robbery that went bad in Texas. Six people were killed, including four cops, and it is thought that Lamar and Odell Pye were involved.

Chapters 11-14 Analysis

Lamar and Ruta Beth check out a Denny's restaurant they plan on robbing during the Sunday afternoon rush, hoping to get more money than they would robbing a bank. The check goes well until a cop becomes interested in Richard and Odell in the backseat of Ruta Beth's car, a situation that could have gone bad if Ruta Beth did not convince the cop that Richard and Odell, who are dressed as women, are her old aunts who rolled up their windows in confusion. This episode adds tension to the novel by bringing a cop



close to catching the gang. It also shows Ruta Beth is a willing participant in the crimes the gang commits. This is important because Ruta Beth's participation will be an avenue the police might use in order to find Lamar.

While Lamar is planning his next crime, Bud is researching Lamar and his gang on his own, focusing on the lion drawings that keep coming up in connection with Richard. At the same time, Bud is attempting to juggle his family life with the affair he is continuing to have with Holly. Holly desperately wants Bud to leave his wife and to be with her now that she is free of her marriage. Bud is not willing, however, to destroy his family even though it had seemed simple when he and Holly talked about it before. Bud is also warned by his colonel not to allow the affair to ruin his career. Bud agrees, but cannot let go of Holly despite his reluctance to let anyone know about their relationship. At the same time, Bud is forced to lie to his family, including telling his son a story about guns he checked out for possible purchase even though he did not shoot these guns when he said he did. This lie will come back to haunt Bud in a later chapter when his son puts his thoughts into action.



Chapter 15-17

Chapter 15-17 Summary

In chapter 15, Richard is sitting in the Denny's, waiting and watching for the robbery to begin. It is Richard's job to signal to Lamar that the place is free of police presence or not. Richard gives the signal that all is clear, but a state trooper comes out of the bathroom just as Lamar, Odell, and Ruta Beth walk in. Lamar kills the trooper before taking the restaurant manager into the office to empty the safe. Lamar also kills the manager. Before Lamar and his gang can leave the restaurant, the police arrive. Lamar hesitates, giving a woman eating at the restaurant the chance to pull her gun. Ruta Beth shoots the woman. Lamar orders Ruta Beth to take Odell and Richard out and meet him at the rendezvous point. Lamar makes his way toward the back of the restaurant as the police surround the building. Lamar has a shootout with two cops in the back alley before escaping through a trash chute. Lamar steals a car and escapes.

In chapter 16, Bud arrives at the Denny's as the crime scene investigation is going on. Bud walks through the scene before focusing on some drawings he finds on the floor. Bud makes a copy of the drawings before turning the originals in to the crime scene people. C.D. pulls Bud aside and asks him what the drawings mean. Bud refuses to share his ideas with C.D., claiming that he is not a detective and is just interested in the drawings themselves. In chapter 17, Richard, Ruta Beth, and Odell are hiding in the water under a bridge. The water is cold, lowering their body temperature enough that the heat seeking technology the police are using to find them will be fooled. However, they have been waiting all night and Richard is beginning to think Lamar is not going to show up, but Ruta Beth insists they continue to wait. Finally Lamar arrives. Lamar swims a rope across the river to the other side for Ruta Beth, Odell, and Richard to use to get across the heavy current. Everyone makes it except Richard who loses his grip on the rope. Lamar jumps in and saves him.

Chapter 15-17 Analysis

Lamar has made an interesting choice by having Richard be the point man inside the restaurant. Richard has more reason than anyone to turn against Lamar, yet Lamar has put him in a position that requires a great deal of trust. This shows the reader how Lamar believes that no one could possibly go against him. However, it seems to the reader that Richard has done just that when Lamar enters the restaurant to begin the robbery and finds himself face to face with a cop. Later, however, it becomes clear that Richard could not have seen the cop because he entered the restaurant through the kitchen. This seems to show that Richard is loyal to Lamar despite the fact that if he turned on Lamar he would finish his term in a minimum security prison, a safer, more relaxed place to serve time.



The robbery goes bad, with Lamar and his gang killing six people. Bud shows up, even though he is not even on duty at the time. Bud's actions seem to suggest a personal interest in finding Lamar. Bud finds more lion drawings and makes a copy, but then tells C.D. that the drawings do not mean a thing. At the same time, Odell, Ruta Beth, and Richard are waiting for Lamar in the river under a bridge. Lamar once again has shown his intelligence by making them wait in the water where the cold will hide their body heat from the police technology being utilized to find them. Lamar gets everyone across the river, except Richard who lets go of the rope he is using to pull himself through the current and is washed away. Lamar saves Richard. Lamar's choice here is interesting because it seems that Lamar would be better off without Richard, who is a possible liability to the gang. However, Lamar is loyal to his people, just as he expects loyalty from his people.



Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary

In chapter 18, the police find the car that Lamar's gang used to escape the robbery and this leads them to the discovery of a tire print that could belong to a car that is traceable to Lamar's hide out. C.D. orders a cast be made of the tire print but has trouble getting anyone to fly in the foul weather. C.D. knows this is important, so he calls in a favor to get the forensic crew to him as quickly as possible. A short time later, Bud gets a call from his colonel requesting that he help with the search for the vehicle that belongs to the tire print. The police computers narrowed the search to three makes of vehicle produced within a specific time period. Bud suits himself up with two weapons, one his service revolver and the other a backup. Before he leaves, however, Bud's wife and son Jeff give him a new Baretta they bought him as a gift. On the way to pick up his list of cars, Bud calls Holly. Holly is upset with Bud for not calling her sooner, so to make her happy Bud agrees to go house shopping with her. After that, Bud picks up the list of car owners and begins making visits to each residence, including one belonging to a young Indian woman who is running an illegal daycare. Bud decides not to turn in the woman.

In chapter 19, Lamar is not pleased with the small amount of money they made from the Denny's job. Lamar is also upset by what the news casts are saying about him. One night, in a fit of depression, Lamar bangs out of the house. Ruta Beth decides to make a surprise for him. With Odell and Richard's help, Ruta Beth puts frosting on a loaf of bread and Richard creates a lion on it out of peanut butter and cookies. The entire gang feels as though they are now a family as they watch Lamar enjoy his cake. The next morning, Lamar is in a much better mood. Lamar goes out to begin working in the fields but then sees Bud pulling into the driveway. Ruta Beth goes out to speak to Bud and when she learns why he is there, takes him out to the garage. Bud examines Ruta Beth's car while Lamar hides in the shadows with a weapon, just in case Bud decides to do something dangerous. Bud does not, however. The tires on Ruta Beth's car do not match the ones he is looking for, so Bud leaves peacefully. Lamar has a big laugh when he discovers why Bud was there. Lamar had the tires on the car changed after the robbery.

Chapters 18-19 Analysis

C.D. is attempting to break the case and find Lamar, but those around him no longer respect him because of his alcoholism and are not making the search easy for him. However, C.D. has a breakthrough with the tire print, possibly linking something tangible to Lamar's hiding place. Bud is called in to search out the vehicle and actually comes to Lamar's hiding place, only to discover the tires in question do not match the pattern. It has not occurred to anyone that Lamar might have had the tires changed after the robbery, once again revealing Lamar's incredible intelligence.



Bud is still struggling with his commitment to his family and his desire to be with Holly. Bud enjoys spending time with Holly, but he feels guilty for what it would mean to his family should he leave them to be with her. Bud is dragging his feet, suggesting to the reader that he no longer wants to be with Holly. When his family gives him a new gun to help keep him safe, his leaving them seems to be an even more remote possibility. However, Bud then turns around and agrees to go house shopping with Holly. Now the reader is just as confused as Bud appears to be. This situation is sure to blow up in Bud's face eventually, causing the reader to wonder what will happen as the plot continues to develop.



Chapters 20-23

Chapters 20-23 Summary

In chapter 20, Bud finishes out his list but has had no luck. That night, Bud promises to go house shopping with Holly the next day. They drive to several homes, finally settling on a small rental house that Bud finds cramped and unappealing, but Holly is deeply excited about. Holly wants to sign the paperwork right away, but Bud hesitates. Finally Bud agrees that Holly should take the place, even though he says he cannot tell his wife about them until after Lamar Pye has been put back in jail. Later that day, Bud goes to the headquarters to see C.D. C.D. is very drunk and unhappy because the tire print did not lead anywhere. C.D. knows that now they will make him retire. In chapter 21, Richard is having difficulty drawing the lion's neck. Richard begins looking for inspiration and finds himself in Ruta Beth's room. In the closet, Richard finds an old folder with crime scene photos from the murders of Ruta Beth's parents. These photos provide Richard with the inspiration he needs. At the same time, Bud goes to the Fine Arts Society and asks the man in charge about the history of lions in art. The man tells Bud that lions are symbols of virility and romance. The man also says that Richard is attempting to simplify the drawing with each new version. This causes Bud to have the insight that Richard is drawing a tattoo for Lamar.

In chapter 22, Richard shows Lamar the finished drawing. Lamar is thrilled that it is done, announcing that he intends to have it tattooed to his chest. Richard is shocked but agrees to help Lamar find an appropriate tattoo artist. While Lamar and his gang are near Fort Dix looking for an artist, Bud takes his family to dinner to celebrate Russ' acceptance into an Ivy League school. Afterward, Bud decides to go see a friend on the Indian reservation to ask about the tattoo. At the same time Bud learns the name of an artist capable of giving Lamar his complicated tattoo; Lamar and his gang learns the same name. Lamar goes to the man's home and barges in, insisting the man give him the tattoo that night. When Lamar agrees to pay his price, the tattoo artist welcomes him inside. Lamar and Odell go in while Richard and Ruta Beth watch guard from the car across the street. While they are watching, Bud pulls up in his truck. In chapter 23, Bud walks into the tattoo parlor and finds himself face to face with Odell. Bud dives for cover just as Odell fires his gun. A gun fight breaks out. Odell is hit almost immediately. It is dark, so Bud and Lamar fire blindly at one another. Lamar then turns on the lights. Bud fires at Lamar, hitting his gun hand and severing several of his fingers. Odell charges at Bud. Bud empties an entire clip in Odell, but he keeps coming at him until he finally collapses on top of Bud. Lamar again comes after Bud, but Bud manages to fall down some stairs and escapes injury. Ruta Beth drives the car into the building and takes Lamar away. The police arrive a short time later, called by the tattoo artist.



Chapters 20-23 Analysis

As Richard struggles to finish the lion drawing for Lamar, he finds the crime scene photos from the murder of Ruta Beth's parents. Ruta Beth's parents were killed in the same bed where she sleeps every night. The reader must wonder about Ruta Beth's mental health when one considers that her parents were killed in the bed she sleeps in and that she has kept the photos. A sane person would most likely not do those things, but Ruta Beth has. Perhaps this explains Ruta Beth's fascination with Richard and Lamar as well as her willingness to allow them to stay with her.

At the same time Richard finishes the lion drawing for Lamar, Bud realizes for the purpose of the drawing. Bud claims to not be a detective, but he seems to be following Lamar's tracks closer than the detectives who are supposed to be doing this same thing. Bud gets the name of a tattoo artist capable of giving a person such an intricate tattoo and arrives at the house at the same time Lamar is having the tattoo done. A gun fight breaks out and Odell is killed. This death is important because Lamar is close to his cousin, having killed his own uncle to protect Odell and would do anything for him, illustrating the theme of family. The reader can already predict, based on this, that Lamar is going to want revenge for Odell's death.

While all this drama is going on, Bud finds himself looking for a house with Holly. Bud once again puts Holly off on when he will tell his wife, claiming he needs to find Lamar first to put things right for Ted. Holly could care less about revenge, just as it seems she has a lack of concern for her dead husband. All Holly wants is to be with Bud. However, the further along the plot develops, the more it seems like Bud has lost his desire to be with Holly on a more committed basis.



Chapter 24-27

Chapter 24-27 Summary

In chapter 24, Bud is once again in the hospital. Civilians look at Bud as though he is a hero, but his own family is upset with him for putting himself in danger, and law officials investigating the incident seem to believe he failed to follow proper police procedure. Bud is cleared in the investigation, but not before it causes him a few minutes of concern for his career. Bud also learns that C.D. has been forced to retire. After being released from the hospital, Bud calls Holly and is once again pressured by her to tell his wife so that they can be together. At the same time, Bud learns of a growing movement around Oklahoma cheering on Lamar. In chapter 25, Lamar is lost in a dark storm of grief. Richard is worried about him, but Ruta Beth believes Lamar will come out of his grief sooner or later. Richard is instructed to draw a picture of Odell in heaven. Richard does, giving Lamar some comfort as he begins to plan his revenge against Bud.

In chapter 26, Bud has begun dreaming of Holly even as he struggles during the day to face his responsibilities. Bud needs to be with Holly, so he sneaks off one afternoon to see her. First, however, Bud stops by to see C.D. C.D. is drunker than ever, sitting in front of the television watching soap operas. Bud feels pity for C.D., the last thing the cop wants. Bud then goes to be with Holly. As he lies in her bed afterward, Bud cannot imagine himself living with her in her new rental house, giving up everything he worked so hard for in his life with Jen. Bud leaves Holly only to return home to find the police guard watching his house waiting to tell him his son, Jeff, has been arrested. In chapter 27, Lamar instructs Richard and Ruta Beth to go to the library and search through the local newspaper to see if they can find any information on Bud's family. Eventually Richard comes across an article in the sports page chronicling Jeff's recent success on the baseball field. Lamar decides they will go to the baseball game and follow Bud home afterward.

Chapter 24-27 Analysis

Bud is injured in the shootout, but not badly. Lamar, however, has lost several fingers. Lamar refuses to get medical care, so lost is he in the death of Odell. As suggested by Lamar's feelings for Odell, he begins to plot revenge against Bud, injecting a great deal of tension into the novel and changing the almost lighthearted tone to a more sinister one. Lamar has Richard and Ruta Beth find information on Bud and his family, learning them the information that Jeff is to play in a baseball game that night. Lamar and his gang plan to follow Bud home from the game, but the reader does not know for sure what they plan at this point. It has been suggested that Lamar wants to kill his family in front of him, to give him the same pain Lamar is suffering. Family, a theme of the novel, has suddenly become a liability for Bud.

At the same time, Bud is still struggling with his relationship with Holly. While Bud sexually desires Holly, he cannot force himself to imagine giving up everything he has worked for with his wife to live in near squalor with Holly. It is clear to the reader that Bud is in the affair for the excitement of having an affair, not because he loves Holly enough to emotionally tear apart his entire family. This seems to foreshadow a break up between Holly and Bud, leaving the reader wondering what kind of impact that might have on the danger beginning to stalk Bud and on the family he has chosen over lust.



Chapters 28-30

Chapters 28-30 Summary

In chapter 28, Bud arrives at the police station to find an angry Jen waiting for him. Bud learns that Jeff beat up a couple of boys after learning they were behind a recent rash of pro-Lamar spray paintings around the school. Bud sends Jen home and arranges with a friend in the DA's office to have Jeff released. In the truck afterward, Jeff announces to Bud that he knows about his affair with Holly. Bud promises to break the relationship off and to confess all to Jen. In chapter 29, Lamar steals a car from the library parking lot before going back to the farm to prepare for the night's activities. Lamar has Ruta Beth cut his long hair to help disguise him. At the same time, Bud takes Jeff to the ballpark where they ask the coach to allow him to play. The coach says he is not supposed to because Jeff is going to be suspended from school but agrees anyway. Bud calls Holly and arranges to see her that night. Meantime, Lamar makes himself comfortable in the bleachers not far from where Bud comes to watch the game. After the game, Bud says goodbye to Jeff who is going to have pizza with his teammates and drives over to Holly's, unaware that Lamar and his gang are following close behind. Bud tells Holly that he cannot see her anymore. After Bud leaves, Lamar comes to her door.

In chapter 30, Bud goes home and tells Jen about his affair, then promises to be true to her from that point on. In the middle of the night, Bud gets a phone call from Lamar. Lamar claims to have Bud's wife, but Jen is asleep next to Bud. Bud realizes that Lamar grabbed Holly believing her to be his wife. Lamar instructs Bud to drive to a phone booth where he will receive a phone call telling him what to do next. Lamar warns that he will kill Holly if Bud involves the police. Lamar calls Bud at the appointed time and gives him instructions to go to another phone booth. Bud knows that Lamar is going to run him all over Oklahoma before luring him into a trap. Bud needs to find Lamar. Bud calls C.D. and asks him to go to headquarters and find the missing connection that will tell him where Lamar's hideout is. C.D. struggles with the only evidence they have, the fact that Lamar called his new accomplice a young woman. C.D. looks through all the records he can think of on the crime computer but comes up with nothing. Finally C.D. calls a friend at the newspaper and has them do a search of crimes involving underage women. Finally C.D. is able to tell Bud to go to the Tull farm.

Chapters 28-30 Analysis

The tension explodes in these chapters as Bud rescues his son from jail, learning that his son beat up a couple of kids for maligning Bud and supporting Lamar, and then Bud learns that Jeff has known about Holly for some time. Bud is ashamed of himself and the pain he has caused his son, so he agrees to end the affair. The reader saw this coming, believing that it only took the reality of the situation to make Bud see his mistake. At the same time, Lamar is planning on attending Jeff's baseball game as a way of finding out where Bud lives. The reader is hoping that Jeff and Bud will not go to



the game because of Jeff's legal problems but soon discover this to be untrue. Jeff will play and Bud will be in attendance. This gives Lamar exactly the chance he needs to put into action his plan of revenge.

Lamar kidnaps Holly and calls Bud to force him into action. For a brief second the reader doubts if Bud will care about Holly enough to play Lamar's game but again sees the kind of person Bud is in the fact that he cannot allow anyone to be victimized by Lamar because of him, even Holly. Bud is a good, moral person, touching on a theme of the novel, and this forces him to go after Lamar one last time. It is also something of revenge to Bud because Lamar killed Ted Pepper on Bud's watch. This situation also gives C.D. one last chance to redeem himself. Bud calls C.D. and asks him to find Lamar's hiding place based on the fact that Lamar called his new partner young lady. C.D. is able to put the facts together and finds Ruta Beth Tull, giving Bud the edge he needs to save Holly.



Chapters 31-32

Chapters 31-32 Summary

In chapter 31, Bud sneaks onto the Tull farm and scopes out the house. Bud sees everyone in the living room so he ties the kitchen door shut, making the front door the only escape. Bud then fires into the living room from the front yard. The bullet does not travel straight because the screen door turns out to be a weather door. Ruta Beth is hit in the throat, but Lamar, Bud's original target, is unharmed. Lamar sends Ruta Beth out onto the front porch, hoping Bud will show his location in response to her appearance. Bud does exactly as Lamar predicts, allowing him to fire his weapon at Bud. While Bud is diving away from fire, Lamar escapes out a side window with Holly. Bud is forced to kill Ruta Beth when she fires her gun at him. Bud then takes off after Lamar, following him toward a stand of trees in the distance. Lamar lets Holly go as he reaches the trees because he no longer needs her. Bud comes across Holly and sends her off to safety. However, Bud is first forced to roughly tell Holly that they will no longer be together when she insists on discussing the matter.

Bud chases Lamar through the trees; however, Lamar is able to ambush Bud and they get into a fist to fist fight. Lamar is larger and stronger than Bud and it begins to look as though he will win. However, Bud is able to get a hold of a gun and shoots Lamar. The cavalry arrives a short time later with C.D. in the lead. C.D. finds Bud in the trees with Lamar. As they discuss what took place, Richard arrives. Richard picks up a gun and points it at the law men. Just as it seemed they had talked Richard into giving up the gun, Richard sees Lamar dead in the undergrowth. Richard fires.

In chapter 32, several months have passed. Bud meets C.D.'s sons at C.D.'s grave where they discuss what a hero the law man was. C.D. was killed by Richard and Bud was injured with the same bullet. Bud's injuries forced him to retire from the Highway patrol. Richard was shot by the police when he fired his weapon but survived his wounds. Richard is now being put back in McAlester to serve a life term for killing a police officer. Richard expects he will not make it to nightfall but discovers that the inmates have a newfound respect for him because of his crime.

Chapters 31-32 Analysis

Bud arrives at the Tull farm at the climax of the plot. Bud is smart and is able to catch Lamar by surprise. However, the bullet meant for Lamar is deflected and hits Ruta Beth instead. Lamar does something surprising and sacrifices Ruta Beth. This is a surprise because up to this point Lamar has always been loyal to his gang. However, Lamar's life and freedom are at risk now, as well as his opportunity to get revenge for Odell. Lamar will clearly do anything it takes to take Bud down. Lamar and Bud chase each other out into a stand of trees where they participate in hand-to-hand combat. It seems Lamar will



win because of his size and strength, but Bud has a third gun hidden and is able to get the better of Lamar.

C.D. has redeemed himself by helping Bud. When C.D. arrives on the scene, he is there to participate in the afterglow of a job well done. However, C.D. ends up taking a bullet from Richard. C.D. dies a hero, just as he would have wanted. Bud is forced to retire, however, learning a lesson from C.D. and moving on before the job makes him a miserable alcoholic. Richard goes back to jail where he is a new man, instead of being afraid of his own shadow he is now a well-respected inmate who has killed a cop.



Characters

Lamar Pye

Lamar Pye is a convicted murderer who escapes from the penitentiary because he was forced to kill a member of a rival gang. Lamar is concerned that the other members of the gang will come after him for retribution, so Lamar devises a plan to escape with his cousin, Odell, and another inmate, Richard Peed. Lamar is a very intelligent man who knows the inner workings of the prison so well that he is able to pull off the escape in a matter of minutes. Lamar and his gang escape in the truck belonging to the Hostess guy. From there, Lamar needs to find weapons but is smart enough to know the police will be looking for him to rob a gun store, so he goes to a private home where he knows the owner keeps large weapons for his hunting hobby.

Lamar and his gang hide out on the farm of a woman who wrote letters to Richard while he was in jail. While here, the reader gets to see a more gentle side of Lamar. Lamar creates a family for himself out of the people who make up his gang. Lamar is fiercely loyal to those who matter to him, and they are to him as well. At the same time, Lamar continues to do the only thing he knows, committing crimes. Lamar also becomes fascinated with the power of lions, believing they express how he feels himself. Lamar has Richard draw him a picture of a lion to be tattooed onto his chest. During the actual application of this tattoo, Bud Pewtie finds them and Odell is killed in the ensuing gun battle.

Bud Pewtie is just another state trooper to Lamar when they first come into contact with each other. However, when Bud kills Odell, he becomes the object of Lamar's obsession. Lamar adored his cousin. Odell was the only person in the world who Lamar could count on and who he loved above all else. When Odell died, Lamar became lost in his grief. As a result, Lamar created a plan to hunt down Bud and kill him. As a result, Bud came after Lamar and took him down.

Odell Pye

Odell Pye was born with a cleft palate that was never repaired. On top of this, Odell is mentally disabled. As a child, Odell was treated like an animal by his own father, often tied up and abused in the barn. When Lamar became aware of Odell's situation, he killed Odell's father, his own uncle, and took over as Odell's sole caregiver. Over the years, Lamar used Odell as his partner in crime and often Odell would be the strong arm, the one who would beat and murder at Lamar's command. In fact, Odell is also serving time for murder because of a murder he committed with Lamar.

Odell is gentle when he is not hurting people for Lamar. However, when Odell becomes confused or frightened he can become violent. Only Lamar can keep Odell calm in these moments. Due to this fact, Lamar and Odell are very close. When Odell is killed in



a gun fight with Bud Pewtie, Lamar falls into a dark depression and becomes obsessed with bringing Bud Pewtie down. It is this death that leads to the final climax of the novel.

Richard Peed

Richard Peed is an artist who was raised by an overbearing, negative mother. Richard stabbed his mother in the eyes one night when he had finally had enough of her negativity. Richard is serving a few months in maximum security before being transferred to a minimum security prison. Due to the fact that Richard is a small man and therefore vulnerable to the violence in prison, he has become friendly with Lamar Pye in hopes that Lamar's friendship will protect him from the other inmates. Richard began drawing pictures to Lamar's specifications. When Lamar decides to break out of prison, Richard has not completed the drawing he is making for Lamar, so Lamar insists that he escape as well.

During the escape and the aftermath, Richard realizes that he has made a mistake by leaving the prison. Richard was about to be transferred to minimum security, but this escape could guarantee he will remain in maximum for the rest of his sentence. Not only this, but Richard is not a violent criminal like Lamar and his cousin Odell. Richard is frightened by the crimes he watches Lamar commit as well as the robbery in which Lamar forces him to participate. Richard thinks on many occasions that he should attempt escape, but eventually comes to realize that Lamar and Odell are the only family he will ever have. When things go wrong and both Odell and Lamar are killed, Richard shoots two state troopers in revenge. This places Richard back into maximum security prison. Rather than being murdered as he expected, Richard is treated with respect due to his crime.

Russell "Bud" Pewtie

Bud Pewtie is a state trooper in Oklahoma. Bud has been a law man since leaving the army and is good at his job. Bud takes everything about his job seriously and enjoys all aspects of it, especially driving the cars. When the novel begins, Bud is called in to help in the search for several escaped criminals. Bud is to team up with a fellow state trooper, Ted Pepper. Bud trained Ted and knows him well. Bud also knows Ted's wife, Holly, with whom he has been having an affair for several months.

Bud and Holly plan on telling their spouses about their affair so that they can both get divorced and begin a new relationship together. Unfortunately, Ted is killed before this plan can be put into action. Bud is also injured in the same gun battle that killed Ted. Bud refuses to speak to his wife about Holly during his recovery, reluctant to make things more difficult on her than they are already. Bud is also feeling guilty for what happened to Ted and is beginning to rethink his relationship with Holly.

Bud has two sons. During the search for Lamar and his gang, Bud finds his son Jeff is having a difficult time in school with the kids who are rooting for Lamar to do well. Jeff gets into a fight. In the aftermath, Bud learns that Jeff knows about his relationship with



Holly. Bud agrees to end the relationship and to do all he can to fix his marriage. When Bud goes to tell Holly, Lamar and his gang follow him to Holly's, believing it is Bud's home. Lamar kidnaps Holly, forcing Bud to come to her rescue. During the gun battle that ensues, Lamar is killed and Bud is injured.

Ted Pepper

Ted Pepper is a new state trooper whom Bud helped to train. Bud and Ted are friendly, but not close. During the initial hunt for Lamar, Odell, and Richard, Bud and Ted are teamed up. During their time together, Bud learns that Ted is worried that he does not have the courage to do his job. Ted pulled over a couple of men who were clearly smoking pot in their car but allowed them to leave when they pulled a gun. Ever since this incident, Ted has been worried that he does not have the courage required to enforce the law. Shortly after telling Bud this, Bud and Ted go to an isolated farm to check on the well being of the man who lives there. Unknown to them, the house is currently occupied by Lamar and his gang. Bud and Ted are ambushed in the front yard. Ted is killed and Bud is badly injured.

Holly Pepper

Holly Pepper is Ted Pepper's wife. Holly is young and beautiful. Holly's marriage to Ted has become strained in the past few months because of Ted's preoccupation with his personal bravery. Holly has turned to Bud for comfort. Bud and Holly's affair has been going on for several months before the beginning of the novel. Bud enjoys being with Holly because she makes him feel young again. Holly wants to marry Bud. They have discussed this possibility over the recent weeks and Holly believes that Bud is prepared to tell his wife. However, after Ted's death, Bud begins to think better of his desire to be with Holly. When Bud learns that his son knows about the relationship, he decides to end things with Holly. Holly is unhappy with this news. When Bud comes to rescue her from Lamar, Holly believes that Bud has changed his mind. Unfortunately, Bud roughly tells her that this is not the case.

Jeff Pewtie

Jeff is Bud's youngest son. Jeff is more like his father than his older brother; therefore, they are very close. During the novel, Bud takes some time off to go to Jeff's baseball games. Bud also takes his son shooting where he tells him about a new gun he is thinking of buying for himself. Jeff is so worried for his father's safety that he gets his mother to buy the gun for Bud. Later, Jeff gets into a fight with some boys at school who say some unkind things about state troopers. Bud arranges to get Jeff out of jail. On the way home, Jeff tells his father that he knows about Bud's relationship with Holly. Due to the fact that this knowledge is clearly causing his son pain, Bud agrees to end the relationship and to make his marriage work.



C.D. Henderson

C.D. Henderson is a cop from a time when being a cop was something to be proud of rather than a game of politics. C.D. has seen a lot of terrible things in his career and this added to the stress of seeing the way politics have changed the legacy of cops, has caused C.D. to become an alcoholic. The escape of Lamar and his gang gives C.D. one last chance to prove his powers as a police officer. Once again, however, C.D. is made to look a fool and he is finally forced to retire. Bud turns to C.D. when Holly is taken, encouraging the old man to take a second look at the case and find where Lamar might have taken Holly. C.D. eventually comes up with the answer, arriving with the cavalry just as Richard draws on Bud. C.D. is killed, a hero cop shot in the line of duty.

Ruta Beth Tull

Ruta Beth Tull is a young woman who killed her own parents while they lay in their bed sleeping. Ruta Beth was underage and therefore only served a few years in a hospital for the criminally insane. Ruta Beth lives on the farm her parents owned and spends a great deal of her time writing letters to other people who committed crimes against their parents. Richard is one of the people to whom Ruta Beth wrote. When Lamar needs a place to hide up, Richard remembers Ruta Beth's letter and directs Lamar there. Ruta Beth not only welcomes the gang, but she begins a relationship with Lamar. Ruta Beth also becomes a member of their gang. When Bud comes to rescue Holly, Ruta Beth is killed in the cross fire.

Jen and Russ Pewtie

Jen Pewtie is Bud Pewtie's wife. Jen has become bored and as a result, her marriage has become stale. Jen is unaware that Bud is having an affair, but when the knowledge comes to her attention, she agrees to stick with Bud and to try to make their marriage work for the sake of their children. Russ Pewtie is Jen and Bud's oldest child. Russ is more like Jen, book smart. Russ gets into an Ivy league school during the novel, something for which Bud is proud, but cannot relate. Russ and Bud are not close because they are so different. However, Bud loves all members of his family.



Objects/Places

Drawings

Richard makes many drawings of a lion for Lamar, who wants the drawings turned into a tattoo for him to have placed on his chest. These drawings help Bud Pewtie trace Lamar to a tattoo parlor.

Denny's

Lamar, Odell, Richard, and Ruta Beth rob a Denny's restaurant. The robbery goes bad when a cop surprises them when he comes out of the bathroom. Several people are killed, but Lamar and his gang are able to escape.

Tattoo Parlor

Lamar goes to a tattoo parlor with his gang in order to have a picture of a lion placed on his chest. During the process of applying the tattoo, Bud Pewtie walks in. A gunfight ensues and Odell is killed.

Guns

Bud wears three guns after being shot at close range with a sawed off shotgun by Lamar.

Hostess Delivery Van

Lamar, Odell, and Richard escape McAlester in a Hostess delivery truck.

Toyota Tercel

Ruta Beth Tull owns a Toyota Tercel that she, Lamar, Odell, and Richard use as a getaway car after they rob a Denny's restaurant.

Baseball Field

Lamar, Odell, Richard, and Ruta Beth attend one of Jeff Pewtie's baseball games in order to follow Bud home. The gang mistakenly follows Bud to Holly's house where they later kidnap her.



Pepper Home

Holly shares a trailer with Ted and later moves into a rental house. It is at the rental house where Lamar kidnaps Holly in order to lure Bud into a trap.

Stepford Farm

Lamar, Odell, and Richard break into the Stepford farm and take the owners hostage while they steal their guns. Bud Pewtie and Ted Pepper stumble across the gang when they arrive to check on the Stepfords. Ted is killed in the ensuing gunfight and Bud is badly injured.

Tull Farm

Lamar, Odell, and Richard stay at the Tull farm with Ruta Beth Tull after the gunfight at the Stepford farm. The criminals know of Ruta Beth from her writing a letter to Richard in prison.

McAlester State Penitentiary

McAlester State Penitentiary is the prison where Lamar and Odell Pye and Richard Peed are serving time for murder. After being attacked in the showers, Lamar kills a fellow inmate and escapes with Odell and Richard.

Oklahoma

McAlester State Penitentiary is in Oklahoma and the majority of the novel takes place in Oklahoma.



Themes

Family

Lamar Pye is a criminal. Lamar was abused and neglected as a child, causing him to turn to criminal behavior early in life. Lamar never really cared about anyone else during this rocky childhood until he went to live with his aunt and uncle. Lamar's cousin, Odell, is a mentally disabled young man who was horribly abused by his uncle. Lamar knew this treatment was not right and took the situation into his own hands. Lamar kills his uncle. Lamar becomes responsible for Odell, taking him along with him as he travels around the state, committing various crimes along the way. Odell is simple, but large. Odell will kill whenever Lamar orders him to do so. Only Lamar can control Odell's behavior. Odell becomes angry at times and when he does he becomes violent. Only Lamar can prevent these tantrums. Odell adores Lamar and Lamar loves Odell.

Bud Pewtie has a family. Bud is married and has two children, boys who are in their final years of high school. Bud's marriage has become stale over the years and Bud's oldest son, Russ, is a bookworm with whom Bud has little in common. However, Jeff, Bud's youngest child, is an athlete and an adventurous soul with whom he feels a kindred spirit. Bud is close to Jeff and deeply proud of his athletic achievements. Jeff returns most his father's affection. Unfortunately, Jeff learns that his father is having an extramarital affair and becomes angry with him. This causes tension between the two. Jeff's revelation of this knowledge also prompts Bud to end the relationship.

Family is a theme of this novel because of both Bud and Lamar's attachment to a member of their family. It is the death of Odell that causes Lamar to target Bud specifically. It is also the idea of family that keeps Richard from running away from Lamar. Richard has never really had a family that cared about him. In their own way, Lamar, Odell, and Ruta Beth have become Richard's family. Due to this fact, Richard makes the decision to shoot Bud and C.D. for killing Lamar when Richard could have just walked away and allowed his lawyers to save him from the charges related to his escape.

Morality

Murder is immoral and yet Lamar, Odell, Richard, and Ruta Beth have each committed this sin. Lamar explains his actions away by explaining that he only kills people who are a threat to his freedom and safety. Lamar does not kill people he respects, such as the Stepfords who despite horrendous abuse refuse to allow their fear to overwhelm them. Lamar also commits robberies. These robberies are a product of Lamar's upbringing, according to him. Lamar's father was killed by an Oklahoma State Trooper before Lamar was born and his mother was an overwhelmed widow who neglected her son. Lamar believes that crime was the only avenue that was open to him. Therefore Lamar has morals, just not the same morals other people have.



Bud Pewtie believes in law and order. Bud believes that a man does not lie, cheat, or gamble. Bud lives his life by the creed of the police officer. However, Bud is also having an extramarital affair with the wife of one of his fellow officers. Bud knows this relationship is wrong, but he is excited by the mere thought of Holly. Bud talks with Holly before the death of her husband about getting divorces and making a try of their relationship. Holly is excited by this prospect and speaks of it often to Bud. However, when Ted is killed, Bud begins to realize that this relationship was immoral. Despite this, Bud continues the relationship because he cannot make himself end it. It is not until Bud learns that his son knows about the relationship does Bud finally end it.

Morality is a theme of this novel because two of the main characters have a strict code of morals they live by. These morals are not always of the type one might expect a man to live by, but they are their morals just the same. At times these morals are broken and the man pays a price for it. However, morality is something both men share and that makes it a necessary element to the plot.

Respect

Lamar is a large man who tends to be very violent when pushed into a corner. As a result, Lamar has won the respect of everyone in prison. This respect is important because it means Lamar can do whatever he wants behind bars without worrying about being the target of a rival gang or a rapist. However, this respect is lost when Odell annoys the leader of a rival gang and the punishment is targeted on Lamar because of Odell's disability. It is this situation that causes Lamar to kill a fellow inmate that ends in the escape from the prison.

C.D. Henderson is a cop from the old days when there were no computers, no automatic pistols, or forensic science. C.D. built a reputation on honest, hard work and intuitive detective skills. However, those days have long passed. C.D. is forced to watch the profession he gave so many years to fall at the feet of politics. C.D. begins to drink, often coming to crime scenes already drunk. C.D. has lost the respect of his fellow officers and is days from being forced into retirement. The search for Lamar, Odell, and Richard is C.D.'s last chance to prove himself as a great detective.

Richard is a coward. Richard befriends Lamar in prison because he is afraid of the other prisoners and knows that with Lamar he is safe. For this same reason, Richard escapes prison just weeks before he is due to be transferred to a minimum security prison. Richard is weak and therefore garners no respect from anyone. However, when Richard realizes that the state troopers have killed Lamar, the only man who has ever showed him any affection, Richard shoots them. When Richard returns to prison, he expects he will be killed immediately. Instead, Richard now is respected by his fellow prisoners because he was one of only a few brave enough to shoot and kill a state trooper.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person omniscient. The novel switches back and forth from the perspective of Lamar Pye to the opposing perspective of one of the state trooper searching for him, Bud Pewtie. The omniscient point of view allows the reader to have access to Lamar and Bud's inner thoughts and well as their emotions. This point of view also allows the narration to occasionally enter the minds of other characters, such as C.D. Henderson and Richard. On occasion, the narration is seen through the eyes of Odell Pye. Odell Pye is mentally disabled; therefore, when the narration is seen through his eyes, the words and sentence structure are jumbled.

The point of view of this novel works because it allows the reader to see events from the perspective of both the criminals and police officers. In this way, the reader is allowed to see both sides of the hunt for Lamar and his gang as well as adding some intimacy between the reader and characters that helps the reader care what happens in the final scenes of the novel. If the point of view were different, say first person, the reader would be restricted to the thoughts and emotions of only one character. This would make the novel narrower, changing the story and presenting a whole different type of plot.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in southern Oklahoma and Northern Texas. The characters move around a lot at the beginning of the novel; therefore, the setting is basically the road. However, the characters settle down after a time. Lamar, Odell, and Richard settle at the farm of a young woman who has a fascination with criminals who are serving time for killing one or both their parents. This woman wrote a letter to Richard, who had attempted to kill his mother, and Richard remembered the letter from the woman when the gang needed a place to hide. At the same time, Bud finds himself moving from a temporary headquarters to the hospital to the home he shares with his family.

The setting of this novel is almost a character all its own. The setting, Oklahoma, is a place that tends to be open and windy, a place that can be hostile at a second's notice. This setting is as close as modern day criminals will get to the Old West. It is this mentality, the Old West mentality, that drives a large part of the plot. Therefore, setting the novel in Oklahoma emphasizes the sense of frontier justice.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel takes place in the south; therefore, the dialogue includes some slang that a person might hear while speaking to natives of the Oklahoma area. The novel also includes some words that are associated with prisons and prison life because a group of the main characters are criminals who



have escaped prison. When Odell speaks his speech is impeded by a cleft palate defect that was never fixed. Therefore, when Odell speaks his dialogue is often broken and familiar words can appear foreign. The same is true when the narration is seen from Odell's point of view.

The language of this novel works well because it is appropriate to the setting. The language is simple, but includes slang words that are accurate. The language of this novel also works because it is simple enough for even the youngest readers to follow along without too much confusion. The only difficult aspect of the language in this novel is when the narration or dialogue is presented from Odell's perspective. Odell is both mentally disabled and has a cleft palate defect that was never repaired. As a result, Odell's thought processes are fractured and his speech is difficult to understand. The author attempted to reproduce this language in his novel causing brief moments within the novels narration in which the reader is forced to slow down and puzzle out what Odell is attempting to say.

Structure

This novel is divided into thirty-two chapters. The chapters are all reasonably long and are themselves divided into smaller sections that denote a change in narration or setting. The novel is told in both dialogue and exposition with some internal monologue added. The novel is told from many perspectives, but the bulk of the novel is told from the points of view of Bud Pewtie, the state trooper searching for Lamar's gang and Lamar himself.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the escape of Lamar's gang from prison and the subsequent search for them. The subplots include the activities of this gang while they are free as well as the affair Bud Pewtie is having with a fellow trooper's wife. The subplots also include Richard's attempts to create a suitable tattoo for Lamar and Bud's struggle to keep his wife from learning about his affair. The many subplots add complexity to the novel and help the reader get to know the main characters better. These subplots all come to a satisfying conclusion along with or before the main plot.



Quotes

"It was all attitude, Richard knew. All it took was a certain carriage, a manly posture, a strut that stank of violence and warned all who saw you that you were the stone stud."

Chapter 1, pg. 13

"The outside world: Richard had forgotten such a place existed. The weight of the prison was its totality, its immensity: in its grip, all other possibilities diminished, even disappeared."

Chapter 1, pg. 23

"He wasn't exactly an emotion machine, and his profession had conspired to drive what few public feelings he had even deeper behind the set lines of his squarish face. No one could read much on Bud." Chapter 2, pg. 27

"Put Richard on the street and he's dead. Put Richard in jail and he's dead. Put him in Russia, in ancient Rome, on Mars, in the Marine Corps, all those places—he's dead. Not Lamar. Lamar ends up running most of them, or in their prisons, running them. Lamar just knows."

Chapter 5, pg. 62

"The breeze rattled the leaves—so much shimmering green, all of it stirred by the persistent wind, that Oklahoma wind that seemed to wash over everything—amid the gray stones that stood over men who'd died because a bitch called duty had said so."

Chapter 8, pg. 105

"Odell sat with the AR-15 in his lap and a red wig on his head. He had tits. He was wearing lipstick and a blue fur-trimmed coat from the year 1958, the year that Ruta Beth's daddy had bought it for Ruta Beth's mother at Dillon's Department Store in Oklahoma City. He didn't look much like a woman. He looked like a gigantic transvestite with an assault rifle, if you looked close.

But who would look close." Chapter 11, pg. 135

"It looked like the last building left standing in a battleground. Its windows all shattered, its walls pocked with bullet holes, shards of glass and window frame everywhere, tables tossed this way and that. And, of course, the chalk outlines of bodies long removed."

Chapter 16, pg. 197

"Goddamn Lamar, smart as a whip. All them brains spent on defeating the law, and completely unyoked to any moral compass. He could have been a doctor, a goddamned lawyer, with brains like that. But he spent all that time just figuring out one thing: how to get away with it." Chapter 20, pg. 249



"They began to come in the night. He could not deny them. He wasn't sure if they were dreams or fantasies, but they always came between the hours of four and six while he was in a semiwakeful state, involving visions and positions as yet untried: smoky memories, these visions, all of Holly. He'd roll over and see Jen sleeping, and wonder, Why, oh why aren't you enough for me?" Chapter 26, pg. 329

"He lovingly threaded shells into chambers and magazines, thrilled, as always, at the fitting together of parts, the slick camming of slides and pumps and bolts, the heavy feel of them all, until each gun seemed alive with its charges." Chapter 29, pg. 353

"Bud felt exactly the opposite of how he expected. He thought he'd feel liberated at last, shorn of his secret life, ready and willing to embrace with all seriousness of high purpose his old life, which had been miraculously restored to him. But no. He just felt draggy, slow, morose, grouchy. He wanted to get in a fight." Chapter 30, pg. 370

"Long after the funeral, which was one of the biggest in the history of the state, long after the newspapers and the television had lost interest, long after people had stopped asking about it, the Ford F250 pulled into the parking lot of a small cemetery in Kiowa county. It was November, the day before Thanksgiving, when Oklahoma turns chilly and ocher and seems somehow drained of its brightness." Chapter 32, pg. 424

Topics for Discussion

Why does Lamar kill Junior in the showers? Why does Lamar not allow Junior to enforce his punishment for Odell's actions? If Lamar knows killing Junior will cause his life to be in danger, why does he do it? How does Lamar plan the escape so quickly? Why is Lamar not afraid of being prosecuted for the murder?

Who is Richard Peed? What is Richard's crime? Why did Richard commit this crime? Why does Richard befriend Lamar? What does Richard want from Lamar? Does Richard get what he wants from Lamar? In what context?

Why does Lamar want Richard to draw a lion? What does Lamar hope to do with this picture? What does this picture say about Lamar? What does drawing it do for Richard? How does Bud use these pictures to track down Lamar? What does Bud think of the pictures? What would Lamar say if he knew Bud's opinion? How does this show differences between the two men?

Who is Odell? How is Odell different from the other criminals? Is Odell a dangerous criminal? Should Odell be in prison? Why does Odell escape the prison? What does Odell hope to get from this escape? Who is Odell supposed to see during this escape? Does Odell see this person? Why or why not? How does Odell end this escape? Is this a fitting end for Odell?

Who is Ruta Beth? Why does Ruta Beth welcome Lamar and his gang into her home? What does Ruta Beth receive from this arrangement? Why did Ruta Beth write Richard in the first place? What do Ruta Beth and Richard have in common? Does this draw the two characters together?

Who is Holly? Why is Bud involved with this woman? Does Bud intend to end his marriage for this woman? Why or why not? What does this affair say about Bud? Why does Bud decide to end the relationship? Did Bud ever intend to be with Holly? Why does Holly believe Bud's decision to save her life means he wants to be with her? Is this true? Why does Bud push Holly away while going after Lamar? What does this say about Bud's character?

Why does Bud become obsessed with catching Lamar? Does his obsession have anything to do with his affair with Holly? Why or why not? What does this obsession say about Bud's personality? How does Bud's obsession affect his family? How does his obsession change his personality and the course of his life?