

Double Whammy Study Guide

Double Whammy by Carl Hiaasen

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Plot Summary

Double Whammy is a dark comedy by writer Carl Hiaasen. R.J. Decker is a down-on-his-luck private investigator that is hired to catch a cheating bass fisherman. Not knowing anything about fishing, Decker turns to an eccentric recluse to help him with the case. This man, Skink, is a famous politician living incognito, who is determined to stop the cheater, but for different reasons. Together Skink and Decker find themselves embroiled in a world of murder and mayhem, going from investigators to fugitives on the run. Double Whammy is a suspenseful comedy that will appeal to readers of all backgrounds, even those who cannot tell a lunger from a hawg.

R.J. Decker is a private investigator, who has been hired by a rich businessman to prove that Dickie Lockhart cheats at bass tournaments in which the two men participate. Decker knows nothing about bass fishing, so when he arrives in Dickie's hometown, he hires a cheap guide to show him the ropes. This guide is named Skink. Skink is an eccentric recluse who likes to eat road kill. However, as odd as Skink is, he knows his stuff and Decker hopes he will prove to be a valuable addition to his investigation.

Soon after arriving in town, Decker learns that the man who was investigating Dickie before him is dead. Within days, Decker's colleague from his newspaper days is also found dead. Shortly after finding his friend's body, Decker and Skink are chased through the woods by a man with a gun. Skink kills the gunman and disposes of his body rather than calling the police. Decker considers quitting the case at this point, realizes he needs the money the case is paying.

Decker and Skink fly to New Orleans to attend a bass tournament being held there. Decker and Skink go out on the lake the night before the tournament and watch two men catch and cage several bass around the lake. Skink frees all but two of the caged bass. The next day, Decker and Skink stake out the remaining cage hoping to catch Dickie in the act of cheating. They catch two fishermen, but unfortunately neither one is Dickie.

That afternoon, Decker is surprised when Lanie Gault, the sister of his employer, shows up at his hotel. Skink disappears while Decker and Lanie spend the evening together. After leaving Lanie at her hotel, Decker goes looking for Skink. Rather than finding Skink, Decker finds Dickie Lockhart dead on the dock where the tournament took place. Decker leaves the body there and returns to his hotel. The next day, Decker leaves for the airport and is nearly mugged while changing a flat tire on his rental. It is because of this attack that Decker assumes a police detective friend, Al Garcia, wants to talk to him a few days later.

Decker nearly gives himself up to the police before Skink stops him. Skink has learned that Decker is the prime suspect in Dickie's murder. Skink helps Decker escape and the two men go on the run. Skink and Decker spend a night at Decker's ex-wife's house, only to be chased out of the house in the middle of the night when Garcia shows up. Decker and Skink then hide out in a hotel for a few days before Garcia catches up with



them again. However, by this time, Garcia has figured out that Decker is innocent and has decided to help him prove it.

Decker, Skink, Garcia, and Skink's friend, Jim Tile, all gather at Skink's and begin formulating a plan to prove Decker's innocence. Skink enrolls Tile and Garcia in the Dickie Lockhart Memorial Bass Tournament at Lunker Lakes, a new community development owned by Charles Weeb, a televangelist and producer of Dickie's fishing show. To ensure Tile and Garcia win, Skink transports a large bass fish he has befriended to Lunker Lakes.

Before leaving for the tournament, Decker learns that a man in Gault's employ has kidnapped his ex-wife, Catherine. While Tile and Garcia join the bass tournament, Decker goes in search of Catherine. Skink, at the same time, pretends to be a blind man and is hired to fake a miraculous cure on Reverend Weeb's television show. Skink purposely fakes his cure, exposing Weeb as a fraud on national television. Later, when the fishermen begin arriving at the docks, Weeb is further embarrassed by the fact that no one was able to catch a fish except for Garcia, who caught a tiny bass. When Garcia asks for his winning check, Weeb has to admit that the money is missing. Weeb is then arrested for fraud.

At the same time, Gault learns where Skink hid his large fish. Determined to catch the fish and win the competition, Gault makes a fatal mistake. Gault hooks the fish and turns on his boat engine in order to aid in reeling the fish in. However, the fish proves to be more powerful than Gault imagined, pulling him overboard and killing him.

Decker meets with Catherine's kidnapper and arranges to exchange himself with her. However, the kidnapper has been ordered to kill both him and Catherine. Decker convinces the kidnapper to take a photo of him and Catherine for memory's sake. When the kidnapper pushes the button on the camera, it explodes, killing him instantly. Decker and Catherine return to the tournament where they hijack a camera and film Weeb's downfall. Later, when Skink realizes the fish are dying, he rushes to the rescue of his large bass, saving it from the polluted waters.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Double Whammy is a dark comedy by writer Carl Hiaasen. R.J. Decker is a down-on-his-luck private investigator that is hired to catch a cheating bass fisherman. Not knowing anything about fishing, Decker turns to an eccentric recluse to help him with the case. This man, Skink, is a famous politician living incognito, who is determined to stop the cheater, but for different reasons. Together Skink and Decker find themselves embroiled in a world of murder and mayhem, going from investigators to fugitives on the run. Double Whammy is a suspenseful comedy that will appeal to readers of all backgrounds, even those who cannot tell a lunger from a hawg.

Bobby Clinch is a telephone repair man who has the annoying hobby, in his wife's opinion at least, of bass fishing. One morning Bobby gets up early to go out on the water in his boat; however, Bobby is not fishing, although he takes an old rod for appearance sake. Bobby does not return home that afternoon. The next morning, Bobby's wife gets the call that Bobby has had an accident in his boat and drowned. At the same time, R.J. Decker, a private investigator, is speaking with Dennis Gault, a businessman who wants to hire him. Gault is a bass fisherman who attends many fishing tournaments. Gault believes another fisherman, Dickie Lockhart, is cheating. Gault wants Decker to prove Dickie cheats. Decker takes the case because it pays a great deal of money.

A local pathologist examines Bobby Clinch's body. The pathologist does not do a thorough job because he is squeamish when it comes to corpses. As a result, Bobby's death is ruled accidental. At the same time, Dickie Lockhart is on the lake filming the latest episode of his fishing show, Fish Fever. Dickie is frustrated because his budget does not allow for the camera and film he would prefer to use. Not only this, but Dickie has not caught anything good all day. In the middle of a scene, another boat moves up and the occupant tells Dickie about Bobby's death. Dickie offers his condolences but does not appear bothered by the news. Dickie then gives the man his favorite lure, a double whammy.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Bobby Clinch is introduced in the first chapter. Bobby is a working man who likes to go bass fishing. It is clear his wife does not like this hobby since Bobby mentions several times that she is often annoyed by the expense of his hobby. Bobby does not seem worried about his wife's unhappiness, however. Bobby goes out to the lake with his boat, but he does not appear to be going fishing. Bobby takes a reel, but not one of his best. Bobby also thinks about taking a gun, suggesting to the reader that whatever Bobby is going out to do might be dangerous. This suggestion seems to be well founded when Bobby never comes home and is later found drowned. An autopsy



confirms this diagnosis. However, the reader is left skeptical about this diagnosis since the doctor who does the autopsy is squeamish around corpses and did not do a thorough job.

R.J. Decker is also introduced in the first chapter. Decker is a private investigator, who is desperate enough for money that he takes a job from an unpleasant businessman, who seems to have petty reasons for wanting to catch a fisherman cheating at tournaments. This businessman, Dennis Gault, is rude and pompous, turning Decker off from the beginning of their meeting. However, Decker agrees to take the job because the money is good and it is different from the insurance work he has been doing most recently.

Dickie Lockhart is also introduced in these first chapters. Dickie Lockhart is a bass fisherman and is the subject of Dennis Gault's cheating theory. Dickie is the host of a small fishing show, Fish Fever, and clearly a celebrity in the small town where he lives. Dickie is in the middle of filming an episode when he is introduced to the reader. Dickie is having little luck catching a fish and is frustrated. When Dickie is interrupted with the news of Bobby Clinch's death, he seems more annoyed than anything else. Dickie gives his favorite lure to the man who interrupted, but he throws it at the man, causing it to lodge in his skin. This implies to the reader that Dickie is not the nicest man in the world.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Decker is the son of an FBI agent. Decker has always liked photography and became a professional photographer soon after high school. However, Decker found shooting models boring and decides to take the offer of a job with a local newspaper. When Decker arrives in Harney, Dickie's hometown, his first stop is to the local newspaper where an old colleague of his works. Ott Pickney came to Harney after retiring from the Miami Sun. Decker visits him to find out where he can hire a guide to teach him a few things about bass fishing. When Decker says he cannot afford any of the local guides, Pickney sends Decker to Skink, an eccentric recluse who occasionally works as a guide.

Decker goes to Skink's ramshackle cabin and finds a crazy man with a rifle. Decker offers Skink a hundred dollars to take him bass fishing. Skink reluctantly agrees. Skink takes Decker in his truck and drives down the highway until he finds some road kill. Skink rescues the opossum off the road and returns to his camp to cook it. Skink insists that Decker eat with him. Decker does despite his reluctance. Skink then agrees to take Decker fishing the following day.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Decker is a photographer who found photographing models boring, so he then works at a newspaper, but now he is a private investigator. The reader can make the assumption that something changed at the newspaper to make Decker quit. Perhaps the work became boring there as well. Decker now is working for a man he does not like because it pays good. This suggests that Decker is in need of money and that whatever made him leave the newspaper prevents him from returning to the type of photography that helped him make large amounts of money for a few hours of work.

Decker arrives in Dickie's hometown and makes contact with Ott Pickney, an old colleague from the newspaper. Pickney points Decker to a cheap guide, who might be able to show him a few details about bass fishing. Decker goes to meet this man, who turns out to be an eccentric recluse who would rather shoot Decker than speak to him. This man, Skink, is odd and scary. Skink makes Decker share a meal of road kill with him before he agrees to take him on the lake. Skink is a strange character, who only becomes more odd as the plot progresses. The reader, however, looks forward to learning a few more details about Skink, perhaps an explanation later in the novel that will make his odd behavior understandable.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The next morning, Pickney wakes up Decker early and takes him to Bobby Clinch's funeral in order to allow Decker to see some of the local bass fishermen who will be in attendance. On the way, Decker tells Pickney how he spent ten months in jail for beating up a kid who was stealing his cameras. Turns out the kid was a local sports hero and his father had pull with the DA. This is why Decker no longer works for the newspaper. What Decker does not tell Pickney is that he decided to change occupations because he found that he had gotten to a point where he did not see the real world unless he was looking through the lens of a camera.

After the funeral, Decker meets a beautiful woman named Lanie. They speak for a few minutes and it becomes clear to Decker that this woman was Bobby Clinch's mistress. Lanie does not believe that Clinch died by accident as the police claim. Lanie believes Clinch was murdered and hopes Decker can find out who and why. At the same time, Pickney is speaking with Clinch's wife for an article he plans to write for the local paper. However, the woman proves to be a poor interviewee because she seems to feel little emotion toward her dead husband. Later, Decker questions why Bobby Clinch is being buried with his favorite fishing rod. The accident that killed Bobby supposedly happened while he was fishing, so Decker questions why he would not have taken his favorite rod with him.

At the same time, Dickie Lockhart is meeting with Charles Weeb, the owner of the cable station on which Fish Fever is shown. Weeb is concerned because Dickie is slowly losing a ratings war with his rival, Eddie Spurling. Weeb wants Dickie to improve his ratings, but does not want to give him any more money with which to do it. Weeb warns Dickie that if he does not continue to be on top, changes might be in order.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The reader learns more about Decker in this chapter. It turns out that Decker became jaded by his work at the newspaper and soon found he could not see reality unless it was through the lens of a camera. On top of this, Decker was convicted of assault and spent time in prison for beating up a thief that turned out to be a star athlete. Decker's bad luck actually proved to be a blessing because it was an excuse to get out of the photography business all together. Now Decker prefers to only use his cameras on rare occasions, giving a reason why he does not go back to making a large amount of money by photographing models.

Lanie Gault is introduced in this chapter. Although Decker does not know she is his employer's sister, he does learn that she was Bobby Clinch's mistress. Lanie is clearly heartbroken over Dennis' death and hopes that Decker will find out how he died. Decker



assumes, like everyone else, that Bobby Clinch died by accident, but Lanie makes Decker question this assumption. When Decker notes that Bobby is being buried with his prize fishing rod, he wonders why Bobby did not take the rod fishing with him that fateful day. The reader wonders this as well and begins to think perhaps Bobby's death was not accidental.

Dickie Lockhart misses the funeral because he has a meeting with Reverend Charles Weeb, the owner of the cable channel on which Dickie's show appears. Weeb is concerned because Dickie's closest rival, Eddie Spurling, is gaining on him in ratings. Weeb wants Dickie to increase his ratings but will not give him more money to make better shows. This introduces Weeb's character as cheap and egotistical. Weeb clearly does not want to spend the money necessary to help Fish Fever gain in the ratings, but is willing to put all the blame on Dickie's shoulders for the show's difficulties. This places Dickie in a hard place, perhaps providing motivation for him to cheat during the bass tournaments. As long as Dickie can win these tournaments, he can win the ratings for his show.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Decker returns to Skink's cabin and waits on the porch for the man to arrive. Skink walks up with a dead rabbit, insisting once again that Decker share in his road-kill meal. As they eat, Decker asks Skink about Bobby Clinch. Skink reveals that he saw Clinch the day he died. Skink was skinning a snake in a nearby tree while Clinch was idling in the river, looking for something in the water. Skink could not be sure what Clinch was looking for, but he did see another boat nearby with two men on board. Skink did not wait around to see what happened, but suspects Clinch did not die by accident.

Pickney visits Clinch's widow to interview her again, hoping for a good quote for his article. While at her home, Clinch's widow shows Pickney Clinch's fishing gear, which she is trying to sell before moving out of their home. Pickney notes that Bobby Clinch did not take his fishing tackle with him the morning he died, further suggesting that Clinch was not fishing that fateful morning. Pickney begins to wonder if Decker is right, that Clinch did not die the way the police believe.

That evening Skink takes Decker fishing. Skink teaches Decker how to cast and reel in a fish. Decker catches a small bass and is exhilarated by the success of it. Skink throws the fish back into the water. On the way back to shore, Skink tells Decker that he believes Clinch was searching for a particular fish on the morning he died. Skink believes that Clinch had been investigating the possibility of Dickie cheating and was looking for proof that morning. While Dickie was not one of the men on the boat Skink saw that morning, he believes that Dickie is behind Clinch's death.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Decker returns to Skink's and once again is expected to share a meal of road kill. Decker seems undergoing some test in order to win Skink's trust. It appears that Decker has passed because Skink agrees to take him fishing later that day. When they go out in the boat, Skink teaches Decker how to fish, which shows that Skink clearly knows how himself. Perhaps Skink was once a tournament fisherman as well, giving the reader some inside into his past and suggesting he was not always an eccentric recluse. Skink also offers a theory on Clinch's death. Skink believes that Clinch knew about Dickie's cheating and was searching for proof on the morning he died. Skink believes Dickie sent the two men Skink saw near him, to kill Dickie. The reader is suspicious of Dickie as well, especially in light of his desperation displayed in the previous chapter when faced with the need to raise his ratings for his show.

Pickney returns to Clinch's wife and hopes to get a better quote for a story about Clinch's death. While there, Pickney finds the wife packing up the house and moving. The woman wants to sell her husband's fishing gear so she shows it to Pickney. Pickney

sees that Clinch's tacklebox did not make the fishing trip with him that fateful morning, so he finds himself wondering if perhaps Clinch was not fishing that morning and if perhaps something else was going on. Pickney wants to dig further and learn the truth, foreshadowing the next few chapters as Pickney acts on his reporter's instincts.



Chapters 6-7

Chapters 6-7 Summary

Lanie Gault is waiting for Decker when he returns to his motel. Lanie tells Decker that he photographed her for an ad once. Then Lanie goes on to talk about how Bobby Clinch was going to leave his wife for her, how he was different from the other fishermen she had met. Lanie then tells Decker that Bobby was working for her brother, Dennis, investigating Dickie when he died. Lanie also thinks that Dickie killed Bobby and warns Decker that he might be in danger as well. Decker has to return to Miami the next day. As he packs, he considers dropping the case, but now he is curious to find out what kind of man would kill over a fish.

Pickney interviews a local man, Culver Rundell, about Bobby Clinch. During the interview, Pickney learns that Clinch's boat is at a local carpenter's shop because Bobby's casket was made out of the hull of the boat. Pickney decides to go take a look at the boat. At the shop, Pickney sneaks around to the back of the shop, where he finds the remains of Bobby's boat in the dumpster. Pickney picks through the debris until he finds the console. Underneath the console, Pickney discovers that someone has tied a rope around the base of the steering column causing the steering wheel to be useless. Pickney is still staring at this rope when three men come up behind him.

Decker goes to visit Dennis Gault while he is in Miami. Decker wants to know what else Gault has not told him. At first Gault is pleasant, showing Decker a video of Dickie at one of the tournaments, trying to show how obvious it is that the fish Dickie won with is a ringer. Decker cannot see it. Decker then asks Gault why he did not tell him about Clinch. Gault says he did not want to scare off Decker. Then the two men discuss Lanie. Gault becomes angry when Decker suggests that Lanie is promiscuous. The two men argue. Decker gets up to leave and Gault attacks him, attempting to choke him. Decker gets the better of Gault and beats him unconscious. Before Decker leaves, he writes a note to Gault asking for a hundred thousand dollars for the case rather than the original fifty thousand. Back in Harney, Ott Pickney fails to show up for his performance as the local high school's mascot, Davey Dillo.

Chapters 6-7 Analysis

Decker learns from Lanie that Clinch died while working for Gault, something Skink suspected and told Decker in a previous chapter. Now Decker knows for sure that Clinch was working for Gault and considers using it as an excuse to quit the case. However, knowing his life is in danger excites Decker and he decides to stick with it. Decker confronts Gault about the issue, wondering what else Gault is not telling him. Gault insists this is all he has left out, but the reader and Decker both are suspicious that there might be more. Decker and Gault argue about Lanie and her sexual proclivities. This argument shows that Decker is more intuitive than the reader might

have suspected at first. The argument also shows that Gault is sensitive to his sister's reputation and willing to fight for her. Gault's reaction suggests love for his sister, but the reader suspects, given Gault's previous behavior, that he is actually more concerned by how his sister's reputation affects his own.

Decker and Gault have a physical confrontation, and Decker beats Gault unconscious. The reader wants to believe Decker is a gentle man, but this confrontation shows that Decker tends to lose control when he is angry. The reader loses some of their sympathy for Decker and decides that his time in prison was more than likely justified. However, the reader is as disgusted with Gault as with Decker, so Decker remains a more likable character. When Decker leaves Gault, he leaves a note requesting more money for the case. Gault is angered by this, but the reader finds the note amusing. This note will come back to haunt Decker, however, when it reappears in a later chapter.

Pickney has decided that Clinch was murdered. Pickney begins to investigate under the guise of writing an article about Clinch for the local paper, regaining some of the excitement he had when writing for a Miami newspaper. After interviewing a local man and learning where Clinch's boat is, Pickney goes to check out the boat. Pickney looks at the console and discovers that someone has tampered with Clinch's steering column. While looking at this and wondering what it means, Pickney is joined by three other men. Later, Pickney fails to show up for his job as the local high school's mascot. This makes the reader wonder if Pickney ran into the men who killed Clinch. The reader is also concerned that Pickney may suffer the same fate as Clinch.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Decker is at his trailer home developing some film in his dark room when his ex-wife, Catherine, stops by. Catherine is remarried to a chiropractor, but her new husband is often out of town. Catherine worries about Decker, especially since she blames herself for the time he spent in prison because the incident that caused him to go to jail took place the day she remarried. Now Catherine has made herself a sort of self-appointed guardian, watching over Decker. Catherine asks Decker why he insists on working as a private investigator. Catherine tells him he could make a lot more money if he moved to New York and went back to photographing models. Decker refuses even when Catherine suggests that she and her new husband might be moving to New Jersey.

That same day, Skink calls Decker and tells him Ott Pickney has disappeared. Skink asks Decker to come back to Harney immediately. Decker drives all night and arrives before dawn. Moments after Decker arrives, a state trooper pulls up. Skink introduces Jim Tile. Tile tells Decker how he was on patrol that morning and saw a truck pulled over on the side of the road at a place called Morgan Slough. As Tile went to investigate, three men returned to the truck and drove off. Tile recognized one of the men, Ozzie Rundell, Culver Rundell's brother.

Skink and Tile believe these men have something to do with Pickney's disappearance, so they all pile into Tile's car to go take a look. At Morgan Slough, Skink finds a chain in the water. Skink pulls it up and finds at the end is a fish stringer. Attached, with a hook through both his lips, is Ott Pickney.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Decker's ex-wife is introduced in this chapter. Catherine is a beautiful woman, who clearly still loves her ex-husband despite the fact she is remarried. The reader gets the impression, both from Catherine and from Decker's thoughts about her that she remarried for money purposes rather than for love. Catherine clearly feels guilty about this since she has remained close to Decker and has appointed herself as his guardian of sorts. Catherine wants Decker to move to New York in order to pursue a photography career. The reader finds themselves wondering, however, if her desire for Decker to do this is because of concern for his well being or because she wants him to remain close to her. Catherine's husband wants to move to New Jersey, which would mean leaving Decker behind unless he moves to New York.

Skink calls Decker and tells him that Pickney has disappeared. Decker rushes back to Harney and learns that Skink has a friend in the state patrol. This friend, Jim Tile, saw a group of men pulled over on a remote stretch of highway. When Tile learns of Pickney's disappearance, he puts two and two together and alerts Skink. Skink, Tile, and Decker

go to this remote spot and find Pickney's body. Now the reader knows Pickney's fate and the tension of the plot increases as the reader wonder what will happen to Decker when he gets closer to the truth of these murders.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Tile and Skink decide to leave Pickney where he is because they cannot report their find to the police. Tile has no probable cause for investigating the scene. Tile is also convinced he would not find any support from the local sheriff because he is biased against Tile due to his skin color. Tile drives Skink and Decker back to the road that runs beside Skink's cabin. After Tile drives off, a pickup truck approaches. It appears to be the same truck Tile saw parked at Morgan Slough. One of the men gets out and begins following Skink and Decker through the woods. Seconds later, gun fire breaks out. Skink tells Decker to run. Seconds later, Skink begins returning fire. When everything quiets down, Decker discovers that Skink has shot their pursuer and taken his gun. Later that night, Skink disposes of the body, then tells Decker that he will go with him to New Orleans where a fishing tournament will be held in a few days.

Skink's real name is Clinton Tyree. Clinton Tyree is a Vietnam Vet, a football star, and an eligible bachelor. When Clinton Tyree ran for governor, it was his teeth that people remembered most about him. During his first year as governor, Tyree discovered the depth of corruption in Florida and decided to clean it up. Tyree was determined to keep development out of the virgin lands throughout Florida. At first the corporations who offered bribes thought Tyree simply wanted more. However, when Tyree made his intentions clear, these corporations went to their supporters in the congress. Congress decided to make their displeasure known by voting down every bill Tyree attempted to pass. Tyree became ineffectual as governor. One morning, Tyree decided to run away. Tyree had his driver from his security detail, Jim Tile, drive him to the airport. Tyree disappeared, never to be heard from again.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Skink and Tile leave Pickney where he is despite Decker's objections. Tile does not think they could get any support from the local police because Tile is a black man. As a black man, Tile gets little support from any of the local people, especially the sheriff. Not only this, but Tile had no reason to be investigating the men in the truck. Decker does not understand this reasoning because he is law abiding citizen, but he trusts Skink and chooses to follow his guidance.

When Tile drops Decker and Skink off near Skink's cabin, two men from the same pickup truck follow them into the woods. One of the men has a gun and begins firing at Skink and Decker. Skink tells Decker to run. Skink then guns down the man, killing him. Later Skink hides the body. Again, contacting the police is something Skink does not choose to do. The reader begins to wonder if Skink is hiding from something.



The reader then learns that Skink is really Clinton Tyree. Tyree was once a highly-accomplished man, who ran for governor. Tyree a naive man, who believes he can change the world; however, Tyree soon learns he cannot change anything on his own. Tyree tries to stop development in Florida's nature reserves, but by doing this, he angers a great many people. Florida Congress turns on Tyree and makes him powerless as governor. Tyree, disappointed by human nature, disappears and becomes Skink. Now the reader understands why Skink does not want to go to the police. If someone finds out who he is, it might make his anonymous life impossible to maintain.



Chapters 10-11

Chapters 10-11 Summary

Decker goes to spend the night at Lanie's motel room rather than sleep at Skink's. When Decker arrives, he tries to learn more about Gault's role in Bobby Clinch's death, but Lanie begins crying, trying to convince Decker of the depth of her grief for Clinch. The next morning, Reverend Weeb takes a helicopter tour of his new community development, Lunker Lakes. Weeb is promoting the condos as a new Christian city designed just for Christians. There is a network of canals at the site that Weeb is promoting as lakes, which he intends to stock with bass. To promote the show, Weeb orders Dickie to shoot an episode of his television show there, despite the fact that the lakes have not yet been stocked.

Skink is late arriving at the airport. While waiting, Decker calls the Harney Sentinel and learns that Ott Pickney has died in a car accident, supposedly driving home drunk from a romantic interlude in another town. Tile drives Skink to the airport. On the way, Tile tells Skink how he pulled over the pickup truck from Morgan Slough and how the man driving, Thomas Curl, told him he was late to work, but Curl was driving in the wrong direction for going to work. Tile also mentions how it appeared the man had been traveling with a companion, but that the companion and his gun appeared to be missing. Skink knows his shooting victim is Curl's brother, Lemus, from the wallet he found on the body. Skink also knows what Tile is fishing for but refuses to tell him about the gun fight in the woods the day before.

When Skink and Decker board the plane, Skink notices that the Rundell brothers are on the same flight. In order to protect Decker from their notice, Skink raises a fuss on the plane, causing him to be taken into custody by the sky marshal. Decker then continues on the flight to Tulsa rather than disembark at New Orleans, giving the appearance that Decker is not with Skink and not headed to the fishing tournament in New Orleans.

Chapters 10-11 Analysis

Decker spends the night with Lanie but does not learn anything new from her. At the same time, Weeb is touring his new community development called Lunker Lakes. Weeb has put a lot of money into this community and needs for it to be a success. This is an important development to the plot because the possibility of failure adds tension to the story. The reader can already sense that Weeb is concerned due to his decision to have Dickie film an episode of his show on the lakes despite the fact that they do not have fish in them yet.

Decker learns that Pickney has been found, but his body is not in the slough where they left it the day before. Now it appears that Pickney has had an "accident" in his truck. The reader knows that Pickney was not driving the day before, so the assumption is that the



killers moved Pickney to the truck and staged the accident. This gives the reader a clue to Bobby Clinch's murder. If the killers can stage a car accident, they can also stage a boat accident; therefore, it seems that Pickney's killers are most likely Clinch's killer, too. At the same time, Tile has learned the identity of one of the men who attacked Skink and Decker the day before. Tile pulled the man over and learned his name is Thomas Curl. Skink knows this man is the brother of his shooting victim, Lemus Curl, but does not tell Tile about it now in order to protect Tile.

Skink arrives late at the airport and boards a flight to New Orleans with Decker; however, Skink sees the Rundell brothers on the flight. Skink does not want these brothers to know Decker is headed to New Orleans because they might warn Dickie. Skink causes a disturbance on the plane in order to separate himself from Decker and then sends Decker on to Tulsa, protecting him from the Rundell brothers. Due to Skink's reaction, the reader now knows that Decker and Skink are going to New Orleans to catch Dickie cheating, hoping to end this investigation. The reader also now knows that Skink suspects the Rundell brothers are working for Dickie, suggesting that Decker might be in danger from these brothers since one of the brothers, Ozzie, was seen with the Curl brothers.



Chapters 12-13

Chapters 12-13 Summary

Dickie becomes drunk his first night in New Orleans. Fueled by the alcohol, Dickie decides to go to Weeb's hotel room in the middle of the night. Dickie finds Weeb in the company of two near-naked women. Further encouraged by this compromising position, Dickie blackmails Weeb for a better contract. Dickie has heard that Weeb has approached his rival, Eddie Spurling, to take his place on Fish Fever. Dickie wants a promise that Weeb will keep Dickie on the show for five years and increase his budget per episode by five hundred dollars. Weeb reluctantly agrees. Dickie also requests the company of one of the women who is with Weeb, with whom Dickie has felt an instant connection.

Skink and Decker settle in a motel near the lake where the fishing tournament is to take place the following day. Skink sleeps all day and Decker becomes lonely. Decker calls his ex-wife and she offers to come to New Orleans, but Decker turns her down. Later that night, Skink and Decker take a boat onto the lake, where Skink locates a boat with two fishermen. Skink follows the boat until it leaves the lake, noting each spot where the boat stops for any length of time. Skink goes back to the spots and finds fish cages the two men have filled with large bass. Skink lets the fish go until he gets to the last cage. In this cage, Skink leaves two bass that he has marked by clipping their fins. The assumption is that these cages are being filled for Dickie Lockhart's benefit for the tournament the following day.

The morning the tournament begins, Decker watches the competitors fill the lake, while Gault is back in Miami wishing he were there. Gault chose to miss this tournament because he was hoping his absence would make Dickie comfortable enough to cheat and be caught. However, Gault is unhappy with Decker's progress and launches a back up plan, calling his sister to ask her help. Later, as the tournament progresses, Decker and Skink take a boat back out to the last cage in which Skink left two bass. They wait most of the day until finally a boat shows up. Decker begins taking pictures, but cannot capture the boat's occupants until Skink makes a loud noise, causing them to turn. It is a perfect picture, but unfortunately, neither man is Dickie Lockhart.

Chapters 12-13 Analysis

Dickie has heard that Weeb wants to replace him as host of Fish Fever with his nearest competitor, Eddie Spurling. Dickie is not happy by this and becomes drunk and depressed his first day in New Orleans. Dickie makes an unannounced visit to Weeb's hotel room and finds him in a compromising position with two women. This proves to be good for Dickie, who uses the situation to force Weeb into agreeing to a five-year contract and a raise in budget per episode. This looks like a win for Dickie. This episode also reveals Weeb's less than moral behavior off the airwaves. The reader has



suspected that Weeb is not a nice guy, but now the reader knows Weeb is not very religious either, or at least he does not behave as one might think a Reverend should act.

Skink and Decker spend the night on the lake, trying to catch Dickie cheating. The two men catch a couple men fishing and loading fish traps, leaving the traps in various locations around the lake, where only someone looking for them would find them. The assumption is that these cages have been filled and left for Dickie Lockhart. Skink and Decker stake out one of these cages after emptying the others, guaranteeing that the cheater, touching on the theme of cheating, will come looking for this specific cage. Decker takes pictures of the men as they come for the fish, but when the men look over at him, Decker discovers that none of the men is Dickie. At the same time, Gault has become impatient and set into motion a new plan that involves his sister. The reader does not know what this plan is but suspects it will not mean good news for Decker.



Chapters 14-15

Chapters 14-15 Summary

Over lunch, Decker expresses his disappointment at not catching Dickie Lockhart. Skink offers to kill Dickie for Decker, but Decker turns him down. Later, Decker goes to the weigh in and watches as Dickie arrives at the last minute and wins the entire competition, beating out the second place winner, Spurling. When Decker arrives back at the motel, he finds Lanie waiting for him. Lanie has been wrapped in yards of fishing string. Lanie tells Decker that Skink tied her up and left. Lanie is not terribly upset, however. Lanie and Decker spend the afternoon in bed and then drive to New Orleans for dinner. Afterward, Decker leaves Lanie at a hotel and drives back to the lake. Decker takes a less populated route back, hoping to spot Skink. When Decker drives past the dock, he sees that someone has left the lights on. Decker goes down to check out the large fish tank where the fishermen placed their catches after the weigh in. Decker is curious if they remembered to let the fish go after the competition and is amused to see they did not. However, along with the dead fish, Decker discovers Dickie Lockhart's body floating in the tank. Afraid Skink has committed the murder, Decker leaves the body where it is.

Weeb has built his business on the idea that he is the son of an alcoholic and drug addict, who sold his little sister in exchange for drugs. However, Weeb's parents are still alive and productive citizens, and his only sibling is an older brother. Weeb has created his entire persona because he saw profit in becoming a televangelist. Weeb bought a small cable station and turned it into a Christian network, showing both religious shows and outdoor sports shows, such as Fish Fever. Weeb craves success, which was his main motivation in seeking to hire Eddie Spurling when it became obvious that Dickie's days were numbered. The news that Dickie has died could not come at a better time. Now Weeb is free to hire Spurling.

Decker wakes the next morning and finds that Skink is still gone. Decker checks out of his motel and drives past the dock. The police are there interviewing most of the people who participated in the tournament the day before, hoping to find a witness to Dickie's murder. Decker continues on his journey, suffering a flat tire on his way to the airport. While changing the flat, a truck with three rednecks inside pulls over. Decker tells them he is doing fine, but the men announce they have stopped to rob him. Decker suggests a picture first, telling the men he is a professional photographer and can make them a picture that makes them look good. The men pose and Decker takes advantage of their distraction to hit them with the tire iron. Decker knocks the men out and drives off to the airport on his flat tire.



Chapters 14-15 Analysis

Lanie arrives in New Orleans and immediately seduces Decker. The reader recalls that Gault called his sister to help him with his new plan, so the reader wonders if this is part of that plan. Lanie keeps Decker busy all night. Decker then discovers that Dickie Lockhart has been murdered. Remembering that Skink offered to kill Dickie over lunch, Decker is afraid that Skink has committed the murder. To protect Skink, Decker returns to the motel and pretends he did not find a dead body. The next morning, Skink has not returned to the motel. Decker goes past the dock again and discovers the police investigating the murder. Decker is concerned and decides to go home, hoping Skink has managed to find his way back.

Weeb's past is revealed in this chapter, exposing him as a fraud when it comes to his religious credentials. The reader already suspected that Weeb is a fraud, but now the reader knows for sure. Weeb is simply a business man attempting to make a few bucks off the religious beliefs of his viewers. Not only this, but Weeb was planning all along to fire Dickie and hire Spurling, which he is now free to do since Dickie is dead. The reader must suspect at this point that Weeb had something to do with Dickie's death, both because Dickie was blackmailing him and because Weeb wanted to fire Dickie.

Finally on the way home, Decker runs into three rednecks who want to rob him. Decker manages to talk the men into allowing him to take their picture. While the men are distracted trying to find the perfect pose, Decker takes them out with the tire iron. This is the second time the reader has seen Decker's more violent side. More important, however, is the chance Decker might be arrested for this assault. Also important is that Decker was able to distract the men with his camera, something he might utilize later in the novel when trouble presents itself again.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

When Decker gets home, he cannot get Gault on the phone. Later, Decker gets a call from a police detective friend, who wants to know if he can come over for a talk. Decker suspects from his friend's demeanor that this is a professional visit and suspects that his muggers are pressing charges. Decker is also concerned it might have something to do with Skink and Dickie Lockhart's murder. When the detective, Al Garcia, arrives, he is in the company of several uniformed officers. Decker hesitates, but intends to give himself up assuming it is nothing more than an assault charge. However, before Decker can go outside, someone comes up behind him and knocks him out. When Decker comes to, he finds Skink is his attacker.

Skink will not allow Decker to talk to the police. Decker believes this is because the police are looking for Skink. After the police leave, Skink and Decker go to breakfast at a local restaurant. Decker asks Skink where he went after he left the motel. Skink tells him that he stole Ozzie Rundell's boat and found Dickie's cages. Skink then sank Ozzie's boat. Before Decker can learn anything else, a police car drives slowly past Decker's car. Decker guesses that Garcia put out the word on him and decides they better go. In the car, Decker tells Skink he should get out and run. Skink finds this amusing and tells Decker that the police are not after him; they are after Decker.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Decker gets a call from Garcia, a police detective friend of his and believes that the three muggers in New Orleans are pressing charges against him. Decker finds this somewhat amusing. When Garcia shows up with uniformed officers, Decker is a little concerned but still thinks the charges are assault and will be easy to defend. However, before Decker can turn himself in, Skink knocks him out. Decker then begins to think Garcia is there to arrest Skink for murder. Decker asks Skink where he went after he left the motel and learns he found Dickie's cages, proving Dickie did cheat in the tournament, touching on a theme of the novel. However, now that Dickie is dead, it does not seem to matter much. Gault seems to have also lost interest since Decker cannot get him on the phone. However, the reader might suspect there is more to Gault's silence than this.

Skink and Decker see a cop checking out Decker's car and decide it is time to move on. Decker tries to give Skink a chance to run away, believing Garcia is after Skink. However, Garcia is not after Skink. Skink tells Decker Garcia is after him. Decker is surprised and does not know why and neither does the reader. This leaves the reader waiting impatiently to move on to the next chapter and find out for what Garcia is after Decker.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

Decker and Skink ditch the car and rent a new car at the airport. Skink then tells Decker how Tile told him about a warrant New Orleans police sent to Miami for Decker's arrest. It seems Gault ran down to New Orleans the moment he learned of Dickie Lockhart's death and told the police that Decker was blackmailing both him and Dickie with pictures of Dickie cheating. When Dickie refused to pay, Decker killed him. The police say that Gault provided not only pictures supposedly showing Dickie cheating on film that can be traced to Decker, but also a note in Decker's handwriting demanding one hundred thousand dollars. Finally, the New Orleans police have a statement from Lanie Gault stating that Decker told her he intended to go see Lockhart after dropping her off at her hotel.

Decker and Skink need a safe place to stay the night, so Decker takes them to Catherine's house. Decker has never been to the house and never met Catherine's new husband, but he does not hesitate to knock on her door. James, Catherine's new husband, is hospitable to Decker and Skink. However, Skink clearly dislikes James and becomes agitated when he learns that James earned his money selling time shares in a community that Skink tried to stop from being built when he was governor. Skink requests to sleep outside, while Decker takes one of the many guest bedrooms in Catherine's large house.

Decker wants to speak to Catherine before he leaves, so he sneaks into her bedroom in the middle of the night. Decker wakes Catherine and then steals a few kisses while her husband sleeps beside her. Catherine is reluctant to be alone with Decker but agrees to go to his room with him. However, Skink interrupts their plans when he sneaks into the room and announces that the police have arrived. Al Garcia knocks on the front door as Decker gets dressed and tries to explain to James what he is doing in his bedroom. Skink and Decker escape out the back door and take off in Catherine's boat. At the same time, the Rundell brothers have returned from New Orleans and are angry. The brothers believe that Skink sank their boat. The Rundells go to Tile's house, aware he is a friend of Skink's, to ask him to take them to Skink. When Tile refuses, Culver Rundell pulls a gun.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

Decker and Skink get a new car and then Skink tells Decker what he knows about the warrant against him. It appears that Gault has given testimony that makes Decker look as though he has been blackmailing both Gault and Dickie Lockhart. To prove this, Gault hands over the note Decker wrote after his fight with Gault that asked for one hundred thousand dollars for the case instead of the original fifty thousand. Gault also turns over pictures that supposedly show Dickie cheating. Decker has no idea what



these pictures are or how Gault got them, but he suspects Lanie stole some film from his camera case while she was alone in his motel room. On top of all this, it seems that Lanie has given a statement putting Decker with Dickie after leaving her at her hotel in New Orleans. It seems the police have a strong case against Decker thanks to Gault. It is also apparent what Gault's plan was and that he is might possibly be behind Dickie's death.

Decker takes Skink to Catherine's house in order to have a safe place to stay the night. Skink learns that James made his money from selling time shares at one of the developments he attempted to stop while governor, so he refuses to sleep in the house. Skink is clearly still upset about the things that happened while he was governor and regrets leaving instead of staying to fight. Now the reader has real insight into Skink's inner turmoil and wonders what he might do to rectify the situation. Later, Decker attempts to spend a few minutes of quiet time with Catherine, but Al Garcia has tracked him to her house and is at the front door. Decker and Skink escape in Catherine's boat while Catherine distracts Garcia. At the same time, Tile gets a visit from the Rundell brothers who are looking for Skink. Tile refuses to help out these boys, and they pull a gun on him, leaving the reader on pins and needles wondering what will happen next.



Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary

While Skink drives Catherine's boat up the Intracoastal Waterway to Ft. Lauderdale, Tile gets off work and returns home to tend to a gunshot wound in his thigh. Tied up on the floor are the Rundell brothers. Culver has a broken jaw. Tile unties Ozzie and questions him about Bobby Clinch and Ott Pickney. Ozzie does not know anything about Clinch but was present when the Curl boys killed Pickney. Ozzie swears he had nothing to do with it and did not see the actual murder. However, Ozzie does tell Tile that the Curl boys killed Pickney because he was curious about Clinch's boat. Tile thanks Ozzie and helps him get his brother into his truck, allowing the boys to go free.

At the same time, Dickie Lockhart is being buried, Reverend Charles Weeb throws a press conference. Weeb announces that Eddie Spurling will be taking over as host of Fish Fever. Weeb further announces that he and his network are sponsoring a bass tournament in Dickie's name to be held at Lunker Lakes.

Garcia interviews Gault and finds him to be pompous and rude. Garcia asks Gault why Decker would blackmail him and how, learning that Gault publicly disliked Dickie and Decker supposedly thought this would cause him to desire proof of Dickie's cheating. Gault says that Decker called him at work several times, but that his secretary most likely had thrown out the messages by this time. Garcia wants to know why Decker would call the bribe money a fee, and Gault stumbles, refusing to give an answer. Garcia believes Gault is a liar and finds proof of his lies when he listens to a tape from Decker's answering machine on which Gault offers to hire Decker.

Decker and Skink stay in a hotel for a few days. From information Catherine sends Decker about the network that produced Fish Fever, he learns that the company has invested in a new community development called Lunker Lakes. Skink reads where Lunker Lakes is located and becomes agitated, going outside to fire a gun at passing airplanes. This act brings security after Skink. When they knock on Decker's hotel room door, he and Catherine pretend to be interrupted lovers. The same afternoon, Thomas Curl has just arrived in Miami. Curl dislikes Miami and is not happy to be there. Gault assures him it is only for a short time. Curl is to find Decker and take him out, for Lemus, Thomas' brother that Skink killed.

Chapters 19-20 Analysis

Culver Rundell has shot Tile, but it seems Culver got the worse end of the deal. Tile may have a hole in his thigh, but Culver has a broken jaw. Tile got the better of the two brothers, tied them up, and left them in his apartment while he went to work. This episode shows Tile's strength and courage, showcasing him to be a man who can take care of himself. When Tile returns home, he questions Ozzie and learns that the Curl



brothers were behind Ott Pickney's murder, suggesting they were also involved in Clinch's murder. This leaves the reader wondering who hired the Curl brothers and why, something Tile is sure to investigate.

While Decker and Skink are staying in a hotel and investigating Reverend Weeb, Weeb is announcing that he plans to sponsor a bass tournament in Dickie Lockhart's name. This tournament is to be held at Lunker Lakes. The reader questions Weeb's motivations, wondering if perhaps Weeb is doing this more to promote Lunker Lakes than out of respect for Dickie. It seems if Weeb were that upset over Dickie's death, he would have gone to his funeral or maybe waited a few more weeks before replacing him on his fishing show, Fish Fever.

Garcia goes to interview Gault about Dickie's murder and discovers that not only is Gault not a nice guy, but he seems to be lying. Garcia questions the wording in the note Decker left for Gault, pointing out that he calls the money a fee rather than a bribe. Gault has no easy answer for this. Garcia then hears a message on one of Decker's answering machine tapes from Gault offering to hire Decker's services. Garcia now knows that Gault is lying. The reader is left wondering if this knowledge will help Decker in any way with the charges against him.

Decker is interested in the cable company that produced Fish Fever, perhaps wondering if the network executives had anything to do with Dickie's death. Skink becomes agitated when he discovers the community has been built on the border of the Everglades. Skink fires his gun at passing planes, causing trouble with hotel security. Decker hides him, but realizes he must get Skink back to his own element soon or he will be impossible to control.



Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary

Decker decides that he and Skink should move on. Decker rents a car and they get on the road; however, within a few minutes Skink notices they are being followed. Decker pulls over when he recognizes Garcia. Decker believes Garcia is going to arrest him but discovers that Garcia wants to help him. Garcia begins the long drive to Harney and listens to Decker tell his story. At Lunker Lakes, Weeb has just learned that the bass he had stocked in the canals are all dying. The hydrologist tells him that the lakes were built on an old landfill and the water is contaminated. Weeb is becoming desperate. The condos at Lunker Lake are not selling fast enough. Weeb needs money to help recover some of what he is losing in the Lunker Lake investment. Weeb remembers when he first started out he would perform healings on the show with animals. Weeb thinks that maybe he should do a healing now, only on a human. Weeb calls his deacon and asks him to find a suitable candidate.

Decker and Garcia drop Skink off at an overpass and leave him to cook his road kill while they go into town to get some food. At the same time, Tile is in Orlando talking to Thomas Curl's uncle. Thomas Curl's uncle runs a small petting zoo with a dangerous collection of animals. Tile threatens to turn the uncle in for selling unlicensed products if he does not tell him where Thomas is. The uncle caves in and tells Tile the name of the hotel Thomas is staying at in Miami. Back on the highway, Skink is attacked by three teenagers while sleeping under the overpass. Decker and Garcia arrive. Decker attacks the boys, beating one of them mercilessly until Skink pulls him off.

Chapters 21-22 Analysis

Decker and Skink are caught by Garcia. At first Decker thinks that Garcia is going to arrest him, but Garcia has come to help. Garcia puts Decker and Skink in his car and begins the drive back to Harney. This seems to be proof to the reader that Garcia believes in Decker's innocence, thanks to the evidence he found in a previous chapter. This could be good news for Decker, but he is still not out of trouble.

Weeb gets a call that all the fish he has put in Lunker Lakes are dying. This can only mean trouble for Weeb who is sponsoring a bass tournament there in a few weeks in order to create publicity for the condos he is trying to sell. Weeb has invested a great deal of money in these condos and is beginning to worry about his finances. Weeb decides he needs to do something to raise money. Weeb thinks back to his early days as a televangelist and how he performed healing miracles with animals. Weeb decides to do the same thing, only with a human. This decision leaves the reader worried about all the things that could go wrong with human beings. This decision does not seem wise, but the reader will wait to see how it develops.



Tile interviews Thomas Curl's uncle in order to find out where he is. At the same time, Decker and Garcia leave Skink on the side of the highway to have his road kill while they go to a restaurant. While Decker and Garcia are gone, Skink is attacked by a group of teenagers. The attack is sudden, unexpected, and shows Skink's vulnerability. When Decker arrives and attacks the teenagers, the reader can observe Decker's morality, anger, and his concern for Skink. These two men have really become good friends despite their differences, making a statement about tolerance.



Chapters 23-24

Chapters 23-24 Summary

Skink is badly injured. One of his eyes looks as though it might be lost. Decker has Garcia pull over at a convenience store, where he uses the phone and gets a new pair of sunglasses for Skink, the only thing the man wants. Skink refuses medical care. As Garcia, Decker, and Skink continue their drive, Weeb's deacon finds a young girl at a welfare office to fit the bill for Weeb's healing. The young girl is double jointed and can make her arms look hideously deformed. The rehearsals do not go well, but when they perform the healing in front of the cameras, it goes so well that the program raises more than a million dollars.

Thomas Curl goes to Decker's trailer, hoping to find something that will tell him where Decker has gone. Curl is attempting to break open the back door when a neighbor's pit bull attacks. The dog latches on to Curl's arm and will not let go. Curl kills the dog with a screw driver, but the dog's jaws do not let go. Curl goes inside the trailer and uses a saw to cut the dog's body from its head, leaving the head attached to his arm. With symptoms of infection from the bite already setting in, Curl then goes to Catherine's house and kidnaps her to use her as leverage to draw Decker out of hiding.

Jim Tile leads Garcia into Harney and to Skink's cabin. Once there, Tile shows Decker a copy of the pictures with which Gault says Decker was blackmailing him. The pictures are the same ones that he took at the New Orleans bass tournament, only someone has altered them by putting Dickie Lockhart's face on one of the men. Decker thinks Lanie stole the film from his bag before Skink found her in their motel room. Decker suggests that they go talk to Lanie and find out what she knows. Decker and Tile surprise Lanie at her condo in St. Augustine. Tile tapes the conversation as Decker asks Lanie about Clinch's death. Decker has come to the conclusion that Gault had Clinch killed because he was getting too serious about Lanie. Lanie does not believe it. When Decker asks about Dickie's murder, Lanie admits that she lied to the police because Gault asked her to. In an attempt to apologize, Lanie takes Decker and Tile to her guest bedroom and shows them Ellen O'Leary, the young woman Dickie met through Weeb the night before the tournament in New Orleans. Lanie has been drugging Ellen since Thomas Curl brought her there several days before. Ellen tells them she was with Dickie the night he died and that Thomas Curl came to his hotel room and asked to talk with him. At the same time, Gault calls. Lanie pretends everything is normal and tells Gault to have Thomas come get the girl.

Chapters 23-24 Analysis

Skink is badly injured and will most likely lose his eye; however, Skink refuses medical help. Decker calls Tile who meets them on the highway and escorts them to Skink's cabin and Tile takes care of Skink. Later, Tile shows Decker the pictures Gault has



offered as evidence against him, pictures that Decker took of the cheaters at the New Orleans tournament that have been altered to look like Dickie is one of the cheaters. Decker figures out from the pictures that Lanie is behind them and decides they should go talk to Lanie. This proves to be a good idea since Lanie not only confesses to helping Gault frame Decker, but reveals that she has been hiding a witness. Ellen O'Leary was with Dickie the night he died and can place Thomas Curl as the last person seen with Dickie alive. This is important for Decker because it suggests that Thomas Curl is Dickie's murderer. However, it is still just circumstantial, so Decker is not yet out of trouble. Things are looking up, though.

Weeb performs a healing on television and it goes well. The healing goes so well, in fact, that Weeb raises more than a million dollars. The reader knows how greedy Weeb is and how desperate he is to recoup some of the money he is losing in the Lunker Lakes deal. The reader would not be surprised if Weeb tries to do another healing. However, as poorly as the healing went in rehearsals, the reader wonders if Weeb might not be pushing his luck if he tries another human healing.

Thomas Curl goes to Decker's in order to search for some clue as to where he went. Curl is attacked by a pit bull, who latches onto his arm and will not let go. Curl kills the dog, but this only latches the dog more tightly onto his arm. Curl cuts off the dog's body and leaves the head in place. Curl is already showing signs of infection when he arrives at Catherine's house and kidnaps her. The reader finds themselves wondering how dangerous Curl will become as the infection progresses. Also a concern is Catherine's safety since Curl is a proven murderer and is now suffering a massive infection that might affect his mind. From past chapters, the reader knows Decker would be devastated if something happens to Catherine; therefore, the reader is concerned about this situation.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Garcia is at Skink's cabin, trying to get along in the outdoors without frightening himself when he thinks of the wild animals prowling the woods around him. Skink is recovering from his wounds, although he has lost his left eye. Skink has replaced the eye with a fake eye from a stuffed owl, giving him a wild look. Skink takes Garcia out on the lake and catches a net full of small fish. Skink then pats the water and feeds the fish to a very large bass. Skink introduces the bass to Garcia as Queenie and shows Garcia how to feed her, telling him Queenie would be a world record catch in a bass tournament.

Weeb is at Lunker Lakes and just learned that the second group of bass have died. The hydrologist informs Weeb that the water is contaminated because the canals were dug too deep where there had been a landfill until a few years before. No fish will ever survive in this water without years of cleanup. Weeb insists the bass tournament must go on and decides to stock the lakes the night before the tournament, hoping no one will ever learn the truth. Weeb then tells Spurling he must win the tournament that weekend and that he will arrange for him to cheat. The deacon comes and tells Weeb he has not found a new subject for his healing, but that all the openings for the tournament have been filled.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Garcia hates the outdoors, so it is surprising when Skink takes him out on the water. Skink, who has replaced his lost eye with a fake from an owl doll, introduces Garcia to a large fish that would be considered not only a hawg by fishing professionals, but would be a world record catch. The appearance of this fish makes the reader wonder if Skink plans on using it in the fishing tournament at Lunker Lakes in order to assert some sort of punishment on Gault. How Skink might do this, the reader is unclear but would not be surprised to see it used just the same. The addition of a final team to the tournament seems quite coincidental, though.

Weeb is at Lunker Lakes where he learns the fish are still dying. This fact makes the upcoming tournament seem impossible to hold; however, Weeb is determined to hold his tournament in order to promote his condos. Weeb decides to have the lakes restocked the day of the tournament. The reader wonders at the wisdom of this decision. The fisherman attending this tournament are professionals and might be able to figure out something is amiss with the lakes. At the same time, Weeb tells Spurling he has to win the tournament and therefore should cheat, touching on a theme of the novel. Spurling does not like this idea, but Weeb is insistent. The reader is left with the impression that Spurling might cheat if only to please his new boss.



Chapters 26-27

Chapters 26-27 Summary

Thomas Curl has named the dog head attached to his arm Lucas. Curl has begun to lose his mind and believes the dog is a pet. Catherine goes along with this by faking barks to make Curl believe the dog is responding to his conversation. In Harney, Skink teaches Garcia how to fish and then announces that he has enrolled Garcia and Tile in the Dickie Lockhart Memorial Bass Tournament as brothers. Skink and Lanie go for a ride to look for road kill. Lanie seduces Skink in the backseat of her car. Skink then goes into town and collects supplies for the fishing tournament, including an old outboard engine for his small boat. Skink has also prepared Queenie to travel with them to Lunker Lakes. Decker goes into town and calls his answering machine. On the machine is a message from Curl informing him that he has Catherine.

Skink feels guilty for what Curl has done, believing it is in retribution for Skink's killing of Lemus Curl. Decker refuses to allow him to take the blame. Decker decides to handle the situation himself while Tile, Garcia, and Skink go forward with their plan. Lanie goes to Gault and tells him about Queenie, obviously having got the information from Skink. Lanie then invites herself to go to the tournament with Gault. Curl and Catherine check into a motel. Curl is becoming more insane every minute. Now Curl is taking the dog for walks and buying it food.

Chapters 26-27 Analysis

Curl is going insane as infection takes over his body. Curl believes the dog head attached to his arm is his pet and has even given it a name. Curl tries to feed the dog. This insanity proves dangerous for Catherine. Curl has done nothing to hurt Catherine at this point, but he has a gun and he is unstable. The reader is fearful for Catherine's life.

Skink prepares a plan to get back at Gault. Skink has entered Tile and Garcia in the Dickie Lockhart Memorial Bass Tournament and has apparently decided to take Queenie to Lunker Lakes in order to have Tile and Garcia catch her. Perhaps Skink intends for Tile and Garcia to embarrass Gault by catching this world record fish. The reader wonders, then, why Skink would tell Lanie about Queenie. Perhaps Skink's true intention is a little more sinister than it seems on the surface, or perhaps Skink simply made a slip of the tongue while being intimate with Lanie. The reader is unsure at this point, but looks forward to the next few chapters to find out.

Decker has learned that Catherine has been kidnapped. Decker is upset but will not let anyone take the blame for it but himself, showing once more his depth of character. Decker decides to go after Curl himself, making Tile and Garcia promise not to interfere. The reader is unsure what Decker plans but knows he can take care of himself. The

only concern is Decker's notorious temper and the fact that he tends to go overboard when defending himself. This concerns the reader, leaving them wondering if Decker will be able to rescue Catherine without placing her in danger.



Chapters 28-29

Chapters 28-29 Summary

Weeb finds out that Tile and Garcia, racial minorities, have joined the tournament, Weeb is unhappy with the image this will display to potential buyers, so short of throwing them out of the tournament, Weeb has his deacon make sure Tile and Garcia get no television time. The next day is practice day. The fishermen have no luck on the water, but they do not talk about it amongst themselves, afraid of revealing a weakness in their fishing abilities. Therefore no one knows that there were no fish caught that day. Tile and Garcia spend the practice time setting up a brushpile for Queenie and are unknowingly caught by Gault's helicopter pilot. At the barbecue afterwards, Reverend Weeb makes a speech to encourage the fishermen. Afterward, the fishermen are taken to the lodge for the night, while Weeb supervises the stocking of the lakes with fresh bass. Tile and Garcia arrive to bad news. A raid on Curl's motel room has failed. The policemen raided the wrong room and Curl has gotten away. Curl is at Lunker Lakes, awaiting a meeting with Decker the next morning.

Tile and Garcia are harassed the entire night by fellow fishermen, who do not want the minorities in their tournament. At the same time, Skink catches Spurling trying to free a bass that has been hidden in a cage in the Everglades. At first Skink thinks Spurling is going to hurt the fish, but when he sees the truth, he allows Spurling to go. When Spurling is gone, Skink frees Queenie into Lunker Lakes where Tile and Garcia built the brushpile. Across the lake, Decker prepares for his meeting with Curl. The next morning, Tile arranges a police escort to the docks. The entire episode is caught on tape and shown over the cable network broadcasting the tournament. Weeb is unhappy about this. Deacon Johnson spends the morning looking for someone to be healed during the tournament's live broadcast. Deacon cannot find anyone and is on his way back to Lunker Lakes, when he sees a blind man sitting on the side of the street. The deacon picks up this man, promising him payment for his time. About this time, Tile and Garcia discover that someone has tinkered with their outboard motor and they are dead in the water.

Chapters 28-29 Analysis

Weeb is unhappy that Tile and Garcia are to be in his tournament, complaining that this is not the demographic to which he would like to sell condos. Tile and Garcia insist on remaining in the competition, a theme of the novel, even after they are harassed by fellow fishermen, showing the lack of tolerance prevalent among these men. Tile arranges a police escort to the tournament the next morning and all of it is caught on tape, further embarrassing Weeb. Things are further complicated for Weeb when it becomes apparent that the deacon cannot find a suitable person to partake in Weeb's live healing. The Deacon lucks on a blind man, who seems very familiar to the reader. The reader imagines Skink allowing the Reverend to heal him and smiles.



Skink catches Spurling freeing a bass from a cage in the Everglades. This episode reveals several things to the reader. First, it shows that Spurling is an honest man since he refuses to cheat. Second, it suggests that something is wrong with the water in Lunker Lakes since Weeb has hidden the bass in the Everglades rather than the lakes. However, Skink does not appear to make this connection and puts Queenie in the lakes anyway. The fact that Skink has placed Queenie in Lunker Lakes suggests he wants Tile and Garcia to catch her. However, the reader sees that this plan is in danger when the reader realizes that Gault knows where Skink has hidden the fish.

A raid has failed on Curl's hotel room, a raid that Decker made Garcia promise he would not initiate. This has put Curl on the run, making him more dangerous. Curl is at Lunker Lakes and is awaiting a meeting with Decker in the morning. Decker is preparing for this meeting as well, but the reader is unclear at this point what exactly Decker has planned. While this is going on, Weeb restocks the lake with fresh bass. However, the reader wonders if the poor condition of the lakes will not affect the fishermen's ability to catch these fish even if they do not die during the tournament. The reader also wonders what would happen if all the fish die on national television during the tournament. It seems this would not sell many condos, either.



Chapters 30-32

Chapters 30-32 Summary

Thomas Curl is very sick with infection and has been drinking steadily to keep the pain at a dull roar. Decker meets Curl and Catherine beside the lake. Curl announces that he plans to kill both Decker and Catherine. Decker asks Curl to take a picture first to commemorate their last moment together. Curl agrees. Curl pushes the button on the camera and it explodes, killing him instantly. Tile and Garcia are trying to row to the place where Queenie waits, but are afraid it will take all day and they will miss the weigh in. At the same time, Gault has already arrived at Queenie's brushpile and is attempting to catch the award-winning fish.

The deacon introduces Skink to Weeb, telling Weeb that Skink is partially blind and willing to fake a cure on air. Weeb coaches Skink through the healing before their rehearsal. Skink does well at rehearsal. However, Skink blows the on-air healing, making Weeb look like a fool by refusing to read a sign that should prove the healing and allowing his fake eye to pop out on camera. Gault finally manages to get Queenie to take his hook. However, Queenie is so large and heavy that Gault has trouble reeling her in. Gault turns on the engine of his boat so that he can follow Queenie around the lake in his attempt to reel her in gently. Queenie begins to pull Gault in the opposite direction from where the boat is traveling. Gault is pulled overboard and killed by the propellers on the boat's engine.

Skink finds Decker and Catherine safe and sound. Decker confesses to Curl's murder, and Skink assures him this was a necessary evil. Skink then asks Decker to help him. Skink has arranged for Decker to hijack a camera during the weigh in for the tournament. It is quickly clear that the lake has no healthy fish in it as the fishermen all come in without having caught a single fish. At the last minute, Spurling's boat appears. Spurling is towing two other boats, Tile and Garcia's and Curl's. Spurling, too, has not caught a single fish. In fact, the only person to have caught a fish is Garcia. However, when Garcia attempts to collect his winning check, Weeb announces that the check has disappeared. Weeb is arrested for fraud.

Moments after Weeb's arrest, Skink becomes aware that all the fish in the lake are dying. Skink is frantic about Queenie and insists on going to get her. Skink, Decker, and Catherine take Spurling's boat to where Queenie is. They find Gault's boat there with a traumatized Lanie on board. Decker finds Gault's body in the water and Skink admits that he set Gault up to die, assuming he would behave exactly as he did. Skink then jumps into the water, grabs Queenie and runs off into the Everglades.



Chapters 30-32 Analysis

Curl is clearly insane now. Curl is also not thinking very clearly since he is so ill and drunk as well. Curl agrees to take a picture of Decker and Catherine, falling for Decker's plan to kill him. Decker has used his cameras as a distraction before and it works just as well this time as predicted in an earlier chapter. Catherine is saved and Curl has been put out of his misery. Decker returns to the tournament and helps Skink put Weeb's downfall on national television. The problems with the lake become obvious as the fishermen come in without having caught a single fish. Then Weeb cannot come up with the winner's money, so he is arrested for fraud, ending his scam of a career.

Gault has found where Queenie has been hidden and decides he will catch her and not only win the tournament, but go down in the history books for catching the largest bass ever. However, Gault misjudges how strong Queenie is and refuses to let her go even when he is in danger. Gault is pulled overboard and killed, ending his ability to hurt innocent people. Skink confesses to setting up his death on purpose, ending speculation on how Lanie learned about Queenie and why. Skink believes he has done what needed to be done, killing Gault for killing other innocent people. It seems to be justice, Skink style.



Characters

R.J. Decker

R.J. Decker was once a professional photographer who found the world of fashion boring. Decker took a job with a newspaper only to become burned out. After serving a short term in prison for assault, Decker became a private detective. Taking pictures in insurance fraud cases pays the bills and does not require Decker to see the world through the view finder of his camera any longer; however, it does not pay as well as photographing models. Therefore, when Decker is offered a job investigating cheating in bass fishing competitions, he jumps at the chance despite the fact he knows very little about fishing.

Decker begins his investigation by reaching out to an old colleague from his newspaper days. This man tells Decker about a cheap fishing guide who lives out in the woods. Decker visits the guide, an eccentric named Skink, and convinces him to help in the investigation. Decker has no idea that Skink has an agenda of his own and that soon Decker will be wrapped up in that agenda. At first, Skink does only what he has promised, teaching Decker to fish and outlining the power struggle that accompanies these fishing tournaments. Soon, however, Skink and Decker find themselves part of a murder mystery that puts their lives in danger.

Decker's newspaper friend disappears and is soon found murdered. After this, Decker is more determined than before to solve the case he is working on since he feels that it is this case that caused his friend's death. However, when a famous bass fisherman is found dead and Decker is accused of his murder, the case becomes even more personal. Decker works with Skink and his friends to find out who is behind these murders and to mete out justice on these people in their own, unique fashion.

Clinton "Skink" Tyree

Skink is an eccentric who lives in the woods in an old ramshackle cabin and eats road kill for most of his meals. Skink was once the Governor of Florida; however, when Skink attempted to stop corruption and the expansion of development in the Everglades, the State Congress turns on him. In frustration, Skink gives up and disappears. Now Skink attempts to stay off the public radar and work against these corrupt organizations from a less visible standpoint.

When Skink meets Decker, he sees in him a chance to take action against certain groups that are killing fish for sport. Skink shows Decker how to fish and tells him about the characters involved in the fishing tournaments he has come to investigate. Things become out of control when Skink and his friend, state trooper Jim Tile, discover the murdered body of Decker's newspaper friend. While showing Decker the body, Skink and Decker run into two of the men who committed the murder. A gun fight breaks out



and Skink kills one of the young men. Later, the brother of this man is assigned to find Decker and kill him. When Decker proves to be difficult to locate, the man kidnaps his ex-wife.

Skink travels with Decker to a fishing tournament in New Orleans, where the two attempt to catch one of the participants cheating. They catch a man cheating, but it turns out to be the wrong man. Later, Decker discovers that the target of his investigation has been murdered. Decker returns to Florida under the assumption that the investigation is over. However, he soon learns through Skink that his employer has framed him for the murder. Decker goes on the run with Skink. Skink comes up with a plan to not only prove Decker's innocence, but to ruin all the responsible participants in the scheme.

Catherine, Decker's Ex-Wife

Catherine is R.J. Decker's ex-wife. Catherine blames herself for the emotional meltdown Decker suffered that led to his conviction for assault. Catherine has taken it upon herself to watch out for Decker, often visiting him to be sure he is getting along alright. Due to this continuing friendship, Decker feels safe going to Catherine when he is in danger. However, by doing this, Decker has alerted the bad guys to Catherine's existence and her importance in Decker's life. Catherine is kidnapped out of her home when Decker proves difficult to locate. The kidnapper works for the same man who hired Decker, but he has a personal agenda as well. The kidnapper's brother was killed by Skink, and the kidnapper believes Decker was involved. The kidnapper wants revenge. Decker hatches a plan to save Catherine, but it forces him to commit a crime with which he is not sure he can live. However, Decker rescues Catherine, the only thing that truly matters to him.

Dennis Gault

Dennis Gault is a rich businessman who likes to participate in bass fishing tournaments. Dennis feels as though the other fishermen do not accept him because he is not a redneck like they are. Dennis resents these men, especially Dickie Lockhart. Dickie Lockhart is a hero in the bass fishing circles because he almost always comes in first place at most of the tournaments. Due to this, Dennis believes that Dickie must be cheating. Dennis hires first Bobby Clinch and then Decker to prove Dickie is cheating.

Bobby Clinch is having an affair with Dennis Gault's sister. When Dennis learns that Clinch plans to leave his wife for his sister, Dennis has Clinch killed, making it appear as though he was murdered by Dickie because Clinch made a discovery that would prove Dickie's guilt. Later, when an opportunity to kill Dickie comes up, Dennis has one of his hired men commit the murder and then he flies to New Orleans personally to pin the guilt on Decker. Decker is soon running from the police in an attempt to prove Dennis set him up. In the meantime, Dennis participates in a fishing tournament in which he discovers Skink has placed a large fish in the water with the intention of his own team



catching it and winning the tournament. Dennis goes after the fish himself. The fish proves too strong, however, and Dennis is pulled overboard and is killed by the propellers of his boat's engine.

Lanie Gault

Lanie Gault is Dennis Gault's sister. Lanie is having an affair with Bobby Clinch. When her brother learns how serious this relationship, he has Clinch killed because he believes Clinch is not good enough for his sister. Then Dennis plots with Lanie to set up Decker for the murder of Dickie Lockhart. Lanie willingly goes along with this plot, unaware of her brother's role in the death of Clinch. However, when Decker informs her of this, Lanie does not turn on her brother. In fact, Lanie goes to her brother and tells him that Decker is on to him. Later, Lanie attends a fishing tournament with her brother and is the only witness to his death.

Charles Weeb

Charles Weeb is an ambitious businessman who discovers an easy way to make money. Weeb becomes a televangelist. Weeb uses religion and in order for Weeb to make money, his viewers need to believe in something bigger than themselves. When Weeb first started out on his show, he pretended to heal animals. Later, Weeb concentrated on providing his viewers with the things they wanted to see, such as fishing shows. Weeb has grown a multi-million dollar business through his cable station and his own religious program. Weeb has taken a great deal of that money and sunk it into a community development, which he plans to market as a Christian city for family living. However, the lakes that Weeb has built on his land prove to be contaminated because the land was a landfill just a few short years before.

Weeb is desperate for his Christian city to do well, but sales prove to be slow. Weeb decides to profit from the recent death of his fishing show's star by throwing a bass tournament in his name. The only problem is that the fish keep dying from the contaminated water. Weeb overcomes this problem by shipping in and depositing fresh fish the night before the tournament. Weeb then attempts to garner donations for his community project by performing a healing ceremony live on his show. The person Weeb attempts to heal is Skink. Skink blows the miracle for Weeb and then hijacks a camera in order to show the failed results of the fishing tournament. Weeb is not only ruined, but he is arrested on his own show for fraud.

Dickie Lockhart

Dickie Lockhart is a bass fisherman. Dickie hosts a fishing show on the OCN, Weeb's cable channel. The show is the best in its market, but another show runs a close second and is causing Weeb to second guess Dickie's abilities to remain on top. Dickie feels pressure to win as many fishing tournaments as possible. One night, Dickie walks in on Weeb in a compromising position and convinces him to renew his contract despite the



fact that Weeb has already made the decision to hire a new host for the fishing show. Weeb agrees. Unfortunately, Dickie is found dead a day later, and Decker is accused of his murder. This frees Weeb to go through with hiring the other host. It turns out, however, that neither Decker nor Weeb had anything to do with Dickie's death. Dickie was murdered by men hired by Dennis Gault so Gault might actually have a chance of winning a few fishing tournaments. Gault will ironically die during the tournament named in Dickie's honor.

Al Garcia and Jim Tile

Al Garcia is a police detective with the Miami police department. Al and Decker are good friends, so it is no surprise when Al calls and asks to see Decker. However, Skink informs Decker that Al is coming to arrest him. Decker goes on the run, but Al knows Decker well and knows where to look for him. Al almost catches Decker at Catherine's house. A few days later, Al catches up with Decker and Skink after they rent a car. Instead of turning Decker in, Al has investigated the case and believes Decker is innocent. Al teams up with Decker and Skink to help prove Decker's innocence.

Jim Tile is a Florida state trooper and was once assigned to protect a candidate for governor and was later assigned to the governor's detail. Tile and the governor, Tyree (aka Skink), became close friends. When Tyree chose to disappear from the public eye, it was Tile who drove him away from the capitol. Now Tile is the only person in Florida who knows that Skink is the former Governor Tyree. Tile and Skink have remained close friends with Tile often taking care of Skink's basic needs. Tile helps Skink in his plan to clear Decker's name and get revenge on the men who have set up Decker.

Bobby Clinch

Bobby Clinch is a bass fisherman who is having an affair with Lanie Gault. Bobby learns that Dennis Gault believes Dickie Lockhart is cheating in the bass tournaments and agrees to help him prove it. However, while looking for traps that Dickie uses to hide fish, Dennis has Bobby killed. Bobby's death appears to have been an accident, but a reporter for the local newspaper, and an old friend of Decker's, discovers that the accident was a cover up for murder. As a result, the reporter is killed. These deaths spur Decker to close his investigation as quickly as possible. However, when the target of the investigation is murdered, Decker finds himself the prime suspect.

Thomas and Lemus Curl

Thomas and Lemus Curl are brothers from Louisiana, who are hired by Dennis Gault to kill Bobby Clinch. The boys commit the murder but are forced to commit another when a newspaper reporter stumbles on their secret. In the course of hiding the body from this murder, the brothers are discovered by Jim Tile. Jim tells Skink, who is then pursued by the two brothers. Lemus tries to kill Skink, but Skink kills him first. Thomas runs home to Louisiana but is soon called back to Florida by Dennis Gault. Gault wants Thomas to



track down Decker and kill him. Thomas goes to Decker's trailer to try to find some indication of where he might be hiding. While there, Thomas is attacked by a pit bull that lives next door. Thomas kills the dog but is unable to detach its jaws from his arm. As infection sets in, Thomas begins to lose touch with reality. Thomas kidnaps Catherine in this condition, leaving her fearing for his sanity and her life. Decker catches up with the pair and tricks Thomas into setting off a bomb in his own face, killing him.



Objects/Places

Double Whammy

A double whammy is a fishing lure used to catch bass.

Lunkers and Hawgs

Lunker and hawgs are large bass. A lunker is a large bass, but a hawg is an award-winning size bass.

Fishing Poles

There are a great variety of fishing poles, ranging from cheap to expensive. Most of the tournament participants prefer expensive poles while Skink favors cheaper, garage-sale type poles.

Boats

Most of the tournament participants own and use large, expensive power boats to fish, many of which have been won in previous tournaments. Skink uses a cheap boat that Jim and Al find themselves using in the Dickie Lockhart Memorial Bass Tournament. It is in this boat that Al and Jim find themselves trapped when the engine dies.

Photographs

Decker takes photographs of two men cheating at a fishing tournament in New Orleans. These pictures are altered to make it appear as though Dickie Lockhart is one of the cheaters. Gault claims that Decker was using these photos to blackmail both himself and Dickie.

Fish Tanks

At the fishing tournament in New Orleans, judges place the fish in a large fish tank with the idea of returning them to the lake when the tournament is over. However, they do not. This tank is also where Decker finds Dickie's body on his way back to his hotel the night after the tournament.



Cameras

Decker has several expensive cameras that he uses to photograph evidence in his private detective cases. Decker was once a professional photographer until he felt he could not see the world unless he was looking through the lens of a camera.

Road Kill

Skink likes to take road kill and cook it for his meals rather than kill an innocent animal for food.

Pickup Truck

Jim Tile sees a pickup truck pulled to the side of the road beside a stretch of lake. Tile goes to investigate and finds the dead body of Decker's newspaper colleague. Later the people in this same truck try to gun down both Decker and Skink.

Queenie

Queenie is a record-breaking large bass that Skink has befriended. Skink uses this fish to lure Dennis into killing himself.

Miami

Miami is where Decker lives.

Harney, Florida

Harney is a small town where Dickie Lockhart lives and films his television show. Harney is also where Skink and Jim Tile live. Harney is where Decker goes in order to catch Dickie at cheating in the fishing tournaments.

New Orleans

Decker travels to New Orleans in order to attempt to catch Dickie cheating during a fishing tournament being held there. This is also where Dickie is murdered and Decker is accused of committing the murder.

Lunker Lakes

Lunker Lakes is the name of the community development Weeb has built in order to create a Christian city he hopes to sell to his viewers. It is at Lunker Lakes where the Dickie Lockhart Memorial Bass Tournament is held.



Themes

Competition

The entire novel develops several different forms of competition. The first and most obvious is the various fishing tournaments in which most of the characters participate. These competitions require fishermen to venture alone onto a body of water to try to catch the largest fish they can before the appointed weigh-in time. Several times, Dickie Lockhart comes into the weigh station at the last minute and wins the competitions; Dennis Gault begins to suspect the man is cheating. In order to cheat, Gault believes that Dickie has someone catch large fish and place them in cages under the water in places where only Dickie can find them. It is difficult for anyone to prove that Dickie did this; in fact, it is never proven within the pages of the novel. However, Gault's desire to win against Dickie leads him to make these accusations and to have Dickie killed in order to get him out of the competition. Gault then sets up someone else to take the fall.

Another form of competition within the novel is the competition between Dickie's fishing show and that of another fisherman, Spurling. The ratings between these two shows are fairly equal, though the other show is gaining in market-share. Dickie's boss, Weeb, is becoming frightened by the gains the other show is making and pushes Dickie to make a better show, to increase his ratings, and to do it all without any increase in budget. When it appears that Dickie will not be able to do these things, Weeb goes to the competing host and offers him Dickie's show. Dickie learns about this and blackmails Weeb into extending his contract. When Dickie dies, this situation makes it appear that Weeb is the guilty party.

Finally, Weeb is in competition with himself. Weeb wants to sell out the condos at Lunker Lakes. However, the lakes are actually canals that have been dug too deeply and are sitting on land that was once a landfill. This causes the water to be contaminated with years of decomposing batteries and other products that have left behind chemicals in the soil. No fish will live in the water. Weeb wants to have a bass competition at Lunker Lakes in order to promote the condos but cannot do this without trucking in fish the day of the competition. As a result, none of the professional fishermen invited to the competition are able to catch any fish. Weeb has outsmarted himself and set himself up for a fraud conviction, all of which is caught on national television. It is for these three reasons that competition is a theme of the novel.

Escape

A person can escape from difficult situations in a number of ways. For R.J. Decker, escape is a theme in his life on several different occasions. First, Decker is a photographer and a good one. Decker spends his days taking pictures of models; however, Decker finds this boring, so he accepts a job with a newspaper. Taking pictures of crime scenes and funerals is an exciting job. Soon though, Decker begins to



realize he cannot handle reality unless he is looking at it through the lens of a camera. Decker arrives at a crime scene and begins taking pictures when he realizes the victim is someone he knows. However, Decker cannot put down the camera. It is then that Decker realizes he must stop working for the newspaper before he goes crazy. Decker is then in a fight with a young football star and ends up in jail. When Decker is released, he decides to go to work as a private detective, only using his camera when he needs to have photographic evidence of a crime. This is Decker's final escape, taking him away from the lens of his camera and back into the real world.

Escape is a larger issue for Clinton Tyree. A decorated soldier and gifted politician, Tyree tries to clean up Florida's government when he is elected governor. Tyree refuses to accept contractor bids and will not allow building in Florida's precious nature reserves. However, Tyree underestimates the power of the corporations that pay these bribes and want to build in these areas. The State Congress turns its back on Tyree and overrules most of his decisions in these cases. Tyree becomes so disillusioned that he runs away. Tyree goes to the woods near a small town called Harney and changes his name to Skink. For these two characters, escape is a central theme to their lives, making it a theme of the novel.

Cheating

Cheating is a theme of the novel because it is the entire reason Decker becomes involved in the case that will propel the largest part of the novel's plot. Dennis Gault believes Dickie Lockhart is cheating at bass tournaments because Dickie always seems to win them at the last minute. Dennis claims that the last few times Dickie has won, his fish has the appearance of one that had been dead longer than could be possible in a fishing tournament. Dennis wants Decker to prove that Dickie is cheating; however, Dennis does not tell Decker that the last man he hired to prove this fact has been murdered.

Decker takes the case because it pays a large sum of money and seems to be an easy case to prove. However, Decker soon learns that the people involved in these fishing tournaments take the tournaments very seriously and his meddling into the case is not received well. Decker's friend, a co-worker from his newspaper days, turns up dead a few days after Decker begins his investigation. Decker becomes frightened and tries to quickly end the case. Decker gets photographs of a few cheaters at a tournament in New Orleans, but neither man is Dickie Lockhart. Before long, Dickie is murdered and Decker learns he is the prime suspect, thanks to his employer, Dennis Gault. Decker spends the remainder of the book trying to prove his innocence, making cheating a major theme of the book.



Style

Point of View

The book is written in the third person point of view. This point of view is omniscient, meaning the reader is given access to both the narrator's thoughts and feelings. The narrator shifts many times throughout the novel, moving sometimes a matter of two or three times in a single chapter. The narrators range from major to minor characters, allowing the reader access to scenes that they might not be privy to if only one major character acted as narrator. Including among the narrators are Decker, Skink, Jim Tile, and Catherine.

The point of view of this novel works because the transitions between narrating characters are smooth and do not confuse the reader as to the identity of the narrating character. The point of view also works because it allows the reader access to everything they need to know in order to follow the flow of the plot. If the reader were restricted to only one or two narrators, the plot would be narrower than it is and would leave several scenes to the imagination rather than right there on the page, where the reader can learn what they need to know in order to understand character motivation and plot.

Setting

The novel is set mostly in Florida. Decker starts the novel in Miami, his hometown, and moves to Harney, a small town populated by rednecks. Decker is like a fish out of water in Harney, finding it difficult to get along with the locals, who do not trust strangers. It is in Harney where Decker meets Skink, a recluse who lives in a ramshackle cabin and eats road kill. Skink turns out to be one of the best friends Decker could have. When Decker is accused of murder, Skink is the only friend to come to his rescue. The novel also moves to New Orleans, where a bass tournament takes place and later to the shores of a new community development called Lunker Lakes.

The setting of the novel almost takes on a life of its own. The sunshine and hurried pace of Miami contrasts with the slow, small town life of Harney, showcasing the difference not only between the settings, but the people who come from these places. New Orleans introduces a change of scenery, while Lunker Lakes underscores Skink's distaste of people who are determined to move into the wilds of the Everglades and tame them forever.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English that includes a great deal of slang and the occasional foreign word. Because many of the characters are uneducated, the dialogue tends to include a lot of slang as well as strange methods of punctuation. Where there is



an educated character, his speech is more formal, filled with more varied vocabulary and precise grammar, contrasting nicely with the speech of the less educated. The novel also includes words that are associated with bass fishing, such as the words for the size of the bass. These words give the story a sense of authenticity that help the reader feel as though they are not just being entertained, but learning something as well.

The language of the novel works because it is used in a way that helps characterize the various characters in a subtle, comprehensible way. Often new writers try to establish their characters with too much description, but this writer allows the dialogue and action of his characters let the reader know who they are. The language also works because it uses words that would be utilized by these characters in real life situations. This allows the reader to feel as though they are learning something by reading this story. Finally, the language is simple English, clear and concise most of the time, making the novel easy to read for even the youngest reader.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-two chapters. Most of the chapters are fairly short. The chapters often include three or four separate scenes, often moving the reader from one location to another with a simple break between paragraphs. Often this change in location also includes a change in narration. This quick movement creates a flow within the novel that keeps the reader interested. The novel is told in equal amounts of exposition and dialogue, with small moments of inner dialogue when certain characters are narrating, including the main character, R.J. Decker.

There is one main plot within the novel with several subplots. The main plot follows R.J. Decker as he attempts to prove that Dickie Lockhart cheats in bass tournaments. This plot follows Decker as he learns how to fish, photographs a group of cheaters, and is accused of murdering Dickie. One subplot follows the story of Skink as he attempts to help Decker catch Dickie cheating, while all the time aiming to punish people who have little respect for nature. Another subplot involves Decker's employer, Dennis Gault, and Gault's sister Lanie. Finally, one other subplot involves the owner of Dickie Lockhart's fishing show, the Reverend Charles Weeb. All these subplots are woven within the main plot and enrich it as they all come to a climax at the same time.



Quotes

"To Dr. Michael Pembroke fell the task of dissecting the body of Robert Clinch. The weight of this doleful assignment was almost unbearable because Dr. Pembroke by training was not a coroner, but a clinical pathologist. He addressed warts, cysts, tumors, and polyps with ease and certitude, but corpses terrified him, as did forensics in general." Chapter 2, pg. 17

"The thirty-acre cemetery was known as Our Lady of Tropicana, since it had been carved out of a moribund citrus grove." Chapter 4, pg. 41

"Decker honked twice as he drove up to Skink's shack. Short, polite honks. The last thing he wanted to do was surprise a man in a shooting mood." Chapter 5, pg. 49

"The possibility of being murdered over a dead fish did not appeal to R.J. Decker's sense of adventure. He had photographed men who had died for less, and many who had died for more. Over the years he had adopted a carrion fly's unglamorous view of death: it didn't really matter how you got that way, it stunk just the same." Chapter 6, pg. 63

"Ott Pickney floated up dead on the end of a fish stringer. Like a lunger bass, he had been securely fastened through both lips." Chapter 8, pg. 87

"Of course then the tears came, and the next thing Decker knew he had moved to the bed and put his arms around Lanie and told her to knock off the crying. Please. In his mind's eye he could see himself in this cheesy scene out of a cheap detective movie; acting like the gruff cad, awkwardly consoling the weepy long-legged knockout, knowing deep down he ought to play it as the tough guy but feeling compelled to show this warm sensitive side." Chapter 10, pg. 101

"Swiftly, Decker fired away. His camera captured every detail of bewilderment in the two men's faces, including the bolt of fear in their eyes." Chapter 13, pg. 134

"In the flickering shadows Decker couldn't be sure, but he had a pretty good idea what his friend was fixing for dinner. It was Bambi, of course. Skink was serenely roasting the doctor's pet poodle."
Chapter 17, pg. 171

"The Reverend Charles Weeb arrived at Lunger Lakes just in time to see the second batch of fish die. The hydrologist was crestfallen but said there was nothing to be done."
Chapter 25, pg. 244

"Like a surgeon inspecting his instruments, Dennis Gault laid out his tournament bass



tackle on the pile carpet and took inventory: six Bantam Magnumlite 2000 GT plugging reels, eight Shimano rods, four graphite Ugly Stiks, three bottles of Happy Gland bass scent, a Randall knife, two cutting stones, Sargent stainless pliers, a diamond-flake hook sharpener, Coppertone sunblock, a telescopic landing net, two pairs of Polaroid sunglasses (amber and green), a certified Chatillion scale and, of course, his tacklebox." Chapter 26, pg. 260

"The touch of blue steel on her face had made Catherine shiver. She thought she might even faint; in a way, she wished she would. Falling facedown in the sawgrass would be better than this. And Decker—she could have clobbered him, standing there like it was the checkout line of the supermarket." Chapter 30, pg. 292

"A hundred yards away, at the point where Charlie Weeb's canal met the dike, the great fish crashed to the surface, shook its head, and threw the hook." Chapter 31, pg. 306



Topics for Discussion

Who is Bobby Clinch? Why does the novel begin with him? What is he doing the day he dies? What is wrong with the autopsy of Bobby's body? How would the story be different if someone else had done the autopsy? How does Bobby Clinch's death affect Decker and the case he is working on? Why was Bobby Clinch killed?

Discuss R.J. Decker. Who is he? Why did he quit working as a photographer for fashion magazines? Why did he go to work for the newspaper? Why did he quit that job? What does Decker mean when he said he could only look at the world through the lens of his camera? Why is that a problem? Why does Decker become a private detective? How does this situation make him the perfect man for Gault to set up for murder?

Discuss Skink. Who is Skink? What was his life before he became Skink? Why did he become Governor? Why did he quit? What caused Skink to become a recluse? Why does he live in the woods? Why does he eat road kill? What is Skink's motivation when he decides to help Decker?

Discuss Dennis Gault. What is Gault's true motivation in hiring Decker? Does Gault really believe Dickie is cheating? Why does Gault kill Bobby Clinch? Why does Gault kill Dickie Lockhart? Why does Skink kill Gault?

Discuss Dennis Gault's relationship with his sister. Why does Dennis not approve of Lanie's relationship with Bobby? Why is Lanie's personal life any of Dennis's business? Why does Lanie forgive Dennis so quickly for killing Bobby?

Discuss Catherine. Why did Catherine divorce Decker? Why did Catherine marry the chiropractor? Does she love the chiropractor? Why does Skink not like the chiropractor? Why does Catherine remain Decker's friend? Is Catherine still in love with Decker? Is Decker still in love with Catherine? Why does Thomas Curl kidnap Catherine? Does this act garner its desired effect?

Discuss bass fishing. What is bass fishing? What is a bass fishing tournament? How does a person win this tournament? How is it possible to cheat? Do you think Dickie Lockhart cheated in his tournaments? What evidence can you produce to prove your theory? Why did Weeb want Spurling to cheat? Why was it important for him to win the Dickie Lockhart Memorial Bass Tournament? Who really won? Why?