

Echo Burning Study Guide

Echo Burning by Lee Child

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Plot Summary

Echo Burning by Lee Child is a multi-layered novel of intrigue and suspense, right and wrong. Jack Reacher is a loner. An ex-military policeman who served in the army for most of his adult life, he is now free and traveling the country he protected for so long. He is a man who likes his privacy, and doesn't like to be in one place for any length of time, a strong man, and though he can be patient, he doesn't like to take much garbage from anyone. He is also a fan of justice, both legally and morally, and when he sees an injustice he is inclined to put himself at risk to aid those on the side of truth and what is right. When Carmen picks him up hitchhiking, he becomes entwined in a plot that includes greed, murder, and kidnapping. All of this is to keep the truth from surfacing, and reveal the not so pure nature of the man who would be judge.

Jack Reacher prefers to be anonymous. He uses no credit cards and leaves no trail behind him. He carries no identification, and has no plans past where he will spend the next meal. While hitchhiking his next ride, Reacher meets Carmen Greer, who after analyzing him decides he is just the kind of man she needs to help her. She confesses the truth. She wants Reacher to help her kill her husband. Soon, Reacher finds himself involved in an ever growing conspiracy in which the Sheriff, Hack Walker, who wants to be a judge, is willing to kill his friends, frame their family, and eliminate anyone else in his path, all in an effort to climb another rung up the legal ladder of success. Unfortunately, the list of people who can stand in his way keeps growing, and when Reacher involves himself, he is added to the list of people the assassins are to eliminate. Hack Walker underestimates Jack Reacher and his level of intelligence and determination to uncover the truth. With the help of lawyer, Alice Aaron, he pursues the truth behind the events that led to the deaths of Al Eugene and Sloop Greer. Reacher's past has taught him to look at things from all angles and he doesn't believe the evidence that lands Sloop's wife Carmen in jail for his murder, especially after their daughter Ellie disappears. Eventually, after a confrontation that ends with the deaths of two of the three assassins, the third is headed for jail, having given a full confession, and Reacher has rescued the kidnapped child and freed her framed mother. Now it's time for him to move on again. He accepts the first ride that stops for him on the highway and leaves without so much as saying goodbye.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Echo Burning by Lee Child is a multi-layered novel of intrigue and suspense, right and wrong. Jack Reacher is a loner. An ex-military policeman who served in the army for most of his adult life, he is now free and traveling the country he protected for so long. He is a man who likes his privacy, and doesn't like to be in one place for any length of time, a strong man, and though he can be patient, he doesn't like to take much garbage from anyone. He is also a fan of justice, both legally and morally, and when he sees an injustice he is inclined to put himself at risk to aid those on the side of truth and what is right. When Carmen picks him up hitchhiking, he becomes entwined in a plot that includes greed, murder, and kidnapping. All of this is to keep the truth from surfacing and reveal the not so pure nature of the man who would be judge.

Two men and a boy spend the fifth day documenting exactly the same routine enacted by their target in the red house below. With telescopic aids, they quietly record every move the young girl makes before she gets on a bus to go to school.

At the same time, three hired killers are traveling to their next contract. They travel separately, using rental cars and fake identification. One drives, switching plates on the rental as he travels from one state to another. He is responsible for ensuring the equipment they need is on hand that cannot be taken through an airport scanner. The other two fly from different cities, meeting at an innocuous restaurant. They have been in business for many years, and are able to blend into their surroundings without hardly trying.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Two men and a boy lie in a ditch for the fifth day in a row, beginning at dawn, and document the coming and going of the resident of the small red house in the distance. They are meticulous and careful, taking great pains not to be seen by the house below as they make their notations.

Reacher is a tough man, large in size and demeanor. He isn't the type to cause trouble, but won't back down if trouble confronts him. Challenged in a bar, he tries to avoid confrontation, but when it is clear that he won't be able to, he quickly dispatches the threat and leaves. The next day, when he becomes aware that the man he hit is a local police officer, he again tries to avoid confrontation with him and his two friends, leaving by the back window of his motel to avoid them. He prefers to keep a low key profile, and not draw attention to himself. He also likes to avoid leaving a paper trail behind, so when he travels, it is either by sticking out his thumb to get a ride, or by bus where identification is never required.



Two men and a woman travel separately to their next destination. They are hired killers - careful, meticulous and good at what they do. They are perfectionists in their field, which is why they are still in the business after many years. They travel separately to avoid detection and being seen traveling together. Each has their assigned tasks, and the woman is their leader. They use assumed names and identifications, and when they finally assemble as a group they could easily be confused for salespeople heading for a conference.

The woman who picks Jack up has ulterior motives. She judges him to be the kind of man who would fight for the right cause; after a little conversation to confirm her initial impressions of him, Carmen Greer confesses that she needs his help.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Carmen tells Reacher that it is no accident that she has picked him up. In fact, she admits to having trolled the area searching for someone who fit her criteria and might be willing to help her. After talking to him for a short time, she is sure that he might be that man. Reacher is on guard and already sorry he didn't have breakfast and wait for a ride from an anonymous truck driver. She begs him to listen first, and he agrees if coffee is in the deal.

The three innocuous killers wait at the side of the road in a rented Crown Victoria to which they have added long stick-on aerials and removed the plastic hubcaps. Along with the FBI baseball caps purchased at a novelty shop, they look like the police they are pretending to be. They know their target is coming, already aware of his agenda and his car type. When he passes, they pull out after him and with lights flashing and a phony badge held against the window, they convince him to pull over. They are experienced and calm as they get out. They tell him that their boss would like a quick word with him, convincing him that they have already rearranged his appointment so he won't be late, and before he knows it, he is sitting in the front seat of their car. They drive him a bit further to a turn off, get him out of the car, and shoot him dead. They carefully ensure the rental company will clean the car of all traces of the man, and then call to report this part of their assignment complete. Next, they drive slowly past Ellie Greer's school where she notices their car as it goes by.

Carmen tells Reacher about her Texan husband, his family who makes her feel like Mexican trash, and her inability to leave him. Reacher doesn't believe her, seeing no signs that she is telling the truth when she describes how he beat her multiple times a week in private while professing his undying love to her for his family's benefit. When he voices his doubt, she admits the beatings stopped eighteen months ago. She confesses she didn't leave because she had no money and no where to go. Carmen asks Reacher to accompany her to the home of her husband's family in Echo, Texas, and he agrees.

The two men and the boy continue to watch the red house as the maid comes and goes, and the heat of the day wears on.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Reacher wonders whether or not he made a mistake by accepting a ride from Carmen Greer. She obviously wants more from him than a ride and yet for some reason he agrees to hear her out, still trying to be grateful for the ride.

The three hired assassins approach their meeting place and after outfitting their rental Crown Victoria to look like an undercover police car, they don baseball caps claiming FBI standing and wait at the side of the road for their target. They are very well



prepared, and nothing is left to chance. Their careful planning ensures they have his itinerary and know he will pass by this stretch of highway. They easily pull him over, and the woman helps to create the image they are trying to project. They don't want him to get alarmed, so they stroke his ego to get him into their car, even letting him ride in the front to continue the illusion that he is not in their custody. They have done this many times before, and in many ways. They have enough experience to pull this seemingly dangerous operation off without any trouble. After the woman shoot him, she backs away quickly and raises her hands, allowing her partners to check her for splatter. Then they drag the body into a small ditch and use brush to remove traces of their footprints. Very experienced, they leave nothing to chance. They know how to ensure that all traces of them are removed from their rental, and never leave even the smallest detail to chance. They go back the way they came, but this time their job is only half done. It is an unusual deviation from their normal routine, and makes them all nervous.

Carmen and Reacher stop for coffee in a restaurant where Carmen tries to ignore the looks she is getting as she tells Reacher about her marriage, her child and her in-laws. The story is a sad one, but Reacher is not convinced. The evidence doesn't bear her out. He calls her a liar, but then she admits that her husband quit assaulting her eighteen months earlier. Reacher asks her questions that might trip her up, his role as a former military policemen asserting itself almost unconsciously, but she tells him enough that he begins to believe her. As they get ready to leave, Reacher gets his first taste of the kind of racism that Carmen has been facing in Texas and with her family, and he doesn't like it. She asks him to come home with her, and with large reservations, Reacher agrees to at least accompany her to her home town.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Reacher asks Carmen what happened eighteen months ago that stopped the beatings. Carmen is reluctant to tell him but finally confesses that her husband was put in jail for tax evasion, and further probing reveals why she is so afraid of him being released. She is the one who called the IRS and turned him in. His sentence is to be no shorter than thirty months, and eighteen months of that has already passed. Believing she still had a year to sort out what to do, Carmen hadn't panicked, but then she got word that Sloop has made a deal entitling him to an early release. He is expected home at the end of the weekend. She tells him she has few options, no money, and is so desperate that she even purchases a gun. Reacher tells her he can't be her bodyguard and she agrees. Finally, she admits that she wants Reacher to kill her husband. He refuses outright, telling her he won't kill anyone in cold blood and certainly not someone he doesn't know. Carmen begs, pleads, and finally even offers sex as an enticement. He forces her to pull over and gets out, determined to leave her there and then, but the heat and distance from everywhere convinces him to return to her car. She apologizes profusely, begging forgiveness and pleading desperation as an excuse.

Meanwhile, a Crown Victoria with three assassins is scoping out a place for their next job. Having located a spot that seems suitable, they agree on the following morning.

Carmen speeds to Echo in an effort to get to Ellie's school before the bus arrives to pick her up and take her home. She tells Reacher that he can stay on as hired help, perhaps as a wrangler and stay in the bunkhouse. He agrees, with reluctance, but assures her again that he will not kill her husband. She makes it just in time, and Reacher meets Ellie as she gets into the car. She is reserved at first, but Reacher is friendly and she is soon discussing her day and what she has learned with him. She suggests they go for Coke floats since it is so hot, and knowing Carmen is broke - having already paid for her tank of fuel, Reacher offers to pay. They cross the intersection and go into the restaurant. The only other customers are the group who are traveling in the Crown Victoria. Reacher pegs them as salespeople with a trunk full of samples and doesn't give them a second glance. They leave soon after. Reacher, Carmen, and Ellie finish their floats and head for home, known as the Red House, located half an hour from the school. When they get there, the Sheriff's car is in the driveway with his lights on. Carmen immediately thinks that Sloop has returned, but when they go inside they find out that Sloop's lawyer has disappeared. His car was found at the side of the highway abandoned, and there is no trace of the attorney.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Reacher asks questions, trying to get a feel for her situation. She admits her involvement in notifying the IRS that leads to her husband's arrest and jail sentence. The



rest comes out quickly. Sentenced to a minimum of thirty months, she thinks she has time, but suddenly she only has a year left, and while he agrees that should be enough time for her to arrange to leave him, she tells him now things have changed again. Her husband is due to be released in a matter of days. She is panicking. Reacher searches her clothes carefully, and then the interior and exterior of the car. His training has him convinced that if she were hiding anything, he would find it. Finally, he begins to believe her, and agrees to help her, but makes sure she understands that he won't kill Sloop. In desperation, she even offers sex in exchange and Reacher almost bails right there. At the same time the assassins in the Crown Victoria are selecting the site for their next job. The woman chooses, having an affinity for these things, and they drive there to confirm her choice. Perfect, they agree to complete their contract quickly.

Carmen hurries to Echo to pick up her daughter Ellie. She convinces Reacher to present himself to the Greer family as a wrangler, believing that if they don't see the fact that she is being beaten right under their noses, they will never notice that he is inexperienced. When they get there, the Sheriff's car is in the driveway with its lights on. He has come to tell them that Sloop's attorney has vanished. His car was found abandoned at the side of the highway and no trace of the attorney is found. Rusty Greer, Sloop's mother, is convinced that it is likely foul play relating to Mexican illegals - an obvious shot at Carmen and giving Reacher just a hint of the predicament Carmen is in. Carmen defends herself, prompting Rusty to ask for Reacher's opinion, which puts him on the spot. He sidesteps neatly, unwilling to play the game at all.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The two men and the boy watch the arrival of Reacher, Carmen, and Ellie, taking careful notes, and wondering as to what kind of a threat Reacher might be. They even notice that his shoes are not the kind worn by wranglers or ranch hands.

Reacher goes into the bunkhouse and meets the other two wranglers who are employed by the Greer's. He picks a bunk, and Billy and Josh introduce themselves, inviting Reacher out for a drink, but Reacher refuses politely. The maid brings a simple supper and after the other hands leave Reacher returns the dishes to the kitchen. When he comes out, he looks around at his surroundings and the three who are watching wonder for a moment if they have been seen. Bobby Greer sees Reacher and decides to test him, asking him to bring out the big mare, saddled and ready to ride. He gives him five minutes, and Reacher knows he's in trouble, having never even been near a horse before. He goes into the barn and begins by assessing which horse might be referred to as the big mare. When he has made a decision, he picks up a saddle and tries to put it on her, but Ellie is hidden in the hayloft and corrects him. She hops down and shows him how to saddle and bridle the mare, and Reacher leads her out while Ellie goes back into hiding. Bobby is surprised, having already decided that Reacher is no wrangler, but admits he may be wrong. He hops up and Reacher goes back to the bunkhouse to find Carmen sitting on his bunk with fresh linen. She asks Reacher to show her how to shoot the gun she bought, and spends a little while crying on his shoulder before heading back out. He makes up his bunk, and goes outside hoping for cooler air. Ellie comes to say goodnight, asking to be picked up and looking for a kiss goodnight. Carmen tells her it's bedtime, and Ellie asks that Reacher be allowed to tuck her in. He resists at first, but relents when Ellie is persistent. He goes up and kisses her goodnight, again at her request and she tells him she's glad that he is their friend. Reacher is touched.

The watchers on the hill stay until the sun sets, then carefully backtrack and leave in a pickup that they have put under a tarp. When Reacher gets back downstairs and outside, Bobby corrals him and tells him that he should remember his place, and leave his brother's wife and family alone if he wants to keep his job. His suggestion is followed with a veiled threat, which Reacher returns joking. Bobby tells him that Carmen lies, and he isn't the first. When Reacher asks what he means, he just tells him to ask Josh and Billy.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The watchers note the Sheriff as he comes and goes, and Carmen's arrival with Ellie and Reacher. Even from that distance, they recognize that it is unlikely that he is a wrangler or ranch hand. The other two hands, Billy and Josh, are loyal to the family, but



Reacher doesn't flap easily. He even manages to stay calm when Bobby asks him to fetch the big mare so he can go for a ride, telling him to consider it a test. Reacher gets some unexpected help from Ellie who helps him saddle and bridle the mare. Bobby thought for sure he was going to catch Reacher in a lie, but is disappointed. Bobby leaves, and Reacher goes back to the bunk house. Carmen is waiting for him and again plays on his conscience, asking him to reconsider. Her reasoning is that now he could make Sloop disappear the same way as his lawyer did, and everyone would think that it was the same person. She tries everything, but when nothing works, she offers to teach him to ride in return for lessons on how to shoot a gun. He agrees to meet with her the next day at lunch. Ellie is starving for decent male companionship. She even asks Reacher to take her upstairs and tuck her in. Carmen thinks they got into the house unnoticed by the Greer's, but when Reacher comes back down, Bobby is waiting. He corners Reacher, warning him that they stick together as a family and Sloop wouldn't like Reacher spending time with his wife and daughter. Reacher has done nothing wrong, but Bobby doesn't like his attitude.

The watchers are there until the sun goes down again, and then slink their way back out. No one has seen them, as they gathered a detailed log of the comings and goings of Red House Ranch.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Reacher goes upstairs to get some sleep, disrupted only by Josh and Billy, who return smelling of alcohol. He wakes early and showers.

The watchers assemble, but this time the routine has changed. They are to meet new people in Coyanosa Draw for instructions and payment. The change in plan doesn't bother them. They drive there and follow directions by a man outside who tells them to park in the barn. The driver shuts off the engine, feeling safe and relaxed, just before he and the passenger are shot in the head and killed. The boy in the middle is shot a moment later. Then the windows are left open a crack to admit bugs for decomposition help but deter predators who might aid in the early discovery of the bodies.

Reacher walks through the barn, trying to get a feel for where and what the feed might be. He goes out and Bobby stops him, telling him he needs a driver. He has a rifle and wants to hunt armadillo from the back of the truck while Reacher drives, but Reacher refuses on principle. He doesn't believe in hunting. Bobby isn't pleased and tells Reacher to be available in the afternoon to ride with Billy and Josh to get feed. Reacher agrees and goes back to the barn where Ellie brings him breakfast and reminds him of the riding lesson he agreed to with Carmen. He naps until then, and watches while Carmen saddles both horses. Then he copies her to mount and they ride until they get over the ridge. Reacher notices the tracks from the watchers immediately, and can tell they have been there for four or five days. He tries to discourage Carmen from using or learning to use the gun she has. It has a short barrel, making even across-the-room targets difficult to hit. He demonstrates using his shirt as a target and she is unable to hit it at all. Again he asks her to just bury the gun there in the sand, but she refuses. It is late in the afternoon by the time they return and Billy and Josh are impatiently waiting to leave. Reacher gets into the truck, but leaving the property they turn left, and Reacher knows he is in trouble.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Reacher knows from experience that any time you have a chance to sleep you should. He wakes early and goes down to the barn to try and figure out what is used for feed and watering. All is still quiet at the house until Bobby comes out, telling Reacher he needs a driver. His intention is to hunt from a moving vehicle, and Reacher refuses to take him. Bobby can't force the issue, but he isn't happy about Reacher's refusal. He tells Reacher as part of his job he will have to accompany Billy and Josh that afternoon to get feed. Reacher's experience detects an undercurrent, but to keep his cover story, he has no choice but to go along with what he believes is a charade as there is still a great deal of feed in the storeroom.



The watchers' routine is varied. Instead of keeping an eye on Red House Ranch, they agree to meet up with other professionals in Coyanosa Draw for further instructions and payment. The prospect of payment puts them at ease, and they have no fear of the use of intermediaries. It all seems logical. The assassins shoot both driver and passenger before either really realizes that they are in trouble. The boy in the middle is so stunned by the blood and bone parts he is sprayed with that he never moves. They shoot him next, and leave the bodies behind them. Again, experience tell them that with the windows cracked just an inch, the scavengers will be kept from scattering body parts and revealing the bodies too soon.

Reacher gets a riding lesson after watching Carmen saddle both horses in less time than it had taken him to get one ready the night before. It leaves him feeling slightly inept. They ride up the hill to the ridge and Reacher immediately notices the tire tracks and other evidence pointing to the watchers and their repeated stays there. He knows someone has been there but doesn't necessarily agree with Carmen that they were hired by Sloop to keep an eye on her. She takes out her pistol which has such a short barrel that it makes hitting the target difficult unless the shooter is very close. He tries to discourage her from using it at all, but it gives her a sense of safety and security, and she refuses to just leave it behind. They practice until so she no longer closes her eyes when she shoots, and then ride back to the ranch where Billy and Josh are waiting unhappily. Reacher gets into the truck to go with them, and when they turn left out of the driveway away from town instead of right, Reacher gets a sense of just how much trouble he's really in.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Reacher knows there is already plenty of feed in the storeroom, and the feed bags are all stamped with the store they were purchased in. San Angelo is north and east of Echo County, and when they turn out of the gate, they head south and west. His adrenaline climbs and he tries to pace himself, knowing what is to come. He asks how far the feed place is, playing along as though he doesn't know better. They tell him an hour or so, but then say they will be going for a drink first - their treat. Reacher is agreeable and pleasant, making light conversation and watching the hot, dry deserted scenery go by, only to aware that they could leave him in the middle of no where. He recalls times in his past where he found himself in similar positions, and his experience tells him to strike first and hard. They get to the Longhorn Lounge, and Reacher follows them in, taking note of the patrons by habit. He worries only about the pool table in the corner which sports the only real weapons in the place. Pool cues can do a lot of damage, but Reacher isn't really worried. Three beer are ordered, and they sit, Reacher with his back to the wall. Billy gets up to make a call and when he comes back, he announces that his call was made to an ambulance. Since it takes so long to get there, he knows from past experience that it is better to call for it first. Then they tell Reacher that they have done this before, and intend to convince him not to return to Red House Ranch. Reacher is not afraid. He jumps up, telling them they may as well get to it, and leads them towards the back door. Just before they get there, he grabs a pool cue and just moments later both Billy and Josh are on the ground. Then Reacher takes the keys, and leaving them there, he drives the pickup back to the ranch. Bobby's surprise is evident, and grows when Reacher tells him that Billy and Josh quit. They won't be returning.

Rusty is also surprised, as is the Sheriff who has come to tell them that Sloop will be getting out in the morning. Rusty and the Sheriff plan to drive to Abilene to pick him up for his release time at seven the following morning. Carmen uses Ellie as an excuse not to go, and Bobby decides to stay as well to keep an eye on Reacher and Carmen, still suspecting they are having an affair. The Sheriff, Hack Walker, is Sloop's oldest friend, and helped secure his weekend release. Carmen looks sick as she tries to smile as though she is happy about it. Carmen, Rusty and Hack go inside, but Bobby questions Reacher more on Billy and Josh. Reacher admits he sugar coated it a bit for the family's sake. He tells Bobby that they picked a fight with some big guy in the bar, and were probably on their way to the hospital. He never admits that he is the big guy they tangled with. Bobby asks, but Reacher plays innocent. The Sheriff seems content to let them settle things among themselves. After he leaves with Rusty to pick Sloop up, Bobby comes out and tells Reacher that the horses need feed, water, and the stalls need to be cleaned. Reacher tells him there are going to be some new rules now, and if the horses need tending, he should do it. While he is at it, he can sleep out there with them, and Reacher promises that if he sees him before morning at the house, he'll break his legs. Bobby tries to swing at him, but gets a gentle correction from Reacher before sullenly agreeing.



Two of the three assassins watch this exchange with night vision goggles. They are holed up about ten yards from the road in small craters in the dark.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Reacher notices details that others might not. He knows he is being set up, and is ready for it long before Billy and Josh take him into the Longhorn Lounge. When they confess their intentions, Reacher is not worried. He knows these two men will be no big problem to take care of, but isn't sure about the participation of others so he takes matters into his own hands, controlling the situation by inviting them out the back to get started. He walks away, and by doing so leaves them no choice but to follow. They are still surprised by his confidence. Before they get to the back door, Reacher goes on the offensive. Moments later, Billy and Josh are in need of an ambulance just as Reacher had warned them. He takes their keys and returns to the ranch, to Bobby's obvious surprise which acts as confirmation of who ordered his demise. Reacher tells Bobby that his two hired hands picked on the wrong stranger and are likely on their way to the hospital. Bobby asks if it was him, but Reacher isn't forthcoming.

Rusty is excited that Sheriff Hack Walker has arranged for Sloop to be released the following day. Carmen is almost sick, realizing her time of confrontation with her husband is coming fast. She excuses herself from going with them to pick Sloop up, using Ellie as her reason. Rusty is not happy with the situation, but is distracted enough by the event to let it go. Bobby decides to stay back as well, appointing himself as the one to keep an eye on Reacher and Carmen, convinced that there is something physical between them. When Hack and Rusty leave, the tables turn. Reacher refuses to bow down to Bobby's requests, telling him that things are changing now. In fact, Bobby will be doing the work instead, and will even sleep with the horses that night. Bobby tries to object, but the weak punch he throws is easily avoided. Reacher swats Bobby back, and threatens to break his legs if he sees Bobby before breakfast, and Bobby believes him.

Two of the assassins watch this entire exchange from the edge of the road where they are secreted in craters and observing with infrared glasses.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Reacher goes back into the house and tells Carmen again that she should leave. She refuses, telling him that she won't be a fugitive with Ellie because it isn't fair to her. She takes him up to see Ellie sleeping angelically in bed, and then up to her room to show him where she hid her pistol. Then she asks him to sleep with her, and Reacher refuses, but agrees to stay the night to her relief.

The killing trio move closer to Pecos. The woman has a good feel for how to remain anonymous and blend with her surroundings. They use false names, overlapping motel records and pay in cash.

Reacher wakes to the sound of Carmen showering the next morning. He gets off Sloop's sofa, and looks at a photograph in the sitting area. In it, Hack Walker, Bobby and Sloop are about seventeen and posing for the photo. Carmen tells him he can shower if he wants, so he does, and they go downstairs to eat the pancakes the maid is making. He goes out to check on Bobby, and tells him he gets no breakfast. Later he changes his mind, and takes breakfast out to him, finding the stalls clean and the horses looked after. Bobby is settled down in clean hay, sullenly, but grateful for the food even though Reacher attaches conditions. He wants Bobby to invite him to lunch and dinner that day so that he can observe and speak with Sloop. Carmen is so nervous she can't eat, and changes her clothes more than once before Sloop arrives. She asks Reacher to talk to him, then changes her mind, telling him that she will do it instead. Reacher makes her promise that she will, and that if anything happens she will scream until everyone comes running. She promises.

Near twelve, Bobby comes out of the barn and goes to the house to clean up. He says nothing. He comes out just before one, showered and dressed in clean clothes. Not long afterward, the Lincoln returns with Sloop, who is smiling broadly.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Reacher thinks the best idea for Carmen is to avoid the confrontation with Sloop by just leaving with Ellie. He doesn't understand her stubborn refusal to do so, but Carmen hopes that Reacher will form an attachment for her and Ellie if he sees them in a more intimate way. After showing him Ellie asleep angelically in her bed, she takes him to her room, ostensibly to show him where she keeps her pistol. This ruse is quickly called into the light by Reacher, and she admits that she wants him to sleep with her. He is obviously attracted to her and understands the reasons that she wants to do this have more to do with her feelings of desperation than her feelings for him. He won't sleep with her, but does agree to spend the night nearby on Sloop's sofa in the dressing room.



The killing trio of assassins is led by the woman who has done this many times before and has a feel for how to blend in with her environment. The other two follow her without question, regardless of how many times she switches names, places and covers as they move closer to their next target.

Reacher checks on Bobby the next morning, and ensures that Bobby understands he still pulls the strings. He asks Bobby if he plans to tell his brother or his mother what happened, but the look on Bobby's face tells him that it is unlikely. Bobby is unaccustomed to being treated this way, and having the control taken from him, and Reacher knows it. He also understands that Bobby is long overdue for a lesson in humility, and is happy to oblige him. The barely controlled anger is evident on his face when Reacher tells him that he can stay in the barn until shortly before his brother is due to return before he is allowed to come in and clean up. Carmen's nervousness increases as the noon hour approaches. Her fear is largely based in the reality that Sloop knows it was her that turned him in to the federal authorities for tax evasion even if the rest of the family thinks it was just a coincidence. Bobby comes to the house in just enough time to shower and change his clothes before coming down to greet Sloop and Rusty as they return with Hack.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

When Sloop gets out of the car, Reacher can immediately see the signs of his extended stay in prison. His pallor is pale and he is overweight as a result of substandard and starchy prison food. He happily greets Bobby with much back slapping and then after a short period of initial shyness, Ellie goes to him as well. Bobby steps behind Sloop and has a conversation with Rusty who then comes forward and informs Reacher that this will be a family day, and he will not be invited for lunch or dinner. Reacher slowly agrees, and for hours, stays in the bunkhouse. Later, Carmen brings Ellie out to see her pony, and leaves Reacher to chat with Sloop alone. After introductions and a few questions designed to reveal Sloop's personality to Reacher, Sloop gives him the opening he needs, asking Reacher why he left the military. Reacher tells him it was because he crippled a man who was beating his wife for sport. Sloop manages to hide his feelings well.

Later Carmen sneaks out to the bunkhouse to let Reacher know that after a conversation with Bobby, Sloop called the Sheriff. She is worried, but Reacher isn't. He tells her that if Sloop hits her again, she should just scream and he'll come running. She promises. The Sheriff doesn't come, just as Reacher predicts, but instead two Rangers show up. They tell Reacher that the family called and asked that he be removed, referring to him as a trespasser. He explains he is in their employ, but the Ranger's assure him he's been fired. They put him in the back of the car, where he explains to them the real reason he wants to stay, but their hands are tied. When the drive up to the main house, he tells Carmen in Spanish through the open window that if Sloop touches her, she should call the Rangers. She understands, and an hour and thirty five minutes into their ride to Pecos, a call comes in from dispatch to return to the Ranch. Reacher is worried that Carmen is hurt, and they manage to get back two hours and thirty minutes after they'd left. The Rangers leave him in the car while they go in, and when they finally come back, they tell him Carmen is fine. Sloop, however, is dead, and she is under arrest for shooting him.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Sloop is obviously pleased to be released. Carmen looks stricken when he is affectionate with Ellie. Rusty cancels Reacher's forced invitation to meals from Bobby and does so in a manner that lets Reacher know that she has bested him. Reacher has no choice but to return to the bunkhouse. After lunch, Carmen takes Ellie into the barn so that Reacher can talk to her husband. The conversation is constructed to feel Sloop out, and he finds him to be very controlled, even when Reacher admits he is no longer in the military because he crippled a man who abused his wife in an effort to get a rise out of him.



Carmen comes out later and tells Reacher that Sloop has called the Sheriff, but Reacher isn't worried. His conversation with the Sheriff earlier gives him confidence that he is unlikely to interfere. He doesn't count on the Rangers that show up shortly afterward who arrest Reacher for trespass, and put him in the car. He tells them that the Greers owe him wages, so the Ranger's drive him to the house before leaving. Rusty mouths the words 'checkmate' to Reacher with a smile that tells him she is used to getting her way, but so is Reacher. He uses the opportunity to tell Carmen in Spanish that if she has any trouble she should call the Rangers. She understands, but is obviously terrified.

They head for Pecos, and Reacher tries to convince the Rangers along the way that Carmen is in danger, but unless she makes out a report or complaint, their hands are tied. An hour and a half later, almost in Pecos, a call from their dispatcher sends them back to Red House Ranch on a domestic dispute. Since Reacher has already told them the situation, they hurry back, lights flashing. More than two hours have passed, and the Sheriff is in the driveway when they get there. Reacher is surprised to see him, and when the Rangers return, he gets another surprise. Expecting to get a rundown on Carmen's injuries, he instead is told that she is under arrest for killing her husband.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The trooper who calls in the incident refers to it repeatedly as a homicide. Reacher corrects him, explaining the death is self defense but his pleas fall on deaf ears. More than an hour later, another cruiser arrives and two more troopers - one a sergeant, get out. Twenty minutes later Hack leaves, and it is another hour before the ambulance arrives to take away Sloop's body. When the ambulance leaves, Carmen is brought out in handcuffs and put in the back of the second cruiser. Rusty, Bobby, and Ellie are left standing on the front porch looking shellshocked. Both cars leave, and Reacher probes the troopers for information on where they are taking Carmen. The cruisers pass the ambulance, and Reacher asks if Carmen will get bail, but the troopers tell him that without a lawyer, she could be in jail for a long time before one is assigned. By that time, Hack is likely to be a judge. As Reacher isn't family, the next time he will be able to see her is the following Saturday, almost a week away. He asks her where to find a bondsman, and gives her a message for Carmen telling her he is going to stick around. Then he walks to the cheaper motels and checks into a room, sleeping fitfully until seven. He goes back to the Courthouse, but the day shift bailiff is no more helpful, and he still can't get in to see her. Reacher sets out to find a lawyer.

The assassins wait patiently, watching Red House Ranch empty out, and waiting for the woman to give them the go ahead.

Reacher chooses a lawyer who looks less bogged down than the others, and sits at her desk while she finishes her call. Agitated, Alice Aaron confesses that though she won the case she had, the rancher who lost won't pay the judgment. Reacher offers her a deal, telling her he'll help her get the judgment money if she dedicates immediate time to Carmen and her bail hearing. She agrees in principle and loans him her car.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Reacher tries to get the trooper not to use the term homicide over the radio, knowing from experience that he is only making it more difficult for Carmen to get bail. Back up arrives, Hack leaves, and all the while Reacher still sits in the back of the first cruiser, beginning to feel as though he should have just handled this himself. Carmen is being taken to Pecos, and Reacher voices his concerns about Hack being the DA there. The troopers are not concerned and are forthcoming about Carmen's unlikely chances of getting out without a lawyer. They explain the backlog to Reacher, telling him that she will likely be there for months before even seeing a judge to get a lawyer assigned. All of that time will pass before she can get a bail hearing. They leave Reacher to walk into town from the highway and suggest that if he wants to do Carmen any favors, he should get her an attorney. He goes straight to the County Courthouse and tries to see



Carmen, but the bailiff is strictly by the book. They won't let him see her, though he tries twice, so he puts his energy to finding her a lawyer.

The assassins watching the house are happy to see the house empty out. Carmen, Reacher and Sloop are all gone. Still, they rely on the woman to tell them when to proceed.

Reacher finds a lawyer that has half the obvious workload of the rest believing she might have time to help Carmen faster. She is on the phone, and as he waits, he hears her tell another client that despite winning a judgment, the rancher they sued refuses to pay. Her voice is strained and when she gets off the phone, Reacher listens long enough to learn that the family involved is in dire straits and will likely be forced to go back to Mexico, which is the rancher's underlying racist intention. When the lawyer then admits her workload will prevent her from doing anything for Carmen for some time, Reacher offers to clear her previous case for her. He tells her that he will get the twenty thousand owed by the rancher if she will then work on Carmen's case. The lawyer is nervous about involving Reacher, but he is convincing, and the family she is representing is truly in trouble. She loans him her car, and tells him that there are maps in the glove box. With a plan in place, Reacher feels a little better. He is a man of action, and now has a direction.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Reacher finds Alice's Volkswagen, and in the glove compartment are maps and a pistol. He takes it apart and notes it has been fired and cleaned regularly, and then he puts it back together again. It's been a long time since Reacher has driven, so the manual transmission feels stiff and awkward. He looks over the maps and drives to a strip of auto dealers looking for one that offers loaners. When he finds one, he drops off Alice's car, asking them to adjust the clutch, and takes a loaner along with the map and pistol. He figures out where the farmer lives, and just before getting there he takes off the license plates and puts them in the car. He knocks on the door, and talks his way in by telling the maid he is a banker. Lyndon Brewer is exactly what Reacher expects. He quickly puts him in his place, and convinces him that his family will suffer if he refuses to pay the judgment he owes. Finally he makes a check out to cash and gives it to Reacher.

The two men stayed three hours before backing out of their hiding place and going to meet the woman. She was ready for them, showing up with cold bottled water and the air conditioning on high. They make their report and she decides they may as well proceed.

Reacher returns the rental and takes the Volkswagen back to Alice. As soon as he gets in, she tells him they have problems and Hack wants to see him. The worry in her voice is obvious, but turns to embarrassment when he hands her the check. She thanks him and he heads to the DA's office. When he gets there, Hack surprises him. To begin with, he isn't just the politician looking for votes that Reacher met at the Greer's ranch. In fact, Hack convinces him that his intentions truly are honorable, and his desire is truly to improve the legal situation in Pecos. He knows that by becoming a judge, he may be able to do that, but this case with Carmen could change everything. He gives Reacher details about Carmen, having known her for some time now, that give Reacher reason to pause. He rightfully guesses how his contact with Carmen came to be, how she propositioned him and even offered to sleep with him. Then he gives Reacher another surprise when he tells him that for the greater good, he would almost be convinced to kick the case as self defense, even though he knows that isn't the whole story. The trouble is that Reacher could be tripped up by Carmen's lies on the stage, so he would have to agree to some coaching to avoid the trouble Hack can foresee, beginning with the lies she has told him. Hack tells Reacher that he needs to think about it for a couple of days and will get back to him.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Reacher is surprised to find a gun in the lawyers' glove box, notices that she has likely been diligent about time at the range, and has kept it clean. He has driven so little over



the years that driving a standard is difficult as he makes his way to the auto dealers. His past has given him enough experience that he knows he won't be able to do what he needs to in her car, so he gets a nondescript LeBaron instead and drives to the rancher's home. He makes sure to disconnect the telephone lines, always thinking ahead, and then gets face to face with Lyndon Brewer to explain the facts of life to him. Reacher is in his element now. He makes sure that Lyndon understands the extent of the misery he is able to cause him and his family, assures Brewer that he will show no mercy, and will make his life hell until the debt is paid in full. He convinces Lyndon to make a check out to cash and assures him of the consequences if it doesn't clear. Reacher is extremely convincing, and Lyndon isn't happy, but complies.

The assassins are picked up by the woman at a time agreed to beforehand. She is organized enough to have cold water and the air conditioning on. They gratefully get in to make their report. The timing seems appropriate to all of them so the woman, calling the shots as always, decides that it is time to fulfill the contract.

Reacher returns the LeBaron and then Alice's Volkswagen. She sends him to Hack after he gives her the check and when Reacher gets to the DA's office he sees an entirely different side of Hack. Until now, he has seen Hack as a typical hand shaking, baby kissing politician, who will do anything to assure his standings politically in the community. Now instead, he sees a man who is very forthcoming about Carmen and his own history with Sloop and his lawyer. He says Carmen lies frequently, and that everything Reacher has been told is falsehood, but Reacher still senses a ring of truth in what he was told. Hack is convinced that Carmen is guilty of first degree homicide, but despite that he admits that it would be in his own best interest to find a way to get Carmen off, even if he has to invent a defense to do it. Now he is talking more like the politician that Reacher expects - a man who wants to save his chances for election, and wants this case to go away, but if Reacher is put on the stand, his answers to some basic questions will paint Carmen as a liar. If her credibility is ruined, she is more than likely to be convicted. Hack wants to coach Reacher into lying to save Carmen. For a brief period, Reacher sees a glimmer of hope for Carmen, and experiences a small doubt as to the validity of her story. Still, in his experience he has seldom been entirely and completely wrong about someone. This case bothers him. So many things just don't seem to add up and the investigator in him won't let it go.



Chapter 12 & 13

Chapter 12 & 13 Summary

Alice and Reacher discuss Carmen's case. Reacher is still convinced Carmen was abused. Alice asks Reacher to accompany her to the bank to cash Brewer's check, and then out to the family to deliver the twenty thousand. He agrees. Reacher hears about their eldest son, Raoul, and how border patrol shot him after he surrendered. In those days, it was sport, she explains. They share a tequila and go back to Pecos to find messages from Hack for Reacher. Hack tells Reacher he only escapes charges because he was in custody at the time. His prints are on the gun, all of the cartridges, and the magazine. Hack hires a defense expert to look over the medical records, still hoping to make a case for self defense. Reacher tells Hack if he wants to look good, he should reopen the old border patrol cases. The families who still live in the area would consider him a hero. Alice is already back when he returns, and tells Reacher that Carmen gave her the silent treatment. Alice tries once more, but Carmen makes it clear that she doesn't want help.

Reacher and Alice pursue the matter on their own. The medical reports come in, and nothing confirms Carmen's claims of abuse. Reacher is as surprised as Hack is. Reacher asks Alice to come with him to talk to Ellie, figuring the truth will come out, but Ellie isn't at school so they head for Red House Ranch. Ellie isn't there either, and Rusty tells them that Ellie was taken by the authorities and is likely in an orphanage now. They check with a jeweler to see if Carmen's ring is a fake, but it isn't. It's real. When they get back, Hack tells them Carmen has confessed. Stunned, they go through the documents Hack has that show a trust fund of over two million dollars set up in Carmen's control. Reacher can't believe he has been so wrong about her. They leave, and head to the morgue where Reacher asks to see Sloop's body. When he does, there is something about the two shots that bothers Reacher.

Chapter 12 & 13 Analysis

Three people try their hardest to create a case of self defense for Carmen. Hack wants her to get off because he knows that prosecuting her will negatively impact his chances for becoming a judge. It would serve the greater good to have her set free, but even though he hires a defense expert to go over the evidence, there seems to be absolutely nothing that points to spousal abuse. Reacher believes that Sloop hit Carmen in secret. He feels that even if no one else knew, it didn't mean it didn't happen, so he goes out of his way to find evidence to support it. He convinces Alice to continue looking into the matter even after she is convinced by the mounting evidence that Carmen has been lying to Reacher all along. Even after Carmen confesses, Reacher still has trouble believing that he could be so taken in, but there just doesn't seem to be any evidence to support her story of abuse and self defense. He looks at every angle, taking her jewelry in for appraisal to find that she lied about it being fake; pouring over medical records



that are sparse and contain no evidence at all of abuse; and even though all of the evidence seems to support what Hack is telling him, something about it all still bothers him.

When they drive out to talk to Ellie and are told by Rusty that she was taken by the authorities, Reacher can't understand why Rusty would let her go. Rusty is honest and spiteful, telling Reacher that she never really cared for the child, and always had trouble reconciling that she was related. Her racism grates on Reacher. She is almost happy when she assures him that it is unlikely that anyone will adopt a child who is half 'beaner,' which makes Reacher see red. He has to retreat and get back in Alice's car before he reacts in a way that will get him shot.

Carmen's jewelry has to be taken back to storage which is in the same building as the morgue. They walk over, and on a hunch, Reacher asks to see Sloop's body. He gets little resistance, partially because Alice is with him and partially because he has an air of having done this all before. When he looks at the body he begins to feel better. Sloop was shot twice in the head with a small caliber weapon, but the wounds tell Reacher that he has been right all along. It's a relief in a way. Reacher has never been so wrong about someone before, and he couldn't believe that Carmen had pulled the wool over him so completely. The whole thing is too neat. For Carmen to have shot Sloop, he would have had to be asleep. There is no other way that with her aim she could have created the wounds that Reacher sees. As a marksman himself, Reacher would have had trouble doing that neat a job of it. Alice is under the impression that it's all over and there is nothing more that they can do, but Reacher tells her they are going to do a whole lot more checking because something stinks.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Reacher tells Alice to look at Sloop's wounds. The bullet holes are about three inches apart and are clean, meaning that they are not contact wounds. There is also no burn rim and even from a foot or more away, there would at least be gunpowder residue, but there is none. The pathologist's report confirms the shooter was eight feet six inches away. Hack isn't pleased with this new information and is unwilling to do much. Alice walks Reacher to the bus station where he buys a ticket for the next bus. He actually gets on but changes his mind. He goes back to Alice's office and calls the Abilene police department telling them where to find the body of Sloop's missing lawyer, based solely on how he would have done it, and then tells them he'll get back to them.

Ellie had heard Rusty talking to the strangers about a new family. The Greer's had no use for her. They told her daddy was dead and mommy wasn't coming back. Then they got rid of her pony. When the strangers took her, she was ready to go. They let her talk to her mommy briefly who cried and told her to be good for her new family. This is a first for the killing crew. While they had taken children before, they had always just eliminated them. Keeping Ellie alive for a period of time was a variation none of them were comfortable with.

Reacher learns the police have found Albert Eugene, shot in the head and knows Hack must be next, having been the only other one involved in Sloop's release. They warn Hack, but he isn't convinced, believing Carmen could have orchestrated the whole thing to keep the two million dollars in trust, but Reacher has him check the records for signs of a payment to the killers and Hack finds none. Then Reacher realizes it can only be about Ellie. Carmen has had no visitors other than Alice, but many calls from a man claiming to be her lawyer right before she confessed. Hack calls Social Services, who have never heard of Ellie. Now he believes Reacher. He deputizes them both so they can compel Rusty to talk to them. Then he gets on the phone and they head for Red House Ranch. The killing crew gets a call for a new contract. This one is for Reacher, and they are given his description and other details.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Reacher convinces Alice that despite his expertise, Reacher knows that from the distance the pathologist estimates the shots came from, it would have been difficult if not impossible for him to have done it with her cheap gun. Hack simply doesn't want to hear about it. He has a confession, and keeps insisting that she lied about everything. Alice is ready to accept that fighting for Carmen is a lost cause, and even Reacher gets as far as the bus station before something else occurs to him. His investigators mind won't turn off and thinking about Albert Eugene's missing body, he realizes they have to be tied together. When he thinks about how he would have committed the crime, he



does what he has always done to solve crime. He puts himself in the killer's shoes and then has a pretty good idea of where Eugene's body is. He passes the information to the Abilene police department and a short investigation reveals Eugene's body and the gunshot wound that caused his death, likely a nine millimeter. Reacher assumes that Hack is next on their list because the three men were close friends, and all were involved in the IRS deal that set Sloop free. They go back to Hack again, and once again, he doesn't seem as upset as he should about any of it.

Since Ellie has been told that with her mother and father dead, and the Greers systematically getting rid of her pony which was the last thing she cared about, she is ready to go to a new family. She knows the Greers don't really like her and Rusty made it clear that she doesn't want her. Ellie is scared, but adult enough to make no argument when the two strangers come and take her away. Rusty barely looks at the paperwork. For her, this is just one less headache, and she is happy to see it go. She would like to forget that her son ever had anything to do with a little 'beaner' child. This is a new thing for the killing crew. They had taken children before, but always just to dispose of them at their earliest convenience. Never before had they been required to keep a child alive like this and it makes them very nervous. They make a call to Carmen, and allow Ellie to talk to her. Carmen tells her to be good for her new family, and it is shortly after that call that Carmen makes a full confession. Her daughter's life depends on it.

Reacher and Alice keep talking to Hack, but Hack now thinks he has reason to charge Carmen with Eugene's murder as well. A conspiracy looks more than likely to him, but Reacher disagrees. A check of Carmen's financial records show no evidence of a withdrawal large enough to cover payment to a killer. Then it suddenly occurs to Reacher why Carmen confessed. A call Social Services confirms they never heard of Ellie. Hack deputizes both Alice and Reacher so that they have the authority to go and question Rusty, and give her no choice but to comply.

The killing crew gets one more call, and yet another job. This one is to eliminate a drifter named Reacher. They are given his information, but they have already spent more time in this area than they've ever spent in any one place, and all three are aware that the chances of being caught increase with every day that they stay.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Reacher and Alice head to Red House Ranch and Reacher is troubled by the lie about the ring. Bobby opens the door surprised, but when shown badges, he lets them in. Rusty vaguely describes the man, woman and their car, unemotional and sure she's done nothing wrong.

The assassins make Ellie take a bath, and one of the men stays in the room the whole time, making her very uncomfortable. She finishes as fast as she can, and gets into bed naked as she has no pajamas either. Meanwhile, Alice and Reacher go back to Pecos and he explains his theories to her. They go back to her office, Alice gives Hack an update, and Reacher calls the Abilene trooper again to ask if the border patrol investigation twelve years previous was a white wash. He has a theory, and to test it, they go back to Hack's office. Hack tells them he has begun a full scale FBI investigation into Ellie's whereabouts. He says the best thing they can all do now is get some sleep, so Reacher tells Hack they'll go to Alice's and he can reach them there if there is any news.

The assassins have to change their operating procedure because one of them has to stay with Ellie. They decide to pull the same stunt they did with Al Eugene, and again alter the Crown Victoria to look like a federal vehicle. She tells the one staying behind that if they haven't returned in four hours, he is to get out, and leave no witnesses behind. Reacher and Alice go to her house where he weighs the FedEx envelope. It comes out differently than what is billed for. He suggests Alice change, and they go back to the courthouse where Reacher breaks in, and from Hack's office steals the Border Patrol file. He gets out before the police have a chance to respond. As they are pulling out, he sees the Crown Victoria turning down Alice's street. They head back to the Red House Ranch and Reacher spends the entire drive reading through the file. When he's finished, he has the ring anomaly figured out, and knows for sure Carmen didn't do any of it. At two in the morning they arrive, and going in they commandeer every rifle and gun in the house. Bobby is compliant, even when Reacher asks for his keys to the Jeep. Reacher tells Alice to follow him closely with her car, and heads down the dirt track behind the barn into open country.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Reacher goes over and over everything in his mind. He can't figure out why she lied about the ring's value. He pumps Rusty for information about the people who posed as Social Workers, but Rusty isn't overly concerned that her granddaughter may be in mortal danger and cares less about the fate of the girl with each day that passes. Reacher and Alice go back to Hack Walker's and he tells them that he has made all the calls necessary to start a manhunt for Ellie, claiming there will be helicopters, searchers,



and volunteers combing the place. He's confident they'll find her. It's a good showing, but Reacher's gut tells him it's a lie. Reacher plays along, even when Hack tells them to go rest. He tells Hack where they will be, and they go back to Alice's. Reacher's mind never stops. Now he is like a dog on a t-bone and uses her scale to weigh the FedEx envelope that contains Carmen's hospital records. Since the weight is much different from what is on the package, he knows that a considerable amount of paperwork has been edited. Reacher is still trying to sort it all out in his head. They leave the courthouse just in time for Reacher to notice the assassins turning down Alice's street in their modified Crown Victoria.

The killing crew has had to vary their normal routine. Because of Ellie, they have to leave one member behind, so only two of them are able to deal with their newest contract. She tells the remaining member of their crew that if they haven't returned after four hours he is to dust and bust, meaning to clean up and leave without any witnesses. She makes sure he understands her meaning, and leaves.

It's all beginning to make sense now to Reacher and he knows Hack is involved. He reads the border patrol file, which answers many of his questions. He remembers comments Bobby made to him about hunting armadillo and everything starts to fit. He figures out the ring anomaly and knows now that Carmen had not lied. In fact, she'd told the truth about everything. The jeweler Carmen had appraise the ring lied to her in an effort to get the ring cheap and make some fast money on an unsuspecting Mexican woman.

When they get back to Red House Ranch, Reacher knows a confrontation is coming, and with a killing crew as experienced as this one is, he will have to be careful. The last thing he asks for are Bobby's keys to the Jeep, and Bobby just hands them over. There is no fight in Bobby when there is no one around to protect him. Reacher tells Alice to follow as closely as she can, and he drives the Jeep around the barn and carefully out into the open country. He knows that they have very little time left as the assassins are coming. He is sure of it.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

They drive for five miles while big raindrops begin to fall on the windshield. He stops at a mesa and has Alice park her car in the twelve o'clock position. He positions her at the eight o'clock position with a rifle, in a shielded position. He tells her that her job will be to fire one shot only, and then leave her position and hide at about seven o'clock until he calls her. Reacher loads several rifles with different ammunition and places them in staggered positions on the clock in his head. Then they wait for the assassins to come. The rain is beginning in earnest now, and Reacher knows that while it helps, it will also make things difficult. Eleven minutes later they drive into the trap Reacher had set. He waits for Alice to fire, and when she does, it distracts them and lights up the area enough for Reacher to see two people in the back of a pickup and one driving. He sees that one is smaller, and knowing that the woman is the shooter, he tries to get her first, but the body that tumbles out of the truck is the larger one. Lightening strikes help to light up the area periodically as Reacher runs from gun to gun, making it seem as though there are more than just two of them out there. When one flash reveals the FBI hats, he knows how they convinced Al Eugene to get out of his car. Then the woman is on the move. Suddenly the pickup makes a tight circle and leaves. It is raining so hard now that the water is beginning to accumulate, and everyone is drenched. Then a handgun begins firing and Reacher realizes the woman is on foot. He tracks her movement, trying to out-think her, and several lightening flashes later, he finds the woman dead by one of his random shots in her direction.

The man guarding Ellie keeps an eye on the time. She is hiding under the covers, afraid of the storm, and of him. When he comes to her after four hours, she insists that the time is not up yet. She even threatens to tell his boss, the lady, that he left early. He actually relents and tells her to tell him when she thinks four hours is up.

Reacher and Alice go back to Red House Ranch and find Hack there. The power is out, and he sits with Bobby and Rusty by candlelight. Reacher slowly unravels the entire scheme, revealing the truth behind the deaths of Al Eugene, Sloop, and Ellie's kidnapping. He tells the group why Hack hired the assassins, and when it dawns on Rusty that Reacher is actually telling the truth, she pulls out a pistol and shoots Hack dead. She continues firing, in a stupor and one of her stray shots hits the Coleman lantern. Soon the fire is out of control and Reacher has a hard time convincing Rusty and Bobby to leave as the place burns down around them.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Reacher knows they are in for a confrontation has to work quickly to scout the terrain for the right set of circumstances. He finds a perfect mesa, surrounded by areas that will conceal his intentions. He sends Alice to one side with a rifle, and places the remaining



loaded rifles in strategic positions around the mesa. He wants to give the impression that there is more than one shooter, and at first his plan works well. Alice's shot distracts them, giving Reacher a chance to evaluate, and then run from rifle to rifle, firing some wildly and aiming some carefully. The storm is picking up, and rain is falling heavily. Lightning flashes give both sides occasional glimpses of what is really going on. The pickup's driver gets nervous and pulls away, leaving the woman assassin and her dead friend behind, and Reacher pits himself against her, trying to imagine what her next moves will be. One of his shots fired recklessly in her direction finds its mark, but it is minutes before Reacher stumbles over her dead body in the dark. He makes his way back to Alice, calling her out of her hiding spot. Her car is beyond help, so both get into Bobby's jeep to return to the ranch.

Ellie is afraid of the thunder and lightning. She hides under her blankets, as much from the storm as from the man who she now believes intends to kill her. Ellie is smart enough to realize that maybe she can survive. When the man finally assures himself that his companions are not returning, he approaches Ellie, but she tells him that her time isn't up, and convinces him to wait. He is reluctant to kill the child, suggesting that she tell him when the time is up.

Reacher and Alice go into the ranch house. Hack is there sitting in the candlelight with Rusty and Bobby. It takes very little time for Reacher to lay out the truth for them. He tells them how he knows that Hack is behind all of the killing and even Ellie's kidnapping, but Rusty doesn't want to believe it at first. He takes Hack's gun, and holds it on him while Hack surprisingly begs Reacher to shoot him. Reacher is agreeable, but first wants to know where Ellie is being kept. Hack doesn't know, but his admission makes Rusty realize that this old family friend of theirs is actually responsible for Sloop's death. She pulls out a small pistol, putting it to her own head before changing her mind and shooting Hack instead. The first shot kills him, but Rusty doesn't stop shooting until the gun is long empty. One of her shots hits the lantern and the fuel that is spilled quickly sets the ranch house on fire. Reacher tells them to leave, but they are reluctant. Bobby miserably asks where they should live and Reacher suggests they try the barn where they belong before he and Alice leave.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The remaining assassin knows when the storm is over that his friends are not returning. It is a sobering thought. He isn't sure now what he will do. He has always been a follower, not a leader, and now he is faced with having to figure out how to make an income again. He stands outside, looking up the road, and reluctantly goes back in putting the do not disturb sign on the door and locking it behind him as he goes in.

Reacher gets Alice to drive, going as fast as she dares while Reacher pours over maps trying to determine where the assassins would be staying with Ellie. Alice notices the gas gauge is on empty, but Reacher tells her not to worry - just to keep going. He has already surmised that the assassins car must be somewhere ahead, and they soon come across it. They switch cars, getting into the Crown Victoria and continue. Now Reacher knows why it was so easy to get Al Eugene into the car. He calls out surrounding areas to Alice while she does her impression of a tour guide, telling him about the area and any landmarks. Reacher has a good idea of what they are looking for, and he explains his reasoning to Alice, telling her that he merely gets into their head space and thinks about where he would go.

Meanwhile, the assassin has decided to take a shower while Ellie sleeps on in bed. He takes his time, in no hurry to finish Ellie off. He contemplates taking her to LA to sell her. The noise of the shower wakes Ellie and she dresses quickly and quietly. She tries to hide from him and for a while manages to elude him just long enough for Reacher to find them. Reacher rescues her, and the FBI are called to take the lone remaining assassin into custody. When the lack of evidence is mentioned, Reacher takes the assassin into the bathroom for twenty minutes, after which he is eager to confess and cooperate. Reacher takes another room and keeps Ellie company while Alice sees to Carmen's release. When Alice and Carmen return, Reacher stays just long enough to witness their reunion before slipping away and going to the nearest highway. He sticks out his thumb and accepts a ride from the first truck driver who stops, leaving without saying goodbye.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Reacher uses all of his skills to put himself in the assassin's place and locate them before the remaining assassin realizes his friends will not be returning. He knows what kind of people they are, and how they would want to hide in plain sight, so he lets Alice drive while he consults a map and gives her directions. She knows the area well enough to answer his questions about the surrounding counties, and Reacher makes a calculated gamble as to where they might find them. He knows that time is running out for Ellie. While they drive around the area, looking for the right kind of motel, Ellie is only too aware that her time is running out. The assassin is reluctant to kill her which is the



only reason she still breathes. She feigns sleep while the assassin showers, and when the water is running, she dresses quickly and hides on an upper shelf in the cupboard. He doesn't find her at first, and when he looks outside the door, thinking she's escaped, Ellie hops down and hides in the shower stall. By the time the assassin actually finds her, Reacher has had enough time to locate them as well.

Reacher sees the assassin through the window, witnessing him dragging her out of the shower stall. It takes seconds to absorb the details of the room, including the gun with the silencer on the dresser. He heaves a rock through the window, and rescues Ellie, subduing the gunman in the process. Alice calls the FBI who arrest him after Reacher ensures that he will make a full confession going back years. Then Reacher stays with Ellie in another motel room while they wait for Alice to make the necessary arrangements for Carmen's release. He stays just long enough to witness a happy reunion before slipping away, and heading for the highway again. He is a loner, and isn't one to stay for accolades or gratitude. He also wants to avoid the excuses he'll have to make for not staying longer - part of him even wanting to. He accepts a ride from the first truck driver who stops, going anywhere, and leaves the town and the people he's come to know behind.



Characters

Jack Reacher

Reacher is a large man. At six foot five inches tall, he is built on the heavy side, weighing in at about two hundred and fifty pounds. He travels alone, with little more than a toothbrush and a wad of cash. Scruffy looking, and unshaven more often than not, Jack's hair is usually a mess as well, making him look like the kind of person most people wouldn't want to mess with. His usual mode of transportation is hitchhiking, and he never stays in one place for long. After spending most of his life in the army, Jack likes to change places frequently. He was part of the military police, and though now retired, his training never leaves him. Having attained the rank of major and earned many medals, Jack leaves after the army downsizes and discharges him. He is known usually only by his last name - Reacher. Having been well trained in the military, he always pays close attention to his surroundings - a habit which likely keeps him alive in many cases. His skin is white, though his forearms often exposed to the sun are sunburned. As a loner, he is uncomfortable with intimacy.

Jack Reacher was the son of a soldier and followed in his footsteps, making his way to lieutenant at the age of twenty-five. The first thirty-six years of his life can be chronicled with accomplishments and medals, but the last few years are harder to account for. He spent most of it drifting aimlessly, and enjoying the fact that he had no cause to report to anyone.

Reacher is approached by Carmen in what appears to be a random meeting and is asked to eliminate her abusive husband. When he refuses, trying to be the voice of reason, he is drawn into the mess that is Carmen's life, and finds himself crusading for her freedom against amazing odds. He sees inconsistencies in the killing of her husband that point to a much more experienced assassin, and his years of experience as a military policeman won't let him walk away. He tracks down the assassins, and eliminates them one at a time while uncovering the ultimate reason for their appearance. His random wanderings in life once again have him impacting on the life of a total stranger, bringing her freedom and saving her daughter from the clutches of assassins posing as social workers.

Carmen Greer

She is a small woman, short and slim and fine boned. She is dark skinned, and has long wavy black hair. Her teeth are small and white, and she weighs little more than a hundred pounds. All in all, she can be described as petite. She has dark and smooth arms and legs, and comes across as self assured and elegantly refined. Carmen has long lashes that do little to conceal spectacular dark eyes. Her cheekbones are high, and her clear skin is the color of tea or dark honey in the daylight. Her hair is also dark, and frames her face elegantly, and shines with almost the color of navy. Her nose is



straight, and comes up to an even and open 'y' shape where it meets her brows. Her mouth, which needs very little color, is the shape of a delicate rosebud, and when she walks it is with the grace of a dancer, with her upper body perfectly erect and her legs forming locomotion under her. Despite her aura of self confidence, she is nervous about being left alone in an unknown place, and walks with her head down as though she doesn't want to be recognized.

Carmen comes from what can be described as a wealthy Mexican family. Her parents own a thousand acres in Napa, and she is raised with culture that includes art, music and history. Her college education takes place in Los Angeles, where she meets her husband, Sloop Greer. Her parents employ white people and Carmen is reluctant to admit her relationship with Texan, Sloop to them. When she finds herself pregnant, they throw her out and she runs to Sloop, who marries her. Their daughter Ellie is born the day after he hits her in the face for the first time. At least, this is the story she tells people. Carmen is a very convincing liar.

The real truth, discovered later is that Carmen met her husband in a bar where she was a stripper. She came from a barrio in South Central Los Angeles, and no one knew who her parents really were. She was never a student at UCLA. She was a whore and serviced frat parties for a living before she met Sloop. Sloop met her when she was performing, and part of her performance includes a trick with a long necked beer bottle. She is stunning to look at, which is likely one of the reasons why Sloop fell for her, and she cultivated the relationship knowing that he was a rich man's son and had a fat wallet. He was her next meal ticket, and knowing that, she took herself off the pill and became pregnant so that Sloop would do the right thing and marry her. She is smart enough to bleed him for years. When she kills her husband, it is premeditated, and first degree homicide. The district attorney has absolutely no doubt.

Ellie Greer

Ellie has thick, corn colored hair and wide, dark eyes that she gets from her mother, Carmen. She has a small, snub nose and a serious mouth with skin that is pink and impossibly perfect. She is only six and a half years old, and as such, school is the center of her universe. She has a controlled and thoughtful demeanor that leads her to cautiously evaluate every decision she makes carefully. Ellie is a serious girl, and intelligent beyond her years. She internalizes her fear, often shoving a fist into her mouth to keep from crying out in fear or sadness. She maintains her stoic front when her father is killed, when her mother is taken away to jail, and even when the phony Social Workers come to collect her. She never cries or complains when the assassins watch her closely even when she is told to bathe. She takes all of this in, without showing emotion. Then, when at her young age she realizes that her kidnapper intends to kill her, she still retains her calm. She waits until the very last moment, thinking the whole way through, until she fears that her time is up. Then she begins to kick and fight back, stalling the inevitable just long enough for Reacher to come to her rescue.



Once the last assassin is subdued in front of her, she still doesn't let go of her emotions, instead constantly reassuring Reacher that she is fine. There are no tears, or outbursts while they wait for Carmen to be released. When the Crown Victoria comes into view, and Alice and Carmen pull into the parking lot, Ellie shows the first real emotion since her ordeal began. With unrestrained joy, she leaps into her mother's arms with such obvious relief and intense display of love that Reacher is compelled to turn away to give them this moment in privacy.

Hack Walker

The sheriff of Echo County, Hack Walker introduces himself as the DA from Pecos and a good friend of the Greer family. He is around thirty years old, but his lightly colored hair is already receding. His brow is domed and obvious as a result, and his face is pale and sees little sun. There is evidence of sunburn on the planes the face upwards, and he sports a huge politicians smile. As Sloop's oldest friend, he behaves with familiarity in their home, but still puts on his campaign facade when introduced to Reacher, admitting he is running for judge in November. His voice is big and honest sounding, and he wears a suit despite the heat. A self proclaimed 'traditional' guy, Hack knows when to mind his own business.

When Carmen kills his best friend, Hack is put in a situation he isn't sure what to do about. He wants to win the election that would make him a judge, but knows that if he convicts Carmen, he will lose the Mexican minority vote, which is substantial. He also knows that nothing he can do now will bring his friend back to life. The problem is that Carmen lies to everyone, even Reacher, and if Reacher is put on the stand his answers will undermine her credibility making it impossible to get her off. Hack knows this, and realizes that he will have to coach Reacher to get him through the deposition, hopefully avoiding trial entirely. Hack likes Ellie, and knows that his friend Sloop would have gladly given his life for Carmen and Ellie if he could have and all of these things play into his decisions now. He also knows that as a judge, he might be able to do some good from within the legal system, and the system is so flawed at present that it really needs all the help it can get. Down deep, Hack is an honorable man, and he only wants what is best for all concerned.

That is the impression Hack would like to sustain, but history catches up with him. When the entire plot is revealed, Hack is shown to have had a dark and violent past that includes the extermination of immigrants in hunting escapades that include his friends Sloop and Al Eugene. When Sloop pressures him and threatens to reveal his true character to the voters before Hack is actually elected, Hack becomes desperate. He can't allow anyone to ruin his chances to succeed in his attempt to attain judgeship. He orchestrates Sloop's release from jail, and when the details are arranged, Hack makes a call to have Sloop's lawyer and their mutual friend Al Eugene killed. Hack pays restitution to the IRS on Sloop's behalf to ensure his release, and then adds his name to the assassins list of people to eliminate. Once Sloop and Al are both gone, Hack thinks he's home free. He frames Carmen and ensures her cooperation by having her daughter Ellie kidnapped, but again his plans are interrupted by the persistence of



Reacher and the lawyer he hired for Carmen. In frustration, Hack adds Reacher's name to the assassins list, making his final mistake. When Reacher is finally able to confront him, and reveal his complicity in Sloop's murder, as well as Al's and then Carmen's frame up and Ellie's kidnapping, Rusty sees their old family friend in a new light. When it registers on her that Hack had Sloop killed, she pulls out a pistol and shoots him dead.

Sloop Greer

Sloop is pale from over twelve months in prison. He has short and fair hair and is slightly overweight from prison life and lack of exercise. He and Bobby look a lot alike. Sloop is from a wealthy background that cultivated his laziness. He is a bit too casual where business dealings are concerned. He can be a little dishonest, and believes himself to be a Texan gentleman. His family money makes him arrogant and even gives him an air of superiority at times, and he can be impatient where some things are concerned. Part of his self image as a Texas gentleman prohibits him from ever striking a woman the way his wife Carmen accuses him. He is caught by the IRS for tax evasion, and spends eighteen months in jail as a result. He met his wife Carmen while she was performing in California. She was a stripper and a whore who was looking for an easy meal ticket, and found one in Sloop who took pity on her. He begins seeing her, and she purposely gets herself pregnant, suckering him into a marriage.

Rusty Greer

Rusty is a crusty old Texan with just enough 'old' money to give her the power she wants over her environment. She is fiercely loyal to family, but has little time for her son Sloop's new wife Carmen, or their daughter Ellie. The problem isn't as much their lack of money as much as it is her bigotry. Rusty can't stand Carmen, and sees her as a huge and embarrassing mistake that her son made. She treats Carmen with as much disdain as she can muster, and Ellie with as much distance as possible. She looks to be in her mid fifties, but dresses as she always has. She wears tight jeans, belted with a blouse and a hair style more suited to a younger woman. She colors it a bright shade of orange, and it is teased up and off her scalp. Her face is thin and the overall impression she creates is that of a young woman who may have been prematurely aged by disease or other medical condition. Despite her appearance, she maintains an air of authority and vitality that reveal a certain amount of vigor still present. Her voice comes across like rawhide and she uses it to make Carmen feel like an idiot when she talks at her. Her love for her son is all powerful, and her opinion of Mexicans in her state is revealed with a sneer whenever she can paint them in a bad light. She takes pleasure in blaming the Mexican population for Al's disappearance, and takes pleasure out of painting Carmen with the same brush.

Rusty reflects the land she owns. She is powerful, but rangy, and most of her better days are already behind her.



Alice Amanda Aaron

Alice has white teeth and dark eyes. She is a Harvard educated lawyer who decided to atone for her fortunate life and good education by committing herself to a five year bargain with her conscience. She is relatively new to the Pecos, Texas law firm, and has a soft heart for injustice. She has long legs and a well developed tan, looking equally good from the front and the back. She drives a Volkswagen that is bright yellow, a year and a half old, and has a flower vase on the dash. She owns an expensive pistol and has spent hours on the range getting to know it. At the age of twenty five, she is an ambitious lawyer, and her interest in policy and government is growing. She is the daughter of a lawyer, and followed in the footsteps and lifestyle she grew up with. A democrat at heart, Alice intends to finish her five year penance and then head for either New York or Washington. She never considered straying from the trade of her family.

Alice may have been born with a silver spoon in her mouth, but she was raised with respect for people in general, and when Reacher comes to her for help she is reluctant at first, but soon helps out in every way she can. She crosses several personal boundaries such as waiting for Reacher while he breaks into Hack's office, and firing the first shot when the assassins try to kill Reacher, but still doesn't back down, knowing that justice won't be served if she gives up. With intelligence and looks, along with an education at Harvard, she could have easily let this part of her life go and instead concentrate on her career, but her personal values make her want to give something back to those who have not been as fortunate as she has. Alice puts aside everything else to help Reacher get Carmen out of jail and reunite her with her kidnapped daughter, Ellie. When it turns out that Reacher is right about Carmen and her innocence, Alice knows the reward of helping someone who might well have slipped through the cracks otherwise.

Bobby Greer

Bobby is Sloop's brother, and the resemblance can easily be seen, not just in physical appearance but in demeanor as well. Having both grown up in a house of wealth and privilege, he is as spoiled as his brother is, and as determined to have things his own way. The two brothers grew up with Hack Walker, who is now the sheriff of Pecos, giving them an advantage where acting outside the boundaries of the law is concerned. This is exemplified by Bobby's behavior when he hunts the protected armadillos from the back of his truck. Not only is his conduct illegal, but it is immoral, and no one interferes. He also rules his home with sometimes utter lawlessness. When Carmen has an affair with a school teacher, Bobby takes it upon himself to have him permanently removed. He does this using his ranch hands to injure and intimidate the teacher, driving him from the area entirely. He even tries this method with Reacher, but loses his ranch hands to hospitalization as a result of injury. Bobby is a bully, and meets his match when Reacher shows up.



The Watchers

A group of two men and one boy, the watchers are introduced early and spend a great deal of time and energy watching the Red House Ranch and noting the habits and behavior of all who come and go. They are never clearly established identities, and left without much description. The target they are watching is Ellie Greer, and their motives are unclear until they are removed from existence by the assassins.

The Assassins

Another trio, the assassins consist of one woman and two men. They are an out-of-state professional crew, Los Angeles based, and contacted through another party in Dallas. In business for more than a decade, they are competent and meticulous. They are also perfectionists. They habitually research a target so that they can blend into the local environment, and after completing a contract, typically leave the area behind. They are seldom seen together and travel to each contract separately. The woman is the shooter, and smaller than the two men she travels with. She is the team leader, getting close to middle age, and is medium sized and a medium blond. She is unremarkable except that she kills people for a living. The driver is small and dark, and is responsible for getting their weapons to a target area. They are responsible for the deaths of Al Eugene, Sloop Greer, the three watchers, and the kidnapping of Ellie all at the behest of Hack Walker.



Objects/Places

Pecos, Texas

Formerly a piece of the real wild west, Pecos is inhabited by most a Mexican population. Pecos is the town that looks after all legal issues for the surrounding areas.

Loving County, Texas

Known as the least populated county in all of the United States, and also the richest per capita, boasting a population of only one hundred and ten. Despite the low population, there are four hundred and twenty active oil leases.

Red House Ranch

Name given to the Greer family ranch in Echo County, Texas, consisting of half a mile of red picket fencing on either side of a red gate; a big house with two stories; a tall chimney and one story additions; low barns and sheds and all painted the same dull red color.

Longhorn Lounge

Owned and run by Harley, the Longhorn Lounge is in the southern half of Echo County, and is where Billy and Josh take Reacher for his 'lesson'.

Echo County

Half of Echo is in the north and the other half of it is in the south, divided by 160 miles of nothing. It's claim to fame is that it's the world's biggest town end to end - even bigger than Los Angeles.

Target Search Zone

Ten miles south and west of the town is a road that runs parallel to bht Big Canyon Draw, and Route 285 is the northwest leg that leads to Pecos. This twenty miles between Fort Stockton and the bridge that crosses the Coyanosa Draw form the target area that Reacher searches to find Ellie.



Fort Stockton

Just under fifty miles southeast of Pecos, Fort Stockton is an area that Reacher feels Ellie might be kept in.

Old Fort Stockton

North of the actual town, Old Fort Stockton is a heritage site that contains an old military fort. Rebuilt in 1867 by the Buffalo Soldiers after the Confederates had torn it down.

Balmorhea State Recreation Area

Thirty miles southwest of Pecos, it is a desert oasis where tourists can swim and scuba dive.

Monahans Sandhills

Four thousand acres of sand dunes that resemble the Sahara desert.



Themes

Racial Profiling

Carmen grows up in a well heeled Mexican family in California. They own property and hire white people to work the land for them. She never spends any time in Mexico, and though she is raised in relative luxury, she is not arrogant about her family's wealth. She attends good schools, but fits in, and in all of her youth is hardly aware of her heritage or her nationality. When she meets Sloop, a Texas 'good old boy' from a wealthy Texan family, she thinks nothing of his background or heritage. She loves him, and he doesn't seem to have any feelings about her nationality one way or another. They have a happy and loving relationship, even marrying when Carmen realizes she's pregnant, though they do this without either of their families in attendance. In fact, neither family approves much of the union, but Carmen has no idea how much until a few months pass. When Ellie is born and they are both finished with school, Sloop is unable to find work and money is tight. He finally makes the decision to go back to his family's home in Texas, and Carmen has no choice but to take Ellie and go with him.

When they arrive, she learns about racial profiling first hand. Sloop's family has no use for his Mexican wetback wife, and they make no secret of it. Every chance they get, they make her painfully aware of her heritage, using racial slurs and generally putting her in her place. They would love it if she would just leave, but Sloop loves his daughter and won't let Carmen take her away, and Carmen won't leave without her. The result is a bit of a stalemate. Sloop presents a loving front to his family because he won't admit to them that he made a mistake and married a class beneath them in every respect. He buys her gifts and showers her with attention in front of them, but when they aren't looking, he is merciless. He beats her and treats her with as little or less respect than his family does. As it is Carmen's first exposure to the racial hatred that is prominent where her nationality is concerned, she is at a loss. The sheriff is Sloop's best friend, and there is no one that she can turn to. Even if she went to the State Police, it is likely that they wouldn't believe her story of abuse when the prominent Greer family is giving another side of the story entirely.

Ethical Conflicts

In *Echo Burning*, there are several ethical conflicts that come into play by more than one character. Reacher faces an ethical dilemma in the beginning when the police show up at his motel after he inadvertently puts a power tripping off duty police officer in his place. He has to make a quick decision. Does he play by the rules, ethically correct, and stay to face the consequences? If he does, he realizes that it is likely the police accompanying the man he hit will be less than sympathetic. He decides to leave before they can complicate his life which is unethical, but likely the smarter move. From there, he is picked up by Carmen, who eventually asks him to get rid of her husband because he is abusive and she can see no other way out. Reacher is torn by his desire to help



her but can't bring himself to cause another man's death when there is no personal involvement on his part. Carmen tries to draw him into a more personal situation, encouraging him to get to know her daughter, and even offering to sleep with him, but he declines, making the ethical decision.

When Bobby tries to encourage Reacher to leave, he does so by instructing his other two ranch hands to take Reacher to a location far enough away to be difficult to return and physically deter him from returning. They have done this before, they admit to Reacher, and seem to take pleasure in being able to repeat the performance, but they underestimate Reacher. Though Reacher knows this will be the likely outcome of the 'feed trip' they take him on, and despite seeing the Sheriff in the bar to begin with, Reacher makes no move to avoid the upcoming confrontation. Instead, he goes on the offensive and before they can cause him harm, he hospitalizes them both. From an ethical standpoint, both sides can be argued as Reacher is an innocent victim, and the two hands make no secret of the fact that they intend to do him harm.

When Carmen takes matters into her own hands and shoots her husband, Reacher makes an effort to have her freed on bail. To do so, he must find her a lawyer, but most are so busy that even the newest lawyer to town admits that it may be some time before she can get to Carmen's case. To speed things up, Reacher offers to help her resolve the current case she is working on, and makes her a deal that if he does so, Carmen's case would then be given priority. The lawyer is faced with the ethical conflict of involving a civilian in a case that he has no vested interest in based solely on the fact that if she chooses not to, the family that she is representing will likely lose everything. Though deep down she knows that Reacher cannot collect the twenty thousand dollar judgment involved without committing some kind of unethical behavior, the rancher Reacher will have to deal with certainly deserves to be put in his place. The lawyer chooses to allow Reacher to access the files while her back is turned and even loans him her car to accomplish their goal.

Even the Pecos District Attorney is faced with an ethical conflict. He is running for local office, hoping to become a judge, and is also the best friend of Carmen's husband Sloop. When he is killed, Hank feels that Carmen has created the entire story to manipulate the situation. He knows she has lied about several key facts, and without asking Reacher to confirm them, he tells Reacher that his feeling is that he is being used. His speculations are certainly accurate enough to have Reacher questioning her honesty and motivations, but then the DA surprises Reacher. Despite his inherent honesty and desire to bring justice to the area, he believes it would serve the greater good to sweep this whole case under the rug, preferably before election. If he prosecutes, it will affect his chances of winning, and therefore decrease his ability to create a better legal situation in Pecos in the long run.

These are just a few of the obvious ethical dilemmas that are a part of this novel, with many twists and turns that leave the reader never knowing what is next.



Freedom vs Moral Obligation

Jack Reacher is a loner. Having spent his entire life at the behest of the army, it is fair to say that this has had a great deal to do with who he has become. Reacher began life as a child of an army father. He spent little time in any one area, and as a result learned not to make any stable friendships, knowing that they wouldn't last long. Moving from school to school was normal, and he learned early in life to have an air of confidence and self reliance. When he reached adulthood himself, Reacher followed his father's example, joining the army as well. Reacher became a military policeman for the army and continued with a lifestyle that seldom allowed him to settle for any length of time. As it was all he had ever known, Reacher didn't feel the loss of stability or home. During his time with the army, Reacher learned to read people. As a military policeman, he dealt with people who consistently attempted to conceal the truth from him, and this likely helped him to develop a basis for mistrust of most people. His skill at reading people enabled him to do his job with a high degree of success. When he finds himself discharged, he realizes that he has spent his entire life in the service of a country he has seen little of. He decides to travel, and since he is no longer responsible to report himself and his every move to the service, he decides to travel in anonymity. As a result, he either hitchhikes, takes buses, or walks everywhere he goes. The only time he spends any length of time in any given place is when he comes across an instance like the one Carmen presents him with. Having spent so much of his life seeking truth and justice, this habit has become ingrained, and now when he see an injustice, he can't help but lend aid if he is able to. In the case of Echo Burning, Jack Reacher stays longer in Pecos than he intended to, but only because he is unable to walk away and leave things they way they are. As soon as the injustice is resolved though, Reacher makes an exit without so much as saying goodbye to anyone he has become involved with. This is his way of escaping the need to explain himself and his need to continue his travels unattached, and also to avoid the gratitude and invitations to stay longer which only make him uncomfortable. Returning to anonymity, he walks out to the highway and sticks out his thumb until a truck driver picks him up. His destination is unplanned and unimportant.



Style

Point of View

Echo Burning by Lee Child is written from a first person perspective throughout most of the book, switching occasionally into narrative. Jack Reacher, the main character, is one that Lee Child has written several books around, maintaining the same general theme. Echo Burning goes from Reacher's point of view to the perspective of the assassins who are involved in the plot to ensure the election of a local Pecos Sheriff. Reacher is an ex military policeman who is now free of the army lifestyle for the first time. Having grown up in an army family, and then enlisted, his entire life has been an ongoing relocation project. Lee Child has a good grasp of the kinds of physical and psychological effects that can be a part of a service vet's makeup, and builds his stories around them. Reacher sees the world through the eyes of a policeman, but also as a vet who has seen a large sampling of man's inhumanity to man. The assassins are there merely to do a job and get out, and become more and more nervous as their assignment becomes more convoluted. After eliminating three men, they are given the task of kidnapping a child and then babysitting her until her mother can be convinced to confess to a crime she didn't commit. Then they are given yet another assignment, and accept it even though the risks now outweigh the benefits. The story has small sections that are told through the eyes of the kidnapped young girl, but all of these perspectives are first person.

Setting

Echo Burning takes place primarily in the small town of Pecos, Texas. While Reacher is not one to stay in any one place, he agrees to help a damsel in distress, and allows her to take him to her home in Echo where he passes himself off as a wrangler on the Greer ranch. Most of the story will alternate from the Greer ranch, called the Red House Ranch to the town of Pecos where the jail and courthouse for the area are located. At one point, Reacher and the lawyer he hires, Alice, are forced into a confrontation that takes place in the back country, but after a brief and bloody exchange in the desert, they return to Red House Ranch. The entire book centers around small town Texas and the complexities of coping with a not so legal system. Corruption and lawlessness abound in an area where a few people can control their surroundings. Reacher uncovers a plot involving a sheriff who wants to be a judge but is being blackmailed by a friend. Sloop Greer knows the sheriff has a past he isn't proud of, and uses it to get himself out of an IRS conviction that lands him in prison. His threat to uncover the sheriff's secret leads to his own elimination as the sheriff looks ahead and sees the beginnings of an ongoing headache.



Language and Meaning

Lee Child adeptly tells a story about abuse, bigotry and murder in a way that takes the reader with him all the way. He uses terms that bring to life not only the ex army policeman, Jack Reacher, and helps the reader to imagine what that kind of life might have been like, but he also works in the cultural difficulties faced by Mexican immigrants to Texas using racial slurs like 'beaner' to emphasize his meaning. Carmen is a California-raised Mexican woman who marries a well-off Texan named Sloop Greer. He accurately depicts the racial disparity between the well-heeled Texas family and the immigrant Mexican 'wetback' and portrays the struggle for acceptance that extends even to the child who is a product of both the Texas blue blood and the Mexican import. The child in this story, Ellie Greer, is cast aside by her Texan grandmother who has no use for the 'half breed' after her son is killed and his wife is jailed for his murder. She allows the child to be taken by Social Services, despite her impression that Ellie will likely not be adopted easily because of her mixed race. The prejudice extends to the sheriff who in his youth hunted Mexican illegal immigrants crossing the border for sport. It is this behavior that later haunts his bid for judgeship in Pecos County.

Structure

Echo Burning is 412 pages long and divided into seventeen chapters. Most of the chapters are approximately twenty-five pages long, though one or two exceed forty pages, but Lee Child has a writing style that allows for good flow of information. Each chapter breaks up to include perspectives from more than one character. For instance, a chapter may include Reacher's perspective and responses to given situations along with a paragraph or two that give the story from the assassins perspective before often returning to the main character as well. In this manner, the author manages to create a timeline that is easy to follow without relying on the traditional structure of a chapter that confines point of view to one group or character, followed by another chapter that uses another point of view. Despite the varying aspects and perspectives, the story is easy to read and follow and the characters and their contributions to the book are linear and comprehensive. All in all, well told and represented. It is followed by a brief glimpse into the next 'Reacher' novel called 'Without Fail', showing Lee Child's affinity for the main character and his exploits.



Quotes

"He's never killed a man that didn't need killing." Ch. 1, p. 23
Inscription on the headstone of Gentleman Gunfighter, Robert Clay Allison.

"Certain it is that many of his stern deeds were for the right as he understood that right to be." Ch.1, p. 23
Obituary printed in a Kansas City newspaper that Carmen asks Reacher if he would be happy with.

"I want him dead, Reacher.... I really do. It's my only way out, literally. And he deserves it." Ch. 3, p. 69
Carmen to Reacher regarding her solution to her husband Sloop.

"One or the other of us is going to be eating humble pie." Ch. 4, p. 97
Rusty Greer to Reacher when he poses the hypothesis that perhaps a white person was responsible for Al Eugene's disappearance.

"Never point a loaded gun at anything you don't definitely want to kill." Ch. 6, p. 141
Reacher to Carmen - advice for sensible gun operation as she learns about her new gun.

".....she's in a shitload of trouble.... the call wasn't about him attacking her. It was the other way around. She shot him." Ch. 9, p. 196
Trooper to Reacher after returning to Red House Ranch after taking Reacher away at the Greer's request.

"Maybe I'll start with one of your sons...Pick one out at random and throw him off the balcony, just like that." Ch. 11, p. 226
Reacher to Lyndon Brewer, explaining to him why he should save himself and his family a great deal of unnecessary aggravation by just paying the money he owes to the Mexican family who won a judgment against him in court.

"So don't prosecute her. It wouldn't be justice, anyhow. Because it was self-defense, pure and simple." Ch. 11, p. 234
Reacher to Hack Walker regarding Carmen's prosecution.

"Because you were on the road in a squad car when this went down. If they'd left you in the bunkhouse, you'd be our number-one suspect." Ch. 12, p. 256
Hack Walker to Reacher after finding Reacher's prints all over the gun and ammunition that killed Sloop.

"Because some jeweler in Pecos laughed at her and told her it was a fake worth thirty bucks." Ch. 15, p. 334
Reacher to Alice, finally understanding how the 'lie' Carmen told him about her diamond ring fits in.



"Superman couldn't hit anything with a handgun in the dark at this distance." Ch. 16, p. 343

Reacher to Alice, reassuring her that with handguns the assassins will never be able to hit her.

"The whole thing faded into history, until twelve years later Sloop was sitting in a cell somewhere and dragged it all up because he was so desperate to get out." Ch. 16, p. 374

Reacher explaining the sequences of events that led to Hack's decision to kill Sloop.

"Go live in the barn. That's where people like you belong." Ch. 16, p. 379

Reacher to Bobby as he watches Red House Ranch burn down.

"Slower now, ... Now we're them. We're looking at this with their eyes." Ch. 17, p. 397

Reacher to Alice as he tries to figure out where Ellie is being held.

"He's a bad man. I think he was going to shoot me." Ch. 17, p. 405

Ellie to Reacher after he rescues her from the last remaining assassin.

"I called it self defense and they bought it without hesitating. It was my car out there and my gun." Ch. 17, p. 410

Alice to Reacher, explaining how she freed him from explanations regarding the two dead assassins.

"She laughed with happiness. I told her it was probably burned down to a cinder, and she just laughed and laughed." Ch. 17, p. 410

Alice to Reacher after telling Carmen that Red House Ranch burned down.



Topics for Discussion

What kind of person is Carmen looking for when she picks Reacher up? What qualities does she see in him that make her believe he is the one she needs?

What efforts does Carmen make to convince Reacher to help her? What is the outcome and why does it come to that?

Sloop presents two different personalities to both outsiders and to his family. Why is that? What are his reasons for his behavior towards Carmen?

What prevents Carmen from just leaving the Greer estate? What steps might she have taken to avoid the outcome and why didn't she?

What evidence piles up that makes it difficult if not impossible to believe Carmen's claim of self defense?

What does Reacher discover that makes him determined to continue investigating despite all the evidence to the contrary?

Why does Carmen confess and refuse legal council?

What tips Reacher off about Sloop's body that convinces him Carmen couldn't have killed him?

What events make Reacher think Hack is involved?

What significance does the ring of Carmen's hold for Reacher, and how does he resolve the issue?

Why do Reacher and Alice go out into the open country behind Red House Ranch? What part does the weather play in the events that follow?

What happens when Reacher reveals the extent of Hack's involvement?

How does Reacher find the lone remaining assassin?

Reacher leaves without a word to anyone after reuniting Ellie and Carmen. Why? What part does his past play in his current behavior, and his method of departure?