

First Blood Study Guide

First Blood by David Morrell

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Plot Summary

First Blood is the debut novel by writer David Morrell. First Blood is about a Vietnam veteran, Rambo, who is travelling across the country alone. Rambo becomes wary of the small town sheriffs who are constantly forcing him to move on due to his appearance and lack of employment. Rambo decides to make a stand in Kentucky against small town sheriff Wilfred Teasle. However, in making his stand, Rambo becomes the most wanted man in the state. Rambo uses the skills he was taught in the Green Berets to fight Teasle and his deputies, but neither man will allow his pride to let him stop, to admit defeat, despite mounting losses. First Blood is a novel about war, about choosing sides, and about the gray areas that make it difficult for either side to be a clear winner.

Rambo knows the moment that the police car pulls up what is about to happen. It has happened to him fifteen times before in other small towns. The sheriff offers Rambo a ride and politely drops him off outside the city limits, making it clear that he is not welcome in this town. Rambo, however, tired of being treated like he is less than a civilian with the same rights as everyone else, walks back into town and stops in a diner to pick up some lunch. Before Rambo has been there long enough to make his order, the sheriff returns. Sheriff Teasle allows Rambo to get his order, but then drives him back outside the city limits and again warning him not to return.

Rambo has grown tired of being treated in this fashion. Rambo is a Vietnam War veteran who spent time in a prisoner of war camp. Memories of his time in the camp and his subsequent escape haunt Rambo and he refuses to allow someone like Teasle to treat him with such disrespect. For this reason, Rambo returns to town. Teasle spots him quickly and arrests him when Rambo refuses to get into the squad car a third time.

Rambo is arraigned on vagrancy and resisting arrest charges and is given a thirty-five day jail sentence. Teasle takes Rambo back to the jail and instructs him to strip so that he can be searched. Although Rambo is weary of the small and wet jail cells, he submits to everything Teasle wants, including the search and a shower. However, when Teasle begins to cut Rambo's hair and attempts to shave his beard, Rambo cannot bear the similarities to his time in captivity in Vietnam. Rambo begins to panic. When a deputy comes close to him with a straight razor, Rambo takes it from him and cuts him across the abdomen.

Rambo manages to escape the jail in the chaos that follows the cutting of the deputy. Rambo steals a motorcycle and races into the mountains. Rambo is pursued, but he manages to climb up into the hills with the motorcycle to an area the squad cars cannot reach. Teasle quickly takes charge of the search, insisting that he and his men move out immediately in pursuit despite the impending approach of darkness so that he can be in charge of the situation when the state police arrive. As Rambo moves through the unfamiliar hills, naked and alone, he manages to find help from a still owner while Teasle and his deputies camp out to wait for daybreak.



In the morning, Teasle and his men follow Rambo's tracks, catching up to him quickly with the use of tracking dogs. However, Rambo is smart and desperate. Rambo manages to escape down the far side of a cliff, taking out an entire helicopter. Rambo then traps Teasle and his men on the cliff side, taking out the tracker and his dogs. Rambo then hunts down the sheriff and his deputies, managing to kill everyone except Teasle.

Teasle survives his nightmare in the woods to lead the state police back after Rambo. After trapping Rambo in a cave, the state police begin to think it is over, but Teasle knows better. Rambo has escaped and stolen a car. Teasle is waiting for him and they begin a gun battle in the streets. Teasle and Rambo shoot one another fatally, but continue to battle until both are dead.



Part 1: Chapters 1-13

Part 1: Chapters 1-13 Summary

First Blood is the debut novel of writer David Morrell. Published in 1972, First Blood was inspired by news reports about the Vietnam War and unrest in an American city.

Rambo is leaving a small town gas station when a patrol car pulls over beside him. The man inside offers Rambo a ride and Rambo can tell by his demeanor that it is not a simple offer, but an order. Rambo gets into the car and listens politely as the sheriff asks him a few questions and offers some polite advice. The sheriff then drives Rambo to the city limits and suggests politely that he move on. Instead, Rambo heads back into town.

Rambo goes into a small diner and orders a couple of hamburgers. Moments later, the sheriff enters the diner. The sheriff, Wilfred Teasle, tells the waitress to make Rambo's order to go.

Teasle again makes Rambo get into the cruiser and he drives him out to the city limits. Rambo sits alone in the grass and eats his meal. Rambo's thoughts move to the war even though he does not want to think about it. Rambo resents Teasle's attempts to make him leave town, feeling that he should be allowed to visit the town if he wants to. For this reason, Rambo begins to walk back into town after eating.

Teasle sits in his car and waits for Rambo to come back. As he waits, Teasle thinks about his wife, who has left him and gone to California. Teasle wants to finish this business with Rambo so that he can go back to the office to call his wife. However, when Teasle finally spots Rambo and stops to force him back into his cruiser, he is distracted by a traffic accident and loses sight of Rambo.

Rambo is outside of a local hotel when Teasle catches up with him again. Teasle orders Rambo into his car, but Rambo has decided he is not going to put up with this anymore. Rambo refuses for several minutes, but finally gives in. However, Rambo tells Teasle he will only return.

Teasle takes Rambo to the police station. Rambo thinks he should back down and end this, but decides he has no reason to do so. When Teasle asks Rambo his name, Rambo refuses to answer.

In his office, Teasle asks Rambo again to give his name and then searches his belongings for identification, but finds nothing. While in the office, Rambo notices that Teasle has been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his service in the Chosin Reservoir Campaign in Korea.

Teasle takes Rambo to the Justice of the Peace. Rambo is sentenced to thirty-five days for vagrancy and resisting arrest.



Rambo is taken downstairs at the police station to where a deputy is washing down the cells with a hose. Teasle has Rambo remove his clothes so that he can be searched. Teasle then instructs Rambo to take a shower.

In the shower, Rambo recalls his time as a prisoner of war in Vietnam where he was kept in a small hole in the ground, whipped and forced to do manual labor. Rambo escaped one day and walked in a delirium for more than three hundred miles before he finally found his way back to American territory.

When Rambo leaves the shower, Teasle insists he must have his hair cut and his beard shaved. Rambo sits for the haircut, but when Teasle accidentally pulls his hair, Rambo cannot stand it any longer and stands. Teasle has another deputy come down to hold Rambo in his chair. When this deputy belittles Rambo's claims of being in the war, he grows even more tense. The other deputy hands Teasle a razor to shave Rambo's beard. Rambo grabs the razor. The deputy pulls his gun, forcing Rambo to act in self defense. Rambo slashes the razor across the deputy's gut and rushes for the stairs. Rambo attacks another deputy in the corridor upstairs and rushes for the front door. Rambo steals a motorcycle from a passing motorist.

Teasle quickly calls for help, sending two deputies already out in their cruisers after Rambo and then alerting the state police. Teasle then calls Orval Kellerman, an old friend and local tracker, to ask him to join the search with his dogs.

Naked, Rambo races the motorcycle outside of town, but soon finds himself in pursuit by two police cruisers. Rambo races off the main street onto a dirt road that crosses a farmer's fields and goes into the hills. Rambo manages to maneuver the motorcycle high into the hills to a place where the deputies cannot follow.

Part 1: Chapters 1-13 Analysis

In these beginning chapters of the novel, the reader is introduced to the two narrating characters and the conflict that will move the characters to the conclusion of the novel. Rambo is a Vietnam vet who has seen horrors in the war and survived more than most people can even imagine in their worst nightmares. Rambo has survived his ordeal to return to an America he no longer recognizes, a world he no longer feels as though he fits in and a place where he is not welcome. Rambo travels from town to town in his struggle to figure out where he fits in and what he will do next. However, in these travels Rambo finds himself discriminated against by small town sheriffs who want him to move on rather than become a burden on their towns. Rambo does not like this attitude and finally has had enough of it.

Wilfred Teasle is a small town sheriff who is used to dealing with minor crimes, such as petty theft and domestic violence. Teasle does not appreciate vagrants and does not want one in his town. For this reason, Teasle decides due to Rambo's shaggy appearance that he is a vagrant and will be a burden on the town, committing crimes and bringing his other vagrant buddies to the town. Teasle asks Rambo to move on



three times before he finally arrests him. Teasle is polite and gentle about his actions, but this does not change the fact that he is making false judgments over a man who is a military hero and should be treated with the respect that all Americans should expect.

In creating two such different characters, the author has taken two separate elements of the time period, those who were fighting against the government and established behavioral standards to inspire change and those who believed in the established standards and the government, to create a personification of the timeless battle of rebels against the establishment. While Rambo forces the issue by refusing to leave town, the sheriff is not really correct in his attempts to make Rambo leave in the first place. Neither man is right in his actions and this is only compounded when Rambo chooses to kill the deputy and escape, causing Teasle to chase after him.

It is important to note at this point in the novel the similarities between the two main characters. While Rambo may appear to be a hippy, to be a vagrant who will only be a burden on society, he is actually a war hero who has survived terrible treatment at the hands of the Vietnamese army. At the same time, Teasle is also a war hero who has earned the Distinguished Service Medal, a medal that is second only to the Medal of Honor. These two men are more alike than either realizes. They are both men who have been trained in the way of war and have served honorably. They are men with a strong sense of pride and a strong idea of what it means to be honorable.



Part 2: Chapters 1-8

Part 2: Chapters 1-8 Summary

Teasle is in the hills where the deputies lost sight of Rambo. Orval joins him. Teasle recalls how he and Orval, the man who raised him after his father's death, fought the last time they saw one another. Teasle tries hard to make amends and to not fight again as he urges Orval to agree to begin the search immediately rather than wait for first light in the morning. Orval finally reluctantly agrees when Teasle explains how important it is to him to be in charge of this search due to the death of his deputy.

Rambo is on foot now, still naked. He makes his way blindly through the hills, aware that Teasle will be close behind him. Rambo searches as he walks, aware that there are often people running illegal stills in the hills and hoping to come across one such man. Finally, Rambo finds a man and his son who agree to give him clothes and food if he promises to lead their search away from the still.

Teasle wakes in the morning to find Orval already up and ready to go. In a short time they are joined by more of Teasle's deputies who have brought supplies and hot food. Over breakfast, Teasle learns that the state police were not happy to learn that he began the search, but have agreed to take a supporting role for the time being.

Rambo has become aware of a helicopter moving through the area, more than likely searching for him. When the helicopter comes closer, Rambo can hear it broadcasting a message to anyone who might be on the ground. Rambo hides under a fallen tree as the helicopter begins to travel across the meadow where he is. A sniper from the helicopter begins shooting at potential hiding places as it crosses and Rambo knows it is only a matter of time before they fire at him. However, the helicopter and its sniper are distracted by a deer hiding a few yards away, giving Rambo a chance to move on before the helicopter returns and fires at his former hiding spot.

Teasle finds himself struggling to keep up with Orval, but determined not to show weakness in front of this man whose respect he so desires.

Rambo can hear the dogs getting close to him. He quickly climbs a hill, making his way up a cliff in a way that he hopes will slow his pursuers. However, Rambo quickly finds himself between his pursuers and a steeper cliff. Rambo decides he has no choice but to try to climb down the cliff face, but finding footholds is almost impossible.

Rambo is nearly halfway down the cliff when the helicopter comes up behind him. Desperate, Rambo drops into a nearby tree, breaking several ribs in the fall, and pulls out the rifle that the old still owner gave him. Rambo fires on the helicopter, killing the sniper. The pilot, frightened that he is next, drops down on the floor of the helicopter, causing it to crash into the cliff side. Expecting to be shot at any moment, Rambo jumps out of the tree and runs for a distant line of trees. When he does not hear any gunfire,



he returns to the edge of the tree line and watches as Teasle and his men appear on the edge of the cliff. Rambo sees Orval with the dogs and realizes that if he is to have a chance, he has to take out the man and his dogs. Rambo manages to shoot three dogs, causing one injured dog to drag two other dogs and a deputy over the side of the cliff.

Teasle's men panic and begin firing indiscriminately toward the tree line. Teasle calls for them to stop, but they do not immediately hear him. Finally, Teasle gets their attention and forces them to stop. Teasle and Orval argue briefly. Orval then becomes aware that one of his dogs is still alive. Orval hands the only uninjured dog to a deputy and goes to the other, to put it out of its misery. As Orval stands to walk back toward Teasle, he is shot in the chest. It is then that Teasle realizes that Rambo has led them into an ambush.

Part 2: Chapters 1-8 Analysis

Teasle desperately wants to be in charge of the search for Rambo, so he maneuvers and manipulates to make it happen. Teasle enlists the help of Orval, the man who raised him after his own father was killed. Teasle and Orval have been fighting a lot lately, but Teasle makes an effort not to fight with the old man again in order to get him to help in his desire to be in charge. Teasle's pride is at stake, both in this search for Rambo and in his need to make Orval see him as a man and an equal. This shows the reader how Teasle often lets his pride make decisions for him, preventing him from making choices that might be a little more practical under the circumstances.

Rambo enlists the help of an illegal still owner to get clothes and a weapon. This allows Rambo to continue his run in a little more comfort and with supplies that Teasle assumes he does not have. Teasle badly underestimates Rambo throughout the search, unaware as he is that Rambo is a trained military man, a Green Beret. For this reason, Rambo is able to shoot most of Orval's dogs and Orval himself. This changes the game for Teasle, making it more personal than it was when Rambo killed his deputy in his own police station.

The fight for Rambo has been personal since the moment Teasle decided to kick him out of town. However, for Teasle the fight only became personal when Rambo shot Orval. It is a difficult situation that is only growing more difficult. Teasle sees it as him doing his job, upholding the law. Rambo, however, sees it as Teasle making judgments based on appearance and not allow Rambo the rights he has been given as an American citizen and then upheld as a soldier. Both were wrong in the beginning and both continue to be wrong as Rambo kills to protect himself and Teasle allows a police matter to become personal.



Part 2: Chapters 9-17

Part 2: Chapters 9-17 Summary

After Orval is shot, Teasle's men again begin to panic, afraid that Rambo will come up the hill behind them. Then Teasle becomes aware that Orval is not dead. Teasle drags Orval to safety and tries to treat his wound, but knows it is too bad to do any good. They call for help over the radio, but there is a storm coming and the state police will not allow any helicopters to fly. It is then that Teasle and his deputies learn that Rambo is a Green Beret who was awarded the Medal of Honor.

As it begins to rain heavily, Teasle quickly realizes that they are sitting in a dangerous place as the water from the rain would rush down the rise behind them and wash them all over the cliff. Teasle orders the men to move, but the men are frightened. Teasle becomes consumed with trying to move Orval up the rise without the water pulling him away. However, Teasle loses Orval once, then twice, unable to stop his body from washing over the side of the cliff. Teasle finds himself alone with one deputy, the others having run off in fear. When another deputy appears in the trees above them, Teasle hits him in frustration.

Rambo knows that Teasle is retreating back down the hill and he knows he should move on. Rambo will have a several hour head start now, thanks to the rain. However, he does not want to leave, does not want to allow Teasle to get away with what he has done. Rambo backtracks, taking supplies from the deputy who fell over the cliff with the dogs. Rambo now has another gun, cartridges, and a canteen. Rambo uses the man's belt to bandage his broken ribs. Rambo then finds Orval's body and takes sausage from his body, the first food he has had since that morning, as well as a knife.

Teasle and three deputies begin making their way down the hill, watching carefully for the frightened deputies, in fear they might mistake them for Rambo. Soon they hear four gunshots, then five, assuming the sound is Rambo shooting the four frightened deputies as they tried to backtrack toward town. Teasle assumes that Rambo will wait for them in the same spot and decides they are safe up on the far side of the hill.

The storm becomes more dangerous as large hail begins to fall. Then one of the deputies is shot. Teasle decides to go in search of Rambo on his own, leaving Shingleton with the injured Mitch alone. Teasle has no luck and soon returns, only to find the deputies missing. Shingleton calls out and warns Teasle just as Rambo fires on him. Teasle turns and runs.

After killing the deputy, Rambo chases after Teasle. Rambo's injuries make the chase difficult.



Teasle rushes to the bottom of the cliff and sets up an ambush for Rambo, but he falls and loses his gun. Teasle begins to run through the woods, unsure where exactly he is or where he is going.

Rambo is struggling because of his injuries. However, he believes he is close to Teasle and will reach him soon. Teasle moves into some brambles and Rambo follows, but quickly loses his path, unable to locate Teasle. Rambo finally stops in frustration and cries.

Teasle manages to make it through the brambles and finds himself in a farmer's field. His determination to get revenge on Rambo keeps Teasle going until he is found by a state trooper.

Part 2: Chapters 9-17 Analysis

Rambo has turned his gun on Teasle and his deputies. At first Rambo's only intention is to take out Orval and his dogs to keep them from chasing after him. It is clear to Rambo that Teasle's men are not trained in this kind of search and that it is only the dogs that has given them such an advantage. However, after Orval and the dogs are down, Rambo knows he should escape but he cannot. Rambo is still hurt and angry with Teasle for trying to kick him out of town and for forcing this situation in such a way that he felt he had no choice but to kill again. Rambo wants revenge for what he sees as Teasle's wrongs against him. For this reason, Rambo falls back on his Green Beret training and goes after Teasle and his men.

For Teasle, it became personal the moment Rambo shot Orval. When Orval is lost to the storm and most of his men abandon him, Teasle becomes even more angry and determined. However, Teasle continues to make mistakes, to allow Rambo to get the advantage. For this reason, Rambo easily kills all of Teasle's men, leaving Teasle alone. Rather than face Rambo man to man, Teasle runs. Teasle manages to escape because Rambo expects him to fall back on his own military training, to stop and ambush him, therefore Rambo allows Teasle to get too far ahead of him and escape. It is a frustrating moment for Rambo because he knows that by allowing Teasle to get away, he has wasted hours he could have used to escape and failed in his personal mission. At the same time, Teasle has become so angry with Rambo and so determined to make him suffer, that he is more determined than ever to stop him.



Part 3: Chapters 1-12

Part 3: Chapters 1-12 Summary

More than twelve hours later, Teasle is in the back of a National Guard truck parked near the same field where the state trooper found him that morning. Teasle should be in the hospital, but has insisted on being a part of the man hunt for Rambo. Kern, the commander of the state police, continues to question his health, but Teasle convinces him he is fine despite the pain and heart palpitations he continues to have. Kern tells Teasle that a couple of civilians accidentally shot one another and that they are removing all the civilian volunteers from the area. Teasle agrees with that decision, telling Kern about a search he was once a part of in which the civilians came out in such numbers that it was chaotic.

As Teasle watches the radioman mark on a map the locations of the force preparing to search for Rambo at first light, a helicopter lands near them. Colonel Sam Trautman introduces himself to Teasle as the man who created the school where Rambo was trained as a Green Beret. Trautman has come at Teasle's request, with the hope that he can offer some insight to help them catch Rambo quicker. Trautman seems proud of Rambo's actions and curious how Teasle managed to escape him, apparently hoping to use this experience as a way to improve the Green Beret school.

Rambo wakes in a cave with no memory of how he got there. Rambo realizes he has a fever, so he decides to remain in the cave, what he now realizes is an old mine shaft, before continuing with his plan to go to Mexico. Rambo builds a fire and explores the cave, but it forces him to bend low and this hurts his ribs, so he stops. Rambo then shoots an owl.

Teasle learns that a cop was shot by a civilian on accident. The cop dies. Teasle wonders how many will die before this is over. Trautman then tells Teasle how he thinks Teasle escaped Rambo, that Rambo would have expected Teasle to behave differently because of his military training. Then Trautman tells Teasle a little about Rambo's sad life, but stresses that he does not believe the past has anything to do with Rambo's behaviors now. Rambo is a Green Beret and that is all he knows now. Trautman then agrees to help hunt Rambo.

Rambo plucks, cooks, and eats the old owl. Outside Rambo can hear a helicopter giving orders to the men on the ground who are preparing to search. Rambo has been taught to disregard information that seems irrelevant or illogical, therefore he ignores what he hears from the helicopter.

As the others sleep, Teasle goes over the plan again and again, finally allowing his mind to wonder to Orval. Teasle feels bad that the last words he and Orval had were said in anger and regrets the fight that caused him to avoid Orval for the past few months. Teasle then thinks about his dead deputies, their bodies still on the bluff because the



state police could not find the hill Teasle described. Teasle is tense and it seems to make his pain worse. Teasle is popping the pills the doctor gave him like they are candy.

Rambo watches as the searchers begin coming into the hills to find him. Quickly coming up with a plan, Rambo finds a stream that runs behind his cave and buries himself in the mud. Rambo begins to panic, afraid he will suffocate before the searchers come. Finally the searchers arrive, searching the area unaware that Rambo is hiding below them. When they are gone, Rambo comes out of the mud and washes himself clean. Rambo then begins to walk in the stream, moving down the hill in terrain the searchers have already covered. However, Rambo runs into a civilian who stopped to soak his feet in the water. Rambo kills the man, but there is another. Rambo turns to run as he hears the searchers responding to the gunshots. At first Rambo considers just waiting for the searchers, giving himself up, but he is afraid he will be shot by a trigger happy searcher. Instead, Rambo makes his way back to the cave.

Teasle gets word that Rambo has been spotted. Kern and Teasle cannot agree on where Rambo will go, Teasle and Trautman insisting Rambo will go away from the road, Kern certain he will go for the road. Finally Kern agrees to send men up the hill when the dogs track Rambo that direction.

Rambo makes it to the cave with some National Guardsmen behind him. Rambo collapses the front of the cave, trapping himself inside. As the guardsmen gather outside, Rambo calls to them and tells them he will only surrender to Teasle. However, Teasle refuses to come. The men instruct Rambo to send out his weapons. Just as he is about to drop the rifle out of a hole in the cave in, Rambo realizes that there is a breeze coming from behind him. Rambo takes a torch and begins to explore the back of the cave.

Teasle begins to have terrible pain in his chest and takes more pills, causing Trautman to notice how many pills he has been taking. Kern wants to take Teasle to a doctor, but he refuses just seconds before collapsing.

Rambo finds a shallow hole in the back of the cave that seems to hide the air source. Rambo painfully drops into the hole just as the guardsmen begin to break through the cave in. Rambo begins to explore the cave, following what he believes is the direction of the air source, but soon realizing that he is lost and would not be able to find his way back if it became necessary. Rambo hears water at one point, but is confused when the sound stops. Rambo retreats and soon finds himself in a cavern where there is an underground stream. Rambo also finds himself in a cave with thousands of bats and the beetles that feed on their feces. Rambo is frightened of the beetles and the bats, retreating to the open area near the stream. Rambo knows he has few choices now.

Rambo goes reluctantly back into the cave with the bats and begins searching for the source of the air, the place where the bats enter and exit the caves. As he searches, the bats awaken and begin to fly away. At first Rambo panics, but then he is overcome with a calming feeling, a good feeling, that is something he has rarely experienced before. In



this calm, Rambo makes his way to the air source and soon finds himself exiting the cave in a small fissure in the hillside.

Part 3: Chapters 1-12 Analysis

Teasle has returned to safety, but due to the fact that he now realizes that it is his actions that got Orval and his deputies killed, Teasle has become more determined than ever to help find Rambo. Teasle wants to be present when Rambo is caught and punished. However, Teasle is badly injured from his run out of the forest and taking some sort of medication that is causing him terrible side effects. For this reason, and the guilt that is overwhelming him, the reader is beginning to wonder if Teasle's reasoning remains clear.

Rambo is badly injured as well, suffering from broken ribs and an infection. Rambo needs to rest and nourish his body, but Teasle and his men are not giving him time. Rambo once again falls back on his training to find a way out of his situation, but where good luck was on his side the day before, bad luck is now causing him to face one stumbling block after another. Rambo soon comes to the conclusion that he will more than likely not survive this ordeal, but he continues to fight, determined to survive.

The author introduces several new characters at this point in the novel. Sam Trautman, so named by the author to represent Uncle Sam, or the government, is the man who designed the school where Rambo was trained to be a Green Beret. Trautman is incredibly proud of what Rambo has done so far, proving that his training is top notch. However, Trautman has also come to realize that what Rambo is doing is wrong and agrees to help. Trautman does help, but it seems that some of what he advises he does in such a way to both help and harm Rambo. Trautman's role in this search is confusing, leaving the reader with the impression that Trautman is out only to protect his own interests, not anyone else's. At the same time, the author introduces Kern's, the state police commander. This man is indecisive, leaving the reader with the impression that if Teasle had allowed the state police to take over earlier, Rambo might already be living the good life in Mexico.



Part 3: Chapters 13-23

Part 3: Chapters 13-23 Summary

Teasle wakes confused in his office. Teasle learns from a deputy that he became irrational and was taken to the office to be seen by a doctor who told them Teasle had overdosed on a medication that was both sedative and stimulant.

Teasle takes a call from his wife, who is calling due to news coverage of the search for Rambo. Teasle pushes his wife to tell him if she is coming home and she admits that she wants him to file for divorce.

Teasle finds his shoes and goes out to rejoin the search. Teasle is convinced that Rambo is no longer in the hills, but on his way through town. As Teasle begins to drive away, this thought is confirmed when there is an explosion across town.

Rambo has stolen a police car and is making his way slowly across town, lighting fires as he goes so that the police will have to go the long way around. Over the police radio, Trautman talks to him, trying to convince him to give himself up. Rambo turns the radio off. Rambo stops at a gas station and rigs it to burn before driving away.

Teasle blocks the main road and waits for Rambo. As Rambo drives toward him, Teasle shoots out the front tires and then the windshield. The car crashes, but before Teasle can approach it, Rambo has gone. Teasle follows Rambo toward the hardware store, surprised when dynamite is thrown into the alley where he stands. Teasle continues to follow Rambo, exchanging fire as they move through the streets. Teasle is again caught by surprise when dynamite takes out the old courthouse. A minute later, the police station goes up with the deputy inside. Rambo then goes into a residential neighborhood.

Rambo moves through the residential neighborhood, trying to force Teasle to use up his bullets before confronting him. However, Teasle surprises him by coming up behind instead of in front of him. They fire at the same time, both are shot. Then, a good Samaritan pulls a gun on Rambo, forcing him to shoot him in the shoulder.

Teasle lies on the sidewalk, aware that he is shot and that it is likely a fatal shot. A woman tries to help him, but Teasle refuses. Trautman and Kern arrive, reassuring Teasle that an ambulance is on the way. Teasle tells them where he thinks Rambo is, but they do not initially believe him. When he is alone with Trautman, Teasle insists that he be allowed to go when they search for Rambo, determined to see it through to the end. The cops begin to think that Teasle has gone crazy. Teasle thinks that Trautman wants to finish this, but he is determined and he manages to rise to his feet.

Rambo crawls through a field of raspberries to a shed, but it is dark inside and he chooses instead to crawl to a small rise. Rambo's body is going numb and he knows it is almost over. Rambo decides to commit suicide and begins to prepare with a final stick



of dynamite. However, Rambo spots Teasle coming toward him and decides on a better way.

Teasle joins Trautman and Kern as they corner Rambo in the raspberry field and try to decide what to do next. Teasle insists that it must be him to end this thing. Teasle moves forward, raising his gun as he approaches the mound where Rambo lay.

Rambo raises his gun, trying to aim, but the gun goes off accidentally. Rambo is angry with himself, afraid Teasle will kill him in a way he has not earned. However, when death finally comes, it is from a different direction.

Trautman tells Teasle, who has been shot again, that Rambo is dead. Trautman has shot him through the head. Teasle describes what he is feeling briefly and then dies.

Part 3: Chapters 13-23 Analysis

Teasle learns that his marriage is over. In short time, he has lost the man who was his surrogate father, his wife, and most of his deputies. Everything Teasle has lived for is gone because of Rambo. For this reason, Teasle has nothing left to lose. At the same time, Rambo has never had anything that meant much to him beyond his military training. Therefore, he has nothing to lose by his life and he is fighting hard to keep that.

Rambo brings war to Teasle's small town, using every tactic he has ever learned to escape the city and find freedom. However, Teasle's pride will not allow Rambo to survive. They battle in the town, destroying everything about it that Teasle was trying to protect when he first asked Rambo to leave town. It is ironic that these two men who are so much alike and who wanted so many of the same things would destroy those things that are supposedly so precious to them in a fit of pride.

The author has taken a story that pits the establishment against the rebels and shows the reader how futile the fight truly is. Both men have their own reasons for fighting and these reasons seem to be logical and morally sound. However, both men cannot be right. In the end, neither man gets what he wants. Instead, not only are both men dead, but they have taken with them many, many others. In this way, the author has shown the reader the futility of war, the futility of pride, and the irony of morality.



Characters

Rambo

The author never gives the reader more information on Rambo other than his last name. There is no first name or even his rank while he was in the Green Berets. Instead, the author introduces his main character by his last name only, not telling the reader that Rambo is a Vietnam vet who suffered in a POW camp in Vietnam until the story has already begun to unfold, misleading the reader almost as much as Sheriff Teasle allows himself to be misled by Rambo's reluctance to share his name and history.

Rambo is suffering from what is now called post traumatic stress syndrome. In the 70s, this was not a diagnosed disorder and therefore there was no treatment for it. However, Rambo suffers from his memories of war, the horrible things he went through as a POW and during his harrowing escape. Rambo returns home to a country that is unhappy with the war and therefore treats heroes such as Rambo with indifference at best, with open disdain at worst. For these reasons, Rambo has taken to walking cross country with no destination in mind, with no desire to settle down, get a job, or even shave his long, shaggy beard.

When Rambo arrives in Sheriff Teasle's town, he is viewed because of his appearance as a bum who will be a source of crime at worst and a burden on society at the least. For this reason, Teasle quickly attempts to run Rambo out of town. Rambo has experienced this treatment numerous times before and has come to the end of his ability to tolerate such disrespect. For this reason, Rambo continuously returns to town until Sheriff Teasle arrests him. Rambo then panics when Teasle tries to cut his hair, the act causing Rambo to flash back to the abuse he suffered at the hands of his Vietnamese captors.

Rambo has been trained in warfare and is quite an expert at running, hiding, and fighting. For this reason, Teasle and his men are quickly out matched when they attempt to capture Rambo a second time. Rambo is now angry and he uses all his knowledge to make Teasle suffer for his mistreatment. However, Rambo is badly injured and he overestimates Teasle, resulting in a battle that both are destined to lose.

Sheriff Wilfred Teasle

Sheriff Teasle is a small town sheriff who lives and works in the same small town where he grew up. Teasle's mother died when he was young and a few years later his father was killed in a hunting accident. This left Teasle to be raised by the hard and demanding friend of his father, Orval Kellerman. Teasle finds it difficult to please Orval and they have recently begun to battle over who might be right or wrong. Pride is strong in both men and this is part of the difficulty they experience in their relationship.



Teasle is married, but his desire to have children has caused his wife to leave him. Teasle spends the first part of the novel wondering if his wife will ever come home, only learning at the end that his wife has already decided to remain in California rather than to return to her husband. When Teasle loses his wife, he has finally lost everything and has nothing left to lose. It is with this knowledge that Teasle goes to face Rambo for the last time.

Teasle is a man of great pride and this pride is much of what motivates him to get into his fight with Rambo. Teasle wants his town to be peaceful and free of crime, therefore he misjudges Rambo and tries to force him out of town. Teasle then insists that things be done his way in his jail. Much to Teasle's credit, he is always polite and proper with Rambo, but he does not stop to learn about Rambo's past experiences in the war and therefore badly underestimates him. It is because of this that Teasle and Rambo find themselves in an unmatched battle.

Orval Kellerman

Orval Kellerman is a dog expert who has trained his six dogs to track prey in a variety of environments. When Rambo escapes the jail, Sheriff Teasle calls him and asks him to help track the escapee. However, Orval and Teasle have recently experienced tension in their long relationship, causing this tension to spill into their search for Rambo. Orval is growing older and he feels that he must prove himself, therefore he often argues with Orval over how he conducts himself as Sheriff. In the end, Orval and Teasle argue when Rambo fires on them, killing several of Orval's dogs. These are the last words they are to share because Rambo then shoots Orval and he slowly dies, not of the gun wound, but of drowning when a sudden storm washes him over the side of the cliff. This death gives Teasle even more motivation to find and stop Rambo.

Deputy Shingleton

Shingleton is one of Teasle's deputies. Shingleton is present when Rambo panics during his haircut and kills Galt. Shingleton is then part of the search, bringing to Teasle supplies on the first morning and accompanying him into the woods. When Rambo ambushes the deputies and kills Orval, Shingleton is the only one brave enough to help Teasle care for Orval and carry him up the rise to avoid the rain created waterfall. Later, Shingleton is able to warn Teasle of Rambo's impending attack as Teasle finds himself the last man standing against Rambo. Shingleton is shot and killed.

Deputy Galt

Galt is the deputy who is cleaning out the jail cells when Teasle brings Rambo down to serve his thirty-five day sentence. Galt is a younger man who tends to be somewhat forgetful. Galt forgets to lock the door to the jail cells twice, the first time when the cells are empty, the second when he goes to get Shingleton to help hold down Rambo for his haircut. When Rambo panics during the haircut and takes the razor from Teasle, Galt



panics and takes out his gun. For this reason, Rambo feels threaten and uses the razor to defend himself, disemboweling Galt. Galt is the first casualty in the war between Teasle and Rambo.

Deputy Mitch

Mitch is one of the younger deputies who goes with Teasle into the forest to find Rambo. When the rains come and most of the deputies panic, leaving Teasle and Shingleton to carry Orval alone, Mitch remains behind. However, when Mitch reveals himself to Teasle, it is seconds after Orval washed over the edge of the cliff. Teasle misunderstands Mitch's presence there and he hits him, causing him to become weak and unable to travel well. Mitch is left behind with Shingleton after Ward is shot when Teasle goes in search of Rambo. Mitch is killed.

Deputy Ward

Ward is one of the deputies who goes into the woods with Teasle to search for Rambo. Ward remains behind with Teasle during the rainstorm and catches Orval the first time Teasle loses him in the rushing water and saves him. Ward helps Teasle carry Orval for a short time, but then Shingleton and then Teasle trip and they lose Orval over the falls. While escaping into the woods, trying to avoid Rambo, Teasle is shocked when Ward is suddenly shot in the face while helping to carry Mitch. Ward dies instantly.

Deputy Lester

Lester is one of the deputies who goes into the woods with Teasle to search for Rambo. Lester is among those deputies who panic when Rambo shoots the dogs. When the rain begins and the men begin to realize that they are in danger of being swept over the edge of the cliff, Lester leads a group of three others back down the hill through a crevice that Rambo had previously attempted to block. When Lester and his companions arrive at this crevice, Rambo is waiting and he kills all four.

Colonel Sam Trautman

Colonel Sam Trautman is the Green Beret who created and runs the Green Beret school where Rambo was trained. When Teasle asked for him to come to the search to give insight on Rambo, Trautman comes quickly. Trautman is clearly proud of Rambo and his actions, proud that Rambo learned well at the school and has used this knowledge in a situation in which he feels he is in danger. Trautman is a little surprised that Rambo allowed Teasle to escape the woods, but realizes that Rambo misjudged Teasle's experiences in the Korean War. This makes Trautman continue to feel pride for Rambo and his use of what he has learned in the Green Berets. In the end, Trautman reluctantly agrees to help capture Rambo, but he uses techniques that he knows



Rambo has been trained to ignore. Later, Trautman finds himself forced to kill Rambo when he is cornered in the town and dying anyway.

Kern

Kern is the captain of the state police. Kern should have been in charge of the search for Rambo from the beginning, but Teasle managed to retain control by going after Rambo immediately rather than waiting for morning. Kern is in charge when Teasle comes out of the woods and too injured to remain in charge. However, Kern allows Teasle to take part in the planning and execution of a new search for Rambo. Kern is a weak leader, a man who cannot make decisions easily because he is always concerned about how his actions will reflect on his career.



Objects/Places

Clothing

Rambo borrows clothes from an illegal still owner and his son. Rambo soaks the clothes in kerosene so that the dogs tracking him will not lead the searchers back to the still owner and his family.

Rifle

The illegal still owner gives Rambo a rifle with luminous paint on the sight so that he might defend himself while on the run.

Knife

Rambo takes a knife from Orval's body after he goes over the cliff. Rambo uses this knife to defend himself while on the run.

Dogs

Orval brings six dogs on the search for Rambo that he has trained to track people. Rambo shoots three of these dogs and causes two others to fall over the cliff along with a deputy when one he shot falls.

Distinguished Service Medal

The Distinguished Service Medal is a very important medal awarded to soldiers who perform bravely in battle. The Distinguished Service Medal is second only to the Medal of Honor. Teasle received the Distinguished Service Medal for his service at the Chosin Reservoir Campaign in Korea.

Medal of Honor

The Medal of Honor is the highest award a soldier can be given. Rambo received this award for reasons never explained to the reader, but more than likely due to his actions during the last battle he fought in before he was taken prisoner by the Vietnamese.

Cave

Rambo finds himself in a cave after Teasle escapes the woods. Rambo later realizes the cave is really an old mine. Rambo traps himself inside the mine after he is nearly



captured by the National Guard. Later he discovers another exit out of the cave that helps him escape into town without anyone but Teasle being aware of it.

Squad Car

Teasle picks Rambo up three times in his squad car so that he might escort him out of town. Rambo refuses to be kicked out of town and continuously comes back until he is arrested.

Motorcycle

Rambo steals a motorcycle when he escapes naked from the police station.

Helicopter

Teasle has one of his deputies fly in a civilian helicopter warning Rambo to give himself up and shooting into possible hiding spots to stop Rambo. Rambo is confronted with this helicopter while climbing down a cliff side. Rambo manages to fire on the sniper, causing the pilot to panic, leave his controls, and crash the helicopter into the side of the cliff.

National Guard Truck

Teasle spends the night in a National Guard truck to help in the planning of a new search for Rambo.

Basalt County, Kentucky

Basalt County, Kentucky is where the novel is set.

Vietnam War

The Vietnam War is a war that took place in the sixties and early seventies. Rambo is a Green Beret who fought in the Vietnam War and won the Medal of Honor after surviving as a prisoner of war in a Vietnamese prison camp.



Themes

The Establishment versus the Disaffected

In this novel, the author creates two characters who appear on the surface to be very different from one another. Sheriff Teasle is a clean cut character who upholds the law and tries to make life a little easier for the people in his town. On the contrary, Rambo is a dirty, unkempt man who has no job and seems to have no interest in being a productive member of society. Teasle takes one look at Rambo and assumes that he will bring crime and burden to his little town, therefore he encourages Rambo several times to leave town.

Rambo has dropped out of society because of his experiences in Vietnam. Rambo struggles to deal with his memories of the POW camp where he was tortured and forced to work at hard labor. Rambo's experiences since returning home have also been difficult, especially the small town sheriffs like Teasle who continuously run him out of town. It is for this reason that Rambo decides to stand up to Teasle. While Rambo resembles what was known as a hippy in this time period, he is not a rebel or a protestor, but a man who is trying to stand up for the rights given to him in the Constitution and for which he fought in Vietnam.

While Rambo represents the disaffected, those who have been lost in the shuffle and left to suffer from a basic lack of empathy, Teasle represents the establishment, the government and a society that has lost sight of what it means to be compassionate, to not judge at first sight. Teasle sees in Rambo one of the growing number of hippies, young people who have dropped out of society to protest the established behaviors of society as a whole. For this reason, Teasle behaves as one in his position would, without thought or curiosity, running Rambo out of town without bothering to learn his story. It is because of this, this lack of basic humanity, that Rambo finally decides to fight back, leading to the conflict that will propel the plot.

Generation Gaps/Father-Son Relationships

Teasle is a middle aged man who would like to have a son of his own. Teasle's own father died when he was young and Teasle was raised by Orval Kellerman, a hard man who taught Teasle respect, but failed to show him compassion or empathy. For this reason, Teasle has become a man who runs his sheriff's office with a steel hand, making him a good leader but causing him to lack some compassion for those who wander into his town.

Teasle desperately wants the respect of his foster father, Orval. However, Orval is an older man who is beginning to feel the burden of his years. For this reason, Orval is stuck on his opinions more than ever, arguing with Teasle over the stupidest things and criticizing everything Teasle does that Orval does not clearly agree with. For this reason,



Teasle feels belittled, feels as though nothing he can do will be right in Orval's eyes. This causes Teasle to make some basic mistakes in the search for Rambo, causing all of his men to be killed, including Orval.

While Teasle struggles with his relationship with Orval, Rambo also has some father issues. Rambo's own father was abusive and cruel. Despite this, Rambo becomes a good man, choosing the Green Berets when he enlists to avoid the draft because he wants to be a part of something elite, something special. It is this training that causes Rambo to fight Teasle so ruthlessly. At the same time, Rambo has a unique relationship to a larger father figure, the American government. Rambo receives from this figure something Teasle never got from Orval, an approval that is filled with pride. At the same time, however, Rambo makes mistakes, allows himself to be cornered, causing this father figure in the personification of Colonel Sam Trautman to end his life.

Pride

Rambo and Teasle could not be more different. Teasle is older, nearly old enough to be Rambo's father, a small town man who has a great deal of pride in his community. Rambo is a soldier without a war, a well-trained killer who has fought his battles and now has no direction, no place where he truly belongs. Rambo is younger, happy to live a direction-less life where Teasle feels he needs to constantly prove something, prove his own worth as a man, to the man who raised him.

In truth, the reader will quickly learn that Rambo and Teasle have a great deal in common. Both are soldiers, both fought with honor and pride. Rambo has even won the Medal of Honor, the highest award a soldier can receive. Both have had a difficult childhood, both losing their mothers at an early age. In the end, both men are so much alike that their similarities have more to do with their inability to let their feud end than their differences.

Both men have a great deal of pride. Rambo has allowed small town sheriffs to run him out of numerous towns, making him feel unwanted, unwelcome. However, Rambo has enough pride that he cannot allow this to continue to happen and he decides to make a stand against Teasle. Teasle, on the other hand, finds his authority questioned, his methods proven to be lacking, and he becomes more and more determined to be the one to stop Rambo. Both men refuse to back down, both men refuse to swallow their pride and admit to being wrong. It is this inability to stop that propels the plot and makes pride a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third-person omniscient point of view. The author tells his story through the eyes of two characters, Rambo and Tease. The novel begins with some authorial voice as the author tells the reader that Rambo will soon be a wanted man, but this authorial voice is limited to this section of the novel and does not return.

The point of view of this novel works well with the plot because the author allows the reader to get to know both the main characters of the novel in an intimate way, allowing the reader access to their thoughts and emotions, showing the reader the emotional struggle both undergo through the conflict that drives them through the plot. The point of view also allows the reader some insight on the characters as they think back on their past, revealing to the reader not only their immediate thoughts and feelings, but events in the past that have shaped their personalities and brought them to this place in time.

Setting

The novel is set in the early seventies. In this time period, the Vietnam War was beginning to wind down and the political protests of the sixties have begun to fade. The novel begins in a small town in Kentucky where the local sheriff is weary of hippies, those people who live on the fringe of society and protest the actions of the government, and therefore asks Rambo, who looks something like a hippy, to leave town. The novel then moves into the hills around the town where Rambo escapes after killing a deputy in the police station when trauma from the war causes him to panic during a haircut.

The setting of this novel is of great importance to the overall plot of the novel because the political climate of the time period allows the conflict that begins the novel to exist. If not for the Vietnam War and the high incidence of vagrants during this time period, there would have been no reason for Rambo to be wandering through town or for Tease to try to make him leave. The physical setting of the novel is also important to this conflict because it creates both places for Tease and Rambo to hide and obstacles that stand between these two men during their battle with one another. Hence the setting of this novel works well with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. The characters of this novel are simple people, with education up to high school but not beyond. The language of the novel supports the language skills of the characters. Rambo's language does not include any odd military language even though he has a background as a Green Beret, leaving the possibility of confusion on the part of the reader at greatly reduced odds. There are no foreign phrases in the novel and no slang.



The language of the novel is proper, simple English, reflecting the education level and experiences of the characters. Although the novel is set primarily in the hills of Kentucky, the author does not try to inject local accents or slang into the dialogue of the novel, keeping his language clear and precise. This allows the reader to easily comprehend the language of the novel and to not impede the reader from the overall plot of the novel. Hence the language works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts. Each part has a group of chapters that numbered exclusively to that part. The novel contains more than forty chapters, some extremely short, while others are quite long. The novel is told both with narrative and dialogue, showing the story rather than telling it, allowing the reader to follow the building tension of the plot as the characters experience it.

The novel contains one main plot with several subplots. The main plot follows Rambo as he first pushes the sheriff into arresting him and then attempts to escape. One subplot follows Rambo as he attempts to understand his own actions and tries to figure out what to do next. Another subplot follows Teasle as he struggles in his relationship with Orval and with his deputies. Finally, a subplot deals with Rambo's training and the oddly proud colonel who has come to both stop and help him. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"His name was Rambo, and he was just some nothing kid for all anybody knew, standing by the pump of a gas station on the outskirts of Madison, Kentucky" (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"That was another thing the war had given him. He noticed dead things more. Not in horror. Just in curiosity of how they had come to end" (Chapter 3, p. 12).

"Rambo stayed out walking in the open to make it clear that he was not trying to hide. Teasle could give up the game at this point and leave him alone; if he did not, well then it was Teasle who wanted the trouble, not himself" (Chapter 5, p. 15).

"It was the same jungle camp they had tortured him in, the same thatched huts and rich green mountains. For a reason he did not at first understand, they had treated his wounds while he was unconscious: the slashes in his chest where the officer had repeatedly punctured him with a slender knife and drawn the blade across, grating against his ribs: the lacerations on his back where the officer had crept up behind, suddenly lashing" (Chapter 10, p. 26).

"He did not want to hurt anyone, but he knew that was coming, he could feel his anger spreading out of control" (Chapter 11, p. 31).

"He had promised himself he was through hurting people, and now that sonofabitch had made him kill once more, and if Teasle kept pushing, Rambo was determined to give back a fight Teasle would wish to God he had never started" (Chapter 13, p. 37).

"'Yeah, Will,' Orval said and struck a match, cupping it to light his cigarette. 'But you didn't answer me. What did this kid do to you'" (Chapter 1, p. 42).

"God, Teasle really wanted him bad, telling his man to shoot at likely hiding places, unafraid of hitting anyone innocent because most people would obey the announcement and come out to show themselves" (Chapter 4, p. 54).

"Toeholds, he could not find any toeholds" (Chapter 6, p. 61).

"Maybe they were just so close that every disagreement was a betrayal and they had to argue" (Chapter 6, p. 119).

"Then since it was the total of what remained, he let it happen, went with it, erupted free through the back of his head and his skull, catapulted through the sky, through myriad spectra, onward, outward, forever dazzling, brilliant, and he thought if he kept on like this for long enough he might be wrong and see God after all" (Chapter 22, p. 166).



"He thought about the kid, and flooded with love for him, and just a second before the empty shell would have completed its arc to the ground, he relaxed, accepted peacefully. And was dead" (Chapter 23, p. 167).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Rambo? Why is he traveling on foot across country? Where is his home? Why does he not bother with basic grooming, such as shaving? Why does Rambo resent Teasle's attempts to make him leave town? Why does Rambo continuously return to town? What does Rambo expect to happen? Does it? How does Rambo react to the consequences of his actions? Who is responsible for what happens between Rambo and Teasle?

Who is Teasle? Why does he not want Rambo in his town? Why does Teasle try to make Rambo leave town? Does Teasle have the legal right to stop Rambo from coming to town? Why does Teasle finally arrest Rambo? Does Teasle ever do anything outright wrong in his treatment of Rambo?

Compare and contrast the characters of Rambo and Teasle. How are they different? How are they similar? What irony is there in their similarities? What element of their characters cause the conflict that will propel them through the plot of the novel? Why do you suppose the author created characters that are so similar and yet so different?

Who is Orval? Why does Teasle enlist his help in the search for Rambo? What is Orval's role in the search? What is Orval's role in Teasle's life? Why is there conflict between Teasle and Orval? What causes it? How is this conflict similar to the conflict between Teasle and Rambo? How does Teasle react when Rambo takes Orval out of the equation? Why does Rambo do this? Why?

Why does Rambo not run to Mexico when the storm makes it impossible for Teasle to follow? Why does Rambo become intent on killing Teasle? What does Rambo hope to accomplish by doing this? How much of Rambo's training has to do with his choices at this point in the novel? How much does Rambo's pride have to do with his choices at this point in the novel? What might have been different if Rambo had not gone back to hunt Teasle at this point in the novel?

How does Teasle escape from Rambo? What causes Rambo to overestimate Teasle's experiences and his actions at this point in the novel? Why does Rambo cry when he fails to kill Teasle? What does this say about Rambo's emotional state at this point in the novel? What impact did being a prisoner of war have on Rambo and his choices in this novel? What does Teasle represent to Rambo in this novel?

Why does Teasle insist that he be the one to stop Rambo? Why does Teasle go after Rambo even when he is badly injured? How does Teasle have a mental connection to Rambo? Why does Teasle take pride in being able to out think and out maneuver Rambo? How did Teasle do this? Why does Rambo decide he wants to commit suicide by forcing Teasle to kill him? Does this work? Explain. How might the novel have ended differently? Why did the author chose to end the novel in this way?