

Fives and Twenty-Fives Study Guide

Fives and Twenty-Fives by Michael Pitre

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Plot Summary

“We’re in the wilderness. The place without rules. I discovered it on the day when I knew for the first time, really understood, that a stranger was trying to kill me and nothing would change his mind” (p. 9).

These are the words of 2nd Lt. Pete Donovan in the novel “Fives and Twenty-Fives” by Michael Pitre. Donovan is one of a trio of narrators who tells the story of the increasing dangers faced by a platoon of Marines who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The book takes its name from a common battle drill in which troops scan first five feet from their vehicles for bombs, then an area of twenty-five feet on foot. The name is fitting as that drill and other warfare maneuvers described in the book help to keep the Marines alive. Other themes include relationships, leadership and the treatment of war veterans.

Donovan, the first of the three narrators introduced in the novel, is a commissioned officer put in charge of a route clearance platoon after the admired Gunnery Sergeant Stout was killed by a bomb hidden in a curbstone. Donovan had never dreamed he’d pass officer school and still doubts his leadership abilities. He wished to fit in with the men he was supposed to lead but didn’t seem to know quite how. When a crisis emerged and Donovan needed to be a leader, however, he stepped forward in fine fashion. His actions at Ramadi after a coalition helicopter was shot down by a missile earned him a Bronze Star. In the present, as a student in business school, Donovan continues to struggle with leftover regrets from his days in the military.

Lester Pleasant, the second of the narrators introduced in the course of the novel, was a natural at medic work. After graduating first in his class, Pleasant chose to work with the Marine Corp. He believed his perfectly packed medic’s bag and abilities could help save lives. After he watched an admired gunnery sergeant die on the pavement after he’d been hit by a bomb, Lester felt he’d let his leader down and had allowed him to die a disrespectful death. When the second member of his platoon died instantly after he was shot by a sniper, Lester dealt with his frustration by stealing and using the pain medications from his medical bag. Soon he was addicted to the medicines. Just after Ramadi, where his abilities saved the life of Sgt. Michelle Gomez after she was shot in the head, Lester was dismissed from the military because of his addiction. Back in the United States, Lester was unable to get a job as a medic because of the circumstances under which he was sent home. He struggled to find a place for himself back in civilian life.

The final of the three narrators is Kateb al Hariri most often referred to as Dodge, the code name given to him when he began his employment as an interpreter for the Marines. Dodge grew up in a privileged Baghdad family. His father was employed in Saddam’s Ministry of Agriculture. At the beginning of the war, Dodge was interested only in his study of the American novel “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.” He believed the thesis he would produce on this novel would be the key to having the life he desired. Unfortunately it was because of his understanding both of the English language and American culture that made the coalition desire him as an interpreter. Dodge was

kidnapped and forced into employment by the United States military, a position that put him in direct opposition with father, brother, and friends who were actively fighting against the Americans. As Dodge matured and grew through the course of the novel he realized that there was a time in which it was beneficial to fight for one's freedom. Instead of trying to run away from the mess in Tunisia, the country in which he'd taken refuge, Dodge became an active member of the freedom movement.



To: Secretary of the Navy — Lester Pleasant

Summary

Lt. Donovan submits a memo resigning his commission from the United States Marine Corps.

In “The Marine I Knew” Donovan dreams he is running through the desert, trying to warn a convoy there is a pressure switch hidden in the road. He wakes up just as the front Humvee hits the switch. He wakes with a full bladder and hangover after having drunk beer in order to go to sleep. He’s studying for a business degree in New Orleans. He remembers he is supposed to meet Zahn, one of his corporals, that night. He takes Dodge’s copy of “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” with him. He’s hoping Zahn will talk about Dodge.

Zahn offers to get Donovan a beer. He’s in town for a wedding and is surrounded with high school friends. Donovan sees that the friends don’t recognize the man Zahn has become and are trying to pawn him off on Donovan because of his problems. Donovan hears a fight start in the back of the bar and goes to check it out because he believes Zahn is involved. It turns out a Tulane undergraduate is fighting with one of Zahn’s friends. Donovan tries to break up the fight but the Tulane undergraduate turns on him. Zahn appears and easily takes the undergraduate out. While Zahn has the boy pinned, Zahn tells him they are different because Zahn is serious about killing the undergraduate. It is not until that point that Donovan gets a glimpse of the Marine he knew in Zahn.

When Zahn lets go of the undergraduate, the undergraduate and his friends as well as Zahn’s friends walk out the door. Zahn asks Donovan about the copy of Huck Finn. Donovan admits he isn’t sure how it came to be in his pack. When Zahn asks if Donovan has heard from Dodge, Donovan admits he never even knew his real name. Zahn mentions that Doc Pleasant did. When the bartender asks Zahn and Donovan to leave they went to Donovan’s apartment where they got drunk and talked. During the visit, Zahn tells Donovan he went to see Michelle Gomez and met her sister.

Zahn also told Donovan he suffered headaches and had blackouts. He couldn’t get veterans assistance because the concussions weren’t listed in his military file. They aren’t considered service related because he doesn’t have a Purple Heart. If Donovan had known then what he knows now, he thinks to himself he would have lied on Zahn’s paperwork. Zahn also says he still has bad dreams. Donovan lies and says he’s stopped having nightmares.

A memo from Lester Pleasant acknowledges his understanding of the charges against him. He accepts his discharge and does not wish to have a hearing.



Lester Pleasant goes to the addiction recovery meetings because the coffee there reminds him of the coffee that Marceau made in Iraq. A worker from a boat on the Gulf comes, still in his work clothes, to get his one-month chip. At the end of the meeting Lester walks between the group of Baptists and the group of atheists to leave the building.

His trauma bag sits on the passenger seat in his truck. He's got all the stuff he needs organized just so. When he gets home he knows that his father will be out in the shed working on his tractor despite the cold. He's afraid his father will hurt himself working out there one night. He knows that the tractor is a coping mechanism for his father just like the trauma bag is a coping mechanism for him. Lester had thought when he first came home that he'd be able to get a job as a medic. He was so angry with himself when he realized his other than honorable discharge from the Marines would work against him that he hit the roof of his truck with his hand until it bled. He wound up working at the same garage that he worked in during high school.

He remembered how so many of the boys at corpsmen school had gone to the military just to get the college money through the G.I. Bill. Lester had turned out to be a natural at medic work. He graduated first in his class and got his pick of jobs. He'd chosen the Marines because he'd never heard one of those recruits mention being in the military because of college money.

When he got home, Lester asked his father not to arrange a welcome home party but he did anyway. His Uncle Chuck and Aunt Linda paid for it all and hosted it at their camp in Bayou Teche. He'd overheard Uncle Chuck discussing Lester's general discharge with his father, suggesting that Lester had been dishonorably discharged. Lester attacked Uncle Chuck without even realizing what he was doing. His cousins had to pull him off. After spending a few hours by himself, Lester had apologized to his father. He'd decided to stay with his father instead of getting a place of his own. Now, as he waits for his father to come in from the shed, Lester tries to look up some information about Dodge on the Internet. He is unable to find anything.

Analysis

Because this book is set in the time of the real war Operation Iraqi Freedom it can be termed a work of historical fiction. Although the war was real, the characters in the novel and the details of the situations they faced are fictional.

Two narrators, and apparently central characters, are introduced in this section of the novel. The two men served together in the same platoon during the Iraq War. Even though they were in the same platoon, the two men seem to be very different. Pete Donovan was a commissioned officer who is using the money he is due from the G.I. Bill to get his graduate degree in business. Donovan surrendered his commission willingly. Although there is a comment in the memo he sent to the Secretary of the Navy that the "character of his service is a matter of debate" (p. 1) it does not appear he was dishonorably discharged. Lester Pleasant, on the other hand, was not honorably



discharged. Lester was an enlisted man who was found to have a talent for medic work. Lester, however, was discovered to have committed the crimes of “larceny and wrongful appropriation of government property” (p. 16). Because of his crimes and the nature of his discharge, Lester is unable to get a job working as a medic based on his military experience. Another difference between Lester and Donovan is that Lester was put off by the people he knew who were joining the military just so they could take advantage of the benefits of the G.I. Bill to put them through college. Lester, a Navy corpsman, chose to work with the Marines because he’d never heard any of the say they’d joined the military only for the purpose of getting free schooling.

One thing that Donovan and Pleasant do have in common is their substance abuse. Donovan admits to drinking large quantities of beer in order to go to sleep. Even so, he still has nightmares about his time in Iraq. Lester attends rehab meetings. He says that he does so just because the coffee there reminds him of the coffee one of the men in his platoon made. Lester seems very disillusioned as he watches a man get his one-month chip. Even though that man is excited by his accomplishment, Lester knew how little that chip actually meant and how easy it would be for that man to start drinking again. Notice also the picture the author draws as he describes Lester walking between the two groups of people who represent extremes in faith — Baptists and atheists — to leave the meeting. The scene seems to represent the idea that Lester adheres to no religious belief, he neither believes in God, nor thinks there is no God.

One of the themes that jumps out right away is the differing ways that vets are treated once they return home from combat and the struggles they face as they try to reincorporate into civilian life. Zahn is a particularly interesting character when it comes to this theme. Zahn has traveled to New Orleans because of a wedding. Once he meets his old friends in a bar, it is obvious to Zahn’s friends that he isn’t the same person they knew in high school. Although Donovan sees the way that Zahn’s friends are put off by him, Zahn does not see that anything has changed.

When Lester first returned home from Iraq, his family welcomed him home as a hero. Lester, however, was not honorably discharged. When he heard his uncle and father discussing the status of his discharge, Lester got angry and beat up his uncle without even seeming to realize what he was doing. He appears to have some emotional distress from his time in the military as he was also badly stressed by the sounds of the kids screaming as they played in the swimming pool at the party. Also as a habit from his days in the military, Lester still keeps his fully packed trauma bag with him even though it is doubtful that he will ever had a chance to use it. Even though he’s returned to civilian life, Lester still walks around his truck to check it out even though there is no longer any danger. Lester knows that his neatly ordered trauma bag is a coping mechanism that he uses to help himself deal with the stress of trying to return to civilian life. He also realizes that his father’s habit of spending long hours working on his tractor is a coping mechanism for him because he doesn’t understand what happened to his son while he was in the military.

Thus far, the novel is structured so that there is a memo from Donovan to the Navy, then a longer section of narration by Donovan; there is then a memo from Lester to the



Navy concerning his discharge from the Marines followed by a long section of narration by Lester. Lester and Donovan both serve as narrators for their sections of the novel, which are told in the present tense. Both men are back in the United States after service in Iraq. The veterans seem to be searching for some meaning to their lives after what they had experienced in Iraq. There are mentions of a place called Ramadi and it appears that something traumatic happened to the entire platoon at this place. Information included in this section of the novel indicates that whatever happened at Ramadi was worse for Zahn than it was for Donovan.

Notice in this section of the novel that Donovan, Zahn and Lester all think about or mention a person named Dodge. This person was apparently of Arabic descent as Donovan mentions that Dodge had written both English and Arabic notes in the margins of his copy of Huckleberry Finn. This copy of Huck Finn will become more important as the novel progresses. In this section of the novel, Donovan and Zahn discuss how Donovan wound up with Dodge's copy of the novel. Zahn suggests Donovan might have stolen the book but Donovan believes Dodge might have put the book in his bag when they were separated.

Relationships between the men in the platoon as well as relationships of the veterans with civilians are discussed in the novel. Relationship discussed in this section of the novel include that of Lester and his father, Lester and his family as a whole, Donovan and Kahn, Kahn, and Gomez, and Donovan and Lester, as well as all of the characters and Dodge

Discussion Question 1

Consider Lester's opinion of the man who earns his one-month chip at the support meeting. What does the poker chip represent? Why do you think Lester realizes how insignificant the chip actually is?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Lester and Donovan.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Lester unable to get a job as a medical technician once he returns home to the United States? Why do you think he still keeps his trauma bag ready even if he isn't able to work?

Vocabulary

resign, commission, obligation, caustic, meticulous, phalanx, legitimate, automaton, compendium, derelicts, convene, impromptu, affable, demeanor, salvo, torque, poise, imperceptible, larceny, serenity, cauterizes, tactically, psychopath



To: Mr. Kateb al-Hariri. Sousse, Tunisia — The Rule

Summary

A memo from the United States Department of State tells Dodge that there is no record that he was ever used by the military as an interpreter. For this reason he is being denied the special immigration status he has requested. It is suggested he try to get a student visa.

When Dodge received this letter at his flat in Tunisia, it was already open. He believes his name has been added to a watch list held somewhere by the secret police. He thinks he might be better off trying to attend college in Sousse with its whitewashed buildings instead of continuing to dream of going to America. The whitewash reminds him of Tom Sawyer and his thesis which he believes is the key to everything. As he tries to work on the project he is interrupted by the sounds of riots outside.

His flatmates have joined the riot against President Ben Ali. Dodge chose not to go with them. He thinks instead about the first time he sat down with his professor in Baghdad to discuss “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.” Dodge had been assigned to read the book as a special project. The professor had explained to him the American customs, speech patterns and the context of the book.

The sounds of the riot get closer to Dodge’s apartment. He searches the Internet quickly because he is afraid he will lose electricity. He searches for Lester Pleasant and Mulasim Donovan. He finds Lester on Facebook but does not send the message he compiles. He thinks about Mohamed Bouazizi who started the riots by setting himself on fire. He wonders what the man had thought he and the rioters would accomplish against Ben Ali’s army. Dodge wonders if he were to reach out to Lester if Lester would, or should, help him.

Donovan writes a memo to a college professor requesting a military transfer credit for a leadership class.

In the section “Leadership Dynamics” Donovan’s classmate Paige Dufossat is talking about the weekly case study but Donovan is instead studying one of the sailboat books he has hidden in the casebook. He is still hung over from his night with Zahn. When Paige points to a lack of empathy as the demise of a business, Donovan knows that Professor Liebert will not respond favorably. As Liebert gives his take on the case, Donovan groans with nausea, catching the professor’s attention. Liebert begins questioning Donovan about his military service and the leadership methods he used there. He finally points out that because Donovan is using veteran’s benefits to pay for tuition and since the students are taxpayers, his classmates should be given information about what he had learned in the service.



Donovan considers his options though he really wants to break the professor's arm. If he withdraws from the class he feels it will prove he is the troubled veteran that Liebert believes him to be. He thinks the man's behavior is punishment for trying to get a transfer credit for the class. When Donovan does answer, he tells the professor that Paige is correct in believing that empathy is required of a leader. His mind goes back to his time in Iraq as he watched the faces of his platoon leaders brighten when Gunny Stout spoke to them, and then darken when Donovan took over. He'd believed he was inadequate as a commissioned officer when he was first chosen. When he'd applied for Officer Candidate School, he'd been told he didn't have a chance in getting past the selection board. He called his father hoping for support but had gotten only a grunt and suggestion to pack extra socks.

Back in the present, Donovan suddenly barks out a memorized passage from officer school. He tells the class he doesn't believe the experience he had as a leader in the military is applicable there because those he led were in danger of dying. After class, Paige thanks him and asks him if he is interested in sailing. He blows her off. As he walks out of the building, footage of the riot in Tunisia is playing on the television.

Lester writes a note to his father telling him he will be visiting his friend Landry in New Orleans for a few days.

In the section "The Rule," as he drives, Lester thinks of the differences between Gunny Stout and Donovan. Gunny Stout had made sure the others knew Lester pulled his own weight. Gunny Stout had taught him the rule of fives and twenty-fives, a rule they followed when the vehicles were stopped to scan for possible explosives first five feet away from the vehicle when they were still inside, then up to a range of twenty-five feet outside the vehicles on foot. He recalls how it was Gunny Stout, Sgt. Gomez and Cpl. Zahn who ran the platoon, not Donovan.

The Marines were there for security for Donovan's road repair platoon. The potholes they found always had bombs in them that had to be cleared before the holes could be patched. On the day in Lester's memory, he remembered noticing two guys running. They had shirts over their faces. Gunny Stout saw them but decided to go ahead because he reasoned they would be alone if they were suicide bombers.

As they continued to drive, they found the disabled tank with a broken track. They determined it had hit a pressure switch causing an explosion. Live grenades had spilled out over the highway, a detail of which the men in the platoon had not been informed. Gunny Stout had said the grenades would have to be picked up by hand before the pothole could be filled. He went to take care of the task without wearing his protective suit. Donovan did not argue with his decision to go out of the safe zone unprotected. When Stout had all the grenades in a hole, he began to walk back to the safe zone. Gunny Stout smiled at Lester as he walked back, and then his face went stiff as he was hit with shots. The shock of the bomb knocked Lester on the ground but as he watched Gunny Stout he was sure he saw the man turn over. Another platoon member was hit by a smaller device when he tried to go for Gunny. Lester also struggled to walk toward his superior officer. Donovan came from behind and pinned him on the road. Donovan tried



to tell Lester that Gunny Stout was dead before he hit the ground. He made Lester look at the curbstones, how they had been made into bombs with a daisy chain effect. It was after this experience that the route clearance team and bomb squad were combined and Lester was put in Donovan's platoon.

Analysis

The writer continues his pattern of including a short memo or note of some sort dealing the character who will narrate the following section of the novel. This short section is followed by a longer section dealing with something mentioned in the note or memo. The third and final narrator for the book is introduced in this section. Dodge, the character whom Lester, Kahn and Donovan have all mentioned in their previous sections of narration, is still living in the Middle East though he is trying to be allowed to move to America because he worked with the military. He is of the belief that the Americans are trying to get him killed and have been for some time. They claim to have no record of his service as an interpreter for the United States military forces. To make matters worse for Dodge, who is also referred to as Kateb and Fadi in different parts of the novel, the letter from the U.S. Department of State was open when he received it. He believes this could cause trouble for him not only because he worked with the United States but also because he has taken refuge in Tunisia under an assumed name. He worries the letter may have gotten him added to some surveillance list.

Notice also that Dodge came from Baghdad where he had been studying the American novel "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." Dodge is intrigued by the American novel and wants to become a true scholar. As his professor explained its importance to him, Dodge became even more interested in the book and the culture that it represented. Especially interesting is the professor's act of pointing out to Dodge that the book was written ten years before the beginning of the Civil War in America. Even though the children, Huck and Tom, were friends as children, had they really existed they would be enemies in the Civil War based on where they were born. This same has become true in Dodge's country as the people fight against each other based on their religious beliefs and countries of origin.

The author brings the ugliness of war in the Middle East to life as Lester thinks back over the incident in which Gunny Stout was killed and another platoon member injured. In his section Lester describes how his convoy set out to inspect a pothole suspected to have a bomb in it. He describes the oppressive heat made worse by the body armor they had to wear, the smell and how everything in the desert blended together into a beige blob. The Marines had to be on their guard the entire time they were out of their camp. They were always scanning for things and people who seemed out of place or suspicious.

It was from Gunny Stout's rule about the scans the Marines were required to do whenever their vehicles were stopped that the title of the book came. The gunnery sergeant commanded them to scan five feet around their vehicle from inside to make sure there were no incendiary devices in that five-foot radius. Once they were out of the



vehicle, they had to scan an additional twenty-five foot radius to establish a safe zone. This and other combat drills are described in the novel. These maneuvers of warfare make up a theme in the novel detailing the dangers the Marines faced and their need for constant vigilance.

In this section it is made clear how the dangers for the military personnel in Iraq were always changing and becoming more difficult to detect. The men were certain there was a bomb in the pothole that would have to be detonated. They also believed the most pressing danger was the live grenades that were scattered around the desert. It was not until after Gunny Stout had picked up all of the grenades and secured them that they realized a new threat existed. The Iraqis had begun hiding incendiary devices that could be activated from a distance in curbstones. It was by one of these bombs that Gunny Stout was hit and killed.

Notice in this section of the novel that it is made clear how much Lester admired Gunny Stout. Gunny Stout had made it clear to the other members of his platoon that even though Lester was a medic he pulled his own weight. Just before they'd gone out on that particular mission, Gunny Stout had Lester remind the men what to do in the case of an injury. Lester had told them all of the ways in which he could help to save their lives. When it came down to it, however, Lester was not allowed to help save Gunny Stout's life. He believed he'd seen the man roll over, even after he was hit by the bomb. Donovan held Lester down and wouldn't let him go to Gunny Stout, telling him that he would be injured as well and that Stout had been dead before he hit the ground.

In the theme of Leadership it is obvious that Donovan never thought himself a leader and doubted his abilities. He sensed that his platoon members did not like him or respect him as much as they did Stout. Lester's thoughts about the differences in the leadership styles between Stout and Donovan illustrate that Stout was a hands on man while Donovan was happy to sit back and let others led. Lester describes Donovan as a lackadaisical officer who would show up for briefings not wearing his heavy gear even though the platoon members were required to wear their gear to the briefings. Lester also pointed out that it was Cpl. Kahn and Sgt. Gomez who were the true leaders of the platoon. Even though she was a woman, Sgt. Gomez garnered more respect from the men who were under her than Donovan did.

Adding to the theme of the treatment veterans receive when they return home from combat is Donovan's experience in his leadership class. His professor makes the assumption that because Donovan is attending school using his veteran benefits, he owes his classmates information about his experiences. In reality, the professor's assumption is wrong as Donovan had earned his benefits by serving in the military. He had already paid his dues to the taxpayers of America. Should he choose to share his experiences the class might benefit from them but Donovan is under no obligation to talk about his time in the service just because he is using the G.I. Bill to pay his tuition.

Note the yellow and black curbstones as these will come up again in a later section of the novel. Notice also the reaction that Donovan got when he told his father he was applying to officers school. Although Donovan had hoped for encouragement, his



decision was instead passed off as being unimportant. This hints that the relationship between Donovan and his father was strained with Donovan seeking praise and approval from his father but never getting it.

Discussion Question 1

Do you agree with Professor Liebert's assumption that just because Donovan is attending school on veteran's benefits that he owes his fellow students information about his time in the military? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe Lester correctly saw Gunny Stout turn over after he'd been hit by the bomb? Do you think there was any way that Lester could have helped him or do you think he was already dead as Donovan said?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the leadership that existed in Lester's platoon based on his description.

Vocabulary

fundamentalist, edifices, filigree, assailed, treacherous, assertion, caveat, concentric, laments, demise, stoically, eschews, clandestine, mediocre, acquiesce, effusive, placate, admonition, civilians, aggregate, ballistic, miscreants, compromise, cordon



As the Duke and Dauphine tie up the raft to work over another town — Dodge

Summary

A snippet of Huck Finn is included. Dodge describes how the actions by the characters show the author's contempt for the people who live in his own country as well as his ignorance of foreign cultures.

In the section "Dodge," because the power has been out for more than an hour, Dodge suspects the outage might be intentional. He decides it would be safer to be out on the street than inside his flat. On the stairs, he bumps into a neighbor. He believes the man knows about the letter when he makes a point to ask Dodge's name.

Dodge, whose real name is Kateb, recounts how he was kidnapped by the Americans and taken for interrogation. Dodge had claimed during his questioning not to know if he were Sunni or Shiite. He also claimed to be an orphan but the Americans suspected he'd been born to a rich family. After he successfully passed his interrogation Dodge was sent to one of Saddam's old air bases with a truckload of old men. Once there he was classified as a category one, indicating he would go out in the field with the Marines to translate. He was given the code name Dodge and assigned to Donovan's platoon.

When Dodge's escort dropped Dodge at the concrete building that served as the base for Major Leighton's command, all the men were too preoccupied with the memorial service they'd just attended to pay much attention to Dodge. Gunny Dole took charge of Dodge and assigned him a cot next to Lester. Dodge waited for Lester to speak first. They talked about music for a few minutes before Lester said he wanted to take a nap. Dodge noticed the Marines had red eyes when they returned from the memorial service and that their rifles seemed heavier than normal.

Analysis

Note this section of the novel is introduced by a snippet from Huck Finn in which Jim is dressed up as an Arab by painting his face with blue paint. Dodge noted in his commentary about the passage that this description was offensive to those of Arabian descent. Dodge believed the author was not only mocking Arabs but also commenting about the lack of intelligence among the American people. Notice that when Dodge was first being interviewed by the Americans, he seemed to treat them with the same disrespect shown to them by the American author. He describes how they indicated it was his idea to go along with them willingly when in reality he felt had been taken from his friends by force. Although the Americans told Dodge they could protect him and his family Dodge refused during interrogation to tell the Americans if he were Sunni or Shia and who his parents were. Dodge also describes how the other old men who were



accepted into the interpretation program were happy they had been included. Dodge, on the other hand did not understand why they thought the Americans were doing them a favor. He didn't trust that the Americans would do what they said they would. Dodge knew that by joining with the American forces, whether willingly or unwillingly, he and the others were setting themselves up for hate and distrust from their own countrymen.

Although he is very intelligent, Dodge is also learning to be skeptical. He had a sarcastic way about him as he teased the old men with whom he rode to the old air base. He likes American culture and knows a good deal about American music and bands. He used his knowledge to connect with the Marines he encountered, Lester in particular. Notice that there is a difference between Dodge as he was going through the process of becoming an interpreter and the Dodge who lives in Tunisia. His experiences with the American military, whatever they might have been, seem to have made him more cautious and brought home to him the true meaning of war. Although his flatmates want to be in the center of the riots, Dodge has no interest in any type of conflict. He wants to keep his head down and not be recognized.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Dodge trust the Americans? Why do you think he lied about his background and family origins during his interrogations?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Lester chose not to attend Gunny Stout's memorial service?

Discussion Question 3

Consider the author's use of the novel "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" as the book on which Dodge is writing his thesis. Discuss the significance of this novel as it relates to the plot of the novel and to Dodge in particular.

Vocabulary

contrived, bedouins, sectarian, secular, distended, infiltrator, besieged, provisional, quipped, audacity, paramount, berm, truculent, admonishes



After Action Report: Enemy Activity Trends — Route Clearance

Summary

An After Action Report submitted by Donovan stresses the continued necessity of the fives and twenty-fives.

In the section “Route Clearance” Paige leaves a note in Donovan’s box inviting him to social get-togethers of the other MBA students and inviting him for a ride on her parents’ sailboat. He’d looked at a sailboat earlier that day that had been wrecked by hurricane Katrina. He thinks how different that wreck probably is from the one owned by Paige’s parents. On his way home, he sees a New Orleans funeral and compares it with the military memorial services he felt they always botched. Thinking back, he believes that empathy was what Major Leighton had missed on the day of the memorial service for Gunny Stout.

Gunny Stout had been the company’s first member to be killed in action. Donovan felt they’d messed up everything from the family notification to the way they accounted for Stout’s death on their personnel status board. He’d learned that the term “Outbound Angels” added by the admin chief had really been the proper military term but Donovan had been offended by it at first. Even though the other men told Donovan there was nothing he could have done to save Gunny, underneath, he believed they were questioning his judgment and criticizing him for letting Gunny go to collect the grenades alone.

Immediately after the memorial service in which he basically told to members of the platoon to get over Stout’s death, Major Leighton had told Donovan that he and his Marines needed to get back on the road as soon as possible to keep from losing their fighting spirit. He gave Donovan a new mission to fill the holes on a road that stretched through 50 miles of desert. Leighton also told Donovan that the bomb techs were now under his authority with no more of the split command.

The platoon left for their new mission the following morning before curfew had even lifted. They reached their first massive hole shortly after going through the intersection of Route Long Island and Route Newport, just 30 minutes into their trip. They waited until the sun rose before getting out of the vehicles to secure the zone. Gomez was nervous because there was so much traffic and so many close buildings. She wanted them to get the repair done as quickly as possible. It was Marceau’s turn to go out with the metal detector to scout for the bomb. Donovan told Lester to be ready if Marceau needed him. Marceau located a bomb in the pothole and the robot was sent out to detonate it. Dodge was worried about the men working with the concrete and asked Donovan if they needed assistance. Donovan instead gave Dodge the bullhorn and told him to tell the Iraqi drivers they would be finished shortly. Donovan noticed Dodge



talking into the bullhorn, howling and pointing at the Marines. He even danced for the drivers, with some of them getting out to watch. Donovan chose to ignore him. As the men poured in bag after bag of concrete, the hole became smaller but Donovan felt they'd been sitting still too long. He also realized he was no longer hearing Dodge. He finally found him carrying a bag of concrete. Donovan began to chide him but realized Dodge was suffering from the extreme heat. Lester was called to treat him. As soon as the still wet concrete was stamped, the convoy finally moved on.

Analysis

The theme of warfare is addressed right way in this section as Donovan's after action report includes descriptions of three ways that the anti-Iraqi forces were changing the way they attacked enemy forces in an attempt to keep them off guard. Donovan noted three combat drills the men needed to continue following in order to help ensure their safety. The one habit he said was essential was the fives and twenty-fives. He also mentions the five Cs, a mnemonic device to help the troops remember the procedures to follow in order to properly deal with a suspected IED. He also suggested the vehicles in the convoys travel with 75 to 100 meters between them so that it would be less likely for enemy forces to be able to take out more than one vehicle with one device.

Notice in the death of Gunny Stout that the explosive devices that killed him were hidden in curbstones, a technique of warfare the Marines had never encountered before. When Thompson went to help Stout he was also hit by explosives. The whole area was so dangerous the troops weren't even able to recover Stout's body until several hours after his death.

Notice in this section the changes in Lester. When Stout had been sent out to collect the grenades, Lester was ready at the front of the safe zone with his medical bag if he had been needed. In this section of the novel Donovan had to remind Lester that he was needed at the front of the safe zone with his medical equipment. Lester seemed to be losing his desire to be involved in the work especially since he'd just seen Stout, a leader he admired, killed.

In the short piece of this section that deals with Donovan's progress after the war, notice he is having trouble dealing with relationships. Even though Paige obviously likes him and wants him to be included in the students' social meetings, he blows off her invitations.

Even though Donovan was at first not completely on board with Paige's idea that leaders needed empathy, when he thought back over Stout's memorial service and the actions that followed, he decided it was this virtue that his major was lacking. This instance fits into the theme of leadership as discussed in the novel. Donovan remembers that Leighton had shown the men no empathy after the death of their leader but had basically told them to get over it. Even to Donovan Leighton had indicated there was no sense in spending time grieving over Stout as it would just make the men lose heart and doubt themselves.



In the realm of his own leadership, Donovan wondered if he were right in telling Lester that Stout had not rolled over after he'd been hit by the bomb. He remembered that Lester had claimed the man had rolled over and was so determined to get to his leader that Donovan had to pin him down to keep him from going into danger. Out of the heat of the moment, Donovan had begun to second-guess himself and his decisions. He also believed others were blaming him for Stout's death even though they told him to his face there was nothing he could have done.

Note also in this section that the author stresses Dodge's humanity. Even though he is of Iraqi descent and had not come to help the Americans willingly, he was troubled when he watched the men who had to carry heavy bags of concrete to fill the pot hole. Dodge offered to help, and then even stopped doing what he'd been commanded to do, explaining what was happening to the Iraqi drivers, to carry concrete. Notice also the when Dodge was given the bullhorn, he put on a show for the Iraqi drivers. The reader has to wonder what he was saying to the Iraqis about the Americans. The incident reveals that Dodge was really just a kid and still wasn't taking the war, or his job, seriously.

A final aspect of note in this section of the novel is that although Dodge had been hired by the military as an interpreter, he was completely ignorant of military procedure. At the site of the pothole he'd sat down on the ground with his legs stretched in front of him. Lester had to correct his posture and instruct him on how to squat down so he could get up and move more quickly if he needed to do so.

Discussion Question 1

How might Major Leighton's leadership have been more successful if he'd shown the men under his watch more empathy after Stout's death? While empathy might be needed in good leadership is there a point at which too much empathy might have the adverse effect on one's followers?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Dodge's actions at the site of the pothole with those of the other Marines. How does he possibly put himself and the others in dangers with his actions? How does he provide help to the Marines?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the different types of warfare operations discussed in this part of the novel. Has your opinion of the soldiers who fought in the Iraqi war changed any since you began reading this novel? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

pristine, abrasions, nautical, botched, proselytize, emplacement, ambiguity, sporadic, bode, monte, regulation, cadence, choreography, minions, emphatically, admonish



Crazy big show! At Siberia! This Friday! Featuring! — Ali, From Sadr City

Summary

A flyer advertises a big show at a nightclub called Siberia.

In the section “Lizzy,” as Lester considers that going into a punk rock club might not be the best idea for him, he remembers Dodge telling him that Dodge and his friends had put on punk rock shows in Baghdad before the war. Gomez had put Lester in charge of watching Dodge after his incident with heat exhaustion. Because his mind was still muddled, Dodge had told Lester some things about his life before the war that Lester sensed he shouldn’t have known. Dodge had said that his father and brother were important in government, and that Dodge and his friends were running when he began working for the Americans.

Inside the club, Landry and Paul are onstage. Lester plants himself in a corner where he feels most secure and settles in to watch and listen. The crowd responds when the two play music only for a few bars but when Landry begins singing in his Cajun accent the sound is ruined. As he’s trying to find some reason to enjoy the music, he spots a girl in a yellow sundress on the dance floor. He notices the girl is looking at him. He tries to ignore her until she surprises him by coming up and poking him in the ribs. She asks if he likes the music and why. She seems satisfied with his answer and invites him to buy her a drink. When the bands change, the crowd moves toward the bar. Lester notices Lizzy, the girl to whom he’s been talking, is being pushed up against the rail by the crowd of sweaty men. A barstool falls onto her foot. Sensing she is about to fall, Lester picks her up, puts her over his shoulder and carries her out of the bar. When he gets to his truck Lester worries if Lizzy will think he’s a kidnapper but she is laughing saying it’s the most fun she’s had all week.

An excerpt from Huck Finn describes Huck’s reaction when he learns Moses, a hero of the Bible, is dead.

As Dodge watches the rioters in the street, he wonders if it will become like Ramadi when the police begin killing the protestors. He thinks about Donovan. All he’s been able to find about the lieutenant is that he was named a hero after Ramadi. He thinks also about his friend Hani who would be too sensible to protest.

It was Hani who convinced Dodge, then known by his given name of Kateb, to leave Baghdad after the university canceled the spring semester. Kateb had taken refuge in his dead professor’s office after his father and brother had left the city. He was there when Hani came to tell him that the school’s tennis coach had been killed. As the two were talking their friend Mundhir joined them. Hani convinced Kateb and Mundhir they had to leave. Hani tried to give Kateb a guilt trip because Kateb claimed not to know



where his father and brother were since they'd left Baghdad. Kateb really knew more than he was putting on because his father and brother had demanded he go with them to start their current business but Kateb had refused.

Hani hoped to be able to borrow money from both his father and Kateb's father and open a bar on the beach. Mundhir had already agreed to go with Hani. They had Mundhir's uncle's taxi and planned leave the next morning at 6 a.m with or without Kateb. Kateb went with them. They carried both their real Sunni passports along with fake Shia passports. They got through several checkpoints with little problem until they had to stop to get gas for the car. Kateb decided they should show their Sunni passports if asked. The three got out of the car. Hani called out they had money to buy gas. They heard rounds of ammunition being loaded into a chamber and saw Shia men walking out of the building. Kateb believed the men were going to kill them but he was surprised by the sound of chickens and a cart. The man in the cart spoke to him, calling him Ali. The man in the cart told the Shia men that Kateb was his nephew, Ali. Kateb played along, claiming to have run out of gasoline. Haji Fasil, the man who stopped, along with his companion Abu Abdul gave the Shia men some chickens and rice, and promised to be back the following week. They convinced the Shia men to let the three boys go with them.

All five got into the taxi and headed for the lake as Haji directed. As soon as Kateb pulled away Haji Fasil told the boys how stupid they had been. Kateb offered Haji Fasil money but Haji said it was not money they wanted. They'd kept the Shia men from killing the boys because if there had been a killing the Shia men would have left, leaving Haji and Abu with one less customer. Haji said they sold supplies to the Sadrists as well as Ansar al-Sunna and Al Queda. It was decided the boys would stay with Haji for the night. Hani questioned him about the lake and his property while Abu Abdul made friends with Mundhir. As they prepared for sleep that night Kateb knew that Hani wanted to stay there. Kateb was afraid it was a decision that would kill them all but went to sleep before he could come up with any reasons good enough to discourage Hani from wanting to stay.

Analysis

In this section of the novel notice that Dodge also mentions Ramadi. It seems that whatever happened in this town is the climax to which the book will lead the reader. As Dodge looks over the rioters in his new town in Tunisia, he wonders if they realize what their rioting could lead to. He wonders if it will be as bad as the day he and the Americans had in Ramadi. This reference indicates that Ramadi was truly a bad experience that Dodge does not want to face again. He's also looked up Donovan on the Internet and discovered that when all was said and done, Donovan was called the hero of that day.

The theme of what life was like for the war veterans after they went back to everyday life in the United States is also developed further in this section of the novel. Even though he realizes it's probably a bad idea for him, Lester goes to a bar to see his



friends Paul and Landry perform. The noise and the crowd of people both make him uneasy. Even though he knows there were no longer any dangers hidden in the pieces of roadside trash, he can't shake the habit of studying each piece of trash to see if it might hold a threat. Additionally, he also is still in the habit of walking around his truck, looking for IEDs anytime he got out of the vehicle and before getting into the vehicle. Even though he is angry with himself for obsessing so much over habits that are so time consuming, Lester can't bring himself to break the habits. Notice also that when Lester notices the crowd pushing around his new friend, Lizzy, too closely, his reaction is to get her to safety. Lizzy interprets his actions as a fun game instead of his response to the terrors he'd seen in war.

In this novel, the author presents warfare and the affect of war from both the American and Iraqi viewpoints. In this section of the novel the readers gets a good deal of background information about Dodge, who is referred to by his given name of Kateb in this section of the novel, and his lifestyle before he was kidnapped and hired as an interpreter for the United States military. Kateb's father had worked for the Ministry of Agriculture during Saddam's reign. Kateb and friend Hani were attending the university in Baghdad. With help from his professor, Kateb had chosen to stay behind when his father and brother left the city even though his family wanted him to come with them.

Since that time conditions in Baghdad had gotten worse with more and more innocent people killed each day for little or no reason. Kateb's professor had been killed. On the day that Hani confronted Kateb about leaving the city the tennis coach and two players had been killed because they wore shorts to tennis practice. When Hani, Kateb and their friend Mundhir decided to leave Baghdad, they took not only their real Sunni identifications but also falsified Shia identifications. At each traffic stop they went through the boys had to determine which identifications they needed to use in order to safely get through that stop. Kateb chose badly when the group stopped to get gas. He knew the Sunni identifications they had with they would get them killed. It was in their favor that Haji Fasil saw the boys and chose to help.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the reasons why Kateb (Dodge), Hani and Mundhir had to take two different types of identification with them, both Sunni and Shia, when they fled Baghdad.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the reasons why Haji Fasil chose to keep the Shia men from killing Kateb (Dodge) and the others.

Discussion Question 3

Consider the references to Hurricane Katrina and the damage done to New Orleans during the storm. How do the mentions of this storm tie into the novel?



Vocabulary

coherent, jihadis, brigade, collaborators, reflexive, burgeoning, feign, impassive, lorry, jerrican, pantomiming



sir it was good to see you this weekend — Cure

Summary

Cpl Zahn leaves a note for Donovan apologizing for his behavior in the bar and telling him he should get in touch with Lester.

In the section “Cure” Donovan’s boss at his winter internship tries to get him to stop doing so much analytical work. He tells Donovan the job is about managing wealthy people, not doing analytics. Stall tells Donovan the only reason he’d offered to mentor Donovan was because he was a war hero. He hopes to cash in on Donovan’s background because wealthy people love war heroes. When Donovan says he doesn’t know any wealthy people Stall tells him he is going to meet some. He drives Donovan to Cure, a cocktail bar, to meet some high school friends.

Inside, Stall and his group crowd into a booth. Donovan looks at the drink menu but doesn’t see anything that looks familiar. He hears a voice calling his name and realizes everyone is looking at him. It is Paige Dufossat who has called him. The group is surprised to learn they know one another. The people at the table used to go to high school with Paige as well as Stall. They wonder among themselves why Paige was working there, why she didn’t say hello to one of the girls who was in her sorority and why she was flirting with Donovan. They began questioning Donovan about his service in the military. When he told them about the bombs and the potholes, the childish response of one of the girls frustrates him and he describes how sometimes the Iraqis would put fake bombs in the potholes to get them to stop just so the Iraqis could shoot at them. He tells about how an Iraqi family was punished because the military had filled their cistern with clean water. Donovan laughs and realizes he’s the only one laughing. He steps away but hears Stall telling his friends they should look up information on the Profane Twenty-Four.

Donovan is headed for the smoking porch but Paige motions him to the bar. He tells her they are friends of Stall, his boss for the winter. Paige tells him how useless they all are. They discuss the money marker for a minute. When Paige makes a comment that it’s all just paper, Donovan gets a mental image of paper burning and laughs. He asks if he ever told her about the time he watched one million dollars burn.

Analysis

Remember the experience that Donovan had in the bar with Zahn at the beginning of the novel. This section of the novel features Donovan in a position similar to that of Zahn. Zahn had gone to a bar to mingle with his old high school buddies but they realized the Zahn who had come back from the war was different from the one with



whom they were interacting after the war. In Donovan's case, his business mentor has sold Donovan to his friends as a war hero. As they interact with Donovan they discover that Donovan is not what they had expected. Just as Zahn's friends had whispered behind his back about how to best handle Zahn, Donovan's boss and his friends now whisper behind Donovan's back about how to best manage Donovan and his strange stories.

Donovan likes to bury himself in his work as a coping mechanism. His mentor wants him to be more outgoing and learn how to manage wealthy people as Stall believes he has learned to do. He decides the best thing Donovan has going for him is his background as a war hero. In fact, Stall tells Donovan the only reason he agreed to mentor Donovan was because of his military background. Even though Stall claims to be impressed by Donovan's military background, he can't quite get his information right about the operation that made Donovan a hero. He calls Donovan the hero of the Profane Twenty Four. Even after Donovan corrects him and tells him it was the Profane Two-Four, Stall doesn't seem to register his mistake as he calls it wrong later in the evening as well.

Donovan is obviously uncomfortable among Stall's rich friends, especially after Paige turns out to be their waitress. He learns Paige used to be friends with Stall's friends but decided to go her own way in working with non-profit agencies. Although Stall had thought Donovan would be overwhelmed and stoked by the attention he was getting as a veteran, Donovan instead seemed embarrassed.

Notice when Stall's friends try to talk to Donovan they don't seem have a clue about the military. Even after Donovan tells them he was in the Marine Corps, one of the girls asks if he was a Navy SEAL. They pretend to be interested in the stories he has to tell but after Donovan mentions there would be bombs planted in the pot holes his team was filling the group is silent as if they can not comprehend what he is talking about, as if the whole idea of war is foreign to them. Topping off the ignorance is a girl who asks why the Americans kept working with the potholes when the work was so dangerous. The author compares her voice to that of a teenager who had just been grounded, giving strength to the idea that these were spoiled rich kids who probably never thought about what soldiers were doing for them so they could remain spoiled and rich.

Notice the references to alcohol in the novel. In Donovan's case, he believes he is not an alcoholic because he drinks upscale beer. It is no wonder that when Donovan describes Stall's lineage he uses references to alcohol and the brewing process to describe Stall's heritage. He says Stall's given name was, "A name fermented and bottled on Prytania Street, aged three hundred years" (p. 137). Donovan also notices the care Paige uses as she is putting together drinks at the bar. When she is finished with a tray he calls what she has created "little works of art" (p. 148).



Discussion Question 1

Compare Stall's friends with Dodge and his friends. Are there any similarities between the two groups? Are there any differences?

Discussion Question 2

How does Stall try to use Donovan's military experience for his own purposes? In what ways does his attempt to manipulate Donovan backfire?

Discussion Question 3

For what reason did Paige say she was no longer friends with Stall's friends? How did this improve Donovan's opinion of her?

Vocabulary

etymological, filaments, spurious, hominem, rhetoric, insurgents

Hey you. Lester — Tourist Town

Summary

Lizzy has left a note for Lester asking him to stick around until she gets off work.

In the section “Nasr Wal Salam,” the smell of fresh cut grass on Lizzy’s sheets and pillows reminds Lester of the grass at Nasr Wal Salam. The platoon had stopped there to escort some reconstruction workers back to Camp Fallujah. The grass in front of the command post had been so inviting that Lester had even bent down to stick his nose in it. When Donovan had come back out of the building Lester noticed he looked like he’d just been told a funny secret by accident. When Zahn asked what was in the truck they’d be escorting Donovan had said it was a million dollars in cash. The money would be used as a bribe to get the local Sunnis into the army. The convoy moved out and Lester thought of what just one of those stacks that made up the million dollars could do for his family. As they drove the back half of the armored Suburban blew up. Lester was sent to check out the security men in the Suburban. They were not seriously injured. Dodge laughed as he pointed out the Americans had money to burn. Lester began laughing as well. Over his shoulder, he glimpsed even Donovan was laughing.

A snippet from Huck Finn describes how Huck had trouble abandoning his friends, even when they could cause him danger.

In the section “Tourist Town,” Dodge joins his flatmates who have picked up a group of pretty girls by promising them safety. They tell the girls that they will find a reporter and Dodge will speak to that reporter in English about what is happening. Dodge disappoints one of the pretty girls when he tells her he didn’t fight the Americans or speak for them in English. He knows she is not the first person he has disappointed.

After their first night at the lake, Kateb (who had not yet been given the code name of Dodge) woke up alone. Mundhir and Hani were already up. Haji Fasil told Kateb that Mundhir was out with Abu Abdul but that Hani had taken the car to town. Kateb tried to hide his anger about Hani leaving with all the money from Haji. For the second time Haji made a mention of Kateb and his friends being rich. When Kateb tried to walk away from Haji, Haji told him that Abu Abdul had not lost his tongue to cancer as Haji had first said. Realizing that Haji wasn’t going to let him go without talking, Kateb sat back down.

Haji told Kateb that during the first war he and Abu Abdul had joined the uprising but Saddam’s army had killed their wives and children. The secret police had cut out Abu Abdul’s tongue. Haji noted that Kateb and his friends were privileged young boys at that time who were now running away. Haji questioned Kateb’s plans, what they would do when they ran out of money and had to sell their car. Kateb told Haji he was a student who was not interested in war. His mother had died of cancer and his father had worked with the Ministry of Agriculture designing the Grand Canal. The canal was never finished, Kateb explained, because the Americans wouldn’t allow his father to buy the



pumps to make it work. He told Haji that only he and Hani were students while Mundhir had worked security for them when they had presented concerts. Haji told Kateb they were all three fools but Kateb countered explaining to Haji what Baghdad had become.

Haji interrupted Kateb's story when he saw Mundhir and Abu Abdul coming with fish for breakfast. Hani also returned with his purchases. Kateb criticized him for not discussing the decision with the rest of them but Hani argued it was the only way for them to change the dinar they had into dollars. As Kateb listened to Haji and Hani talk, he began to understand that Hani worked as a middleman. His farm was on the neutral territory between enemies and he had the advantage of being able to shuttle goods between these enemies. Hani hoped to market to the Americans with the sodas, DVDs and trinkets he had purchased. Kateb worried they were risking their lives by staying on the property. Even though Hani knew that Kateb wasn't happy with the proposition, he asked Kateb to make a sign in English for their business. Kateb tried to make Hani promise their stay there was only temporary but knew Hani and Mundhir were having too much fun to leave. On the sign Kateb wrote: "Tourist Town. Stop and Spend Money on Bullshit" (p. 171).

Analysis

The structure of the novel continues to gel in this section. Notice that in the close of Donovan's section with Paige, he asked her if he'd ever told her about the time he watched one million dollars burn. In this section of the novel Lester picks up the story as the grass smell in Paige's bed reminds him of the grass at Nasr Wal Salam the place where he and the fellow members of the platoon had gone to escort the Suburban carrying the cash. Donovan seemed amused that his platoon had been chosen to escort the cash meant by the State Department to encourage the rich Sunnis to let their sons fight in the Iraqi Army.

Dodge's reaction is priceless as the transfer of the cash must seem to him to be a stereotypical American way of getting things done. After the back of the truck blew up destroying the cash, Dodge was even more beside himself as he laughed declaring the scene was like something out a rap video. Even Lester and Donovan couldn't help but laugh at Dodge's reaction to the destruction of the money. From this section it appears that Dodge was included in the novel not only to tell the Iraqi side of the story, but also to provide some comic relief to the novel.

Notice the author describes the private security officers in a way that shows the members of the real military didn't have much respect for them. Donovan seemed both put out and amused by the job they'd been given. Note that after the explosion, both of the private security officers got on the radio in their excitement and fear. Even Lester knew this wasn't proper protocol.

The storyline makes a change when Kateb, who is called by his birth name as he had not yet been given to code name of Dodge yet, picks back up in the section following that of the burning cash with his story of Haji Fasil. Note that before this section of the



novel there is a snippet from Huck Finn describing how Huck could not bring himself to abandon his friends even when they put him into a position that could be dangerous. The situation described in this snippet from Huck parallels well with the situation in which Kateb found himself. Hani believed that Haji's farm was the perfect spot to set up his beachside resort. Kateb, on the other hand, knew the three would be in immense danger if they stayed too long with Haji. Although Kateb tried to get Hani to agree to leave the farm soon, he couldn't convince his friend how dangerous it could be for them.

Foreshadowing the future of Kateb and his friend is Kateb's conversation with Haji the morning after Haji had rescued the three. Haji told Kateb what had happened to his wife and children, and the wife and children of Abu Abdul. He reasoned by Kateb's age that he, Hani and Mundhir were just children at the time of the war in which Haji's family were killed. This statement by Haji brings to mind the statement made by Kateb's professor that Huck and his friend Tom were just children in the years leading up to the American Civil War. The professor projected that if Huck and Tom had grown up into adults fighting the war, they would have been on different sides. Inferring from Haji's comment and the professor's statement, it can be guessed that this is foreshadowing hinting that Kateb will be separated from his friends by the war and they will perhaps even become enemies.

Although the reader doesn't know much about Kateb's father, one comment made by Kateb to Haji contains important information about that man. Kateb's father had been employed by Saddam to design and build the Grand Canal. Kateb's father hadn't been able to finish the project before Saddam was overthrown. At the time of Kateb and Haji's conversation the canal remained unfinished because the Americans would not let Kateb's father buy the pumps needed to make it work. Because of this Kateb's father must blame the Americans for keeping him from seeing the results of years of labor.

Discussion Question 1

What parallels are there between Kateb's (Dodge's) story and Huck's?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the words that Kateb (Dodge) chose to paint on Hani's sign? Do you think he meant the sign as good advertisement or as a deterrent?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of the burning of the one million dollars. The novel does not indicate who might have been responsible for the bomb. Who do you think might have blown up that vehicle?

Vocabulary

martyr, stagnant, leeching, procure, faction, arbitrage, consignment



Significant Incident Report: Criminal Act, murder and intimidation — A Box Where I Can Keep These Things

Summary

The next memo is a significant incident report written by Donovan about claims made that Iraqi soldiers had killed several merchants.

As Donovan reads a text from Paige and realizes he told her about the wrecked sailboat he is thinking about buying, he wonders if he told her the story about the old man and the hay.

During a mission, he had noticed an old man who was selling hay arguing with a customer. The man reminded him of his father. Donovan watched the man until he was out of sight. The men in the Humvee discussed buying some hay from the man when they heard a bomb. Donovan told Zahn to speed up. He felt the bomb had probably been homemade but was still powerful. Donovan also knew the bomb had been meant for them. When they reached their destination, a combat outpost, they met a line of Iraqi army trucks headed out toward the town from which the bomb had come.

Once they arrived at the outpost, Donovan noticed that Dodge kept his hood on. He told Lester the guys in the compound were Shia and that they would kill him. Donovan called for Dodge to go with him. In a radio room, Donovan heard that three civilians had been killed by the bomb. He told the men he was with the resupply team and that they had air conditioners for them. The captain went with Donovan to look at the products Donovan and his men had brought. As they looked at the air conditioners and the captain criticized their quality, trucks loaded with tied up Iraqis began returning to the base. Meanwhile, the major in charge of the outpost asked permission to borrow Dodge for interpretation.

Donovan watched as the prisoners, including the man he'd seen selling hay were pulled from the trucks and lined up in rows of five. The alfalfa man was crying and seemed to want to tell Donovan something. A soldier pushed his gun into the man's face. These men, who appeared to Donovan to be innocent civilians, had been rounded up by the Iraqis and arrested because of the bombing. Donovan spotted Dodge trying to give one of the men a drink of water. Donovan also saw that the members of his platoon had taken note that the men were thirsty and many of them injured. They were gathering bottles of water for the men while Lester stood ready with his medical bag waiting for Donovan's signal for them to help. Donovan tried to get the major to let the alfalfa man go but was not successful. Instead of taking Donovan's word that those men who had been on the street had nothing to do with the bombing the major complimented his men



for doing a good job. The major would not even allow any medical treatment to be given to any of the men.

Later, in the conversation in which the major wanted Dodge's interpretation skills, Colonel Hewrami first thanked the major in command of the outpost for his help. The colonel suspected all of the men who had been gathered up that day were terrorists. He planned to go to the town that next day and take money from the merchants to give to the families of those that had been killed. The major suggested civil affairs money be given for that but the colonel indicated he wanted the people to know the Iraqi army can take things away from them. The major asked Dodge to translate to the colonel that Donovan was honored to be in the field with the new Iraqi Army. Donovan chose to tell the major he had to get back to his trucks before Dodge had a chance to answer.

On their way back to their trucks Donovan searched for the alfalfa man. He couldn't find him. He did see empty water bottles spread over the field. Hewrami had come out and was talking to an Iraqi who was pointing to Donovan's vehicles and the empty water bottles. Donovan learned from Gomez they had given the prisoners the water. Gomez ordered the men to proceed with a combat off load of the supplies they'd brought. The driver of the cargo truck put it into reverse then slammed on the brakes causing all the air conditioners, food and water to slide off the back of the truck into a pile. As they drove back through the town, Donovan noticed a pile of abandoned alfalfa hay in the middle of the town circle.

A finding of fact memo indicates Lester had been stealing medicine from military supplies and had become addicted to opiates.

In the section "A Box Where I Can Keep These Things" Landry warns Lester not to move too fast with Lizzy. Lester tries to downplay his relationship. He goes to Landry's fridge and looks at the beer. He knows that Landry and Paul know why he was dismissed from the military and wonder if they'd confront him if he got himself a beer. He thinks about the cigar box he has at home where he keeps his military things including his dog tags, medals and memorial service pamphlets. He indicates the pamphlets were in order with Gunny Stout's first and Marceau's next.

Marceau was killed by a sniper when the platoon was on its way back from the air conditioner delivery, Lester remembers. The sniper had gotten a bullet through a seam in Marceau's flak. That bullet hit Marceau's heart. When Dodge had heard the call for a corpsman he'd realized the urgency of the call before any of the others. Dodge was already pulling Marceau out of the turret when Lester ran up. Lester had all of his supplies ready but when he checked Marceau he couldn't find a pulse. Even so he showed Dodge how to help him do CPR. Donovan called for a helicopter to take Marceau to surgery. Lester knew Marceau was dead but continued to work on him. When the flight medic saw Marceau he recognized right away that he was dead and looked frustrated but didn't say anything. The group prayed as the gunmen in the turrets searched for someone to shoot at. Lester felt the guns were useless, just as his perfectly packed medical bag was useless. Back at the base, the platoon members learned Marceau was dead. Donovan said he'd died in the helicopter. Lester



remembered he still had a morphine syringe in his pocket. He went to the bathroom and injected himself with the morphine.

Analysis

A good deal happens in this section of the novel as Donovan and his platoon took revenge on a corrupt American base staffed with Iraqi soldiers who were terrorizing innocent Iraqis, Marceau was killed by a sniper's bullet and Lester began using drugs taken from his medical bag.

The alfalfa man became the face of the incident at the base of the Iraqi Army advisory team six. Donovan and the others had seen the man trying to sell his alfalfa hay and arguing with a customer on the street on their way to the base. Donovan commented that the old man's hand motions reminded him of his father. The men in Donovan's Humvee talked about buying hay from the man just so he could make some money. The next time this man was seen, however, he had been arrested by the Iraqi Army with a variety of other civilians under suspicion of being involved in a bombing meant for Donovan and his platoon. Donovan tried to reason with the leaders at the base and tell them that the old man wasn't involved in the bombing but they wouldn't listen. Instead they left the old man, and others, out in the broiling sun with no water. Donovan tried to keep an eye on the old man's location but eventually lost sight of him as more and more prisoners were brought in. On their way back to their own camp, Donovan and the others in his Humvee see a pile of alfalfa hay being blown around by the wind. The blowing hay was a sign that the alfalfa man's life as he knew it was over.

What is startling about this scenario is that the leader of the Iraqi troops allowed the cruelty to the civilians, who were probably not involved in the bombing, to continue. To make matters worse, the troops were to go to the town the following day to take money away from the merchants and shopkeepers to give to the family of the three people killed in the bombing. It is ludicrous that an army would make innocent people pay for the cruelty of others. They seemed more interested in punishing the people instead of making them safe. Notice also in Donovan's significant incident report that he has been told that members of Shiite death squad were joining the army. In this way these enemies of the Sunni were given the jurisdiction to do as they pleased with the Sunni people.

Dodge's humanity, as well as the humanity of Donovan's platoon is displayed again in the way they treated the men taken as prisoners by the Iraqi Army. Right from the beginning Dodge was caught by Donovan trying to give one of the men a bottle of water. Later, while Dodge and Donovan were talking to the commander of the base, the members of his platoon took water from the supplies intended for the Iraqi base and gave them to the prisoners. Because the Iraqi soldiers seemed angered by the Americans' humanity Donovan made the decision to do a combat disload of the supplies they'd brought to the base. This combat disload left all of the supplies in a heap of broken air conditioners and leaking water bottles after they fell off the back of the truck when the driver backed the truck up quickly then slammed on his brakes.



Sadly, Marceau was shot by a sniper and killed on the way home from that mission. Lester was called to tend to him but Lester knew he was already dead. Even so, he worked on Marceau and made it look as if he might survive. He didn't want to be the one to break the bad news to the other members of the platoon. Notice it was Dodge who ran for Marceau and pulled him from the turret. Although he may not be the one most in tune with military procedures, Dodge realized quickly something had happened to the man and that he needed help. He ran to provide assistance, not even thinking that he could be shot by the same sniper in the process.

Notice also in this section the way that Lester describes the beer in Landry's fridge. It has already been seen in a section of the novel narrated by Donovan how he described things in terms of alcohol. In this section Lester describes alcohol in military related terms. He indicates the beer was packed into Landry's fridge like "ammunition in a magazine" (p. 200). In another spot a few paragraphs later he describes how the creaking floorboard distract him from the "arsenal of beers in the fridge" (p. 201).

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Lester worked on Marceau and allowed the helicopter to be called even though he knew Marceau was dead?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the activities at the Iraqi Army base. Do you think the Iraqi people were being treated fairly by the soldiers? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the role of the alfalfa man in Donovan's story.

Vocabulary

siphoning, stereotypical, brooding, laconic, indulge, idiotic, careened, berm, imperceptible, adjutant, editorializing, rhetorical, cache, discrepancies, erratically, scenester



After some time in the wilderness — A Fair Fight

Summary

Dodge relates to Huck's desire to regress and believes it might be a good idea for the Arab countries but believed also that the novel shared a warning about regression.

In the section "All Smiles, All Friendship," as the rioters continue to circle the square Dodge thought about Lester and how he'd begun using drugs after Marceau was killed. Even though he wanted to leave the protest and go back to making notes about Huck Finn a university student got a bullhorn and called for the people to organize. The prettiest girl yelled at Dodge she had seen a camera crew.

The day after Hani's sign went up he sold his first Coke to the Americans. Haji hoped the Americans would not find anything they would not like while Mundhir stood prepared to step in front of Abu Abdul if he needed protection. The soldiers at first made the men sit on a log with their fingers laced over their heads. Lieutenant Pederson spoke to the men and then had his interpreter translate. The interpreter translated wrong. Kateb told Pederson he could speak English and that the Kuwaiti was translating incorrectly. After the Marines realized they could trust Kateb and the others Hani lead them on a tour of Tourist Town while Kateb translated. Pederson talked on his radio for a while and then gave Hani a twenty-dollar bill for Cokes. He promised they'd be back.

While they were waiting for Pederson to return, Hani sold enough merchandise to get them past Jordan but no mention was made of leaving. Meanwhile, Kateb used his time to read and make notes on Huck Finn. The Marines soon began coming to Tourist Town every day. They were more relaxed with each visit. Pederson asked one day if Hani had seen people from out of town. Kateb was terrified of the question but couldn't warn Hani to watch his answer. Hani told them there had been people from Egypt and Syria. Pederson asked Kateb to take a walk to the lake with him. Pederson frowned when Kateb explained they'd be leaving as soon as they earned enough money. Pederson told Kateb they needed good interpreters and handed him papers he could use to get a job with the military.

When Kateb walked back to the others, he could tell that Haji had seen the envelope. Kateb showed him the papers so he would know that Kateb had taken no money from the American. Haji tried to hide it under a brick but Kateb said they should just burn it. Haji warned him he needed to keep the letter as he and Hani had different fates. They heard a car pull up and Hani calling for Kateb. When Kateb went outside, he discovered his father and brother were there.

Donovan submits an after action report describing the way the Iraqi soldiers were changing their attacks on Americans.



In the section “A Fair Fight,” Paige meets Donovan to look at the sailboat he’s thinking about restoring. Because he’s never been on a sailboat before, Paige takes him for a ride on the sailboat that had belonged to her father. Even though the day was cold and grey, Donovan loves the experience. They spent the night on the boat. Paige mentions she knows a man who might let Donovan lease a space to work on his boat in his covered dockyard. Paige shows she’s ready to hear whatever Donovan has to say but Donovan is scared by the thought of trying to be normal around her and her friends.

At work, Donovan goes back to his analytics. He notices Stall isn’t as friendly as he was Friday. As he thinks of reasons to not meet Paige as he promised, he realizes he misses the call center they had while on deployment. When making calls from this center, it was easy to get off the phone because there were so many reasons to do so. He remembered calling his mother on his birthday from the call center. He’d gone through the pleasantries with his parents, assuring him he was doing well and didn’t need anything, before hanging up. He mailed the letters he’d written to Marceau’s parents, one to his father and one to his mother and went to the chow hall.

In the mess hall he saw Dodge trying to make Lester eat, as well as Gomez and Kahn eating together. Above the table, Gomez and Kahn appeared to be setting an example for the other Marines by focusing on their food but under the table Donovan noticed they were tapping the toes of each other’s boots. At the lieutenants’ table Donovan sat and listened while Cobb told his story about the scorpion. As Cobb was telling his story, a female helicopter pilot’s radio reported three injured people being flown to the base. Her officer asked who was injured but she didn’t know. When the radio came to life again, the pilot got up and left. Donovan talked to the officer and learned that he and his group were tasked with taking the governor of Anbar Province to work each morning. He told Donovan the city of Ramadi was ready to explode. When he left the chow hall to check on those injured, Donovan left the building as well. He climbed to the top of the berm to think. He was surprised when Dodge climbed up after him a few minutes later. Dodge was surprised to see Donovan there.

Donovan asked Dodge about Huck Finn and then suggested he needed friends. Dodge told him that if he made friends with the Americans it would give other nationalities a reason to kill him. They also shared information about their families.

Analysis

A good deal of this section of the novel deals with relationships between characters. There is, however, important information given in this section that will help the reader understand what will happen in coming sections and why it will happen.

Hani had set up his roadside market hoping to draw in business from Americans. He got the Americans he hoped for in the form of a group of Marine infantrymen. After assuring themselves that Hani and the others held no threat to them, the Marines promised to return often to Tourist Town. One of the men, Lt. Pederson gave Kateb a letter requesting his services as an interpreter after he learned how well Kateb could speak



English. Kateb proved this by telling Pederson that the interpreter he was working with was interpreting his words incorrectly. Kateb did not want to work for the Americans and intended to destroy the letter. Haji Fasil, however, had seen the American give Kateb the letter and indicated to Kateb that letter was his salvation. Haji, like the man Kateb rode in the truck with to the abandoned air force base believed it was an honor to work for the Americans.

Notice the relationships that have developed at Tourist Town. Mundhir had become not only friends with Abu Abdul but also became the old man's protector. Meanwhile, Kateb knew what awaited the group if they stayed with Haji but refused to be separated from Hani even when Haji tried to convince him their separation was for the best. At the very end of this section of the novel, Kateb's father and brother visit Tourist Town. It has been indicated before that the relationship between Kateb and his family was not good. The author ends Kateb's story just after Kateb came face-to-face with his father and brother leaving the reader wondering what sort of reunion they will have.

Also important to note in this section is Donovan's mention that although Gomez and Kahn appeared to be all business above the table in the chow hall they were playing footsie with each other under the table. This is the first serious hint that there was a relationship between the two while they were overseas other than that of a sergeant and corporal.

Notice also the difference in the two dramas being played out at the lieutenants' table when Donovan joined the group. Cobb was telling the humorous story of a scorpion adopted by some Marines. As he was telling his story he was completely oblivious to the drama being played out as the visiting lieutenant and pilot receive news that three troops had been injured, possibly their own men, and were being flown to the base. Another thing to pay attention to is Donovan's conversation with the visiting lieutenant who was stationed in Ramadi. While they are discussing the jobs they do, the lieutenant told Donovan that the entire city of Ramadi was ready to explode. As it has been mentioned before, it appears that the entire novel is building up to some tragedy that takes place in Ramadi. These words by the lieutenant reinforce the idea that Ramadi is a truly dangerous place.

In the theme of warfare, consider Donovan's father's comment about his fight with the kudzu not being a fair one as the kudzu kept coming. Although it was on a much less dangerous level the kudzu that kept coming was much like the terrorists that kept coming at the American troops, finding new and more creative ways to injure and kill them.

Also significant in this section of the novel is Donovan's relationship with Paige. He realized the morning after they talked at the bar that Stall had taken him to that he'd told Paige more than he'd intended to tell her. When Paige takes Donovan sailing on her father's boat and they spend the night together, it seems they might have made a break through in their relationship. Notice that it is when Donovan realizes that he will have to go out in public with Paige and have to try to deal with his own uncertainties and fears that he pulls back.



Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the author including the scene with the National Guardsman in the phone center? Why do you think he chooses to include this particular type of call?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Donovan is so scared of having a relationship with Paige? How does his experience in the war add to his fear?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the American Marines are showing so much interest in Tourist Town? Do you think they really have friendly intentions or do you suspect they have some other plans for the area?

Vocabulary

regress, discerned, quips, municipal, condolences, halyard, cleat, brackish, proximity, conjure, feigns, triaging, fiduciary, discretion, carbine, impervious, commemoration



Dad — The Brass Buttons

Summary

Lester writes a note to his father telling him he'll be staying in New Orleans to help out at the shop there and staying with Landry. He promises he'll be back Christmas Eve.

Lizzy and Lester are watching news coverage of the riot in Tunisia when Lizzy questions Lester about his service. Lizzy asks what he thinks about the people fighting for their freedom and Lester responds that he hopes no one gets hurt. Lizzy went on about the country shutting off the Internet and Lester told her the Marines would shut off the phones and Internet for days after someone was killed.

A snippet from Huck Finn and comment from Dodge describes how Huck was charmed by a southern gentleman but that Huck really wanted strong leadership instead of just charm.

In the section "The Second Son of Abu Muhammad," Dodge's flat mates and their pretty girlfriends are scared when the police begin shooting warning rounds. When the crowd didn't flee, they stopped shooting and the people sang "Tunisia, Our Country" in celebration. Dodge didn't sing because Tunisia was not his country, a statement that disappoints the girl with him. Dodge believes Hani would have been better equipped to handle the girl.

In the past, before Dodge began working with the military and still went by his birth name of Kateb, Hani had even handled Kateb's father better than Kateb had. Hani sought forgiveness from the old man even though Kateb never had. Although he'd hoped to act like a man when he saw his father again Kateb instead found himself running to his father, hugging him and crying. After they had all sat by the fire with Haji, Hani told Kateb that his father lived in Habbaniyah. Haji recognized the place as home to Saddam's loyalists. Kateb's father insisted that Kateb come with them to visit for the night. Kateb tried to go and get some things, knowing the American's letter could keep him alive but his brother would not let him. Once in the car with his family Kateb had a flashback to a discussion he'd had with his professor about authority and its origins. His professor had told him the only true authority was one's conscious.

On the way to their house, Kateb's father insisted they drive by the canal. Kateb could see he hoped he'd be able to finish the project. In Habbaniyah Kateb saw the streets were clean and the town showed signs there was a government in operation there. Once they reached his father's compound Kateb saw 11 armed men as well as his nephew and sister-in-law. The men eventually wandered away after they had greeted Kateb. Kateb's father motioned to Muhammad to leave him alone with Kateb. His father took him behind the house where he showed him the black and yellow concrete curbstones his men were making.



In a sitting room, Muhammad and his colleagues were watching footage of Americans doing a safety check as it played on the screen of a camcorder. They were planning how they could put explosives behind the curbstones so they could attack the American forces by tricking them with a fake bomb. Kateb's father told him they were doing as they were because they were honorable resistance. He believed that the Americans were the invaders and needed to be given a message they needed to go back home. He told Kateb the next mission was near Hani's resort. He asked for Kateb's help.

In a memo written by Donovan he describes the deterioration in Lester's physical appearance and his morale.

Donovan makes up lies to keep from having to go home for Christmas. He gets a text from Paige and tells her he's busy at work. He thinks his boss at work is taking bets on how much work Donovan can handle without breaking. He believed that Major Leighton had done the same thing.

Leighton had heard about an open pit filled with neatly stacked, sealed drums of common industrial products. The experts called in to investigate the drums left when they found there was nothing tied to weapons of mass destruction and left removal of the drums to the regiment. Leighton volunteered his men to do the job. Leighton told them that a unit from the State Department would take control of the drums once the Marines got the area secure and moved the drums from the pit.

Although he wasn't happy about being given the job, Donovan told his men they would treat it like a chemical attack and would wear gas masks and protective suits. He wanted them to start working before dawn so they could get finished before the heat of the afternoon. They arrived at the grid coordinates given them by the state before dawn. Six hours later the people from the State Department still hadn't shown up. Donovan was concerned because they'd stayed in one place for so long. Gomez was also nervous.

Four armored Suburbans and two flatbed trucks were finally driven up to the site. A man who identified himself as Doug took Donovan to meet Mr. Moss, the man in charge. Donovan questioned when Mr. Moss mentioned leading them to a pool but Mr. Moss avoided his question. Back inside the car, Dodge told Donovan the men who were driving the cars were Ansar al-Sunna, loyalists of Saddam, who were driving the cars. They drove until they reached a walled subdivision with stucco housing that reminded the troops of southwest America.

Once they stopped, Donovan and Zahn talked to Doug who told them the barrels were in an empty swimming pool behind the house. They smelled chemicals as soon as they entered the pool area. Zahn was unable to go any closer. Donovan peeked over the edge of the pool to see a white powder had eaten holes in the barrels. He could hear the seeping chemicals reacting with each other. He went back to where Zahn was trying to get his breath and pulled him back to the trucks.



Gomez ran to Kahn as soon as she saw him ordering him to let Lester wash out his eyes. Kahn and Donovan ordered everybody to get back away from the chemicals. Gomez pointed out to Donovan he had blisters rising on his face. Donovan ignored his injuries and took Dodge with him to talk to Mr. Moss. He told the man his unit was not equipped to deal with the mess. He would not allow his Marines to go into the area, even with chemical suits on. When Mr. Moss told him that the colonel would hear about Donovan's refusal to complete the project and asked for Donovan's name, Donovan instead said an explicative. Mr. Moss chided Donovan telling him the project had been about winning the war and showing the Iraqi people that the military was there to help. He added the Iraqis would be insulted because they wouldn't be getting the barrels as they had thought they would. When Donovan mentioned to Mr. Moss that his drivers were Ansar al-Sunna Mr. Moss called for Muhammad. Donovan turned to talk to Dodge, he saw that he'd already started back to the car with his hood over his face. Donovan noticed Muhammad looked familiar and that he seemed confused by Dodge being there. Once he followed Dodge back to the trucks, Donovan noticed Zahn looked better. Zahn told Donovan to look at his own face. When he looked, Donovan saw the blisters and felt the pain for the first time. On the way back to the camp, Donovan noticed that Dodge looked as if he might vomit.

Analysis

A good deal happens in this section of the novel both for Dodge, and for Donovan and his platoon members. First, it is important to remember that the reason the Americans first invaded Iraq was because it was suspected that Saddam had supplies necessary to make weapons of mass destruction. These supplies were never found. This is why when Donovan recalled the events of the failed mission to collect the barrels of chemicals he mentioned that they believed they might have found the goods, or the supplies to make the weapons of mass destruction. He indicates that since the war had gone on for so long it had almost been forgotten that was the reason they were even there.

Next, Kateb's (Dodge's) life gets very complicated in this section of the novel. Given that the reader knows that Dodge has been employed with the United States military and that he mentioned in an earlier section of the novel that he did not go willingly into employment with them it can be inferred that Kateb was forcibly made to join the ranks of the military.

In this section, Kateb's father and brother take him for a visit to their home. They make a pretense in front of Haji of being a loving family who had just been separated because of the war. It turned out that Hani had met up with Abu Muhammad and Muhammad in town and had told them that Kateb was with him. During his visit with his family Kateb learned that his father and brother were loyalists to Saddam who were trying to send a message to the Americans that they needed to go home. He showed Kateb the curbstones he and his men were making in which bombs and explosives could be hidden. Remember that it was a bomb hidden in this same sort of curbstone that killed Gunny Stout. In the linear timeline of the events in the novel, Stout's death took place



just before Dodge joined the American troops meaning that it could have been the work of Dodge's father that killed Stout.

Notice also that Kateb's brother and his men were studying videos they had made of the way the Americans did safety checks — their fives and twenty-fives — so that they could find their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. They were planning out how they could use fake bombs to draw the men away from their vehicles and distract them so they could be hit with a real bomb. That evening Kateb's father invited him to come and work with him. He had a project planned near Hani's Tourist Town for which he wanted Kateb's help. Notice that Kateb neither agreed to work with his father or refused his invitation.

Later, when the Marines meet with the men from the State Department to remove the barrels of chemicals Dodge recognized right away that the men who were driving the State Department vehicles were Saddam sympathizers. He knew these men meant no good for the Americans and that whatever chemicals were in the barrels would be destined to be used against American troops. Donovan doesn't question how Dodge knew the drivers were Saddam sympathizers but Mr. Moss, the man from the State Department did. Once Donovan saw Muhammad and recognized he was probably related to Dodge he not only understood Dodge's strange behavior, because Dodge had refused to take off the hood that hid his face, but also knew exactly how Dodge knew the men were sympathizers with Saddam.

Notice how the author makes the reality of the chemical mess almost surreal as he sets it against a backdrop that is described as looking almost like an American subdivision. As he and Zahn walk to the pool area where the chemicals were located, Donovan gets the feeling he's arrived early to a birthday party. The idea of the fun and festivities of a party contrasts sharply with the dangers waiting for the Marines in the pool. Also remember that when Donovan and the others first drove into the subdivision he imagined the Marines as they might have been driving down a similar street to pick up their dates for a dance, another life event that contrasted greatly with the dangerous mission they faced.

A final point of interest is the way the men from the State Department are portrayed in this section of the novel. Donovan had purposefully gotten to the meeting point early in the morning so his Marines could do their work before the heat of the day set in. Instead of getting there on time the State Department vehicles showed up almost six hours late. Note that the chemicals in the pool were made even worse because at that point in the day the sun was adding heat to the mess, speeding up the reactions. Mr. Moss, the man in charge, did not seem to think he'd done anything wrong by showing up so late. In fact he appeared to be offended because Donovan's hand was sweaty when they shook hands. Also note that when the security officials got out of their vehicles, Donovan described their security maneuvers as looking like something they might have learned from the movies. It is apparent from these descriptions that there was little respect for the State Department by military personnel.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of the curbstones that Kateb's (Dodge's) father was making.

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Donovan made the right decision when he refused to let his Marines handle the chemicals in the pool? Why or why not? How did his decision show good leadership? In what ways did he mishandle the situation?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the ways in which the author uses images of America and troops as children to contrast with the dangerous task they've been asked to complete in the Iraqi subdivision.

Vocabulary

supplication, plausible, imperturbable, retribution, flummoxed, ingratiating, sycophants, erratic, deteriorating, morale, slovenly, terse, solace, proficient, decontamination, admonish, rendezvous, etiquette, honorific, tactical, catalyst, impervious, conspicuously, receded, concentric, symmetrical



From: Road Repair Platoon Commander, Engineer Support Company — The Triggermen

Summary

A memo is sent to Lester ordering him to “take immediate corrective action” (p. 288) on several deficiencies.

In the section “Overpressure,” Lester felt even his house had it out for him as it creaked and groaned its complaints about him leaving his father alone. Back in New Orleans on New Year’s Eve, Lizzy wants him to go with her to watch the fireworks. He knows she’s disappointed when he said he didn’t feel like going. The sound of the fireworks already going off remind him of gunfire. Lizzy is excited by the fireworks while Lester winces at the noise and smell. Lizzy begs Lester to take her to see the fireworks and he finally gives in.

They find Lizzy’s friends just before the fireworks start. There is a family with three small children next to them. A drunk girl lights the fuse on a firework and it explodes right over the family. Lester yells at them. The first fireworks take Lester back to a time when the convoy was hit by a bomb. The Humvee in which they were riding was on fire. Donovan pulled Zahn out by the straps of his jacket and pushed him at Lester. Zahn was out cold. Back in real time, Lizzy is angry and Lester knows he’s ruined the evening for her. He goes to a bar where he doesn’t think Lizzy will look for him.

Dodge sends a message to Lester briefly describing his situation and asking for a recommendation so he can come to America.

In the section “The Triggerman,” Dodge is surprised that his flatmates had not run when the police began shooting at them but instead became committed to the revolt. They continue to say that they plan to have Dodge speak for them in front of the cameras without even asking if he wants to participate.

Back in Tourist Town, when Kateb’s (Dodge’s) brother dropped him off at the lake, Kateb showed Hani money he had taken and begged him to leave the lake. Hani stalled saying they needed dollars and not the dinar that Kateb had brought. Kateb grew frightened when he learned from Hani that Pederson was coming back that day. Kateb warned Haji to take Abu Abdul and leave. Haji told Kateb he knew about the bombs that had been planted the night before to trap the Americans. Haji knew he had to stay because if they were gone the Americans would know they were being trapped and would drive by instead of stopping. Dodge’s father and brother and his men would be angry with Haji for warning the Americans and would kill him.



When the soldiers arrived at Tourist Town, Pederson indicated he appreciated Kateb's willingness to sit down with them and his neighbors in an attempt to make things safer. When he heard the trucks from the new Iraqi Army coming, Kateb told Pederson to tell them to stop because there was a bomb on the road. Pederson told Kateb he was right in telling them about the bombs and that he would take care of it. Kateb believed Pederson was telling the truth and that he would see to it that they were all taken care of. When an American put his knee into Kateb's back and put cuffs on him, however, Kateb began to doubt Pederson's word.

Kateb saw the Iraqi truck with dead men around it. Haji was dead. Hani was running to help Mundhir pull Abu Abdul's body from the water of the lake. Pederson had Kateb's cuffs removed once he was in the truck. As Kateb watched Mundhir comfort Hani, Kateb told Pederson he didn't care where the men took him.

Analysis

In this section the reader learns the story of how Kateb (Dodge) "agreed" to begin working for the American forces. He knew his father and his men had planted bombs around the area with plans to sabotage the meeting between the members of the Iraqi Army and the Marines. In his belief that the Americans could stop the attack, Kateb told Lt. Pederson that there were bombs planted and men stationed in the desert with guns. It was at this point that Kateb indicated he realized not only how good his father had gotten at his war but also how inadequate the Americans were at stopping the surprise attacks. Kateb is kidnapped by the Americans, and Haji and Abu Abdul are killed along with the truck of Iraqi Army members.

As the author nears the end of his book, the stress between the characters seems to increase, particularly between Dodge and his family. His family has become aware that he is working with the Americans while he was aware that they were working against the Americans. The reader feels a certain amount of pity for Dodge as he has had little say in his situation. He felt it was dangerous for he and his friends to stay with Haji but could not convince Hani to leave and didn't feel right abandoning him. He's avoided his father because he doesn't want to fight the war that his father is inciting. Dodge hoped to save lives by telling the Americans of the coming attack but was unsuccessful in his attempt.

One theme discussed in this section of the novel is that of the trouble that war veterans had when they tried to reincorporate into civilian society. In this particular instance, Lester has flashbacks to a time when the Humvee in which he was riding was hit by a bomb when he went to watch New Year's Eve fireworks with his girlfriend. Lizzy and her friends saw the fireworks as being fun and harmless but Lester could see the danger in fireworks, especially when the drunk girl set off a firework right over a family with small children.



Discussion Question 1

What does it mean for Kateb (Dodge) that he was working for the Americans while his family members worked against them?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Lester's reaction to the fireworks. Why did he react as he did?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Dodge so disappointed in the Americans?

Vocabulary

judicial, levee, concussive, cabana



I acknowledge this nonpunitive letter of caution — Escalations of Force

Summary

In a memo Donovan acknowledges that even though his words were not spoken to a member of the military, they showed disrespect and reflected badly upon the Marine Corps. He promises to exercise more care in his speech from that point forward.

In the section “Unbecoming,” Donovan goes to Molly’s on New Year’s Eve hoping to find Paige there.

Going back to his time back in Iraq, Donovan remembers that Major Leighton had been angry because the regiment had heard about Donovan’s words with the junior diplomat before he did. Donovan volunteered to take Gunny Dole’s overnight shift in the operations center. He planned to meet Leighton as soon as he came in for breakfast the following morning. When Donovan was relieved of his shift, he waited outside Donovan’s office so tired he could barely keep his eyes open. Leighton chided Donovan for his lack of bearing and lack of emotional discipline. Donovan chose not to defend himself and Leighton told him to do better the next time.

Donovan was headed toward his barracks when he was stopped by the sound of Gomez lecturing a Marine. Next he heard laughter and looked to see what was happening. The entire platoon was engaged in a game of horseshoes. Gomez demonstrated for Dodge but missed the post. Donovan asked if he could throw. He got a leaner. When Lester’s turn came, the men heckled him, throwing him off. Donovan saw Lester becoming angry. He couldn’t help but smile, feeling happy for the first time. When Lester missed his throw, however, he tried to shove Zahn when the man stepped forward to pat him on the back. Gomez stepped in to break up the fight. Zahn whispered to Donovan he should go. Donovan knew it was because they didn’t want him to see anything that would make him have to bring Lester up on formal charges.

Back in the present, when Donovan arrives at Molly’s he is surprised to see a very drunk Lester there.

The next snippet is a note from Zahn telling Lester where he can find Donovan.

In the section “Escalations of Force,” Lester wonders who it is who is calling him “Doc” and taking him out of the bar. He mentions out loud that the man reminds him of Donovan. As Lester begins to sober up, he realizes it is Donovan sitting across from him. Their talk turns to Dodge. Lester mentions that something went bad for Dodge after a bomb hit their Humvee.

Lester tells Donovan about Dodge’s strange behaviors after an escalation of force when a taxi was shot at. One of the men had been killed, the other, a big guy, was brought to



the company headquarters so Leighton could give him money. Dodge was brought to translate. Instead of translating just what the major was telling him to say Lester got the feeling that Dodge was saying a lot more. The burly man wouldn't take the money, only glared at Dodge. They eventually had to pull Dodge away from the man because Dodge got so upset. After that, Dodge had taken a week's leave. When he returned the platoon was back on a mission before Lester had a chance to ask Dodge if he had known the man. Ramadi had come soon after that and then Donovan brought Lester up on charges. Donovan apologizes. Lester means it when he says it wasn't Donovan's fault.

Analysis

The major action of this section of the novel again involves Dodge. The reader guesses from the description that Lester gives that the taxicab that got shot at was Hani and Mundhir's. Dodge got upset not only because his friend was killed but because he'd been shot by the men with whom Dodge worked. In this section of the novel it appears that the shooting of the taxi was a mistake and members of the coalition believed Hani and Mundhir had meant them no harm when they drove too close to a road repair crew. Lester had observed how upset Dodge had gotten when he was called in to translate to the burly man but was never able to find out exactly why Dodge had gotten so upset.

Notice that Lester's behavior was becoming more and more erratic but that the other members of the platoon seemed to be protecting him from getting into trouble. For instance, when Lester got so angry when he missed his shot playing horseshoes, Zahn asked Donovan to walk away so that he wouldn't feel that he needed to bring Lester up on charges. When Donovan did look back at the group he noticed Gomez and Zahn had set Lester down and were looking at him with care as if they were wondering what had gone wrong. Despite their intentions to protect Lester it appears that Donovan brought Lester up on formal charges anyway, assumedly because he was addicted to pain medications.

It is interesting to consider the relationships formed between the men and woman of this platoon. Lester knows things about the people with whom he worked that Donovan did not even know. When Lester got so angry during the game of horseshoes, Gomez and Zahn didn't seem angry as much as they seemed surprised and concerned. As a leader, Donovan didn't seem to care or want to get involved with his men. He wanted to be accepted as a member of the group but at the same time didn't make the effort to really learn what was going on with his men.

Notice that when Donovan meets with Lester as civilians in New Orleans that Lester insists on calling Donovan "sir" just as Kahn had. Also significant in this section is that Donovan takes care of Lester when he meets him in New Orleans, keeping him from getting thrown out of the bar or arrested for public drunkenness.



Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Sgt. Gomez allowed the members of the platoon to play horseshoes in place of their morning physical training? What does this say about her?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the incident Lester describes in which Dodge got so upset with a man for whom he was trying to translate. Who do you think this man was? Give reasons to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Donovan was right to have brought Lester up on formal charges? Do you think there might have been a different way he could have handled his platoon members' addiction?

Vocabulary

nonpunitive, discredit, garrison, impassable, meandering, crescendo, revelers, antics, incompetent, wafting, choreographed, complacency, caustic, irrelevant, coherent, contradictory, accusative, serpentine, kinetic, escalations, provocative, infuse, palpably, scenarios, initiate, reprimand, derision, proxy, heckling, addled, nascent, culpable, invective



Through all his travels and adventures — An Interpretation

Summary

A snippet of Huck Finn is included in which Dodge points out that the boy always shunned pity.

In the section “Fadil al Baquii” Dodge has been asked by his flatmates to write a letter for their cause. They want him to get Lester’s telephone number so he can write down the letter as Dodge reads it.

Dodge remembers his week of leave from the Marines. He is taken to Habbaniyah where he lies and tells the police he is supposed to sleep at their station and patrol with them. He learned that Mundhir had been taken in by Dodge’s father. On the fourth day of his leave, Dodge snuck to his father’s house. The house was dark and quiet and his father’s car gone. As he approached the house he heard Nasim crying. She was sitting in the floor of the kitchen with a rifle in her lap. Dodge’s father and brother had taken Ibrahim to a hospital because they thought he had Cholera. All the guards had been taken by Sheikh Hamza because of an increase of threats on his life. Nasim thought Dodge was aware of their situation and had sent Mundhir. Dodge lied and said that was correct.

Dodge found Mundhir on the roof of the house. He learned his father had come for Hani and Mundhir the day of the attack at the lake. They had been working for him using the taxi as a scout vehicle. Mundhir told Dodge he had not told Dodge’s father about what Dodge was doing. He believed his son was in jail. Mundhir believed Dodge’s brother when he told him that if Dodge hadn’t tipped off the Americans, only Americans would have been killed. Dodge told his friend that his brother was lying. Instead of responding to Dodge’s statement Mundhir told Dodge that when it was discovered that the baby was sick, Dodge’s father and brother had driven off forgetting they had five hollow curbstones in the trunk of the car. Mundhir told Dodge to leave and not come back.

In the next snippet, the lieutenant writes Lester a note telling him he’s left a key for him and that he’s welcome to stay as long as he’d like.

In the section “Returned to Duty” Donovan travels to see Michelle Gomez. The night before he’d texted Paige and asked if he could call her. She responded he could do what he needed, an answer he didn’t understand.

After their Humvee was bombed, Zahn was treated for a concussion. After three days Gomez and Donovan went to pick him up. When Gomez handed Zahn his rifle, his elbows gave way under the weight of the weapon. Gomez ordered him to clear his weapon. Even as she gave Zahn orders and pushed Donovan away from helping Zahn,



Donovan noticed the tears in her eyes. She left the tent quickly. Donovan followed her and she asked what was wrong with him that he wasn't ordering a doctor to do more tests on Zahn. Donovan talked to a doctor, tried to get him to run more tests but the doctor assured him that Zahn was fit for duty. Donovan also asked for an audit of Lester's medical supplies.

Lester responds to Dodge's message, letting him know he would do all he could for him but that he got kicked out of the military. He knows someone who might be a better choice to help Dodge.

In the section "An Interpretation" Lester is surprised that Donovan's place is really no better than anyone else's. He thought life would be better for someone going to college. He sends Dodge a message with Donovan's telephone number on it.

Lester thinks about how the next mission on which they were sent after Dodge came back from visiting his family and Zahn came back from the hospital was the one to Ramadi. Lester sensed Donovan had tried to fight the mission because he was angry when he came to brief the platoon. Donovan said there was a curve in the secondary road that was too sharp for their long-bed truck. He explained that if one of their trucks tipped over in that curve it would block a bridge leaving no way into Ramadi from the east. It would also block a quick reaction force from getting to the city if it was needed.

Donovan had heard Dodge mumble under his breath about pitying the Americans for having to put up with narrow bridges. The two cursed each other until Zahn took charge, telling them to watch their sectors. Just as Donovan had thought, the flatbed truck hit bottom in the curve and tipped over. Donovan was frustrated and cursed at Zahn when he asked for orders. Dodge laughed. Donovan ordered Dodge out of the vehicle as two Marine helicopters flew over calling Donovan. Lester tried to call Donovan's attention to the radio but Donovan was too busy yelling at Dodge. Lester grabbed Dodge and Zahn grabbed Donovan holding them apart. The two helicopters flew over the site again with one of them hovering for a moment before taking off over downtown. Lester watched as the helicopter was struck down by a missile coming from Ramadi.

Analysis

In this section of the novel things have reached a boiling point for the members of Donovan's platoon. Lester was addicted to pain medications and Donovan had called for an investigation and audit of Lester's supplies. Gomez was upset because she knew Zahn was suffering with more than a concussion from the bombing incident but was unable to do anything about it. She begged Donovan to get the doctor to have more tests done Zahn. It was the first time Gomez had let any emotion show. Donovan had gone to the doctor but had been unable to get him to do any more tests on Zahn. The reader may notice that Donovan was not very forceful with the doctor and did not mention Zahn's inability to lift his rifle when he'd first been given it.



Dodge had come back from a visit to his family in which his remaining friend turned his back on Dodge. It turned out that the taxicab had been a threat to the Americans even though they didn't recognize it as such. Hani and Mundhir were working as scouts for Dodge's father when Hani was killed. Mundhir and Hani had been rescued by Dodge's father after the attack at Tourist Town. Muhammad told Mundhir that if Dodge had not tipped off the Americans about the attack only the Americans would have gotten killed. Dodge was unable to convince Mundhir that Muhammad was lying. To make matters worse, Dodge's father and brother had left to take Dodge's nephew, Ibrahim, to the hospital because he was suffering with cholera. In their hurry and fear, the father and son had forgotten to remove several hollow curbstones they had stored in the trunk of their car. Had the two been found with these curbstones at an American checkpoint, the two would have been arrested. At it was, Mundhir and Nasim were hoping and waiting for the two to return. Still believing that Dodge was a traitor, Mundhir told Dodge to leave the house and not return.

Meanwhile, Donovan and his team had been given a mission that Donovan felt was doomed from the beginning. He didn't like the road the major was asking him to take and was afraid their trucks might tip over in a sharp curve which would block a major bridge into Ramadi. The reader can infer from prior mentions of Ramadi and the hot spot for terror that city had become that this mission is the one that was so traumatic for the entire platoon. At the end of this section of the novel tempers have boiled over as Donovan yelled at his platoon members in his frustration and Dodge talked back to him in his anger because he felt the Americans had made him lose not only his family but also his friends.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the encounter between Mundhir and Dodge.

Discussion Question 2

In your opinion, do you think that Donovan took care of business when it came to Zahn as Gomez had asked him to do? Give reasons to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Why was Donovan so angry about the mission on which Major Leighton was sending them? Do you think Donovan's attitude about the mission influence those of his troops? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

stoic, pixels, constitute, conciliatory, requisition, austere, oscillated, roused, wry, cognizant, sectors, incompetent



The Hero of the Profane Two-Four — A Gentleman Stands

Summary

This next section is a report of the investigation into the loss of the Profane Two-Four. Zahn, Dodge and Pleasant were all interviewed about the situation; Gomez was reported as a casualty; and Donovan recommended for a Bronze Star. The helicopter shot down over Ramadi was assigned the call sign Profane 24. Both men on the helicopter were killed. Donovan's platoon had gone into the city to get the pilots.

In the interview with Zahn, Zahn told the investigator that Donovan had told him to secure a place for a helicopter to land. He, Lester, Donovan, Dodge and Gomez had all gotten on the helicopter. Dodge tells them that he was taken to talk to the family where the helicopter crashed. After that he was given a gun which he did shoot. Pleasant, meanwhile, told the investigator he was crouched below Gomez trying to treat a wound on Donovan's face when Gomez was hit. He realized she had a head wound and did compressions until the medic helicopter arrived. Gomez lost 40 percent of her brain matter in the shooting. She survived but would need life long care and disability. Donovan, meanwhile, was given the Bronze Star for his heroism in finding the crashed helicopter and securing the area despite hostile fire until reinforcements could arrive.

The next snippet is Lester's notice he has been terminated from the military.

In the section "A Gentleman Stands" Denise Gomez is happy that Donovan has come to see her sister. She indicates Michelle is happy as well. Donovan doesn't see the pain or despair he had feared he would see but doesn't see anything that lets him know that Michelle has recognized him either. He manages to get about a mile from the house before he breaks down into tears.

After Donovan had received his metal of valor, he spent a week with Cobb. When Donovan arrived at the airport to go to his sister's, his flight was cancelled. He went to the USO hoping to call his family and let them know he'd be late. Donovan decided not to make the phone call but the man at the USO who identified himself as Tippet invited Donovan for a beer. When Tippet learned that Donovan didn't have a girlfriend waiting for him, he goes in search of one. He came back with two ladies telling them that Donovan needed their company to cheer him up. When one of the women held out her hand, Donovan pressed it against his forehead. Tippet admonished him, telling him that a gentleman always stood up. Donovan stood but suddenly felt nauseous and excused himself. He made his way to the beach where he passed out.

Back in Texas in the present, Donovan suddenly wanted to talk to his father even though he knows he doesn't deserve it. He also wants to talk to Paige. He's surprised when she answers his call on the first ring.



Analysis

The novel has been building to the events that happened in Ramadi. It is in this section that the reader finally learns what happened that day. Notice that after the shooting of the helicopter by the missile, which was told from Donovan's point of view, the story of Ramadi switches to a third person point of view. The details of that day are recorded as the results of a military investigation into the loss of the Profane Two-Four, a military helicopter. The author may have chosen to change the point of view for this particular section of the novel so that it is more unbiased and doesn't feature the opinions of any one character over another.

In this section the reader learns why Donovan believed that Ramadi was worse for Kahn than it was for him. Kahn's girlfriend was hit in the head by a bullet during an exchange of gunfire. She lost 40 percent of her brain matter and was left physically and mentally disabled. Because of Lester's medical knowledge and proximity Gomez did survive her injury.

Leadership is a theme that is addressed in this section of the novel. Donovan had never thought of himself as much of a leader but it appears that when the time presented itself he was able to make decisions and step up.

Significant in this section of the novel is Donovan's visit to Gomez and the impact that it had on him. He left her house wanting to talk to his father and get in touch with Paige, things he'd dreaded before his visit. Instead of pain and despair in Michelle and her sister, Donovan felt a great sense of quiet and peace while he was with them. This visit has helped Donovan to gain some perspective in his relationships as he realizes how quickly one's life and health can go away. Notice that even though he still believes he doesn't deserve a relationship with Paige, he goes ahead and calls her.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Donovan expected Gomez's sister to blame him or show some hate toward him concerning her sister's condition? Why doesn't she act as Donovan expected?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way the events of Ramadi are presented by the author. Talk about things like point of view, tense and perspective.

Discussion Question 3

How does Donovan show in this section of the novel that he can be a good leader when needed?

Vocabulary

coalition, disposition, expedient, gallant, strafing, requisite, admonitions, atrophied, submerged, deferent, incoherent, nostalgia, ominous, concourse, induction, configuration, truncated, abated, careened



Zahn – Thanks for the heads-up about the lieutenant — Few People Are So Lucky

Summary

In the next snippet, Lester writes to Zahn asking if he can come stay for a while.

In the section “Floorboards,” Lester stays with Donovan for about a week. When Donovan asks about Dodge Lester lies and tells him he doesn’t know where he is. He believes Dodge has gone dark because he is no longer talking about his visa but is instead about news from Tunisia. He’d helped Donovan and Paige move the wrecked sailboat. They’d both told him he needed to talk to Lizzy but Lester wanted to go see his father first.

As he’s packing to go to Zahn’s house, Lester knows his father is standing outside his door. He hears him leave and go to his shed to work on his tractor. Lester goes out to have a talk with his father and realizes he has his medical bag with him about halfway. He stops and sits under a tree. When his dad finishes for the night with the tractor he sees Lester sitting there and sits beside him. Lester finally spoke telling his father that Gunny Stout had laid in the road for six hours before anyone could get to him. He tells his father that he believed Stout was still alive and was waiting for Lester to come to him.

Next is a snippet from Huck Finn indicating that Huck has come to prefer freedom to what is right.

In the section “Few People Are So Lucky” Dodge is finally talking to the news reporters. Dodge describes what started the riots, an incident where a policewoman confiscated a man’s fruit cart that he used to support his wife and family on a false charge. That man, Mohamed, had set himself on fire. He’d died that morning from his burns. Dodge has decided to die in the streets if necessary even though Tunisia is not his home. He says that even though he is weak, he has a home. The reporters move away because they have found something more interesting to film. His friends pull him behind a Dumpster where they spend the night.

Dodge is woken up by a satellite phone being pushed in his face. He is told that the army refused their orders and did not come as Ben Ali said they would. They want Dodge to call and read his letter to his American friend. Dodge expects Lester to answer but gets Donovan instead. He asks Donovan to write down the letter he will read to him.



Analysis

The theme of relationships continues even into this last chapter of the novel. Although Lester chooses not to check in with Lizzy as both Donovan and Paige suggested he do, he does seem to make some amends in his relationship with his father. Even though they are no longer in military service, Lester notices that Donovan still relates to him as if Lester were his corpsman. Lester points this habit of Donovan's out when he was describing to him the troubles that Zahn was having. Lester felt Donovan hoped he would be able somehow fix the problems the former corporal was having. Notice also in this section that Donovan repaired his relationship with Paige and also accepted the challenge of fixing up the sailboat that had been damaged in Hurricane Katrina. A final snippet to notice is that Paige reminds Lester of Gomez.

The author includes the illusion that the house in which Lester lived with his father was almost having sympathetic reactions in favor of Lester's father. These mentions were noted in a prior section but it seems they become more troublesome to Lester as he's preparing to visit Kahn. The house and its components are personified as the floorboards talk about his father's passing in the hallway. Lester comments that the entire house gossips about him. He feels the house lean in his father's direction when his father leaves, almost as if it is pointing Lester in his father's direction, prompting Lester to talk to him.

Lester finally talks to his father about the incident with Gunny Stout, the one that seemed to begin his descent into drug use. He told his father how he felt he'd let his superior officer down by not going to him and treating his wounds. He explains how disrespectful he felt it was for Stout to lie dead six hours before anyone could get to him as well as how badly he felt that Stout had to die alone on the hot pavement.

Notice also in this final section that Dodge's story continues to parallel that of Huck Finn. The final snippet from the novel describes Huck saying that he has to leave to avoid Aunt Sally adopting him. Dodge interprets this passage as meaning that the boy would rather have his freedom than do what is right. Just as Lester had mentioned that Dodge had gone "dark" it appears that Dodge has decided to join his friends who are fighting against the power of the government.

Dodge had come to realize what a brave statement Mohamed made when he set himself on fire in response to the policewoman taking away his fruit cart and his livelihood even though she'd had no reason to do so. He has known for sometime that the same thing that happened to Mohamed could happen to him. Running has not helped Dodge. Working for the Americans has not given Dodge the answer he wanted either. He realizes that the fight for freedom is no longer one that he can sit back, study his book, and ignore.



Discussion Question 1

What does it signify that Lester's father doesn't make any comment when Lester finally tells him about the death of Gunny Stout, one of the most traumatic events during his deployment? Do you think his silence is the best response?

Discussion Question 2

How have the stories of Dodge and Huck Finn paralleled each other throughout the novel? What does Dodge learn about the Americans from the novel? What has he learned about himself?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that it is Donovan that Dodge reaches on the phone when he calls from Tunisia to transcribe his press release?

Vocabulary

implying, procured, confiscated



Characters

1st Lt. Pete E. Donovan, USMC

Pete Donovan is a lieutenant, a commissioned officer with the United States Marine Corps. He is one of the main characters of the story and also acts as one of the narrators. Although Donovan has a position of leadership in the military, he is very unsure of himself and his ability to lead the men and women under his watch. He felt more comfortable letting his sergeant and gunnery sergeant take care of his men. When Gunny Stout was killed in action Donovan had to take more charge of the platoon as he was deemed leader of the road repair crew as well as the bomb squad by his major.

Donovan had applied for officers school on a whim and had never thought he would make it through the training. Even after he graduated and was put in charge of the platoon, Donovan still questioned his ability to lead. There are however, two instances where Donovan's leadership abilities do shine through. One of these was the instance where Donovan kept his Marines from handling the barrels of chemicals. The second was when he took charge of his platoon at Ramadi and went after the men who were on the downed helicopter. He did have his regrets. He regretted the fact that Kahn had not gotten a Purple Heart for his head injury. He also seems to regret the way that he handled Lester's drug addiction.

After the war Donovan decided to use his veterans benefits to get his masters degree in business. Even though he tries to pretend he has no worries, Donovan had to drink in order to be able to sleep at night. He can't drink in public because he winds up telling stories people don't want to hear about his time in the war. A girl in his business ethics class, Paige Dufossat approaches him as a friend. Donovan does his best to push her away. It was not until after Donovan went to visit Michelle Gomez, the sergeant who was shot in the head at Ramadi, that he recognizes how lucky he was to have people who loved him in his life.

Kateb "Dodge" al-Hariri aka Fadi

Dodge, whose real name is Kateb al-Hariri, is the son of Abu Muhammad, who was an influential leader in Saddam's government. He is one of the main characters and one of the narrators for the story. Dodge grew up rich and spoiled in Baghdad. He was uninterested in politics or the war that was ongoing in his country. He seemed of the belief that it would never affect him or his way of life. Dodge was content to study the American novel "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and listen to American music. It was only after Hani pointed out to Kateb how dangerous life was becoming in Baghdad and threatened to leave his friend that Kateb agreed to leave Baghdad.

At Tourist Town, after seeing that his father was in business making the curbstones used to injure and kill American forces, Dodge chose to warn the Americans what his father



had planned. He believed that the Americans could somehow keep the violence from happening. Unfortunately a truck full of Iraqi soldiers, Haji, and Abu Abdul were all killed in the attack. Because of this incident Dodge lost some respect for the American soldiers. He also realized how serious his father was about the attack he was leading on the Americans and how good he had become at it.

As an interpreter in Donovan's platoon, Dodge's actions keep the troops entertained. Dodge seemed to use his sarcastic, over the top personality to keep people from knowing just how much he hated the war and how much he hated being a part of the violence. Before he'd been forced to take action Dodge was happy to study his novel and work on his thesis. Even after he was dismissed from service with the Americans Dodge continued to try to immerse himself in the study of his book. However as he watched his flatmates standing up and fighting for their freedom even after the fight became hard, Dodge was impressed by their willingness to stand up for themselves. He eventually joined their cause and contacted Donovan with a press release for him to share with the news media.

Mundhir

Mundhir is a friend of both Kateb (Dodge) and Hani. Mundhir is described as a burly older teen who had provided security for Kateb and Hani at their rock shows. He went along with Kateb and Hani when they left Baghdad because he had nowhere else to go. At Tourist Town, Mundhir developed a close relationship with Abu Abdul, the man who'd had his tongue cut out by Saddam's army. After the violence erupted at the town and Abu Abdul was killed, Mundhir was also recruited by Kateb's father to work for him. Mundhir was with Hani the day that Hani was killed when their taxi was shot at by Americans. Mundhir was injured. Because the Americans believed they'd shot at the taxi without cause, the Americans tried to give Mundhir money as compensation for his loss. Because the troops did not know that Dodge knew Mundhir, he was brought to translate for Mundhir but Mundhir would not talk to him.

Mundhir is last seen in the novel as he sat on the roof of the house where Kateb's father had been staying. Abu Muhammad and his son had gone to take Ibrahim to a hospital because it was suspected the boy had cholera. In their excitement and fear, the two had forgotten that there were several hollow curbstones in the trunk of the car. Mundhir was sitting on the roof looking for enemies and also hoping to see Abu Muhammad's car returning. Mundhir told Kateb (Dodge) when he talked with him on the roof that he really wanted to kill Kateb because he believed his friend was the cause of the family's troubles. He had not told Kateb's father that Kateb was working for the Americans but also refused to let Kateb know the fate of his father, brother, and nephew. He ordered his former friend to leave and not return.



Cpl. Walter Zahn

Cpl. Walter Zahn is known for his habit of dipping snuff and his love for Sgt. Michelle Gomez. It is Zahn who Donovan meets up with at a New Orleans bar when Zahn is in town for a wedding. Zahn pins a guy who is trying to pick a fight with one of his friends in the bar. It is as Zahn threatened the guy that Donovan caught a glimpse of Zahn as the Marine he had known in combat. Significant in Zahn's story is that he is unable to get veterans' benefits for a head injury he sustained during the war. Because it was believed he only had a concussion from his head injury when the Humvee in which he was riding was struck by a bomb, Zahn was not qualified for a Purple Heart, a medal that would have verified that he'd been injured in combat. In fact, the concussion was not even listed on Zahn's military medical record. Zahn not having gotten a medal was among the regrets Donovan had from his time in the service.

Although he was much more lackadaisical than she, Zahn was having a relationship with Gomez during their time overseas. Donovan had noticed the two of them playing footsie under the table at the chow hall one day. When they met up after they had returned to America, Donovan noticed Zahn referred to the sergeant as Michelle. When the Marines were called to remove barrels of chemicals from a pool, Zahn went with Donovan to check out what they were facing. Even though he was big and burly, Zahn could not get close to the stench of the chemicals.

Hospitalman Third Class Lester "Doc" Pleasant

Lester Pleasant joined the military as a way to escape his life of poverty in Louisiana. As the medic for Donovan's platoon, Lester is one of the main characters of the novel and also serves as a narrator. After the tragedy in Ramadi, Lester was sent home from the military when it was discovered that he'd been stealing medicine from his bag and had gotten addicted to opiates. Donovan seems to regret that he wrote the boy up for his addiction and got him dismissed from the Marine Corp, especially after it was Lester's expertise that kept Gomez alive after she'd been shot in the head during an exchange of gunfire at Ramadi.

Once he returned home from Iraq Lester seemed to suffer from post traumatic stress disorder as he had trouble being places that were noisy or had large crowds. Even though he knew he was safe in the United States, Lester couldn't shake the habit that he had learned in the military and continued to check trash for bombs and conduct walk arounds of his vehicle before getting into it. Lester was badly set off by a fireworks display on New Year's Eve and experienced a flashback to the time his convoy was hit by a bomb. He went to a bar to get drunk and was found there by chance by Donovan who kept his friend from getting arrested.



Gunny Stout

Gunny Stout was a gunnery sergeant who worked in the route clearance platoon before Donovan was put in charge of it. Donovan felt the men in the platoon admired and respected Stout in a way that they never did him. Stout was a mentor to Lester particularly. Before each mission Stout allowed Lester to go through the medical procedures with the troops, telling them the ways he could save their lives. This recognition by Stout made Lester feel important and a part of the team. Stout also had the other Marines take turns lifting Lester's medic bag so they could understand that even though he was just a medic, he was still pulling his own weight as part of the platoon.

It was when Lester watched Stout hit by a bomb that he began his slow descent into his drug use. Stout had been sent out to pick up several live grenades that had fallen out of a tank that had tipped over. Stout had successfully picked up all the grenades and was returning to the safe zone when a bomb hidden inside a curbstone was detonated. Donovan tried to convince Lester that Stout had died before he'd even hit the ground. Lester, on the other hand, believed he'd seen his senior officer roll over and that he was waiting for Lester to come and take care of him. Later, Donovan second-guessed himself wondering if Stout really had died instantly as he'd told Lester he had.

Sgt. Michelle Gomez

Sgt. Michelle Gomez is the member of Donovan's platoon that he admitted was the true leader of the troops. Even though she was a woman, Gomez was as hard a leader as any of the other men. The men admired her and followed her leadership even though she was a woman. While they were in Iraq, Gomez was in some sort of relationship with Kahn. She gave away her special affection for this man first when he was overcome by chemicals during a mission in an abandoned Iraqi subdivision. When encouraging him to let Lester treat him, Gomez called the man by his first name instead of his title as she generally did. Gomez again showed how much she cared for Kahn after he'd suffered a concussion but obviously was still not right even though his doctor had said he could be returned to duty. She cried and ordered Donovan to do what needed to be done to get Kahn extra tests and treatment. At Ramadi, Gomez was shot in the head during an exchange of gunfire. Because of Lester's medical expertise, Gomez survived but had lost a good deal of brain matter. Her injury left her physically and mentally disabled.

James Marceau

James Marceau was known for his ability to tap dance and his habit of dancing after he'd finished a mission. Marceau was also responsible for the sexual graffiti that was often found in the bathroom at the platoon's camp. He was known for his habit of making really strong coffee, a habit learned from rehab meetings at his parents' church. The troops hadn't liked Marceau's coffee at first but when they became sleep deprived, he was ordered back on coffee detail as they understood their need for strong coffee.



Donovan described Marceau as caring more for reality than perception and being happy with himself if he knew he was doing his job and protecting his fellow Marines. Marceau was the second member of Donovan's platoon who was killed in Iraq. He was shot by a sniper when the group was on its way back from delivering supplies to an Iraqi Army base.

Professor Liebert

Professor Liebert was the professor for the Ethics in Business class of which both Paige and Donovan were members. One day after Paige had talked about a case study and had determined a lack of empathy had caused the business to fail the professor picked on Donovan to talk about his leadership experience in the military. Donovan felt his professor was picking on him because Donovan had asked to receive transfer credit for the class based on his leadership experience in the military. Liebert indicated during their discussion that since Donovan was going to college using veterans benefits, the students in the class were owed a report of what he had learned in the military. All in all, Liebert showed an ignorance of the military even though he tried to belittle Donovan and his service.

Hani

Hani is Kateb's (Dodge's) best friend. They attended Baghdad University together and played in a punk rock band until Baghdad became so dangerous they were afraid to stay there any longer. Hani wanted to open a beachside resort in Tunisia and included Kateb and Mundhir in his plans. When the three were saved by Haji Fasil and taken to his lake house Hani decided that would be a good place to set up his beachside resort even though Kateb tried to warn him how dangerous it would be for them to stay there. Hani survived the attack on the Americans by Abu Muhammad (Kateb's father) and his men, and was taken in by Abu Muhammad. Hani and Mundhir were riding in Mundhir's taxi together doing scouting work for Abu Muhammad when the Americans opened fire on the taxi because it was driven too close to their convoy. Hani was killed by the gunfire.

Abu Muhammad

Since the overthrow of Saddam's government Abu Muhammad had been on the run both from the Americans and from the Shiite forces. He had worked in the Ministry of Agriculture in Saddam's government. His job was to design the Grand Canal, a canal that was never completed because Saddam was overthrown. After Abu Muhammad fled from Baghdad he began a company that produced hollow curbstones in which terrorists could hide bombs to use against the Americans. Because Abu Muhammad's grandson got sick he and his son took the boy to the doctor. They forgot they had several hollow curbstones in the trunk of their car. It was never learned what happened to Abu



Muhammad but if he had gone through an American traffic stop and the curbstones had been found, he would have been arrested as a terrorist.

Paige Dufossat

Paige Dufossat is the woman in Donovan's business ethics class who first gives him the idea that leaders needed to be empathetic. She reaches out to Donovan and offers him friendship but he tries to brush her off at first. One night after he'd been drinking, Donovan tells Paige about the sailboat he wants to renovate and invites her to come see it. While together Paige takes Donovan sailing on her father's boat. Donovan continues to avoid Paige's attempts at friendship until after he visits the injured Michelle Gomez. It is at this point that Donovan realizes he's lucky to be alive and have people who love him. He calls Paige and she answers on the first ring.

Major Leighton

Major Leighton is the man who was the commander over the base where Donovan and his platoon were stationed. Major Leighton came to Donovan's mind when Paige talked in their business ethics class about leaders needing to have empathy. Donovan indicated empathy was the one thing that Leighton had lacked as he'd told the members of Donovan's platoon to get over Gunny Stout's death and get back to work. Donovan was of the impression that this man wanted to see if he could push Donovan past his breaking point. He believed Leighton finally hit on Donovan's breaking point when he sent Donovan's platoon on the ill-fated mission to Ramadi.

Mohamed Bouazizi

Mohamed Bouazizi is the Tunisian man who began the riots in the city of Sousse. He doused himself with alcohol and set himself on fire after a policewoman confiscated his produce cart on a trumped up charge. That cart had been the only way that Mohamed could support his wife and family. Dodge reasoned that Mohamed had set himself on fire because he knew it was the only way that the injustice done to him would be publically known. Any other action he might have taken would have probably resulted in his death but would not have been publically known.

Nasim

Nasim is Dodge's sister-in-law. When Dodge took his one-week leave from the military he visited his family one night. Nasim was the only one at home. She was sitting in the kitchen with a rifle in her lap hoping that her husband and father-in-law would return safely from taking her son, Ibrahim to the hospital. Nasim had dreamed of being a doctor and had even been going to the university to become a doctor. Instead she wound up being the cook for Muhammad's family and his father's workers.



Haji Fasil

Haji Fasil is the man who kept Kateb (Dodge), Hani, and Mundir from being killed by the Shia terrorists. Haji made a living for himself because he lived on neutral territory and shuttled goods between enemies, a sort of middleman. Haji tried to convince Kateb (Dodge) that his fate was different from that of Hani. He encouraged Kateb to take the American lieutenant's offer to be an interpreter for the military but Kateb did not want to listen to him. Haji was killed when Abu Muhammad and his men attacked Tourist Town.

Muhammad

Muhammad was Kateb's (Dodge's) brother. Muhammad helped his father in his curbside making business. Muhammad was a significant character in the novel because he was one of the men who accompanied Mr. Moss of the State Department when he went to retrieve the barrels of chemical. Dodge saw and recognized his brother. Muhammad also recognized Dodge. When Donovan saw Muhammad he recognized him as being related to Dodge and understood why Dodge had been acting so strangely.

Uncle Chuck and Aunt Linda

Uncle Chuck and Aunt Linda were Lester's relatives. They offered to hold Lester's welcome home party at their camp and paid for all of the expenses. After Lester attacked Uncle Chuck when he heard the man talking to his father about Lester getting kicked out of the military dishonorably, Uncle Chuck and Aunt Linda would no longer have anything to do with Lester or his father.

Mr. Moss

Mr. Moss is the diplomat who was the representative the State Department sent to meet Donovan and pick up the cans of chemicals. Moss is arrogant and showed up for the project late. He wanted the Marines to deal with the canisters of chemicals while he sat in an air-conditioned truck. Dodge warned Donovan that the people to whom Mr. Moss was planning to turn the chemicals over to were loyalists of Saddam.

Gunny Dole

Gunny Dole is technically Donovan's gunnery sergeant but he never left the boundaries of the camp. Dole was waiting out his final deployment so he could retire and draw his pension. When Dodge was first brought to the camp where Donovan's platoon stayed, it was Dole who met him and took him to the barracks.



Professor Al-Rawi

Professor Al-Rawi was Dodge's advisor at the university in Baghdad. It was this professor who got Dodge interested in the American novel "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." The book was the professor's favorite. Before Dodge and his friends fled from Baghdad Professor Al-Rawi was killed.

Denise Gomez

Denise Gomez is Michelle Gomez's sister. Denise Gomez took care of her sister after she was shot in the head during Ramadi. Donovan is surprised by Denise's graciousness when he made the trip to visit Michelle. Denise is happy her sister is alive and with her regardless of her condition.

Tippet

Tippet was the man who worked at the USO station at the San Diego Airport who got Donovan drunk and tried to set him up with two women when Donovan had first gotten back from the military. When Donovan did not stand to greet the women Tippet brought to him Tippet admonished him, telling him that a gentleman always stood.

Cobb

Cobb is a lieutenant stationed with Donovan and his platoon who was in charge of outpost construction. Cobb was known for telling stories, especially one about a poisonous scorpion the troops under his command attempted to adopt. After Donovan returned home from Iraq, he spent a week with Cobb.

Abu Abdul

Abu Abdul is the friend of Haji. Abu Abdul had his tongue cut out by Saddam's men during the first war. Abu Abdul became special friends with Mundhir. He admired Mundhir's strength. Abu Abdul was killed when Abu Mohammad and his men attacked the Americans at Tourist Town.

Lizzy

Lizzy was the girl who Lester met at Siberia when he went there to hear Paul and Landry's band perform. They dated until Lester yelled at one of Lizzy's friends when the drunk girl set off a firework above a family with small children.



Ibrahim

Ibrahim is the son of Nasim and Muhammad. He contracted cholera and had to be taken to the hospital by his father and grandfather. It is never learned if he survived his sickness.

Landry and Paul

Landry and Paul were Lester's friends who had begun their own band. They were also friends of Lizzy. It was through one of Landry and Paul's concerts that Lester and Lizzy met.

Lt. Pederson

Lt. Pederson is the leader of the Marine platoon that often visited Tourist Town. He made friends with Kateb (Dodge) with the intention of getting him to work for the military as an interpreter. When Kateb refused to go with Lt. Pederson willingly he was taken by force.



Symbols and Symbolism

"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"

"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is an American novel that Dodge studies throughout the course of the novel. The novel was a favorite of Dodge's professor at the university in Baghdad. Dodge planned to write his thesis about the novel. The book is important as there are many parallels that can be drawn between Huck's life and Dodge's life. The book is a symbol of Dodge and the changes he makes in his life.

Purple Heart

Had Zahn gotten this medal for his head injury in Iraq, he could have gotten medical care provided by the veteran's assistance. As it was, Zahn's injury was not even recorded on his military record. Zahn's lack of a Purple Heart becomes a symbol of Donovan's belief that he lacked leadership skills.

A Poker Chip

Lester watches as a new man in his rehabilitation support group receives his one-month chip, indicating the man had not drunk alcohol or taken drugs for that time span. Lester notices the man is so proud of his accomplishment that he came straight from his job on a boat, not even bothering to shower or change his clothes. Although the man who got the chip believes he has achieved a landmark, to Lester the chip means nothing because he knows how easily it can be to go back to drinking and using drugs.

Lester's Trauma Bag

Lester believed his perfectly packed trauma bag was a symbol of his ability to save the lives of his fellow platoon members. After Gunny Stout and Marceau died with Lester unable to do anything to help either of them, Lester began a slow descent into drug use. After he was dismissed from the military Lester began to obsess with his medical bag and supplies again almost as if he could make up for his failings by being over prepared.

Sentimental Journey

The Sentimental Journey is the name of the wrecked sailboat that Donovan decides to renovate. It is a project he seems to hope will take his mind off what happened to him in Iraq.



A Concrete Stamp

United States military forces used a special concrete stamp to mark the cement they used to fill potholes. These stamps symbolized that the patch job had been completed by coalition forces and not enemy forces trying to hide a bomb in a patched hole.

647 Potholes

While he was overseas, Donovan and his platoon filled a total of 647 potholes. Of these potholes, all of them had bombs hidden in them. This number of potholes, all of them hiding explosives, symbolizes the extreme danger under which the troops were in Iraq.

An Old Cigar Box

Lester's uncle ordered this box of cigars for Lester and had it engraved with his name Lester "Doc" Pleasant. Lester eventually used the box to hold his mementos from war including his medals, dog tags and the memorial service programs of those killed in action in his platoon. The box, which Lester said was filled with cheap cigars when he received it, is a symbol not only of Lester's military service but also of the way that business owners use gifts intended to honor the military as moneymaking opportunities.

The Morphine Syringe

Although Lester had prepared himself for every possible scenario by having his medic's bag neatly organized with everything where he could get to it quickly, his preparations could not save Marceau when he was hit by a sniper's bullet. After he'd returned to the base from the mission during which Marceau was killed Lester still had a syringe of morphine in his cargo pocket that he had pulled out for Marceau. Lester injected himself with the morphine, this syringe and Lester's act of injecting himself represents the beginning of his addition to pain medications.

Saddam's Grand Canal

Dodge's father had been employed to design and oversee the building of Saddam's grand canal. Because Saddam's rule was overthrown, the canal was never finished. Abu Muhammad could not convince the Americans to let him order the pumps he needed to make the canal work. This canal is a symbol of Abu Muhammad disappointment and broken dreams as a result of the war. He saw it as a way that the Americans were blocking progress in his country.

Curbstones

Dodge's father and his brother went into business making hollow curbstones that could be filled with explosives to kill American soldiers.



Settings

New Orleans

New Orleans is the city to which Lester went to hear Paul and Landry play music at a bar. Lester met Lizzy at this bar. It is later during a fireworks display in this city that Lester yells at Lizzy's drunk friends for setting off fireworks close to a family with children. New Orleans is also the city where Donovan ran into Lester.

Bayou Teche

Bayou Teche is where the camp belonging to Lester's aunt and uncle is located. It was at this camp that Lester's welcome home party was held. During this party Lester got angry when he heard his uncle telling his father that Lester must have gotten dishonorably discharged. Lester attacked his uncle causing a rift in the family.

Sousse, Tunisia

Sousse, Tunisia is the city where Dodge wound up after he left his position with the Marines. Dodge may have gone to Tunisia because this was the place Hani had hoped to go so he could open a bar on the beach. When he first arrived in Tunisia, Dodge had hoped to get a visa to go to America, but he instead wound up staying in Tunisia and fighting with the protestors.

Camp Taqaddum

Camp Taqaddum is the name of the military camp where Donovan and his platoon were stationed during their time in Iraq.

Saddam's Old Air Base

Kateb (Dodge) and the other Iraqis were taken to Saddam's old air base where they were checked in as interpreters. The other Iraqis stayed at the air base while Dodge was sent out in the field with the Marines.

Baghdad

Baghdad is the city where Kateb (Dodge) grew up. It was in this city's university where Kateb was studying when he and his friends had to flee because there were increasing numbers of senseless killings.



Tourist Town

Tourist Town is the name that Kateb (Dodge) gave to Hani's lakeside haven. The three boys planned to stay at this place until they could earn enough money to go to Tunisia where they could open a bar on the beach. Hani kept putting off their plans to leave until there was an attack on the town and Kateb was taken as an interpreter.

Houma

Houma is the city where Lester first lived with his father when he returned home from the military.

Molly's

Molly's is the bar in New Orleans where Donovan ran into Lester on New Year's Eve.

Dallas, Texas

Dallas, Texas is the city to which Donovan traveled to visit Michelle Gomez at her sister's home.

Tigris Bridge

The Tigris Bridge is the bridge that was blocked when a flatbed truck turned over as Donovan had feared it would. One of the helicopters that had flown by the wreck in an attempt to provide assistance was shot down by a missile over Ramadi. Both men on the helicopter were killed.



Themes and Motifs

Leadership

Leadership is a theme that is of major importance in the novel. The young Lt. Donovan struggled in his role as a leader of platoon and often regretted the choices he'd made once he returned to civilian life. As bad a leader as Donovan believed he had been, there are other characters in the novel who show examples of bad leadership. In contrast, there are also those who set good examples of leadership. It is not until Donovan returned home from war and was taking a business ethics class that he realized that empathy was one important characteristic of a good leader.

Although Paige Dufossat had been criticized by her business ethics teacher for suggesting that a business had failed because of a lack of empathy, it was an idea that got Donovan thinking. He believed that Major Leighton his senior officer could have used a bit more empathy in the way he treated the troops. For example, after Gunny Stout's death Donovan had basically told the men to get over it. He'd commanded Donovan to take the platoon out on a mission the day after the gunnery sergeant's memorial service as he believed the men would lose heart if they didn't get back out in combat.

In contrast to Major Leighton, Gunny Stout had been a leader that had been liked and admired by his men. Lester remembered how Stout had made the men understand that even though Lester was a Navy corpsman and not a Marine, he still carried his weight. Each time before they'd gone on a mission Stout had allowed Lester to talk to the men about the ways he could save their lives if they were injured. Stout's actions had made Lester feel as if he were an important member of the team and had kept him involved in the platoon.

Also a good leader was Sgt. Michelle Gomez. Even though she was a woman, she was as tough on the men in her platoon as any man would have been. At one point in the novel Donovan admitted that an outsider looking at the platoon would believe that Gomez was its leader by her actions. Lester even recognized the leadership abilities Gomez possessed. He indicated at one point in his narration that Donovan was happy to let Gomez take charge of the men.

It is hard to say if Donovan was really a good leader or a bad leader. He had times when his leadership abilities would falter, such as the time he got into the fight with Dodge and the time he cursed Mr. Moss from the State Department. But there were also times when Donovan took charge of his Marines and kept them from getting hurt, such as the instance where the men had been sent to deal with the barrels of dangerous chemicals that had been dumped in the pool. Donovan refused to let his men be exposed to the chemicals and refused to complete the mission. He did let his emotions control him when he tried to tell Moss why he wouldn't complete the mission. It was in this regard that Donovan could have handled himself better.



Another point in which Donovan showed characteristics of a true leader was when he took his troops into Ramadi to recover the helicopter personnel after they'd been shot down by a missile. Although Donovan doubted he deserved the medal he received for his actions, Donovan took charge of a dangerous mission and saw his platoon through the danger.

Back at home Donovan struggled with several instances where he thought he'd failed as a leader. One of these dealt with the treatment Zahn received for his head injury while overseas. Because the military didn't see a concussion as an injury, Zahn was not given a Purple Heart nor was his concussion even recorded on his medical file. When Gomez and Donovan went to get Zahn from the medical tent after he was cleared for duty, it was obvious he was not right as he was at first not even able to support their weight of his rifle with his arms. When Donovan met with Zahn in New Orleans Zahn said he was still having headaches and problems from his head injury but could get no help from veterans' assistance because of the way concussions were classified by the military. Donovan thought to himself that if he had known then how Zahn's injury would affect him the rest of his life, he would have lied on Zahn's injury report.

Another decision that Donovan seemed to regret he'd made while in his military leadership position was his decision to bring Lester up on formal charges. He'd seen Lester's symptoms of drug abuse just as all the other members of the platoon had but hadn't done anything to help Lester. Remember the incident where Lester became so angry during a game of horseshoes. Gomez and Zahn had not admonished him but instead seemed to be trying to figure out what was going on with him. In fact, Zahn had suggested Donovan leave the area so he wouldn't see anything that would force him to bring Lester up on formal charges. Despite their attempts to protect their fellow platoon member, Donovan did wind up requesting a formal inventory of Lester's supplies.

Warfare / Military Operations

Since this novel shares its title with the name of a battle drill, it makes sense that a major theme of the story will be that of Military Operations in Iraq. Throughout the course of the novel the ever-changing threats to the American troops are described. Also included are descriptions of the ways in which the Americans tried to protect themselves and innocent Iraqi citizens from the terrorists.

Included in the novel are several memos where Donovan describes the way the Iraqis were changing the ways they attacked American troops so their attacks would be more fatal. Bombs were hidden in animal carcasses, potholes and even curbstones. Remember Dodge's brother and his friends watching videos of the Americans' security measures so they could find places where the Americans were most vulnerable.

To make matters worse, the battle was not a clear one between two distinct enemies. The Sunni and Shia fought against each other. Loyalists to Saddam fought against the Americans and tried to make them leave the country. Iraqi terrorists joined the army the Americans were trying to create to protect the Iraqi people. Instead of protecting the



innocent civilians, these terrorists disguised as soldiers used the opportunity to attack, hurt and kill the innocent.

In all this fighting and unrest, the Americans tried to keep the roads and towns safe and protect their own lives. To do so, there were rules as to how close together vehicles in a convoy should travel, how close an Iraqi person or vehicle could come to a convoy before it was considered a threat and how long a convoy could sit still before it became a sitting duck for terrorists. As the title of the novel implies, the fives and twenty fives remained of vital importance throughout the novel. The combat drill was one in which the troops would check a five foot radius around their vehicle from inside the vehicle for bombs anytime the convoy stopped. After this five foot radius was determined clear, the troops would check a twenty-five foot radius on foot.

Treatment of War Vets

The Treatment of War Veterans once they returned home from war is another important theme in the novel. Though most people seemed to respect these veterans, they also seemed to have little idea about the reality of war and didn't know who to interact with them. Along with those who were respectful there were also some who did not show respect to the veterans and tried to use their military service for profit.

Not only do the veterans of Donovan's platoon have trouble reintegrating into society because of what they have experienced in the war, they also have trouble dealing with the people they encounter when they return home. Lester, for instance, beats up his uncle when he hears his suggesting to his father that Lester was dishonorably discharged. Donovan has trouble hitting a happy medium between telling stories that offend and shock other people about his military service and seeming like a brooding vet who refuses to talk about what he's seen.

At one point in his schooling, Donovan encounters a professor who believes that since Donovan is attending school using the G. I. Bill that the students in the class were entitled to hear tales of his leadership abilities in the service. Another "friend" of Donovan's tried to use Donovan's background as a war hero as a way to entice his rich friends to invest money with the company for which he worked. This plan backfired as these rich friends had little idea about the realities of war and were put off by the stories that Donovan told them about his service.

Huck Finn

Although it may seem a strange literary companion to a novel about war in Iraq, the American novel "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is important in the novel. Many aspects of the novel parallel aspects of the life of Dodge, the Iraqi native who joined Donovan's platoon as an interpreter. In the end of the novel Dodge, like Huck, decides that freedom is more important than being right.



Dodge began studying the American novel when he was a student at the university in Baghdad. He wanted to be a scholar and was working on a thesis on this novel. Dodge was also obsessed with American pop culture and enjoyed the music the country produced. By reading and understanding Huck Finn, Dodge believed he could also understand the American people.

One of the most haunting parallels between Huck and Dodge was pointed out by Dodge's professor. He explained to Dodge that the reader had to understand the context of Huck Finn to understand its significance. As Tom and Huck were growing up, America was moving toward its own Civil War. Had Tom and Huck been real boys, they would probably have fought against each other in that war. The chilling reality of this statement is understood when the reader reaches the part of the novel where he understands that Mundhir and Hani, the two boys with whom Dodge grew up and with whom he was close friends, are fighting on the opposite side of the war from Dodge. It is, in fact, Americans stationed at the same base on which Dodge is stationed that killed Hani.

Another parallel between Huck and Dodge is Dodge's loyalty to his friends regardless of what side of the war those friends were fighting on. When he was at Tourist Town, Dodge refused to leave Hani and Mundhir even though he knew that they were in danger if they stayed there. Yet, when Dodge became a member of the American platoon, he was loyal to the friends he made there. Dodge saw Lester's troubles and tried to make him eat and reminded him of what he was supposed to be doing when they were out on patrol. Even though he was told not to, Dodge stepped up and helped the Marines carry bags of concrete even though he made himself sick in doing so. At the Iraqi Army base, Dodge was the first one trying to give the prisoners water even though the Iraqi soldiers were waving their guns in his face trying to keep him away.

Relationships

Relationships are a theme in this novel. Relationships discussed include those between the servicemen as they fought together in Iraq, and the changes in their relationships after they returned home. Even as the members of Donovan's platoon worked together in Iraq, their relationships seemed to grow stressed and deteriorate as they move closer to Ramadi, the climax of their deployment. Back at home, with the stress of war off their minds, the Marines try to reconnect with one another and mend their relationships.

Another aspect of relationships that is discussed during the novel are the changes in the relationships between the service members when they return home from service and their friends and family. Zahn is a perfect example of the way a relationship can change when a person returns home from overseas service. His friends had wanted to get together with him when he returned home from service, but they weren't prepared for the impact the war had made on him. By midway through their reunion, they were discussing ways they could dump Zahn off on Donovan because they were afraid he would embarrass them. The stress of a deployment can also change the relationship between a service member and his family. This is shown by Lester's relationship with

his father. Although it is apparent that Lester's father loved him, was proud of him and wanted to understand what had happened to Lester overseas, he didn't know how to break through to his son. It was not until Lester finally opened up to his father that their relationship began to heal.

Styles

Point of View

This novel is interesting as it is told from the first person point of view of three different narrators. The points of view include those of Lt. Donovan, a self-conscious officer who believes he is lacking in leadership skills; Lester, a green Navy corpsman who got addicted to drugs; and Dodge, an Iraqi citizen who was hired as an interpreter for the military. These three narrators give their own points of view of the war efforts in Iraq as well as their attempts to reintegrate into civilian society once they are finished with their deployment. There is one section of the novel, the one entitled “The Hero of Profane Two-Four” that is not told from the first person point of view. This section of the novel is told from the third person point of view from the viewpoint of the military interrogated the members of the platoon who participated in the events at Ramadi and drew up a report.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is significant because a good deal of military terminology is used in the course of the novel. Even the title of the novel “Fives and Twenty-fives” is the same as that of a combat drill. The author presents these military terms so that even a civilian reader can understand them. Also significant in the novel are the references to Huckleberry Finn as well as American pop music.

The author uses a good deal of comparison and contrasting description when describing the things that happened to the platoon in Iraq. One of these instances in particular occurs when the platoon members go to the Iraqi subdivision to collect the barrels filled with chemicals. The danger and unfamiliarity of the situation is contrasted with the troops’ belief that the neighborhood is somewhat like one they might have grown up in America. The author again makes a point by using his strange habit of contrast when Donovan indicates he felt like he’d arrived early to a birthday party when he went to look at the situation they faced with the chemicals. Again, the idea of the fun and games of a birthday party is contrasted with the danger the troops face in dealing with the chemicals.

Structure

While the language of the novel is not necessarily complex, the structure is quite complex and can be confusing at times. The timeline is not linear but instead bounces back and forth between the present and the past. Each section of the novel is narrated by one of three characters. These sections generally begin with a bit of information from the present time, after the members of the platoon have returned from war. The narrator then takes the reader on a trip down memory lane by going back in time generally to the point in time when the three were serving together in Iraq. These flashbacks are not told

in any particular order so it can sometimes be difficult for the reader to determine where each section falls into the overall timeline.

The novel is divided into 59 sections. The sections aren't marked as chapters; they are titled only with the first several words of the text of that section. Also there is generally a short snippet consisting of some sort of military memo, a note one character has written to another character, or a short section of the novel "Huck Finn" and some of Dodge's analysis. A much longer section that is related to the short section in some way follows these short sections. The remainder of the novel is structured with a short section, related long section, short section, related long section and so forth.



Quotes

We're in the wilderness. The place without rules. I discovered it on the day when I knew for the first time, really understood, that a stranger was trying to kill me and nothing would change his mind. No words to save me. No police to call. And in the end, nothing between me and the dead man in the ditch but the will I had to put him there, to break his body into wet pieces without taking the time to wonder, what happened? Where'd that spark go? That soul? An animal doesn't think about that. It doesn't cross his mind.
-- Narrator (The Marine I Knew paragraph 66)

Importance: As Zahn fights with the college student in the bar, Donovan thinks about how he would not really call what he was seeing a fight. He compares what is happening to what he learned in Iraq when he realized he and his people were truly on their own against their enemies.

As if Ramadi were an experience shared between the two of us. As if it weren't much worse for him.

-- Narrator (The Marine I Knew paragraph 74)

Importance: The reader isn't aware at this point in the novel but it was at Ramadi that Zahn's girlfriend, Gomez, was badly injured when she was shot in the head. It is for this reason that Donovan thinks to himself that Ramadi was worse for Zahn than for him.

It's my fault, of course. When Zahn went down, we requested an urgent casualty evacuation, watched his temperature spike and his pulse slow subthirty. But it didn't count. He wasn't out for more than thirty seconds, and there weren't any holes, no blood. Just a concussion. So no Purple Heart. That was the rule back then. I didn't know it. I would've lied on the paperwork if I'd known.

-- Narrator (The Marine I Knew paragraph 105)

Importance: Donovan believes it was his fault that Zahn did not get a Purple Heart for his concussion. The concussion was not considered at that time to be a combat injury so it was not included in Zahn's medical file and he could not get veterans assistance for the medical problems he'd been having because of the head injury. Donovan thinks to himself that if he had known then that Zahn would have had so much trouble, he would have lied on his injury forms.

I don't think he ever understood what 'sent home' meant. He was just proud, I guess. Real proud.

-- Narrator (Lester Pleasant paragraph 35)

Importance: Lester believed it wasn't until after he'd come home and his uncle had talked to his father that his father realized that Lester had come home under less than positive circumstances.



Ten years after these boys met to scheme in caves, their civil war fell upon them. These boys, these Missouri boys, they would have cut each other's throats in that war. And the sides they would pick? This was determined in their youth, you see."

-- Professor Al-Rawi (These Boys, These Missouri Boys paragraph 16)

Importance: Kateb's (Dodge's) professor pointed out to him that the boys who were friends in Huckleberry Finn would become enemies in the country's civil war when they grew up. The story that Professor Al-Rawi foreshadowed what would happen to Kateb (Dodge) and his friends in the coming years.

Well, first of all, I led men and women. Not just men. And we don't call ourselves soldiers in the Marines. Soldiers are what you call people in the Army. But in any case, yes: I agree with Paige. Empathy is a good quality for a leader to have. Maybe essential, even, though I'm not sure I'd want to go that far."

-- Lt. Pete Donovan (Leadership Dynamics paragraph 33)

Importance: Donovan's response to his professor's snide comments about Donovan's leadership roles in the military partially sets the professor straight about some things he has wrong about the military as well as giving his support to Paige who believes leaders must be empathetic.

And I stood there, in front of those Marines. Right there, nineteen years old. Big ears, red hair, and a missing tooth. Two dozen Marines listened to me as I told them all the different ways and everything I'd do to save their lives if the time came for it.

-- Narrator (The Rule paragraph 34)

Importance: Although Lester was only a Navy corpsman, Gunny Stout had always let him tell the Marines what he could do to save their lives when the time came. Sadly, when Stout was injured, there was nothing that Lester could do to save him.

I knew what it was the second I laid eyes on it. A black curbstone, not set in concrete like the others. It was a different color black, too. More gray than black. And it looked new. No scuff marks.

-- Narrator (The Rule paragraph 124)

Importance: As soon as the differences in the curbstones were pointed out to Lester, he realized that stone was where the bomb that had killed Stout had been hidden. These stones will continue to be important in the novel as the source of the curbstones turned out to be Dodge's father and brother.

Battalion folded the bomb disposal team, sent Staff Sergeant Thompson home to learn how to walk again, and put me in Lieutenant Donovan's platoon.

-- Narrator (The Rule paragraph 129)

Importance: Lester thinks about how it was after Stout was killed that he came to be put in Donovan's platoon.



Even after covering my face, stuffing me into their Humvee, and taking me away from my friends at the lake, they treated me as though it had been my idea to come hide on their base at Ramadi. My elaborate trick.

-- Narrator (Dodge paragraph 19)

Importance: Dodge shares his sense of irony as well as his distaste for the Americans when he thinks about how the Americans made it appear he'd come with them willingly even though they had cuffed and kidnapped him from Haji's house near the lake.

The Americans, with all their guns, could not defend us from those bombs. They could not defend themselves. And who better than we Iraqis who rode willingly in the back of an American truck would our countrymen rather see turned to a bloody mess?

-- Narrator (Dodge paragraph 49)

Importance: Even though he was young, Dodge realized there was nothing the Americans could do to protect the Iraqi men who were riding in the back of their truck. He knew that because they were betraying their country by willingly serving as interpreters for the Americans, Iraqi bombers would be happy to do away with them.

I think of Paige and her speech about empathy. She might've been onto something with that, and I find myself wishing I'd put up a better fight on her behalf. It's what Major Leighton missed on the day of Gunny Stout's memorial. Empathy.

-- Narrator (Route Clearance paragraph 14)

Importance: Donovan puts Paige's comments about empathy in perspective when he thinks about Major Leighton's actions and behaviors on the day of Gunny Stout's memorial service. Gunny Stout had been the first Marine killed in action in the platoon. Instead of giving the squad or Donovan any empathy he had pushed them back into another mission telling Donovan that if they didn't go, the men would lose their courage.

It was a hundred meters away and difficult to assess with any detail through the flickering heat, but I found myself searching for some clue, some reason to hope that this pothole might be the first one without a buried artillery shell rigged to explode.

-- Narrator (Route Clearance paragraph 112)

Importance: On their first mission after Gunny Stout's death, Donovan hoped the first pothole they found would not have a bomb hidden in it with which they would have to deal. He knew, however, that probably wouldn't be the case.

It shouldn't take all kinds of science and a full goddamn minute of my life every time I step out this truck.

-- Narrator (Lizzy paragraph 6)

Importance: Even though Lester knew in his mind that there were no IEDs or bombs set to hurt him in America, he could not break out of the habit of examining each piece



of trash to determine if it contained a hidden explosive and checking the perimeter of his truck before getting into it.

I thought of Professor Al-Rawi, and the day I told him of my father's plan to flee west into Anbar. I would have to go with my father, I told my professor, not aware that I was crying, having only come to tell him that work on my thesis would have to be postponed.
-- Narrator (Ali, From Sadir City paragraph 82)

Importance: As Kateb (Dodge), Hani and Mundhir fled from Baghdad Kateb thought about the time he'd gone to his professor to tell him he had to leave his studies to go with his father. At that time Kateb's studies had been more important to him than anything. He had no interest in the war that was going on around him.

It is not your money we wanted. Had they killed you, you see, they would have left that safe house. We would have lost a customer.
-- Haji Fasil (Ali, From Sadir City paragraph 154)

Importance: It was after Haji, Abu, Hani, Mundhir and Kateb (Dodge) were on their way to Haji's farm that Haji told Kateb his act of saving the boys was purely personal as his customers would have had to leave town if they had killed Kateb and his friends.

These State Department guys are delivering it to the civil affairs guys in Fallujah, who are delivering it to the sheikhs west of Ramadi. Not enough local Sunnis joining the army, so the million dollars is a bribe to get their sons in uniform."
-- Lt. Pete Donovan (Nasr Wal Salam paragraph 47)

Importance: In this quote Donovan explained to the other men in his platoon why a million dollars in cash was being transported and why they had been called to work security for the transport.

His profits depended on merchants who could not mingle for fear of decapitation. He took that risk for them.
-- Narrator (Tourist Town paragraph 73)

Importance: In one of his sections of the novel Dodge describes how Haji got and kept his business. Haji marketed based on the fear of the people around him. He could make trades between people who were too scared to trade face to face but needed the supplies they could get from each other.

It's even worse, though, when I just sit there quietly and refuse to discuss the war at all. People get the impression that I'm the stereotypical brooding vet.
-- Narrator (Big Boy Rules Out Here paragraph 7)

Importance: Donovan thinks to himself that even as badly as people reacted to him when he talked about his experiences in the war that it was even worse when they tagged him as a stereotypical veteran when he refused to talk at all about what he had done in the war.



My medical bag was just as useless. Organized just right. Everything where I could get at it fast, and what did it matter? Nothing.

-- Narrator (A Box Where I Can Keep These Things paragraph 48)

Importance: After both Stout and Marceau were killed without Lester being able to do anything to help save them he began to wonder why he even kept his medical bag so neat and organized. He reasoned that the perfectly packed bag didn't matter as it hadn't helped anyone.

He tells us to block the entrances to the square so that Ben Ali's police will have to fight through with armor and make a scene for the Western news cameramen who are appearing, though choosing to remain inconspicuous and camouflaged by the crowd.

-- Narrator (All Smiles, All Friendship paragraph 4)

Importance: A university student directs the rioters in Tunisia to make a scene so the journalists would record Ben Ali's police fighting with the students. They hope the journalists will share their story with the Americans.

Always, I am speaking English on behalf of fools.

-- Narrator (All Smiles, All Friendship paragraph 7)

Importance: Kateb (Dodge) had hoped his studies at the university and learning of the English language would help him to have a different life from that of his father. Instead, he feels he was instead using his education to spread messages he didn't want to spread.

Haji Fasil dropped to his knees to finish the work of hiding the envelope and, when he rose to his feet, whispered, 'You and Hani. You have different fates. You must know this.'"

-- Haji Fasil (All Smiles, All Friendship paragraph 93)

Importance: Haji Fasil told Kateb (Dodge) that he did not need to destroy the letter that the American soldier had given him as it could be the key to Kateb's safety. Haji instead hid the letter so Kateb could get to it later if he needed it.

My father enjoyed Hani and would often say that he and I should have been born brothers. I always took this to mean that my father would have preferred Hani as his second son.

-- Narrator (The Second Son of Abu Muhammad paragraph 17)

Importance: Dodge admitted he felt as if his father had always seemed to prefer Hani, who was willing to humor the old man, and would have liked for Hani to be his son instead of Dodge.

Kateb, Kateb . . .' Professor Al-Rawi laughed. 'In the end, Huck must learn two very important lessons. First, that civilization is an illusion. Second, that the only authority is one's conscience.'"



-- Professor Al-Rawi (Abu Muhammad paragraph 69)

Importance: This quote was the professor's response to Kateb's (Dodge's) questions about the authority governing Huck's behavior in the American novel.

A project officer from the provincial reconstruction office will meet us at the site with trucks and local nationals to haul away the drums. All we have to do is secure the scene, remove the sealed drums from the pit, and transfer possession."

-- Major Leighton (The Brass Buttons paragraph 19)

Importance: Major Leighton's description of the mission he was giving Donovan and his men made it appear that the task would be relatively easy. The mission turned out to be completely different than it had been originally reported to be.

Through my clouded vision, I could see the Marines on security standing against a backdrop of houses not dissimilar from the ones in which they might have grown up, and they appeared to me as the children they had been just a few years earlier.

-- Narrator (The Brass Buttons paragraph 68)

Importance: As Donovan tried to recover from his exposure to the chemicals in the pool he imagined the Marines under his command as they might have been as children. The idea of these Marines as children made it even more shocking that someone would put their lives at risk by exposing them to the dangerous chemicals. Though Donovan did not think himself a leader, he showed that he did have leadership abilities as he refused to let the men be exposed to and possibly injured by the chemicals.

It's feeding on itself, this amateur hour before the big show, and starting to sound less like a controlled machine-gun range, and more like something worse.

-- Narrator (Overpressure paragraph 22)

Importance: The fireworks being set off on New Year's Eve remind Lester of gunfire giving him flashbacks to his time in the service.

Yes, I know. Men passed by here late last night. I saw them planting the bombs, Kateb."

-- Haji Fasil (The Triggermen paragraph 20)

Importance: As Dodge (Kateb) was trying to tell Haji that he and Abu Abdul had to leave the farm, Haji told Dodge that he already knew about the bombs that had been planted.

No. No, you see, the thing to do is stay. Let these things happen as God wills and try to survive the bullets when they come. Let some Americans die if they must, let them kill your brother and his people if they can, and we live until tomorrow, Kateb."

-- Haji Fasil (The Triggermen paragraph 24)

Importance: Haji tried to explain to Kateb (Dodge) that there was nothing to be gained by running away from his home. He encouraged Kateb to let the attack run its course



and hope that the bad people were the ones who got killed. In this case the bad people he pointed out were Kateb's father and brother.

Not until I felt the American tightening plastic cuffs onto my wrists did I begin to doubt. / They pulled me to my feet and I understood, for the first time, how good my father and brother had become at their war. The marines gave me a tour as they hauled me toward their Humvees.

-- Narrator (The Triggermen paragraph 48)

Importance: Kateb (Dodge) had believed that the Americans would somehow be able to stop the violence that was impending at Haji's farm. As he saw the destruction, Kateb realized how good his father, brother and others like him were at their business of war.

An outsider, observing the platoon without context, would have no problem spotting its leader.

-- Narrator (Unbecoming paragraph 73)

Importance: When Donovan walked up on the members of his platoon playing horseshoes, an activity Gomez had encouraged to let them have some down time, he knew who was really the leader of the men.

It was happiness, I realized. I couldn't remember the last time I'd been happy. The platoon, my Marines, had welcomed me. For the first time, invited me to join. In that moment, listening to them laugh and jeer, not standing apart from them or banished to my Humvee, I smiled.

-- Narrator (Unbecoming paragraph 99)

Importance: Donovan felt accepted by the members of platoon and accepted for the first time during Gomez's spontaneous game of horseshoes. The feeling did not last long as Lester became uncharacteristically angry when he missed his shot and the others mocked him.

Our next mission back out on the road, Major Leighton sent us into Ramadi.

-- Narrator (An Interpretation paragraph 10)

Importance: Just after Zahn had returned from the hospital and Dodge had returned from his week of leave, Major Leighton sent the platoon to Ramadi. It is this mission to which the action in the story has been building.

I am weak. And that is all. But I am not without a home. To be weak? To be scared and frail? This is to have a home. These people behind me are all very weak and all very scared. We are so easy to kill. President Ben Ali has made certain that we are all reminded of this. But to die here? Outside where it is cold? This would be to die at home. And few people are so lucky as to die at home."

-- Dodge (Few People Are So Lucky paragraph 13)

Importance: Although he didn't think he'd ever speak up for freedom, Dodge joined his

flatmates' protests. He, like Huck Finn, had realized that freedom was the most important asset a man could have.