

Green on Blue Study Guide

Green on Blue by Elliot Ackerman

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Plot Summary

Through a series of clever manipulations, American trained fighter Aziz became what he most despised in the novel “Green on Blue” by Elliot Ackerman. Aziz joined the Special Lashkar in hopes of getting revenge on the Taliban leader who had injured his brother, Ali, in a mortar attack. Aziz’s work in the military group also paid for Ali’s medical care. As Aziz became more and more wise to the deceitful and political nature of the war, he also became more entangled with the leaders of the various groups involved in the war. When he realized peace would never be reached with the selfish leaders in charge of the war, Aziz agreed to take over the place of a Taliban leader.

Aziz and his older brother Ali were left orphans with few options for a livelihood other than begging on the street after their parents were killed in an attack on their village. Years later, the two boys had found jobs in the city of Orgun as errand runners. A mortar attack on the bazaar at Orgun left Ali a cripple, blowing off one of his legs and his male organs. When Aziz searched for his brother in the hospital he was helped by a military leader, Taqbir, who recruited Aziz to the Special Lashkan. Aziz was promised good medical care for his brother in exchange for his service. He was also promised that he would get the chance to get revenge on Gazan, the man who had injured his brother. As a Pashto Aziz had been taught it was his obligation to get revenge on the man who had taken away his brother’s honor.

Once he began his training and fighting with the Special Lashkar, Aziz learned he was among a group of young men who had been promised the same opportunity for badal, or revenge, against Gazan. He slowly learned that Commander Sabir, the leader of the Special Lashkar, was paying Gazan and giving his men supplies to attack a village in which Sabir wanted to build an outpost. Sabir also commanded his forces to block the roads around that village keeping transports of food and supplies from getting to the people. Sabir would do what was necessary to keep the war going because it was profitable to him.

Meanwhile, Aziz accidentally shot a fellow squad member during a mission. Because it was feared the man’s brother, who was also a member of the Special Lashkar, would try to kill Aziz, Aziz was dismissed from that military group. In order to continue to fund his brother’s medical treatment, Aziz allowed Sabir to talk Aziz into working as an informant. Aziz was to get information on Atal, the leading elder in the village in which Sabir wanted to put his outpost, and relay it to Sabir. As their relationship deepened, Atal told Aziz he was trying to broker for peace between Gazan and the American, Mr. Jack, who worked on the same firebase as Sabir.

During a meeting between Atal, Gazan and Mr. Jack, Aziz realized Gazan was not looking for peace, but for the best monetary situation for himself. It was when he agreed to give information to the American about the actions of other Taliban groups in exchange for more money that Aziz shot Gazan, Mr. Jack and Atal. Believing he had learned from the mistakes of the prior leader of the Taliban group, Aziz agreed to be the leader of that group in the place of Gazan.



Part I: Chapter 1

Summary

Aziz agreed to fight with the Special Lashkar in exchange for his brother, Ali's, medical care after Ali was badly injured when the Taliban bombed a bazaar in the Afghan city of Orgun. Promised to be given the opportunity to get revenge for his brother's injury, Aziz eventually not only killed Gazan, the man responsible for Ali's injury, but also turned into the very person he wanted to kill.

In Chapter 1, Aziz remembers his first years living with his parents in the village of Sperkai, a village that had since been destroyed. Aziz's father had served under the Taliban. The village was attacked after he and his group returned home early and disobeyed orders to extort taxes. Ali and Aziz had been out collecting pine nuts. They watched as the living and dead villagers were shoved into a shipping container together. At their home, the house was burned and their parents gone. Ali and Aziz went to Orgun.

The boys begged for food in Orgun. When Aziz saw the pity in the eyes of the people in the streets, he wished his father were there to take revenge on the people who doubted the boys' honor. After two years of living like that the boys took shelter in a shipping container one night when it snowed. They saw claw marks inside the container. In the morning, Ali was sitting outside the container. He was wearing the silver ring set with a ruby that was their father's. He told Aziz he had found it in the container.

To continue making money, the boys pretended Aziz was a cripple until a grocer uncovered their scheme. Ali hit the grocer, Rafi Jan. When Hamza saw Ali defend his brother's honor, he gave the boys a job, which led to more work. In their fourth year away from home, the Americans came claiming they wanted to protect the Afghans from the Taliban who, in turn, claimed to be protecting the Afghans from the Americans. Meanwhile, Ali had earned enough money to send Aziz to madrasa.

One day, the day of Ashura, Aziz was returning from madrasa when the city was attacked. He went to the hospital to look for his brother. Unable to find him, he was taken to Taqbir who helped him find his brother who had lost his leg and male organs in the blast. Ali had been put in a tent outside the hospital; an orderly said it was the outpatient ward. Aziz went to Taqbir who gave Ali the ring that Aziz had been wearing and said he'd try to work something out to get Ali treated in the hospital. Taqbir agreed with the hospital supervisor that he would pay for Ali's treatments. In exchange Aziz was to fight with the Special Lashkar, a group of Afghans who fight against the Taliban. Because Ali was all the family Aziz had, Aziz agreed to the arrangement.



Analysis

The basis of the book is lined out in this first chapter. Aziz and Ali had been taught by their father that when a Pashtun man was offended it was important for him to take badal, or revenge, when his nang, or his honor, was challenged. The idea of nang and badal was very important to the people of Aziz and Ali's culture. It was so important to Aziz that he revenge his brother's injury that the soldier, Taqbir, was able to manipulate Aziz with the promise of getting him the opportunity to get this revenge for his brother. Another aspect by which Taqbir was able to manipulate Aziz was by his promise of good medical treatment for Ali. It was apparently a technique Taqbir used often to fill his ranks, as the hospital supervisor mentioned to Aziz that Taqbir was a friend to many people indicating that others had joined Taqbir's army to help their loved ones.

Aziz was easier to manipulate because he was homeless, jobless and his parents were dead. He had no one to take care of him, and no one to help supply care for his older brother. He was faced with the possibility that if he did not agree to fight against the Taliban, his brother would simply be left to die. As long as there was a promise that Ali would be kept alive and cared for, Aziz could be manipulated.

Also important in this section is the background the writer gives about the family. The boys' father had fought with the Taliban. Just after the group of soldiers with whom their father fought had refused to extort taxes and had gone home early, the village in which they lived was attacked. The living and the dead were put into a shipping container and hauled away. Ironically, Aziz and Ali take shelter in this same shipping container years later. They saw the claw marks where people tried to get out of the container. The item in the container that proved to Aziz and Ali that their parents were dead was the silver ruby ring Ali found in the container. They knew their father would never have left this ring voluntarily.

The ring was an important symbol in the family. When the boys were young, their father had told them he'd made the ring by stealing a ray of light from a radio tower near their home. The boys no longer believed their father's story but the ring had become a symbol of manhood. For years, Ali had pestered his father to allow him to have the ring. His father had told him that as long as he was immature enough to pester him about a ring, he was not mature enough to wear the ring. After his father's death when Ali found the ring, he had begun wearing it. After Ali was injured, Taqbir gave Aziz the ring. Although Taqbir probably did not realize the history and symbolism of the ring, his act of giving the ring to Aziz was symbolic of the passing of the manhood in the family from Ali to Aziz.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the circumstances under which Aziz and Ali grew up. How did their early life and the lessons they learned affect their lives once their parents were dead?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of the ring.

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Aziz will fight against the Taliban?

Vocabulary

prosperous, bazaar, vice, entrusted, defect, complexity, karez, irrigate, extort, madrassa, amid, receded, badal, obligation, nang, befriending, scaffolding, militants, somber, gurneys, sinewy, decrepit, reeking, assurance, resentment



Part I: Chapter 2

Summary

Aziz went to FOB (Forward Operating Base) Sharana. The guard at the gate told Aziz that Aziz did not look like a soldier. Aziz was shown to a holding area filled with soldiers where he waited for hours as an Afghan and an American called names of men who were flown out of the base. Finally, Aziz was left alone with Naseeb Ilyas, the supply commander for the base to which Aziz would be flown. Naseeb told Aziz it was an honor to fight for Commander Sabir. He also told Aziz he would be training through the winter to be ready for fighting in the spring.

When Aziz and Naseeb arrived at the base, there was no one there to instruct him where he should go. Naseeb pointed him in the direction of the barracks for the recruits. Before sunrise Aziz awoke and found the latrine. While in a stall, a blond American entered the latrine and washed his clothes in the sink. A mark on his shirt identified him as Jack. Another man, an Afghan, came into the room and began washing. This man, Issaq, had scars crisscrossing his back. After Mr. Jack left, Issaq discovered Aziz in the toilet stall. He ordered Aziz to wipe, then flush. Aziz did so and hurried back to the barracks.

Aziz described Issaq as a tyrant. The recruits' lives through the winter were repetitious with training. The men exercised, were forced to march and run behind Issaq as he rode on his motorbike. They were given old weapons with bent barrels with which to practice their shooting. Lunch was leftover bread and raw onions. The recruits were allowed to eat dinner with the real soldiers and got a much better meal. At the mess hall, they talked of a bombing in Orgun. They wondered what the response to this new attack would be as the Americans wanted Gazan stopped. Mr. Jack gave Commander Sabir the supplies and money he needed to go after Gazan. After dinner, the recruits went out for more training. One day in the spring the recruits returned from training to find they'd each been given a new uniform signifying they were now soldiers.

Analysis

Important in this chapter is the introduction of the theme of the politics of war. Aziz and his fellow recruits knew very little at this point about what their jobs would be in the Special Lashkar. They felt certain they would be instrumental in bringing an end to Gazan, a leader of a group of Taliban forces, especially since Gazan and his followers had orchestrated another attack on Orgun. They'd learned that the Americans — who are represented by Mr. Jack — wanted Gazan stopped. These Americans were willing to give Commander Sabir as much money and supplies as he needed to ensure that Gazan could be gotten rid of.



Notice that when Aziz first arrived at FOB Sharana the guard at the gate indicated Aziz did not look like a soldier. At that time, Aziz was completely naive of the military process and didn't fit the typical description of a soldier. He also didn't have the violent mindset of a soldier. Just as the hospital supervisor told Aziz that Taqbir had many friends, so did Naseeb Ilyas, the supply officer for Commander Sabir's firebase. It appeared Taqbir preyed upon young men whom he could manipulate into joining the Special Lashkar. With the fresh bombing in Orgun, there would plenty more vulnerable young men and boys to fill the ranks of these forces.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean that Aziz did not go to visit his brother before he reported for his military duty?

Discussion Question 2

What did Aziz believe that a rifle and uniform said about a soldier?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that the Americans were funding the efforts of the Special Lashkar?

Vocabulary

departed, perimeter, concertina, serpentine, hydraulic, barracks, dwarfish, anonymity, feral, tormentor, tyrants, solidarity, confiscated, shackle, petrified, binjo, chassis, disfigured, mangled



Part 2: Chapter 3

Summary

Aziz and the rest of the group lined up in formation for their final inspection. Commander Sabir, with his mangled lower lip, told Mortaza he would soon have the revenge for the pain Gazan had brought to his family. He pointed out Qiam and Tawas, who had been found destitute by Taqir, and said those two now had a family. Commander Sabir spoke of each of the recruits in turn telling the whole group that Aziz's brother, Ali, was a legless cripple because of Gazan. He privately told Aziz that Ali was fine and that Taqbir had recently visited him.

The recruits were assigned to one of two squads. Aziz was assigned to the Tomahawk group. Commander Sabir announced he was the leader of the Tomahawks while Bator would lead the Comanches. The recruits were then given their gear and shown to their new barracks. In the barracks, Yar, the second in command, told the recruits their first mission would be to help Commander Sabir arrange a shura that he hoped to have in Gomal to talk about an outpost with the town leaders. They planed to travel there using a smugglers' route so the spingaris weren't warned Sabir was coming.

Analysis

It is in this chapter of the book that Aziz and the recruits who joined the Special Lashkar at about the same time as he were graduated to fighting soldiers. Also during this time they were given their first assignment, one that was described as being hard, but good.

One of the aspects of this chapter that stands out is that even as Commander Sabir had already gotten his recruits "signed up" for service and trained, he took the opportunity to remind them where they'd been when they joined the service. This act of reminding the new soldiers from where they came may be a way for the military leaders to keep their hold on the young men. They manipulated them by reminding them how bad circumstances were before they joined up. This reminder echoes with the idea that if they were to flee from service, their circumstances would be as bad as before or worse.

Commander Sabir's words to Aziz not only reminded him why he was fighting, but also made him wonder how Sabir knew his circumstances. He was embarrassed to hear his brother's condition broadcast in front of his fellow soldiers even though none of them knew his brother. Since he had said nothing to anyone about why he'd joined the Special Lashkar or what had happened to his brother, he wondered how Sabir knew the details of what had happened. Sabir later told Aziz in a more private way that Taqbir had visited Ali recently and that Ali was doing well.

Notice also that as Sabir walked his ranks of new troops, he told them they were a family. Family ties were apparently very important to the Afghans. Consider how Aziz had put himself into a dangerous condition to see that his brother was taken care of



well. Sabir hoped the troops would protect and take care of one another just as they would another member of their family.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Commander Sabir not want the Spingaris to know he was coming to arrange a shura? What did he think surprising them with the meeting would accomplish?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the Special Lashkar commander made a point of reminding each of the recruits where they had been before they were recruited for service? What purpose did these reminders serve?

Discussion Question 3

Why did it embarrass Aziz to have his brother's condition broadcast to the other soldiers?

Vocabulary

inspection, sinew, destitute, snarl, formation



Part 2: Chapter 4

Summary

Aziz's job on the mission was to man the machine gun in the bed of one of the six Toyota HiLuxes that made up their convoy. In the late afternoon, one of the drivers did not follow the route through a water filled ravine that Sabir's vehicle had taken. As a result, the truck got stuck. Although two trucks tried to pull out the stranded truck, they were not able to do so. Sabir's truck returned and the commander walked up the window of the truck, still stuck in the mud, and punched the driver, breaking his nose. Sabir threw the driver out of the truck out of the driver's seat into the water. Using a push from his own truck as well as the pull from the pair of trucks, the stuck truck was freed. Before getting back into his truck, Sabir went to the driver he'd just hit and patted him on the shoulder.

While Aziz was on night watch, Yar kept him company for a while. Yar told Aziz that he trusted Sabir with his life, then went on to tell Aziz that Sabir's brother had once been the commander of the Special Lashkar. The Americans had given Sabir's brother, whom they called James, money to start the group. James was killed in an ambush led by a man named Hafez. After James was killed, Sabir had joined the Special Lashkar in order to support his family. Sabir had shown promise and was quickly promoted to team leader. However, he'd disappeared for about a month from the base. When he returned, he had the injury to his face. It was rumored among the troops at that time that Sabir had taken his revenge on Hafez. After he returned to the base, Sabir was named commander.

Once they arrived in Gomal, Mortaza and Tawas discussed the plight of the boys who came to them begging for food. Tawas said he believed the boys who didn't even understand their own struggle were poor in the worst of ways. Mortaza argued they didn't want to work or better themselves. He took that stand that it was from charity that the people needed to be freed.

Mortaza and Aziz were sent to wake the spingaris and tell them they were to report to the bazaar for the shura in one hour. At the last house, they met Atal. He invited them in and offered them breakfast. He hollered for his niece, Fareeda, to bring breakfast. While they were waiting, Mortaza told Atal about the shura but Atal apologized, saying he would be unable to attend. A girl came from the kitchen holding a tray above her head with her left arm. Aziz noted the girl was beautiful but that her right hand was grotesquely deformed and her right arm appeared useless. After Fareeda left the room, Mortaza continued to push Atal to attend the shura. After Aziz told Mortaza he'd said enough, Atal explained he knew the matter that would be discussed and that Sabir already knew his stance on it.

When they walk away from the house, Aziz noticed smoke rising and went to see what was causing it. Fareeda was lying on a mat, smoking opium to relieve the pain from her



arm. She told Aziz she had no family. Atal had taken guardianship of her when her father, who was Atal's friend, was been killed. She told him that she had little pain with her arm when she had her medicine. Aziz fought the desire to take Fareeda back to the clinic at the firebase or the hospital where Ali was so she could be given the medicine to cure her.

When Aziz returned to the bazaar, Haji Jan, the oldest of the village elders, was trying to talk to Yar one-on-one but Yar directed him to the group of spingaris. When Issaq learned that Atal had refused the shura. Issaq suggested the man was probably back at the firebase selling Gomal's secrets to the American. In the shura, Sabir asked the village leaders for permission for an outpost to be built in Gomal to protect the villagers from Gazan. Mumtaz was first to speak saying that Gazan only attacked Gomal when the Special Lashkar was there. The war would never stop, he was afraid, if the outpost were built. Haji Jan spoke next. He agreed with Mumtaz and stated that if they let Sabir, who was ruled by the American's money, guard their village, they'd be ruled by the American as well. The men agreed they had no part in the war between Gazan and Sabir. They did not want to take sides. When Sabir mentioned the wealth that would be brought to the village by the outpost, many of the elders left.

On the way back to the firebase, another of the trucks got stuck. Aziz was told to be ready for attacks. As they waited, they hear four explosions and saw smoke from the direction of Gomal. A rocket also exploded right in front of the convoy. The men began climbing the wall of the mountain that lined the road as the ambushers were positioned above them. Issaq and Yar boosted Aziz high enough he could shoot his machine gun over the ledge of the canyon covering Mortaza's final run up the canyon. Issaq, Yar and Aziz followed. Aziz shot until he heard a call to cease fire. A dead man, a member of Gazan's forces, was in a trench. Along with some other supplies, he had a bag of rice marked USAID. The man's rifle was bent. Issaq agreed the rifles were familiar. The men agreed that they believed Gomal was being attacked as retribution by Gazan because of the shura they'd held just hours prior.

Analysis

The refusal of the elders, or spingaris, to allow the Special Lashkar to build an outpost near the village of Gomal is a turning point in the novel. Things began going downhill for the villagers right away as Gazan's men started shooting rockets at the village just after the Special Lashkar left. Notice that both Mumtaz and Haji Jan said the village had not been threatened by Gazan. They did not see the need for an outpost and believed it would only draw trouble to their town. The soldiers with Aziz interpret the attack on Gomal as punishment for the city even allowing the shura to take place. Keep in mind at the same time that some suspicion had centered on Atal and the important business that kept him from attending the shura. Issaq suggested the man was going to their firebase to tell Mr. Jack the secrets of his village in exchange for money. It was strange that Atal was the only person who was known to have been out of the village at the time that he could have warned either the American or Gazan's forces about the shura taking place. Unless it was leaked by someone with the Special Lashkar before they left for



their mission, no one else would have had the information about the shura to give to Gazan to get them organized for an attack on Gomal that quickly.

Notice also the supplies found with the lone gunman who was shooting at the Special Lashkar on their way back to the firebase. Even though the men were relatively close range and he had the advantage over them, literally being above them, he didn't manage to hit any of the men or their equipment. The leaders were disturbed when they discovered the man had a bag of rice marked USAID, which they believed came from their supplies. They also admitted the damaged, bent gun the man was shooting with looked familiar.

Changing the topic from fighting to hospitality, another important law of the Pashtunwali is of importance in this section of the novel. These Pashtunwali place a high level of importance on hospitality as well as the proper behavior for a meelma, or guest. Unfortunately these rules of behavior are very different for the Afghans once they became soldiers. Tawas was disturbed when Aziz and Mortaza took their guns and buckled on their helmets when they prepared to go notify the spingaris of the shura. Although Tawas argued that was not how guests were to behave, Yar reminded him that Aziz and Mortaza were not coming as guests but as soldiers. Similarly, when the two soldiers went to Atal's home, he was the only one who invited them inside. Atal believed in the importance of being hospitable. Notice that Aziz began to respond in the common Afghan way of responding to an invitation inside by taking off his shoes but a look from Mortaza stopped him.

Although Aziz had seemed like one who wanted to stay behind the scenes, he surprised Atal when he spoke up about Mortaza's continued badgering of Atal about the shura. When Aziz told Mortaza he'd said enough, Atal looked up at Aziz, surprised at his forcefulness. Notice also Aziz's interest in Atal's "niece." He was fascinated by her not only because she was beautiful but also because she was damaged. Aziz wished he could take her someplace that could cure her disease, and that he could work to take care of her, just as he worked to care for his brother.

Sabir's character is expanded upon in this section of the novel. He appeared to be cruel one minute and kind the next. This was displayed by his act of breaking the nose of the man who got his HiLux stuck in the mud. After the situation was over and truck was freed, Sabir patted the man on the back like they were old friends. Sabir's suspicious nature came out when he was overseeing the shura. When the elders of the village mentioned they'd shown Gazan's men hospitality just as they'd shown hospitality to the Special Lashkar, Sabir at once believed the people of Gomar were working with Gazan. Also during this section of the novel Aziz learned how Sabir's lip was injured, leaving him with his deformity and how Sabir had become the leader of the Special Lashkar. Sabir's lip was injured when he sought badal from Hafez, the man who had killed Sabir's brother James in an ambush of the Special Lashkar. When he'd returned from his quest for badal, the position of commander had been given to Sabir.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of the Special Lashkar squads being named after American Indian tribes; why was this an insult to the Afghans?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe Gomal was being attacked by Gazan because of the shura or do you think something more sinister was happening?

Discussion Question 3

What, if anything, strikes you as strange about the ambush that the Special Lashkan forces faced on their way home? Use examples from the book to support your answer.

Vocabulary

motorcade, traversed, ambushed, brine, engorged, deformity, shura, deceit, paunch, strafe, depress, canted, parapet

Part 2: Chapter 5

Summary

A few days after the troops returned from their trip to Gomal, Aziz was surprised to see both Mr. Jack and Atal's vehicles parked at the firebase as he walked to the mess hall. Inside the hall, Naseeb was being made to stand watch over the line for six hours a day as punishment for the rice found in Gazan hands. He also had a bruise on his jawbone from Sabir. After eating, Aziz helped his squad members repair and maintain their vehicles. The men talked about Atal while they worked but Yar discouraged their talk saying that as long as their bellies were full, what others did was none of their business.

In the late afternoon, Yar told the men they'd done enough work for the day. Because Aziz was late to start work, he was left cleaning up. As Aziz gathered the tools, he saw Atal walking across the compound. He was followed by Fareeda and Haji Jan. Atal recognized Aziz and spoke to him. Haji Jan told Aziz that Sabir and men like him were responsible for all the pain in the world. Atal followed up by saying their village was no longer safe. Aziz again felt desire for Fareeda. As he opened her door to her vehicle, he brushed against her bad arm. She didn't feel the touch and he felt he'd stolen it from her.

Aziz bathed, then walked to the mess hall. There were rumors that since the outpost would not be built, the soldiers would be setting up checkpoints along the north road to starve the villagers. Yar agreed there would be checkpoints but their purpose would be to find who was stealing their supplies. When Aziz suggested Atal might have visited the firebase to talk about the checkpoints, Yar told him that Atal was no business of theirs. He did, however, tell the men that Atal was a dog who wanted only money and Mr. Jack was his handler.

After dinner, Aziz sat on a picnic table outside the mess hall. He thought of the way that he, the hospital supervisor who looked after Ali, and Atal were all motivated by money. He made himself feel better by telling himself that the truly corrupt had unreliable motivations. He believed there was nothing more reliable than money. As he thought, Issaq and Batoor left Sabir's shack. Sabir told them he wanted to do checkpoints running in two days. When Mr. Jack walked up to Sabir, Issaq and Batoor walked away. Mr. Jack told Sabir he wanted to drink with him. Sabir felt he'd been insulted by Atal's visit and told Mr. Jack so. He continued his argument saying that Atal was not one with whom they needed to be involved. The following morning, Mr. Jack's HiLux was gone.

Analysis

The theme of the political nature of war is developed in this section of the novel. Special Lashkar has returned from unsuccessful negotiations with the elders of the village of Gomal. The members of the squad wondered about what they'd seen and heard as they



worked on their vehicles but Yar insisted that it was not their responsibility to question anything done by Sabir or to worry about what Atal might be up to.

Getting more political, the physical war being fought was between the Taliban and the Afghans. While these might be the obvious “sides” of the war, there seems to be much more going on than just that war. First, the Americans were giving the Afghans money and supplies with which to fight the Taliban. This money, obviously, was going to support groups like the Special Lashkar. However, some of the supplies intended for the Special Lashkar were ending up in the hands of the Taliban. No one seemed to have any idea how this might be happening. Additionally, the villagers did not want to take sides with either the Special Lashkar or Gazan and his men. Meanwhile, the men had overheard Issaq saying that Atal was making a profit from the war by selling the secrets of his village to Mr. Jack. A few days after the shura in Gomal both Mr. Jack and Atal visited the firebase at the same time. Sabir was offended by Atal and angry that Mr. Jack would bring him to talk. Even the usually silent Yar mentions that men like Atal are dogs who fight only for money. He said that Mr. Jack was Atal’s handler.

It was during a conversation between Mr. Jack and Sabir upon which Aziz was eavesdropping that the phrase that gives this book its title was first mentioned. A green on blue killing is an instance where an Afghan trained by Americans using American money and supplies, killed an American. In Sabir’s mention of this term, he indicated there were people who played one side against the other, causing these killings to happen. Atal was one of the men that Sabir included in the players.

Notice also that Aziz compared himself to Atal after he heard the man criticized for fighting for money. As he considered his condition, Aziz believed he fought for money as well, but he fought for the money that would be used to keep his brother alive. If Atal was considered corrupt because he was motivated by money, Aziz wondered if that meant he was corrupt as well. Aziz justified the idea as he thought that both he and Atal put their money they earned through the war to good use, with Aziz taking care of his brother while Atal took care of Fareeda.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the politics of this war as they have been presented up to this point. What do you think Atal’s role was in what was happening? What was Mr. Jack’s?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe Aziz was corrupt for fighting for money to help his brother? Do you suspect there might be some corruptness in what Atal was doing? What was the difference between Atal and Aziz?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the character of Yar. Why did he not allow his troops to discuss things outside their own business? Do you think this was a good practice or a bad one?

Vocabulary

amid, chassis, abide, cleaved, shroud, cleft, feud, negotiation, menace



Part 2: Chapter 6

Summary

Checkpoints around Gomal were set up the following day. One day while guarding a smuggler's path Aziz stopped a man carrying a coffin on the back of his motorbike. Aziz felt pity for the man as he helped him load the coffin containing a young boy back onto the bike. Even Yar seemed to soften when he saw the face of the young boy through the glass pane in the coffin. The man explained the boy had been stealing pine nuts from another village because there was no food in Gomal. Yar asked him to take badal by coming and fighting with them. The man said he saw no difference in Gazan or the Special Lashkar as the Special Lashkar had put the people of the village in the position that made his nephew have to steal for food.

Near the end of the day, two motorbikes carrying four men approached. Yar shouted to the men to lie down on the ground. They were handcuffed and questioned. They claimed to be musicians looking for work but they had no instruments so the soldiers were skeptical of their story. Aziz believed Yar was overreacting when he spat onto the ground then kicked the wet glob into the face of one of the men. After Yar finished his humiliation of the men, he had them loaded into the back of the truck. Aziz was assigned to watch them. Knowing one of the men was uncomfortable because of his handcuffs, Aziz cut him free.

Analysis

One important thing to notice in this section is that as a young soldier, Aziz still had much more humanity than the older soldiers in his squad. He had not yet begun to see every person he met as a potential enemy. He felt immediate and complete pity for the man whose nephew had been killed. Yar softened when he saw the man's dilemma but was still more interested in trying to recruit the man as a soldier for the Special Lashkar than he was in giving him sympathy. Although the next group of men who traveled the smugglers' path had no legitimate reason for being there, they also didn't appear to hold any danger for the Afghans. Even so, Yar treated the men cruelly. He handcuffed and questioned them, and then hit them and spat in their faces when their answers didn't match what he wanted to hear. Aziz was shamed because of the way Yar was treating the men.

Discussion Question 1

How did Yar punish the soldiers who did not do according to his wishes? How did he reward those who acted as he wanted them to act?



Discussion Question 2

Consider Yar's brutality toward the men who they stopped on the trail. He seemed most sympathetic for the man who was transporting the body of his nephew but showed only cruelty to the other four men whom he stopped. Do you think he acted as he should? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Consider the line of thinking of the man whose nephew had been killed. Do you think his best revenge was to fight with neither the Taliban or the Special Lashkar? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

interrogate, lever, inconspicuous, defiantly, absurdly, sniveled

Part 2: Chapter 7

Summary

Before they entered the gate of the firebase, Aziz put a new set of handcuffs on the prisoner he'd set free. The man gave him a dirty look. After the men were put in a locked hut, Aziz reminded himself he was a soldier and tried to forget them. Aziz and the other soldiers had begun to realize that if Commander Sabir got his outpost, the troops would never get badal against Gazan as they'd been promised. Sabir wanted the outpost for the control it would give him over a large portion of the region but if they killed Gazan and his men, the villagers would want the outpost shut down. The outpost would also force the Americans to give the Afghanistan people more money to run operations. Sabir was pilfering this money and would become richer. Aziz breaks into his story from the present and says that he knows now that the war was a racket. Yar told about the adventure with the motorbike riders at breakfast, making Tawas out as a hero. Aziz finished breakfast and left the mess hall as quickly as he could. He was afraid he would absorb the morals of Sabir and the way of life at the firebase.

During the day, Issaq took his troops to some abandoned huts by the range where they could practice raids. One morning during a day off, Aziz was sitting on a picnic table and saw Taqbir walk by. Aziz ran to him, asking how his brother was. Taqbir didn't seem to know him at first and had to refer to an envelope of notes and pictures. After confirming Ali's injuries, Taqbir handed Aziz a picture of his brother. Taqbir said Ali was well and asked about him often. The report seemed rehearsed. In the picture, Aziz believed it appeared his brother was looking at a ghost just out of range of the camera.

Aziz had been dozing, lulled to sleep by the singing of a bird captured by Tawas when he was woken by a voice yelling for Sabir. The men ran from the barracks. Sabir was also running from his quarters. The man at the gate was Atal. His shirt was smeared with blood. Haji Jan had been injured in an attack on the village. He was taken into the clinic. As Atal moved toward Sabir, Fareeda ran to help him. Aziz was ordered to help them but Atal refused his help. Aziz was ordered by Sabir to bring tea to his quarters for Atal. While he was in Sabir's quarters Aziz heard Atal tell Sabir that Sabir and Gazan had gone too far. Atal was highly upset that his house had been struck and Haji Jan injured. Aziz noticed Sabir had to fight back a smile. Sabir turned his attention to Fareeda and her deformed arm hinting that the medicine they get from the American must be very expensive. He indicated that Atal was influential in his village and could convince the men to allow an outpost there. Atal argued with Sabir describing him as the disease that troubled his village. Sabir told Atal it was time to make a choice between him and Gazan.

Issaq ran into Sabir's room noticing only in the nick of time that Atal and Fareeda were there. He shook his head at Sabir. Atal saw the nod and knew that Haji Jan was dead. He asked leave to go and bury him. Atal did allow Aziz and Fareeda to help him to the clinic to be checked out. Aziz waited outside with Fareeda while Atal was treated.



Fareeda knew trouble was coming in their village as her uncle was now the most important of the spingaris with Haji Jan dead. It would be hard for him because Sabir would want him to support the outpost while the villagers would want badal for the death of Haji Jan. When Aziz told Fareeda she should not talk about fighting because she was a girl, she told him fighting was her whole life as she fought to keep her disease from consuming her. She was tired and laid down on the single bench. Aziz sat in the dirt beside her.

Analysis

Aziz was offended when the prisoner whom he'd cut the cuffs from gave him a dirty look when he put them back on once they reached the firebase. Aziz felt the man should have been more appreciative that he took them off and let him travel in semi comfort. Notice that Aziz has to remind himself that he was a soldier. It seemed to be his way of justifying the way he was being forced to act. When he heard Yar talking about the way they'd taken the four men prisoner, however, Aziz had to leave the mess hall because he was unhappy about the way that Yar was telling the story and making Tawas out to be a hero. Note Aziz's fear that by being around the men their morals would rub off on him.

Interesting also in this section of the novel was Aziz's discussion with Fareeda. Aziz was beginning to create an image in his mind what a soldier was. He was surprised when Fareeda referred to herself as a soldier. Fareeda argued that she fought with her disease just as much as a soldier did.

Significant in this section of the novel is the death of Haji Jan. Atal brought the elder, who had been injured in a mortar attack, to the firebase for treatment. He confronted Sabir, telling him that Sabir and Gazan had gone too far when they bombed his village. This confrontation between Atal and Sabir added to the theme of the politics of war as Aziz noticed that Sabir was happy about the distress he'd brought to Atal and the injury to Haji Jan. It seemed to be his retaliation for the elders deciding against the outpost. Notice also that while Atal accused Sabir of working in conjunction with Gazan, Sabir never made any indication that the accusation was correct.

Also important in this section is Aziz's encounter with Taqbir. Even after all of the comments he had heard indicating that Taqbir was responsible for recruiting numerous boys in Aziz's position to the Special Lashkar, Aziz still seemed to believe Taqbir should remember him. When Taqbir did bring to mind who Aziz was and with which patient he was associated he gave Aziz a picture of his brother in the hospital. This picture was important to Aziz because it was a physical reminder of his brother and his condition. Aziz kept this photo between his chest and the steel plate of his body armor during his remaining missions.



Discussion Question 1

Why did Aziz not want to be around the men in the mess hall when they were bragging about their conquest over the men on the smugglers' path? Do you think it is possible to "catch" another person's morals?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of the death of Haji Jan.

Discussion Question 3

There were two pets included in this novel. The first was Sabir's goldfish Omar, the second is the magpie that Tawas had caught. What was the significance of these animals? Why do you think the author included them in the novel?

Vocabulary

defiance, vulnerability, immense, vigil, departure



Part 2: Chapter 8

Summary

After Atal left the firebase, Aziz and Mortaza went to their barrack instead of to dinner. Mortaza told Aziz he'd joined the Special Lashkar because of the foolishness of the elders of his village, somewhat like the foolishness of Haji Jan. Their town had been offered protection in exchange for extra taxes but the elders of the town had chosen not to choose. Their town was hit by mortars and their house destroyed. Mortaza's mother was dug out from the rubble. She died before Mortaza was able to pull his sister from a tree into which she had been blown. The elders refused to take a side, even after the violence done to their village. Mortaza had joined the Special Lashka because they promised badal, which the elders would not do. Mortaza then asked Aziz if he thought their desire for badal had been what killed Haji Jan. Aziz answered that he believed it was Haji Jan's refusal to take a side that killed him.

Aziz woke several hours later. On his way to the latrine, he was stopped by Commander Sabir. Sabir was drunk. He made a motion as if to punch Aziz but then stopped and played with his thumb between his fingers, making himself laugh. Sabir motioned for Aziz to sit beside him and then gave him a paper cup of whiskey. He asked Sabir if they would ever get a chance to get badal on Gazan. Sabir instructed Aziz to ask those who had gotten the badal they desired if they had gotten the peace for which they'd hoped. He pointed out that many of those men were still fighting.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, the reader learns that tragedies like the one that took place in Gomal were not uncommon in Afghanistan. The village from which Mortaza had come had also been offered protection but the village elders had refused to take it. Notice in his discussion with Aziz about what had happened that Mortaza indicated promises had been made to the elders that he felt could not have been kept. He also indicated different sides had been played against the others in an attempt to convince the elders to choose a side. Because the elders did not choose a side, just as Haji Jan and his followers would not choose, they were bombed.

Also in this chapter, the reader learns more about Commander Sabir. Remember that Sabir had gone out and gotten his badal against Hafez. He'd been wounded in the process. Instead of leaving the military and seeking a peaceful life, he continued to fight. The badal was not enough. Sabir tried to convince Aziz that even if he and the troops were allowed to get the badal they wanted, they would still not achieve the peace or the full life for which they hoped.



Discussion Question 1

Do you think there was any single person to blame for Haji Jan's death or was it caused by the acts of many people? Support your answer with examples from the book.

Discussion Question 2

How does Sabir try to help Aziz understand that even after he got badal on Gazan and his men, he still would not have the life or the peace for which he wished?

Discussion Question 3

Why has Mortaza joined the Special Lashka? How was his story similar to Aziz's? How was it different?

Vocabulary

futility, latrine, callused, sieved, writhed



Part 2: Chapter 9

Summary

After breakfast, Yar waved Aziz, Mortaza and Tawas to him. He told them that Sabir knew where Gazan was and that he had decided to launch a raid against him. As they worked on their HiLux, Tawas was happy about their mission that night. He believed he would be able to see life fresh once Gazan was dead. When Sabir finally came to tell the soldiers their orders, they'd been waiting most of the day. They were to attack a madrassa in which Sabir had gotten information that Gazan would be meeting with the elders from Gomal.

They left for their mission in darkness, not even turning on flashlights. Aziz fell when he got into the bed of a truck, knocking the flashlight off that he had bolted to his gun. Before they left, Yar ran back to the truck in which Aziz was to ride. Aziz was told he was to cover the back door of the madrassa and shoot anyone who ran from it. The darkness and mud made it hard for Aziz to see and run as quickly as Yar wanted him to. He arrived at the back door in time to see one figure run but was unable to shoot. In position, Aziz felt for his flashlight but it was not there. Another dark blur came from the door and he shot at it three times.

Finally, he heard Yar's voice calling for Aziz to help him. Aziz had shot Tawas. Aziz believed Yar was crying when he asked what had happened. Sabir joined them and told Aziz to load the body in the back of the truck. In the courtyard two men were being searched. Atal's HiLux was there as well as a binjo loaded with bags of USAID rice. After Aziz had loaded the body into the truck he thought about sitting in Tawas' spot in the cab. He decided better and sat in his usual spot in the bed.

Analysis

This chapter marks a turning point in the novel for Aziz. Mistakes had led Aziz to shoot Tawas. First, he had knocked the flashlight from his gun and was unable to see who he was shooting at. Second, he had been ordered to shoot anyone who came through the back door. He had assumed no friendly forces would be leaving through that door. Now, according to the laws of the Pashtunwali Qiam would be seeking to avenge Tawas' death.

Remember that during the shura Sabir had accused the elders of Gomal of working with Gazan when the elders said they offered hospitality to Gazan and his men just as they offered hospitality to the Special Lashkar troops. Sabir continued to believe that the elders of Gomal were working with Gazan even though the village had been bombed, supposedly by Gazan and his men, and their most influential elder killed. When Atal's HiLux was found on the compound along with a truck full of USAID rice, it seemed that Sabir's suspicions might be correct. After all, Atal had been left as the most influential



elder after the death of Haji Jan. Remember, however, that Atal seemed not to be working for any particular group but perhaps only for himself. Since no members of Gazan's men were found at the madrassa, the reader has to wonder why Atal might have been there. While it could be argued that the first dark figure seen by Aziz running away from the madrassa could have been Gazan or his representative, it could also have been Atal running away.

The theme of the importance of family and fighting for family is strengthened in this section of the novel as the relationship between Tawas and Qiam was a focus in the chapter. The brothers had been assigned in an earlier chapter to two different squads, so Tawas would be involved in the actual fighting while Qiam would be waiting outside. Because the other members of the Special Lashkar understood and respected the relationship between the brothers, they allowed them a moment alone in the truck to talk before they were split up in the fight. As Aziz thought about the closeness between the two brothers he thought how he would be alone if it weren't for his brother, Ali. It was with this tone set that the troops entered the battle in which Tawas was killed. Even as Aziz regretted his own actions, he sympathized with Qiam because he understood the tie of brotherly love especially when a brother was all one had left of one's family.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Tawas' attitude about the coming raid with Aziz's attitude.

Discussion Question 2

What does it mean for Aziz that he had killed Tawas?

Discussion Question 3

Who do you think it was who escaped from the madrassa before Aziz was in position to shoot?

Vocabulary

conspiracy, cordon, attuned, penetrate, unspooled, cumbersome, conspired, ashen, permanence



Part 3: Chapter 10

Summary

When he returned to the firebase, Aziz was locked that night into Naseeb's hut. Commander Sabir came in the morning. When Aziz tried to defend himself by telling Sabir no one was supposed to come out the back door Sabir hit him knocking him to the floor. Sabir helped him up and told him Qiam had been sent north with Tawas' body. Aziz must be gone before Qiam returned. Sabir told Aziz he had a proposal for Aziz's future. Sabir told Aziz that he believed it was Atal who was stealing from their base and giving the supplies to Gazan and his men. He wanted Aziz to work as a spy on Atal. The money Aziz earned from his spying would be used to continue to take care of Ali. Aziz knew it was the only choice he had. He was given civilian clothes and was told to memorize a cell phone number he would use to call Sabir with information.

Aziz began his trek to Gomal on foot. He tried to hitch a ride but was denied until he stopped Mumtaz on his motorbike. Mumtaz not only gave Aziz a ride, but a place to stay when he got to Gomal. The following morning Aziz ate breakfast with Mumtaz then went to the bazaar to buy a cell phone. He told the man who ran the electronics store that he was formerly a soldier with the Special Lashkar who had come to Gomal looking for work. After buying his phone, Aziz purchased some bedding. He recognized Fareeda in the bazaar. They did not speak but he believed she would tell Atal he was there.

With his shopping done, Aziz went to the woods for more firewood. During his search, he crouched behind a large boulder in the forest and sent a message to Sabir saying he had arrived in Gomal. After he sent the message, he heard crashes behind him and saw three frail looking young men. One of the men wore a gaudy red sequined vest and carried a mortar launcher. After they passed Aziz in his hiding place, he hurried down the side of the hill. About halfway down, he heard a pair of mortars being fired on the town from the direction in which the three men had gone. He was surprised the mortars missed the town. Two more mortars were shot that missed as well. Aziz noticed the people of the town didn't seem concerned about the mortars but instead went about their business.

Analysis

Sabir took opportunity of Aziz's mistake of shooting Tawas by turning Aziz into an informant. Sabir mentioned to Aziz he'd noticed that Atal seemed to have an affection for Aziz. It might be wondered if Sabir had already considered this plan to have Aziz work as an informant for him. Another possibility is that Sabir had set up the killing of Tawas so he could manipulate circumstances so that he could get Aziz into the position where he felt he had no other choice but to work as an informant. Aziz was manipulated by Sabir but he basically had no choice but to do what Sabir was asking him to do. Had he tried to strike out on his own, he would not have satisfied his desire for badal against



Gazan. He would also be on the run from Qiam as his former friend tried to get badal against him for the death of his brother. Additionally, if he had not worked with Sabir, Aziz's brother would no longer have medical care.

Notice the strangeness of the mortar attack by the men that Aziz encountered in the woods. It was almost like the ambush on the Special Lashkar during its return trip from Gomal. Those shooting the mortars don't appear to have any intent to hit anything or anyone in the village just as the lone gunman in the ambush didn't seem to be intending to hit anyone from the Special Lashkar forces. It was almost as if these two attacks were staged for show. Notice also that the people of the village don't seem concerned by the falling mortars. It could be assumed they were just so used to the attacks they didn't get upset but the way Aziz described the scene he saw below him the people were going about their business almost as if they knew they weren't in any danger. This could indicate the village elders have indeed paid Gazan for protection and are aware that Gazan's men will be shooting the mortars as a way to cover the agreement between the two.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the people of Gomal showed so little concern when Gazan's men began shooting mortars at them?

Discussion Question 2

What is your opinion of the deal that Sabir made with Aziz? Do you think this was the only option Aziz had available to him? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Consider the unusual nature of the story that Aziz was telling about why he came to Gomal. Do you think anyone believed his story? If you were Atal would you be suspicious of Aziz's sudden appearance in Gomal?

Vocabulary

avenge, eking, destitution, incompetent, informant, sentry, negotiation, improbability, petrified, tethering, writhed, toiled, felled, gaudy, capacity



Part 3: Chapter 11

Summary

As he waited with the hope that Atal would make contact with him, Aziz spent a good deal of time in Mumtaz's home. He learned Mumtaz's family had been relatively wealthy before the war. He and his brother had been among the ranks of the soldiers who had fought the Russians. Mumtaz told of how he and his brother had laid a land mine in the road hoping to kill a Russian convoy said to be passing that way. The boys planned to take up the mine the following morning if the Russians hadn't come but they never got the chance. Instead of a Russian truck, it was a civilian truck carrying lumber that was destroyed by the mine. Mumtaz's father was ordered to pay for the truck and cargo, an amount that depleted his savings. Additionally, a relative of the man killed in the truck called for badal on Mumtaz's older brother. Before his brother had left in an attempt to hide from those who wished to kill him he told Mumtaz he didn't want him to take badal on his death. He ordered Mumtaz to leave the war and take care of their father. Several months later a man came to them with the news that Mumtaz's brother was dead.

The day after Aziz heard Mumtaz's story, he went to gather more firewood and send Sabir a message. When he opened his phone he found Sabir had already sent him a message requesting a status report. Although he hadn't talked to Atal yet, Aziz sent back a message that he'd made contact with Aziz. He had decided he'd have to go to Atal instead of waiting for Atal to come to him. At Atal's home, Atal told Aziz he'd wondered how long Aziz would wait before coming. Atal verified the story that Aziz had killed a man at the madrassa when he'd tried to kill Atal. Aziz told Atal he was trying to help him because Atal was being hunted. Fareeda had just entered with a tray when Atal received a phone call and went outside to take it.

Alone with Aziz, Fareeda told him she'd seen him in a dream. She asked him what he planned to do with her uncle. Aziz told her Atal was in a difficult position and that he could help. When Aziz reached out to touch Fareeda's bad arm, he was hurt that he saw only indifference in her eyes. When Atal returned, Fareeda left the room. Atal told Aziz he had a task for him. If that task was completed successfully, they would go from there. Atal wanted Aziz to meet a man on the footpath, and then phone back to Atal for further instructions. Although he wasn't told by Atal, Aziz inferred the man he would be meeting on the path would be Gazan.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Aziz finally made contact with Atal. Atal had been expecting him but seemed suspicious of him at the same time. He had heard that Aziz was in trouble for killing a man. Aziz told him the truth, that he'd killed the relative of a man in the Special Forces and that he could no longer work there because the man might seek badal against him. Aziz told Atal that he knew Atal was in a bad position and wanted to



help him. He didn't mention that he was working under Commander Sabir's orders. Atal remained suspicious of Aziz until he received a phone call ironically almost as soon as Aziz had arrived. When he returned from his call, Atal was ready to work with Aziz. After the meeting with Atal was complete, Aziz thought to himself that it would be Gazan that he would be meeting in the woods during his first assignment from Atal though he didn't know that for certain. Notice that Atal told Aziz that he was learning to trust Gazan. This comment indicated Atal's relationship with Gazan might not have been going on for as long as Sabir believed it had been.

Note also in this section that Atal told Aziz that he had been the first person to run from the madrassa. It was he that Aziz would have shot had he arrived at his post at the back door in time. One has to wonder if Sabir had arranged for Aziz to cover the door intentionally so he would be the one to shoot Atal.

Manipulation both of people and of circumstances is a theme in the novel. Note in Mumtaz's story that he and his brother were victims of a clever manipulation. A man from a trucking company had told the brothers that they could destroy a Russian convoy if they planted a land mine in a particular spot. Instead of this mine destroying a Russian convoy, however, the mine destroyed a truck from that same trucking company. Ironically, Mumtaz's father was also in the trucking business but was put out of business when he had to pay money to replace the truck and cargo. It appears the man from the trucking company found a clever way to not only get more business for himself but also to get himself an influx of money by using Mumtaz and his brother's hunger for destroying the Russians.

Discussion Question 1

How did Aziz come to the conclusion that the man he would be meeting for Atal was Gazan?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Fareeda's dream. What do you think the dream and its variations meant?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the literary techniques used by the writer in describing the surroundings, people and events of the novel.

Vocabulary

solemnity, idealistic, rouse, cache, pyre, obscene, sanctioned, communal, compensated, brazen, affront, inert, ruttled



Part 3: Chapter 12

Summary

When Aziz returned to town, he saw Mumtaz arguing with a grocer over the cost of a bag of rice. Aziz stepped up and paid for the rice. Mumtaz seemed upset when Aziz announced he was working with Atal. Aziz left that night for the job Atal had given him. He walked down the path in the dark. Going as far as he dared, Aziz turned and retraced his steps. He'd just entered an area filled with pine trees when he felt a hand on his shoulder. The man pumped his arm twice and they were surrounded by more than a dozen men. Gazan asked why Atal had sent Aziz instead of coming himself. Aziz called Atal on the phone as he'd been instructed, but got no answer. Gazan offered his phone for the call. Aziz noticed Sabir's number, the private one, was among the numbers on Gazan's phone. When Aziz called from Gazan's phone Atal answered immediately. Atal and Gazan arranged that Aziz would stay with Gazan's men while Gazan walked to Atal's home. If Gazan was not back by sunrise, the men were to kill him.

Two of the men, one of them the one Aziz had seen before wearing the red vest, sandwiched Aziz between them as they walked into the woods. They talk and the men seem surprised that Aziz worked for Atal. They are also surprised he had switched loyalties from Special Lashkar to Atal. In the discussion, Aziz learned that Commander Sabir had been paying the Gazan to attack Gomal. One of the men pulled a mine out of his rucksack and showed it to Aziz. He said it was for Aziz's friends on the north road. Just as it was nearing dawn, they heard the sounds of Gazan's footsteps. The youth wearing the red vest stood up so Gazan could see him more easily. Just like that, Aziz was free.

Aziz sent Commander Sabir a message stating that a mine had been planted on the north road, hoping to avoid his friends in the Special Lashkar getting hurt. Aziz returned to Atal's house where Atal told him he needed help with his security. Atal said he was trying to broker peace with Gazan. He explained that it was Sabir who was the threat as Sabir was the one who paid Gazan and his men to bomb Gomal. Through Gazan's attacks, Sabir was also ensuring he had an endless supply of young men who wanted badal against Gazan to continue fighting.

Atal spoke of the killing of Hafez by Sabir. He said that after the body had been brought to his house, he had realized he had an obligation to Hafez and his family. The villagers pleaded with Atal to take badal. He explained Hafez had been young and angry when he'd begun fighting, but as an older man had tried to start a family with a woman. He'd even given Atal money to send to the woman. Though Hafez was tired of war by the time he left it, the anger he'd started with was still there and came back to kill him. It was only after Fareeda was abandoned at his house that he realized he must commit his life to her in respect of Hafez's memory. For years, Atal said, Sabir had been taunting him hoping that Atal would choose to take revenge against him. He asked



Aziz's help in getting to see his American contact in Shkin. Atal and Aziz heard a rumble and went outside. Atal told Aziz only he would see him when it was dark. As he walked toward Mumtaz's house he realized that Sabir intentionally did not stop the Special Lashkar from driving the north road even though he knew the mine was set.

When Aziz woke, he saw that Mumtaz had fixed him dinner. He ate half, leaving the rest for Mumtaz. At Atal's house, Atal handed him a gun and asked if he knew how to drive. Atal blacked out. Atal hung out the window shouting directions as Aziz drove the truck. They are both surprised when the truck suddenly pitched forward. They had almost driven into the crater caused by the land mine. He noticed two vertical stripes on the door of the ruined truck and knew the men were Comanches from the Special Lashkar. Atal was determined to make the trip to see the American and decided to walk. They had not gone far when they heard the sound of an engine. Atal walked up to the truck ignoring the cries for him to stop. It was not until Aziz ran up saying they were Tomahawks that the men relaxed. Yar punched the jaw of the machine gun operator who had tried to shoot at them. He told Aziz that it was Qiam's truck that had been destroyed by the mine. Yar talked to Commander Sabir and told Atal he was to take both of them back to the firebase.

Once they arrived at the firebase, Aziz was told that Commander Sabir wanted to talk to him. Meanwhile, Mr. Jack waited for Atal. Sabir criticized Aziz for not telling him he was bringing Atal especially since he'd arranged for Qiam to be killed by the mine. Aziz was surprised but Sabir told Aziz he was more valuable to him than Qiam. Aziz told Sabir Atal was brokering for peace between Gazan and the Americans. Sabir told Aziz there was no profit in ending the war. The goal was to prosper in the fight, those who did not prosper in the war become a victim of it. He said that if peace were allowed between Gazan and the Americans, the Special Lashkar would be out in the cold. He gave Aziz a pistol with the orders to take badal against Gazan. He indicated Atal must also be sacrificed in the killing of Gazan.

Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that Aziz learned the true depths to which the deceit in this war went. Atal had arranged for Aziz to meet Gazan on the forest path. Aziz was to call Atal from his cell phone when he got in contact with Gazan. When Aziz called Atal from his cell phone, however, Atal did not answer. He did not answer until Aziz called him from Gazan's phone. Atal could have waited for Aziz to call from Gazan's phone because he wanted proof that Aziz was indeed with Gazan. Aziz's act of calling from Gazan's phone would have proved without a doubt he was with Gazan. Notice also that when Atal looked at the numbers in Gazan's phone, he saw the secret number that Sabir had given him to use as a contact number. At first Aziz was surprised to find Sabir's number in Gazan's phone he knew this indicated some sort of bad business but wasn't quite sure what it meant.

Later, back at Atal's compound, Atal explained to Aziz how far the depths of the politics of the war spread. Not only was Sabir punishing the villagers of Gomal by blocking the



roads and keeping supplies from them, he was also paying Gazan and his men to launch mortar attacks against the village. All the while that Sabir had been accusing the elders of Gomal of working with Gazan, it had been Sabir who was working with the enemy. Sabir did this because he wanted the outpost, which would earn him more money, built in Gomal.

If Aziz still doubted Sabir's intentions, there should be no doubt left after they talked to Sabir on the firebase when Aziz traveled there with Atal. Sabir told Aziz that the war was being fought for profit and that he intended to benefit from the war regardless of what he had to do to ensure that profit. Notice that Sabir believed he had done Aziz a favor by getting Qiam out of the way. Aziz voiced his anger at Sabir for not protecting his men even after Aziz had warned him the mine was set on the road. Sabir indicated to Aziz he had another plan in mind as he'd sent Qiam's truck down that road knowing that after Qiam was dead, there was no one left to take badal against Aziz. He'd planned Qiam's death intentionally because Aziz was more profitable to him than Qiam.

Sabir additionally believed he had done Aziz a favor by giving him the chance to get badal against Gazan. There was only one catch. In order to get badal against Gazan, Aziz must also kill Atal for Sabir.

Discussion Question 1

How deeply was Sabir tied up in the political nature of the war? Do you have any respect for him and his motivations?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think it was fair for Sabir to force Aziz to kill Atal along with getting his badal against Gazan? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Consider the death of Qiam. Who was responsible for his death? Gazan's men who set the mine? Sabir for not warning Qiam the mine was there? Aziz for his act of accidentally killing Tawas, an action that made Sabir set up Qiam to be killed so Aziz would not be killed by Qiam?

Vocabulary

indignant, amid, sinister, rucksack, fearsome, cynicism, beacon, etched, divulged, obligation, bespeak, taunts, inevitable, vengeful, veneer, restrained, duplicity, taunt, heft, permanence



Part 3: Chapter 13

Summary

Mr. Jack burst out of his hut and drove off in his HiLux. Atal and Aziz went with the truck to pull Atal's HiLux loose. On the ride back to their truck, Aziz considered Atal and the position in which Sabir had put him. Sabir continually insulted him but Atal had chosen to endure the constant abuse. Aziz wondered why he hadn't taken Hafez's place and led the men that Gazan now led. Atal held his community in danger because of his well-meaning arrogance. Aziz decided that was a reason that he could kill him as life would have been better for the villagers had Atal fought Sabir in a true war, one with no deceit.

On the way back, Aziz mentioned that Mr. Jack seemed frustrated when he left. Atal rattled the bottle with Fareeda's medicine in it saying he couldn't have been too upset. Atal said he was disappointed as things weren't moving as quickly as the American wanted them to. When they got back to Atal's home, he paid Aziz with a few American bills.

Before going to sleep, Aziz hid the gun Sabir had given him in the woodpile. Weeks went by with no war or attacks. Aziz spent his days gathering firewood and listening to Mumtaz's stories. One day Mumtaz pointed toward the pile of firewood and told Aziz that whatever he had hidden there would end the bad peace brought by the American and Atal. From that point, Aziz decided to carry the pistol with him.

One night Atal came into Mumtaz's house telling Aziz they had work to do. Mumtaz told Aziz he hoped he'd return there. Atal told Aziz they would be having a meeting with Gazan and Mr. Jack in his truck. It will be Aziz's job to provide security during the meeting. Mr. Jack handed Aziz an envelope filled with one hundred dollar bills. On his drive to pick up Gazan, Aziz threw the pistol out of the truck. He believed killing Gazan would only make him a slave to Sabir. Aziz picked up Gazan as directed. On the way back to Atal and Mr. Jack, Aziz told Gazan that Gazan and his men were responsible for his brother's death. When Aziz asked Gazan if he could bring peace, Gazan chose not to answer right away. Only later he told Aziz the only way for peace to come was for him and all those who fought to leave.

When they met Atal and Mr. Jack, Aziz was given a rifle and told to sit in the back of the truck behind Gazan. Aziz pushed the mouth of the rifle into the back of Gazan's seat. Mr. Jack sat beside him with his rifle muzzle down into the floorboard. Silence filled the truck when Mr. Jack said peace could only take place when all parties agreed to it. Mr. Jack told Gazan he wouldn't have to fight any longer, just provide the Americans with information about other Taliban and militant groups. Atal was upset as the arrangement offered no peace for his village. Mr. Jack told him there would be controlled fighting instead. He talked to Gazan telling him that as he came for peace, he couldn't be in favor of the plan that Mr. Jack was suggesting. Aziz felt a fool for thinking Gazan would be in favor of anything that would help the larger whole and not him as an individual. He



shot Gazan. Atal slammed on his brakes and Mr. Jack tried to get up his rifle but Aziz was quick in shooting him. Although he felt guilty for leaving Fareeda and the village without their caretaker, he shot Atal as well.

Analysis

Although Atal had hoped that Gazan was truthful in his intent for peace, it turned out he was only brokering the best deal for himself. When the American Mr. Jack offered him better pay and better supplies for information about other militant and Taliban groups, Gazan was happy to take him up on the offer. Although Aziz had hoped the men would reach an agreement for peace, he realized that Gazan was a man who was too interested in his own interests to want peace for all the people unless it was a benefit to him.

It was not until Aziz realized Gazan was only playing sides against each other that he came to the conclusion that he was going to shoot Gazan. His whole goal in becoming part of the Special Lashkar had been to get badal on Gazan. If his act of allowing Gazan to go free had brought peace to his land, Aziz would have been satisfied to let the man live. Knowing that Gazan only wanted to work out the best deal for himself, Aziz shot him.

Notice in this section that on their way back from the firebase, Aziz tried to decide if he respected Atal or if he only felt pity for him. Atal had tried to find peace for his village but had gone about it in a way that had actually made attacks against the village worse. For this reason he thought the Atal was well-meaning but arrogant. He believed Atal and his village would have been better off if Atal had taken his badal against Sabir and then fought in Hafez's place in a real war with no deceit.

Discussion Question 1

As Aziz thought about Atal and his place in the war, he thought Atal's village would have been better if Atal had taken Hafez's place but had fought a war with not deceit. Do you think it is possible to fight a war with no deceit? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Now that Aziz has been paid such a large amount of money by the American and has completed the tasks the Sabir lined out for him, what do you think Aziz's next steps will be?

Discussion Question 3

How does Aziz justify his acts of killing Atal, Mr. Jack and Gazan?

Vocabulary

amputated, defied, arrogance, winch, balaclava, gestation, reinforce, imposter, molted, pakol, navigated, castrated, insignificantly, humiliation, predictable, reeled, compensated



Part 3: Chapter 14

Summary

Aziz sent Commander Sabir a message telling him Atal was dead. He didn't mention the deaths of Mr. Jack and Gazan. He believed by looking at the destruction in the truck no one would know that Mr. Jack's death was a green on blue. As he considered the war, he couldn't think of a way to die that wasn't a green on blue as the Americans had a hand in everything in the war. When he looked at Gazan's face, he saw the man's eyes were shut. Aziz believed this closing of his eyes indicated Gazan had given up his life and took from Aziz the idea he'd taken Gazan's life. Before he left the truck, Aziz took the opal necklace from Atal's neck.

Aziz got a message from Sabir requesting him to return to the firebase. He chose to go to Fareeda first to tell her in person what had happened. When he arrived, Fareeda went for tea as she'd been taught. She knew from the blood on his hands what had happened and asked if he would stay. She told him he might as well shoot her also. Aziz told her he wanted to help her as her uncle had. She gazed at him hatefully and Aziz realized the hate came from the fact that she needed to have someone care for her. He kissed her good hand and held her to him, a promise he would return though Fareeda seemed to be afraid of the meanness she thought was in him. Before he left to return to Sabir, he tied the opal pendant around her neck.

Sabir met Aziz outside the firebase. He commented that Aziz was driving Mr. Jack's truck. Aziz told him Mr. Jack's death was unintended, but that Atal and Gazan were dead as well. When Aziz asked Sabir what options remained for him Sabir suggested that he take charge of Gazan's men. Aziz told Sabir he wanted to see his brother first. He was told to drive to Orgun and arrangements would be made. Afterward, he was to go to Atal's home and wait for Gazan's men to come to him.

In the hospital, Aziz noticed his brother was in a hospital room much too big for just him. Ali said he was doing better since he'd been moved to that room but didn't say how long he'd been there. Ali told Aziz he imagined that Aziz had worked hard and made a good life for himself in order to keep him in the hospital. Aziz realized that his brother did not want to hear that badal had been taken. He wanted to hear that Aziz had a good life. He lied to his brother telling him he was apprenticed to a man in Kabul. Ali asked Aziz to come visit again soon and Aziz lied, telling him he would.

Analysis

Most significant in this section of the novel is Aziz's decision to step in as leader of Gazan's men. By doing this he has literally become his own enemy. He will fill the shoes of the man who ordered the bombings that led to the injury of his brother. Aziz's trip to visit his brother in the hospital seemed to cement his decision. Ali told Aziz he was doing



better since he'd been moved. Although Aziz didn't ask how long his brother had been in the nice room, he assumed that it was since he'd been promoted to a better position with Sabir. Now that he stood the chance to take over as leader of Gazan's men Aziz assumed his brother would continue to get this good treatment.

Notice also the interaction between Aziz and Ali in this section. Although Aziz had wanted badal for what had been done to his brother, Ali never asked whether or not Aziz had gotten revenge for him. Ali was instead interested in knowing that his brother had achieved a good life. He hoped that his work to put Aziz in school had paid off. Instead of telling Aziz what he was doing to keep Ali in good medical care and taking care of himself, Aziz lied to his brother. He chose to tell his brother he was working with a trucking company.

Notice also in this section that the idea of a green on blue killing is mentioned again in this section. When Aziz looked at the carnage he was leaving behind from the deaths of Atal, Gazan and Mr. Jack, he did not think anyone would realize it was a green on blue killing. As Aziz considered the idea of the green on blue killings, he began to wonder if there were really any killings in the war that weren't green on blue killings as the Americans were so deeply ingrained in all parts of the war.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Fareeda's reaction to Aziz when he visited her after Atal was dead.

Discussion Question 2

How do you think Aziz's visit to Ali influenced his decision to take Gazan's place?

Discussion Question 3

What would be the significance of someone realizing that Mr. Jack's death was a green on blue killing?

Vocabulary

talismans, precaution, predators, trifle, calligraphy, civility, trolling, indispensable, apprenticed, promotion



Part 4: Chapter 15

Summary

Aziz stands on the banks of a dry creek and looks at the towers of FOB Sharana in the distance. Even though the creek bed is dry at that time, Aziz knows the rain will fill it, then it will dry out. He lays in his truck and thinks about how he needs to find the American in charge of debriefing the Afghans to tell that American he's lost control. He will help Commander Sabir get his outpost built. He plans to use to Americans to get the medicine he needs to help Fareeda survive. He hopes to succeed in the war where Atal and Gazan failed. In the morning, it is raining. Aziz washes his face in the water that is pooling in the creekbed.

Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that the tense of the novel returns to the present tense. Aziz has returned to the point of the novel where he first indicated there were many people who thought he was dishonest. The reader now knows what it was that Aziz had done that had made him believe people thought he was dishonest and how he has justified the changes in himself.

Notice particularly in this chapter the creek bed. As Aziz stood in it to look at the American base and think about what he had to offer the Americans, Aziz noted the creek was dry. He knew, however, the rains would come and fill the bed again. When he woke in the morning to a creek bed full of water it is almost as if it is being indicated a refreshing change is coming.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that Aziz will be able to succeed in the war where Gazan and Atal failed?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe that Aziz will be able to succeed in the war where Gazan and Atal failed?

Discussion Question 3

What is your opinion of Aziz's decision to take over Gazan's position? Do you think taking care of his brother and Fareeda was a good reason to take over as leader of this Taliban group?

Vocabulary

wadi, debriefs, ensure, leverage, prosper



Characters

Aziz Iqtbal

Aziz Iqtbal is the narrator and main character of this novel. He agreed to sign up with the Special Lashkar, a group of Afghan troops funded by Americans, to fight the Taliban. Aziz was promised that in exchange for his service he would be given the opportunity to get badal, or revenge, on Gazan for injuries received by his brother in a bombing, and the money he earned would pay for medical care for his brother. Aziz did not like being a soldier because he didn't like the way he was forced to treat his fellow Afghans. One example of this came when Aziz was on patrol guarding a smugglers' path. He was very upset by the way his commanding officer treated a group of men who tried to pass them on this path. Although the men presented no real threat to Aziz or any of the other troops, the commanding officer beat them and interrogated them before taking them to the firebase as prisoners.

Aziz's sensitive nature was additionally shown in the way that he cared for his brother. When their parents were killed during a raid on the village where they lived as children, Ali took charge of his brother. He made sure his brother had food and a place to sleep. One day when a grocer embarrassed Aziz in the marketplace, Ali stood up for his brother. With his brother unable to take care of him any longer because of his injuries, Aziz took charge by joining the military. Unfortunately, the military leaders manipulated Aziz by using his desire to take care of his brother against him. When Aziz was forced to leave the Special Lashkar because he'd accidentally killed a fellow squad member Commander Sabir encouraged Aziz to be an informant for him. Had Aziz not taken this job offer, he would have had no way to care for his brother. Again, after Aziz had done Sabir's wishes and killed Atal, Aziz agreed to take over as leader of Gazan's men because he knew it was the only way he could see to it that his brother's needs would continue to be met.

Aziz additionally developed a soft spot in his heart for Fareeda, the adopted niece of Atal. Aziz thought she was beautiful despite the disease that twisted her right arm and made it useless. After he killed Atal, Aziz took over as Fareeda's caregiver. He imagined himself being able to afford the medicine for her that would make her well.

When Aziz took over as the leader of Gazan's men, he had ideas that he could make the war more fair with less deceit. His plan first was to tell the Americans that they had lost control of the troop of men that Gazan had once led. He planned to work with Sabir and at some point replace Sabir with a better man. He hoped one day he'd be able to earn enough money that he'd be able to leave the war and still care for his brother and Fareeda.

Aziz's character is a paradox as he changed from one extreme seeking badal against a Taliban group who had hurt his brother to a leader of this same Taliban group as the profit from leading the group allowed him to take care of his brother. In order to keep



both his brother and Fareeda cared for medically, he put himself in a position where he stood to injure and hurt others. Remember also that early in his military career, Aziz had once considered the position Atal filled and wondered if he, like Atal, was using the war only for profit. He had rationalized at the time that his desire for money from the war was not corrupt because he was using what he earned in the war to take care of his brother. At the conclusion of the novel, however, Aziz had decided he wanted to take full advantage of the war and profit from it.

Commander Sabir

Commander Sabir is the leader of the Special Lashkir. He joined the American funded military group after his brother, who had been the original leader of the group, was killed by Hafez, the leader of a Taliban faction, in an ambush. Commander had sought out Hafez and gotten badal for his brother's death by killing Hafez. During the clash Sabir's lower lip was injured. The injury never healed completely and he was left with a disfigured face. Sabir spent his life tormenting Atal because it was Atal's responsibility to take badal for Hafez's death. Atal, however, never took his revenge.

One of Sabir's goals was to build an outpost in the village of Gomal. He hoped to be able to earn money by skimming off the top of the money the Americans would pay to have this outpost built and manned. Because the elders of Gomal would not support the outpost, Sabir instead paid Gazan, the Taliban forces against which his group was supposed to be fighting, to launch mortar attacks on Gomal.

After Aziz had to leave the Special Lashkar because he accidentally shot Tawas, it was Sabir who offered him the job of spying on Atal and selling the information to Sabir. Later, after Aziz shot Gazan, Atal and Mr. Jack, Sabir indicated he wanted Aziz to take over as the leader of Gazan's men.

Atal

Atal is one of the richest men who lived in the village of Gomal. After the death of Haji Jan he became the most influential elder in the village. It was rumored that Atal was a player in the war, selling the secrets of his village to the American, Mr. Jack, in exchange for money. Atal used some of the money he earned from his work to take care of Fareeda, his adopted niece, and buy the medicine that gave her relief from her disease. After the bombing of the village of Gomal in which Haji Jan was killed, Atal began working with Gazan and Mr. Jack to try to bring the war to an end. Aziz shot Atal, Gazan and Mr. Jack when he realized during a meeting between the three that Gazan and Mr. Jack didn't really believe or want peace to be achieved. It was through Atal that Aziz realized that even Commander Sabir, the leader of the Special Lashkar, was in contact with Gazan. The two were working together to keep the war going. Atal had been friends with Hafez, the man who killed Sabir's brother. Aziz shot Atal because Commander Sabir had ordered that he do so.



Mumtaz

Mumtaz is one of the spingaris of the village of Gomal. He was one of the first men to speak up against the outpost during the shura arranged by Commander Sabir in the village's bazaar. Mumtaz made the point that Gazan only struck the village when the Special Lashkar was there. He seemed to indicate that the best way to protect the village was for Special Lashkar to stay away. Later, after Aziz was forced out of the Special Lashkar and given the job of informing on Atal, Mumtaz gave Aziz a place to stay despite Mumtaz's poverty. He said when the war had first begun it had been for the hope of a brighter future. Now he believed the war was being fought for profit. Mumtaz came from a wealthy family as his father had owned a trucking business. His family's fortune had begun to change when Mumtaz and his brother accepted an assignment to hide a mine in the road. Instead of killing the Russians as intended, a civilian truck loaded with lumber had activated the mine. All of the family's money was used to reimburse the company for its truck and cargo. Mumtaz's brother was killed as badal.

Ali Iqtbal

Ali Iqtbal was the older brother of Aziz. After Ali and Aziz's parents were killed in a raid on their village, Ali had taken over care of Aziz. He'd worked to make sure his brother had food and a place to stay. When Aziz was older, Ali continued to work and sent his brother to school. He hoped his brother would have opportunities he didn't have the chance to get. Ali, however, was injured in a bombing by Gazan on the day of Ashura. Ali lost a leg and his male organs in the bombing. In order to care for Ali, Aziz signed up to fight with the Special Lashkar. In the course of the novel, Aziz visited his brother in the hospital only once. Ali asked what his brother was doing to keep him cared for so well. Aziz could not bring himself to tell his brother the truth and instead lied and said he was working with a trucking company. Ali wanted to know that Aziz had a good life. During their visit he never asked if his brother had gotten badal against Gazan.

Mortaza

Mortaza is another recruit in Aziz's squad. Mortaza was the one who went with Aziz to tell the spingaris in Gomal about the shura Commander Sabir had called. Mortaza continued to insist that Atal must attend the shura until Aziz told him to stop. Later in the novel it was Mortaza who asked Aziz if he felt they were responsible for Haji Jan's death. His question indicated that he had more sympathy for the people than did some of the recruits. Mortaza felt he had wound up in the Special Lashkar because the elders of his town were as foolish as the elders of Gomal. The spingaris were offered safety but in the deal, all groups played against one another making promises they couldn't keep. Mortaza's mother and sister were killed in a raid. Mortaza had joined the military to care for his father who refused to farm his land or leave his destroyed house.



Fareeda

Fareeda is the adopted niece of Atal. She was the daughter of a friend of Atal. It was suspected that Fareeda was the daughter of Hafez, but this relationship was never made certain. When that friend was killed, Atal took guardianship of Fareeda. Aziz was attracted to Fareeda who was described as being very beautiful with dark hair and brown eyes filled with flecks of all different colors. In contrast to her beauty, Fareeda has a disease that has made her right arm swollen and grotesque. Atal's work in the war helped him to earn money to buy the medicine that helped ease Fareeda's pain and stop her disease from spreading. Although she was female, Fareeda had a good deal of knowledge about the war and its effect on her life. Aziz was surprised when Fareeda compared herself to a soldier because she was continually fighting against her disease. After shooting Atal, Aziz took charge of Fareeda's care.

Haji Jan

Haji Jan is the oldest of the spingaris, or elders, in the village of Gomal. He was strongly against the building of an outpost by the Special Lashkar in Gomal. He felt that if the elders allowed the outpost to be built, their village would be controlled by the Americans who would fund the building of the outpost. When Commander Sabir began talking about the money that would be earned by the outpost, Haji Jan could not stand what he considered deceitful talk any longer and left the shura. Haji Jan was later fatally injured in a bombing of Gomal by Gazan and his men. Even though Atal brought him to the firebase for treatment of his injuries, Haji Jan could no be saved.

Taqbir

Taqbir is a soldier responsible for searching the hospitals and villages for people whom he could recruit to the Special Lashkar. Taqbir used the Afghans' need to get revenge for the offenses done to them by the Gazan to incite young men to join the military. Taqbir manipulated Aziz into joining the Special Lashkar by promising his brother, Ali, would get good medical care if he did so. Taqbir later gave Aziz a photo of Ali taken in the hospital. He told Aziz that his brother was doing well but his response sounded practiced, as if it were what he told many recruits. Taqbir later met Aziz the one time he decided to visit Ali in the hospital. Taqbir was the one who took Aziz to Ali's room.

Yar

Yar is the second leader of the Tomahawk squad. He was missing his pinky and ring finger on his right hand. It was never told what happened to Yar to disfigure his hand. Yar was a hardened soldier and showed no pity on his recruits or the people whom they met during the checkpoints operated by the squads. When Atal and Aziz tried to walk to Shikin to meet the American after they could no longer drive after reaching the blow out



part of the north road, it was Yar and his group who stopped them and took them to the firebase.

Naseeb Ilyas

Naseeb Ilyas is Commander Sabir's supply officer at the firebase where Aziz was stationed. He was friends with Aziz as the two met the night that Aziz was flown to the firebase. The two were the only ones on that particular transport. Naseeb was punished by having to stand and oversee the mess hall for six hours each day after Special Lashkar supplies were found in the possession of Gazan's men. Naseeb was also hit by Sabir because of the missing supplies leaving Naseeb with a swollen and bruised jaw.

Qiam

Qiam is the brother of Tawas. He and his brother were recruits who joined the Special Lashkar about the same time as Aziz. Aziz accidentally killed Qiam's brother leaving him open to a revenge killing by Qiam. Commander Sabir arranged for Qiam to be killed in a mine blast, releasing Aziz from the possibility he might be killed by Qiam.

Mr. Jack

Mr. Jack was the American who oversaw the operations at the firebase. He was the one in charge of doling out funds to the Special Lashkar. Yar told the recruits at one point that Mr. Jack was Atal's handler. It was suspected that Atal got his money by selling information about the village of Gomal and Gazan to Mr. Jack.

Issaq

Issaq was the member of the Special Lashkar who was in charge of training the new recruits. After Aziz and his group were trained, Issaq took over as leader of the Tomahawks, the squad of which Aziz was a member. Aziz described Issaq and his style of training as that of a tyrant.

Tawas

Tawas is the brother of Qiam. Aziz accidentally killed his friend Tawas during an attack on a madrassa.

Batoor

Batoor is the member of the Special Lashkar who is the leader of the Comanches.



Symbols and Symbolism

A Shipping Container

This shipping container becomes a symbol of loss, particularly the death of Ali and Aziz's parents. Although the boys did not see their parents being put into this container during the raid on their village, they later learned they had probably died in this container when Ali found his father's ring in the corner of the container when the boys took shelter in it one snowy night.

Father's Ring

The silver and ruby ring that Aziz and Ali's father wore was a symbol of the male leader in the family. The man who wore the ring was considered the leader. Ali wore the ring after he found it in the shipping container in which it was believed their father was killed. After Ali was injured and was no longer able to be a leader, Aziz wore the ring symbolically taking charge of his family.

The Soldier's Gun

The worth of a soldier was represented by the worth of his gun, according to Aziz. The recruits were given old, bent rifles that didn't shoot straight when they practiced their shooting. Even though these rifles were low quality, the recruits took them with them to dinner so they'd have that common bond with the real soldiers. It was not until the recruits moved up and became soldiers that they were issued guns that were of good quality.

Commander Sabir's Disfigured Face

Commander Sabir's disfigured face was an outward symbol of his ugly and deformed personality.

A Fresh Green Uniform

While they were still recruits the soldiers had to wear their shalwar kameez during training. They didn't receive an official uniform until they had passed their training. Therefore, the uniform was a symbol of their new status as soldiers.



Toyota HiLux

The Special Lashkar used Toyota HiLuxes as their vehicles. As Aziz indicated, these vehicles were symbolic of the same values the commanders used when choosing recruits. They wanted recruits who were like the vehicles, economical choices and generally reliable.

A Tear Shaped Opal Pendant

Atal wore this tear shaped opal pendant on a silver chain. Aziz indicated the necklace reminded him of a piece of jewelry that a woman would wear. The necklace seemed to be a symbol of defiance as Atal attempted to work against both the white man's rules of war and the Afghans' ideas of badal. After Aziz shot Atal, he took this pendant from his neck and put it on his own. He later gave the necklace to Fareeda.

Bag of Uncooked Rice

After the Special Lashkar shot one of Gazan's men who tried to ambush them on the way back to the firebase from Gomal, they found a bag of uncooked rice stamped with the letters USAID. This bag of rice was symbolic as it proved to the Special Lashkar that American supplies were somehow getting into the hands of Gazan and his men.

Hospital Photo of Ali

Tabquir gave Aziz this photo of Ali in the hospital to prove that he was doing well. This photo became a symbol of Aziz's loyalty to Ali as he kept the picture between his chest and the plate in his body armor when he went out on duty.

Red Sequined Vest

When Aziz first saw this red sequined vest on one of Gazan's men, he thought it was flashy and gaudy. He was surprised at the deliberate nature of the soldier who wore this vest because the red so easily gave away his position. It was only later that Aziz realized that the red vest was worn intentionally as it allowed Gazan to be able to easily find the man in woods without him having to make any noise.



Settings

Sperkai

Sperkai is the village from which Aziz and Ali came. It was while in this village that they observed the attack that took their parents' lives.

Orgun Bazaar

The Orgun Bazaar was the place where Aziz and Ali begged for food and work. It was also in this same bazaar that Ali was badly injured when Gazan and his men bombed the area.

The Hospital

It was in this hospital in Orgun that Aziz finally located his brother with the help of Taqbir. Aziz was troubled when he learned his brother was in an outpatient unit where he would not receive proper medical care. It was also in this hospital that Taqbir talked Aziz into joining the Special Lashkar by telling him that he would not only earn money that would help pay for his brother's medical care but would also be given the opportunity to get badal against Gazan. Later in this same hospital Aziz visited Ali before he agreed to become the new leader of Gazan's men. Aziz did not mention his military career, instead choosing to tell him that he was being apprenticed to a man who owned a trucking company.

FOB Sharana

Forward Operating Base (FOB) Sharana was the base to which Aziz was sent when he agreed to join the Special Lashkar. It was from this base that Aziz was sent to the firebase where he was stationed until he was forced to get out of the Special Lashkar when he accidentally shot Tawas.

The Firebase

The firebase is what the base was called to which Aziz was sent. It was at this base that he trained and lived during the time he was in the Special Lashkar.

Gomal

Gomal is the village in which Commander Sabir hoped to build his outpost. It was to this town that Aziz and the other members of the Special Lashkar traveled to get the elders



of the town together for a shura. While there, Aziz met Atal and Fareeda. Later when Aziz agreed to work as an informant for Sabir he lived in this town pretending he was looking for work. He stayed with Mumtaz while waiting for Atal to get in touch with him.

The Madrassa on the North Road

It was to this madrassa that the troops went for a raid. They had been told Gazan was there and that they'd be able to get their badal on him that night. Not only did the troops not kill Gazan at the madrassa, Aziz accidentally shot Tawas when Tawas exited the madrassa through a back door that Aziz had been sent to guard.



Themes and Motifs

Laws of the Pashtunwali

The laws of the Pashtunwali and the importance the people put in following them is an important theme in this novel. One of the laws of the people that is of great importance is the requirement that a person should get badal, or revenge, for an evil done to him. In many instances, the American and Afghanistan military leaders use this law to manipulate Afghan boys and get them into military service. Another law of the Pashtunwali that is of importance in the novel is the idea of hospitality, or melmastia. The Afghans believed guests should be treated with hospitality and that guests should respect their hosts.

Even when he was just a small boy Aziz's father taught him the importance of badal. A boy had busted Aziz's lip so his father took him to the boy's house asking for recompense. When the father didn't act, Aziz's father hit the boy's father, getting his revenge. Later in his life Aziz sought revenge, or badal, against Gazan when a bombing ordered by Gazan injured Ali. He was manipulated into joining the Special Lashkar with the promise he would be given the chance to get the badal he wanted. Aziz later learned many young men who had signed up with Special Lashkar had done so on the same premise.

Atal was one character who went against this idea that everyone who was offended should try to get badal. Instead of going after Sabir because Sabir killed Atal's friend Hafez, Atal chose to take care of Hafez's daughter as his show of respect to Hafez. Sabir did not respect Atal because Atal didn't try to get badal for the offense done to his friend. He tormented Atal constantly in an effort to get him to seek revenge against Sabir so Sabir could kill him as well. Sabir did finally get his chance to bring Atal's life to an end even though he didn't do it with his own hands. Instead, he ordered Aziz to kill Atal.

Hospitality to guests is another Pashtunwali law taken seriously by the Afghans. For instance, in the shura the elders of Gomal told Sabir and the others they'd offered hospitality to Gazan and his men just as they'd offered hospitality to the Special Lashkan. The practices of hospitality were hard ones to leave behind once Aziz and the other young Afghans became soldiers. When they were going to tell the elders of Gomal about the shura, one of the soldiers commented they shouldn't go with guns and protective gear. They were re ordered, however, to act like soldiers instead of civilians practicing the laws of hospitality. The differences in acting by the laws of hospitality and acting as a soldier again collided when Aziz and Mortaza were invited into Atal's home. Aziz began to take off his boots, which was done under the laws of hospitality but Mortaza stopped him as the action wasn't one befitting a soldier.



Politics of War

While it seems that war should be a cleanly laid out battle with a defined enemy, the war in which Aziz found himself fighting was anything but cleanly laid out. It was a battle filled with deceit and run by men with intentions of profiting from the battles. Peace for the whole is not a goal of this war. Each man seemed to be out for his own best interests. This was shown by Atal's failed attempt to broker peace with Gazan.

When Aziz entered the ranks of the Special Lashkar, he did so because he was promised he'd be able to get badal, or revenge, on Gazan for injuring Ali. Instead of getting this badal, however, Aziz was sent on missions to help Sabir get an outpost built in the village of Gomal. Aziz, along with the other men soon came to realize that Sabir wanted this outpost built because it would mean more money for him. Sabir was willing to do whatever it took to get this outpost built.

Sabir began his crusade to get his outpost honestly enough by trying to convince the elders of the village to allow the outpost to be built. When they did not agree to what Sabir wanted, Sabir went on to try to get his outpost by force. He cut off entrances into and out of Gomal with checkpoints. Aziz learned later that Sabir had also paid Gazan and given him supplies in exchange for Gazan's men bombing Gomal. As he learned more and more about the war that was going on around him, Aziz realized it not be profitable for Sabir to allow the men to get badal on Gazan. The war was profitable to him only if Gazan was allowed to live and the war continued.

Atal also tried to influence the war and bring peace to his village. However, it was rumored that Atal also profited from the war by selling the secrets of his village to the Americans. Aziz realized that Atal's main intent in the war was to care for Fareeda, the daughter of a friend killed by Sabir. Near the end of the novel Atal attempted to broker with Gazan for peace. These talks fell apart when Atal realized that Gazan only wanted peace if peace was the best option for him. When the American went over Atal's head and offered Gazan a better deal by keeping the fighting going, Gazan instead agreed to take that offer.

Green on Blue

Another significant idea in the novel is the idea of the green on blue killing. It was from this type of killing that the novel took its name. A green on blue killing is one in which an American is killed by an Afghanistan trained or supplied using American funds. As Aziz thought about these killings, he wondered about the frequency of killings that could be considered a green on blue killing.

It was during a conversation between Sabir and Mr. Jack that the reader first learns about the significance of green on blue killings. These war deaths take place when an American is killed by an Afghanistan trained or supplied using American funds. At this point, Sabir was trying to discourage Mr. Jack from working with Atal. Abir warned that it was people like Atal, who worked the Afghans against the Americans, that caused the



green on blue killings. In reality, Sabir could, himself, be considered responsible for these killing as he put American supplies into the hands of Taliban in an attempt to manipulate the war in the way he wanted it to go.

Another important incident in the novel in which a green on blue killing was mentioned took place when Aziz killed Mr. Jack. Mr. Jack had been an unintentional victim in Aziz's killings. Because he realized Gazan intended to support peace only if it benefited him, Aziz killed Gazan. He killed Atal because Sabir had ordered he do so. Mr. Jack was in the wrong place at the wrong time. As he looked at the scene, Aziz believed no one would think that it was a green on blue killing. When he thought about how deeply the Americans were entangled in support the fight against the Taliban along with the American supplies and money that are rerouted to Taliban he wondered how many killings would actually turn out to be green on blue killings if they were investigated.

Manipulation

Manipulation is a major technique used in this novel. Not only are young Afghanistan men manipulated to join the military, the different factions of the war also manipulate one another in an attempt to get what they want out of the war. Aziz was among many who'd been manipulated into joining the war through his situation only to find the leverage used against him to get him involved in the fighting was deceitful.

As the Taliban bombed villages and market places, the hospitals were filled with the injured as well as family members looking for ways to take care of their family members who were injured in the war. Taqbir had been stationed in the hospital to search out young men looking for a way to take care of family. Aziz was among those he found. Aziz was promised not only that he'd be able to get badal against Gazan for the injury done to his brother, he was also promised medical care for his brother. As Aziz moved from each stage in his military career, from soldier to informant to leader of Gazan's men, he was manipulated with the hope of getting badal as well as the promise that he'd be able to take care of his crippled brother.

Meanwhile, the military leaders don't limit their manipulation to the naive young men they hope to recruit for their ranks. They also manipulate the different factions involved the war to get what they believed was the best deal for them. Sabir, for instance, wanted his outpost in Gomal. In order to get it, he started with the elders of the village. When they didn't give him what he wanted, he moved on to manipulate the village elders in different ways. He closed off the city with checkpoints and then paid Gazan and his men to bomb the village hoping this violence would convince the elders to do what he wanted them to do.

In this landscape military leaders are not the only ones manipulating circumstances to better themselves. In Mumtaz's story, for instance, Mumtaz told Aziz that a trucking company had tricked him and his brother into setting a land mine that he knew would blow up one of his own company's trucks. The brothers, however, were told that a Russian convoy would be coming along the road. Instead of killing the enemy as they



had hoped, Mumtaz and his brother were manipulated into killing a civilian and destroying a civilian work truck. Mumtaz's father was required to pay restitution to the truck company. This act of paying restitution wiped out all of the family's wealth and knocked that family out of their own trucking business. As Mumtaz noted, however, the trucking company that had tricked Mumtaz and his brother profited well in the arrangement.

Family/Love

Family was important to the people of Afghanistan. This importance can be seen in the Pashtunwali law of badal. Its importance is also shown by how easy it was to manipulate the young men who had lost family in bombings by Gazan. Even close friends can be included in the umbrella of the family and treated with the same respect as members of the family.

Getting badal, or revenge, for a family member that had been treated badly is one aspect that illustrates how important family was to the Afghanistan people. It was particularly for members of their family that had been killed or injured that the men wanted badal for losses and damages. This was the case for Aziz as he sought badal for his brother, Sabir as he sought badal for his brother, and Mortaza as he sought badal for his mother and sister.

Notice also along the lines of family ties, those men who had joined the military are told they have been given a new family to replace the one they lost. By referring to the military as a family, the military leaders not only hope that these young men will recognize the military as their new family but that they will also treat the military with the love and respect they would treat their own family members.

Notice that in the case of Atal and Fareeda, even close friends are sometimes considered family members. Atal considered Hafez to be his brother even though the two were not related by blood. When Hafez was killed, Atal took Fareeda, who was believed to be Hafez's daughter, as his own. Just as if Hafez had been his brother, Atal considered Fareeda to be his niece.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is told from the first person perspective of Aziz. He is an Afghan native who has lived among fighting his entire life. His parents were killed in what appeared to be a retaliatory act because the group of Taliban with which his father fought refused to extort taxes as they'd been ordered. The first person point of view is the best one for this story as Aziz's story is one that must be told from the person who has experienced what Aziz did. No other character in the story could tell the story of the changes that took place in Aziz's life. He was the one who could best tell the small nuances that affect his decisions and slowly change his mind about the fighting.

The majority of Aziz's story is told in the past tense. The only exceptions to this use of the past tense occurs in the first sentence of the novel when Aziz begins his story with a one sentence quote from the present tense. The sentence serves to show the reader that there will be a great change in Aziz and his state of mind from the first of the novel to the end. There is only one other point in the body of the novel that Aziz speaks to the reader from the present tense. This takes place in a part of the book where Aziz was describing the type of war that was being fought. He indicates in this quote given from the present tense that he knew the war in which he was fighting was a racket. The novel remains in the past tense until the final chapter, Chapter 15 where the tense changes to the present tense.

Language and Meaning

Significant in the language of the novel is the use of Pashto words as well as the use of several military acronyms that might be unfamiliar to the reader. Each time the author uses Pashto words the first time, he includes a translation of these words, but after that first translation the reader is expected to remember the meaning of the words. Badal, for instance means revenge, while nang is the Pashto word for a man's honor. Another word used often is the word melmastia, the hospitality shown to a friend. A final common Pashto word is the term spingaris, which refers to the elders of a village. Military acronyms are also used in various parts of this novel. When Aziz first joined the Special Lashkar, he was sent to the Sharana FOB. In this use FOB stands for Forward Operating Base. Another military term that might not be familiar to the reader is the reference to HESCO barriers. These barriers are named after the company that made them. They are collapsible containers filled with dirt, in this instance the dirt from the ditch around the FOB, and sometimes stacked to form a wall.

Although this is a military novel and could be very cold and rigid, the novel is very colorful with the author's use of personification and simile. One quote that showcases the author's use of personification is the following: "a stove full of embers held out against the cold. A thin dusty carpet struggled to cover the dirt floor" (p. 33). The



personification comes in the author's act of describing the stove as holding out against the cold although the stove has no ability to hold out or give up. Additionally, the carpet in this quote is described as struggling to cover the floor, again an action a carpet can't do, but this assigning of human like abilities to these inanimate objects gives the story more life and color. In another quote, the author writes: "The mountains closed around us. We drove through them like children playing in a window's long curtains, chasing each other, all of us near, but hidden in the folds" (pp. 51-52). As the convoy starts out on its trip down the smugglers' path to Gomal, the line of trucks is described in a simile in terms of children playing in a set of curtains. This idea of playing children contrasts greatly with the truth these men are soldiers at war.

Structure

This novel is divided into four parts, each of which describes a different part of Aziz's experience, and 15 chapters. The first part of the novel contains two chapters which describe Aziz and Ali's life up to the point that Aziz completed his training in the Special Lashkar. The second part of the novel consists of seven chapters. This part of the novel describes Aziz's duties with the Special Lashkar up to the point that he accidentally killed Tawas.

Part Three of the novel includes a change of direction for Aziz. Because he can no longer fight with the Special Lashkar, he agreed to work as an informant for Commander Sabir. This part covers through Aziz's act of killing Gazan, Atal and Mr. Jack. Part Four is the shortest of all the parts, consisting of only one chapter. This part briefly describes Aziz's state of mind and goals as the new leader of Gazan's group of Taliban. The chapters range in length from 31 pages for Chapter 12 to a brief two pages for Chapter 15.

Quotes

Many would call me a dishonest man, but I've always kept faith with myself. There is an honesty in that, I think.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This opening quote by narrator and main character Aziz foreshadows the idea that he has undergone a great change. This change appears to not necessarily be for the best but Aziz seems to have found some way to come to terms with his change.

The living and dead were locked together inside the container.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 17)

Importance: After the Taliban attacked the village of Sperkai, the people, including Ali and Aziz's parents were gathered together and locked inside a shipping container. The boys were later sure that their parents were killed in this container when Ali found his father's ring inside the same container. The boys know their father would never have left his ring behind if he'd been alive.

You understand how to defend your brother's nang, he said to Ali. You know something of Pashtunwali. That is all too rare in these days. I could use a young man like you. Untangle these branches and deliver them as kindling to the Rish Khor Teahouse.

-- Hamza (Chapter 1 paragraph 52)

Importance: Because he understood the importance of defending his brother's honor, Ali was given a job by Hamza, a man who knew this characteristic in the young man would make him a trustworthy worker.

The militants fought to protect us from the Americans and the Americans fought to protect us from the militants, and being so protected, life was very dangerous.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 62)

Importance: As the militants and the Americans tried to protect the Afghan people from the militants and the Americans, it was the Afghan people who suffered in the bomb blasts and shootings.

We fight against the Taliban to uphold Pashtunwali, said Taqbir. The Special Lashkar protects the border and keeps men like Gazan in their place.

-- Taqbir (Chapter 1 paragraph 100)

Importance: When Ali was badly injured during a bombing in the bazaar at Orgun, Taqbir manipulated Aziz to join the Special Lashkar by telling him he'd be able to get revenge, or nang, on Gazan.

That winter, had I seen the future as clearly as the past, I might have run away.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 112)



Importance: This quote again foreshadows the idea that Aziz's career in the military may lead him down a path he doesn't want to travel. Seeing now what has happened to him, he believes if he'd known then what his future would hold, he might have run away when he had the opportunity.

To us, it seemed a small but misguided sort of insult. For our tribes had never been conquered.

-- Narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: The squads in the Special Lashkar were named after Indian tribes that had been conquered. While the leaders believed there was honor in using the Indian names, the Afghans consider it an insult, as their tribes, after which they have not been named, were never conquered.

I also fought for money, so if men like Atal were corrupt, then so was I. As long as I stayed a soldier and my pay went to the hospital, my brother would be cared for. My war was as simple and honest as that. There was no cause in it except the cause of survival.

-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 64)

Importance: When Aziz began to think of his reasons for fighting in the war, he compared himself to Atal who fought for profit. He thought if Atal was considered corrupt because he fought for personal profit, Aziz was corrupt as well because he fought to earn money to ensure his brother would have the medical care he needed.

When you Americans are deceived, killed in a green on blue by the very soldiers you trained, or something less, always it is done by those Afghans whose business it is to play each side against the other.

-- Commander Sabir (Chapter 5 paragraph 82)

Importance: This quote alludes to the title of the book "Green on Blue." It is indicated that this type of killing was one where an American was killed by an Afghan soldier trained using American supplies or funds.

Unjust? he said. You knocked me off this trail, which I drive because your feud with Gazan blocks the north road. My nephew is dead because you starve my village. Now I will bury him far from your fighting. Badal is all I have left and my badal is to deny myself to you, to Gazan, or to any other who speaks of blood.

-- Man on the motorbike (Chapter 6 paragraph 38)

Importance: The man on the motorbike had determined that even though he was asked to join the Special Lashkar to get revenge for the death of his nephew, he would not join the fighting. He believed the only way he could truly get revenge for the boy's death would be by not joining any group that was motivated by killings.



Destroying Gazan and his fighters would never be a good option for Commander Sabir. He needed them.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 2)

Importance: Aziz and his fellow troops began to realize that if Gazan were destroyed, it would remove Commander Sabir’s power over the Afghan villagers.

In Pashto, Commander Sabir’s type of war is called ghabban: this is when someone demands money for protection against a threat they create. For this type of war, the Americans don’t have a word. The only one that comes near is racket. Our war was a racket.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 5)

Importance: Furthering the theme of the politics of war, Aziz described how the type of war that Commander Sabir was fighting was one in which he was paid to fight Gazan, an enemy he allowed to remain an enemy because he did not want to lose his paycheck.

The door creaked on its hinges in the wind, banging against the tan suede boot of the man I’d killed, and the sound seemed like a slow steady knocking on the door of all the unhappiness I would ever know.

-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 64)

Importance: It was when Aziz accidentally killed Tawas that his career in the Special Lashkar was finished. He would always be in danger of being killed by Qiam, Tawas’ brother. After this unfortunate circumstance, Aziz agreed to be an informant for Commander Sabir so he could continue to fund his brother’s medical care.

I fought to avenge my brother, but I’d just killed the brother of another man, a friend. I’d taken from him just what Gazan had taken from me. Had I become the very thing I despised, that which I wished to destroy?”

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 2)

Importance: It is in this part of the novel that Aziz realized that although his killing of Tawas was accidental, he had become the very thing he’d once sought to destroy.

We all had a future then, he said. We understood what it meant to sacrifice that small future for a bigger one. Such sacrifice is what it meant to be a mujahid and this is why all the mujahideen are now dead, even the living ones such as me are dead. Now the cause is war for advantage, war for profit, not a future.

-- Mumtaz (Chapter 11 paragraph 6)

Importance: Mumtaz, the man with whom Aziz took refuge during his stay in Gomal, told Aziz he had fought in a war because he believed it would provide a better future. He refused to take sides in the current war because he knew the soldiers were not fighting for a better future but for profit for a few men.



Atal held his gaze on mine, affirming a decision in me that he'd already made. I am helping Gazan broker a peace with the Americans, he said.

-- Atal (Chapter 12 paragraph 92)

Importance: Although Aziz was working as an informant for Commander Sabir, he managed to earn the respect and confidence of Atal. Atal told Aziz that he intended to try to arrange for peace between Gazan and the Americans.

Do you believe it was an accident that was Qiam's truck? he asked. Think what you will of me, Aziz, but I am deliberate.

-- Commander Sabir (Chapter 12 paragraph 240)

Importance: Commander Sabir believed he had done Aziz a favor by arranging for the death of Qiam, the man who could have killed Aziz in revenge for his brother's death. Aziz, however, was upset that more people had been killed when he had warned Commander Sabir that the land mine had been set.

My journey up to this moment — my brother, joining the Special Lashkar, Tawas's death — this was all invisible to him, but that invisible distance made my final action possible.

-- Narrator (Chapter 13 paragraph 170)

Importance: Aziz explained how he was able to kill Atal because Atal didn't know everything about Aziz that had led him to that moment. He was not aware of the pain Aziz felt because his brother had been injured or that he had killed Tawas, leaving him with no choice but to inform on Atal.

With the driver's door open, the overhead light gave me a last look at the scene and offered me confidence that whoever found this would draw a simple conclusion — a meeting between a militant commander, corrupt village elder, and overconfident American gone sour with deceit.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 8)

Importance: Aziz does not believe that he would be suspected in the killings of Mr. Jack, Atal and Gazan.

Plenty, if you choose. But you can't come to Shkin anymore. You are completely outside us now. But with this, you are valuable. Gazan is gone, but someone must lead his fighters. You.

-- Commander Sabir (Chapter 14 paragraph 38)

Importance: Commander Sabir manipulates Aziz by telling him he can't return to the firebase because of what has happened. He tells Aziz the only way that he can make a living and support his brother is if he takes over leading Gazan's men now that Gazan is gone.