

High Five Study Guide

High Five by Janet Evanovich

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Plot Summary

High Five is the fifth installment in Janet Evanovich's Stephanie Plum series. In this novel, Stephanie finds herself searching for one of her uncles who went missing while on his normal afternoon errands. Stephanie follows every lead she comes across, including a dispute her uncle was having with his garbage company. At the same time, Stephanie is desperate to make some money, so she asks Ranger to throw a few jobs her way through his security company. However, working closely with Ranger causes a new set of problems for Stephanie, especially in her on-again, off-again relationship with an old flame, Joe Morelli. High Five is another fast-paced, comic adventure that will leave readers guessing even past the last page.

Stephanie Plum is a bounty hunter who cannot get enough work to pay the bills. Only one client has missed his court date, leaving Stephanie desperate for money. After Stephanie attempts to apprehend the fugitive and fails, she asks fellow bounty hunter Ranger to throw some work her way through his security company. Ranger enlists Stephanie's help in evicting a drug dealer illegally from his apartment. Later, Stephanie shares night guard at the apartment building. The drug dealer returns with a gun and his chest strapped with explosives. Stephanie is held at gunpoint, forced to take the man back to his apartment. While Stephanie attempts to explain that Ranger's men took all the man's things away, a neighbor comes out of her apartment. The woman pulls a gun on the drug dealer when he fires at her, shooting him and causing the man to explode.

The next job Ranger offers Stephanie is a chauffeuring job. Stephanie pulls over to get her spoiled, teenage passenger a drink, and he steals the car. Rather than fire her, however, Ranger continues to throw work Stephanie's way. During this same time, Stephanie finds out her uncle is missing. Stephanie visits her aunt to see if there is anything she can do. Stephanie learns that her uncle had a dispute with his garbage collection company that he intended on dealing with the day he disappeared. Stephanie's aunt also gives Stephanie some pictures she found in her husband's desk. The pictures appear to depict a female body that has been dismembered and placed in garbage bags.

Stephanie talks to a cop friend who tells her how her uncle's car was found in front of the grocery store with the dry cleaning neatly laid out in the backseat. The cops seem to think Uncle Fred simply got confused and wandered off. Stephanie also learns that Uncle Fred was having an affair, something that was not new in Fred's daily routine. While investigating his disappearance, Stephanie meets up with a man who claims to be Uncle Fred's bookie, hoping to find Fred in order to collect on some money. This man, Bunchy, wants to work with Stephanie to find Uncle Fred. Stephanie refuses, but Bunchy begins following her anyway. Also during this time, Stephanie learns that Benito Ramirez, a crazed rapist, has been released from jail. Stephanie helped put Ramirez in jail, therefore has reason to believe he might come looking for her.

Ranger has Stephanie help him with another job. This job consists of Stephanie distracting a man while Ranger and his guys repossess his car. Stephanie is in the



middle of flirting with the guy in a bar when Ramirez comes in and threatens the guy. A fight breaks out, emptying out the entire bar. A short time later, Stephanie laments the Buick she is forced to drive. Ranger overhears and soon presents her with a new black Porsche, calling it a company car. Stephanie accepts the car, using it to go visit her on-again, off-again lover, Morelli. However, when Stephanie arrives at Morelli's she sees an old girlfriend of his dropping him off. Stephanie becomes enraged with jealousy, pushing Morelli away, while at the same time finding herself conflicted over her feelings for Ranger.

Stephanie takes the Porsche to visit first the local bank, curious if the check her uncle set aside to prove payments he made to the garbage company is legitimate. Afterward, Stephanie takes the check to the garbage company where an employee tells her there is something strange about the check. The check was cleared by a local bank rather than the big bank the company normally uses. Stephanie is about to leave when the employee calls her back inside for a short time. When Stephanie finally leaves, a garbage truck runs into the side of the car. While they argue about the accident, the Porsche explodes causing the garbage truck to fall onto the Porsche.

Rather than getting angry, Ranger gives Stephanie another car. This car is stolen while Stephanie is attempting to arrest another fugitive. Stephanie returns home only to find the bank manager waiting for her. It seems Stephanie has gotten too close to the man's embezzlement scheme. Stephanie's uncle got too close as well, threatening the bank manager with exposure after seeing him dump garbage bags with the pieces of his partner's wife in them. The bank manager killed most of his partners and now wants to kill Stephanie. However, Ramirez bursts into Stephanie's bedroom at that point, getting shot by the bank manager. The manager escapes, sparing Stephanie her life. The next day, Stephanie finds the bank manager as she drives a teenager to the airport, apprehending him before he can escape.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Stephanie is a bounty hunter who works for her cousin Vinnie's bond company. Stephanie's pay depends on the fugitives she brings in and the amount of their bond. Vinnie has been going through a good spell where all his clients have been appearing in court on time, which is good for Vinnie but not good for Stephanie. Stephanie is desperate to make some money to pay her bills.

Stephanie goes to the office to see if there are any FTAs to go after, but the only one Connie has is Randy Briggs, a computer programmer who was arrested for having a concealed weapon. The contract is only worth seventy dollars to Stephanie, but it's the best she can do for now. Stephanie goes to Briggs' apartment and tells him who she is. Briggs refuses to allow her to take him in, claiming he is too busy to go to court on a bogus arrest. After Briggs slams the door, Stephanie gets a page from her mother. Stephanie goes to her mother's and finds out that her uncle is missing. Grandma Mazur wants Stephanie to see what she can do to help find Uncle Fred. At Uncle Fred's, Stephanie speaks to his wife, Mabel. Mabel tells Stephanie that Fred went out to do the regular errands and disappeared. Fred was supposed to go to the dry cleaners, the grocery store, and the garbage collection company. Fred was in the middle of a dispute with the garbage company. The company missed their house one morning, so Fred wanted two dollars back on their prepaid account. However, when Fred complained, the girl claimed she could not find Fred listed in their computer as a customer. Fred was to return that afternoon with a check proving payment.

Mabel also shows Stephanie some photos she found in Fred's desk. The photos are of a young woman, apparently dismembered and stuffed into a garbage bag. Stephanie searches Fred's desk to see if she can find anything else of interest. All she finds is the check to the garbage company. Stephanie takes both the check and the pictures when she leaves. Stephanie calls a friend with the police department and learns that Fred's car was found with the dry cleaning neatly placed in the back. Fred made it to the dry cleaners, but not the grocery store. It also appears that an hour is missing between the time Fred left home and arrived at the dry cleaners. Stephanie then calls Morelli, a friend and on-again, off-again lover, to give him the pictures of the dismembered body. Stephanie returns to the bonds office where she runs into Ranger. Stephanie tells Ranger about her desperate economic situation and asks if he could give her some work through his security company. Ranger agrees.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Stephanie Plum, the main character and first person narrator, is introduced in this first chapter. Stephanie is a bounty hunter who needs to make some money in order to pay her bills. Stephanie has only one option, a computer programmer who refuses to be



taken in. Randy Briggs, the computer programmer, is a little person, a fact that throws Stephanie off when she first comes to his apartment, allowing him to close his door and escape her clutches for the time being. However, readers know that Stephanie is desperate, even for the small pay this job will offer; therefore, readers suspect she will return. At the same time, Stephanie is alerted by her mother and grandmother that her uncle is missing. Stephanie visits her aunt to find out what the deal is with her uncle. Stephanie is not terribly concerned, suspecting the uncle will show up eventually. However, when her aunt shows her some pictures of what appears to be a dismembered body, Stephanie is intrigued.

Not only does this first chapter introduce Stephanie and Briggs, but it also introduces the two men in Stephanie's life, Ranger and Morelli, as well as her family. Stephanie is big on family, always running when they call, even though she pretends to be annoyed by their intrusion, introducing the reader to the theme of family as well as exploring Stephanie's gentler side. Morelli is a cop with whom Stephanie has been having an on again, off again relationship for many years. Stephanie finds Morelli exciting, but is put off by his history of philandering. Ranger, on the other hand, is a strong, dark, mysterious figure who is incredibly sexy and exciting. Stephanie finds both men attractive, setting up for the reader the idea of a lover's triangle as Stephanie talks Ranger into helping her make a few bucks while things are slow in the bond business.



Chapters 2-3

Chapters 2-3 Summary

Stephanie returns to Briggs' apartment building. When she establishes that he is not home, Stephanie gets the key from the manager. Stephanie waits in the apartment until a note is slid under the door letting her know he does not plan to come home until she leaves. Stephanie goes home to reflect on the day's events. Ranger comes over with dinner and tells Stephanie that he wants her help with a redecorating job the following day. Ranger picks Stephanie up before dawn and takes her with three other guys over to an apartment building in a seedy part of town. Stephanie, Ranger, and his men barge into an apartment and forcefully evict the drug dealer and addict who lives there, then remove all his things. Then Ranger tells Stephanie that the men will be taking turns guarding the building for the next couple of days. Stephanie agrees to take the night shift with a guy called Tank. Back at her apartment, Stephanie gets a call from her Aunt Mabel telling her how a man came to her door asking about Fred. Later, Stephanie learns that a different man came to her apartment looking for her.

Stephanie also gets a call from her grandmother giving her the name of a woman Fred was possibly seeing on the side. Stephanie visits the woman and establishes that Fred was with her during the missing hour Friday afternoon before he disappeared. Stephanie also tracks down the woman's husband to make sure he did not find out about the affair and go after Fred. Stephanie is satisfied that the husband knew nothing about the affair. Stephanie also speaks to Fred's sons, but learns nothing new from them either, except what she already knew about Fred's cheap nature. After these interviews, Stephanie goes off to meet Morelli at a local restaurant. Morelli invites Stephanie to a wedding that weekend. Then Morelli tells Stephanie that Benito Ramirez, a crazed rapist who attacked Lula and blames Stephanie for getting put in jail, has been released. Stephanie leaves the restaurant to go home and prepare for guard duty with Tank that night. When she gets home, Stephanie finds a man waiting at her door. The man lets himself into her apartment and introduces himself as Bunchy. Bunchy claims to be a bookie who is looking for Fred. Bunchy wants to work together with Stephanie. Stephanie agrees in order to get Bunchy out of her apartment.

Later that night, Stephanie goes back to the apartment building with Tank to watch for the drug addict-dealer. Stephanie is asleep on the floor when the guy shows up. Tank goes down when the guy shoots him. The guy then shows Stephanie a bomb strapped to his chest and tells her to take him to his apartment. When they get inside the apartment, the man becomes angry when he discovers all his things are gone. A neighbor comes into the hall and begins to argue with the drug addict. The addict fires his gun, causing the neighbor to fire back, exploding the bomb on the man's chest. Stephanie awakes strapped to a gurney. Morelli visits her in the hospital, demanding an explanation. Morelli does not like that Stephanie is working for Ranger because he questions Ranger's ability to keep Stephanie safe. Stephanie asks Morelli if he knows a guy named Bunchy, but Morelli does not recognize the name despite knowing most of



the bookies in town. Stephanie arrives home to find Bunchy in her living room. Bunchy wants Stephanie to go check out Uncle Fred's bank. Stephanie sends him away, makes plans to go to her mother's for dinner, and gets into the shower.

Chapters 2-3 Analysis

Stephanie returns to Briggs' apartment but has less luck this time. Again the readers find themselves doubting Stephanie's bounty hunting skills but hope to see her return successfully at some point. Later, Stephanie continues the investigation into Uncle Fred's disappearance. Stephanie learns little new, except that Fred was having an affair with a woman from the senior center, but that this affair has nothing to do with his disappearance. Stephanie then goes to work on guard duty at the apartment building where she helped Ranger evict a tenant only to nearly get herself blown up when an elderly neighbor shoots the drug addict. Again, it seems everything Stephanie touches ends up going wrong.

Stephanie has an argument with Morelli who is concerned about her working with Ranger. Morelli thinks little of Ranger because he tends to work outside the law and seems to place Stephanie in danger quite often. However, Stephanie expresses her right to make her own decisions by refusing to stop working with Ranger. This explores Stephanie's personality, showing that even though she is not entirely sure of her own abilities to protect herself, she refuses to allow anyone tell her what she can and cannot do. Finally, Stephanie has met and is plagued by Bunchy, a bookie who wants to work with Stephanie in finding Fred. Morelli does not recognize Bunchy's name or description when Stephanie asks, which seems odd since his job allows him to know quite a few bookies in the area. Stephanie finds Bunchy to be an irritant and tries to pacify him so he will stay off her back. At the same time, Stephanie questions Bunchy's story of being a bookie, making the reader wonder if perhaps Bunchy might have some other interest in either Fred or Stephanie.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Ranger stops by Stephanie's apartment and asks her to take another shift with Tank at the apartment building, but Stephanie refuses. Stephanie goes out and discovers that Bunchy is following her. Stephanie pulls over and demands to know what he is doing. Bunchy insists that he wants to be a part of Stephanie's investigation into Uncle Fred's disappearance, but Stephanie suspects there is more to his interest than he admits. Stephanie goes to the office and asks Lula to get Bunchy off her tail. Lula distracts Bunchy by kissing him while Stephanie drives away. Stephanie goes to Mabel's and asks about Bunchy, but Mabel insists that Fred was too cheap to throw money away on gambling. Mabel also mentions that Fred did not own a camera, suggesting the pictures she found were taken with a disposable camera. Stephanie goes to the bank next and talks to a second cousin who is a teller there. Leona tells her she saw Fred there the day he disappeared and that he stopped to talk to Allen Shempsky, vice president. Shempsky tells Stephanie that Fred wanted to ask about taking out a loan. From there, Stephanie goes to RGC, the garbage collection company where Fred had a dispute. Stephanie talks to the receptionist, Martha, who claims Fred was not even listed in the computer as a customer. Another employee in the office, Larry Lipinski, told Stephanie that they had been having trouble with the computers, and he was working on fixing the problem. Martha argued with him, however, and they were still arguing as Stephanie left.

Stephanie takes Lula with her and they return to Briggs' apartment. Lula gets Briggs to open the door long enough for Stephanie to snap her cuffs on him, but Briggs runs back into the apartment. A scuffle ensues, but Stephanie and Lula are both reluctant to become violent with a little person. Once again, Briggs is able to escape when he runs out of the apartment and then backtracks and hides behind the locked door. That night, Stephanie has dinner with her parents and grandmother where discussions center around Fred. Stephanie ends up spending the night, forcing Bunchy, who is once again following her, to spend the night in his car. When Stephanie returns home, she finds a message from Ranger on her machine, as well as one from Ramirez. Stephanie calls Ranger and learns that he wants her to take a job chauffeuring a teenager from the airport to the home of some relatives. Stephanie studies the copies of the pictures from Fred's desk that she had made, establishing that the woman was a small brunette and that the building behind the body is made of stucco. Stephanie decides it is time to visit Mabel again.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Bunchy is following Stephanie. Stephanie does not believe Bunchy is a bookie, so now she wonders why he is following her and why he is so interested in the case. The reader wonders the same thing, thinking maybe Bunchy is a cop and Uncle Fred was on to



something bigger than a missed day from the garbage company. Even Lula distracting Bunchy does not help because he somehow locates Stephanie again. At the same time, Stephanie continues to struggle with Briggs. Stephanie needs to bring him in, but Briggs continues to use his small stature to stop her. The reader gets to know Briggs a little every time Stephanie goes to see him, seeing him as a little person who is willing to use his disability to his advantage. Briggs is also an intelligent man who is committed to his work and determined to finish his current project. This leaves the reader wondering if Briggs will continue to outsmart Stephanie or if she will eventually get the better of him.

Ranger wants Stephanie to continue working on the apartment building job despite the fact that she got the drug addict blown up. Stephanie refuses, but Ranger offers her another job. This shows the reader that Ranger is either a poor business man who hires incompetent employees or that he has some affection for Stephanie and is trying to help. Due to the highly successful nature of his business, the reader suspects the latter. Ranger could become a problem for Stephanie if the reader is reading the sexual tension, a theme of the novel, correctly. Finally, Stephanie continues to plug away at the mystery surrounding her uncle's disappearance despite the fact that it is a non-paying job. Stephanie visits the bank and learns that Fred checked with the vice president about taking out a loan. This seems suspicious to the reader because of Fred's frugal nature but at this point does not sound any warning bells for Stephanie. Stephanie also visits the garbage company and finds some disagreement between the employees over the nature of Fred's dispute with them, leaving the reader wondering if something odd is not going on there.



Chapter 5-6

Chapter 5-6 Summary

Stephanie visits Mabel again but does not learn anything new. Stephanie tries to call the garbage company and speak to Larry about Fred's bill but is not successful. Stephanie attempts to run the facts as she knows them so far through her mind and comes up with a scenario. Stephanie believes Fred saw someone dump the bags containing the body and was blackmailing that person. It was the only scenario that makes sense to her. Stephanie goes to pick up Ranger's car so she can do the chauffeuring job for him. The kid Stephanie is to drive is a spoiled Arab child with a sexual fixation. Stephanie is annoyed by the kid's complaining as they make their way through traffic and finally agrees to stop and buy him a coke. Stephanie goes inside a fast food restaurant only to return to the parking lot to find the car gone. Stephanie calls Ranger who quickly locates the kid and his car. Stephanie calls Lula for a ride. They decide to go shopping at the mall to blow off some steam. Stephanie buys a hot new dress and shoes for the wedding she is to attend with Morelli that weekend. When they get back to Lula's car, they find a note that tells them they should not wear dresses like the one Stephanie just bought. Stephanie is convinced the note came from Ramirez even though the note is unsigned.

Ranger stops by to return Stephanie's jacket and openly admires Stephanie's new dress. Stephanie feels the sexual tension between them but does nothing to act on it. Bunchy stops by after Ranger leaves, but Stephanie refuses to tell him anything about the case. Bunchy comments on Morelli, however, when he learns that Stephanie is dating him, letting her know that he knows Morelli's reputation with the ladies. Stephanie talks to Larry at the garbage company the following morning and promises to bring Uncle Fred's check by before the end of the day. Then Stephanie leaves only to find herself face to face with Ramirez in the parking lot. Stephanie manages to get away, but she is frightened by the confrontation. Stephanie decides today is the day Briggs is going in. Stephanie returns to his apartment and tries to reason with him. When that does not work, Stephanie gets a tire iron from her car and pries his door open. A fight ensues, ending with Stephanie and Briggs rolling down the stairs. Briggs is bruised and battered but successfully apprehended. Afterward, Stephanie drives out to the garbage company where she learns Larry Lipinski has committed suicide after confessing to the murder of his co-worker, Martha, who was killed the day before. Stephanie has dinner with her family again that night where the suicide is the talk at the table. Afterward, Stephanie takes a plate of food to Bunchy who is again following her.

Chapter 5-6 Analysis

Stephanie does another job for Ranger and it again turns into a disaster. It seems every case Stephanie touches ends in a mess, but Ranger does not seem to mind. Stephanie is confronted by Ramirez in her own parking lot and is frightened, a situation that makes



her more determined to prove her own strength. Stephanie is a stubborn woman who does not want to be told what to do by any man. Perhaps this stems from her bad marriage or is simply a character quirk. At any rate, it leaves Stephanie determined to bring in Briggs. Stephanie does, but she ruins the lock on his door in the process and leaves him looking as though he were in a fight with a man twice his size. This is important because the state of Briggs' door will become an issue later in the novel.

Larry Lipinski has killed himself the day after his co-worker, Martha, was found shot to death in the parking lot. This is interesting for several reasons. First is the fact that Fred was having a dispute with these people the day he disappeared. Second, Martha and Larry were arguing over the nature of Fred's dispute the day before Martha died. Finally, Larry claims to have killed Martha, suggesting he was hiding something that was related to Fred's dispute. All of this leads the reader to believe that the dispute Fred had with the garbage company had something to do with his disappearance.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Stephanie takes her grandmother to the funeral home to view Martha's body. While she is there, Stephanie runs into Terry Gilman, Morelli's girlfriend all through high school and the niece of a well known mobster. Stephanie is annoyed when she sees Morelli walk up and say hello to Terry, too. Afterward, Stephanie returns home with a large bag of leftovers, which she eats, leaving her feeling guilty and concerned about fitting into her new dress on Saturday. Stephanie calls Ranger and asks him to go running with her in the morning. However, the exercise does not go well, and Stephanie ends up walking back to her apartment alone. On the way, Stephanie is once again confronted by Ramirez who tells her it is almost time for him to teach her things. Stephanie walks away and meets up with Ranger again in her parking lot. Ranger asks Stephanie to help him with an FTA who is known to visit his mother in the Burg. Back at her apartment, Stephanie finds Bunchy waiting for her. Bunchy is studying the copies of the pictures found in Fred's desk. Bunchy tells her that the circular in the bag with the body dates the pictures to just a day before Fred disappeared.

Stephanie goes to the office and enlists Lula's help for the dead. Stephanie makes posters with Fred's picture, and she and Lula go back to the shopping center where Fred disappeared. They have no luck most of the day, but then Stephanie finds a woman who remembers seeing Fred get into a car with a small man. Afterward, they return to Lula's car and discover that Bunchy has taken off the tires to get back at Lula for distracting him the other day. Stephanie goes to visit Mabel again and finds out that Fred took his extra trash bags behind the butcher's the Thursday before he disappeared because RGC charges for extra bags. Finally, Stephanie stops by an old friend's house and asks her to keep an eye on her neighbor's house for the FTA Ranger is looking for.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Stephanie shows some of her feelings for Morelli when she gets jealous of his high school girlfriend. The reader has followed Stephanie's flirting with Ranger and her flirting with Morelli, but this is the first time in this novel she has shown any real feelings for either man. It seems Stephanie's feelings run deeper for Morelli than Ranger. However, the story is continuing to develop, so Stephanie's feelings for Ranger may still reveal themselves later. At the same time, Stephanie continues to investigate the disappearance of her uncle even as she is being stalked by a crazed rapist. The reader witnesses Stephanie's confrontations with Ramirez and begins to wonder if perhaps she is not taking these a little lightly. It seems Ramirez represents a real danger, and Stephanie should tell someone or take some precaution.

Stephanie finds a witness who saw Uncle Fred get into a car with a small man. This appears to be a big breakthrough in the case. Now they have a witness. However, they

have no way of identifying the suspect at this point. The reader suspects this witness will be able to identify someone as the plot continues to develop.



Chapter 8-9

Chapter 8-9 Summary

Stephanie rushes home to get ready for the wedding, changing her mind about the sexy dress at the last minute and instead wearing a more conservative dress. As she is about to leave, Randy Briggs arrives. Briggs' apartment was broken into because of his broken lock, so Vinnie gave him Stephanie's address. Stephanie calls Vinnie and learns that Briggs threatened to sue so Vinnie sent him to her to protect them both from a lawsuit. Reluctantly, Stephanie agrees to allow Briggs to stay with her. Stephanie and Morelli go to the wedding where they run into Terry Gilman. Terry pulls Morelli away during the reception to help calm a male guest. While he is gone, Stephanie gets a call from her friend in the Burg telling her that the FTA is at his mother's house. Stephanie tries to call Ranger, but he does not answer his phone. Stephanie looks for Morelli but cannot find him either. Stephanie decides to go to the house herself to keep an eye on the FTA until Ranger can arrive. However, Stephanie forgets her phone. The FTA leaves the house, and Stephanie feels that she must follow after him. The man tries to get away, but Stephanie manages to get him down on the ground where they fight until Ranger and Morelli arrive.

The following Sunday, Stephanie drives behind the butcher's and sees that one of its neighbors has a stucco wall in back, suggesting perhaps the location of the dismembered body when Uncle Fred took the pictures. Stephanie returns home where her grandmother calls insisting they go to Larry Lipinski's viewing. Stephanie goes to her parents' for dinner first, taking Briggs with her, since there is no food in her kitchen. Briggs goes along to the funeral home as well, getting caught up in Grandma Mazur's scheme to get pictures of Lipinski's face for Stephanie's witness. Grandma Mazur pulls the fire alarm and takes his picture while people are rushing from the building. The following morning, Stephanie has the pictures developed and then takes them to her witness. However, the witness says that Lipinski was not the man she saw with Uncle Fred the day he disappeared. At the same time, Stephanie sees a picture of Lipinski's wife and thinks she looks like the woman in the garbage bags. Finally, Stephanie goes to speak to a woman whose husband had a similar dispute with the cable company that Fred had with the garbage company. When Stephanie arrives home after her day's activities, she finds Ranger waiting for her. Earlier in the day Stephanie had mentioned that she disliked her car and needed a new one. Ranger presents Stephanie with a black Porsche, telling her he likes all his employees to use black cars.

Chapter 8-9 Analysis

Briggs returns to Stephanie's life. Briggs' apartment was broken into because of the lock Stephanie damaged, so Vinnie forces Stephanie to take him in in order to avoid a lawsuit. Stephanie reluctantly agrees. They do not become friends, but tolerate each other to the point where Stephanie takes Briggs home to dinner and along to the



viewing for Larry Lipinski. This suggests that Briggs will become a fixture in Stephanie's life for the remaining of the novel. At the same time, Stephanie goes to the wedding with Morelli but ends up chasing down an FTA in her wedding attire. This time Stephanie manages to get her man on the first try, but the chase leaves her dirty and unable to return to the wedding.

Stephanie does more leg work on her uncle's disappearance, learning few things. Of importance here, however, is the fact that another senior citizen had a similar problem with the cable company as Fred had with the garbage company. This suggests that perhaps this dispute was not only the cause of Fred's troubles, but that it goes much deeper than Stephanie originally suspected. Stephanie also learns the cause of the dispute goes deeper than Lipinski because he is not the man who was seen with Fred the day he disappeared. This suggests more people involved. It could also suggest that Lipinski's death was about something deeper than a dispute with a co-worker. Finally, Stephanie believes she has identified the woman Fred found dismembered. The woman might be Laura Lipinski, Larry's wife.



Chapters 10-11

Chapters 10-11 Summary

Ranger insists that Stephanie take the car for a few days and think about whether or not she is willing to accept it. Stephanie calls her best friend Mary Lou and tells her, wondering aloud what Ranger wants in return. The general conclusion seems to be sexual favors. Out of guilt, Stephanie calls Morelli and offers to have dinner with him, but Morelli says he has to work. Stephanie is uneasy all night deciding to go out for some junk food. Instead, Stephanie takes the Porsche to Morelli's, arriving just in time to see him getting out of Terry Gilman's car. Stephanie is so upset that she buys a bag full of candy and eats it all. The next morning, Stephanie takes the check from Fred's to the bank and asks Leona if there is something strange about it. Stephanie asks Shempsky as well, but neither notices anything odd about the check. Back at her apartment, Stephanie has lunch with Bunchy where it finally hits her who Bunchy is. Morelli mentioned working with some Treasury department guys. Stephanie believes Bunchy is one of them. That night, Stephanie goes with Ranger to work a job. Stephanie is to distract a lawyer while Ranger and his crew repossess his car. Everything is going well until Ramirez suddenly appears and starts a fight with the lawyer.

Afterward, Stephanie finds Morelli waiting for her at her apartment. Stephanie is angry with Morelli, but somehow they end up kissing against her door after Morelli expresses concern about her safety and suggests he might want to marry her someday. Stephanie lies awake half the night thinking about Morelli and her uncle's case. Stephanie gets out of bed to look out her window and finds herself staring directly at Ramirez. Stephanie is frightened and ends up spending the rest of her night with Briggs on the couch. The next morning, Grandma Mazur's friend calls to let Stephanie know she found a check for the cable company. Stephanie goes by and picks up the check. Stephanie then swings by and gets Lula before heading over to the bank. Stephanie again asks Leona if there is something odd about the checks. Stephanie also speaks to Shempsky for a minute before she and Lula go out to the garbage company. The clerk there tells them that the checks were canceled at the local bank instead of the large bank where all of their checks normally go. This makes Stephanie and Lula think that someone is skimming money from the company. Stephanie and Lula are called back inside so the clerk can make a copy of the check before they finally leave. A garbage truck sideswipes Stephanie's Porsche. Stephanie and the truck driver begin arguing when suddenly the Porsche explodes.

Chapters 10-11 Analysis

Ranger gives Stephanie a car, causing her to wonder what Ranger might want from her. Stephanie is working for Ranger, but she is not the best of employees and a Porsche is not a common work car. This causes Stephanie to feel a need to connect with Morelli. Unfortunately, Stephanie catches Morelli with Terry Gilman, sending her into a fit of rage



and self destruction. This reveals Stephanie's true feelings for Morelli to the reader even though Stephanie does not seem to understand her own feelings herself. At the same time, Stephanie continues to work for Ranger. Stephanie helps Ranger repossess a car but is interrupted by Ramirez. This episode foreshadows another time when Ramirez might show up to stop a man from touching Stephanie. At the same time, Stephanie sees Ramirez outside her window, showing the reader how vulnerable she is to attack.

Stephanie continues the investigation into her uncle's disappearance. This investigation leads Stephanie to believe that someone has been stealing money from local companies. The person responsible is still unclear. However, several people have either died or disappeared, leaving the reader concerned that whoever is responsible might be killing off witnesses and/or partners. When Stephanie's car explodes, this idea is underscored, leaving the reader more concerned than ever for Stephanie's safety.



Chapters12-13

Chapters12-13 Summary

Stephanie tells Morelli her theories about her uncle's disappearance after the explosion. Stephanie gets the impression that she and Morelli are working on the same case, especially after he confirms for her that Bunchy is not a bookie. Morelli tells Stephanie to back off, suggesting she get out of town for a while, but Stephanie refuses. Ranger shows up and takes Stephanie to dinner. They talk for a while and Stephanie learns some things about Ranger's past she did not know. Things seem to heat up between them when Ranger drops her off at home, so Stephanie rushes off. At home, Stephanie calls her friend Mary Lou and asks her to help spy on Morelli. This is not the first time they have done this, and like before, they get caught. Morelli drags Stephanie into the house and demands to know what is going on. Stephanie demands he tell her what he knows about her uncle's disappearance. Morelli tells Stephanie that he has been working on a case that involves someone stealing money from Terry's uncle's companies. The Treasury department came in, hoping to break a large crime ring. Morelli is involved because the uncle, Vito Grizolli, refused to deal with anyone but him.

The next morning, Ranger delivers a new BMW for Stephanie's use. This car includes sensor detectors that will warn Stephanie if someone puts a bomb under it. Stephanie goes to her mother's to ask a few questions, but does not learn anything new. At Mabel's, Stephanie again learns nothing new except that Mabel has gone on a spending spree and appears to be optimistic that Fred will never return. Stephanie then goes to the office where she learns there is a new FTA. Stephanie takes Lula with her to make the apprehension. Before they go after the guy, they stop at the bank and show Leona the two checks. Leona does not notice anything odd about the checks except that they were both cleared there at her bank. Stephanie asks if anyone at the bank might have cause to get involved in a skimming scheme, but no one in particular comes to mind. Stephanie and Lula go after the FTA. Stephanie parks the car some distance from the man's house so he will not see them. They make the apprehension with only a small amount of violence.

Chapters12-13 Analysis

Ranger and Morelli are causing Stephanie a great deal of trouble. Touching on the theme of love versus sexual tension, Stephanie finds herself struggling with her desire to have a committed relationship with Morelli or a hot affair with Ranger. Both men show concern for Stephanie and express desire for her. However, Stephanie's affection tends toward Morelli despite his past reputation as a womanizer. As part of this struggle, Stephanie goes to spy on Morelli, hoping to learn once and for all if he is having an affair with Terry Gilman. Instead, Stephanie learns the details of the case Morelli is working on. Someone is stealing money from some of Terry's uncle's businesses, including RGC. This ties in with Stephanie's uncle's disappearance. Now Stephanie and



the reader both know that Bunchy is really a Treasury agent who was hoping to solve his case by watching Stephanie solve it for him. The checks continue to be the biggest clue for Stephanie, leaving her wondering if someone at the bank is behind the entire scheme. It seems whoever was skimming the money at the companies would need a connection at the bank to clear the checks. Stephanie is unclear who this person might be, but the reader is beginning to get an idea.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Stephanie sends Lula to get the BMW, but Lula discovers the car was stolen. Stephanie calls Vinnie for a ride. Morelli calls and tells Stephanie that a suspect connected to his case was found murdered. Back at the office, Stephanie calls the bank and asks about Shempsky. Stephanie thinks Shempsky could be the one who put the bomb under her Porsche since he was only one of a few who knew she was driving the car. However, Shempsky is not at the bank but has gone home sick. Stephanie retrieves her Buick from her apartment parking lot and goes to Shempsky's house. Shempsky is not there. Stephanie steals a picture and takes it to her witness. The woman positively identifies Shempsky as the man who she saw with Fred the day he disappeared.

Afterward, Stephanie goes to her parents' for dinner, locking the Buick in the garage. Mary Lou drives Stephanie home where she finds Ranger waiting for her. Stephanie tells him about the BMW. Ranger finds the whole thing amusing. Stephanie and Ranger share a kiss in the car before she goes inside. Stephanie is distracted by Ranger when she enters to building so she does not see Ramirez until it is too late. Ramirez grabs her and tries to take her out of the building, but one of Stephanie's neighbors sees what is happening and fires a gun, scaring him off.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Stephanie has lost another of Ranger's cars, but he finds the whole situation amusing. In fact, Ranger seems perfectly happy to continue to furnish Stephanie with anything she wants. Stephanie and Ranger share a kiss, distracting her from the reality of the danger she faces with Ramirez on the loose. Ramirez grabs her, but Stephanie manages to get away when one of her elderly neighbors pulls a gun. Once again the reader is reminded about the danger that surrounds Stephanie, foreshadowing a moment when Stephanie could face the reality of her mortality. Before all this, Stephanie finally has a suspect for her uncle's disappearance. Stephanie has finally realized that Shempsky is the perfect suspect because he knew she was driving the Porsche the day her car was bombed. Stephanie takes a picture of Shempsky to her witness, and sure enough, the witness makes a positive identification. Now Stephanie is not only in danger from Ramirez, but no one knows where Shempsky is.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Stephanie rushes up to her apartment to call the police. Unfortunately, Shempsky is there waiting for her. Shempsky tied Briggs up and put him in the closet. Now Shempsky plans to kill Stephanie. First, however, Stephanie gets him to tell her all about his crimes. Shempsky says that he played poker with Grizzoly's accountant and three accountants from various companies around town including the garbage company and the cable company. They came up with a scheme to make some extra pocket money by keeping some customers off the company rolls and cashing the payments themselves. However, Lipinski's wife found out and demanded that he get the money now. Lipinski panicked everyone and they pushed Shempsky to give them their share, but Shempsky had made some investments and lost the majority of the money. Then Lipinski killed his wife and the two of them were seen by Fred disposing of her body, which is why Shempsky killed Fred. Now Shempsky wants to kill Stephanie, but Ramirez bursts through the window. Shempsky kills Ramirez and runs away.

The following day, Stephanie is supposed to drive the Arab teenager to the airport. Stephanie decides to take the Buick instead of Ranger's car because nothing bad has ever happened to the Buick. Stephanie is also forced to take her grandmother because of an incident between her and Stephanie's father the night before. On the way to the airport, Stephanie learns that Shempsky has tickets on a flight leaving in a short time. Stephanie tells her grandmother to keep an eye out for him, not really expecting to find him. However, when they reach a toll booth they see Shempsky ahead of them. Stephanie manages to run him down and apprehend him. After all the excitement, Stephanie returns home. Stephanie wants to call Morelli or Ranger to come over but cannot decide which man. Stephanie puts their names in a bowl and chooses one. However, the reader does not find out which she chose.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Stephanie goes to her apartment only to find Shempsky waiting for her. Stephanie is now in mortal danger from Shempsky. To stall for time, Stephanie gets Shempsky to confess to all the murders that have taken place in the course of her investigation, including the murder of her uncle. When it seems that Stephanie can no longer stall the situation, Ramirez makes another appearance. Shempsky kills Ramirez, solving that problem for Stephanie, but Shempsky gets away. The following day, Stephanie takes the teenager to the airport and happens to find Shempsky. For once Stephanie is able to apprehend a fugitive without any problems, showing the reader and herself that she is as tough as she wants people to believe she is and that she can think clearly under pressure. Stephanie has proved she is good at her job and can take care of herself despite her comic mistakes earlier in the novel.



Wrapping up the theme of love versus sexual tension, Stephanie makes a choice between the possibility of commitment with Morelli and a sexual affair with Ranger. Stephanie makes her choice by putting their names in a bowl but confesses to peeking when she picked. However, the reader does not know which man she chose. The reader is pretty sure it was Morelli due to Stephanie's deep affection for him, but will not learn the truth until the next novel.



Characters

Stephanie Plum

Stephanie Plum is a bounty hunter who works for her cousin Vinnie's bond company. Stephanie dislikes guns and rarely carries hers and when she does, it often is not loaded. Stephanie prefers to use pepper spray and a stun gun when it is necessary to use force against her fugitives. Stephanie is not very good at her job, often getting herself into comical situations, but more often than not, she does get her fugitive. In this novel, Stephanie finds herself with few fugitives to apprehend. The only fugitive she is asked to find is Randy Briggs, a little person who was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. The payment on Briggs is hardly worth the effort to capture him.

Stephanie has to go after Briggs several times. The first time, Briggs shuts the door in Stephanie's face, not allowing her into his apartment. The second time, Stephanie takes Lula with her, but again Briggs locks them out even after Lula gets the cuffs on him. The third time Stephanie decides she won't take no for an answer. Stephanie breaks down the door with a tire wrench, causing a scuffle that ends up with her and Briggs falling down the stairs. Briggs suffers several contusions to his face. Afterward, Briggs threatens to sue Vinnie unless he finds a safe place for Briggs to stay until his door is fixed. Vinnie kindly offers Stephanie's apartment, much to her outrage.

Stephanie asks fellow bounty hunter, Ranger, if she can do some work for his business in order to make her rent money. Ranger agrees and gives Stephanie several jobs, including evicting a drug dealer from his apartment and chauffeuring a spoiled Arab child from the airport to a relative's house. Stephanie does poorly at both jobs, but Ranger continues to keep Stephanie on his payroll, even giving her a car to use. Stephanie manages to get the car blown up, but Ranger gives her yet another car, which is stolen. Stephanie refuses any more cars from Ranger after this, including the car he provides for her to chauffeur a young man to the airport.

At the same time, Stephanie is attempting to make her rent, she finds herself enlisted in the search for her missing uncle. Stephanie learns that her uncle had a dispute with the garbage company that collects his garbage, causing Stephanie to stumble onto an embezzlement scheme. Stephanie is taken hostage in her own home by the mastermind of the scheme. At the same time, Stephanie is being stalked by a rapist she once helped to put behind bars. As the embezzler is about to kill Stephanie, the rapist bursts through the window. The two men attack each other, ending the standoff. Stephanie eventually brings the embezzler to justice.

Joe Morelli

Joe Morelli is a childhood friend of Stephanie's. Stephanie and Morelli grew up within blocks of each other in the Burg, and Morelli was Stephanie's first love. Stephanie and



Morelli have been dating, but a recent pregnancy scare left Stephanie afraid of the consequences of their relationship. Stephanie ended the relationship, but her profession brings her into constant contact with Morelli. Stephanie and Morelli often find themselves together, discussing business, which leads to more intimate discussions.

Morelli invites Stephanie to attend a wedding with him. Stephanie buys a nice dress for the occasion but is afraid it is too sexy and will send the wrong message. Stephanie wears a different dress to the wedding. A few days later, Stephanie sees Morelli come home late at night with a woman he dated all through high school. Stephanie is jealous, though she tells herself it does not matter. Morelli wants to be with Stephanie and has even mentioned the "M" (marriage) word to her, though Stephanie is not sure she ever wants to get married again. At the end of the novel, Stephanie makes a choice between the two men in her life, but the reader is not allowed to see which man she chooses.

Ranger

Ranger is a bounty hunter who occasionally works for Vinnie and was Stephanie's mentor when she first entered the business. Ranger also owns a security company through which he does a varied number of jobs. Stephanie is desperate for money in this novel so she asks Ranger to give her some work through his company. This work includes evicting a drug dealer from his apartment and chauffeuring a spoiled teenager from the airport to a relative's home. When Stephanie complains that she needs a new car, Ranger shows up at her apartment with a brand new black Porsche. When the Porsche is blown up by a bomb and smashed by a garbage truck, Ranger gives Stephanie a brand new black BMW. The BMW is promptly stolen.

Ranger is a dark, mysterious man who is very sexy. Stephanie finds herself attracted to Ranger despite her affection for Morelli. Ranger, too, is clearly attracted to Stephanie, admitting to her that a relationship between the two of them would be dangerous, and this is why he has never pursued it. They share a kiss in Ranger's car. Stephanie finds herself torn between both Morelli and Ranger, making a choice at the end of the novel that the reader is not revealed to the reader.

Uncle Fred

Uncle Fred is Stephanie's uncle. Uncle Fred went out to do some errands one afternoon and never came home. His car was found parked at the local grocery store with the dry cleaning laid neatly in the backseat. The cops believe that because of his old age, Uncle Fred became confused and wandered off. The cops think he will show up again on his own. When Stephanie goes to talk to her aunt, however, she learns of some strange photographs found in his desk. The pictures appear to be of a dismembered body. Stephanie also learns her uncle was in the middle of a dispute with the garbage company. Stephanie wonders if perhaps this dispute had something to do with her uncle's disappearance. Stephanie goes to talk to the garbage company employees. Within two days, the two people Stephanie spoke to are dead. Stephanie then learns



that the checks her uncle paid to the garbage company were not cashed by their regular bank, but a local bank. Stephanie eventually realizes that employees of the garbage company, as well as other companies in town, have been stealing money from the companies by not registering certain accounts and taking those customer's payments for themselves. Eventually, Stephanie learns that Uncle Fred was murdered to keep him quiet about the embezzlement scheme and the murder of a garbage company employee's wife.

Randy Briggs

Randy Briggs is a little person who was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. Briggs is angry about the charge because he claims it was not a weapon but a ceremonial knife. Briggs does not show up for his court date; therefore, Stephanie is assigned to bring him in. The first two times Stephanie arrives, Briggs refuses to allow her into his apartment. The third time Stephanie forces her way in, resulting in a scuffle that leaves Briggs bruised and battered. Not only this, but Briggs' front door lock is broken, leaving his apartment vulnerable to thieves. Briggs threatens to sue Vinnie unless he provide a safe place for Briggs to live until his door is repaired. Vinnie sends Briggs to live with Stephanie. Reluctantly, Stephanie agrees. Briggs is at Stephanie's when Ramirez appears outside her bedroom window. Briggs is also there when Shempsky shows up to kill Stephanie, killing Ramirez instead.

Allen Shempsky

Allen Shempsky is the manager at the local bank in the Burg. Shempsky and Stephanie went to school together as kids. Shempsky seems like a nice guy when the reader is first introduced to him. Shempsky attempts to help Stephanie with the hunt for her uncle. However, Stephanie later becomes suspicious of Shempsky when she learns that the checks for her uncle's garbage payment went through Shempsky's bank rather than the large bank the garbage company normally uses. It turns out the Shempsky and his poker buddies launched an embezzlement scheme to steal money from the various companies at which his buddies worked. Shempsky then took the money and invested it, losing a great deal of it before he could parcel it out to his partners. Stephanie's investigation into her uncle's disappearance brings her too close to the scheme, causing Shempsky to attempt to kill her. Instead, Shempsky kills Ramirez, a rapist stalking Stephanie. Shempsky vanishes, but Stephanie is able to track him down and stop him.

Benito Ramirez

Benito Ramirez is a rapist who raped and beat Lula, the woman with whom Stephanie works. It was this case that brought Lula and Stephanie together and made them friends. Ramirez has been released from prison and seems intent on taking revenge on Stephanie for putting him in jail in the first place. Everywhere Stephanie goes, she finds Ramirez not too far behind. Stephanie is frightened but refuses to allow her fear to keep



her away from the investigation into her uncle's disappearance. When Shempsky breaks into Stephanie's apartment and threatens to kill her, Ramirez breaks through her bedroom window in an attempt to get at her. Instead, Shempsky panics and fires his gun, killing Ramirez.

Bunchy

Bunchy comes to Stephanie claiming to be a bookie. Bunchy claims that Fred owes him money and he wants to help Stephanie find Fred. Stephanie does not believe Bunchy is a bookie, nor does she believe his interest in her uncle is about money. However, there is little Stephanie can do to keep Bunchy from following her. In fact, when Stephanie becomes aware that Ramirez is following her, she is grateful for Bunchy's presence. As Stephanie becomes aware of the embezzlement angle to her uncle's disappearance, she realizes that Bunchy works with the Treasury department. Bunchy is hoping to stop a ring of thieves, not aware that Shempsky is working with a group of poker buddies, not criminal masterminds.

Terry Gilman

Terry Gilman was Joe Morelli's girlfriend all through high school. Terry is also the niece of a local gangster and thought to be an active participant in his illegal activities. Stephanie becomes upset when she sees Terry drop Morelli off at his house late at night until she comes to realize that Terry and Morelli are working on a case together. Morelli is working with Bunchy in order to catch the people stealing money from Terry's uncle. Terry is working as a go-between for her uncle and the police.

Mr. and Mrs. Plum and Grandma Mazur

Stephanie's mother is a domestic goddess who loves to cook and can often be found in her kitchen working over an ironing board or a hot stove, even early in the morning. Stephanie's father is a hardworking man who likes to come home to peace and quiet. Unfortunately, Stephanie's grandmother lives with her parents. Grandma Mazur is a spirited old woman who often causes Stephanie's father a great deal of heartache as he continuously dreams up ways to kill her. Stephanie spends a great deal of time with her family, especially around dinner time. Stephanie claims she is simply attempting to save money, but the reader gets the impression that Stephanie feels safer around the insanity at her parents' house.



Objects/Places

Check

On the day he disappears, Uncle Fred is having a minor argument with the garbage collection service. Uncle Fred wants a refund for a day the company missed picking up his garbage, but they have no record of him as a customer in their computer. Fred was to return to the company with a check proving his payment, but disappears before arriving. Later Stephanie realizes that the check was cleared through a local bank rather than the large bank the garbage company uses.

Grand Union

Grand Union is a grocery store in Trenton. Uncle Fred left his car in the parking lot of Grand Union with the dry cleaning neatly placed in the back seat.

Briggs Apartment Door

Stephanie tries to enter Briggs' apartment by forcing the door open with a crowbar, causing significant damage to the lock. While Briggs is in jail, someone robs his home, causing him to threaten to sue Vinnie if he does not give Briggs somewhere safe to live until his door is fixed. Vinnie gives Briggs Stephanie's address.

Pictures

Stephanie's aunt gives her some pictures she found in Uncle Fred's desk that appear to be of a woman's dismembered body in some garbage bags.

SWAT Hat

Ranger gives Stephanie his SWAT hat on the first morning they work together.

Candy

After seeing Morelli with another woman, Stephanie eats a large amount of candy to soothe her emotions. Afterward, Stephanie is concerned about fitting into a new dress, so she goes for a long run the following morning.



Apartment Building

Stephanie works with Ranger and his team in evicting a drug user and dealer from an apartment. While on night watch, Stephanie is forced to allow the young man into his apartment when he shoots Tank and threatens to shoot her if she does not. A neighbor woman pulls a gun on the young man and shoots him after he fires at her, inadvertently setting off an explosive strapped to the young man's chest.

Sexy Dress

Stephanie buys a sexy dress to wear to Morelli's cousin's wedding but decides not to wear the dress at the last minute. Stephanie later puts the dress on to entertain a man, but the reader is left in the dark as to whether the man is Morelli or Ranger.

Buick

Stephanie drives a large, powder blue Buick that she has borrowed from her uncle. Stephanie has trouble keeping her cars from getting blown up.

Black Porsche

Ranger gives Stephanie a black Porsche to drive while she is working for him. After a minor car accident, the Porsche explodes, causing a garbage truck to fall over onto it.

Black BMW

Ranger replaces the Porsche with a black BMW. While Stephanie is pursuing a fugitive, the BMW is stolen.

RGC

RGC is the name of the garbage company where Uncle Fred has a dispute.

Trenton, New Jersey

Stephanie lives and works in Trenton, New Jersey.

The Burg

The Burg is a suburb of Trenton where Stephanie was born and raised. Stephanie's parents continue to live in the Burg.



Themes

Love versus Sexual Tension

Stephanie finds Ranger irresistible. Ranger is dark, handsome, and dangerous, making him the kind of bad guy about which many women fantasize. Not only this, but Ranger clearly is interested in Stephanie as well. Ranger kisses her and makes her aware that he would love to spend some time in bed with her. However, this overture is made with the understanding that it would only be about the sex, not a committed relationship. At the same time, Stephanie finds herself drawn to Joe Morelli. Joe is a childhood friend, a lover with a long history. Stephanie knows that a relationship with Joe will mean commitment. Marriage is even discussed. However, Stephanie does not know if she can trust Joe after years of rumors about his many female companions.

Stephanie was married once, years ago. The marriage ended after Stephanie found her husband on the kitchen table with her archenemy. Now Stephanie is not sure that a committed relationship is really something she wants. Stephanie is not eager to get hurt again. At the same time, Stephanie is not sure she is willing to enter into a sexual relationship without the possibility of an eventual commitment. Stephanie toggles between the two men in her life, eager to spend time with both. When Stephanie sees Joe with another woman, she falls into a rage, eating candy and refusing to speak to Joe the following day. This reaction suggests to the reader that Stephanie's heart has already gone where her mind refuses to go. However, at the same time Stephanie sits in a car with Ranger and shares a passionate kiss. It is this clear conflict that makes love versus sexual tension a theme of the novel.

Morality

Stephanie is desperate for money. Because very few of Vinnie's bonds have missed their court dates, Stephanie has little hope of paying her rent this month. Stephanie goes to Ranger and asks to do some work with him to help pay her bills. Ranger agrees, but when Stephanie asks about the nature of his business, Ranger admits to fudging a little when it comes to the law. Ranger has a strict moral code, but his moral code does not always work within the law. Stephanie learns quickly about this moral code when Ranger hires her to help evict a tenant from an apartment before the legal process has come to a conclusion. Ranger believes the man needs to leave sooner than the law allows because he is a drug addict and dealer who attracts the wrong kind of people to the neighborhood, placing the lives of those around him in danger.

Stephanie also finds herself involved in the disappearance of her uncle. The man disappeared while doing the family errands. Stephanie learns that her uncle was in the middle of a feud with his garbage collection company. The company claimed that the uncle never paid his bill, which of course angers the uncle because he is the type of person who pays all his bills on time. Stephanie dislikes this uncle. Everyone dislikes



this uncle because of his miserly ways and his dark personality. Even Stephanie's aunt, the wife, dislikes the man. When Stephanie learns that her uncle cheated on his wife and refused her nice things because of the money it would cost him, she can hardly blame the aunt's dislike of her own husband. Stephanie's uncle was morally corrupt, but due to these same morals her uncle lacked, Stephanie finds herself searching for him anyway. Stephanie feels as though she owes something to her family. It is because of these two moral situations that makes morality a theme of the novel.

Family

Stephanie has two families. Stephanie's biological family consists of her mother, father, sister, and Grandma Mazur. Stephanie visits her family on a nearly daily basis, often eating at home to save herself the cost of groceries. Stephanie also works for her cousin, Vinnie, a man whose own sense of morals is unique. Stephanie is close to her family despite the fact that her job often embarrasses her mother. Stephanie often includes her grandmother in her investigations, taking Grandma Mazur along on stake-outs and interviews. Stephanie has a strong sense of family.

Stephanie has a second family. This second family consists of her co-workers, Lula and Connie, as well as the old people who live in her building and the friends she has from the Burg. Almost any case Stephanie takes for Vinnie or Ranger, she can call her network of friends to get the information she needs to find her fugitive. When Stephanie wants to spy on Morelli, she calls her friend Mary Lou to go along. When Stephanie needs help taking down a fugitive, Lula is always willing to go along. If a fugitive has been seen in the Burg, Stephanie calls a friend or neighbor and has them spy, keeping an eye out for the fugitive. Family is an important part of Stephanie's life and her extended family has often helped save her life while aiding in the investigation of her fugitives. It is because of this that family is an important theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is first person. Through the first person point of view, the reader sees the entire novel through the eyes of the main character, Stephanie Plum. This point of view gives the reader a unique connection to the main character, keeping the reader close to this character in a way that another point of view would not allow. The reader is never confused by who the narrator might be or a sudden shift in point of view. The reader is always inside Stephanie's head, always beside her during the action, and always connected at the most intimate level possible.

The point of view of this novel works because it offers a unique sense of intimacy between the reader and the main character that would not exist with another point of view. Unlike third person, this point of view remains with one character throughout the entire novel, never shifting, keeping the point of view steady and without the confusion of other points of view. The reader is allowed to see and hear everything the main character experiences, including emotions, making the reader care what happens to the main character in way that other points of view might not offer. Finally, this point of view works because it is unique to this book, to this character, and creates a story that is tight and exciting because of the main character and her experiences.

Setting

The novel is set in Trenton, New Jersey. The setting of this novel is a city that is large, but not too large, urban, but not too impersonal. Stephanie grew up in Trenton, in a section of the city called the Burg. The Burg is largely residential, filled with families and family-related businesses. Stephanie spends a great deal of time here, visiting her family and investigating the disappearance of her uncle. However, Stephanie does not live in the Burg, but in an apartment building filled with senior citizens. The apartment is another important setting to the novel because Stephanie spends a great deal of time here. Stephanie's empty refrigerator and hamster cage tell the reader a lot about Stephanie's life, about her softer side.

The setting of this novel is important because it sets the backdrop to Stephanie's life as well as sharing with the reader the various aspects of Stephanie's personality. Stephanie is in a tough profession, chasing down fugitives for her cousins bond office. This toughness is echoed in the big city where Stephanie lives. However, Stephanie is not good at her job, often making silly mistakes that get her hurt or allow the fugitive to get away. Stephanie is a clumsy, soft-hearted woman trying to make a living in a tough world. The Burg echoes this part of Stephanie. The Burg is a suburb of the big city, a small world unto itself where families live and children are raised. The setting of this novel is a perfect complement to the main character, expressing its tough side along with its softer side, just like Stephanie.



Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. The novel contains some slang that is common to the bounty hunters' language, including anagrams for the name of the fugitives they hunt down. This slang adds to the authenticity of the main character's profession. There is also slang that comes from the street, language that Lula, an ex-prostitute, often uses. Ranger also uses his own unique sort of slang, something that is a cross between cop language and language a soldier might use. All this slang adds to the characterization of these people, adding authenticity to their personalities and professions.

The language of the novel works because it is simple enough for the youngest readers to understand. The language is simple, direct, telling a story that the reader can almost imagine was written down by an authentic Trenton girl. The slang adds to the authenticity of the story, giving the reader the sense that they are really listening to conversations spoken by these types of people. The slang is not excessive, however, and does not cause the reader to pause or reread a passage for clarity. Due to the simplicity, the novel is easy to read, flowing the way a novel of this type should flow.

Structure

The novel is divided into fifteen chapters. Each chapter is about twenty to thirty pages. The novel is written in both exposition and dialogue, peppering internal dialogue with actual conversations between the main character and the people Stephanie encounters in her daily activities. Due to the fact that the novel is written in the first person point of view, the narrating character is always the same. This keeps the narration tight, focused on one character and the actions taking place around her.

The novel contains one main story and several subplots. The main story revolves around Stephanie Plum, the main character, and her search for her uncle. Stephanie is attempting to find out what happened to her uncle after he disappears while doing the family errands. The police seem to believe the uncle became disoriented and simply wandered off. They believe he will reappear on his own. Stephanie, however, believes the disappearance has something to do with a dispute her uncle had with his garbage company. One of the subplots has to do with Stephanie's need to make extra money. To earn her rent money, Stephanie offers her services to Ranger, a fellow bounty hunter who has a business on the side. Another subplot has to do with Stephanie's affections for both Ranger and childhood beau, Joe Morelli.



Quotes

"When I was a little girl I used to dress Barbie up without underpants. On the outside, she'd look like the perfect lady. Tasteful plastic heels, tailored suit. But underneath, she was naked. I'm a bail enforcement agent now—also known as a fugitive apprehension agent, also known as a bounty hunter. I bring 'em back dead or alive. At least I try. And being a bail enforcement agent is sort of like being bare-bottom Barbie. It's about having a secret. And it's about wearing a lot of bravado on the outside when you're really operating without underpants."

Chapter 1, pg. 1

"Joe Morelli is a plainclothes cop who has skills not covered in the policeman's handbook. A couple months ago, I let him into my life and my bed. A couple weeks ago, I kicked him out. We'd seen each other several times since then on chance encounters and arranged dinner dates. The chance encounters were always warm. The dinner dates took the temperature up a notch and more often than not involved loud talking, which I call a discussion and Morelli called a fight." Chapter 1, pg. 15

"'Either you're searching for your keys or your pepper spray,' the guy said, getting to his feet. 'So let me help you out, here.' He reached into his pocket, pulled out a canister of pepper spray, and tossed it to me. 'Be my guest,' he said. And then he pushed my door open."

Chapter 3, pg. 49

"It seemed like a weakness to be so frightened, and I wasn't crazy about the feeling. Especially since I'd chosen to work in a form of law enforcement. Hard to be effective when you're blubbering in fear." Chapter 6, pg. 103

"Stephanie Plum, master of diversion. If your hair is bad, shorten your skirt and add extra mascara." Chapter 6, pg. 113

"Tomorrow morning I'd get up first thing and go for a run. Maybe. No! Definitely!"

Chapter 7, pg. 122

"I looked at the bed. Very tempting. I could crawl into bed and stay there until the rain stopped, or the world came to an end, or until someone showed up with a bag of doughnuts."

Chapter 8, pg. 155

"Unh! I climbed into the Buick and roared off into the mist. I stopped for a light and thunked my head on the steering wheel while I waited for the green. Stupid, stupid,



stupid, stupid, I thought while I thunked. Why had I said 'okeydokey'? What a dopey thing to say! I did one last thunk and the light turned." Chapter 9, pg. 169

"Halfway through lunch I looked at Bunchy, and Morelli's words echoed in my ear. I'm working with a couple Treasury guys who make me look like a Boy Scout, he'd said. The Hallelujah Chorus rang out in my head, and I had an epiphany. 'Holy cow,' I said. 'You're working with Morelli.'" Chapter 10, pg. 191

"I locked the door behind him and thunked myself on the forehead with the heel of my hand. I was such a dope. I'd just kissed Morelli like there was no tomorrow. Not the message I'd wanted to give him at all. What about Terry? What about Bunchy? What about Ranger? Never mind Ranger, I thought. Ranger wasn't part of this problem. Ranger was a different problem." Chapter 11, pg. 205

"Maybe this says something about my personality, but put me behind a mask, and I'm a happy person." Chapter 12, pg. 225

"I got two pieces of paper, wrote Joe's name on one and Ranger's on the other. I dumped the two names into a bowl, closed my eyes, mixed them up, and picked one. Let God decide, I thought. I read the name and cracked my knuckles. I hoped God knew what he was doing. I showed the paper to Rex, and he looked disapproving, so I covered his cage with a dish towel."
Chapter 15, pg. 291

Topics for Discussion

Discuss Uncle Fred. Who is Fred? How is he related to Stephanie? List some of Fred's character traits. Is Fred a kind person? How do people in Fred's life feel about him? How do they feel about his disappearance? Why does Fred's wife buy a car after his disappearance? What does this purchase say about their relationship?

Discuss Stephanie Plum. Who is Stephanie? What does she do for a living? Why is Stephanie looking for her Uncle Fred? What does Stephanie believe happened to him? What do the police believe happened to him? Who is right?

Discuss Ranger and Joe Morelli. Who is Ranger? What does he do for a living? Who is Morelli? What does he do for a living? How are these men similar? How are they different? How does Stephanie feel about these men? What is different about her feelings for each man? What is similar? Who do you believe Stephanie chose in the end?

Who is Briggs? How does Stephanie meet him? Why does he move into Stephanie's house? Are they friends? Do they become friends? Why? How does Briggs help Stephanie? Is Briggs a criminal? Why does Briggs refuse to appear in court? What was his original charge? Was he guilty? Is Briggs innocent? Why or why not?

Why does Stephanie work for Ranger? Why does Stephanie object to some of Ranger's methods? What is wrong with what Ranger does? Is Ranger working outside the law? What about morals? What does Ranger's work say about his morals? Is Ranger morally correct in the way he does business? Why does the law not support Ranger's morals? Should it?

Discuss Stephanie's vehicles. How many cars has Stephanie had in this novel? What happened to each of her cars? Why does Stephanie have trouble keeping her cars? Why does Stephanie drive the Buick? What happened to Stephanie's last car? Why does Stephanie refuse to take Ranger's car at the end of the novel? What is Stephanie afraid will happen to the car?

Discuss bounty hunters. What is a bounty hunter? What is their function within the law? What are bounty hunters allowed to do that police officers are not? Why are bounty hunters necessary? Is Stephanie a good bounty hunter? Why or why not? How could Stephanie improve her success rate?