

King Rat Study Guide

King Rat by James Clavell

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Plot Summary

King Rat is a novel written by British author James Clavell. It is based in part on the author's own experiences while being held as a prisoner of war by the Japanese during World War II. The novel is set in the Japanese-run Changi prison camp, located deep in the jungle on Singapore Island, during the months leading up to the Japanese surrender and the end of the war. While chronicling the harsh and brutal conditions in Changi – where the POWs are fed only the bare minimum needed to keep them alive and men die every day of diseases and conditions that would be simple to treat in the outside world – the novel also tells the story of the unique friendship that grows between a British RAF Lieutenant named Peter Marlowe and an American corporal called the King. James Clavell, who passed away in 1994, was the author of many novels including Noble House, Shogun, and Whirlwind – all international bestsellers. King Rat was James Clavell's first novel.

An American corporal known as the King walks back to the hut he shares with the other American POWs at the Japanese-run Changi prison camp after being interrogated by the camp's British Provost Marshal Lt. Grey. The King is one of the most important and successful black market "traders" in Changi. Although Grey knows about his activities, he has never been able to catch the King in the act. The King passes a young British officer who is speaking to one of the guards in perfect Malay. After he reaches his hut, he sends one of his "employees" out to bring the British man to him. A short time later RAF Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe introduces himself. As the two men get to know each other, Marlowe tells the King that he learned Malay while hiding out in a village on Java after his plane had been shot down. As they are talking Lt. Grey comes into the American Hut and almost catches the King with a watch he had "traded" for earlier in the day, but Marlowe lies and covers for the King. Grey leaves empty-handed. When the King tries to pay him for his help, Marlowe refuses and becomes angry; but, the King quickly calms him down. A short time later there is a surprise search of all the huts, and Marlowe returns the hut he shares with other British officers after promising the King that he will come back later that night.

After the search of the huts is over, Marlowe goes to the "bungalow" shared by Colonel Larkin and Mac, his best friends. He tells them about meeting the King. Larkin and Mac tell Marlowe that he needs to be careful around the King. After evening roll call, Marlowe goes back to the American Hut and spends time with the King talking. Near the end of the conversation the King says that from time to time he goes "through the wire" and visits a native village not far from camp. He asks Marlowe if he wants to go with him the next time he goes, and Marlowe says yes. Several days later there is another surprise inspection and this time Captain Yoshima, the Japanese officer in charge, finds the wireless radio he has been searching for in the hut Peter Marlowe shares with a number of other officers. Yoshima places the man caught with the radio under arrest and later sends him to Utram Road Jail, a place rumored to be much worse than Changi. Later that night Marlowe and his friends Larkin and Mac assemble the radio they have kept hidden since arriving at Changi, but when Mac tries to get the news from Calcutta he finds that it doesn't work.



Several days later Marlowe, the King, and several of the other men in the American Hut catch a male rat, and the King decides that they should find a female rat. They can breed them in a trench under the hut and sell the meat. Three weeks later, the first litter of rats is born. Two weeks after that they let the first two rats – which they have named Adam and Eve – mate again. The King tells Marlowe that they will be going to the village the next night. During the past month Marlowe has been spending a lot of time with the King and thinks they have become friends. Later that night Marlowe serves as an interpreter as the King sells a watch for another prisoner to a Korean guard. He reluctantly accepts a 10% “commission” from the sale, although he feels odd about taking money for doing a friend a favor. The next morning Marlowe goes to see his friend Mac who is recovering from Malaria in the hospital and finds out from him what part of their radio is broken.

The next night the King and Marlowe go “through the wire” to a small village near the ocean where, with Marlowe acting as translator, the King negotiates the biggest deal he has ever made with a Chinese smuggler named Cheng San. It's the sale of a 4-carat diamond. They quickly negotiate a price and agree on the details of the deal, which will be completed later. When they are finished the King leaves Marlowe alone with Sutra, the village headman, while he goes to visit a woman. After telling Sutra about himself and gaining his trust, Marlowe asks the headman if there is an old radio in the village, and Sutra gives him a radio that is in perfect condition. As they are heading back to the village the King notices the radio and becomes angry, telling Marlowe that a radio is the most dangerous thing a prisoner can have and demanding he get rid of it, but Marlowe refuses. After the King calms down he talks Marlowe into only taking the part he needs and burying the rest of the radio, and the two sneak back into camp. The next night Mac uses the part Marlowe has brought him and is able to get the news from Calcutta, which they quickly spread through the camp by word of mouth.

Several days later Mac hears over the radio that the war in Europe is over, and the news spreads quickly among the prisoners. Yoshima turns the camp inside out looking for a radio, but finds nothing. Eve gives birth to another litter of rats, and the King sees that they will need more cages to hold the rats as they grow. He brings an Australian trader named Timsen – his biggest competitor in Changi's black market – in on the deal and gives him 50% to sell the rat meat when it is ready and to provide the materials to build more cages. A few nights later Shagata – the guard that the King and Cheng San agreed on as a go-between – tells the King that Cheng San has been arrested. The King says that all they can do is stick to their original plan and that he will meet Shagata in a few days to show him the diamond and collect a portion of the money. Two days before this is to happen a tree stump falls on Peter Marlowe's arm while he is on a work detail. Although the doctor tells him that it is just a flesh wound, the pain in his arm increases. Just before he and the King are to meet with Shagata, Marlowe sees the doctor again and is told that the arm has turned gangrenous and will have to come off soon. When he meets the King he is almost delirious with pain and worry, but the King helps him pull himself together. Then, they go to meet Shagata.

After the King has one of his men fetch the Australian POW who is selling the diamond (and who has Timsen representing his interests) Shagata inspects the stone and sees



that it is genuine. He gives the King the down payment and then he and the Australian leave just as Lt. Grey, who has heard from his informer about the deal, shows up. The King and Marlowe are able to get away, but quickly find that most of the camp seems to know about the deal and that there are squads of MPs and gangs of hijackers – some of whom are working for Timsen – after them, trying to steal the money. After realizing there is no way they can escape, the King tells Marlowe to take the money “through the wire” and bury it in the jungle while he distracts Grey and the others. When Marlowe refuses, the King tells him that if he does it and saves the money, he will find a way to save Marlowe’s arm, and Marlowe finally agrees.

The next day the King makes arrangements with Timsen to get the medicine and equipment needed to save Marlowe’s arm. That night Marlowe tries to go back to the jungle to get the money, but he passes out before he even reaches the wire and the King and one of his men carry him back to the American Hut. Timsen arrives a few hours later with antitoxin and administers the first injection to Marlowe himself, then says that he will need an injection every six hours for the next two days. Marlowe receives the injections at Mac and Larkin’s bungalow so that no one else will know about the black market drugs. By the time the injections are finished Marlowe’s arm is almost healed, although he is still very weak. He goes back to his own hut and falls asleep. When he wakes up it is dark, and he is just strong enough to go through the wire and get the money he buried, which he takes to the King. The King pays a small man who has managed to steal the diamond from its original Australian owner half what it would have cost him originally, then takes it back to the American Hut. Almost immediately Lt. Grey and Captain Yoshima come and search the American Hut – Yoshima for a radio, Grey for the diamond – but neither find what they are looking for. The search for the radio that an informer has told Yoshima is in camp intensifies and Marlowe knows it is only a matter of time before they are caught but he, Mac, and Larkin continue to listen to the news from Calcutta every night, and make sure that it spreads through the camp.

Two days later the King goes back to the village alone, delivers the diamond, and is paid more money than he has ever had before. A short time later Captain Yoshima arrives at the bungalow with a squad of guards while Mac, Larkin, and Marlowe are listening to the news from Calcutta and places them under arrest, but leaves the men – and the radio – there with only a single guard after another guard arrives and whispers something in his ear. As they wait, Mac hears that the Americans have dropped an atom bomb on Hiroshima. A few days later the men are still under hut arrest, and Mac hears that the Japanese have surrendered. Mac, Marlowe, and Larkin are brought to see the British Camp Commandant. They are told that the war is really over and that the prisoners will begin to be transported home soon.

Word quickly spreads through the camp and the men in the American Hut – all of whom had been on the King’s payroll – turn their backs on the King and treat him as though he were dead. Because of the surrender, all of the Japanese dollars the King was paid for the diamond are worthless, and suddenly men who had always wanted to do business with him, and who had been on his payroll, want nothing to do with him. Only Peter Marlowe seeks the King out and tells him that they are friends and that he wants to help



him, but the King says that he has no friends and tells Marlowe to get lost. Marlowe tries to talk to the King for the next few days but is unsuccessful. When the King climbs on the truck with the rest of the American prisoners to start the journey home he is a broken man, and doesn't even look at Marlowe as he is waving goodbye. As the novel ends, Marlowe is left with many questions as a result of his strange relationship with the King, including whether the King had ever really thought of him as a friend at all.



Book One: Preface, Chapters 1-3

Summary

Book One: Preface, Chapters 1-3

King Rat is the first novel published by prolific British author and screenwriter James Clavell. Based in large part on the author's own experiences as a prisoner of war during the final years of World War Two, the story takes place during the months leading up to the Japanese surrender in 1945 and is set in Changi Prison, an overcrowded Japanese-run POW camp located in a remote part of Singapore Island. The novel follows the lives of many of the prisoners at Changi and focuses specifically on the unlikely friendship that grows between RAF Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe – a character based on the author himself – and an American corporal called the King, a “businessman” who is always looking to make a deal and turn a profit and who seems to be alone in his ability to thrive in Changi's brutal environment. Published in 1962, King Rat is part of the author's bestselling six-part “Asian Saga”, which also includes Shogun, Noble House, and Whirlwind. James Clavell passed away after suffering a stroke in 1994 at the age of 69.

Preface. In a short, untitled preface the author writes that Changi Prison is located on the eastern tip of Singapore Island. Built to hold 2,000 prisoners, the Japanese have crowded 8,000 POWs – mostly English and Australian – into the camp; the enlisted men live in the cell blocks of the prison while the officers live in the sheds and huts surrounding it. One shed houses the prison's 25 American prisoners. The entire area is surrounded by a barbed wire fence outside of which is dense jungle. The POWs move through the camp freely and the perimeter is only lightly guarded; if a man were to escape there is nowhere for him to go. The year is 1945, and for the most part the Japanese have left control of the camp to the prisoners; the Japanese issue orders and the officers in Changi are responsible for carrying them out.

Chapter 1

As he looks out the window of the MP (Military Police) Hut Lieutenant Grey – Provost Marshal of Changi – sees an American corporal called “the King” standing in the yard. Although all of the other men in the yard, including officers, are dressed in filthy tattered rags and look emaciated and ill, the King is wearing a clean shirt, creased pants, polished shoes and appears well-fed and healthy. Grey tells his assistant Sergeant Masters that one day he will arrest the man and have him sent to the Utram Road Jail, and then calls the King over. Grey asks the King where he got his shirt, and then has him turn out his pockets and pile the contents on a table. Among the items is 400 dollars and when Grey asks where he got it, the King says he won it gambling and later tells Grey that he also won the fine watch and gold ring he is wearing playing cards. Grey accuses the King of being a criminal and “trading” with other prisoners, which is against



camp law, and says that one day he will catch him and send him to Utram Road Jail, where he belongs.

As the King moves towards Lieutenant Grey to hit him, Colonel Brant comes into the hut. Brant tells Grey that even though he has a right to search other prisoners he has no right to abuse or threaten them and has Grey apologize. He then tells the King that he is inviting trouble by walking around camp dressed so well. Brant lets the King leave, and then tells Grey that it isn't right for a British officer and gentleman to lose his temper, no matter how undisciplined the Americans are. Colonel Brant leaves and Grey goes back to watching the King out in the yard.

Chapter 2

Out in the yard the King is talking to Major Barry, another British officer. Barry wants the King to sell a lighter for him. The King agrees to handle the transaction for his usual 10% fee and says that he will send someone to pick it up. The King then walks through the yard, nodding to officers and enlisted men that he knows. He stops at Hut 24, where he tells one of Australians who lives there that he wants a shave and manicure. The King sees Tex – another American soldier – walking down the path and calls him over. He hands Tex \$15 and tells him to give it to Colonel Brant, and then says that Tex should tell the British officer not to be so late the next time Grey decides to search him. He also tells Tex to find Major Barry and pick up the lighter. As the King is doing this Lt. Grey leaves the MP Hut and gets in line for food. After he receives his ration of one cup of thin soup and one cup of rice, he hears another British officer – Captain Spence – whisper news about Allied victories in Manila and Krakow.

After his manicure the King walks home to the American Hut and passes a young British officer he doesn't recognize talking with a native in perfect Malay. When the King reaches his hut he sees a soldier named Max sitting on his bed guarding his possessions, and the King thanks him and gives him some tobacco. A short time later Tex comes over with the lighter he picked up from Colonel Barry, and the King says that Tex can have his soup ration. The King then tells Max to go and get the young British officer he passed who was speaking Malay. A few moments later Max returns with the young man, who tells the King that his name is Peter Marlowe. The King takes a black box from under his bed and pulls out two eggs from among the cigarettes and sacks of coffee and sugar he has in there. He fries the eggs on a homemade hotplate and shares them with Marlowe as they talk.

Suddenly Lt. Grey and Sergeant Masters enter the American Hut. Grey walks to the King's bed and after asking Marlowe what he is doing there asks the King what he knows about a gold ring that has been stolen. The King says he never saw the ring. Marlowe rolls a cigarette and asks the King if he can borrow his lighter; Grey sees Major Barry's lighter and asks the King where it came from. Realizing that the King is in trouble, Marlowe says that the lighter was his but he lost it playing poker. Grey doesn't believe Marlowe but he can't prove he is lying. He leaves the hut. A moment later it is chow time for the Americans and the other men in the hut go to stand in line for food, leaving Marlowe and the King alone.



Chapter 3

The King offers Marlowe money for getting him out of trouble, but Marlowe is insulted by the offer and refuses. He starts to leave but the King asks him to stay and talk, and Marlowe agrees. As they are talking Marlowe tells the King that he knows a way to treat the raw tobacco most of the men smoke so that it won't be as harsh and will taste better. The King sees a business opportunity, and offers to go into partnership with Marlowe and split the profits. Marlowe tells the King that he isn't interested in going into business and then shocks the King by offering to show him how it is done for free. An hour later, Tex prepares a perfect batch of tobacco using Marlowe's recipe, and the King says that they will start production the next day. The King and Marlowe move outside the hut to escape the flies.

Marlowe says that he was an RAF pilot and learned to speak Malay while hiding for several months in a village on Java after being shot down during an air raid. As they are talking an effeminate young man named Sean walks over to where Marlowe and the King are talking. Sean asks how Marlowe is and says that he never sees him anymore, and then says that he should come by the theater. Marlowe, obviously uncomfortable, introduces the King and Sean says that he is honored. The King tells Sean that he was great in Othello and Hamlet. Sean thanks him and says that he doubts Peter would agree, and Marlowe immediately tells Sean to stop it. Sean apologizes and says that he just wants to be friends again. After Sean leaves the King says that if he didn't know Sean was a man he would swear that he was a beautiful woman, and then jokingly says that it sounded as though he and Marlowe had been having a lover's quarrel. Marlowe says that Sean had been in his squadron and that before he got to Changi he had never been the slightest bit effeminate. Marlowe then says that he had once almost killed Sean. Before the King is able to find out more he sees Captain Brough – the senior American officer – heading towards the American Hut, while other officers head for neighboring huts. Thinking it could be a search, the King hands Marlowe a pack of cigarettes and tells him to come by later that night, then heads back into the hut and hides his black box under his bed. Marlowe leaves quickly, and a moment later Captain Brough orders everyone in the hut to go outside.

Analysis

The preface and first few chapters introduce several of the major and minor characters in the novel, while also providing the reader with an outline of Changi Prison and the conditions that the prisoners of war who are being held there must endure. Built to house 2,000 prisoners, as the novel opens there are over 8,000 men crowded into Changi – both within the walls of the large stone prison itself and in the dozens of huts and sheds surrounding it. The novel is set in 1945 during the last few months of World War Two, and many of the prisoners in Changi have been there since 1942. The Japanese leave the day to day running of the camp to the prisoners themselves, only intervening rarely when they become aware of a serious breach of their regulations. Otherwise, they issue orders for work details which the prisoners have to fill, and expect the captured officers to enforce the camp's regulations. The Japanese provide barely



enough food to keep the prisoners alive; most of the men are thin and hungry, and many suffer from raging infections, dysentery, and other intestinal illnesses. Along with the shortage of food there is also a shortage of clean drinking water and medicine, and men die every day from conditions that could easily be cured in the outside world.

One notable exception to the general condition of the prisoners at Changi is the King – an American corporal who is well fed, free of sickness, and enjoys luxuries such as fresh eggs and factory-made cigarettes that few of the other prisoners have access to. The King is well known in the camp, and while he is respected and his “friendship” sought after by enlisted men and officers alike, he is also envied and hated by most of the very people who want him to make deals with – or for – them. The King is a businessman; for a ten percent commission he can sell anything a prisoner has to sell, or get almost anything a prisoner wants to buy. The King is able to survive and even thrive in the prison’s harsh environment by being clever and careful and by putting the people he needs to help him stay in business on his payroll, including all of the other men in his hut, and even Colonel Brant – an English officer who shows up at the MP Hut at just the right time to get him away from the camp Provost Marshal, Lieutenant Grey. Lt. Grey hates the King with a passion and has made it his mission to catch him “trading” (or engaging in smuggling or other black market activities) and send him to the Utram Road Jail – a place rumored to be many times worse than Changi. Although Grey watches the King constantly he has never been able to get concrete proof of the King’s crimes, although he has come close on a number of occasions.

While walking back to his hut after being interrogated by Lt. Grey, the King notices a young British officer speaking fluent Malay (the language of the Singapore natives) and subsequently meets RAF Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe. Along with the King, Marlowe is one of the novel’s main characters, and is based on the novel’s author James Clavell, who was himself held at Changi Prison as a POW during the Second World War. Marlowe is from a military family and has a highly developed sense of honor; he refuses to accept money from the King as a reward for helping him get out of trouble after Lt. Grey catches him with Major Barry’s lighter, and later refuses to go into business with the King treating tobacco to make it smoother, even though Marlowe provides him with the formula free of charge. Although it is evident from the start that he is almost the complete opposite of the King – who is always looking to make a deal or find a new way to turn a profit – the two men begin to form a friendship almost immediately, based partially on the fact that they are so different from one and other. This strange friendship, and the different way each man views it, is explored in depth throughout the story and is one of the novel’s central themes.

Discussion Question 1

From the very beginning of the novel the author makes it clear that Lieutenant Grey hates the King, and is almost consumed by his desire to have him sent to Utram Road Jail. Why does Grey have such a burning hatred for the King? How much of a part – if any – do the cultural differences between them play in this hatred? Explain your answer.



Discussion Question 2

Why does Peter Marlowe refuse to take any money after helping him get out of trouble when Lt. Grey catches the King with Major Barry's lighter? Why does he later refuse to go into business with the King treating tobacco, even though the King will be using Marlowe's formula?

Discussion Question 3

While Marlowe and the King are talking outside the American Hut Sean – an effeminate young man who looks and acts more like a woman than a man – comes over and talks to Marlowe. How does Marlowe react to Sean? How does the King react to him? Discuss how their reactions to and impressions of Sean differ, and why.

Vocabulary

Tropical, capacity, saluting, masochistically, cunning, contempt, testicles, swagger, Sikh, enormous, amebic, torment, joviality, malevolent, overhang, impatient, manicured, clustering, password, underplay, delicately, starched, shattered, crinkling, organic, embarrassment.



Book One: Chapters 4-8

Summary

Book One: Chapters 4-8

Chapter 4

Peter Marlowe hurries back to Hut 16 and finds the other prisoners who share it with him are already lined up along the road outside. Marlowe quickly sneaks into the hut and gets his water bottle. After Marlowe joins the other prisoners Captain Spence reports to Colonel Sellars that all of his men are accounted for. As the prisoners wait in the heat guards search all the huts looking for the radio they know is hidden somewhere in camp, but after three hours they have found nothing and the prisoners are dismissed. Marlowe takes a quick shower and joins Colonel Larkin and Mac – friends he knew before he was sent to Changi – at the “bungalow” they live in and tells them about meeting the King. Mac becomes angry when Marlowe tells him that he gave away the process for curing tobacco without getting anything for it, but Larkin calms Mac down by saying it would have been risky for Peter to go into business with the King. Marlowe then divides the cigarettes from the pack the King gave him between the three of them. As it starts to rain, Larkin warns Marlowe to watch his step around the King.

Chapter 5

After the rain ends Marlowe, Larkin, and Mac have dinner, then relax before evening roll call. Lt. Grey walks up and salutes Colonel Larkin, then reports that he has arrested two men in Larkin’s regiment – Corporal Townsend and Private Gurble – for fighting. After Larkin says that he will deal with the men, Grey says that there is a rumor going around that someone in camp has a diamond ring, and Larkin says that he’s heard the rumor too, but that it isn’t one of his men. Grey salutes again and walks back to the MP Hut where he tells Sergeant Masters to release the prisoners. Grey tells Townsend and Gurble to report to Colonel Larkin after evening roll call. A few minutes later, a stone with a note attached to it comes through the open window. The note offers to “deliver the King on a plate” if Grey will look the other way when the anonymous note-writer does a little illegal trading himself, then says that if he accepts the deal Grey should stand outside the hut for a minute holding the stone. Grey steps outside the MP Hut with the stone, then walks back inside and dismisses Masters for the day. A few minutes after Masters leaves a second rock sails through the window with a note that says Grey should check a can in a ditch by Hut 16 for messages twice a day. It also says that the King will be trading with a man named Turasan that night.

Chapter 6

That evening Corporal Townsend and Private Gurble report to Colonel Larkin. When Larkin asks why they were fighting, Townsend tells him that Gurble stole half a pound of



rice from their hut's rations. Although Gurble denies it, Townsend's evidence is damning and Larkin tells Gurble that he is no longer a part of his regiment, and that he is dead to him. After Gurble stumbles away, Larkin orders Townsend to keep quiet about the incident or the other men in the regiment will tear Gurble to pieces. In another part of the camp, Lt. Grey goes to his bunk in Hut 16. A short time earlier he had watched from his hiding place in the shadows as a Korean guard named Turasan met with the King. He had only watched for a moment before leaving, and as he climbs into his bed he begins to plan his next move now that he knows his mysterious informant's information is reliable. Peter Marlowe is seated on the steps in front of Hut 16 keeping watch while at the far end of the hut Captain Dave Daven is using a homemade radio to listen to a news report from Calcutta; Captain Cox stands guard at the back entrance to the hut. When the broadcast ends Daven hides his part of the radio while in the next bunk Captain Spence hides the other part. Daven, who lost one leg early in the war, takes his crutches and heads out of the hut. He greets Marlowe and signals that he is finished and that the news is good, then limps off toward the latrine. By the time he returns, Marlowe is in his bunk.

Behind the American Hut, the King concludes his transaction with Turasan in which he sells the guard a fountain pen, and then slips back into the hut. He pays Max for guarding his possessions, then lies in his bunk and thinks about the diamond; he has learned who has it and how he can get it, and believes that now that he knows Peter Marlowe he has all the pieces he needs to complete a complicated deal. The King thinks about the long conversation he had with Marlowe after he came back that evening during which he'd mentioned that he knew a man who sometimes went "through the wire" and visited a nearby village. Although Marlowe had said that he would never have the courage to do that, the King heard something in his voice that said the opposite and understood immediately that the excitement would appeal to him. After a long silence Marlowe asked if the King really had a friend who sometimes went to a village. The King had looked into Marlowe's eyes and said, "You like to come ... next time I go?" and Marlowe had said yes.

Chapter 7

Several nights later the King goes to the camp hospital. He finds Sergeant Masters – Lt. Grey's assistant – lying on a cot, barely conscious. The King thanks Masters for telling him that someone was informing on him to Grey. He offers him some tobacco, but Masters suddenly dies. Dr. Kennedy comes over and confronts the King, asking him how he manages to stay so healthy when everyone else is so weak and sick. Kennedy tells the King he could help them all, but the King tells Kennedy to help himself and leaves. Another patient dies, and Kennedy calls an effeminate orderly named Steven over and tells him to get a burial detail together for that patient and Sergeant Masters. Kennedy is disgusted by homosexuality, and suddenly tells Steven to stop pretending that he's a woman. Dr. Prudhomme walks over at that moment and tells Dr. Kennedy that he has finished the autopsy on a man who had been found upside down in a latrine "borehole" and that the man had died of suffocation. He says the man's name was Gurble and that few days before he had been caught stealing hut rations. Kennedy says that the man probably deserved to die and starts off on his rounds. As he walks away



Kennedy sees Dr. Prudhomme caress Steven and Steven return the caress intimately, and is disgusted.

Early the next morning Peter Marlowe sits outside Hut 16 and splits open a coconut that the King had given him the night before as a gift for the whole hut. Most of the other officers in the hut are still asleep. As he is digging out the contents of the coconut a number of guards arrive and stand around the entrance to Hut 16. A Japanese captain named Yoshima steps up and announces that there is a radio in the hut.

Chapter 8

Lieutenant Colonel Sellars salutes Yoshima and says he knows nothing about any radio, then turns and asks the rest of the men who all deny knowing anything. Colonel Smedly-Taylor – who is in command of several huts including Hut 16 – enters the hut and argues with Yoshima for a moment, then orders everyone to go outside and tells Yoshima to conduct his search. After spending a few moments pretending to search, Yoshima walks directly to the hollow beam above Dave Daven's bunk his informant had told him about and finds the radio. Yoshima asks whose bunk it is. Dave Daven says it is his and that he made and used the radio alone. Yoshima offers Daven a cigarette, and then courteously asks him to please sit down. Captain Cox, who had been guarding the back entrance a few nights before, starts to sob uncontrollably and Yoshima looks at him with contempt and disgust. Yoshima leads Daven and Cox away and the rest of the men know that the two of them will be sent to Utram Road Jail.

Later that night, Marlowe takes his water bottle and goes to Larkin and Mac's bungalow. As Marlowe stands in the entrance keeping watch, Mac takes the false bottom from Marlowe's water bottle and pulls out part of a radio, which he adds to the parts he and Larkin carried in their water bottles. Marlowe walks over to him as Mac makes the final connection and tries to get the Calcutta station for news. After several minutes of trying, Mac says that the radio isn't working.

Analysis

While the terribly unsanitary living conditions and the lack of medicine in Changi are contributing factors to the poor health of the prisoners, by far the largest reason for the general weakness of the men and the fact that many die of illnesses that would not even be considered serious in the outside world is the lack of food. The Japanese provide a small amount of rice and some thin soup per meal which the prisoners augment with whatever fruits and vegetables they pick or grow themselves, as well as eggs from the large heavily guarded camp chicken coups. The largest coup holds 130 chickens which are owned by the entire camp and whose eggs go into a common pool for the 8,000 prisoners; the smaller coups house the hens that are owned by individual units or groups of units – usually two or three hens each. Only the King owns his own hens, and has seven of the finest birds in camp. All of the food in Changi is scrupulously weighed and measured to ensure that each prisoner gets his fair share.



Because food is so scarce and so precious at Changi stealing even a small amount is one of the most serious crimes any prisoner can commit, because he is literally taking the food out of other men's mouths. When Private Gurble is caught stealing rice from his unit's rations, Colonel Larkin is forced to throw him out of the regiment. Though Larkin has known Gurble for many years – the man had worked for him in his office in Sidney before the war started – and understands that a man alone with no mates in Changi has no chance of survival, Gurble's offense is so terrible that Larkin has no choice. When Gurble is found dead halfway down a latrine "borehole" a few days later no one is certain whether the man committed suicide or whether some of the men from his former regiment had put him in the borehole head first as punishment for stealing food. Whichever is the case, the reader understands that the general feeling of the other POWs who know about the incident is that he got what he deserved.

Although Peter Marlowe sleeps in Hut 16 with a number of other British officers, he is closest to Australian Colonel Larkin and Major McCoy – who everyone calls Mac – a tough Scotsman in his fifties who had owned a plantation in the Malaysian jungle for 25 years before the war started. Marlowe met both Mac and Larkin shortly after he was captured, before the three of them had been sent to Changi, and the three became close friends. Even though both Larkin and Mac are wary of the King and understand that Peter is taking a risk by associating with him, neither tries to talk Marlowe out of pursuing a friendship with the American as both understand that having a friend like the King could do everyone in their unit a lot of good. For his part, the King started probing Marlowe to find out what kind of man he was at their second meeting. The King understands that Marlowe's ability to speak fluent Malay could be invaluable to him – particularly when it comes to some of his more complicated business deals with the locals and the guards – and begins the process of feeling Marlowe out by telling him that he occasionally goes "through the wire" and visits a nearby village. Marlowe's reaction, which is one of curiosity and subdued excitement, is exactly what the King had hoped for. A large part of the King's success in the camp is due to his unique ability to "read" the people around him and understand what they want and need, and Marlowe's interest in taking the risks associated with breaking out of the camp and visiting a village is enough to convince the King that Marlowe is, indeed, someone that he will be able to use in his business ventures.

While the Japanese leave day-to-day discipline and enforcing camp regulations to the prisoners themselves for the most part, they take a very aggressive role when it comes to finding and destroying the "illegal" homemade wireless radio they know is in the camp somewhere, and ensuring that the men who are responsible for building and operating it are punished. The radio that Dave Daven operates with the help of a few other men in Hut 16 – including Peter Marlowe – is the camp's only link with the outside world, and the only source of information the prisoners have about how the war is going. Since the novel is set near the end of the war in 1945, most of the news is good for the Allies and gives the men in the camp hope. The location of the radio is a closely guarded secret and only Dave Daven, Captain Cox, Captain Spence, Marlowe and three or four other officers know its exact whereabouts. When Captain Yoshima is able to find the radio quickly after only a perfunctory search of Hut 16, it is obvious that one of the men who knew about the radio has informed about its exact whereabouts to the Japanese –



something that causes Daven and Cox to be sent to Utram Road Jail and which will almost certainly result in their deaths. Although Marlowe knows that he is lucky not to have been arrested with Daven and Cox, he also knows how vital it is that information continues to get into the camp from the outside world. The night after the first radio is found he gets together with Mac and Larkin and waits as Mac assembles the radio that the three of them have carried and kept secret for the three years they have been in camp. However, although everything seems to be intact, Mac is unable to get the radio to work meaning that for the present no news other than what the Japanese tell them will get to the prisoners in Changi.

Discussion Question 1

When Peter Marlowe tells Colonel Larkin and Mac that he refused to go into business with the King and accept a percentage of the profits after giving the American the recipe for curing tobacco, Mac becomes angry. What does Mac think Marlowe should have done, and why? Why does Mac later apologize for becoming angry?

Discussion Question 2

During their second conversation, why do you think the King tells Marlowe that he sometimes goes “through the wire” and visits a nearby village? What is Marlowe’s initial reaction? Why do you think Marlowe says “yes” when the King asks if he wants to go with him the next time he visits the village?

Discussion Question 3

After he finds the radio in Hut 16, Captain Yoshima treats Dave Daven with respect and honor after he confesses to it being his. A few moments later he treats Captain Cox with contempt and disgust after he realizes that Cox is guilty as well. What do you think causes Yoshima to view the two men so differently, even though they are both guilty? In what ways does Yoshima show his respect for Daven, and his disgust for Cox?

Vocabulary

Motivated, bitty, scraggy, dysentery, clutch, homicide, torrent, ridiculous, rumor, malaria, finery, mosquito, informer, riddle, anesthetics, unique, sentries, expression, supervision, battalion, momentum, bedbug, funeral, regiment, scrotum, latrine, ominously, rabble, widowed, hobbled.



Book Two: Chapters 9-12

Summary

Book Two: Chapters 9-12

Chapter 9

Six days later Max, Tex, Dino, the King, and Peter Marlowe corner a huge rat in the American Hut. Although the others want to kill the rat, the King instructs Tex and Max to get a blanket and capture it alive. After they capture the rat, the King says that they need to find out if it is male or female, then find a rat of the opposite sex and start breeding them so that eventually they will be able to sell the meat. They won't tell anyone the meat is from a rat, but rather a tiny deer-like animal called a Rusa Tikus that Marlowe tells them is native to Singapore. The King says they can use part of the slit-trench beneath the hut for their rat farm. Within a few minutes Tex has part of the slit-trench sectioned off and has devised a secure makeshift gate, and Max drops the rat – which they name Adam – inside its new “cage.” The King then has Marlowe come with him to visit Squadron Leader Vexley, who teaches an informal class on zoology to any interested prisoners. Vexley is lecturing about whales when they arrive, but the King gives the older man a cigarette and coaxes him into telling them about the mating habits of rats.

Chapter 10

After they return to the American Hut, the King has Marlowe tell the others what they learned from Vexley; female rats have litters of 12 to 14 pups every 22 days, and those pups are ready to breed within two months. By the end of six months, if all goes well, the rat farm will have bred over 6,500 rats. The bad news is that rats are cannibals, so they will need to be separated. Tex says that he can build a network of cages in the slit-trench without any problem. As they are discussing how to run the farm, another American POW named Kurt comes in the hut carrying a squirming blanket. After determining that the first rat was a male, Kurt went out and caught a female rat. Everyone climbs under the hut and watches as Kurt places the female rat – which they name Eve – in with Adam and are delighted when the rats immediately mate.

Chapter 11

The first litter of 12 rats is born 22 days later. The King and the others let Eve nurse the pups for 15 days, then put them into separate cages and mate Eve with Adam again that same day. After they climb back up into the American Hut through the trap door he'd had built in the floor so they could get to and from the rat farm easily, the King tells Marlowe that the next night they will be going to the village. Marlowe says that he had begun to wonder if the King had changed his mind about taking him, but the King says Peter needn't worry about that and then invites him to have lunch. As they are eating



the King sees that something is bothering Marlowe and asks what it is. Marlowe tells him that his friend Mac has malaria and had been taken to the hospital the day before. The King takes a bottle of quinine pills from the black box under his bed and gives Marlowe 20 pills, which he says should be enough to fix the malaria. Marlowe asks the King why he is so generous, and the King tells him that he has plenty and that Marlowe is a friend. The King then asks Marlowe if he will be able to act as interpreter for him that night with a Korean guard. Marlowe agrees immediately although it is obvious to the King that he doesn't like the idea of dealing with a guard at all.

A short time later Lt. Grey is walking through the camp feeling ill and thinking about his young wife when he sees Peter Marlowe walking towards the hospital carrying an American mess kit. He has Marlowe open it and sees that it is full of food. Marlowe tells him that he got it from the King and is taking it to one of the Americans in the hospital. Grey continues to question him, and Marlowe gets angry and says that he has done nothing wrong. Marlowe then insults Grey after which Grey says that Marlowe is "kissing a corporal's arse to get food." The two men almost come to blows, but finally Marlowe continues on his way. At the hospital he gives Mac the quinine tablets, and then sits beside his friend as he falls into a fitful sleep. Marlowe is still sitting there when Mac awakens, and he asks Steven the orderly if Mac can have a dry blanket. Steven takes a blanket off a man who died a few moments before and expertly tucks Mac in. He then tells Marlowe that he will take care of his friend and find some extra food for him, and then sends him off to get some rest. As he starts walking back towards Hut 16, Marlowe looks back into the hospital and sees Steven weeping softly over the dead man he'd taken the blanket from.

Chapter 12

Later that night Marlowe finds the King talking with an Australian Major named Prouty in the shadows outside the American Hut. The King tells Prouty to wait there, and then takes Marlowe to the small "shed" behind the hut. A moment later a Korean guard named Torusumi joins them. After exchanging polite greetings, the King shows Torusumi a gold watch Prouty has given him to sell. With Marlowe translating, the King and Torusumi politely negotiate and after a few minutes the King takes Prouty back an offer of \$400 dollars. Prouty tells the King that he couldn't sell it for less than \$1,200. The King says that he will get what he can from the guard but not to expect too much, and then walks back to Marlowe and Torusumi. As this is going on Lt. Grey checks the can in the ditch behind Hut 16 and finds a note saying that the King and Marlowe will be trading that night. As he heads towards the American Hut a British Colonel named Samson walks up to him and says that he would like to get Grey's views on the Singapore Campaign for a history he is compiling. Grey says he would be happy to discuss it tomorrow, but Samson insists on discussing it right then and Grey has no choice.

The King has Marlowe tell Torusumi that the owner of the watch will take no less than \$2,600. After more negotiations and a couple of trips by the King back to Prouty, they agree on \$2,200. After they make the exchange the King tells Marlowe to wait for him inside the American Hut and goes back to Prouty. He gives the Major \$900 – the price



Prouty had eventually agreed to sell for – and collects his 10% commission. A moment later the King sees Lt. Grey walking towards the American Hut. Prouty runs into the shadows while the King jumps into the hut through a window. When Grey enters the hut he finds the King, Marlowe, and a few other men playing poker. He comments on how much money there is in the pot then turns and leaves, cursing Colonel Samson under his breath. After Grey leaves, the King gives Marlowe \$108 – his 10% of the \$1,080 profit he will make after expenses. At first Marlowe refuses, but the King convinces him that he earned it and he takes the money. Later the King gives Marlowe another \$90 and asks him to give it to Colonel Samson, who will be waiting near the MP Hut. Marlowe takes the money and finds Samson where the King said he would be. Samson asks Marlowe to tell the King that he held up Grey for as long as he could and apologizes for it not being longer. He then tells Marlowe that he is lucky to be so close to the King.

Analysis

In these chapters the reader is given an in depth look at how the King “trades” for the first time, as well as his almost innate ability to bring people around to his way of thinking – usually to everyone’s benefit. Although the other men in the American Hut – and Peter Marlowe – initially think that the King is kidding when he suggests that they start a rat farm and sell the meat from the stock they raise, all of them quickly get to work and start making things happen when they realize that he is completely serious. They understand that if the King believes in a project it will probably make money and although no numbers are ever discussed, every one of the Americans knows that he will get a share of the rat farm’s profits. For the King, while he believes that the rat farm will be a good income producer, of equal importance to him is the fact that the rest of the men in his hut are now working together on a single project that is dependent on his leadership to succeed. Even though all of them are already on the King’s payroll, the fact that the King is the brains of the rat farm operation makes Dino, Max, Tex and the others even more dependent on him and gives him even greater power and control over them. In the deal he makes selling Major Prouty’s watch to Torusumi, the King knows as soon as he sees the watch that it is a fake and that Prouty is trying to cheat him; he also knows that Torusumi will be able to sell the fake watch for at least twice the \$2,200 he eventually pays for it and that the Korean guard is also trying to cheat him. In the end, both Prouty and Torusumi believe they have gotten the best of the King and are satisfied with the deal, while the King makes a huge profit and ensures that everyone leaves the deal happy.

Lieutenant Grey’s hatred of the King – and his determination to catch him breaking camp law and put him into jail – continues to grow and has been joined by a rapidly growing hatred of Peter Marlowe. Part of the hatred that Grey feels for Marlowe stems from the fact that he feels he is disgracing himself by becoming friends with the King, while part of it is personal. While Grey has had to work hard to earn every promotion and commendation he has ever received, Marlowe was born into an upper class military family and, in Grey’s opinion, has had everything handed to him his entire life. Grey is jealous of Marlowe and envious of the life he had before Changi – and the life he will presumably return to – and uses Marlowe’s relationship with the King to feed his envy



and hatred. For Marlowe's part, although he had never paid much attention to Grey in the past, since he started spending time with the King Grey has begun stopping and questioning him almost every time they run into each other, often times for no reason, and he starts to resent it. After an argument between the two of them ends with Grey accusing Marlowe of "kissing a corporal's arse to get food," the resentment turns to hatred. The animosity between Grey and Marlowe will impact both men throughout the remainder of the novel.

Along with the lack of food and medicine (made even worse by the fact that after Dave Daven's radio was found the Japanese cut the camp's rations as punishment) and other physical hardships the POWs are forced to endure, confinement in Changi takes an emotional and psychological toll on the prisoners. Most of the men have been at Changi for two or three years and have not been able to communicate with their families in all that time; the loneliness and anxiety caused by the years of separation and uncertainty about their loved ones is almost as painful and debilitating as the malnutrition and the sickness. For Peter Marlowe, the longing he feels for the young girl he fell in love with while he spent several months hiding in a native village keeps him awake hour after hour when he should be sleeping, while for his friend Mac not knowing if his wife and infant son escaped the Japanese or whether or not they are even still alive weakens him as much as the malaria and other conditions he suffers from. Even Lt. Grey wanders the camp some nights replaying the horrible fight he'd had with his new bride the last time he'd seen her before he'd shipped out three years before over and over in his mind, wishing he could change things. Only the King seems to be as immune to the emotional issues suffered by the rest of the men in camp as he is to the physical, and at one point tells Peter Marlowe he never worries about things he can't do anything about. Along with his people skills and business savvy, this ability to only focus on the here and now helps the King to thrive in Changi.

Discussion Question 1

When the King asks Marlowe if he will translate for him while he makes a deal with one of the Korean guards Marlowe agrees to do it immediately, but the King can see that he isn't happy about it. Why do you think Marlowe feels uncomfortable about this? Why do you think Marlowe agrees to do it? Was there any "honorable" way Marlowe could have gotten out of it?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think the King dealt fairly with Major Prouty and Torusumi during the transaction involving the watch? Do you think he cheated either or both of them, or do you feel that the way he dealt with both of them was justified? Why do you think Marlowe accepted money for his part in the transaction when he had refused to take money in the past? Explain your answer.



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the hatred and animosity that is growing between Peter Marlowe and Lt. Grey as the story progresses. Why does Grey begin targeting and searching Marlowe every time he sees him? Why does Marlowe initially dislike Grey, and what causes this feeling to intensify? How much of a role do you think the difference in their “classes” plays in each man’s feelings, and how is this evidenced?

Vocabulary

Gasped, anticipated, flurry, mascot, microbes, malevolently, resonance, seminar, flukes, spectacle, benignly, furiously, potential, squirming, outsmarted, eternity, loathed, quinine, irritably, marketer, translate, alleviate, impinge, witness, campaign, grumbled, profit, blithely.



Book Two: Chapters 13-14

Summary

Book Two: Chapters 13-14

Chapter 13

The next day Marlowe visits Mac in the hospital and brings him half of a chicken that he and Larkin bought and cooked the night before with the money the King had paid him. Marlowe tells Mac where the money came from and that he feels guilty that he took it, but Mac tells him he earned it. Speaking a kind of Malay code Marlowe then carefully asks Mac if he knows what part of their radio is broken. Mac says he thinks it is a condenser and Marlowe tells him that he might be able to get another one. Mac says he will be out of the hospital in a couple of days to help him but Marlowe tells him he will need to do it that night, alone. Though he doesn't tell Mac, Marlowe thinks that there might be an old radio in the village he will be visiting that night that he can get a condenser from.

When it is almost time for lunch Marlowe goes back to Hut 16 to wait with the others. Grey makes a sarcastic comment to him, but Marlowe tells him to go "play cops and robbers" and ignores him, taking his place in the chow line. After getting his food Marlowe heads to the bungalow and tells Larkin that he has seen Mac and that he is looking much better. A tall man from the unit named John Hawkins walks by leading a dog he has named Rover on a leash, and Larkin and Marlowe give him a few scraps for the dog. Larkin then asks if Mac wants to play bridge later, but Peter says that he can't. He wants to tell Larkin about his upcoming trip to the village, but knows it would put his friend in danger and so remains silent.

Chapter 14

When Marlowe arrives at the American Hut that night the King has everything ready, and the two of them slip out of camp easily and head into the jungle. The King expertly leads Marlowe to a small village, and then to a hut where they are greeted by Sutra – the village headman – and Cheng San, a tall Chinese man. Although the King wants to talk about the deal he has come to make Marlowe says they cannot talk business until they have shared a meal with the two men or they will be very offended. A few minutes later the headman's wife and one of his daughters named Sulina serve the men a huge feast. After they finish eating Marlowe says that it is okay to start the dealing. The King has Marlowe tell Cheng San in Malay that he has a four carat diamond to sell. He says that he doesn't have the diamond with him but that if Cheng San can bring the money to the camp the King will show him the diamond and then make delivery three days later. After some haggling they agree on a price of \$30,000 and that they will use a camp guard they both know named Shagata as a go-between. Shagata will go to the American Hut in ten days to inspect the diamond and if he is satisfied with it he will hand



over 75% of the money. Three days later, the King will deliver the ring to Cheng San in the village and collect the other 25%. When they finish dealing Sutra walks Cheng San back to his boat. A few moments later the King tells Marlowe that he will be back in an hour and also leaves the hut.

The King goes to the hut of a woman named Kasseh. A few moments later a small Chinese man enters the hut and Kasseh leaves; the man is a member of a guerrilla unit fighting the Japanese that Kasseh has contacted for the King. The King tells the Chinese man that if the war ends suddenly and the Japanese start killing POWs he wants to be protected, and he will guarantee the guerrillas \$2,000 a head for every American – including himself – that they get out of Changi. The Chinese man says they can maybe save ten Americans, and that the price will be \$5,000 a head; if the King doesn't pay after they are out, the guerrillas will kill them all. After the King agrees to the terms the Chinese man leaves and Kasseh returns, and soon after they make love.

Peter Marlowe is alone in the hut when Sutra returns and the two men start talking. Marlowe tells Sutra how he learned to speak Malay and about his life in the village in Java where he had hidden. When he thinks Sutra is starting to trust him, Marlowe says that he needs a part for a wireless radio. He says knows the Japanese forbid radios even in villages, but asks if perhaps there is an old broken one that might have the part he needs. After a long silence Sutra takes Marlowe to his daughter Sulina's bedroom. After telling the girl to go to the veranda and keep watch Sutra reaches under her bed and brings out a small radio. He says that it works well, and that Marlowe can have it but that he must protect the village and not tell the Japanese where he got it if he is caught. Marlowe thanks Sutra and then goes down to the shore to have a swim. When he is done, he sits on the beach and stares at Sulina, who is standing in front of one of the hut's windows. A short time later the King finds Marlowe and says it is time to go. Marlowe runs back to the hut to get the radio, which is wrapped in a cloth, and they leave the village.

The King notices the bundle Marlowe is carrying when they stop for a rest and asks what it is. Marlowe shows him the radio, and the King becomes angry. He says that radios are poison, that Marlowe had no right to use his contacts to do his own business, and tells him to throw the radio into the jungle. Marlowe refuses and the two men almost come to blows, but the King slowly regains his composure. He apologizes to Marlowe for losing his temper, and Marlowe tells the King about the condenser he needs for the radio he, Mac, and Larkin have. The King suggests that Marlowe take the condenser he needs from the radio and bury the rest of it; they can come back to get it if he needs more parts. Marlowe agrees, and after burying the radio they start for camp again. When they are almost there they come upon a Japanese soldier sitting against a tree holding a rifle. The King leaps at the guard and grabs the rifle and then realizes the guard is dead, but Marlowe tells the King to run. When they are a short distance away Marlowe tells the King that there was a deadly flying snake in the soldier's lap. The King realizes that Marlowe has saved his life and thanks him, and then the two men laugh about it. When they reach the place in wire they left camp through they see Lt Grey walking near it and are forced to wait. Finally Grey disappears behind one of the huts and they slip back into camp unnoticed.



Analysis

Marlowe spends most of the day anticipating going to the native village with the King, and remembering the time he'd hidden in the village in Java and the girl he had fallen in love with there. Although he has been looking forward leaving camp and going to the village with the King for several weeks, Marlowe finds himself feeling very frightened by how easy it is to get out. Once they are in the jungle, however, Marlowe is impressed by how expertly the King is able to lead the way to the village, and thinks that the American has probably visited the village many times before. Once in the village, Marlowe sees that it is very much like the village in Java, and even though the King has been there many times before Marlowe understands the customs of the natives and quickly takes charge. Although he is distracted by the headman's daughter Sulina – who reminds him of the girl in the other village – he helps the King make a much better deal with Cheng San than he would have been able to make himself, and the King knows it.

The reader is shown clearly that Marlowe is right about the King having visited the village many times before when he leaves Marlowe in Sutra's hut and goes to Kasseh's hut after finishing his negotiations with Cheng San. Although the King pays for Kasseh's services, she has come to care about him over the course of the months he has visited her. For his part, the King has grown to trust Kasseh and asks her to arrange a meeting with the Chinese guerrilla which he tells Peter Marlowe nothing about. For the last several weeks there has been a rumor going around camp that when the war ends the Japanese plan to kill all the prisoners at Changi, and the King wants some insurance that will help him to survive if this turns out to be the case. Even though he tries unsuccessfully to arrange to get all of the Americans out, the reader understands that all that really matters to the King is that he gets out himself; any others the guerrillas save will be extra, and the King will find a way to make a profit from it.

While Peter Marlowe has been looking forward to the excitement and danger involved in going to the native village with the King for weeks, he also hopes to be able to find a replacement for the part of the radio that has been damaged there. Despite his having worked on it every spare moment before he was taken to the hospital, Mac has been unable to repair the radio that he, Marlowe, and Larkin have kept safe for years. The day before Marlowe and the King go to the village, the camp's Japanese commandant announces that he will be reinstating the camp's regular food rations to celebrate huge victories by the Japanese Navy over the American fleet, and victories by their army in the Philippines. Even though most prisoners believe that the Japanese are lying about their victories in the war, they have not had any real news since Dave Daven's radio was found and are depressed by the commandant's claims. Marlowe understands that it is now more important than ever that they get the radio working, and so when they are alone he risks asking Sutra if there is an old radio in the village and is shocked when the headman gives him a working wireless. For Sutra, Marlowe is the answer to his prayers; he has been looking for a way to get rid of the radio for many months since it would mean the death of his village if the Japanese found it there, and is only too happy to let the young Englishman take it with him.



When the King finds out what Marlowe has done as they are making their way back to camp he loses his temper not so much because Marlowe has made a deal behind his back, but because a radio is just about the most dangerous thing to have in Changi. While he thinks he might be able to concoct a story that could get them out of trouble if he and Marlowe are caught coming back into camp, he knows that if they are found with a radio nothing will save them from being sent to Utram Road Jail. When Marlowe stands his ground and refuses to throw the radio away the King realizes that there is no profit in being angry and that he still needs Peter, and quickly apologizes. After Marlowe agrees only to take the part Mac needs back to camp, everything is once again okay between the two of them, and the King finds that his esteem for Marlowe has actually grown because he had the courage to stand his ground.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Marlowe tell Mac where he thinks he might be able to get the part he needs to repair the radio when he visits him in the hospital? Later, even though he wants to talk with his friend about it, why doesn't Marlowe tell Larkin that he will be going to the village with the King that night?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between the King and Kasseh. Do you think that Kasseh loves the King, or is their relationship purely a business arrangement? Does the King love Kasseh? Why do you think he trusts her to arrange the meeting with the Chinese guerrilla? Explain your answers.

Discussion Question 3

How does Marlowe react when the King becomes angry after he finds out that Peter is bringing a radio back to camp from the village? Why does Marlowe absolutely refuse to get rid of it? When they have straightened things out, do you think that the King's opinion of Marlowe has changed and, if so, how?

Vocabulary

Yoga, fastidious, courtyard, amok, sponging, merchandise, accountant, windward, hostile, worthwhile, finite, ornament, lotus, conducting, whimpered, veranda, scooped, abruptly, smug, lapse, substantial, counterfeit, guerrilla, contentedly, threshold, dreamily, condenser, clogs, beret.



Book Three: Chapters 15-16

Summary

Book Three: Chapters 15-16

Chapter 15

The next morning Mac is released from the hospital. Marlowe goes to the bungalow and shocks him by giving him the condenser. Larkin asks where he got it, but Marlowe merely shrugs and Larkin does not ask again. That evening, Marlowe and Larkin stand guard while Mac tries the radio and gets the station in Calcutta. Later that night, Larkin goes to Colonel Smedly-Taylor's quarters and reports that the Russians are 40 miles from Berlin and that the Americans have landed on Iwo Jima. Smedly-Taylor asks if he is sure, then tells Larkin that he can do nothing to help anyone who is caught with a radio, and Larkin says he understands. A short time later, when Marlowe returns to his hut after telling the King the news, one of the men whispers the news to him and he is frightened by how fast word has travelled. Five days later Captain Yoshima turns the camp inside out looking for a radio, but finds nothing.

The next day, Marlowe sees a crowd gathered by the chicken coops and learns that John Hawkins' dog Rover broke into Colonel Foster's unit's coop and killed a hen. Foster tries to attack Hawkins, but Lt. Grey stops him and takes charge; he tells Foster that he will report the incident, and orders Hawkins to kill the dog. Hawkins begs Grey to take back the order, but Grey says he can't and tells him to kill the dog quickly. Hawkins then begs Marlowe to help him, but there is nothing he can do. Later that same day, Dino finds Marlowe resting in his bunk and says that the King wants to meet him inside the huge stone jail in Cell 54 on the fourth floor in 30 minutes and that he should bring Mac and Larkin with him. Marlowe finds Mac and Larkin and even though they know it is against regulations for officers to go into the jail, they are curious as to what the King wants and decide they should enter the building separately and meet at Cell 54.

Marlowe carefully makes his way inside the jail and finds Larkin and Mac waiting for him inside Cell 54. A short time later the King and Tex arrive carrying packages, and Tex puts a hotplate and large stewpot on a bunk attached to the wall. The King starts opening packages and pouring beans, vegetables, salt, and sugar into the pot, then opens a large package which contains fresh meat. Marlowe and the others are shocked, and the King tells them that it is his birthday and he wants to celebrate, and brings out a bottle of sake. As the King cuts the meat and puts it into the stewpot a knock comes on the cell door and Tex lets Captain Brough, the senior American officer, into the cell and locks the door behind him. The King then sets his guests to work sealing the door so the smell of the cooking meat will go out the cell's window and disappear among the camp's other smells. As the stew starts to cook, the men talk. The subject turns to world politics, and soon all of them are swearing and arguing their points loudly. Someone pounds on



the door and shouts for them to keep the noise down. The King apologizes and tells the others it is the guy who lives the cell, and then says that he has rented it for five hours.

Soon the stew starts to boil. The King adds some native spices, and the men's mouths begin to water. Marlowe asks where the King got the meat, and the King shocks them all by saying that it John Hawkins' dog Rover. Marlowe says that he feels like a cannibal and doesn't know how he will face Hawkins again and Brough agrees, but Mac says that there is nothing wrong with eating dog and the aroma of the stew quickly helps the others get over their disgust. The stew is ready an hour later, and all the men eat until they are ready to bust. When they are finished the King passes around a pack of cigarettes, then opens the sake and passes it around. Tex makes coffee and they play cards until the stew's smell is completely gone and it is safe to open the cell door.

Chapter 16

A few days later it is V-E Day; the war in Europe is over and the men in Changi are thrilled. Eve gives birth to another litter of rats and under the American Hut 14 cages are already filled, and 12 more cages will be full soon. The King says they need to build more cages, but Tex says there is no more wire mesh to be had. The King says they will have to bring the Aussies into the deal and tells Tex to get Timsen, an Australian "trader" and the King's largest competitor. Timsen arrives at the American Hut a short time later and the King and Marlowe show him the operation. The King offers Timsen 50% of the profits if Timsen supplies the materials for 1,000 more cages and markets the meat. Timsen says that he doesn't want to sell it to other Aussies, and Marlowe says he doesn't want the meat sold to the British soldiers. Suddenly the King has an idea. He calls his men – who also have concerns about selling the meat – over and announces that they will begin marketing the meat in ten days, but that they will only sell it to "the brass," officers with the rank of Major and above. Everyone, including Timsen and Marlowe, know officers they want to sell the rat meat to and everyone agrees to the idea. Later, shortly before lights-out Shagata – the guard that Cheng San and the King agreed to have act as a go-between – stops by the American Hut. With Marlowe translating Shagata asks if the King has something to sell. The King says no but that he will in three days, and that Shagata is wise to check.

After Shagata leaves the King asks Marlowe to come over the next morning so they that can make plans, but Marlowe says that he's on a work detail. The King then asks if he will be able to go to the theater with him to see Sean in the new show tomorrow night and after Marlowe says he will, the King asks how he almost killed Sean. Marlowe says that Sean had been part of his squadron and when he didn't come back from a mission, Marlowe thought that he was dead. Marlowe saw Sean acting in a camp show shortly after he came Changi, playing the female lead. When the show ended Marlowe went backstage and found Sean wearing a negligee and stockings, surrounded by men. Sean sent everyone away and when they were alone Marlowe asked what happened to him and how he could let those men "paw" him as they had been doing. Sean said that he didn't mind because he was now a woman. Marlowe became angry and tore Sean's clothes off him, screaming that he was a man. Sean started to cry and Marlowe stormed out of the theater. When Marlowe went back to apologize, he found Sean lying on a bed



with a long cut on his wrist and blood everywhere; he put a bandage on the wrist and got a doctor. When Sean came too Marlowe apologized and Sean asked him to please be his friend, but Marlowe walked away hating himself. The King remains silent when Marlowe finishes his story and Peter gets up and walks away, visibly upset by the memories.

Analysis

The condenser that Peter Marlowe brings back from the village is the part that Mac needs to get the radio working. Soon news from Calcutta starts to make its way through camp on a nightly basis. In the interests of security Marlowe, Mac, and Larkin decide that they will only tell the news to two other men each and then suggest to their contacts that they only tell two men and so on, but the news spreads far more rapidly than any of them imagine possible. Before a full day has passed, the Japanese Commandant and Captain Yoshima know that there is another radio in camp. The Commandant cuts rations again, and Yoshima searches the camp thoroughly. But, Marlowe and the others keep the radio components in their water bottles except when listening to broadcasts, and they never let those bottles out of their sight. Even though the news is consistently positive, and the prisoners are elated when they hear of the German surrender on V-E Day and the American invasion of Iwo Jima, their joy at the good news is mixed with the fear of reprisals by the Japanese should the Allies invade Japan. There is a growing belief in the camp that no prisoner will be allowed to leave Changi alive, and some POWs begin to believe that every Allied victory brings the day of their own deaths closer.

Beneath the American Hut the rat farm is progressing according to plan and Eve has her next litter right on schedule. While Max and the others have been able to widen the slit-trench beneath the hut so that it will be able to accommodate over one thousand cages, it is obvious to everyone that to keep on track they will need several hundred more cages in a few days, and a thousand within just a couple of weeks. Tex has stolen or traded for all the materials he can find and the King knows that the only way they will be able to get the wood and wire they need is if he makes a deal with Timsen. Timsen is an Australian POW who is as well known for his trading as the King, although almost everyone including other Australians prefer to deal with the King for more valuable items. Timsen sees the potential for profit immediately and already has the materials the King needs for the cages but, like Marlowe and even the other Americans, feels uncomfortable with the idea of selling rat meat to his fellow prisoners. Just as it is looking like the deal is going to fall apart and the rat farm fail, the King comes up with the idea of only selling to senior officers with the rank of Major or above. This idea immediately appeals to everyone since they all have at least a couple of officers that they hate, and the general consensus is that the senior officers have it easier than everyone else and deserve what they get. Even though he came up with it on the spur of the moment, it is exactly what is needed to save the enterprise and shows yet again the King's innate ability to find a way to make a deal that everyone involved is happy with.



Although he has avoided the subject since Marlowe mentioned it at their first meeting, the King senses that the time might be right after making arrangements to go to the camp theater with him the next night to ask Marlowe about the time he almost killed Sean. Marlowe immediately tells him the story, glad that the King has asked and that he is finally able to get it off his chest. While homosexuality was certainly not unheard of in 1945 and relatively common within the confines of Changi, it wasn't something that was generally approved of or discussed openly. The idea that a friend from his old squadron would dress and live openly as a woman is something that Marlowe can't deal with, and the longer he talks with Sean, the angrier he becomes. When Marlowe tears Sean's clothes off him and screams that he is a man and should act like one, he feels nothing but disgust and hatred for what his friend has become. Later, after he calms down, Marlowe realizes that he has no right to judge how another man deals with the horrors of the camp and goes back to apologize, but finds Sean unconscious after attempting suicide. He understands that his cruelty and abuse is directly responsible and, being the basically decent man that he is, he has carried his guilt with him silently until he tells the King the story. When he finishes the story it is obvious to the reader that while Marlowe continues to be disturbed by the fact that Sean still dresses and acts like a woman, he still feels guilty about his actions and has never forgiven himself for causing Sean so much pain.

Discussion Question 1

When the King tells his "guests" that the meat they will soon be eating is John Hawkins' dog Rover, how does each of them react? Do you think that there was anything wrong with them eating the meat, considering that the dog had to die anyway? How do you think you would have felt if you had been one of the King's guests, and why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the King decide to bring Timsen – his biggest competitor – into the rat farm operation? What is Timsen's initial reaction to the King's proposal, and how does it change after the King comes up with the idea to only sell the rat meat to officers? What is it about this plan that appeals to the other men involved in the rat farm, including Peter Marlowe?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the story that Marlowe tells the King about the time he almost killed Sean. Why do you think Marlowe reacted as he did when he went backstage at the theater to see Sean for the first time? Why do you think that even though he went back and saved his life Marlowe still feels guilty about the incident?



Vocabulary

Distaste, cookhouse, apologetically, fiddled, shrapnel, trumps, furiously, deliberate, condenser, openhanded, berserk, hundred, insanely, alternately, twinge, consumed, cemented, fascinated, adjusted, peered, grazed, trickle, cycles, suspiciously, interjected, sanctuary, dribbled, permeated.



Book Three: Chapters 17-18

Summary

Book Three: Chapters 17-18

Chapter 17

Early the next morning, Marlowe leads his work detail of twenty men through the camp gate and along with a number of other details they march to the airfield. Marlowe notices that one of the Korean guards waiting for the prisoners is Torusumi, whom Marlowe had met earlier with the King. The Korean greets him politely. Torusumi says that he will take Marlowe's detail, and then apologizes for the fact that they will be working on the east end of the airfield, where there is no shade. Marlowe suggests that Torusumi should ask for better treatment and request the west end, where it is cooler. Torusumi thinks for a moment, then walks over and talks with the Japanese officer in charge. When he returns, Torusumi tells Marlowe that they will be working on the west end cutting down coconut trees – which is the assignment all the details hope to get. Torusumi then says that he told the Japanese officer that Marlowe was the King's interpreter and so should be taken care of.

Although he is suffering stomach spasms from dysentery, Grey goes to the Supply Hut to make his weekly inspection. When he arrives, Lieutenant Colonel Jones, the supply officer, and his assistant Sergeant Blakely are weighing out the rations on a large scale and distributing them to the unit cookhouse representatives. When they are finished, Grey makes his inspection and finds everything in perfect order. As he is leaving Grey suffers a severe stomach spasm and stumbles against the scale, knocking the weights to the ground. Grey picks up one of the weights and immediately sees that it has been tampered with; a hole has been drilled in the iron and filled with clay. Grey checks the rest of the weights and sees they have all been tampered with. Jones says there must be some mistake, but Grey accuses him and Blakely of stealing rations. Blakely panics and says that Jones forced him to use the fixed weights and that he only got a small percentage. Jones offers to share what they steal each week with Grey, but he refuses. Grey takes the fixed weights with him to Colonel Smedly-Taylor and reports what he has found. Smedly-Taylor is shocked and tells Grey that the matter will need to be handled carefully, and that he is not to say a word about it to anyone. Smedly-Taylor then says that Grey did an excellent job and that he will make sure it is mentioned in his record, which could mean a promotion.

Shortly before they return to camp one of the men in Marlowe's detail asks Peter if he could sell a pen to Torusumi for him. The man says that since Marlowe is friends with the King he might be able to get a better price. Marlowe hesitates and then asks how much he wants for it, and the man tells him \$65. Marlowe takes the pen to Torusumi, who immediately offers him \$75. Remembering how the King did business, Marlowe haggles with Torusumi until finally they agree on \$120. Marlowe gives the soldier the



\$65 he asked for and keeps the rest. When they get back to camp Marlowe takes a shower, and then runs into Grey. Grey tells him that he is under hut arrest, and that he is to report to Colonel Smedly-Taylor that night after dinner.

Chapter 18

Grey is already there waiting when Marlowe reports to Colonel Smedly-Taylor's hut. Smedly-Taylor asks Marlowe if he went to the jail yesterday and Marlowe tells him he had gone there to visit men from his unit. Smedly-Taylor then asks if the King had been there also, and Marlowe says yes. Smedly-Taylor advises Marlowe to stop associating with the King, fines him a month's pay for disobeying camp rules and visiting the jail, and dismisses him. After Marlowe leaves Smedly-Taylor says that he has relieved Lieutenant Colonel Jones and Sergeant Blakely of their duties, but that is all he is going to do and tells Grey to forget the matter. Grey becomes angry and demands that the men be court-martialed, but Smedly-Taylor says his decision has been made and that Grey will obey orders. He then tells Grey that he has recommended him for promotion to his superior, the British Camp Commandant, but Grey accuses Smedly-Taylor of trying to buy him off and says that he has the weights as proof. When Smedly-Taylor shows him a weight Grey sees that it has not been tampered with and realizes that it isn't the one he'd given the Colonel earlier. Knowing he is beaten, Grey returns to the MP Hut and passes out. A short time later Smedly-Taylor is playing bridge with Lieutenant Colonel Jones and Colonel Sellars. He tells Jones that he was careless letting Marlowe catch him, and that he'll be replaced by Colonel Samson. He then tells Colonel Sellars that it will be his job to make sure Grey is kept busy on the days the false weights are used.

That evening Marlowe and Larkin enter the camp's open air theater to see the new play. The King spots them and invites them to sit with him. Marlowe feels uncomfortable after what Smedly-Taylor said to him earlier, but Larkin says why not and Marlowe goes with him. Just as the camp band begins to play the overture, Dino appears and whispers something to the King, and the King leans over and tells Marlowe that someone is waiting to see them. Marlowe and the King leave the theater and find Shagata waiting behind the American Hut. Shagata says that Cheng San is being questioned about smuggling by the police. Shagata fears he might implicate them, and asks what he should do. The King tells Shagata that he needs to keep tabs on Cheng San and get word to him if he talks, and Shagata agrees. Shagata leaves, and the King and Marlowe head back to the theater.

When they reach the side door to the theater a man named Rodrick rushes over to them and says that Sean is throwing a tantrum and refusing to go on. As Marlowe goes to the dressing room, the men in the audience start chanting "We want Sean." When Sean lets him in Marlowe sees that he is dressed as the female lead, and that he has been crying. Sean says that he can't go on pretending anymore and wishes he were dead, and then asks Marlowe what he has become. Marlowe says that Sean is the most important person in camp at the moment and that although God only knows how or why, Sean IS a woman. The words are what he needs to hear and a moment later Sean composes himself, thanks Marlowe, and is greeted with loud cheering as he steps on stage.



Marlowe goes back to the King and they watch the rest of the show from backstage. Sean is brilliant and when the show ends he gets ten curtain calls.

Analysis

Even though they have only known each other for a few weeks, the fact that Marlowe is friends with the King is known throughout the camp and provides some unexpected benefits. While Marlowe knows that the King is a big man with the other prisoners and even with some of the Korean guards, he is amazed when he finds out that just being the King's interpreter is enough to have the Japanese officer in charge of the air strip project give his detail the best assignment there is. As Torusumi explains it, the Japanese officer gets 10% of any business the guards do with the prisoners, and so someone who is close to the King is an important man and must be taken care of. Marlowe is also amazed – and slightly irritated – when one of the men in his detail asks him to sell a pen for him to Torusumi because the man knows he is friends with the King and will be able to make a better deal. Marlowe's first instinct is to refuse, but he talks himself into doing it by telling himself that he will be helping the man out, and that he will be able to use the money that he pockets from the deal to buy extra rations for his unit.

However, Marlowe's friendship with the King – and the hatred that Lieutenant Grey has for him – has also brought him to the attention of Colonel Smedly-Taylor who says that while he can't order him to stop associating with the King, he would strongly suggest that Marlowe do so. Marlowe finds himself feeling uncomfortable about sitting with the King at the theater, while at the same time feeling guilty that he should be concerned or ashamed about being seen with a man he considers his friend. Marlowe's proper upper class upbringing is at odds with the genuine affection and friendship he feels for the King, and he finds it difficult to balance the two.

When Lt. Grey literally stumbles on the "fixed" weights in the Supply Hut he is shocked not only by the potential enormity of the crime, but also because Lieutenant Colonel Jones has always seemed to be very conscientious and is one of Grey's favorite officers. That evening, when Colonel Smedly-Taylor tells him to forget about the incident and then offers him a promotion Grey realizes that he is, in effect, being paid off to keep his mouth shut and that Smedly-Taylor is in on the conspiracy with Jones. He threatens to go to Smedly-Taylor's superior – the British Camp Commandant – and turn them all in, but realizes that he will never be believed when he sees that the Colonel has replaced the "fixed" weights with accurate ones. Smedly-Taylor and Jones are part of the same upper class military establishment that Peter Marlowe belongs to and as he heads back to the MP he realizes that he is powerless to stop them. He also realizes, as he is being carried to the hospital on a stretcher after passing out from a combination of stress and dysentery, that all he can do now is step up his efforts to catch the King and Marlowe and send them both off to Utram Road Jail.

The news that Cheng San is being questioned by the police about smuggling is very bad. Since there is nothing he can do about it, the King decides that they will stick to their original plan and hope for the best. The King tells Shagata to get as much



information as he can and let them know if Cheng San talks, although he doubts the Korean guard would be able to get word to them in time. As they are returning to the theater Marlowe asks the King what they will do if it looks like Cheng San has given them away, and the King says that they will have to make a break for it, but his voice shakes as he says it and Marlowe understands that he doubts it will work. For the first time in the novel the King faced with a situation over which he has no control and even though it obviously frightens him, he keeps his head and does not panic. This ability to remain cool under pressure and continue to search for options when most other men would panic is another important part of why the King has thrived for so long in Changi.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Marlowe agree to try and sell a pen for one of the soldiers in his work detail to Torusumi? Why does he decide to keep the extra money for himself? Do you think that his friendship with the King is changing Marlowe as a person and, if so, in what ways?

Discussion Question 2

What is the real reason Colonel Smedly-Taylor tells Lt. Grey to forget about the “fixed” weights he finds in the Supply Hut? Why do you think Grey initially refuses to do so, even though Smedly-Taylor offers him a promotion to keep his mouth shut? What finally convinces Grey that there is nothing he can do?

Discussion Question 3

When Sean throws a tantrum and refuses to go on after the play starts, Marlowe talks to him in his dressing room. What does Marlowe do to him that convinces him to perform? Do you think Marlowe means what he says? Do you think that telling the King about the time Sean almost killed himself has changed how Marlowe feels about Sean and, if so, how?

Vocabulary

Edible, delicacy, chewable, insisted, cabbage, efficient, tampered, provisions, massacred, feigned, pondering, expectantly, appalled, rejoiced, conscience, turmoil, shysters, insult, exultation, caustically, mischief, tumult, commission, eternity, brutally, extricate, spellbound.



Book Four: Chapters 19-23

Summary

Book Four: Chapters 19-23

Chapter 19

Three nights later Marlowe and the King wait for Shagata. The Korean is late, and there has been no word from him. Marlowe winces in pain as he shifts his left arm. Two days earlier, during a work detail, a tree stump had fallen on his arm. Dr. Kennedy bandaged the arm and said it was just a flesh wound, but it has become increasingly painful. Max pops his head into the hut and says that Lt. Grey is prowling the camp. The King tells Marlowe that Grey knows something is up because he has an informer in the American Hut; the King knows who it is, but doesn't tell Marlowe. Timsen sends word that the owner of the diamond is nervous, the whole area is crawling with MPs, and they either need to get things going or quit for the night. Finally the King calls everything off, and says they will try again tomorrow.

The next day near dusk Peter Marlowe screams in pain as Dr. Kennedy removes the bandage. The wound has become gangrenous, and Kennedy says that because he doesn't have the right medicines he will need to amputate the arm. Marlowe leaves the hospital after Kennedy puts on a fresh bandage and goes to the American Hut. As they wait again for Shagata, Marlowe tells the King about his arm. Just as he finishes Max comes into the hut and says Shagata is on his way. The King stands up, but Marlowe doesn't move and suddenly starts screaming wildly that they are going to cut off his arm. The King slaps him and brings him out of it and the two head to the "shed" behind the hut. When Shagata arrives he tells them that the police have let Cheng San go, and that he has the money. The King quickly goes to where Timsen is waiting with Corporal Townsend, the diamond's owner. He brings Townsend to Shagata and has him show the guard the diamond. At the same time, behind the MP Hut, Dino whispers to Lt. Grey that Shagata and the King are meeting. After Shagata is satisfied that the diamond is real he puts several stacks of bills on the table in the shed, then bows to the King and leaves. Outside the shed, Max whispers that Grey is coming. The King scoops up the money and tells Townsend to tell Timsen that they will settle up later. He and Marlowe duck under the American Hut just as Grey arrives.

Grey chases Marlowe and the King through the camp. Men from the American Hut delay Grey as much as possible, but Marlowe and the King almost run into a squad of MPs and barely escape. As they hide in the shadows a group of Aussie prisoners run past, and one of them says that the King and Marlowe are on the run with thousands of dollars. Realizing that the whole camp seems to be after them, the King gives Marlowe the money and says that he will cover for him while he slips through the wire and buries it outside camp. Marlowe says he'll be killed and refuses, but the King says that if Marlowe saves the money, he will save Marlowe's arm. Marlowe hesitates, then runs for



the wire and carefully slips through. A moment later Grey and another MP find the King and search him; they find nothing on him and Grey lets him go. The King lets Grey follow him as he walks slowly through the camp for a while, then finds Marlowe waiting for him in the American Hut. Before he leaves Marlowe asks the King if he meant what he said about saving his arm and the King says he does, but he has no idea how he will do it.

Chapter 20

The next morning Colonel Larkin visits Corporal Townsend in one of the Aussie huts. Townsend has been severely beaten and says that he'd had a diamond, but it had been stolen from him last night. Marlowe goes to the American Hut and the King says that he will have to get the money that night. Marlowe asks again if the King can save his arm, and the King says he will take care of it. After Marlowe leaves a stranger comes to the window of the American Hut and shows the King the diamond. He says he wants \$10,000 for it and the King says it's a deal. After the man disappears Timsen arrives and the King says they should complete the deal. Timsen says the diamond has been hijacked but that he should have it back tomorrow. The King says he understands and then smiles, knowing he will get the diamond for half price from the other man. The King then tells Timsen that he wants to buy antitoxin and sulfa powder to cure gangrene. After some haggling Timsen says that he can have the drugs Marlowe needs there that night, along with a nurse to administer them and all the equipment they will need. Although the price Timsen quotes is very high, the King knows that it is well worth it.

Chapter 21

When Marlowe visits Dr. Kennedy again the doctor tells him that the arm should be amputated immediately or it might be too late. That evening, after waiting with the King until it is safe, Marlowe tries to get the money but is almost delirious with pain and passes out before he even reaches the wire. Tex and the King carry him back to the American Hut and lay him on the King's bed. Timsen arrives with the drugs and says he will administer the first dose himself. He gives Marlowe – who is barely conscious – a shot of morphine and removes the bandage. He cuts away the rotted flesh on Marlowe's arm, then cleans the wound and sprinkles sulfa powder on it. He re-bandages the arm and has the King watch as he gives Marlowe an intravenous injection of antitoxin. He tells the King that Marlowe will need an injection every six hours for the next two days. Timsen leaves and a few hours later Marlowe comes too. The King tells him about the treatments, and asks if there is anywhere Marlowe can get the rest of his injections without being noticed. Marlowe says they can use Larkin and Mac's bungalow. The stranger with the diamond comes back to the window, but the King tells him it will be two days before he will have the money, and the man angrily slinks off into the darkness.

Chapter 22

Two days later Steven gives Marlowe the last antitoxin injection at the bungalow. Although he is still weak, Marlowe's arm is almost completely healed. That evening, Marlowe goes to the American Hut where they have just butchered the first ten rats and



sees the hindquarters lined up on a tray. He wraps one in a banana leaf, takes it back to Hut 16, and puts it on his bunk. He then makes certain that Reverend Drinkwater, a man he hates with a passion, overhears him tell another prisoner that he has something special to eat. Marlowe leaves the hut and when he comes back a short time later the rat leg is gone and Drinkwater is licking his lips. Marlowe starts to laugh, then gets into his bunk and falls asleep.

Tex is waiting for him when he awakens; he says the King sent him and that Marlowe is overdue. Marlowe apologizes and quickly goes to the latrine area, waits until it is almost empty, then slips through the wire into the jungle. It takes Marlowe an hour to find the money, and it is another hour before it is safe for him to come back through the wire. As he heads towards the American Hut Timsen joins him, and Marlowe thanks him for the antitoxin. After the King gets the money from Marlowe, Timsen says he still hasn't caught the hijacker but should have him soon, and the King says it is fine. Shortly after Timsen leaves the man with the diamond arrives. The King pays him \$10,000, takes the diamond, then hurries back into the hut. The King is elated that he has ended up with the diamond and most of the money, but Max rushes into the hut and says "cops." The men quickly start a pretend poker game. A moment later Grey appears in the doorway of the hut; Captain Brough, Captain Yoshima, and Shagata are with him.

Chapter 23

Yoshima walks to where the men are playing cards and asks where all the money came from, and the King says it is gambling money. He then sees Marlowe and asks what he is doing there, and Marlowe weakly says he is just visiting. Yoshima tells the King to give him his water bottle. He examines it carefully, and then works his way around the hut examining the rest of the American water bottles. He then asks Marlowe where his water bottle is, but Marlowe is suddenly overwhelmed with nausea and unable to answer. The King quickly reaches under his bunk and produces a spare bottle, which he tells Yoshima belongs to Marlowe. After he inspects it, Yoshima demands to know where the radio is, and Brough tells him there is no radio. Realizing that his information is wrong, Yoshima tells Grey to collect all the water bottles in camp and bring them to the guardhouse, and then storms out of the hut. Captain Brough then orders the King to strip. Lt. Grey searches his clothes, his black box, and his bunk for the diamond, but finds nothing. Grey then searches Marlowe, finds nothing, and finally leaves.

All of the water bottles in camp are collected. Marlowe, Larkin, and Mac turn in duplicate bottles and hide the ones with the radio components in them in one of the boreholes. Later that night Timsen comes to the American Hut, and the King pays him what he owes him for the drugs. Timsen says that he sold the first shipment of rat meat, and then gives the King his share of the profits. The next afternoon guards search the bungalow three times, but do not find the radio. That night Mac retrieves the water bottles from the borehole and listens to the broadcast, but doesn't hide the bottles afterwards because he knows he is being watched.



Analysis

Despite the fact that Shagata is able to tell the King that Cheng San has been released by the police and that they are now safe, the deal for the diamond starts off badly and quickly goes downhill from there. Lt Grey – who is being fed information by the King's friend Dino – has several squads of MPs covering the camp and knows exactly when the deal is going to be made. There are also several gangs of hijackers – some of whom are working for Timsen who is handling the deal for the Australian Corporal Townsend, some who are working for Colonel Smedly-Taylor, and some who are working for other groups in the camp– who have learned exactly when the deal is happening and want to get the diamond and the money for themselves. While they are able to escape from Grey after Shagata turns over the money, there are simply too many groups of MPs and hijackers for the King and Marlowe to elude them all for long.

To further complicate the matter, Peter Marlowe's injured arm has developed gangrene and he is barely able to concentrate on what he is doing because of the pain, and the fact that the doctor has told him that the arm will have to come off. After they run out of places to hide, the King realizes that the only way he can keep the money is to have Marlowe go through the wire and bury it in the jungle while he keeps Grey and the others busy. When Marlowe refuses, out of desperation the King offers to save his arm if he goes through the wire and buries the money. Although Marlowe can't imagine how he would be able to do it, he believes that if the King tells him that he will do something he will somehow get it done, and trusts the American to keep his word. Using the last of his strength, Marlowe makes his way through the wire and buries the money in the jungle. While the King is relieved that the money is safe, at least for the time being, he also knows that he will have to keep his bargain with Peter Marlowe if he ever hopes to see the money again and that the only man in the camp who can get him what he needs is Timsen.

The next day the King makes a deal with Timsen, even though he knows that some of the hijackers who tried to rob him had been working for the Australian. For the King that is in the past – just one of the risks of doing business – and all that matters is what Timsen can do for him in the future. Timsen agrees to help, in part because he likes Marlowe and in part because Corporal Townsend hadn't been as lucky as the King and had been robbed, and Timsen needs time to find out who robbed him and get the diamond back. When the stranger comes to the window of the American Hut, shows the King that he has the diamond, and offers to sell it for \$10,000, the King realizes that not only does he have the chance to get the diamond and keep most of the money for himself but he can also cut Timsen completely out of the deal and pay him back for trying to rob him. Both the King and Timsen are always looking for ways to get the better of the other man, and both of them always expect that the other will try to cheat him any time he can. Although their relationship is very competitive and very complicated, the reader understands that the men have a grudging respect for one and other, and are very much alike in that they have both found a way to thrive in Changi.



The medicine that Timsen gets through his contacts – along with Steven’s nursing – cure Marlowe and he is able to go to the American Hut in time to take one of the first ten rat hindquarters and ensure that Reverend Drinkwater finds it and steals it from him. Drinkwater is one of the only men in camp that Marlowe truly hates because he knows that the Reverend browbeats the young men who are assigned to him as assistants into giving him a large part of their rations, and that several of those men have ended up in Ward Six – the part of the hospital where men who have gone blind due to the lack of nutrition are sent. Later that night Marlowe is also able to go through the wire and retrieve the money, but it takes all of his strength. When Lt. Grey, Captain Yoshima, and the guards burst into the American Hut and start searching the water bottles for radio parts, Marlowe is too weak to do anything but watch it happen. Although the King saves him by giving Yoshima his spare bottle, guards search Mac and Larkin’s bungalow three times just a couple of days later. The three men know that whoever is informing to the Japanese knows about their radio and that it is only a matter of time before they are caught.

Discussion Question 1

How does Lt. Grey know when the deal for the diamond is about to take place? How do you think Colonel Smedly-Taylor finds out about it? How does Timsen try to cheat the King during the deal, and why is he unsuccessful?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the King go to Timsen to get the drugs needed to save Marlowe’s arm even though just the day before Timsen had tried to cheat him? How does Timsen get the drugs? Do you think the King would have tried to save Marlowe’s arm if he didn’t need Peter to retrieve the money from the jungle?

Discussion Question 3

After Captain Yoshima orders all the water bottles in the camp confiscated, how does Mac manage to hide the three bottles containing the radio parts? Why, after the bungalow is searched, do Larkin, Mac, and Marlowe decide not to hide the bottles anymore?

Vocabulary

Gangrenous, solitaire, ointment, bushwhackers, limitations, infected, sterile, amputating, toxemia, diagnosis, beckoned, pursuit, interference, vegetation, chuckling, murdered, advertise, squirm, hijacker, exploded, agony, sterilized, putrid, crouching, hysterics, haunches, staggered, grudge.



Book Four: Chapters 24-26, Afterward

Summary

Book Four: Chapters 24-26, Afterward

Chapter 24

Two days later the King goes to the village alone. He delivers the diamond to Cheng San and receives the remainder of the money. When he returns to the American Hut, he finds that his black box is gone. After shouting at Max, who was supposed to be on guard, the King orders him to get Brant and Samson and tells them that there will be no more payoff money until the box is found. After the British officers leave Marlowe stops by and the King tries to give him his cut of the diamond profits, but Marlowe says he owes the King far more and doesn't take it. He then says that he won't be stopping around anymore because the Japanese are closing in on the radio and he doesn't want the King involved. The King tells Marlowe to dump the radio, but Marlowe says he can't. Timsen comes by later and says that he found the King's black box under his hut, empty. The King tells Timsen to spread the word that there is a \$1,000 reward for proof of who stole the box. Within the hour the word has spread through the entire camp.

Chapter 25

Captain Yoshima and a squad of guards come to the bungalow that night as Mac is listening to a news broadcast and place him, Larkin, and Marlowe under arrest. A guard comes up to Yoshima and whispers something in his ear and Yoshima storms out of the bungalow. Mac whispers that he heard on the news that the Americans dropped an atom bomb on Hiroshima. The men sit in silence through that night and the next morning. The next afternoon Lt. Grey brings the men food and as Marlowe distracts the guard, Mac whispers the news to Grey. When Grey leaves he tells the news to Colonel Smedly-Taylor and soon the entire camp knows. At sundown Shagata relieves the guard at the bungalow, and Mac asks if he can lie down in his bed. Shagata allows it and after he lies down Mac whispers to Larkin that the radio is still on and that he can hear it clearly. The King stops by the bungalow and tells Marlowe that if the Japanese start killing prisoners they should rush the guard and try to get through the wire near his hut. The King then goes back to the American Hut and tells the men there about the arrangements he made with the guerrillas, but doesn't mention that only ten of them can go. Later that night Mac hears that a second atom bomb has been dropped on Nagasaki and two days later, still under arrest in the bungalow, he hears that the Japanese have surrendered. Three days later, the British Camp Commandant and a Japanese soldier come for Marlowe, Larkin, and Mac.

Chapter 26



The Commandant takes the three men to his quarters where Smedly-Taylor, other senior officers, and Captain Brough are waiting. He tells the assembled men that he has spoken to the Japanese General in command of Changi and was informed that the war is over, rations would be doubled, and that the guards are now protecting the prisoners. Max is listening outside the Commandant's quarters and reports what he has heard to the American Hut. The King says he isn't convinced and tells Max to make some coffee, but Max picks up the saucepan used for boiling water and throws it through the window. The King then tells Tex to fix coffee, but he refuses. The King says that the others better hope that the war is over for real and leaves. Marlowe comes to the American Hut sometime later and after confirming what Max told them sees that the King is not there. When he asks where the King is Max starts to cackle and says he's dead. Tex says that the King is still alive but that as far as they are concerned he's dead. When Marlowe says that the King kept them all alive and they owe him something, Max starts screaming and attacks Marlowe with a knife. After the others restrain him Marlowe says that he's had a fit and needs a doctor, then leaves to look for the King. He finds him sitting alone and when the King asks what he wants Marlowe says that he is the King's friend and wants to help. The King says that he has no friends and tells Marlowe to get lost. Not certain what to do, Marlowe says he will see the King tomorrow and walks away.

The next morning a rumor spreads through camp that before dawn an airplane had flown over Changi and that a man had parachuted out of it. A short time later, Marlowe is walking by the main gate when a man wearing a strange green uniform and a beret walks out of the jungle and orders the guards at the gate to salute in English. He then walks up to Marlowe, who is standing there staring. He introduces himself as Captain Forsyth and asks Marlowe who is in charge, but Marlowe suddenly becomes frightened of the stranger and takes a step back. The Captain offers him a cigarette, but Marlowe is suddenly terrified and runs away.

Later that day the King finds Captain Forsyth standing alone near the British huts and watches as he walks towards a group of men only to have them move away quickly as soon as they see him. Earlier that day the King had found out that all the Japanese Dollars he'd made from the sale of the diamond are now worthless. Most of the men in the America Hut now completely ignore him, as do the British officers that had been on his payroll. The King walks up to Forsyth and offers the Captain a cigarette. Forsyth thanks the King, introduces himself, and says that he has been sent to look after the camp until the fleet arrives to take the POWs home. Forsyth asks who the men he sees going in and out of the huts are, and the King says that they are British and Australian officers. Forsyth is shocked that the officers are dressed in rags and then really looks at the King for the first time. He asks why the King is in a clean uniform and looks healthier than the others, and the King tells him that he looks after his clothes and tries to keep fit. Captain Forsyth becomes angry and dismisses the King, saying that he will make it his business to investigate him. As the King angrily walks away he runs into Marlowe and salutes him. Marlowe asks what's wrong and if he has done something to anger him, but the King says it has nothing to do with him and walks away, suddenly feeling lost, terrified, and completely alone.



Over the next few days more Allied officers, doctors, and supplies arrive at Changi. A group of American officers arrive and the American soldiers are brought the gate to board a truck which will take them to a plane bound for home. Marlowe has tried desperately to talk to the King for the last several days but each time he found him, the King had said “later” and walked away. Marlowe goes to the gate to watch the Americans leave hoping to say a final goodbye to the King and thank him for what he has done and watches as Tex, Brough, Dino, and Max – who is trussed up in a straight jacket – board the truck. The King is the last man on the ground, and doesn’t answer when his name is called. The Sergeant in charge has to shout at him to get his ass in the truck before he comes out of his trance and moves. Marlowe runs up to the truck as it pulls away and waves at the King, but the King never looks back. Marlowe runs into Grey and Grey says that it was good to see the King jump when the Sergeant yelled at him like the scum he was. Marlowe hits Grey and Grey fights back, and Captain Forsyth has to break them up.

More Allied soldiers and officers arrive, and the POWs feel like sideshow freaks as they see the newcomers stare at them and make comments behind their backs. Many of the men walk around like zombies, unaware of what is happening. Some men go swimming and one day Sean walks down to the shore with the other men, puts on his best sarong and fixes his make-up, walks into the sea, and drowns himself. Mac and Larkin leave a few days after the Americans – Larkin for Australia, and Mac to the city of Singapore to try to find his family. The next day Marlowe runs into Drinkwater and tells the reverend that the rabbit leg he stole from him had actually been rat meat. Marlowe then puts on the new uniform he’d been given and walks to the American Hut, where he finds the newly promoted Captain Grey. He tells Grey that he knows Dino had been his informant, and then says that Dino had acted on the King’s orders so that Grey would always be just too late to catch him. Grey says that the war ended just in time to save Marlowe from being completely corrupted by the King, but Marlowe says that the King was an honorable man in his own way and had merely adapted to circumstances. Grey tells Marlowe that his hatred of him and the King was what had kept him alive for the last few months, and then walks away. Marlowe stands in the doorway of the hut looking at the King’s bunk, then says “goodbye and thanks” softly. He walks to the line of trucks waiting by the main gate, and leaves Changi.

Afterward. By nightfall the camp is deserted, except for the rats underneath what was the American Hut. Adam manages to tear the wire of his cage apart and then starts on another cage, devouring the weaker rats held there when he breaks through. Eve joins him and they feed on the weaker rats together. Adam becomes king of the rats and rules until he is no longer the strongest. He then becomes food for the next king, and the cycle continues.

Analysis

As Marlowe, Mac, and Larkin expected, Captain Yoshima catches them with the radio as Mac is listening to a broadcast but rather than send them off to Utram Road Jail he places them under hut arrest after he is informed that the Americans have dropped an



atom bomb on Hiroshima. As the news of the bombing of Hiroshima is quickly followed by the news that a second bomb has been dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, an undertone of panic spreads through the prisoners in the camp as they brace themselves for the reprisals they are afraid will come. However, after a few more days Japan surrenders unconditionally, and the war is over.

For the King, the end of the war means the end of his empire, and the people that he has been closest to start to turn on him almost immediately. The other men in the American Hut refuse to do the chores and perform the services that the King has been paying them for, and tell him that he can take care of himself from now on. Although they were happy to think of him as their friend and do what he asked when he was the most important and powerful POW in camp, with the Japanese surrender and the knowledge that they will all be going home soon they no longer have any interest in the King. Most of them resent the way that the King has treated them – remembering only when he lost his temper and became angry, and forgetting about all the good things he had done for them – and now want nothing to do with him. This feeling is shared by the British officers who had been on the King's payroll, the guards he'd done business with, and Timsen and the other POWs he'd made money for – all of whom treat him as though he doesn't exist. Only Peter Marlowe still considers himself to be the King's friend and searches him out to try to help him. Marlowe understands that, alone among the men in Changi, the King is sorry that it is all over and that he will soon be going home. Marlowe tries to comfort him, but the King sends him away. The final blow comes when Captain Forsyth says that he intends to investigate him after he sees the King looking healthy and dressed in a clean uniform when all the men in the camp are dressed in rags and look like zombies. The King retreats deeper and deeper into his depression over the loss of his "kingdom" and although Marlowe tries to talk to him several times, the King always avoids him. When the King finally leaves the camp with the other Americans, he does not even look back to see Marlowe waving at him and the reader understands that he is truly a broken man.

The King is not the only one in Changi who is adversely affected by the Japanese surrender. Throughout the camp, prisoners walk around aimlessly, almost like zombies, and many of them – including Peter Marlowe – run in terror when Captain Forsyth first approaches them to introduce himself. Although these men did not thrive in Changi like the King did, many of them have been there for two or three years and the world outside the camp has ceased to exist for them. They have had no contact with the outside world and are terrified by what they may find out has happened to their loved ones and to their own ability to fit in outside the camp. Although in Peter Marlowe's case the terror is only a temporary thing when he first meets Captain Forsyth, for many of these men the prospect of going home and trying to exist outside of the camp is incredibly frightening. The reader understands that the physical scars the men have will heal much faster than the psychological scars that Changi has left. For some, like Max, the scars will probably never heal while others, like Sean, prefer to die rather than face the outside world.

For Peter Marlowe, knowing the King has left him with many questions about himself and the world that he realizes he might never find the answers to. Even though he is unable to understand why the King would not speak with him during their last few days



in camp and refused to even wave goodbye as he was leaving, his friendship with the King is something that he knows will influence the rest of his life. While he is saddened that he was unable to tell him how much he'd meant to him and how grateful he was to him, the King has changed who Marlowe is on a fundamental level and he knows that he will never forget him.

Discussion Question 1

When the news that the war is over comes, why do you think the men in the American Hut immediately turn on the King? Does the King deserve to be treated that way? Do you think there is anything the King could have done to avoid the other Americans' hatred?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the problems that many of the POWs have after the war ends. What are the prisoners afraid of? Why do they avoid Captain Forsyth when he first arrives in camp? Why do you think Peter Marlowe initially runs from Forsyth? How do the soldiers and doctors who come into Changi from the outside view the prisoners, and why?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the King avoids Peter Marlowe, even though Marlowe is desperate to remain his friend? How does Peter Marlowe deal with not being able to tell the King how grateful he is to him, or even say goodbye? How do you think his friendship with the King has changed Marlowe? Do you think the change is a positive one? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

Fawning, opposite, balance, wireless, vastness, stealthily, earphone, motioning, trigger, rations, indecision, nausea, saucerpan, masterpiece, gruffly, twitched, clincher, catcalls, obscene, pimp, reflex, stint, incredible, decal, impotence, parachute, revolver, croaked, resplendent, crucified.



Characters

The King (Corporal King)

The King is a 25-year-old American Corporal and one of two main characters in the novel. The King is one of only twenty-five American prisoners in the camp. He is the most successful black market “trader” and businessman in Changi. As a result, he has been able to thrive in the camp’s harsh environment. Unlike the other men imprisoned in Changi, the King possesses the ability to adapt to almost anything, an innate cunning that allows him to sense not only when there is a profit to be made but also the best way to handle a deal, and a natural magnetism which seems to draw people to him and make them trust him. While his friendship is sought after by most POWs and even guards because of his power and wealth, the King is envied and hated even by those closest to him. Although the King is pursued relentlessly by Changi’s Provost Marshal Lt. Grey, and most of the people he does business with try to cheat him whenever they can, the King is smarter and shrewder than his enemies and always manages to remain a step ahead of all of them.

After hearing him speaking Malay to a guard and realizing that he might be able to use him, the King forms a friendship with Peter Marlowe and slowly makes the reluctant British officer a part of his business. The King brings Marlowe with him “through the wire” to a native village to help him negotiate a deal for the sale of a diamond, and later arranges to get medicine through his contacts which saves Marlowe’s arm after a wound turns gangrenous. While the King seems to genuinely like and trust Marlowe throughout the novel, the reader is never certain whether the King really considers him a friend or whether Marlowe is just another useful “employee,” and at times the King is not sure himself. When the war ends and the Japanese Dollars that make up the majority of the King’s wealth become worthless the other men in the American Hut – all of whom had been on the King’s payroll – and the other prisoners and guards who had previously done business with him turn on the King and refuse to have anything to do with him. As the empire that he has built in Changi crumbles in a matter of just a few days only Peter Marlowe remains loyal to him, but the King does not want his friendship and withdraws further into himself. When the King leaves Changi with the rest of the Americans, he is a broken man.

Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe

Peter Marlowe is a 24-year-old British RAF officer and the other main characters in the novel. Based on the novel’s author James Clavell, Marlowe is from an upper class military family and has a highly developed sense of honor and duty. After his plane was shot down over Java in 1942, Marlowe lived in a native village for six months where he learned native customs as well as how to speak fluent Malay. After finally being captured Marlowe was moved from camp to camp, and it was during this time that he met and formed a close friendship with Larkin and Mac – a friendship that continues



after the three of them are transferred to Changi. Marlowe is a very loyal and trustworthy officer, and one of the few men in camp who is trusted with the location of Dave Daven's radio. After Daven is arrested and his radio confiscated, Marlowe – along with Larkin and Mac – operate their own radio, risking almost certain death to ensure news from the outside world gets to the POWs in Changi.

Marlowe comes to the attention of the King one day when the American Corporal overhears him speaking Malay to one of the guards. The two quickly become friends. Due to his strict upbringing the idea of “trading” and making a profit is completely foreign to Marlowe. He soon begins using his ability to speak Malay to translate for the King when he conducts business with the guards. After the King starts working on a deal to sell a 4-carat diamond, Marlowe goes “through the wire” with the King to a native village and is instrumental in helping the King make the best deal possible. After the war ends and almost everyone who knows the King turns on him, only Marlowe remains his friend and tries to help him, although the King will not talk to him and leaves the camp with the other Americans without even letting Marlowe say goodbye. At the end of the novel Marlowe is profoundly changed as a result of his friendship with the King, and finds that he must reexamine the values he was raised with in the light of what he has learned from his American friend.

Lieutenant Robin Grey

Lt. Grey is the Provost Marshal of Changi Prison. As the camp's main POW law enforcement officer, Grey is responsible for enforcing most of the rules and regulations imposed by the Japanese and maintaining camp discipline. Grey is a mean spirited man in his mid-twenties from a working class family who has had to earn every promotion and commendation he has ever received and who is jealous of the upper class officers who he believes have had everything handed to them all their lives, including Peter Marlowe. Grey has a particularly strong hatred for the King, and when Marlowe begins associating with the King he transfers this hatred to him as well. Although Grey knows the King is breaking camp rules by “trading” and has an informer who keeps him abreast of the King's movements, Grey is never able to catch him in the act. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Grey's informer was actually working for the King and fed Grey information that insured that he always arrived too late to make an arrest. Although he is portrayed as being a petty, not terribly intelligent young man Grey is nonetheless an honest cop who does his job to the best of his ability and refuses to take bribes from anyone, including the senior officers who he catches using false weights to steal camp rations. After the Japanese surrender Grey is promoted to Captain, and tells Peter Marlowe that his hatred of Marlowe and the King was what kept him alive during the last few months of the war.

Major McCoy (Mac)

Mac is a tough 53-year-old Scotsman who lives in one of the senior officers' bungalows with Colonel Larkin. Prior to the outbreak of the war, Mac had owned a rubber plantation



in Malaysia. When the Japanese invaded the area Mac had put his wife and infant son on a boat bound for one of the Allied-held islands in the Pacific, but was captured before he could find out if they made it to safety and is often tormented by his worry for his family. Along with Peter Marlowe and Colonel Larkin –both of whom Mac became friends with while the three of them were shuttled from camp to camp by the Japanese before finally landing in Changi – Mac operates an illegal radio which provides the camp with its only news from the outside world. After the war ends, Mac goes to the city of Singapore to search for his family. Throughout the novel Mac is portrayed as a brave, friendly man who for the most part manages to keep his sense of humor and is willing to risk his life to keep the illegal radio in operation.

Colonel Grant Larkin

Colonel Larkin is one of the ranking Australian officers in Changi and is in charge of a regiment of Australian prisoners. Before the war Larkin had been an accountant with an office in Sydney, and has a wife and several children there. Captured when the Japanese invaded Singapore, Larkin met and became friends with Mac and Peter Marlowe before the three of them were transferred to Changi, and shares one of the senior officers' bungalows with Mac. Larkin is a friendly, sensitive man who cares deeply about his men and who at one point is torn apart emotionally when he is forced to throw a soldier out of his regiment after the man is caught stealing food. Along with Mac and Peter Marlowe, Larkin operates an illegal wireless radio which is the only source of news the prisoners have, and reports the news they hear on it directly to Colonel Smedly-Taylor – a senior British officer. Larkin is an outgoing, friendly man who is quite popular with his men and with the other officers in camp.

“Tiny” Timsen

Timsen is an Australian POW and the King's major competition when it comes to “trading.” Timsen usually handles deals that are too small for the King to bother with, although he is involved in the deal for the diamond and the King also brings him in on the rat farm enterprise. Timsen tries to cheat the King during the diamond deal but fails, and later the King has Timsen use his contacts to get the medicines that save Marlowe's arm. Although they are in direct competition and both assume that the other will try to cheat him whenever he can, throughout most of the novel the King and Timsen admire and respect each other's abilities. When the King's empire crumbles at the end of the novel, Timsen completely turns his back on the King.

Max

Max is an American POW and one of the King's most trusted “employees,” even though he is not as smart or emotionally stable as some of the others in the American Hut. Max is usually given the job of guarding the King's possessions including the black box where he stores most of his wealth whenever he is out of the American Hut. Max serves



as the main lookout during most of the King's deals. When the war ends and his empire begins to fall apart, Max is one of the first people to turn his back on the King. Max's mind snaps, and he attacks Marlowe with a knife after Peter says that he should be grateful to the King for helping to keep him alive. When the Americans leave the camp, Max is in a straight jacket.

Dino

Dino is another of the King's most trusted American "employees." Dino usually delivers messages to people the King wants to see and handles delicate chores the King needs done. Dino is the "informer" who has been feeding Lt. Grey information about the King's movements by means of notes left in a predetermined spot, but at the end of the novel it is revealed that Dino had been acting on the King's direct orders to help ensure that Grey always arrived just a bit too late to catch the King. At the end of the novel Dino is willing to work for the King longer than the other men in the American Hut, but in the end turns his back on him like the rest.

Colonel Smedly-Taylor

Colonel Smedly-Taylor is a 54-year-old British career military officer. He is one of the senior officers at Changi, and reports directly to the British Camp Commandant. Although Smedly-Taylor appears to be a compassionate commanding officer who tries to do the best he can for the POWs, Lt. Grey discovers that he is actually in league with Colonel Jones – an officer who Grey discovers has been using incorrect weights to steal camp food. After making the fake weights disappear Smedly-Taylor orders Grey to forget the matter, and shortly before the war ends promotes Grey to Captain. Near the end of the novel Smedly-Taylor and a few other corrupt officers enjoy a huge dinner of what they think is roast rabbit, but which is in reality rat meat.

Captain Brough

Captain Brough is the senior American officer in command of the American Hut where the King lives. Before the war, Brough was a college student and intends to be a writer when he gets home. Although he is not strictly on the King's payroll Brough has good idea of what the King does and for the most part looks the other way, although he does take advantage of the extra rations and tobacco the King makes available. Brough becomes angry with the King after Colonel Yoshima and Lt. Grey search the American Hut – Yoshima looking for a radio and Grey looking for the diamond – and takes several thousand dollars from the King as a "contribution," which he then distributes among the other Americans in the hut.



Captain Yoshima

Captain Yoshima is the Japanese officer in charge of making sure that camp rules are enforced by the prisoners, as well as enforcing those rules that the prisoners cannot be trusted to enforce themselves, such as the rule against operating an illegal wireless radio. Yoshima has an unnamed informant who feeds him information and he is able to discover Dave Daven's radio and later the wireless being operated by Peter Marlowe, Larkin, and Mac. Yoshima is a professional soldier and lives by a very strict code of honor; he respects the men who keep their dignity and act as soldiers after they are caught while despising anyone who grovels and begs.

Sean

Sean is a British soldier who had been in Peter Marlowe's squadron before being captured. Sean is an actor who always has the female leads in the plays that are put on in the camp, and who dresses and lives as a woman even when not on stage. Although at one time Marlowe had been disgusted by Sean, he comes to realize that he has no right to judge how another man deals with the horrors of Changi and at a critical time gives Sean words of encouragement which allow him to go onstage and perform. After the Japanese surrender and the war ends, Sean kills himself by walking into the sea rather than face what he has become.

Captain Dave Daven

Dave Daven is a British officer who is in charge of operating an illegal radio in Hut 16. Before he was captured by the Japanese Daven lost a leg just above the knee, and walks with the aid of a wooden leg and crutches. Acting on information from his informant, Yoshima finds the radio and arrests Daven, respecting the fact that Daven never begs or shows fear, and he is sent to Utram Road Jail. When the Japanese surrender Daven is returned to Changi; he weighs 70 pounds and is in a coma, and dies in the camp hospital without regaining consciousness.

Sutra

Sutra is the headman of the village that Marlowe and the King visit when they go under the wire. Although he is not directly involved in the deal for the diamond, he is present during the negotiations and is very impressed with Peter Marlowe's knowledge of native customs and the Malay language. Sutra gives Marlowe a radio from which Peter is able to get the part needed to get the radio he, Mac, and Larkin have to work, in part because he respects Marlowe and in part because he wants the radio out of his village so the Japanese don't find it.



Lieutenant Colonel Jones

Lieutenant Colonel Jones is from an upper class British military family is the chief supply officer at Changi, responsible for weighing and distributing rations to the units in camp. During a routine inspection Lt. Grey finds that the weights Jones uses have been tampered with. Although Grey reports the crime to Colonel Smedly-Taylor and Jones is relieved of duty, no other action is taken; the false weights disappear and Grey is ordered to forget the matter. Lieutenant Colonel Jones is one of the officers who dine on rat meat with Smedly-Taylor at the end of the novel.

Cheng San

Cheng San is the Chinese trader that the King makes the deal for the diamond with when he and Marlowe visit the village. A few days after they make the deal Cheng San is arrested by the police and questioned about his black market activities, but is later released and able to complete the deal with the King.

Reverend Drinkwater

Reverend Drinkwater is a pious, unpleasant British Chaplin who browbeats the young men who are assigned to assist him into giving him part of their rations, and several of these men end up in Ward Six. Peter Marlowe despises Drinkwater and arranges for him to find one of the first hindquarters from the rat farm on his bunk, which Drinkwater promptly steals and eats.

Dr. Kennedy

Dr. Kennedy is the head of the prison hospital at Changi. Although a talented physician in civilian life, Kennedy is given almost no drugs or supplies to work with by the Japanese and watches helplessly as men die every day from minor illnesses. It is Kennedy who tells Marlowe that his arm will have to be amputated, although the King is later able to save the arm.

Steven

Steven is a nurse at the camp hospital who is instrumental in helping save Marlowe's arm. Steven is a caring and compassionate young man who cares deeply about all the men who are brought to the hospital. Steven is openly homosexual, but deals with who and what he is better than Sean, and is accepted by most who know him because of his generosity and kindness.



Captain Forsyth

Captain Forsyth is a British officer who parachutes into Changi after the Japanese surrender to coordinate the release of the prisoners. Forsyth is amazed by the zombie-like behavior of most of the men he sees, and confused by the fact that they all seem to fear him. After seeing him dressed in a clean uniform and looking healthy, he promises to investigate the King.

Tex/Kurt/Byron Jones III/Miller

These are American soldiers who are on the King's payroll and who perform various services for him including delivering messages, cleaning his clothes, making coffee, and acting as lookouts. Tex also helps the King with the "fry-up" he has in the prison. All of them are "partners" in the rat farm, with Kurt taking care of the breeding schedule and Miller serving as butcher.

Shagata/Torusumi/Turasan

Shagata, Torusumi, and Turasan are Korean guards who all do business with the King. Turasan buys a pen from the King, while Torusumi buys a watch and later arranges for Marlowe's work detail to get the prized job chopping down coconut trees. Shagata is the go-between in the diamond deal. Later, he allows the King to talk with Marlowe after Peter is arrested for having a radio.

Colonel Brandt/Colonel Samson

Brandt and Samson are British officers whom the King keeps on his payroll to distract Lt. Grey and keep the Provost Marshal out of his way. Brandt dismisses the King early in the novel after Grey brings him to the MP Hut for questioning, while Samson holds Grey up as he is hurrying to the American Hut to catch the King selling a watch to a guard.



Symbols and Symbolism

Japanese Dollars

The Japanese Dollar – sometimes referred to as “counterfeit dollars” – is the currency used on the islands the Japanese invade in WWII, including Singapore Island, and is used in Changi Prison by the prisoners and Korean guards alike. It is also the currency used in the village where the King goes to make the deal for the diamond. After the King completes that deal he has thousands of Japanese Dollars and believes that he is set for months. A few days later, however, the war ends when Japan surrenders. The currency becomes worthless, which ruins the King.

Tobacco/Kooa Cigarettes

Tobacco – and particularly factory made Kooa cigarettes – is another form of currency used in Changi Prison and is almost as valuable in the camp as Japanese Dollars. Tobacco is scarce in the prison and very expensive. It is highly sought after by the prisoners. Smoking is one of the very few luxuries they are allowed. It reminds them of what life was like when they were free men. His seemingly inexhaustible supply of Kooas is one of the most visible symbols of the King’s enormous wealth in the eyes of the other prisoners.

Lighters/Watches/Pens

Lighters, watches, pens, and other small personal items are brought into Changi by the prisoners and are highly prized by the Chinese and Korean guards. A large part of the King’s “business” is selling these items for the prisoners to the guards for a 10% commission (although he often comes away with a far larger profit). In most cases these items represent the last things of value that the POW possesses – as well as the last link to their former life – and are only sold when there is no other way to keep themselves or their unit alive. For the most part, the King only deals in the most valuable of these items, leaving the lower value merchandise to others.

Borehole Duty/Borehole Party

Boreholes are the holes under the latrines that the POWs use to relieve themselves. Borehole Duty is one of the most unpleasant duties a prisoner can have and involves scraping cockroaches off the sides of the boreholes into five gallon cans and delivering them to the hospital, where they are cooked and fed to the blind men in Ward Six as an extra source of protein. A Borehole Party refers to a form of camp vigilante justice in which a man accused of stealing food is shoved head first into a latrine borehole and allowed to suffocate in the stench. The horrible nature of this form of execution symbolizes how hated a man who steals food from his mates is in Changi.



Coconuts/Millionaire's Cabbage

The most sought after work detail job at Changi is cutting down the coconut trees at the west end of the airfield. Not only do the prisoners in a detail which is assigned this duty get to gather coconuts and bring them back to camp, but they also get the makings for "millionaire's cabbage," a delicious local dish made from the insides of a coconut tree. Peter Marlowe's work detail is assigned to cut down coconut trees after the Japanese guard in charge is told that Marlowe is the King's interpreter. This shows the high esteem the King is held in even by some of the Japanese.

The Diamond

For several months prior to the start of the novel, the rumor that one of the prisoners has a 4-carat diamond has circulated through Changi. The King manages to find out who has the diamond. With the help of Peter Marlowe, who acts as his interpreter, the King goes to a great deal of trouble to put together a complicated and dangerous deal to sell the stone to a Chinese trader. The deal for the diamond is the largest that the King has ever attempted. When it is over, he believes that the massive amount of money he receives has made him invincible. A few days later, however, the war ends and the money becomes worthless, leaving the King with nothing.

Weights

Since food is so scarce at Changi every morsel is carefully weighed and accounted for before it is distributed to the unit cookhouses. When Lieutenant Grey discovers that the weights at the Supply Hut have been tampered with he assumes that it is simply case of a dishonest officer stealing food, but it soon becomes clear that there is a major conspiracy at work that involves many of the camps most senior and trusted officers. The incident with the "fixed" weights, and the resulting cover-up, serve to show that there is corruption even in the "honorable" upper classes of the British military hierarchy, and reinforces one of the novel's central themes that men are all basically the same regardless of their class distinction.

Radios

The radio that Marlowe, Mac, and Larkin operate – like the radio Dave Daven operated before he was caught – is the only source of news the POWs at Changi have. Although they know that it will mean being sent to Utram Road Jail and almost certain death if they are caught, Marlowe and his friends believe that it is their duty to ensure that information continues to flow to the men in the camp. The radio represents the prisoners' only connection to the outside world, and the news that comes over it helps the POWs remember that there is a world outside of Changi.



Rats/Rat Farm

The rat farm that the King and his men build under the American Hut makes everyone involved squeamish at the start, but it grows into a project everyone gets behind after the King decides that they will only sell the rat meat to senior officers. Although the war ends just after the first few hindquarters are butchered, the author only shows the rat meat being consumed by individuals who deserve to eat something that disgusting, including Reverend Drinkwater and the senior officers who had been stealing food from the rest of the camp. At the very end of the novel, the rats are left to fend for themselves, and the strongest rats feed on the weaker ones, symbolizing the way that the strongest prisoners at Changi had fed on the weakest.

Ward Six

Ward Six is the hospital ward where prisoners who have gone blind due to a lack of vitamins are sent. Even though the rations that the Japanese provide the POWs with are barely enough to keep them alive, some prisoners trade part of their rations for tobacco and other luxuries or are browbeaten into giving rations away as is the case with the men chosen to be Reverend Drinkwater's assistants, and go blind as a result. The cockroaches collected from the boreholes are cooked and fed to the men in Ward Six as an extra source of protein, but it does not appear any of the men ever regain their sight.

Utram Road Jail

Utram Road Jail is where prisoners who are caught with radios – or breaking other major camp rules – are sent by the Japanese. Although never shown in the novel, Utram Road Jail is rumored to be many times worse than Changi, and means almost certain death for any man sent there. When Dave Daven comes back to Changi Prison from Utram Road Jail after the war ends he is in a coma, weighs just 70 pounds, and dies within a few hours. Lt. Grey wants to catch the King and Marlowe trading so that he can send them both to Utram Road Jail, which illustrates the depth of the hatred that he has for the two men. Throughout the novel, Utram Road Jail symbolizes something worse to men who already think that they are living in hell.



Settings

Changi Prison

The vast majority of the novel is set inside Changi, a large Japanese-run POW camp complex located deep in the jungle on the eastern tip of Singapore Island. Built before the start of the Second World War as a prison, Changi was originally designed to hold up to 2,000 criminals when it was full. At the time the novel takes place – in 1945 near the end of the war – 8,000 POWs have been crowded into Changi. Most of the prisoners are British or Australian, although a small number of men of other nationalities are held in the camp, including twenty-five American soldiers. Since the prison camp is so overcrowded, sanitary conditions are terrible. Due to the lack of adequate drugs and medical supplies, men die every day of common illnesses and minor infections that could be easily cured in the outside world. The Japanese provide just enough in the way of food to keep the men alive, and hunger is a constant companion to almost every POW. The day to day running of the camp is left mostly to the prisoners – the Japanese issue orders to the POW officers, and they are responsible for ensuring that the orders are carried out.

A huge multi-story stone prison with hundreds of cells in neatly designed cellblocks stands in the center of the Changi complex, and the enlisted men are housed inside its walls. A large number of huts and sheds surround the prison; these have been converted into dormitories and house the junior officers (lieutenants and captains). One of the smaller huts houses the 25 American prisoners. Behind these huts there are number of small “bungalows” which house the senior officers (majors and colonels). All of the POWs are allowed to move around the camp freely and the barbed wire fence that surrounds the camp is only guarded by a small contingent of Japanese and Korean guards. Because of its remote location in a jungle on a Japanese-held island, even if a man were to escape there is no way for him to get home, and he would not survive in the jungle for long.

The Village

When Marlowe and the King go “through the wire” and leave Changi they go to a small native village on the coast that the King had found sometime before. While in the village, the King negotiates the deal for the diamond with the Chinese black market trader Cheng San and makes arrangements with a guerrilla fighter to get some of the Americans held at the camp out if the Japanese start slaughtering prisoners. Marlowe is given a working radio by Sutra, the village headman. Later, he watches Sutra’s beautiful daughter Sulina as she stands in the window of her room while he swims in the ocean. The village is a primitive, peaceful place. It reminds Marlowe very much of the village he’d hidden in for six months after his plane was shot down over Java. For the rest of the novel Marlowe dreams of the village and of Sulina, but he never returns there.



Themes and Motifs

Friendship

While a number of unique and often quite complex relationships are explored throughout the course of the story, actual friendships are quite rare in this novel. This is due in large part to the “every man for himself” attitude that most of the prisoners in Changi have been forced to adopt to survive as well as the emotional and psychological toll that the camp has taken on the men being held there. Even the close friendship that exists between Peter Marlowe, Mac, and Colonel Larkin was forged long before they were sent to Changi, although this friendship remains one of the most important things in Marlowe’s life. Both Mac and Larkin are much older than Marlowe and because they have experienced more than he has during the course of their lives they are father figures to him. He seeks their advice about things that he has difficulty understanding, and this is particularly true when it comes to his relationship with the King. The King is someone who is completely different from anyone he has ever known, and Larkin and Mac help Marlowe try to work out how he really feels about him.

Peter Marlowe is the closest thing to a friend that the King has, although it is unclear at the end of the novel whether or not their “friendship” ever actually meant anything to him. For the King people are customers, or employees, or business partners to be used, paid for their services, and forgotten about until the next time they are needed. Although he is one of the most sought after and popular men in Changi and virtually everyone wants to know him, the King is envied and hated by almost everyone including those people who are closest to him and before he meets Peter Marlowe he has no real friends in the camp. Even with Marlowe, who during the course of the novel becomes closer to him than anyone else, the King remains guarded and never lets the young Englishman know even half of what is thinking and planning. After everyone else has turned their back on the King, Marlowe tells him that he is his friend and wants to help him, but the King says that he has no friends and refuses to even talk with Marlowe. At the end of the novel Marlowe is left with many questions including whether the King had ever truly thought of him as a friend or whether he’d simply used him as he had everyone else.

Class Differences/Distinctions

The vast majority of POWs in Changi are British and, particularly for the officers, class differences and distinctions play a major role in how individuals view and treat one another. This is most clearly illustrated by the hatred that grows between Peter Marlowe and Lieutenant Grey. Although both men are equal in rank, Marlowe is from an old, well established upper class military family while Grey comes from the “lower classes,” and because of this Marlowe looks down on Grey throughout the novel. Because of his family, Marlowe has received an excellent education and joined the RAF as a Flight Lieutenant right out of school while Grey began his military career at the bottom and has



had to work hard for every commendation and promotion he has ever received. Grey's hatred of Marlowe is due in part to his hatred of Marlowe's class – and the fact that in Grey's opinion Marlowe has had everything given to him all his life and has never had to earn anything for himself. Throughout the novel, Marlowe insults Grey by saying that his terrible manners and lack of intelligence are due to his lower class beginnings, which only serves to intensify Grey's hatred of him. Over time, however, Marlowe's relationship with the King – for whom class differences mean nothing and who believes that everyone is the same as everyone else – helps to change his feelings about the importance of which class one is born into. At the end of the novel Marlowe apologizes to Grey for having looked down on him because of where he'd come from, but not for despising him for the man he'd become.

Interestingly, even though most of the senior British officers in Changi are from the same sort of upper class British military family as Peter Marlowe, it is some of these well-bred, highly respected and trusted officers who end up being the most corrupt men in the camp. Lieutenant Colonel Jones – who Grey catches using “fixed” weights to steal rations from the rest of the camp – is from this upper class background, as is Colonel Smedly-Taylor who is part of the conspiracy and covers the crime up, as is Colonel Samson who takes over from Jones and is also in on the conspiracy. Although class distinctions play an important part in the command structure in Changi, the reader understands – as does Peter Marlowe at the end of the book – that a man should not be judged by the class he is born into, but rather by what kind of man he becomes.

Honor/Duty

Although he is a relatively young man Peter Marlowe possesses a well defined sense of honor and a firm commitment to what he sees as his duty, and these two qualities go a long way towards defining who he is as a man. When he first meets the King, Marlowe refuses to take any money for the favors he does for him or even accept a percentage of the profits from deals he is involved in because his sense of honor forbids it. In Marlowe's mind the King is his friend and one does not accept payment for helping a friend. Later, even though Marlowe begins accepting a “commission” for helping the King transact business by translating for him, he still feels uncomfortable about it and is only able to justify taking the money by telling himself that he will use it to help his unit. As for the King, while he is always on the lookout for ways to turn a profit and isn't above keeping any overages that come his way, for the most part he conducts his business in an honorable fashion even though virtually everyone he does business with tries to cheat him. Although his code of honor is based mostly on his instinct for survival, the author makes it clear that the King is an honorable man in his own way, and never cheats anyone.

Though he knows that it will mean being sent to Utram Road Jail and almost certain death if he is caught Peter Marlowe – along with Mac and Larkin – operates the illegal wireless radio because he believes that it is his duty to do so. Like Dave Daven before him, Marlowe, Mac, and Larkin understand that the radio is a life-line connecting each and every one of the 8,000 prisoners in Changi to the outside world, and that the news



that comes from the radio is all that they have to hold on to. Even when he knows that it is only a matter of time before he is caught, the idea of not doing his duty and saving himself never crosses Marlowe's mind. This dedication to duty and the selfless bravery Marlowe shows is one of the key differences between him and the King, and indeed between Marlowe and most of the other men in Changi. While part of this sense of duty is due to Marlowe's upbringing the reader understands that it is mostly due to the man himself, and this makes him a heroic figure.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person. While the point of view is omniscient for much of the novel, the author often presents particularly significant events from the point view of whichever character is central to the scene. Much of the action is presented as it is seen and experienced by the novel's two main characters – Peter Marlowe and the King – although some scenes are presented as they are experienced by a large number of other major and minor characters, again depending on which character is central to that specific scene. The thoughts and feelings of all of the major as well as a large number of the minor characters are presented at various points in the narrative. This technique not only helps present the action in a personal and understandable way, but also helps the reader to experience the horrors of Changi from multiple perspectives.

The novel is written using a combination of dialogue and descriptive prose which not only presents a large amount of information in an entertaining and engaging way, but also helps the reader to connect with a large number of characters in the novel's huge cast and come to care about what happens to them. For the most part the narration is reliable in that it accurately presents information as the characters involved in the scene understand it, although particularly when it comes to scenes involving the King the reader is never 100% certain what is true and what is not. There are a considerable number of flashback scenes used in the course of the narrative which help to better define certain characters and their motivations, as well as highlight how their time in Changi has changed them. For the most part, these flashback scenes are short and do not interrupt the flow of the narrative or seem at all intrusive.

Language and Meaning

The novel is intended for adults, and the language used assumes a high school – or higher – education level. That having been said, for the most part the descriptive passages are written in an easy to understand, entertaining manner while the dialogue is fast paced and usually quite tight. There are very few long “speeches” in the novel, and each of the major (as well as several of the minor) characters have distinctive “voices” which become easily recognizable as the novel progresses. Although there is very little profanity used in the course of the narrative and there are no explicit sexual scenes in the novel, there are a number of scenes in which extreme violence and some of the other horrors that are a part of life in Changi are graphically presented, and these scenes will be disturbing to more sensitive readers.

The novel was written over fifty years ago in 1962, but because it is set in 1945 during the Second World War the overall story remains as relevant today as it was the day the novel was first published, although today's readers might find the writing style to be slightly more formal than what they are used to. There are also a number of slang terms



used by the characters which will in all likelihood be unfamiliar to American readers (“pommy” meaning British, “cobber” meaning friend, etc.) although most readers will quickly come to recognize these terms. One of the more unique uses of language in the novel is when the author translates the conversations that Peter Marlowe has with various other characters in Malay. Malay is a very formal language in which the speaker is often self-deprecating while at the same time flattering the person being spoken to. It is also a language in which it is considered impolite to ever say anything directly; rather, people are expected to talk “around” a subject. These conversations in Malay tend to be quite entertaining, while at the same time highlighting the difference between the Eastern and Western ways of communicating.

Structure

The novel is divided into four untitled books, each of which is about 100 pages in length and contains multiple numbered chapters. In all there are 26 chapters in the novel, as well as a short untitled Preface and Afterward – both of which are presented in italics. The longest chapter is 35 pages long while the shortest is just two pages in length. Most of the chapters are divided into untitled, unnumbered sub-chapters, and most sub-chapters contain a combination of dialogue and narrative prose. Some of the sub-chapters contain a single scene which takes place in just a few minutes, while others cover incidents that occur over the course of several weeks. The novel takes place during last few months of World War Two and ends shortly after the Japanese surrender following the Allied bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The reader is kept aware of the passage of time throughout the novel in a number of ways, including information the prisoners obtain from radio broadcasts of the day’s news. While a rudimentary knowledge of World War Two history would be helpful when it comes to following the passage of time, it is not necessary to the reader’s overall enjoyment of the story.

The novel contains several major plot lines, and a large number of minor subplots. One of the major plot lines follows the relationship that grows between RAF Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe and an American corporal called the King. Another major plot line revolves around the complicated and dangerous deal that the King puts together to sell a 4-carat diamond to a Chinese black market smuggler. Another plot line follows the camp Provost Marshal Lt. Grey and his consistently unsuccessful attempts to catch the King “trading,” while yet another follows Peter Marlowe and his friends Larkin and Mac as they operate an illegal radio. The many horrors of Changi, and the terrible toll they take on the men imprisoned there, influences the actions of all of the novel’s characters and is a factor in all of the novel’s plots and subplots.



Quotes

By now, 1945, the Japanese had learned to leave control of the camp to the prisoners. The Japanese gave orders and the officers were responsible for enforcing them. If the camp gave no trouble, it got none. To ask for food was trouble... To ask for anything was trouble.

-- Narrator (Preface paragraph Page 12, paragraph 4)

Importance: In a short untitled preface, the narrator describes how things work in the Japanese run POW camp at Changi Prison, which is located in the dense jungle on the eastern tip of Singapore Island. Built before the start of World War Two to hold 2,000 prisoners, by 1945 the Japanese have crowded over 8,000 POWs into the camp. There is only a small contingent of Japanese and Korean guards at the camp since the remote location means that a man would have nowhere to go were he to escape, and the Japanese leave the enforcement of camp rules to the prisoners themselves.

That's where he belongs. And that's where I'm going to put him. Because he's a thief, a liar, a cheat, and a bloodsucker. A bloody vampire who feeds on the rest of us.

-- Lieutenant Grey (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 14, paragraph 7)

Importance: Lieutenant Grey – Provost Marshal of Changi Prison – stares out of the MP Hut at an American Corporal everyone calls the King and explains to his assistant why he wants to arrest the man and send him Utram Road Jail, a place rumored to be far worse than Changi. Grey hates the Corporal because knows that he engages in “trading” and other black market activities, but the King has always been too clever for Grey to catch.

Thus it was that to touch a chicken belonging to the camp, or to another, was a vast crime. Once a man had been caught with a strangled hen and had been beaten to death by his captors. It had been ruled justifiable homicide.

-- Narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 65, paragraph 8)

Importance: The Japanese provide the prisoners in Changi with barely enough food to survive, and the prisoners augment these meager rations with fruits and vegetables they find or grow themselves, and with the eggs from chickens that are kept in a closely guarded chicken coop. Stealing food, even in small quantities, is the most serious crime a prisoner can commit (at least in the eyes of the other prisoners) and usually results in the offender being killed by his fellow prisoners.

Once you know a man, the King told himself contentedly, know his Achilles heel, you know how to play him, how to work him into your plan. Yep, his hunch had paid off when he had first seen Peter Marlowe ...

-- The King (thinking) (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 82, paragraph 10)

Importance: The King is thinking about a conversation he'd had with Peter Marlowe a few minutes before in which he'd told him that he occasionally went 'through the wire'



and visited a native village, then asked Marlowe if he wanted to go with him the next time he went. Although the King took a huge risk Marlowe had said yes, which told the King a lot about the young British officer and confirmed his hunch that Marlowe could become an important part of his business.

Peter Marlowe knew, too, that though all three of them welcomed the King's wealth and help, their liking for the man was due mainly to the man himself. When you were with him, he poured out strength and confidence. You felt better and stronger yourself – for you seemed to be able to feed on the magic that surrounded him.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph Page 97, paragraph 1)

Importance: As the friendship between them grows the King gives Marlowe – and his friends Larkin and Mac – a number of gifts. While this would be enough to buy anyone's friendship in Changi, Marlowe has come to realize that the extra food and cigarettes are not as important to him as the strength he seems to draw from being around the King. The man is unlike anyone Marlowe has ever met, and he understands that there is something very special about him.

A sales pitch is a gimmick. A way of making people believe something. People always want something for nothing. So you have to make 'em believe they're stealing from you, that you're the sucker, that they – the buyers – are a helluva lot smarter than you.

-- The King (Chapter 11 paragraph Page 125, paragraph 3)

Importance: The King is explaining one of his philosophies of doing business to Peter Marlowe who, because of his upbringing, knows nothing about selling or making a profit. In the King's opinion, the way to ensure a successful deal is to make certain that everyone else involved believes that they have gotten the better of you – something that he does several times during the course of the novel while always managing to come out on top.

The King thought for a moment. Well, he told himself, if you buy brains, it's bad business not to use them – unless you've got a hunch. That's where the smart businessman makes or breaks – when he plays a hunch over the so-called brains. But in this case he didn't have a hunch, so he just nodded.

-- Narrator/The King (thinking) (Chapter 14 paragraph Page 173, paragraph 2)

Importance: After they arrive in the native village and meet Sutra and Cheng San, the King wants to start doing business immediately but Marlowe tells him that they need to eat first or their hosts will be very offended. Although the King wants to get started, he knows that Marlowe understands more about native customs than he does, and decides to follow his lead and do as he says.

V-E Day came and the men of Changi were elated. But it was just another today and did not actually touch them. The food was the same, the sky was the same, the heat the same, the sickness the same, the flies the same, the wasting away the same.

-- Narrator (Chapter 16 paragraph Page 231, paragraph 1)



Importance: Even though Marlowe, Larkin, and Mac have gotten their radio working and the news of the war is consistently good, many of the POWs have been in the camp for so long that the outside world no longer seems real to them. For others, even though the news of Allied victories makes them happy, their joy is mixed with the fear that the Japanese will kill all the prisoners in Changi if Japan loses the war. For almost all of the POWs, one day is the same as the next with nothing to ease the monotony.

All the way back to the airfield Peter Marlowe was silent. He felt unclean with the monstrous bundle of notes in his pocket, but at the same time he knew that he owed the money to the King and was pleased to have it, for it would buy extras for the unit.

-- Narrator (Chapter 17 paragraph Page 261, paragraph 8)

Importance: Because of his friendship with the King, one of the men in Marlowe's work party asks him to sell a pen to a Korean guard for him, and Marlowe reluctantly agrees. When he is able to get considerably more for the pen from the guard than the man had asked for, Marlowe keeps the difference for himself. Even though he feels guilty about keeping the money, his friendship with the King has started to change him and he also feels happy.

The curtain began to rise, and when it was completely up the awful silence shattered and there were cheers and ten curtain calls and more cheers and then Sean stood alone drinking the life-giving applause.

-- Narrator (Chapter 18 paragraph Page 279, paragraph 10)

Importance: When Sean throws a tantrum and refuses to go on as the female lead after the play starts, Peter Marlowe tells him that he is the most important person in the camp at that moment and that he IS a woman. The words are exactly what Sean needs to hear; he gives a brilliant performance and is rewarded by waves applause, which is the only thing that seems to have any meaning to him anymore.

That night the King was worrying about a new problem. How in the hell could he do what he had said he would do?

-- Narrator (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 297, paragraph 18)

Importance: When the King and Peter Marlowe run out of places to hide after getting the money for the diamond from Shagata, the King tells Marlowe to take the money through the wire and bury it in the jungle. After the King promises that he will save Marlowe's arm (which the doctor has said is gangrenous and must be amputated) if he saves the money, Marlowe does what the King asks. That night, however, the King realizes that he has no idea how he will keep his promise to Marlowe.

For two days Peter Marlowe battled with death. But he had the will to live. And he lived.

-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph Page 318, paragraph 1)

Importance: The King manages to arrange for Marlowe to get an injection of antitoxin every six hours for two days, but the medicine takes a toll on him and he very nearly



dies. However, due to his will to live Marlowe recovers and the injections – and the nursing that he receives from Steven – get rid of the gangrene and save his arm.

The three of them decided not to hide the bottles anymore. They knew, without despair, that very soon they would be caught.

-- Narrator (Chapter 23 paragraph Page 336, paragraph 6)

Importance: After Captain Yoshima orders all water bottles in camp inspected and the bungalow is searched Marlowe, Larkin, and Mac know that it is only a matter of time before their radio is discovered. Although they have been able to keep the components hidden, they know that the camp informer is on to them and that the Japanese will arrest them soon and send them to Utram Road Jail.

Listen.” He dropped his voice and told them about the plan. “When the killing starts, rush the guard and break out near our hut. I’ll try and cover for the three of you, but don’t hope for much.

-- The King (Chapter 25 paragraph Page 344, paragraph 13)

Importance: After the news that an atomic bomb has been dropped on Hiroshima spreads through the camp the King visits Marlowe who, along with Mac and Larkin, is under hut arrest after they are caught with the radio. The King is convinced that it is only a matter of time before the Japanese start slaughtering the prisoners in retaliation. Although he wants to help Marlowe and the others and will do what he can for them, at this point he isn’t even certain that he will be able to help himself.

When you think about it, the King’s sense of honor was pretty high. But you’re right in one thing. He did change me. He showed me that a man’s a man, irrespective of background.

-- Peter Marlowe (Chapter 26 paragraph Page 378, paragraph 12)

Importance: Marlowe is talking to Grey just before he leaves Changi. Although his friendship with the King has left him with many questions about himself and about life, Marlowe believes that the King has changed him in a fundamental way for the better. Although he knows that Grey will never understand, in this passage Marlowe is explaining how he feels as much to himself as he is to the other man.