

# **The Killing Film Summary**

## **The Killing by Stanley Kubrick**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Killing Film Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Context.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Summary and Analysis.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Style and Cinematography.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Symbols.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Essay Questions.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>

## Context

*The Killing* is a story of criminals and their efforts to make a killing by pulling off the perfect crime. Viewers are asked to explore the lines between good and bad and the difficulty in choosing who to befriend and who to trust.

Johnny has just gotten out of prison, and he has already made his plans for pulling the perfect job. He gets all his friends involved, and they prepare to retire rich men. They don't realize that one man, George, will betray their confidence to his controlling and hateful wife. Sherry then tells her boyfriend, Val, who plans to steal from the thieves. The plan goes off without a hitch. When Johnny leaves, though, he ends up getting stuck in traffic and runs late. Val shows up before Johnny arrives, kills the group and is killed himself. In the end, almost everyone dies, and Johnny is caught.

Stanley Kubrick is best known for exploring the dark side of human nature in his films, focusing on war, crime and betrayal. Although *Killer's Kiss* (1955) and *The Killing* (1956) made Hollywood take note of Kubrick, *Paths of Glory* (1957) guaranteed him success. Later famous works included *Spartacus* (1960), *Lolita* (1962), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Shining* (1980), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Every film Kubrick has worked on has become an immediate success.

Sterling Hayden plays the role of Johnny Clay. Although Hayden claimed to hate acting, he did bring several incredible characters to life. In 1950, he gave his greatest performance in *The Asphalt Jungle*. He went on to star in *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *The Last Command* (1955), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *The Long Goodbye* (1973).

With appearances in over 120 films, Elisha Cook, Jr., who plays George Peatty, is one of the most popular character actors of all time. He had impressive roles in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Shane* (1953), *The Big Sleep* (1946), *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1970).

The rest of the cast members of *The Killing* are not as well known, but Marie Windsor, Ted de Corsia, Coleen Gray, Jay C. Flippen, Joe Sawyer and Vince Edwards were all players in noir films. Although their performances are exceptional, most did not go on to make big names for themselves during their careers. They provide a great backdrop for Sterling Hayden and Elisha Cook, Jr.'s brilliance and show their talent through their performances in this film. Although popular, *The Killing* was not a critics' pick and won no awards.



## Summary and Analysis

*The Killing* begins at the horse races, where the audience sees the jockeys and their horses entering. The race begins, and a gentleman enters. The narrator then tells us that the man, Marvin Unger, is the only person there who isn't excited about this fifth race, because he doesn't like racing or betting. As a bookie, though, he put \$5 on each horse.

Unger goes to the bar and places a paper in front of the bartender. The bartender then tells him a certain phrase, and Unger lets him take the paper and walks away from the bar. After the race, Unger makes a bet on a new horse. He feels that he doesn't really have a lot of control over the outcome, but he can't be sure until he sees what happens.

The narrator says that an hour earlier in the city, Randy Kennan, a police officer, had to deal with some personal business in a restaurant. In a flashback, Randy meets with a man named Leo who reminds him of his powerless position. Randy tells him that he simply doesn't have the money, so Leo offers to rewrite the balance. Randy tells him that he can't pay for a couple of weeks.

On the same day, Johnny Clay furthers his plan. As he walks toward a woman, his girlfriend Fay, he tells her that everyone has decent lives, but they do undercover jobs. For instance, Unger, the guy who owns the apartment, is a bookkeeper and will be putting up the money for the job. Johnny tells Fay that after five years in Alcatraz, he has learned that the sacrifice should be worth the pay. She tells him that he doesn't have to tell her and that she'll always believe in him. She thinks the years being locked up must have been terrible on him, and she felt locked out from him. She begs him not to leave her alone again, and he tells her he'll see her Saturday night on the plane. Unger walks in, and Fay leaves. Half an hour earlier, Mike O'Reilly, the track bartender, comes home to find that his wife, Ruthie is lying still in bed; she is very sick and may die. He looks at a plant and then at a piece of paper, which tells him to arrive at an apartment around 8:00.

George Peatty, the track cashier, arrives at his apartment around 7:15 to find his wife Sherry sitting quietly. After he tells her that his stomach hurts, she tells him that he might have a hole in his stomach. He pours her a drink and starts to tell her about seeing a young couple, but she rudely interrupts his story. Sherry hasn't cooked any dinner, and he asks why she married him in the first place. She is frustrated that he doesn't have the money he promised. He tells her that in a few days he will have those big bucks, but he can't tell her all about it. She begins to threaten him with the idea of her with another man and he finally agrees to tell her a little. Soon after, Sherry goes to see her boyfriend, Val Cannon. She is upset with him for not answering her calls the previous night. He tells her that he doesn't want her to try to tell him how to live his life. Later she tells him that he's most interested in money and women.

Sherry then tells Val that George has stumbled on to something big, and they'll be rich now. Sherry reveals to Val that the guys in the mob are planning to knock off the



racetrack. One of the only things she found in George's pocket was that slip of paper, and she shows it to Val. Val tells her that this is a lot bigger than she thinks it is.

Elsewhere, Johnny is in a room talking with some men and telling them that the extra two guys on the job won't know who they are and vice versa. Johnny says one has to handle the gun, and the other is going to start the fight at the bar. They aren't in on the whole plan, but are just being paid for their services. They can trust the guys because if they try to weasel out, they'll be done for good. The guys expect the take to be at least \$2 million. All the money is out in the open to be picked up by an armored car. A stick-up is out of the question after the car arrives because they would be caught too easily.

Suddenly, someone knocks at the door. Viewers hear a girl's squeal and someone being roughed up. George admits that this is his wife Sherry, and they slap him. He tries to deny telling her anything, but they don't believe him. The guys plan to question her, and they take George home. The guys plan to slap Sherry around rather than killing her. Sherry tells Johnny that she found the address in George's pocket and thought he might be playing around on her. Johnny says that he knows she will do anything for money. He tells her to sit tight if she wants money, but if she doesn't, she will never get a penny.

At home, George gives Sherry a lecture on her actions. George is angry and offended, and he tells her that he's going to drop out because he's afraid. She tells him that if he doesn't get the money, she won't believe he really loves her. She asks him to do this for her and begins to undress. She then promises to always love him.

Three days later, early on Tuesday morning, Johnny finishes preparing for the job by meeting with Maurice Oboukhoff. Maurice warns Johnny to be careful. He feels that he's wasting time playing chess, and Johnny offers to give him \$2,500 if he starts a fight at the bar to keep the track cops busy. Maurice wants to know more, especially since he doesn't enjoy the idea of going to jail.

Elsewhere Johnny buys a gun from a guy named Nikki Arcane and offers him \$5,000 to kill a horse without talking about the gig if something goes wrong. Johnny gives Nikki just the information he needs to do the job, and Nikki agrees. Johnny arrives at a hotel to meet with Joe Piano for a place to stay. The place was recommended through a friend at Alcatraz. Johnny leaves one bag now and one later. He pays Joe \$10 a week for the room. Johnny checks the place out and hides the bag then leaves.

Four days later, it's early, but Sherry is wide awake. She goes in to see George and tries to be nice to him. George is nervous about the events of the day. George wonders if she's sick or something since she's nice to him. He tries to convince her that this isn't the day of the job. Sherry feels that George believes Johnny over her, and she finally tells him that she couldn't stop Johnny. She insinuates that Johnny raped her because he didn't trust her. George is angry that Johnny would do such a thing, so he finally admits that this is the day of the job.

Johnny Clay goes in and wakes up Unger before he leaves. Unger tells Johnny that he's always felt like his father. Unger hopes that after this job Johnny will be a man who will



think about settling down and getting married. Johnny picks up a plane ticket and then visits Joe. He lets Joe know that a cop will be leaving a package that evening. After reaching the bus station, Johnny leaves a package in a locker and goes to Mike's apartment to drop off a key in the box.

In the apartment, Mike tries to get Ruthie, his sick wife, to eat some more food. She promises to eat after taking her medicine. He promises her that they'll be rich very soon, and he heads to work after promising to pick up some magazines for her. As he walks out, he tells her that he'll be having a get together with the guys that evening, so he'll be home a little late. Before leaving, he picks up the key and goes to the bus station to pick up the package. He leaves and catches the bus to the racetrack.

At noon, Mike arrives at the track with his wrapped package. He tells them that the flowers in the box are for his wife. George loads his gun. Mike won't let them put the flowers in the refrigerator; he wants them in the locker so he doesn't forget them. They don't seem to believe him, but they leave quietly. George then walks past as Mike puts the package in the locker, and he watches as the cops put the money in the office.

After the first race, Mike is busy. Unger walks up and demands another drink. Mike asks if he hasn't already had enough, and he goes away. Randy makes a call saying that his set seems to be a little messed up since it keeps going dead. He knows that he has to arrive at the track at just the right moment. The seventh race is beginning when he arrives.

Maurice arrives and asks a guy to make a call for him. Then, he heads to the bar, where he orders a beer. Suddenly, he yells at Mike and punches him. After knocking Mike down, he begins to attack others in the area before putting the police to shame by fighting them off. Mike tries to hit him in the head with a bottle, but Maurice keeps going. No one can stop him for quite some time, until most of the cops in the building are there and finally contain him. Then one man steps into the office.

When Nikki tries to park in the area that Johnny told him to park in, the cop won't let him in. Nikki tries to bribe him with some money, and the guy finally agrees to let him in. Nikki parks his car at the perfect spot. The cop then comes over and gives him a program to help him out. Nikki finally gets rid of him and continues watching the race. The cop comes back to talk and thanks Nikki for the money. Nikki then rudely sends the guy away. Finally, the race begins, and Nikki prepares to do his job. As the horses come around the corner, the audience sees the lead horse, Red Lightning, fall to the ground. Nikki then tries to speed away, but the cop fires and kills him.

Johnny finally arrives at the track right on time, and George lets him in. They enter the office. The flower box held a gun beneath the flowers, and Johnny puts on a clown mask before going back upstairs. He then holds up the office and has them fill up a bag with cash. Outside, the men hear about the shooting over the intercom. The bag is finally full, and Johnny sends the workers into the locker room. He then changes clothes, puts the gun in the bag and throws the bag out the window before walking out



of the office. A cop tries to stop him, but he punches the cop and gets away in the commotion.

All the men in the scam watch the television coverage of the heist later that afternoon in Unger's apartment. The authorities are amazed that the man was able to get away with \$2 million in a duffel bag. No one saw the duffel bag thrown out the window or saw Rodney pick up the bag. They are beginning to get worried, though, that Johnny isn't coming with the money from where he was supposed to pick it up at Joe's hotel. They hear the elevator and find that Val and his friend are there to hold them up. Everyone begins shooting. George is shot, but he kills Val and his friend. Everyone but George is dead.

The narrative flashes back to earlier, when Johnny has reached the hotel. He is running behind because of traffic. He arrives at the hotel, picks up the bag and heads to the apartment, arriving fifteen minutes late, as a bloody, injured George walks out and gets into his car. In order to save himself and the money, Johnny simply has to leave. He buys a large suitcase later and goes to a remote place to move the money into the suitcase. When he finally fits the money into the suitcase, he locks it with a key.

Later, Sherry is packing and expects Val to be coming in. Instead, George stumbles in and asks her why she would turn on him. She asks why he couldn't play it smart, and George tells her that Val is dead. Sherry refuses to call an ambulance for George and sends him away even though he professes his love. She tells him to leave, and he shoots her. George grabs the birdcage and pulls it down as he falls.

At the airport, Fay waits for Johnny. She runs out and embraces him when he finally appears. There are men in suits watching them as they come in. A rich older woman talks to her dog while waiting for her husband's flight to arrive. Johnny and Fay hurry to check their bags for their flight to Boston. Although he wants to carry it on the flight, the clerk tells him that the bag simply won't fit on the plane. Johnny asks to see the manager, who tells him that the only other option is to get a rebate on the flight. Finally, Johnny agrees to let them check the bag. Johnny's bag is the final bag put on the plane. As they wait, the rich woman once again talks to her dog. When the plane arrives, Johnny's bag is driven by. At the same moment, the woman's dog runs out on the airstrip, and the driver tries to avoid hitting it. When he swerves, the bag spills open, and all the money flies out.

Johnny and Fay hurry out of the airport while they are being paged. They try to catch a taxi in vain, and the men in suits are told that he is out there. Fay begs him to run, but Johnny asks what the difference is. As the men come out with guns pulled, the film ends.



# Characters

## Johnny Clay, played by Sterling Hayden

### Description

Johnny Clay has spent years in prison, and now that he's out, he's ready to make up for lost time. Apparently being in the pen doesn't do quite as much rehabilitation as one might hope. Instead, Johnny has spent his time planning the perfect crime so that he can support Fay and live in luxury. When he returns to see his girlfriend, he assures her that they will be rich and happy if she will just let him do one last job. She agrees, and he gets his group of criminals together to set out their plans. They all work together to create the plan and implement it with Johnny's direction.

Johnny's plan goes perfectly until Val comes into the picture. Little does Johnny know how terribly everything will turn out. Finally, he and his girl are caught as they try to escape at the airport. His perfect crime has been foiled, and he will quickly be returning to prison.

### Analysis

Johnny is a hardened criminal who has spent most of his life in the business. Over the years, he has become increasingly good at his job, as he struggles to make money for himself and his girlfriend. After being caught and imprisoned, he naturally returns to his normal life, but this time he plans to pull off the perfect crime, one final two-million-dollar job that will set him up for life. He's tired of being caught and wants to settle down to a normal life, as long as he doesn't have to work hard to get there, of course. Johnny's attitude is that if he can't get what he wants easily, then he'll just take it from other people. He has no real ambition and has become addicted to making an easy buck through stealing. When he comes up with his plot, he never stops to think that it could get him killed.

## George Peatty, played by Elisha Cook, Jr.

### Description

George Peatty seems to be an unusual choice to join with the rest of the group. He is somewhat timid and cannot even keep his wife interested in him. Although he knows that Sherry doesn't love him, he has no clue that she has been cheating on him for a long time. He is completely ignorant concerning the true situation of his marriage. When George finds out the plans for the job, he promises not to tell anyone, not even Sherry. However, when he breaks his promise, he puts everyone in danger. Sherry wants her and Val to be happy, so she shares the information with him. Everyone dies because George trusts his untrustworthy and unfaithful wife.





## Analysis

George is a small, insecure man. He wants to make a lot of money to please his wife, who has only a financial interest in him. He feels that if he somehow keeps her happy with money, then he will be able to keep her around. George is even willing to betray his friends in order to keep her happy.

After Val kills the gang members, the wounded George goes to Sherry and yells at her. He is about to die, but before he does he decides to take her with him. George has no fear of getting caught, since he knows he has only a few moments to live. In these last moments of his life, George finally gets some guts. Seeing his wife for what she is, his only desire is vengeance.

## Sherry Peatty, played by Marie Windsor

### Description

Sherry is George's wife. She is completely focused on money and only married him because of his job. Sherry has been having an affair with Val for a long time, and she is trying to find a way for them to make enough money to be on their own. When she hears George and Johnny's plan, she immediately tells Val so that he can ruin their plans and steal the money.

Little does Sherry know that her plan will destroy her and everyone in her life. When she first becomes involved, Johnny threatens her. When Val is killed in the process and George is mortally wounded, Sherry is revealed as the turncoat that she is. George comes to wreak his vengeance on her and kills her. His hatred for her allows him to finally put her evil plans to rest.

### Analysis

Sherry is a selfish brat who is only concerned about money. She married George for that reason alone. She wants to be cared for and babied so that all she has to do is lay around the house all day. Sherry has no qualms about cheating on her husband, even though he provides her with everything she wants. She simply wants to satisfy her own desires while still having all the money she wants.

Sherry is also dishonest when she promises George that she'll keep his secret. Instead, she tells Val. She also tells George that Johnny raped her instead of telling the truth about the situation. She starts a terrible chain of events, and her selfishness destroys her and everyone around her.



## **Val Cannon, played by Vince Edwards**

### **Description**

Val is Sherry's boyfriend. They have been together for a while, but he doesn't have the money to care for her like George can. He simply has to accept seeing her when George is out. Val is thrilled when Sherry tells him of George and Johnny's plans to rob the racetrack.

Val makes plans of his own. Along with some of his own friends, he plans to steal the money from the thieves. His plan backfires because Johnny ends up running late. Thus, Val, his friends and Johnny's group are all killed during the fight when the money isn't even there. Val's big plan to become rich and win Sherry backfires on him.

### **Analysis**

Val is in love with Sherry, although he realizes her faults. They are very much alike because they are both extremely selfish. He simply wants to satisfy his own needs and desires, which include her. Their love is likely just a way for each to satisfy selfish wants. When Val discovers the plan, he sees this as his way to make some easy money and get everything he wants.

Although Val is greedy, he's not very smart. He makes plans to steal the money, but they are not well thought out, nor do they consider the caliber of criminals he will be up against. Because of his greed and his ignorance, he and his friends are killed, but not before he takes out some of Johnny's men as well.

## **Marvin Unger, played by Jay C. Flippen**

### **Description**

Marvin Unger is a bookie who is putting up the money for the job that Johnny has planned. He doesn't generally care a lot about the races because no matter who wins, he always makes money. Unger feels like a father to Johnny, and he wants to help him with this one final job. He hopes that this money will allow Johnny to settle down, marry Fay and start a family. Unger worries about Johnny and feels like helping him now is protecting him in the future.

### **Analysis**

Unger's fatherly care seems to backfire. Since he is involved in illegal activities, he can't imagine making a living any other way. Johnny feels the same way, and together they end up planning their own downfall. Although Johnny survives the job, he is arrested, while Unger is murdered because of the robbery.



Unger really wants to do right by Johnny, but he fails in his goal. They are all captured or killed in the process. Ultimately, no crime is perfect, and they have all lost their lives from a plan that Unger backed.

## **Randy Kennan, played by Ted DeCorsia**

### **Description**

Randy is a dirty police officer who is willing to help Johnny and the others. By picking up the money and dropping it off, he is able to help with the plot. Randy's actions do not seem suspicious, since he is a police officer, and he can easily move around freely without suspicion.

### **Analysis**

Randy breaks the law repeatedly by helping Johnny. He feels compelled to do this because he is in debt and needs to take care of himself and his family.

## **Mike O'Reilly, played by Joe Sawyer**

### **Description**

Mike O'Reilly is the bartender at the racetrack. He has been working there for years and is good friends with Johnny and the others. Mike's wife is extremely ill, and he wants the money so that he can get her medical help and try to save her.

### **Analysis**

Mike has the best reason of anyone to be in the plot. He's not in it to be greedy. He only wants to help his wife, who is very sick. Mike's plan backfires, though, when the plan goes awry and he is killed.

## **Nikki Arcane, played by Timothy Carey**

### **Description**

Nikki Arcane is an expert sniper. He can kill anything from a long way away. Johnny gives him \$5,000 to kill a horse during the race to cause yet another distraction. Nikki agrees to do the job but gets killed after shooting the horse.



## **Analysis**

Nikki is trying to get out of the business when Johnny approaches him, but he agrees to do this one last job since the stakes are so high and the payout so good.

## **Maurice Oboukhoff, played by Kola Kwariani**

### **Description**

Maurice is a large thug who works for Johnny sometimes. In this case, he works to create a distraction so that they can actually steal the money.

### **Analysis**

Maurice is big and scary, and he is willing to spend a little time in jail to get a huge payoff from the job Johnny is pulling.

## **Fay, played by Coleen Gray**

### **Description**

Fay is Johnny's girlfriend. She believes in him completely and backs him up even when his plans include robbing others.

### **Analysis**

Fay is sweet, honest and trusting. Fay seems to be a clueless girlfriend who knows little about the real world. She is scared and unsure, but she is willing to believe anything that Johnny tells her.



# Themes

## Thieves Never Win

Although in many modern films, thieves seem to live charmed lives where they are always rich, happy and successful, *The Killing* does nothing to paint this sort of image. Instead, viewers learn that no matter how well thieves plan for their jobs, they will never come out on top. The pursuit of easy money ends up in tragedy, and it almost seems that the bigger the potential score, the worse the outcome.

As Johnny and Unger create their meticulous plans, they are also planning for Johnny to get out of the business and settle down with Fay. Although their motives are good, they still cannot win while trying to become honest by stealing. As the famous phrase goes, cheaters never win. Criminal activity is painted as dangerous and difficult in this film. Everyone ends up dying by the end of the film, except Johnny and Fay, who are arrested at the airport. There is no success in the film, with everyone failing to get what they wanted.

## Trust Is Dangerous

Trust is built over time, and it's hard for anyone to choose who to trust. Viewers see that with thieves, the difficulty is enhanced. These are dishonest men doing dishonest work, so how can they trust each other? However, it is not the thieves' dishonesty that ruins their plans, but instead the conniving and influence of a bad woman, a *femme fatale*. When Johnny and the others trust George, they have no idea that this will cost them their lives. George is not trustworthy primarily because he cannot stand up to his wife. She bosses him around, and he never tells her to leave him alone. Once George tells her the plan, it's not long until she shares it with Val, who makes his own plan and ruins everything.

## Choose Friends Wisely

Friends can make or break a person, and Johnny and the others learn this quickly after they are betrayed by a good friend. George tells Sherry about the plan, and she in turn tells Val. Because of their mistake in being friends with George, everyone suffers. In another example of this theme, Mike has chosen friends who get him in trouble. He finds that his friends' ideas don't help him and his wife, but hurt them instead. Mike is a good man with friends who are thieves. His choices cause him to get involved in dangerous activities that harm his family. By choosing people who are troublemakers as friends, Mike is unable to make good choices. Instead, he risks and loses his life by making the bad choice to be in on this plan.

## Style and Cinematography

*The Killing* evaluates the lives of professional thieves who are plotting to steal a lot of cash quickly. They want to have an easy life, and they feel that this is the way. In order to make the film believable as well as to create a feeling of the dark underside of life, director Stanley Kubrick uses a gritty film style that makes the events seem devastatingly real. Viewers are never in any doubt that all of these things could happen and even might happen in our world.

Younger viewers may not be accustomed to black and white films. In this case, the lack of color adds to the film. The cinematography uses the light and dark contrast of black and white for a visual effect. Viewers are able to see the good and bad in terms of the lightness or darkness of the screen. As things get especially rough when Val and his friends show up, everything becomes darker and more difficult to see. When secrets are being passed, the film gets darker as well. The visual effect makes the storyline even more powerful and dramatic.



# Motifs

## Horse Race

The setting of the film centers on horse races, where the men plan to pull off the perfect crime. From the very beginning, viewers realize that these races are imperative to the plot of the film and to the goals of the characters. With each race, we learn more about the characters. The first race allows us to be introduced to all the characters and learn more about their lives. We know what jobs they have and how they will likely relate to the plot before the first half hour is over. During the second horse race, we actually see the crime as they are doing the deed. We learn more not only about the job but also about the attitudes and character of the men involved. The setting of the horse races also resonates with the idea of risk. Horse races are a setting for gambling, and what these men are planning is the biggest gamble of all. They are staking their lives against the chance at millions of dollars.

## The Perfect Crime

After getting out of jail, Johnny begins work on his perfect crime, which he has planned while in prison. All his friends are to be involved, and he has it set for the perfect day when they can make the most money off the plan. All of the men believe that the perfect crime can be pulled off fairly easily. They have no doubt about their own abilities, even though the odds are against them. Little do they know that a man's breach of confidence will unravel everything and ruin all of their lives forever.

The perfect crime is also the means to an honest living for some of the men, especially Johnny. He's ready to settle down with Fay and start a family, but he knows that he has to wait until he can take care of her. Rather than work hard, he wants to pull one perfect crime to keep them comfortable for life.

## Cheating Wife

The cheating wife is always the one who causes the problem for men in the world. In this case, Sherry is cheating on the weak George. She truly hates him and treats him terribly, as she has for many years. She keeps him around for the same reason she married him - money. When she convinces him to tell her about the plan, all the plans begin to unravel. She immediately goes to Val, her lover, with the news. They want to be together, so she figures that if he steals all the money, she can finally have her cake and eat it too. The cheating wife throws everything terribly out of kilter, and everyone is killed due to her meddling and greed. In some ways, this ends up being a type of moral for the story - a cheating, hateful woman should never be trusted. Her greed and unfaithfulness is portrayed as worse than the men's robbery and illegal dealings.



# Symbols

## Mask

Johnny wears a clown mask when he steals the money from the racetrack. In a way, this mask symbolizes the truth that the entire plan and the job of being a thief is foolish and pointless. As Johnny walks into the back room in the clown mask, he holds the men up at gunpoint. They look at him as if he's crazy at first, and then they realize that he has a gun. Suddenly the entire scene becomes humorous, as a man in a clown mask robs half a dozen other men of millions of dollars. In the end, the mask is thrown away, and Johnny can't hide from the police. His nervousness and his looks give him away while he and Fay try to escape at the airport. Johnny's charade has finally come to an end.

## Bag of Money

The bag of money that the gang steals is symbolic in several ways. Money is important to sustaining life and creating comfort. It represents security, but ironically the track to obtaining it is the most insecure of all. All the characters have money, and therefore security, as their goal, and they strive to get the money in the easiest possible way. Each has a worthy goal, but none reach their objective because they don't come by their money honestly.

Johnny wants to settle down with Fay after his time spent in prison, while Unger wants this for Johnny as well, since he feels like a father to him. Mike wants to take better care of his wife, who is extremely ill, while George hopes the money will make Sherry finally love him. The bag of money is symbolic of all these desires as well as the greed that causes them to want so much. They want to have it all, and they want it now no matter what they have to do to get it. As their impatience combines with their greed, the characters end up ruining their lives quickly.

## Guns

Guns are symbolic of power in *The Killing*. Everyone with a gun has power. Johnny and the others have always found their sense of power in taking from others by force. They do it even though Johnny has been caught at least once, while the others have probably been arrested before as well.

Johnny brings a large gun to the racetrack so that he can intimidate everyone else and steal the money. He goes into the back room while wearing a clown mask and begins to rob the men. At first, they are not impressed with him, but when they realize that he has a gun, they suddenly become completely focused on what he wants because of the power of a gun.





Johnny is able to demand control and respect by using guns. The other men feel the same way. Val and his friends use the same method to try to come out on top. Sadly, everyone fails because no one can be on top all the time, especially when they're always staking their claim by force. In the end, everyone but Johnny dies at the hands of someone else's gun.



## Essay Questions

How are all the men described by the narrator related?

Why is Johnny Clay starting a new job?

Describe George and Sherry's relationship.

What is Sherry's plan for her and Val? How would you describe Sherry and Val's love for each other?

Describe Johnny's plan and the take.

Why is Mike involved in the plan?

What is in Mike's flower box?

How does Johnny steal the money?

What happens when Val busts in on the guys? Do the characters deserve what they get?

Do Johnny and Fay get away? How would the story and its themes be different if the ending were different?