

Last Shot: A Final Four Mystery Study Guide

Last Shot: A Final Four Mystery by John Feinstein

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Plot Summary

Last Shot is a novel by the best-selling author John Feinstein. Feinstein is a Duke graduate and former sports writer. The story follows the two main characters, Stevie Thomas and Susan Carol Anderson. Both kids are in junior high and winners of the U.S. Basket ball Writers Association essay contest. As winners of the contest, Stevie and Susan Carol act as student reports covering the Final Four in New Orleans.

While looking around in the area where CBS sets up during the Final Four, Stevie and Susan Carol overhear a conversation between the star player for MSU, Chip Graber, and an unknown man in charcoal gray suit. What the two take away from the conversation is that Chip is being blackmailed to throw the championship game between MSU and Duke. After overhearing the situation, Stevie and Susan Carol struggle with what to do with the information they've acquired and who they can tell the story to help them stop the blackmail.

As Stevie and Susan Carol start their own investigation, they enlist the help of the blackmailee, Chip Graber. They concoct a story to get into Chip's hotel room and confront Chip with the information they overheard. Chip joins the two student reporters in the investigation to uncover who is responsible for the plot to blackmail him and why.

Together, Chip, Stevie, and Susan Carol go through twists and turns of the plot, finding out that the people they thought they could trust cannot be trusted, and that the people they thought were responsible for the blackmail are in fact not involved in the way that they assumed.



Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

In Chapter 1, Stevie Thomas receives a letter that he is the winner of an essay contest. As the winner, he has the opportunity to cover the final four basketball games as a student reporter. Stevie's mother says Stevie has to wait for his father to get home to see if he can take time off of work to accompany Stevie to the games, which are in New Orleans. Stevie's dad said yes. When they are checking into their hotel, they are in line behind a famous sports reporter, Tony Kornheiser.

In Chapter 2, the following morning, Stevie and his dad are heading to the award's breakfast when they meet the other winner of the student reporter essay contest, Susan Carol Anderson. To Stevie's dismay, Susan Carol is a huge Duke basketball fan. While the parents are talking, Joe Mitch, who is one of the judges of the essay contest introduces himself to the parents and the kids. They group also has an opportunity to meet a famous sports' writer, Dick "Hoops" Weiss, who says he enjoyed reading Stevie's essay. Dick Weiss says they should head out so they can pick up their media credentials before watching Duke practice on the court.

Analysis

Just checking in to the hotel, Stevie and his dad run into a famous person associated with the final four. It foreshadows that over the time Stevie is there as a student reporter, he is going to meet a lot of famous basketball players, coaches, sports' reporters and more.

Even though Stevie hates Duke, it foreshadows that he might end of liking Susan Carol anyway. First, Susan Carol's southern accent intrigues Stevie. Second, Dick Weiss, who is also a big hater of Duke, tells Stevie that he should read Susan Carol's essay--even though it is about Duke's coach, Coach K--because Susan Carol is a really good writer.

Vocabulary

bleachers, avid, fandom, thrust, upgrade, spite, unbiased, easels, podium, riled, lapels, credentials, comrade, convert, skeptic



Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

In Chapter 3, Stevie and Susan Carol are attending the awards breakfast. They both have to pose with their plaques for pictures, but neither of them has to speak. Dick Weiss tells them that they have to write one story per day during the event. Weiss also tells them that they have to work on deadline, like a real reporter. Susan Carol tells Stevie that she already wrote her story for the day. She says that when she interviewed Coach K for her essay that she was also able to line up an interview with the coach from Syracuse. As they walk to the Dome to watch practice, Stevie notices that people are trying to sell tickets to the games. Weiss explains that the lower seat tickets are selling for \$2,500 and the higher level seats are selling for \$1,500. When they try to pick up their media credential, the NCAA guy gives Stevie a hard time because he doesn't have a photo ID, but Weiss and Stevie both explain that he is only 13 years old. As Duke is practicing on the court, the three head towards press row. Stevie and Susan Carol get introduced to Dick Vitale, a big ESPN newscaster.

In Chapter 4, Stevie and Weiss maneuver their way toward the court, where the press sits. The coaches are being interviewed by the reporters from CBS. Susan Carol is standing with the Duke coach on the court, Coach K. Stevie and Weiss approach them. Coach K invites Stevie to call his office for tickets so Stevie can visit the Duke stadium.

This is the first time Stevie watches college basketball practice. Weiss explains to Stevie who each of the players are and the other members that work for the team. When Stevie looks at Susan Carol, he realizes he is jealous of her because she has already written her story, but Stevie still has to write his. Stevie wants to write about one of the Minnesota players, but Weiss deters him away from doing so.

Susan Carol and Stevie go into the interview room with their escorts. The student athletes and the coaches will be answering questions. Weiss tells them that it's in the moderator handbook to refer to the basketball players as student athletes, so Stevie and Susan Carol joke about how many more times the moderator has to say it by the end of the weekend to say it a total of 100 times.

Analysis

Stevie is learning from Weiss the ins and outs of being sports' reporter. Ironically, Coach K compliments Stevie's essay, even though Stevie is not a fan of Duke. Stevie learning about all of the work that goes into basketball finals is teaching him about project management. It's also teaching Stevie about the value of hard work because some of the big college basketball coaches started out as assistant coaches or even lower on the totem pole. The fact that Stevie and Susan Carol are warming up to each other suggests they might be close friends or girlfriend and boyfriend by the end of the trip.

Vocabulary

impressions, benchwarmer, solicit, wonderment, fantasized, intimidate, blush, tangled, enthralled, generic, sarcastic, cadre



Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

In Chapter 5, as they sit through the press conferences, Stevie starts to get antsy. Stevie decides to write his story about what it's like to be a kid reporter at the Final Four. He tells Weiss he's going to take a walk around the building. Stevie wants to include the number of references to student athletes so he asks Weiss to keep track of the number of references for him. Susan Carol decides to walk around with Stevie. As they approach the locker room, the security guard lets Susan Carol through, but tries to stop Stevie. Susan Carol helps Stevie get through by showing the guard the letter that they are "fully accredited media" at the Final Four because they're the winners of the contest.

Stevie and Susan Carol go to the CBS compound. They decide to walk down to the compound to see if there is anyone interesting to talk to when he sees a shard of light coming from the entrance of the building. Chip Graber and a man in gray suit are looking around suspiciously to see if anyone is watching them and then walk toward the loading dock. Stevie and Susan Carol overhear Chip and the guy in the gray suit talking about throwing the game on Monday so that Minnesota loses against Duke.

In Chapter 6, Stevie writes and submits his first story to the paper he is writing his articles for as a student reporter. When he meets Susan Carol on the court, Stevie asks her if she's been able to find the blackmailer in the gray suit. Susan Carol points out that there are numerous men wear identical suits, so Stevie comes up with a plan for Susan Carol to talk to them to see if she recognizes the voice of the blackmailer. After talking to the men in suits, she identifies the voice and they use a media guide to identify him as Thomas Whiting, a professor for Minnesota State University.

Analysis

Stevie and Susan Carol realize what they've just overheard is someone blackmailing the best college basketball player in the country to lose to Duke in the Final Four game on Monday. They struggle with right and wrong. They know what they overheard is wrong and that they need to tell someone but they don't know who to tell that will believe what they heard.

Ironically, when they read Professor Whiting's bio in the media program, they find out he sits on a sub-committee about gambling. In addition, it's also ironic that the professor teaches an ethics and morals class at the university since his plan to throw the basketball game is immoral and unethical.

Vocabulary

dreamy, bias, drawl, flush, accredited, obtuse, compound, shard, indicate, charcoal



Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

In Chapter 7, Stevie and Susan Carol discuss what they should do with the information they have and who they can trust with the information they overheard. They decide Brill and Weiss, their assigned reporters, is who they should tell. Weiss says it's probably just a misunderstanding. After returning to the press room, Stevie checks with his editor and the editor tells him his story is very well done. Susan Carol and Stevie decide they're on their own to fix the problem. They sit down in the hotel lobby to review what they know, which is the MSU faculty rep is blackmailing the MSU star player. They also think Whiting is working with someone else. The parts they are missing is why and how they plan on throwing the championship game. They decide they have to talk with Chip Graber, the star player who is being blackmailed.

They find out the hotel where the MSU team is staying. Stevie and Susan Carol part for dinner and plan to meet the next morning at 8:30 am to go to the MSU hotel.

In Chapter 8, Susan carol and Stevie both tells their fathers that they have radio interviews in the morning. They eat breakfast with their dads and then head to the hotel where MSU is staying. They can't get past the security guard keeping people off the floors where the players are staying. When they run into one of the MSU staff, Jerry Ventura, he gives them his keycard to go to his room to get drinks. Susan Carol thinks he has a list of the rooms so they plan to try to get his list to see which room is Chip's room.

Analysis

Ironically, Stevie doesn't take the compliment from the editor as seriously as he normally would have because he is distracted by the blackmailing and the fixing of the game. Stevie and Susan Carol are using their investigative reporting skills to solve the mystery of what's going on. It's ironic that Susan Carol would lie to her father because he is a minister. It's also ironic because she is so outraged by Professor Whiting's unethical behavior yet lying is unethical too.

Vocabulary

cynical, threaten, glanced, scandal, intense, expert, debut, ensued, suspicious, dreading, hysteria, mezzanine, equivalent



Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

In Chapter 9, Stevie and Susan Carol find the list of players' room numbers in Jerry Ventura's room. They realize Chip doesn't have a roommate. While they're still in the room, the maid tries to come in, which startles them. Stevie and Susan Carol go down to the front desk to get a copy of the keycard and a replacement card for Jerry Ventura so he doesn't know they have a copy of his room key to access the players' floors. When they get to Chip's floor they are stopped by a security guard, but Stevie says he's Chip's cousin. When the guard takes them to Chip, Stevie and Susan Carol give Chip hints in front of the guard to let them know they overheard his conversation yesterday with Whiting, so Chip confirms Stevie is his cousin. Chip tells them he doesn't know what they thought they heard but they're wrong.

In Chapter 10, Stevie and Susan Carol tell their story to Chip. Chip says there is nothing they can do about the blackmail. Chip says he'll tell them his story as long as it's off the record. Chip says it started the Monday night they got home from winning the championship game that got MSU into the Final Four. The next morning, the phone rings and it's Whiting saying he needs to see Chip and it's something about Chip's dad. When Whiting arrives, he tells Chip there's a problem with his transcript. Whiting says that Chip's transcript says he has a transcript stating Chip failed two classes the previous semester, instead of one class, which would prohibit Chip from playing. Whiting adds that Chip failed a class in the fall, which is not true either. The class Whiting says he failed in the fall is the one Whiting teaches on ethics and morals. This is when the blackmail started.

Analysis

Chip telling Stevie and Susan Carol that they misunderstood what they heard foreshadows Chip telling them a lie to keep them from outing him and Professor Whiting. Chip is treating Stevie and Susan Carol as if they are real reporters that might leak his story instead of kids. It appears as if someone is trying to set Chip and his father up by changing Chips' transcript so that they could blackmail Chip.

Vocabulary

concierge, alumni, panicking, flinch, ordained, mulling, panoramic, frauds, implication, quizzically



Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

In Chapter 11, Chip is getting ready to leave for the walk-thru with the team. Stevie, Susan Carol and Chip devise a plan to try to get a hold of the dean that can help Chip to prove his grades. Whiting is blackmailing him with are wrong. Stevie and Susan Carol go back to their hotel and have lunch with their dads. Then, Susan Carol and Stevie head to the Superdome, plug their computers in and decide to head out to the court. Susan Carol calls the assistant of the dean and her voicemail says if it's Chip, he should call her home number. Her home number voicemail says that she has the information Chip is seeking. Susan Carol finds out the dean is in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, so they start to plot on how they're going to get there.

In Chapter 12, Susan Carol is about to call Dean Wojenski before they go to Mississippi to interview him to talk to Mr. Kornheiser, a famous sports journalist. Stevie introduces himself and Susan Carol. Kornhesier and another journalist have a debate as to how old Stevie and Susan Carol are. Susan Carol calls the dean about Chip. The dean tells Susan Carol to come by his house tomorrow and the dean will look in his files for Chip's grades. Susan Carol and Stevie watch the game from the media seats. Susan Carol is sitting next to a sportscaster, which it turns out is interviewing Professor Whiting as part of the interview panel. Chip Graber makes a three-point shot at the buzzer and Susan Carol and Stevie hug with excitement. Stevie finishes writing his story by half time for the second game. Susan Carol goes to write her story when Stevie is heading toward the locker room to talk to Chip. Mr. Ventura taps Stevie on the shoulder and tells Stevie they need to have a talk.

Analysis

Stevie and Susan carol know right from wrong. They know what Profession Whiting is doing to Chip is wrong. They are determined to help Chip because Chip has done everything he can to try to help himself, but Chip is running out of time. It seems as if someone is trying to set up Chip and his father because the dean confirms that he doesn't think Chip failed his class.

Vocabulary

concocted, previous, fouled, adopted, stake, representative, self-confessed, transcript, glorified, faculty, double-teamed, awkwardly, play-by-play, ecstatic, chat



Chapters 13 - 14

Summary

In Chapter 13, Jerry Ventura questions Stevie about being in his room. Stevie denies being in his room, even though Jerry thinks the kids were in his room looking for a scoop for their stories--once he finds out they are the student reporters representing the Final Four. Stevie checks in with Susan Carol and she sends Stevie off to get a couple of quotes so she can finish her story. She tells Stevie that the dean wants them to meet him the following morning. They make up a story about interviewing student athletes at a Fellowship for Christian Athletes (FCA) meeting the following day, in order to drive with Chip to meet with the dean. Before they part for the night, Susan Carol gives Stevie a kiss on the cheek to thank him for getting her the quotes for her story.

Susan Carol and Stevie meet with Chip to tell him about the meeting. Chip arranges to borrow a vehicle to drive them to meet with the dean.

In Chapter 14, Stevie, Susan Carol, and Chip arrive at the dean's house at 9:30 am. The dean catches Chip in a lie when he introduces Susan Carol as his sister and Stevie as his cousin. They start the introductions over and then talk on the dean's back porch. After listening to their story, the dean says he cannot find Chip's transcript, but says that he does remember reviewing Chip's transcript for eligibility. When Susan Carol mentions Christine Braman helping to connect them with the dean, the dean says he never talked to this person. The dean thinks there is a connection between the mystery woman and Chip's blackmailing. The dean tells Chip a story about the wife of the man that Chip's father got the head coaching job for when he was working at Davidson--and the woman's maiden name is Christine Braman.

Susan Carol makes some phone calls to find out where Christine's husband, Steve Jurgenson is staying. When she does, Chip tells them they are being followed. They write down the license plate on the car following them and Susan Carol calls a friend to run the plates and find out who the car belongs to. Chip calls to let them know he is going to be a few minutes late for the news conference. When Susan Carol's friend calls them back, they find out that it's Steve Jurgenson that's following them. The three talk about a plan for Chip to make it to the news conference and for Stevie and Susan Carol to get away from Jurgenson safely.

Analysis

Stevie's attitude toward Susan Carol is evolving. While he first thought of her as an adversary, he now thinks of her as being on the same side. The kiss Susan Carol gives Stevie on the cheek also indicates that their relationship is turning toward a more romantic nature. It appears as if the blackmailing is revenge against Chip's dad for an old job that Chip's father won over the other candidate.

Vocabulary

steered, bluff, assuming, quotes, convince, heroics, enthused, greet, celebrity, charade, deserved, eligibility



Chapters 15 - 16

Summary

In Chapter 15, Chip, Stevie, and Susan Carol arrive at the back door of the stadium. The guard won't allow Susan Carol and Stevie to come in with Chip, so Chip refuses to come in until they allow the two student reporters to come in with him. Stevie goes into the press room to find Brill and Weiss. He tells them that the interviews were harder than he and Susan Carol thought so they'd like to see how he interviews people.

On the drive back from the dean's home, the three decided they needed to bring in someone official to help them with the blackmail situation. After debating on who to trust, they finally decide on Stuart Feeley, who is the chairman of the board of trustees for Duke. Later, while waiting for Brill in his hotel lobby to go on his interview with Feeley, Stevie and Susan Carol hear a familiar voice, which is Whiting walking with another man. They suspect the other man is Jurgenson, so Susan Carol asks the hotel to ring Jurgenson's room. She gets his voicemail so they conclude the man with Whiting could be Jurgenson.

Susan Carol and Stevie go to Feeley's suite to sit in on the interview with him and Brill. At the end of the interview, Susan Carol asks to speak briefly to Mr. Feeley.

In Chapter 16, Susan Carol returns to the lobby and they catch a ride back to their hotel. Susan Carol tells Stevie Mr. Feeley is going to talk to Jurgenson, but Feeley wants to talk to him alone to give Jurgenson a chance to explain his side of the story.

Stevie calls Chip to tell him about Feeley. Stevie and Susan Carol have dinner with their dads at Morton's. the next morning Stevie keeps looking at his watch because they are expecting to hear from Feeley before noon. Chip calls Stevie at 10:40 am to tell Stevie Feeley called him to say he spoke to Jurgenson and Jurgenson told Feeley to go ahead and call the FBI. Jurgenson threatens to show the transcripts to the NCAA officials, which can prevent Chip from playing until he can reapply to play. Stevie calls to tell Susan Carol the news.

Later, Chip meets with Stevie and Susan Carol in Chip's hotel room. Chip tells them he tried to call Jurgenson so Chip can talk to him himself. Chip plans on telling Jurgenson to go ahead and go to the FBI. Jurgenson returns Chip's call to meet with Chip late that night at an out of the way hotel. Susan Carol convinces Chip to allow her to send an email to a reporter that details the plot, time and place of their meeting, and a note to call to the FBI if they don't make it to the arena by seven o'clock. The three head to the Days Inn to meet with Jurgenson. They arrive at the hotel room and instead of Jurgenson, Dean Wojenski answers the door.



Analysis

Susan Carol speaking to Feeley alone provides her with the opportunity to tell him what's going on with Chip and Whiting and to get Mr. Feeley to intervene. Stevie draws the conclusion that in the south, there is a connection between sports and religion. When he questions Brill about this, Brill chalks it off as a need to have a reason for success in the sports' world. Stevie's father hints that Stevie and Susan Carol might soon lose some of their freedom because the fathers do not like that the two kids are going around New Orleans by themselves. This could hamper their investigation and ability to help Chip.

Feeley wanting to confront Whiting alone foreshadows that Feeley is also a part of the blackmailing scheme. Susan Carol foreshadows something bad happening when she questions why Jurgenson wants to meet with Chip so late and at such an out of the way hotel. Dean Wojenski answering the door foreshadows he is either involved in the plot or that he was able to stop Jurgenson and is there to tell Chip, Stevie and Susan Carol about it.

Vocabulary

profanity, trustees, hesitating, conspiratorial, briskly, concoct, exasperated, impose, vision, stupendous



Chapters 17 - 18

Summary

In Chapter 17, when they enter the room, they see Whiting, Feeley's assistant and, of course, Dean Wojenski. The dean confirms the blackmailing plot is his and that Jurgenson was just a lead to throw Chip, Stevie and Susan Carol off the trail. The dean says he's going to hold the kids hostage until after the game to ensure Chip does what he's supposed to do to throw the game. They wrap duct tape around Stevie and Susan Carol's wrists and ankles. Chip leaves for the game. By eight o'clock, they're watching the game on TV when someone knocks on the door. When Gary, Feeley's assistant opens it, a man pushes Gary down, beats him up and takes away his gun. The man identifies himself as Steve Jurgenson as he cuts off the tape from the kids' hands and ankles.

In Chapter 18, Steve Jurgenson duct tapes up Gary. Jurgenson says he was following them yesterday to find out what Chip was mixed up in. Jurgenson drives them to the Dome, but they get stuck in traffic. Jurgenson says that Coach Graber called Jurgenson to check on Chip when the security guard goes to coach the night Stevie and Susan Carol first got into Chip's room by saying Stevie was Chip's cousin. Jurgenson confirms Coach Graber and he are friends and that Jurgenson is the coach's lawyer. Jurgenson says it's the email Susan Carol sent to the reporter that led him to them. When they arrive at the Dome, Jurgenson gives them all-access passes and says they have to get somewhere that Chip can see that they are safe, so he doesn't throw the game. Whiting tries to stop them, but the commotion causes Chip to turn and see that Stevie and Susan Carol are safe. As the security guard tries to haul off Stevie and Susan Carol, Coach Graber tells the security guards to let them go because they have all access passes. Stevie and Susan Carol head back to the press room to watch the rest of the game. Chip makes a comeback and ties the score. At the buzzer to end the game, Chip makes a basket to win the game. Jurgenson shows up to take Stevie and Susan Carol to Special Agent Applebaum from the FBI, so they can confirm Jurgenson's story. Jurgenson tells Stevie and Susan Carol that the dean had also been calling the president of MUS, Earl Koheen, who Jurgenson says is the originator of the blackmailing plan. The FBI agents start arresting each of the conspirators. The only person they aren't able to locate is the dean.

Analysis

Susan Carol remaining calm in the hotel room suggests she is taping the conversation, so when Chip gets the men to explain why they're blackmailing him, Susan Carol is getting the whole story as a recording. Ironically, it is Steve Jurgenson, the man they thought was the blackmailer, that saves Stevie and Susan Carol.

Vocabulary

ushered, gambling, betrayal, trussed, tension, lingering, arrogance, disgraced, subjected, lawsuit, trampled, cuffs, aspiring, entourage, throng



Chapter 19

Summary

In Chapter 19, after the award ceremony, Coach Graber gives a press conference. He asks that the reporters stick to questions about the game. Chip runs over to Stevie and Susan Carol and gives them a big hug. Stevie and Susan Carol explain how Jurgenson helped save them. Coach Graber comes up behind Chip to meet the "heroes." Chip says his bad playing wasn't an attempt to throw the game. Chip says he just couldn't concentrate until he saw that Stevie and Susan Carol were safe.

The next morning, Stevie and Susan Carol go to the FBI field office to give their statements. Applebaum says they haven't been able to find the dean. The dean's wife says that when Chip made the basket, he packed a bag and told her that he had to leave town for a while. Brill and Weiss tell the kids that they should write their own story and that their papers will run it under the by-lines. Stevie and Susan Carol go with Applebaum and the Grabers into the press conference room.

Analysis

Coach Graber telling his son that he should have come to him with the problem is a lesson that kids shouldn't handle their problems in their instead. Instead, they should turn to their parents for help.

Vocabulary

lackluster, curtained, magically, disappear, overheard, root, agape, statements, testimony, by-lines



Characters

Steven

Stevie Thomas is a junior high school student. He aspires to be a sports writer one day and so he enters a writing contest with the U.S. Basketball Writers Association. Stevie is one of the two winners of the contest, which entitles him an opportunity to cover the Final Four Championship as a student reporter.

Stevie travels with his father as his chaperone to New Orleans, where the championship game takes place. Stevie became a huge basketball fan when his father started taking him to Philadelphia's Big Five when Stevie is four years old. In addition to being a huge basketball fan, Stevie is also a fan of several famous sports reporters, which Stevie reads religiously in hard-copy and on the Internet.

Susan Carol Anderson

Susan Carol Anderson is the other winner of the U.S. Basketball Writers Association essay contest. She is from North Carolina and a huge fan of Duke basketball. Susan Carol has a southern accent. She is also very tall for her age, which makes her look older than she is.

In addition, Susan Carol is very inquisitive and smart for her age. She is always asking questions that seem innocent, but she really has an ulterior motive for asking. Susan Carol's father is a reverend, so she is also very religious.

Susan Carol's investigative reporter skills and street smart is what ultimately saves her and Stevie from the kidnapers that are holding them hostage by the end of the novel.

Bobby Kelleher

Bobby Keller is a famous sports reporter. He is also the president of the U.S. Basketball Writers Association. Bobby is the one that sends the letter top both Stevie and Susan Carol to announce to them that they are winners of the contest and to invite them to come to New Orleans for the Final Four coverage.

Ultimately, Bobby Kelleher is the reporter that Susan Carol sends an email to tell Bobby where they are when they go to meet Jurgenson at a Days Inn. When Stevie and Susan carol don't show up at the final game of the Final Four, Kelleher calls Steve Jurgenson to help him find the kids and uncover the mystery of what Chip is wrapped up in.



Mr. Thomas

Mr. Thomas is Stevie's dad. He is also the chaperone the association pays to accompany Stevie to the Final Four. Mr. Thomas and Susan Carol's father end up becoming friends while accompanying their children for the weekend. At the end of the novel, Mr. Thomas makes Stevie promise to tell his mom that Mr. Thomas knew where Stevie was at all times during the weekend.

Reverend Anderson

Reverend Anderson is Susan Carol's father. He is her chaperone to the Final Four. Reverend Anderson is responsible for founding a religious group for gamblers that has taken off across the country. While he is in New Orleans, the reverend visits the New Orleans chapter. He too makes Susan Carol promise to tell her mom that he knew where Susan Carol was during all times over the weekend.

Chip Graber

Chip Graber is the star player for Minnesota State University (MSU). Chip is also the target of the blackmailing scheme. Chip is not only the star player for MSU, but Chip's father is also the head coach of the basketball team for MSU. Chip ends up forming an unlikely friendship with Stevie and Susan Carol, who help him to investigate who the parties are involved in blackmailing him to throw the Monday night championship game.

Two of Chip's former professors now allege that Chip failed their classes. Two failed classes would make Chip ineligible to play. Chip's ineligibility not only puts the Final Four games in jeopardy, but would call in to question all of the games that MSU won to get them to the championship in the first place. Chip ends up playing an integral role in solving the mystery of who is blackmailing him and why. He ultimately helps Stevie and Susan Carol stop the plot and win the championship for MSU against Duke.

Dick Weiss

Dick Weiss is the sports reporter for the New York Daily News. Weiss is also the reporter assigned to Stevie during the Final Four. Weiss tells Stevie the association has arranged for Stevie and Susan Carol to write a story a day during the final four and for the newspapers they are writing for to publish the stories.

The interview Weiss has scheduled with President Keeley is what gives Susan Carol and Stevie access to Keeley. At the end of the novel, Weiss arranges for Stevie and Susan Carol to write a story about the blackmailing plot and for his paper to publish it under their by-lines.



Professor Thomas Whiting

Professor Whiting is the man Stevie and Susan Carol identify as the one that was talking to Chip in the CBS area about throwing the game. Ironically, the professor teaches an ethics' class at MSU. He is also a former professor of Chip's. Professor Whiting tells and shows Chip transcripts that show Chip failed his class and one other class. The professor also tells Chip that if Chip doesn't throw the Monday night game against Duke that the professor is going to take this information to the NCAA and to the press.

Dean Wojenski

Dean Wojenski is a retired dean from MSU. He is now living in Mississippi. Susan Carol arranges for them to meet with the dean to see if the dean has a copy of Chip's transcripts to prove that Chip did not fail the two classes. Dean Wojenski meets with Chip, Stevie and Susan Carol. He is the one responsible for telling the trio that Steve Jurgenson must be behind the blackmailing plot as revenge for Chip's father taking over a head coaching job when Steve and Coach Graber were both working at Davidson years before.

In the end, it turns out the dean is the originator of the blackmailing plot. He has a gambling problem, so his greed is what leads the dean to enlist the help of Whiting and Keeley to carry out the plot. By the end of the novel, Wojenski is on the run and the FBI is looking for him.

President Keeley

President Keeley is the president of MSU. He is the official that Chip, Stevie and Susan Carol decide to go to with the blackmailing scheme for help. What they don't realize is that President Keeley is in on the plot with Wojenski and Thomas.

Steve Jurgenson

Description Steve Jurgenson was a coach with Coach Graber when they were coaching at Davidson. Steve is the one that Coach Graber got the head coaching job over at Davidson. Wojenski suggests it is Jurgenson that is behind the blackmailing plot. It turns out that Jurgenson ends up saving the kids and exposing the blackmailing plot because he is friends with and the attorney for Coach Graber, which is Chip's father and head coach.



Objects/Places

U.S. Basketball Writers Association Letter

U.S. Basketball Writers Association letter is what Stevie receives to announce he is one of the winners of the essay contest. In addition, the letter comes in handy a couple of times throughout the novel when people don't believe that Stevie and Susan Carol are student reporters covering the Final Four.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Philadelphia is the city where Stevie Thomas is from and where he lives. It is the setting for the opening of the novel when Stevie finds out he is one of the two winners of the contest. It's also the city that Stevie and his father fly out of to travel to New Orleans.

New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans is the city in Louisiana where the Final Four is scheduled to take place. New Orleans is also the primary setting of the rest of the novel. It is the city where Stevie and Susan Carol are staying with their fathers. It is also the city where they overhear the blackmailing scheme and commence an investigation to uncover and stop the plot.

Key Card

The hotel key card is the "pass" that allows Stevie and Susan Carol to gain access to the floor where the basketball players are staying. They use the key card to get by security that is guarding access to the floor and the players. First, Stevie and Susan Carol use Jerry Ventura's key card to gain access to his room to find out the room Chip is staying. The two get the front desk to make a copy of the key for them so they can get to the floor where Chip is and still return a copy to Jerry Ventura so he doesn't get suspicious.

Press Pass

The press pass is the identification that gives Stevie and Susan Carol access to the places at the Final Four that reporters and journalists have access. The press passes they possess are part of the benefits for winning the essay contest. It's also the passes that put Stevie and Susan Carol in the loading dock of the CBS area, which is where they overhear the blackmailing conversation between Chip and Professor Whiting.



Superdome

The Superdome is the stadium where the Final Four basketball games take place. The Superdome is the location where the reporters, including the student reporters, Stevie and Susan Carol, have a room to cover the stories they report and write about the Final Four. Each basketball team in the Final Four also has a locker room in the dome.

CBS Loading Dock

The CBS loading dock is the area in the Superdome where CBS sets up all of their equipment. CBS is the one covering the Final Four games in the book. It is also this area where Stevie and Susan Carol overhear the blackmailing conversation between Professor Whiting and Chip Graber.

Bay St. Louis, Mississippi

Bay St. Louis, Mississippi is where Dean Wojenksi lives during his retirement. It's also the city where Chip drives Stevie and Susan Carol to meet with the dean to try to get copies of his transcripts with the passing grades for the two classes Whiting says Chip failed.

All Access Pass

When Steve Jurgenson rescues Stevie and Susan Carol from the Days Inn suite, he gives each of them an all access pass. These passes gain them access close to the floor when they arrive at the dome during the final game. The passes turn out to come from Coach Graber, who saves Stevie and Susan Carol from being hauled away from security as they signal to Chip, who is playing, that they are safe and he doesn't have to throw the game.

Days Inn

The Days Inn is the hotel where Chip, Stevie and Susan Carol arrange to meet Steve Jurgenson. It's also the suite in this hotel where Stevie and Susan Carol are held hostage by Keeley's assistant. Ultimately, it is the same suite in the hotel where Steve Jurgenson rescues Stevie and Susan Carol and ties up Keeley's assistant so they can get to the Superdome to let Chip know they're safe, so he doesn't throw the game.



Themes

Right vs. Wrong

One of the primary themes running through the novel is right versus wrong. As soon as Stevie and Susan Carol overhear the blackmailing scheme, they both know what Professor Whiting is doing is wrong. The rest of the novel involves Stevie and Susan Carol trying to reveal the plot to the right people in order to stop the blackmailing and the throwing of the game.

The important thing about this particular theme is the age of the people responsible for outing the wrongdoing. Even though Stevie and Susan Carol are junior high school students, they make a difference. In this novel, the roles are reversed, where Stevie and Susan Carol take on the roles of adults and do-gooders and the adults that are supposed to know better turn out to be behind the blackmailing scheme.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as uncovering a blackmailing scheme and being held hostage by the blackmailers. Stevie struggles with the fact that his coming of age includes having a crush on Susan Carol in spite of the fact that she is a Duke fan and the direct opposite of everything he knows in his life.

Susan Carol struggles with her own coming of age, but in a different way than Stevie. Susan Carol is determined to save Chip and she figures out ways to use her innocence as a teenager to get her into adult situations.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of these particular families--the Thomas family, the Andersons and the Grabers. While every family has their trials and tribulations, these families have their own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together one way or the other.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third-person point of view from the perspective of the author, John Feinstein. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time during the Final Four. The past represents the time leading up to the Final Four.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each character in the novel. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside the heads of the characters and learn their inner thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the characters. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in New Orleans, Louisiana during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in uncovering the blackmailing scheme of star player Chip Graber. Stevie and Susan Carol are constantly working to uncover who is behind the blackmailing plot and to expose the blackmailers so that Chip doesn't have to throw the championship game.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the main characters, Stevie and Susan Carol, run across a blackmailing scheme. However, as events unfold, the blackmailing scheme is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters, and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The author, however, interjects some basketball and sports terms to fit into the setting of the novel. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 19 chapters. Each chapter ranges from three pages to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects his own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing his opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of right versus wrong. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Stevie and Susan Carol. Another subplot is family relationships.



Quotes

She said I can go if you go with me" (Chapter 1, p. 6).

I just hope that she's not a Duke fan" (Chapter 2, p. 9).

I guess the key to success is knowing Coach K" (Chapter 3, p. 20).

Apparently he gave a blood oath to say 'student-athletes' no fewer than a hundred times before the end of the weekend" (Chapter 4, p. 41).

Well unless I'm crazy, we just heard the best player in the country being blackmailed to throw the championship game" (Chapter 5, p. 56).

He's right there. Expect there are two of them" (Chapter 6, p. 63).

What's the old saying? Where there's a will there's a way? We have the will. We'll figure out the way" (Chapter 7, p. 76).

Look, if you kids just want a drink, you can go on up to the concierge lounge and get something there" (Chapter 8, p. 94).

Won't I need a new card for my dad" (Chapter 9, p. 102).

You think that's all coincidence" (Chapter 10, p. 119).

Journalism 101, always interview in person whenever you get the chance" (Chapter 11, p. 136).

He said that Chip had always been a borderline student, but as far as he knew he was on probation but okay to play at the end of last year" (Chapter 12, p. 142).

All of which could go down the drain if you don't throw the national championship game" (Chapter 13, p. 166).

Steve Jurgenson was angry, bitter that he didn't get hired. He told people your dad had put a knife in his back to get the job, which, from everything I knew, could not have been further from the truth" (Chapter 14, p. 173).

You know, Reverend Anderson isn't thrilled with you kids being gone all day like this" (Chapter 15, p. 196).

Come on in and all your questions will be answered" (Chapter 16, p. 216).

I'm Steve Jurgenson" (Chapter 17, p. 227).

I just don't want the kids sitting down and telling you their whole story until they've talked to us first" (Chapter 18, p. 244).

Reporters aren't supposed to be part of the story" (Chapter 19, p. 251).



Topics for Discussion

Topic for Discussion 612165

Who is Stevie Thomas? Why do think he is so set against having the other winner of the essay contest being a Duke fan? After Stevie gets to know Susan Carol, how do his feelings change about her and about Duke? Do you think the outcome would have been different if Stevie and Susan Carol had not teamed up to help Chip?

Topic for Discussion 612166

Who is Susan Carol Anderson? Why do think she is such a big Duke fan? Do you think she knows what she's doing when she turns on her innocence and southern charm to get her way? After Susan Carol gets to know Stevie, how do her feelings change about him? Do you think the outcome would have been different if Susan Carol and Stevie had not teamed up to help Chip?

Topic for Discussion 612167

Discuss the relationship between Stevie, Susan Carol and Chip. Are they friends, foes or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Susan Carol feel about Chip? How does Chip feel about Susan Carol? How does Stevie feel about Chip? How does Chip feel about Stevie?

Topic for Discussion 612168

Discuss the relationship between Stevie and his father. Why does his father believe Stevie when Stevie makes up stories to continue his investigation of the blackmailing scheme? How does Stevie's father feel when the blackmailing scheme is uncovered?

Topic for Discussion 612169

Discuss the relationship between Susan Carol and her father. Why does her father believe Susan Carol when she makes up stories to continue her investigation of the blackmailing scheme? How does Susan Carol's father feel when the blackmailing scheme is uncovered?

Topic for Discussion 612170

Discuss the relationship between Chip and Coach Graber. Why doesn't Chip tell his father about the blackmailing scheme? Is there true competition in their relationship?



How does Chip feel about his father? How does Coach Graber feel about Chip? How does Coach Graber feel about the blackmailing plot? What does he do about it? What happens to their relationship?

Topic for Discussion 612171

Who is really behind the blackmailing scheme? What is the true reason behind blackmailing Chip? Why do the blackmailers choose Chip as their target instead of Coach Graber?

Topic for Discussion 612172

Discuss the investigation of the blackmailing scheme. What impact does the scheme have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives? Do Stevie and Susan Carol's actions have anything to do with stopping and revealing the plot?