

The Monkey's Raincoat Study Guide

The Monkey's Raincoat by Robert Crais

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Plot Summary

The Monkey's Raincoat is the story of L.A. detective Elvis Cole, who is hired by Ellen Lang to find her husband and young son. Elvis discovers that Mort Lang has been killed by wealthy ex-bullfighter Dom Duran, because Duran believes Mort stole two kilos of cocaine. Perry, Ellen's son, is still being held hostage. Elvis tracks down the drugs and stages a raid on Duran's mansion to rescue the boy.

As the novel begins, Ellen and her friend Janet Simon come to Elvis Cole's office to hire him to find Ellen's husband Mort and her young son Perry. Mort was supposed to pick Perry up from school and never came home. Ellen knows that Mort has a girlfriend, Kimberly Marsh. Elvis begins investigating and discovers that Kimberly seems to have left town. Mort's business associate, producer Garrett Rice has not seen Mort since a Hollywood party a while ago. The rumor is that Garrett is into cocaine. Ellen's house is broken into, but she does not want to involve the police and get Mort into trouble.

At Ellen's house, Elvis finds a gun registration for Mort, but his gun is missing. He also discovers that Mort, a talent agent who recently moved from a big agency to his own agency, is on the verge of bankruptcy. Before Elvis can investigate further, the police call. Mort has been found shot to death in his car. Elvis goes to tell Ellen what's happen, but she never shows up. She is missing now, too, apparently kidnapped in a grocery store parking lot. Elvis stakes out Kimberly's apartment and follows a man who picks up her mail. He discovers Kimberly and a boyfriend Larry hiding out at a nearby house. Kimberly tells Elvis that the Hollywood party she and Mort went to was at the expensive home of Dom, a potential movie backer and former bullfighter. She slept with Dom, and there was a big fight among the men at the party. Mort warned her of trouble, so she is hiding out.

Dom is Domingo Duran, an ex-bullfighter with mob connections, and soon Dom's thugs kidnap Elvis. Dom says Mort stole two kilos of cocaine from him and demands that Elvis return the drugs in exchange for Ellen and Perry. Instead, Elvis follows one of Dom's men and rescues Ellen, killing two men in the process. Dom still has the boy, though. Meanwhile, Garrett Rice turns up dead, and Elvis investigates whether he's tried to sell any cocaine. He finds out that someone else has: Larry, Kimberly's boyfriend. Elvis goes to the house where Kimberly is staying and forces her to give him the drugs. Then he sets up a meeting to exchange the cocaine for Perry. Instead of Perry, Dom sends a squad of men to kill Elvis and Ellen.

Elvis evades Dom's ambush and breaks into his estate, where he, his partner, and Ellen interrupt a drug deal, foil a police sting operation, rescue Perry, and kill eleven men, including Dom. The police discover that Mort never picked up Perry at school. He saw men kidnapping his son and went after them with his missing gun, getting killed in the process. Ellen, who has grown independent through her experiences, heads forward toward the responsibility of caring for three children as a single parent.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

The Monkey's Raincoat is the story of L.A. detective Elvis Cole, who is hired by Ellen Lang to find her husband and young son. Elvis discovers that Mort Lang has been killed by wealthy ex-bullfighter Dom Duran, because Duran believes Mort stole two kilos of cocaine. Perry, Ellen's son, is still being held hostage. Elvis tracks down the drugs and stages a raid on Duran's mansion to rescue the boy.

In Chapter 1, Janet Simon and Ellen Lang come to private detective Elvis Cole's office to hire him to find out where Ellen's missing husband Mort and son Perry are. The voluptuous Janet pushes Ellen to talk to Elvis, but Ellen is uncertain and reluctant. Elvis tells her about his background as a detective and explains that he will find Mort and Perry for two thousand dollars, not including expenses, but that he will not become involved in a custody battle.

Ellen is ready to leave, but Janet insists that Ellen's husband is a jerk and Ellen needs to get her son back. Elvis makes a sexual comment about her and tells her to butt out. Janet, offended, goes to see Elvis's partner instead, but finds his office completely empty. Elvis tells Ellen that she has to make the decision and Ellen finally gives him photos of Mort and Perry, with descriptions of them written on the back. Mort went to pick up Perry at school last Friday and never came home. Elvis asks why Mort would take Perry but not their daughters Carrie and Cindy and Ellen has no explanation. Janet and Ellen tell Elvis about Mort's girlfriend, Kimberly Marsh, an actress, and Mort's friend, producer Garrett Rice. Ellen has forgotten her checkbook and Elvis says he that will come by the house later to go through her husband's things and get the check.

In Chapter 2, Elvis goes out on the balcony and watches Janet and Ellen drive off in Janet's convertible. He calls his partner, Joe Pike, at a phone number that answers "Gun shop," and tells him they have a client. Then he goes to Kimberly Marsh's address, the Piedmont Arms in Brentwood. He notes two Hispanic men in a 1969 Chevy Nova watching the apartment complex from a side street. Elvis notes four days worth of mail in Kimberly's mailbox and knocks on her door, getting no response. The manager also is not in. Elvis talks to a resident, who does not seem to recognize Mort's picture and then breaks into Kimberly's apartment, where he finds wilting flowers from Mort. He finds the photos and resumes Kimberly uses for acting auditions. A suitcase and toothbrush are missing, so perhaps Kimberly has gone away with Mort. Elvis also finds some drugs and nude photos, including one of Mort, which he tears in half and brings with him. On Elvis's way out, he sees the resident again, walking his dog, and the man tells Elvis that someone else was looking for Kimberly, a big, dark man.

In Chapter 3, Elvis heads to The Burbank Studios, where Garrett Rice has an office, in rush hour traffic. Garrett's office is lowly and hidden away beneath the water tower at the back of the lot. Elvis walks into the small office, to find Garrett on the phone. Garrett



hangs up, and Elvis asks him about Mort. Garrett tries to get Elvis to leave, brushing off his questions, and rushes to close his briefcase. Garrett shows signs of being roughed up, and soon his bodyguard, Cleon Tyner, comes back. Cleon and Elvis know each other, and Cleon refuses to kick out Elvis, who just wants to ask a few questions. Garrett says that the last time he saw Mort was at a party with a potential movie backer and Mort had his girlfriend with him. Mort did not say anything about his wife.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The Monkey's Raincoat is a genre novel and a hard-boiled detective mystery. It begins in a typical style, with a woman in distress coming to a detective's office to ask for help. In many hard-boiled detective stories, the woman becomes a love interest. In this case, Ellen comes with her friend Janet and although Elvis does not like the way that Janet treats Ellen, he is immediately attracted to Janet and purposefully shocks her with his sexual comment. The beginning of the novel sets up Elvis's relationship to women. He will be a protector. He makes sure that Ellen knows that she must make up her own mind about what to do. Elvis will not tell her what course to take, but he will stand by her in whatever he wants to do.

Ellen is a broken woman, unsure of herself because of years of subservience and submission to her husband Mort, whom Janet despises. Mort has a girlfriend on the side, and he leaves Ellen alone as the caretaker of the family. Ellen, however, sticks by Mort, no matter what. Mort is depicted as flawed in many ways. His girlfriend's apartment contains a nude photo of him as well as drug paraphernalia. His friend Garrett Rice is a low-end and slimy producer who does not seem to care about Mort.



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

In Chapter 4, Elvis goes home, heats up some dinner, and gives beer to his cat. After he eats, he calls his office and finds messages from Ellen and Janet saying Mort has broken into the Lang's home and wrecked it. Janet made Ellen call the police, but she does not want to let them in. Elvis arrives and finds the house completely torn up. Nothing seems to be missing. Elvis goes through the whole house, wandering through the children's rooms, the master bedroom with its family photos, the kitchen, and the living areas. He tells the women that Mort did not do this. It was a professional looking for something and they have to talk to the police. Ellen refuses but Janet insists that she should. Elvis goes to check the outside of the house.

In Chapter 5, Elvis gets a flashlight and looks for marks of forced entry, finding none. Whoever broke in may have had Mort's key. A police car arrives and Elvis identifies himself. He and one of the cops go inside, while the other cop checks the outside. The girls have packed overnight cases to stay at Janet's. While the policemen look around, Elvis again recommends that Ellen talk to them. He tells her that Kimberly Marsh has left her apartment and possibly has gone somewhere with Mort. A stranger has likely invaded her house, and the police should know. Ellen still refuses. She does not want to get Mort in trouble. When the police come back, Elvis tells them that it is a domestic dispute and Ellen thinks her husband did it. The police tell her that if she wants to collect insurance, she would have to file a vandalism report. She does not want to. The police leave and Elvis says he will be back the next day to look through Mort's things.

In Chapter 6, Elvis does his daily yoga and martial arts workout and makes breakfast. He calls Patricia Kyle, a casting director and former client. He goes to see her and she tells him about Mort Lang, who used to work as an agent for a large agency before setting out on his own, and Garrett Rice, a last-ditch producer that no one wants to work for. Patricia has heard that Garrett's into cocaine. She has never heard of Kimberly Marsh.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Elvis's relationship to his cat shows his softer side as well as his hard and warrior-like side. Elvis admires the cat because it is independent, a warrior like him. Even in the coyote-ridden Hollywood Hills, the cat survives with its battle scars. It hisses at intruders and strangers. It is not an accepting, domesticated, and cuddling animal. Still, it is affectionate. When it wants love, it comes to Pike or Elvis to be petted and held. It is a hard-drinking, man's cat that feeds on beer and goes its own way.

Elvis continues to show himself as Ellen's protector. He does not force his own decision on her, but stands by her when she does not want to let the police investigate the break-



in at her house. Elvis sees Janet as another version of Mort, controlling and demanding, reinforcing Ellen's low self-esteem. Elvis instead creates a protective bubble around Ellen, in which she is free to act.

Elvis himself practices yoga, to keep himself centered and his mind and body calm. Elvis is a former soldier, a Vietnam vet, who lives in a world of violence. Within his world of violence, calmness of mind is essential for his sanity. Elvis also collects movie memorabilia and Disney knick-knacks. Particularly, in his office, he has Pinocchio figurines. Elvis keeps himself a child, to maintain a connection to the world before the violence of war. He can never let himself grow up because the grownup world is too violent and ugly. Yet, through his job as a private investigator, he thrusts himself into violence and ugliness.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

In Chapter 7, Elvis arrives at Ellen's house around noon. She has been working, cleaning up the house. She has two months' worth of bills that she located but Elvis wants at least six months' records. He asks her for a sandwich and goes to look through Mort's things. He locates client information, a gun registration, and bills and receipts in eight minutes. Ellen is embarrassed that she could not find them, but Elvis says it is stress. They talk about Janet and Elvis says she is abusive to Ellen, like Mort is. He also tells her that his training for being a detective was a stint in Vietnam, where he learned yoga and how to survive and that he wanted to be Peter Pan. Elvis asks her about Mort's gun, but she knows nothing about it. She tells him how she met Mort in high school, in Kansas, and came with him to California. Elvis asks her to go through the phone bills and credit card statements, to note what the phone numbers and expenses are. She objects, feeling like she will mess it up. Then, when he asks for his fee, he realizes that she does not even know how to write a check. Elvis shows her how.

In Chapter 8, Elvis is back at his office and prepares Ellen's check for deposit. Clarence Wu, whose office is upstairs, comes by with samples of Elvis's new business cards. Elvis rejects all the proposed artwork and orders plain cards with just text. He goes through Mort's finances and finds out that he is teetering on bankruptcy, with about two month's worth of savings and almost no income. He talks with Mort's old agency and a few clients. Then, he gets a call from Lou Poitras, a cop friend. Mort has been found shot to death in his car. There is no sign of his son. After Elvis hangs up, he voids Ellen's check.

In Chapter 9, Elvis comes to the police station. He gives Lou the photo of Perry and Lou hands it off to a secretary, Penny, to photocopy. There is no sign of the boy at the crime scene. Elvis tells Lou the whole story, so far. Then, Lou kicks Elvis out while he confers with another officer. When he calls Elvis back in, Lou introduces Lieutenant Baishe, who starts questioning Elvis, insinuating that he is responsible for the murder. When Elvis refuses to answer more questions, Lou takes Baishe aside to talk with him and comes back alone. Elvis offers to tell Ellen what has happened. He calls Janet, tells her what has happened, and asks her to meet him at Ellen's.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Ellen retreats into what she knows to calm herself. She cleans, cooks, and takes care of others. This is what she has done for Mort all her life and it is the world that she knows. She does not just make Elvis a sandwich. She makes him an elaborate sandwich, complete with garnishes on the side. She is concerned about not having enough options for a drink for him. The sandwich that she makes herself, in contrast, is little more than



plain bread, and she does little more than nibble it. Ellen takes care of others, but she does not take care of herself.

Ellen excels in all the areas where she is used to acting such as cooking, cleaning, and housework. However, when it comes to something she is unfamiliar with, like bills, she is completely lost. She does not even want to look at the phone bills or try to understand them. She does not know how to write a check, and she is horribly embarrassed. Elvis becomes her teacher and guide, as well as her protector, leading her through the process of writing her first check. Ellen is completely dependent on Mort and that is part of her love and her need to protect him.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Chapter 10, Elvis arrives at Ellen's house. Ellen is not home yet but Janet is there drinking. While they wait, Elvis criticizes how Janet treats Ellen. Janet says that she used to be Ellen and will stick by her friend. Elvis tells her how he got his name, because his mother saw Elvis Presley perform when he was six years old and legally changed his name to Elvis. He also tells her he was shot in Vietnam. They have at least an hour until Ellen returns with the girls. Janet kisses him and they have sex. The phone rings. Ellen is forty minutes late picking up her daughters at school. Janet goes to get them, while Elvis waits for Ellen.

In Chapter 11, Janet returns with the girls. Ellen has not shown up or called. The older girl, Cindy, is angry and yells that she hates her parents. The younger one, Carrie turns on the TV. Elvis gets her to come into the kitchen and make soup. She asks him about his gun and about a detective show on television. She asks about her father and Elvis avoids answering. Carrie shows him a photo album of Kansas and says she bets that is where he went. One night, she saw him looking through the book and crying. He showed her all the pictures of his childhood home. After the soup, Elvis has some liquor. Ellen has not called. Janet is sure something is wrong.

In Chapter 12, Elvis tells Lou Poitras that Ellen is missing. Janet and Elvis send the girls to a neighbor's house. Elvis makes coffee and puts on his gun. Poitras arrives and interviews Janet, getting a list of places Ellen frequents. Poitras asks Elvis if he has any hint what Mort was into and Elvis speculates that he might have borrowed money and been unable to repay it. The police have been to Kimberly's apartment but were unable to get in touch with Garrett Rice. Poitras asks Janet to think about anything Ellen said that might indicate what was going on with Mort, and to let him know if she thinks of anything. Then he gets a phone call. Ellen's car has been found, abandoned at a grocery store parking lot. Elvis goes to the scene with Poitras. Four bags of groceries are still in the car. Ellen's glasses are under the car. They are broken.

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Throughout the novel, Elvis is portrayed as attractive to women and not aware of it. He does not seem to think about his own attractiveness at all and yet nearly every woman in the novel shows some sexual attraction to him. Janet, who does not like Elvis, sleeps with him, although she distances herself from him after. Ellen also sleeps with Elvis later in the novel.

Elvis also tries to understand Mort over the course of the novel. He sees that Mort has been a controlling husband and sees what that has done to Ellen. He sees the infidelity and drug use. On the other hand, he sees the stress of Mort's financial difficulties. He



sees the photo album from Kansas that Carrie shows him, and Mort's photos with his current family that are hung on the bedroom wall. He cobbles together a mixed picture of Mort, both good and bad. Mort emerges as a man who is both well-intentioned and self-centered.

Ellen is missing, taken from a car parking lot. Elvis's protective feelings toward her will guide him forward. Elvis has already torn up her check because he feels protective and wants to care for her. Now, Elvis is put in the position of a rescuer, who must save her physically as well as emotionally.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary

In Chapter 13, Elvis returns to Ellen's house and tells Janet it looks like Ellen was kidnapped. Janet says she is not sorry that they slept together but brushes him off. She has packed suitcases for the girls and is taking them to her house. Elvis picks up some beer and gets drunk. The next day, he goes to Kimberly Marsh's apartment again, checks the apartment, and then sets up a stakeout. The Hispanic men are still there. Just after three o'clock, a young blond man drives up and gets Kimberly Marsh's mail. The Hispanic men do not seem to notice him. Elvis follows the blonde and when he stops at an auto parts store, Elvis phones Pike to follow the Hispanic men. Elvis continues following the blonde to a house in Universal City. Elvis sneaks up to the house and looks in a window. The house is dirty with an algae-ridden aquarium in the living room. Kimberly Marsh walks into the living room naked and sees Elvis through the window. Soon after, the blonde is out the door, coming after Elvis.

In Chapter 14, Kimberly also comes out of the house, calling the blonde Larry. Elvis tries to talk to her, telling her that Mort is dead, but Larry tells him to leave. Larry approaches him and Elvis hits him with a roll of nickels that he has prepared in his fist, bloodying his nose. Inside, Elvis asks Kimberly about the Hispanics watching her apartment. She says she does not know about them or what is happened to Mort. She tells Elvis that she, Mort, and Garrett went to a high-class party at a potential movie financier's house. His name was Dom and he was Mexican, a wealthy ex-bullfighter. She does not remember the exact location, but there was good coke. She slept with Dom and Mort was jealous. The men got into an argument. The next day, Mort called her and said they were in trouble. She left with Larry.

In Chapter 15, Elvis wakes the next day. Joe Pike is at the house, having broken in while Elvis slept. They eat breakfast and talk about Mort's character. Pike says that Mort had no will and no character. He lost himself. After breakfast, Pike tells Elvis to come for a ride with him.

Chapters 13-15 Analysis

Elvis shows himself to be a thinking detective, more adept and highly skilled than his opponents. He identifies the Mexican men in the car as potential adversaries since they are watching Kimberly's apartment, while he remains unnoticed as he performs the same task. Elvis is also proven superior when he is the only one who notices the blond man who comes to pick up Kimberly Marsh's mail. Kimberly and Larry are portrayed as unlikeable because they are slovenly and because Elvis smells drugs in their house. Larry also uses a racial slur against Hispanics when Elvis mentions the men watching Kimberly's house, marking him as racist. His uncaring attitude toward Kimberly's self-

serving sexuality is another unsympathetic mark against him, as is Kimberly's use of her sexuality for gain.

If Elvis is a superior detective and a soldier-warrior, Pike is even more superior and soldierly. Pike is completely guarded and shut off in his feelings. Elvis retreats into childhood and the idea of never growing up, so that his soldiering is the idealistic soldiering of a young boy playing cops and robbers. Meanwhile, Pike retreats into himself so that his soldiering is something external and cold that takes place around him. He participates in violence but it does not touch his inner being. He leaves it behind him when he moves forward to his next mission.



Chapters 16-18

Chapters 16-18 Summary

In Chapter 16, Pike drives with Elvis into the Los Feliz hills. They go up a narrow street to an ornate gate, bearing crossed bullfighting swords. The gates are at the front of a huge and secluded estate. The Nova that Pike followed from Kimberly's house came here. Pike describes the layout of the estate and gives Elvis the license number of the Nova. The address belongs to Domingo Garcia Duran, the Dom that Kimberly described.

In Chapter 17, Pike drops Elvis off at the office. Elvis thinks over the case. He calls a friend at a newspaper, Eddie Ditko, and asks about Domingo Duran. Domingo is a wealthy retired bullfighter. He seems clean on paper, but he's been seen with gangster Rudy Gambino. Then, Elvis calls Poitras and leaves a message. He calls Janet, but she doesn't want to see him. She hasn't been able to tell the girls about their father's death.

Elvis orders a corned beef sandwich with hot mustard from a nearby deli. He's thinking over the case, when two men come into his office. One is the largest man he's ever seen. Elvis cannot place his ethnicity at first, and the man tells Elvis he is Eskimo. The other is a shorter and fatter Mexican. The Eskimo tells Elvis that Domingo Duran wants to see him and shows Elvis a gun. Elvis tells the other man, Manolo, to get his foot off the desk. Manolo refuses, and Elvis knocks his leg off, kicks him in the groin, knees him in the chest, and likely breaks a rib. Elvis goes with the two men, at gunpoint. He says he did not want them to think he was too easy.

In Chapter 18, the Eskimo takes Elvis and the injured Manolo away in a limousine driven by an Asian driver. They arrive at a ranch to the north, where they are met by Domingo Duran. When Elvis smart-mouths Duran, Duran's men hit him. Duran threatens to have him killed, and says that Mort stole two kilograms of high quality cocaine from him at the party. He believes Elvis has the cocaine now. He talks to Elvis about bullfighting and a conflict of wills over territory. A bull arrives, to mate with a cow, along with a steer to calm the bull during the journey. Duran demands that Elvis return his cocaine, over Elvis's protests that he does not have it. Meanwhile, at the smell of the cow, the bull turns on its friend. Duran tells his men to take Elvis away. If Elvis goes to the police, Duran will deny the meeting, with an alibi ready. As Elvis leaves, the last thing he sees is Domingo finishing off the steer with a knife.

Chapters 16-18 Analysis

Chapter 16 introduces Domingo Duran's estate, wealthy and secluded. This is a secret spot that Elvis and Pike have discovered and its very wealth and seclusion mark it as a place of hidden evil. Although the author portrays Larry as unsympathetically racist by having Larry use racial slurs, non-whites in the book are almost invariably portrayed



negatively. The main villain, Dom, is Mexican, and his bullfighting past makes him foreign, emphasizing Mexican culture as violent and possessive. Duran's mob connection has a clearly Italian name, offering another cultural stereotype. All of Dom's men are non-white, although they are not all Mexican. The author features a homegenous Eskimo and an Asian driver among the cast of villains. Not all the villains are non-white in the novel but all of the sympathetic characters and heroes seem to be white.

Elvis proves himself as a superior warrior again in Chapter 17. He is able to defeat Manolo easily without a weapon. Even though Elvis is outnumbered and outgunned, he is clearly set up as superior both as a fighter and as an investigator.



Chapters 19-21

Chapters 19-21 Summary

In Chapter 19, Elvis finally picks up his sandwich at the deli, where they are not too pleased with him for being late. While he was gone, Lou Poitras called him back. Elvis eats his sandwich and drinks beer while he thinks about what he should do. He does not think Mort had the guts to steal Dom's drugs. Ellen certainly would not know about it. Dom's men kidnapped her and eventually she told them that Elvis had the drugs so that Elvis would come rescue her. Elvis calls Poitras and asks about Dom, denying that it has anything to do with Lang. Then he types up a report of everything that's happened and makes copies, sending one to his home. He thinks over what to do and tries to phone Garrett Rice without result. He calls the DMV and finds out the address where the Chevy Nova is registered and then heads out.

In Chapter 20, Elvis arrives at the Hispanic neighborhood where the Nova is registered. He buys a taco at a corner restaurant while he watches the house. The Nova comes back with one of the Hispanic men in it. Elvis waits until the man leaves again and follows him. The driver picks up another man Elvis does not recognize, stops at a liquor store, and drives to a house, where Elvis sees a third man inside. Sneaking around the house, he sees Ellen Lang tied up inside. Elvis sneaks in to free her and she tells him Perry is not in the house. As they are leaving, a man appears unexpectedly. Elvis shoots him and shoots at two other men as he escapes with Ellen. Elvis drives off with Ellen, stopping at a gas station to steady himself. Ellen guesses that Mort is dead and asks if he stole the cocaine, like the men said he did. Elvis does not know.

In Chapter 21, Elvis drives to his house and gives Ellen a glass of scotch. He drinks two himself. They lock up the house and turn on all the lights. Ellen takes a bath, while Elvis phones Lou Poitras and Joe Pike. Elvis gets ready to cook an omelet, but Ellen comes out of the bathtub and takes over. After they eat, Ellen asks him if Mort would still be alive if she had let the police handle the break-in at her house. Elvis tells her no. Mort was already dead.

Chapters 19-21 Analysis

Throughout the novel, Elvis drinks when he is under stress. Drinking is Elvis's main vice, and he uses drinking to numb his knowledge of violence, pain, and suffering in the world. Elvis's encounter with Dom shows him the cruelty of his opponent, and he drinks in reaction to it. Elvis will continue to drink throughout the novel, particularly when he, himself, is violent. Although he chooses a violent profession and thrusts himself into a world of violence, Elvis hates this world and his own violent tendencies. Still, he wants to be the hero and right injustice and he sees violence as the only way. Elvis rescues Ellen Lang because that is what he does. He rescues. He kills two men because he



must in order to accomplish his goal. He does not consider calling the police when he sees Ellen tied up inside the house. Elvis takes personal responsibility for being a hero.

The novel also deals with drug use, and drug users like Kimberly, Larry, and Garrett Rice are portrayed as weak and worthy of disdain. Elvis seems to condemn Mort for his involvement with drugs, as well. He does not seem to make any connection between his own drinking and the drug use in the novel, which is an extension of the same behavior.



Chapters 22-24

Chapters 22-24 Summary

In Chapter 22, Poitras arrives and Elvis tells him the whole story while finishing the bottle of scotch. He gets another bottle. Ellen tells her story, as well. She was kidnapped at the grocery store parking lot and the men told her Mort stole cocaine from her and demanded it back, threatening to kill and rape her. When they brought in Perry and started hitting him, she told them falsely that Elvis had the cocaine. Poitras questions Elvis some more and tells him that Duran is used by the mafia to launder money. Poitras is concerned that they don't have enough evidence to connect Duran to anything that's happened. The police confirm that two men Elvis shot at are dead. The house was up for sale, and the men must have broken in to the empty residence. Elvis puts Ellen to bed and comes downstairs. Pike has arrived, and he and Poitras clearly dislike each other. Pike goes outside to guard the house.

In Chapter 23, Elvis takes some aspirin and turns off all the extra lights in the house. He lays down on the couch with a sleeping bag and falls asleep petting his cat. Elvis dreams about Domingo Duran as a bullfighter and the Eskimo as a bull who charges Elvis in the dream. When Elvis awakes, Ellen is there. She apologizes for telling her captors that Elvis had the cocaine, but Elvis says she doesn't have to apologize. Ellen is worried about money and about surviving without Mort, and Elvis reassures her. She talks about her relationship with Mort, and Elvis brings her upstairs and makes love with her.

Chapter 24 begins the next morning. Ellen is doing laundry. She has called Janet and told her to tell the girls she is in San Francisco for a few days. Elvis introduces Ellen to Pike, who has a collection of weapons to guard the house with. Elvis picks up clothes and a toothbrush for Ellen at her house and then goes to the police station. O'Bannon, a thin, blond man from the California Attorney General's office, attached to Special Operations, is waiting with Poitras. He is taking over the case, and to Elvis, he seems to be brushing off the kidnapping, saying he may need to talk to Ellen "later." Elvis is furious and O'Bannon says that if Elvis interferes, he'll lose his private investigator's license. Elvis is furious and thinks Duran has bought off the police. As Elvis is leaving, he asks Poitras about the gun licensed to Mort. It has not been found.

Chapters 22-24 Analysis

Elvis's violence is mitigated by the story that Ellen tells. Her captors threaten to kill and rape her, and they hurt her son in front of her to try to make her talk. They have no compunctions about violence and are willing to kill. Because of this, the reader does not have to feel bad about Elvis killing the men. The police will merely wink at Elvis breaking into a house without warning the police that a violent crime is occurring there and shooting two men in the process of taking someone out of that house. The excuse for



Elvis's violent behavior is that he is the good guy, and the men in the house are the bad guys. The behavior itself, perhaps more appropriate to wartime than to the role of a private investigator, is not judged. Only the results of the behavior are judged. Elvis doesn't make mistakes, because he is the fictional hero, so there is no danger of him accidentally harming an innocent person with his uncensored violence.

While Elvis takes on the role of a hero who single-handedly can fell an impossibly powerful enemy, the police are portrayed as ineffectual. O'Bannon takes over the case, and he freezes out the other police officers. The police can't make a move because they are constrained by the bureaucracy. This relates to Pike's story. As an officer, he was exceptional but not successful. He got things done himself, instead of bowing to ineffective authority. In the novel, the individual hero is hailed as more powerful than any group can be. He is a single soldier who is more powerful than an army.



Chapters 25-27

Chapters 25-27 Summary

In Chapter 25, Elvis goes to Garrett Rice's office, and finding it empty, breaks in. He finds some unsavory items, including a child pornography magazine that he shreds and burns. He finds no cocaine. Elvis tries to call Rice and gets no answer. Then he calls Cleon and flirts with his sister. He discovers that Cleon hasn't been home for a few days. Elvis drives to Rice's home, where there's a note on the door saying a police officer is trying to get in touch with him. The house seems deserted. As Elvis thinks things through, a neighbor watches from across the street. Elvis starts his car and drives away.

In Chapter 26, Elvis goes to a gelato shop and phones Patricia Kyle for information about Garrett Rice. While he waits for her to call back, he eats gelato and watches the punk girl wearing black and yellow makeup behind the counter. She says he looks like Andy Summers, the guitarist for The Police. Pat calls back, confirming that Garrett was into cocaine. Elvis asks her to find out who Garrett might go to with two kilos of cocaine, and while he is waiting again, he tells the counter girl what is happening. She does not believe him. Patricia calls back and gives Elvis the name Barry Fein and Elvis calls the police station and gets Fein's address. Meanwhile, two men have come into the shop and one of them is giving the girl a hard time. Elvis intimidates him into making his gelato selection and leaves, giving the girl his card on the way out, in case she ever needs help.

In Chapter 27, Elvis goes to Fein's address, a wealthy apartment building. He parks on a side street and slips into the secure parking garage on foot. Two cars are in Fein's parking spaces, indicating that Fein is home. The elevator is secure and so Elvis slips out again. He buys some materials and makes up a messenger service-type package, which he beats up to look damaged. He goes back to the apartment complex and pretends to be a messenger, insisting that he hand-deliver the package to Fein, especially since he is already in trouble for damaging it. Elvis says the package is from Garrett Rice and he finally gets up to the apartment, although the security guard notices and takes away his gun.

Elvis shows Garrett Rice his investigator's license and tries to ask him questions. Rice's two bodyguards try to kick Elvis out, and Elvis fights back, throwing brandy on one and setting him on fire. Elvis finally gets Fein to tell him Garrett Rice has not tried to sell him any cocaine. Elvis takes Fein's key card to get into the apartment building the next day and tells Fein that he better ask around and find out who Garrett was trying to sell the cocaine to.



Chapters 25-27 Analysis

The punk girl at the gelato shop is an example of Elvis's view of women and how he interacts with them. He has just burned a child pornography magazine in disgust but he lusts after a sixteen-year-old girl, thinking how displeased her parents would be at him picturing her naked. His lust is "clean" lust however because Elvis would never hurt a woman or girl. He desires women, but in a passive way that lets them come to him. Elvis does not act as a predator. Instead, he acts as a protector. The girl at the counter is not being hassled sexually or threateningly. She is more being annoyed by a man who criticizes the shop and wants to eat sample after sample without deciding. He is a jerk, perhaps, but not a villain. Yet, Elvis threatens him, moving into his face, and physically intimidating him. The girl admires Elvis as her savior. Where does Elvis draw the line between when to use violence and when not to? Will he lash out against a man for being annoying and physically injure him, if he does not give in?

Elvis continues to use his combination of skilled violence and intellect to get information from Fein. He gains illicit access to Fein's home and burns his bodyguard to get the information that he wants. To Elvis, his job is serious business because of the goals he is trying to accomplish. Anyone who opposes him is an enemy and violence against the enemy is justified. Elvis is a soldier and this is war.



Chapters 28-30

Chapters 28-30 Summary

In Chapter 28, Elvis drives to his office. He sits and waits. Three hours later the Eskimo calls and reprimands Elvis, saying that they know Ellen is at his house. The Eskimo tells him to go home. Elvis calls and warns Pike that the house is being watched and then he goes home. He gives Ellen the clothes and personal items he picked up at her house. Pike makes dinner. Soon, the telephone rings and a man says to put Ellen on the phone to talk to Perry. When they do, the men begin to hurt Perry and make him scream. After Elvis gets on the phone, a man warns him not to screw up again. Perry is still screaming in the background.

In Chapter 29, Elvis tells Ellen about the case being turned over to Special Operations. Elvis is planning to find the cocaine and then call in the police to get Duran during the trade for Perry. Ellen asks about Pike. He was once a policeman. Now he owns a gun shop and part of the detective agency. He is also a mercenary soldier. He has arrows tattooed on his shoulders, pointing forward, to remind him always to push forward.

In Chapter 30, Pike returns with some Valium and Dalmane. They eat dinner. Elvis attempts to be funny, even putting on Groucho Marx glasses, but Pike and Ellen do not laugh. After a while, Ellen takes two pills and goes to sleep. Pike and Elvis go out on the deck. Elvis speculates that Duran might not really think Elvis has the drugs, but is using Elvis to find them. It starts to rain. Elvis goes inside, and Pike heads out into the night. Later, Pike returns. He found the people watching them and has killed them. He says that they have just disappeared and Duran will never know what happened.

Chapters 28-30 Analysis

Although Elvis is violent, Pike is more violent. Pike hunts to kill and this is one reason he describes himself as a soldier for hire and not a private detective. Pike has no compunction about murdering the men who are watching the house, because to him it is not murder. To Pike, this is an act of war. He is warring for Ellen instead of for a country, but it is still war in which the goal is to kill the enemy. The tattoos on Pike's shoulders show an attitude of never stopping to think and regret and get mired in the past. He is constantly moving forward, so that he does not have to face what he has done, an attitude that he acquired as a Marine in Vietnam.

The phone call from the Eskimo makes the problem urgent. The boy is in danger. Elvis needs to protect women, but even more so, he needs to protect children. Both groups represent the innocent, and Elvis sees himself as a protector of innocence. He cannot stand by while Perry is injured or killed. Elvis needs to, despite all obstacles, be the singular hero who comes in and saves the innocent.



Chapters 31-33

Chapters 31-33 Summary

In Chapter 31, Elvis goes to Garrett Rice's house. Elvis goes around the back of the house this time, and he finds Cleon's body. He's been dead for days. Elvis goes in the house. The alarm is turned off, and Garrett is dead in the kitchen. Someone tortured him for information by burning him on the stove, before shooting him to death. Elvis searches the house, knowing that the drugs won't be there. He reports the deaths to the police anonymously and then covers Cleon's body and goes to Fein's house. Fein found no evidence that Garrett Rice was trying to sell cocaine to anyone. Elvis asks if anyone else has tried to sell a large quantity of cocaine, and he gets a name: Larson Fisk. Fein shows Elvis a picture. It's Kimberly's boyfriend, Larry.

In Chapter 32, Elvis goes back to the house where Kimberly is staying. He breaks in and starts searching the empty house. When he hears Kimberly and Larry arriving, he is ready for them. Elvis ambushes them and kicks Larry in the knee, incapacitating him. He tells Kimberly to give him the drugs. At first, Elvis didn't think Kimberly could have stolen the drugs, because she wouldn't have anywhere to stash it in a sexy dress. Now, he assumes she threw it out the window and called Larry to come pick it up. Kimberly denies it. Elvis threatens to shoot Larry in the leg, and Larry wants to give up the cocaine. Kimberly tries to convince Elvis to go in with her and split the money, and he refuses. As Elvis struggles with Larry, Kimberly pulls the dope out of its hiding place in the algae-ridden aquarium and tries to flee. Elvis catches up to her, slaps her, and takes the drugs.

In Chapter 33, Elvis finds out Duran's phone number and calls his estate. The Eskimo calls him back and says he will pick Elvis up in front of his office. They arrange a trade, the drugs for the boy, the next day at noon in Griffith Park. The Eskimo demands that Elvis bring Ellen, and Elvis reluctantly agrees. Elvis goes home, where Pike is showing Ellen how to shoot a gun. Elvis shows them the drugs and tells them Kimberly and her boyfriend stole them. Elvis and Pike expect Duran's men to come early and set up an ambush. They plan to arrive even earlier and decide what to do based on their surveillance. They do not trust the cops, since they suspect someone is on Duran's payroll.

The phone rings. It is Janet, asking if there's something she can do for Ellen. Ellen is reluctant to talk to her but Elvis hands Ellen the phone. Ellen talks to Janet briefly, though she does not want to. She tells Janet that she does not need anything and that she does not know anything yet. Then she hangs up. Pike starts bringing his guns in from his Jeep.



Chapters 31-33 Analysis

Elvis discovers the true culprit behind the stolen cocaine as the book begins to build toward its climax. Kimberly and Larry are unsympathetic characters, living off of sex, using drugs, and existing in a slovenly world. Kimberly is a contrast to Ellen. Kimberly is sexually free, while Ellen has made monogamy the center of her world. Kimberly has no loyalty to her men, while Ellen is loyal to Mort despite his ill-treatment of her. Kimberly is slovenly, while Ellen is a housekeeper. Kimberly markets herself, while Ellen has no confidence. While Ellen is a victim, Kimberly is a villain. She is willing to betray Mort, let Perry suffer, and even throw Larry under the bus to gain what she wants. Elvis feels no protective urge toward Kimberly. She is not an example of innocence and Elvis only protects the innocent. As soon as he recognizes Kimberly and Larry as the enemy, Elvis has no problem using violence to get what he wants from them.

Chapter 33 is the lead-up to the novel's climax. The cocaine is only a means to an end and Elvis's goal is to retrieve Perry. He is ready to go to war against all of Duran's men in order to get Perry back. Pike, meanwhile, has started to teach Ellen to use a gun. Ellen is the character who goes through a major change in the course of the novel. Elvis is stuck in an eternal childhood as well as an eternal world of violence, where he does not change. Meanwhile, Ellen is a victim, downtrodden under Mort's oppressive household rule. She is a mouse, weak and afraid. Elvis acts as a protector and a guide to save her from, not only kidnapers, but her low self-esteem. Elvis takes Ellen under his wings and transforms her, making her into a version of himself, one who will reflect his violence.



Chapters 34-36

Chapters 34-36 Summary

Chapter 34 begins early the next morning, as it begins to drizzle. Around four in the morning, Elvis and Pike gather food and weapons, and they head to Griffith Park with Ellen.

In Chapter 35, Elvis, Pike, and Ellen arrive at Griffith Park. They pick the lock on the gate to the observatory, locking it behind them, and park on a fire road that gives them a good view of the area. They observe the early morning activity of the park. A ranger comes and unlocks the observatory gate. Cops come and talk to a boy in a VW bus that seems to have been there all night. Bicyclists, cars, runners, and pedestrians pass through. A man in a Cadillac meets a male prostitute in the restroom. Near ten o'clock, Duran's men start arriving. A limo joins them, and Pike goes to investigate. Perry's not there.

Pike and Elvis move stealthily through the woods to ambush two of the men who are isolated from the others. Pike stabs one of the men in the neck, while Elvis holds the other at gunpoint. The man, Sanchez, does not know where the boy is; he was moved this morning. The Eskimo, Luca, might know, but it would be hard to get to him. Duran also would know, and all of Duran's men are at the park. Pike and Elvis take Sanchez back to their car in the increasing rain.

In Chapter 36, Pike, Elvis, Ellen, and their prisoner drive silently away from Griffith Park, with Pike driving and everyone else on the floorboards. Sanchez is bound with duct tape. They drive to Duran's estate. Pike knocks out Sanchez and leaves Ellen in the car with a gun to guard him. He paints her face with lipstick to make the events surreal, so that later, she can forget them and return to normal life. Pike and Elvis head into the estate. By the pool, they see Rudy Gambino, Duran's mafia associate. As they make their way across the estate, they see men lead Perry Lang out of a guesthouse and into the main house.

Pike and Elvis find a locked door into the main house. When someone comes along to let himself in, Elvis knocks him out and they take the key. When they open the door, a man is right there and shoots Pike in the chest. Pike shoots him down before collapsing. Elvis forges ahead, into the house through the kitchen. He shoots one man and subdues another, who tells him Duran is in his office, upstairs. The captive leads Elvis to the office, where Elvis shoots the two men in the outer room. Rudy Gambino opens the inner door to see what's going on, and Elvis pushes him back into the office, following him in.



Chapters 34-36 Analysis

Chapter 34 is extremely short and describes in detail the preparation of supplies and weapons for the upcoming campaign. This chapter transitions into the book's climax and emphasizes that the characters are preparing for war in the coming chapters. Once they are in Griffith Park, Pike and Elvis are soldiers in a war. They ambush, capture, and kill, without compunction.

Pike's use of the lipstick as war paint is his attempt to make this period of violence, of war, forgettable for Ellen. Pike and Elvis are stuck in a war. They never came back from Vietnam; they just keep fighting. Pike has not followed his arrow tattoos forward, into peacetime and civilian life. Ellen, on the other hand, must move forward, out of this time of violence, and transition back into the normal life of a mother. She needs to care for her children.

When Elvis and Pike cross the perimeter of Duran's estate, they are moving into enemy territory. The enemy ground is organized in layers. The outer wall leads them into the first layer, the grounds. Traveling into the main house takes the characters deeper into the lair. The upstairs office is another level, and the inner office, with its soundproofed door, is the final level, the deepest part of Duran's lair, where his machismo decorates the walls in the form of his bullfighting memorabilia.



Chapters 37-39

Chapters 37-39 Summary

Chapter 37 begins in Domingo Garcia Duran's office, which is decorated with his bullfighting memorabilia. Duran and Gambino have been meeting over a briefcase full of cash, a drug deal that Elvis is interrupting. Elvis demands that Duran give him Perry. Elvis is ready to shoot Duran, but the Eskimo comes up behind him. Duran says he will kill Elvis, the boy, and Ellen, and that he doesn't care about the drugs. Just then, Ellen appears in the door with a gun. When the Eskimo drops his guard, Elvis attacks him. While Elvis and the Eskimo are fighting, Duran moves toward Ellen. She shoots him, but he keeps coming. After six bullets, Duran finally falls, and Elvis fells the Eskimo at about the same time. As Elvis is rushing to recover his weapon, anticipating more fighting, the police arrive, led by O'Bannon.

As Chapter 38 begins, Elvis is in the Hollywood Presbyterian Emergency Room, having his arm set in a cast. Poitras and O'Bannon come in. They tell Elvis that Perry was found in the house, in a closet on the first floor. Doctors have treated his hand, where Duran's men had stabbed him with an ice pick, and he is in the cafeteria with his mother. Eleven men are dead, and Elvis denies that Ellen was responsible for any of the bloodshed. O'Bannon had been setting up a sting operation for four months, anticipating the drug deal, and Elvis has ruined it. Elvis accuses O'Bannon of valuing his bust over Perry's life. After O'Bannon leaves, Poitras tells Elvis that they've discovered that Perry was kidnapped before Mort got to pick him up. A paraffin test on Mort shows that he fired a weapon. Poitras thinks that Elvis at least, and perhaps Pike, won't be charged with any crime. He asks Elvis to come in the next day and make a statement.

In Chapter 39, Elvis goes to the cafeteria, where Ellen and Perry are. He takes them to his house to pick up Ellen's things. Elvis calls the hospital to check on Pike, who is out of surgery and stable. Perry asks Ellen about his father, and Ellen takes him into the living room to tell him that he's father is dead. After Perry has cried himself to sleep, Elvis takes him and Ellen home. Elvis sees that Ellen has grown. She is ready to move forward and take responsibility. As she is about to leave, he tells her that Mort was not kidnapped. He saw his son being kidnapped, as leverage to get the drugs back from Mort, and went after the kidnappers with his gun. That's when he got killed. Elvis knows this because of the paraffin test on Mort, that shows Mort fired his gun, which is missing. Ellen kisses him, thanks him, and heads into the house.

Chapters 37-39 Analysis

In Chapter 37, Elvis has entered the heart of the beast and is at the center of the mystery, face to face with the villain he is combating. Elvis, however, does not fell the main villain. He locks in combat with the Eskimo, while Ellen arrives from outside the house. Ellen has taken little active role in the story up until now, acting the part of the



suppressed, weak, and subservient woman. She is spurred on by her maternal instincts as well as by the protective guardianship and tutelage of Elvis. Ellen is given the satisfaction of felling the man who killed her husband and kidnapped her son, gunning him down with six bullets.

Although Elvis acts as a warrior in peacetime, breaks into a wealthy estate without permission or authority and killing eleven men, he is again not likely to face prosecution by the District Attorney. His violent behavior is condoned.

Ellen completes her transformation at the end of the book. Unlike Elvis, who remains a child like his beloved Peter Pan, Ellen must transform into adulthood, like Wendy. She has the feminine responsibility of caring for children, something that will persist for years unlike Elvis's temporary adoption of troubled female clients that allows him to return to his childlike existence after he saves them. The end of the book also brings a final conclusion about Mort's character. For all that Mort did wrong in his lifetime, he died trying to save his son from kidnappers.



Characters

Elvis Cole

Elvis Cole is a detective. He served in the military during Vietnam, and he never truly left his wartime persona behind him. Elvis is nostalgic about childhood and the innocence that he left behind, and he is stuck in a world of violence that he now cannot escape. He makes it part of his life by working as a private investigator. Elvis is a self-styled Peter Pan who wants to never grow up, while at the same time thrusting himself into a horrifically violent adult world that he doesn't really want to see. To cope with violence, he drinks. Elvis cannot leave this violent world behind him because he sees violence as the only way to help the innocent who are suffering in the world.

Elvis is very protective of the innocent. He does not simply hire himself out to Ellen Lang. He becomes her white knight warrior who will protect her and save her from both violent criminals and her own low self-esteem. Elvis tears up Ellen's check because he wants to help her. He teaches her how to write a check. He stands behind her and lets her make decisions on how he handles the case. He is always kind to her, as he is kind to all innocent people.

Elvis is also very violent. He kills two men when he rescues Ellen Lang from her kidnappers. He, Pike, and Ellen together kill eleven men at the end of the novel. Elvis's job is more like a war to him. He goes into Duran's estate as a soldier on a battlefield, shooting down the enemy whenever it is necessary.

Ellen Lang

Ellen Lang hires Elvis Cole to investigate the disappearance of her husband Mort and her son Perry and to find them. Ellen is completely dependent and subservient when she comes to see Elvis. She has depended on her husband her whole life. They were childhood sweethearts in Kansas and she followed him to Hollywood when he wanted to work in the film industry. Although Ellen knew that Mort was having an affair, she stayed with him. She busies herself cooking and cleaning throughout the beginning of the book. She does not want her husband to get into trouble even after her home is ransacked.

When Ellen's husband is killed, she is put into a position where she will have to take the responsibility that her husband has denied her. She needs to become independent, for her own sake and the sake of her children. Ellen is lost and does not know what to do, but she finds strength because she needs to care for her kids.

At the end of the book, Ellen takes on some of Elvis Cole's personality. She becomes a gun-wielding avenger, who breaks into Duran's estate after Elvis and shoots Duran down in his office, firing six shots into him. Ellen reaches independence by lashing out at those who are harming her. Violence becomes a means to self-sufficiency. Ellen is a



stronger person at the end of the novel as if she needed Elvis Cole to pull her out of her subservience and make her into a complete person.

Joe Pike

Joe Pike is Elvis Cole's partner in his detective agency. Pike is an ex-Marine who served in Vietnam. He owns a gun shop and also works as a mercenary in third-world countries. Pike is interested in death and in guns. He is very reserved and seldom speaks. He has tattoos of arrows on his shoulders to remind himself to always move forward and he has no compunction against killing those who he perceives as enemies. Pike likes Ellen and teaches her to shoot. He also decorates Ellen's face with "war paint" of lipstick so that the battle at Duran's house will seem surreal and be easier to forget.

Domingo Garcia Duran

Domingo Garcia Duran is an ex-bullfighter from Mexico. He is extremely wealthy and he owns an estate in the Los Feliz hills as well as a ranch farther north. Duran has ties to the mafia and he is used to launder money. He is usually "clean," which means that he is not directly involved in drug deals. However, Duran has two kilos of cocaine lying around his house, which Kimberly Marsh steals with the help of her boyfriend Larry. Duran also is participating in a secret drug deal with a mafia associate. Duran has Ellen and her son Perry kidnapped to try to find the cocaine that was stolen from him. He also threatens Elvis and has Mort and Garrett Rice killed. In the end of the novel, Ellen shoots Duran to death, firing six bullets into him before he falls.

Janet Simon

Janet Simon is Ellen Lang's friend. Elvis finds her extremely sexually attractive, and he sleeps with her. However, after they sleep together, Janet distances herself from Elvis. Elvis considers Janet to be a bad influence in Ellen's life and another abusive person, like Mort, who pushes her around and does not let her make her own decisions.

Mort Lang

Mort Lang is Ellen Lang's husband. He goes missing along with his son Perry, and Ellen thinks that he may have run off with his girlfriend, Kimberly. Elvis finds out that, although Mort was involved with Kimberly and going to drug-riddled Hollywood parties, Mort also tried to rescue his son Perry who was kidnapped. Mort died trying to rescue his son.



Lou Poitras

Lou Poitras is a detective who works for the Los Angeles Police Department. He is a good friend of Elvis and helps Elvis out. Poitras hates Joe Pike and cannot stand being in the same room with him.

Luca, the Eskimo

Luca, who Elvis calls The Eskimo, is a large Eskimo man who works for Duran. Luca is Duran's right-hand man, one of the head thugs in his operation. He is extremely large, calm, and deadly. However, Elvis defeats him in a fight at the end of the book.

Perry Lang

Perry Lang is Mort and Ellen Lang's young son. Perry and his father both go missing, and it turns out that Perry has been kidnapped by Domingo Duran as leverage to try to get his stolen cocaine back. Elvis rescues Perry at the end of the novel.

Carrie Lang

Carry Lang is Mort and Ellen Lang's middle child. She copes with stress quietly, watching television. She thinks that her father may have run off back to Kansas, his childhood home.

Cindy Lang

Cindy Lang is Mort and Ellen Lang's oldest daughter, who is angry at her parents for seeming to desert her.

Kimberly Marsh

Kimberly Marsh is an actress and Mort Lang's girlfriend. Mort has feelings for her, but Kimberly seems to be only using Mort. Kimberly sleeps with Domingo Duran at his party, looking at it as a way to get a good part in a film. She also has another boyfriend, Larry, who she calls to help her steal two kilos of cocaine from Domingo. Kimberly doesn't seem to care whether Mort or his son Perry get hurt or killed, as long as she profits from the stolen cocaine.

Garrett Rice

Garrett Rice is a sleazy Hollywood producer and a friend of Mort Lang. Garrett goes to Domingo Duran's party with Mort and Kimberly, and he is one of the suspects who might



have stolen the missing cocaine. Garrett is tortured and killed by Domingo Duran's men, who are trying to find the cocaine.

Cleon Tyner

Cleon Tyner is a private investigator and friend of Elvis Cole who takes a job as a bodyguard for Garrett Rice. He is killed by Domingo Duran's men.

Patricia Kyle

Patricia Kyle is a former client of Elvis, who Elvis saved from an abusive relationship. Patricia is now a casting director and helps Elvis by giving him information about people in the movie business.

O'Bannon

O'Bannon is in the California Attorney General's office, attached to Special Operations. He orders Poitras off the Duran case and orders Elvis to leave the case alone. O'Bannon is preparing a raid to catch Duran in a drug deal, and Elvis accuses O'Bannon of being willing to sacrifice Perry's life for his bust.

Larson (Larry) Fisk

Larry Fisk is Kimberly Clark's blond boyfriend. He is large and muscular, and he thinks he can beat up Elvis. Elvis, however, is easily able to incapacitate him.

Barry Fein

Barry Fein is a Hollywood drug dealer. Elvis uses Barry to find out who has been trying to sell a large quantity of cocaine.



Objects/Places

Elvis Cole's Office

Elvis Cole conducts business from an office which he has decorated with Disney memorabilia. He has pastel directors' chairs for clients to sit in and his balcony has a beautiful Los Angeles view.

Elvis Cole's Home

Elvis lives in a house in the Hollywood Hills with a balcony that has a lovely view of the hills. He has a cat who comes and goes as he pleases.

Jiminy Cricket Figurines

Elvis has Jiminy Cricket figurines on his desk at his office, a symbol of his love of childhood.

Pike's Office

Pike's office at the detective agency is completely empty without any furniture or items. Pike never comes to the office.

Pinocchio Clock

Elvis has a Pinocchio clock in his office, a symbol of his love of childhood.

Duran's Estate

Duran has a vast and expensive estate in the Los Feliz hills.

Griffith Park

Elvis arranges to exchange Dom's cocaine for Perry at Griffith Park. He, Pike, and Ellen arrive early to see if Dom sets up an ambush, which he does.



Mort's Gun

Elvis finds a gun registration among Mort's papers, but he finds no gun. The gun never turns up, but the police find gunpowder residue on Mort's hands. They believe he fired the gun at Perry's kidnappers before he was killed.

The Aquarium

In the house in Universal City where Kimberly Clark and her boyfriend Larry are hiding out, there is an aquarium with dead fish that is overgrown with algae. Kimberly and Larry have hidden the missing cocaine in the aquarium.

The 1969 Chevy Nova

Elvis notices a 1969 Chevy Nova with two Hispanic men watching Kimberly Marsh's apartment. Pike follows the Nova to Dom's estate. Later, Elvis tracks down the registration on the Nova and follows it to where Ellen is being held by her kidnappers.

Photos of Perry and Mort

When Ellen comes to hire Elvis to find Mort and Perry, she brings photos of both her husband and son. On the back of each photo, she has neatly written a description.

Ellen's Checkbook

Ellen says she has forgotten to bring her checkbook when she goes to hire Elvis. Later, when he comes to her house and asks about payment, she seems reluctant. Elvis realizes that she does not know how to write a check. He has her get her checkbook and teaches her how to fill out a check.

Pike's Tattoos

Pike has tattoos of arrows on his shoulders to remind him to always move forward.



Themes

Women and Innocence

In the novel, Elvis Cole is a protector of innocence and a defender of women and children. The more Elvis sees that Ellen is a victim who has become subservient, with low self-esteem, the more he wants to help her and transform her. Instead of Ellen getting power from within herself, she seems to be saved, like a damsel in distress, not just from kidnapping but from her own self-image. This tendency in Elvis goes beyond Ellen and her innocent son Perry. His description of his job for former client Patricia follows similar lines. Elvis stepped in and saved her from a possessive, violent boyfriend, and as a result, Patricia has been lifted up to a new self-image, a new job, and a new life. Elvis steps in as the defender and bestows independence on women, including the counter girl at the gelato shop, who cannot deal with an annoying customer without Elvis's help.

Another aspect of Elvis's desire to defend innocence is his desire to live in an innocent past. He sees the perfect age and the age he wants to stay at as fourteen. Elvis is a self-styled Peter Pan, a boy who never wants to grow up. He wants to maintain his innocence, which he had before he left for Vietnam. This is why others' innocence is so important to him. Elvis holds on to his Disney memorabilia and his movie monster masks. He makes silly jokes and wears Groucho Marx glasses. He is holding on to childhood and innocence in the face of a world that destroys innocence in violence.

Violence and War

Elvis Cole and his partner Joe Pike are soldiers and warriors. They have both served in the Vietnam war and despite the horrors that they experienced there, they have embraced a life of violence. They approach their activities as private investigators as soldiers instead of as private citizens. Joe Pike describes himself to the police as a mercenary, and he acts as a mercenary much more than as a private investigator.

When Cole invades the house where Ellen is being held hostage, he is invading it as a soldier. He is willing to shoot the enemy, because it is a kill or be killed situation and because in war, killing is needed. Cole believes in the cause he is fighting for, innocence, and he also believes that violence is needed to solve problems. He cannot defeat Duran and save an innocent woman and boy without violence. At the same time, he abhors violence in himself, which drives Cole to drink.

Cole becomes more and more violent as the novel progresses. When he and Pike invade Domingo Duran's mansion, it is a full-scale attack. They enter as soldiers, their weapons ready, and they fight an organization of enemy soldiers. There are two clearly defined sides, and violence is taken for granted. Cole draws Ellen into this world as well,



and when she appears with her weapon to shoot down Duran, she is also a soldier, fighting for the safety of her son against an enemy she is not afraid to kill.

Good and Evil

Good and evil are clearly delineated in the novel. Drugs, drug users, and drug peddlers are evil. Kimberly, despite exterior beauty, is an evil presence. She is only concerned with her own best interest, willing to sell herself for gain, and willing to steal and not worry about the consequences for others. The world of drugs is a world of evil, and Elvis has no compunction against using violence against those involved in drugs.

Organized crime is also an element of evil, and evil pervades both Hollywood and the financially wealthy. Hispanics and other ethnic groups, including the Italian mafia, are suspect, easily organized into gangs of thugs. These criminal elements are purely evil, willing to do anything to get what they want. The thugs that Elvis comes into contact with will mow down anyone who gets in their way, sometimes making them miss valuable information. Though Elvis and Pike are just as violent, they are the good guys, and so their violence is forgiven. They are smarter than the thugs they fight and more valiant. They kill, but they kill the forces of evil for a good end.

The innocents who are uninvolved in the worlds of crime, money, and drugs are the people that Elvis most wants to protect, people like Ellen and her son Perry. They are purely good. The other force of good in the novel is the police. The police are on the side of good, but they need to follow rules and be a part of civilization. They are not warriors. In Elvis's eyes, this holds the police back. It uncovers another evil, which is bureaucracy. O'Bannon represents the evil of bureaucracy, which interferes with a valiant and direct, if violent, fight against greater evils.



Style

Point of View

The Monkey's Raincoat is told from the first-person perspective from the point of view of Elvis Cole. The story of the novel centers around Ellen Lang and her missing husband Mort, who is suspected of stealing two kilos of cocaine. Elvis is an outsider and a professional detective. He narrates the story from the outside. Because Elvis begins the novel not knowing any of the characters or situations, the reader learns about the unfolding events and the characters involved through Elvis's eyes, as he is introduced to them. As the mystery unravels, the reader learns along with Elvis why Mort has gone missing, who has Perry, and who has the stolen cocaine. In the end, the reader is right with Elvis as he makes his way into Duran's office to recover Perry and revenge Mort.

Since the perspective of the story is limited, the reader does not see certain events first-hand. The reader does not see Ellen's kidnapping or her experiences while she is being held hostage. The reader does not see Perry at all, except for a few brief glimpses, although recovering Perry is Elvis's main job through most of the novel. Ellen's experiences are told second-hand, when she relates what happened to her. This distances the reader from some traumatic events.

Elvis is both powerful and violent. The reader is able to also feel powerful and able to fight back against the villains of the story. Like Ellen, the reader takes on some of Elvis's warlike attitude toward the world, following along with Elvis as he arms himself and shoots his way in to Duran's villa to rescue Perry.

Setting

The setting of The Monkey's Raincoat is Los Angeles in the 1980s, the time during which the book was written. Technology that has become commonplace since that time, such as cell phones, would make a great difference in Elvis's investigations. The investigator finds himself using cell phones from around the city to contact his partner or informants. The time period is also important because cocaine became a major recreational drug in the 1980s, and cocaine is central to the story's plot. An important element in Elvis's past, which also fits into the novel's timeline, is his service in the Vietnam War. The trauma of Vietnam is still resonating strongly with Elvis in the 1980s, as he copes with living in a civilian world.

Los Angeles is the center of the film industry and a lot of the novel delves into the world of second-rate film. Garrett is a second-rate film producer, trying to scramble together money to make a movie. He is the person you would go to as a last ditch, if you had no other options. The film business also involves big money, which involves Domingo Duran, someone with money to spend.



The presence of Domingo Duran is also related to the novel's setting. Los Angeles, in the southern part of California, is close to Mexico. It is influenced by Mexican culture, and it has a significant Mexican population. Domingo Duran, as a retired Mexican bullfighter, fits into the Hispanic culture of Los Angeles, although he is far more wealthy than most.

Language and Meaning

Elvis Cole narrates in the tone of a classic hard-boiled detective, with a sense of wry humor and a tendency to metaphor. Elvis describes Lou Poitras as having a "face like a frying pan." He compares falling rain to bulls' hooves. His sleek metaphors paint a picture of the world around him and how Elvis sees it, while also evoking the film noir and Mickey Spillane style hard-boiled detectives of the past. The novel is full of short sentences and pointed sentence fragments, as it follows Elvis's train of thought.

Elvis makes ironic jokes and comments about himself, the case, the people he meets, and the world in general. At the beginning of the novel, Elvis startles Ellen's loud and controlling friend into silence by making an overtly sexual comment about her. Elvis uses language to control situations and part of that is using jokes and shock tactics on those around him. When he first meets Duran, he is full of wise cracks that get him smacked around in retaliation. His wit and words is how he survives and deals with the world.

The novel is filled with descriptive passages about the beauty of Los Angeles, as the characters travel through different areas, including Hollywood and the Los Feliz hills. Elvis enjoys driving his convertible through the cinema-rich historical neighborhoods and making connections between his environs and the old movies that he loves.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-nine short chapters, averaging just over five pages each. The short chapters divide the fast-paced novel up into quick bites, so that it's always easy to turn the page and consume just one more short bit before putting the novel down. The short chapters contribute to the quick pace of the novel as well as encouraging the reader to keep turning pages. The story begins with an instigating event, Ellen Lang showing up at Elvis's office to hire him. Ellen draws the outsider, Elvis, into the story, as well as drawing the reader (also an outsider) in.

Elvis begins to investigate, but the first major plot point is the discovery of Mort's body. Mort has been shot to death and suddenly a case of what might be a runaway father turns into a case of murder. Soon on the heels of that event, Ellen is kidnapped, and Elvis has a very definite and immediate goal, which is to save her. The story is pushed forward when Ellen gives her kidnappers Elvis's name, and he is brought to Domingo Duran.



As the story goes on and Elvis gets drawn deeper into the plot, realizing that he is up against a drug-dealing, violent, wealthy, and mob-connected ex-bullfighter, Elvis gets more violent. He takes out one opponent after the other, clawing his way to the center of the organization. The more violent the story becomes, the more Pike becomes involved. Pike seems to thrive on violence and not care about any other type of investigation. Elvis's violence culminates in the raid on Duran's mansion at the end of the novel. This is the climax of the book, where Elvis is pitted against Duran and his Eskimo gunman in a battle of life and death.



Quotes

"The longer I looked at Garrett Rice, the more I wanted to cover my face with a handkerchief and fog the air with Lysol" (Chapter 3, pg. 16.)

"I woke just before nine the next morning and caught the tail end of Sesame Street. Today's episode was brought to you by the letter D. For Depressed Detective" (Chapter 6, pg. 30.)

"Lou Poitras has a face like a frying pan and a back as wide as a Coupe de Ville. His arms are so swollen from weights he pumps they look like fourteen pound hams squeezed into his sleeves" (Chapter 9, pg. 47.)

"We sat down and ate, Carrie with the book beside her on the table. Her last meal believing her daddy was alive, could walk in the door and make it better" (Chapter 11, pg. 63.)

"He rarely takes the glasses off. He never smiles. He never laughs. I've known Joe Pike since 1973 and he has never violated those statements." —Chapter 15, page 80.)

"I read somewhere that in the Deep Ice Tribes young kids still have to kill polar bears to pass into manhood. By themselves. With sticks." (Chapter 17, pg. 90.)

"I still didn't have a plan. Maybe the guys in the Nova, maybe they had a plan. Maybe I could borrow it" (Chapter 19, pg. 100.)

"Poitras' face was empty the way a traffic cop's face is empty when he's listening to you try to talk your way out of a ticket" (Chapter 22, pg. 115.)

"I took small bites of the gelato and thought about the girl behind the counter to keep from thinking about Perry Lang and Ellen Lang and Domingo Duran and a guy named O'Bannon" (Chapter 26, pg. 135.)

"Joe's eyes were pinpoints of light in the dark. They did not move. 'He won't know what happened, Elvis. No one will. Ever. They're gone" (Chapter 30, pg. 157.)

"By the time we made the Jeep, the drizzle had evolved back into rain—heavy, gravid drops that beat at you, and thudded into your head with a sound I imagined to be like that of the hooves of bulls pounding damp earth, earth damp with blood" (Chapter 35, pg. 181.)

"I felt very tired, the sort of deep, bled-to-the-bone tired you feel when you've tried very hard to keep something dear to you only to lose it" (Chapter 38, pg. 198.)



Topics for Discussion

How does the book address issues of gender? What is Elvis's attitude toward women? Is Ellen a strong woman character?

How does the book address issues of race?

What kind of person does Mort turn out to be? Is he sympathetic?

How does Elvis escape without penalty for his violent behavior?

How is Elvis's attitude toward the world similar to a soldier's attitude in war?

What kind of a person is Pike? Is he sympathetic? Why does Elvis have Pike as a partner?

Why does Elvis collect Disney and movie memorabilia? What does his decorating say about his character?

Is Dom Duran an interesting villain? What does his bullfighting past say about his character? Is there anything sympathetic about Duran?