

Point of Impact Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The story opens with Bob Lee Swagger sitting uncomfortably in the sleet at exactly the point where he will encounter a trophy buck called "Tim" by the locals. He waits for hours, refuses to allow his teeth to chatter, and makes the perfect shot when the monster buck appears. The buck falls and Bob watches the downed animal, noting the fear and betrayal in its eyes, then cuts the antlers off and stands back, now certain that the buck won't be taken merely as a trophy.

Bob is a former U.S. Marine sniper and one of the best shots there is. He now refuses to kill anything and is retired, having been shot in the hip by a sniper in Vietnam. That sniper killed Bob's spotter and best friend, Donny Fenn. Bob lives alone with little contact with the outside world. Then comes the day when a man named Colonel Ray Shreck approaches Bob, gives a fake name and government affiliation, and says the sniper who shot Bob, is now planning to assassinate the United States President. In truth, the assassin is a bitter paraplegic named Lon Scott. Bob's role is to act as the scout, find the best possible vantage point for the assassination because Lon, confined to a wheelchair, can't do his own on-the-ground research. Bob does so, thinking he's helping save a life and capture the man who killed Donny.

When Bob sees the assassin, just as he'd predicted, he's unable to intervene and those he thought were trying to prevent the murder of the president do nothing. Instead of the president, a Salvadoran archbishop is shot and the general feeling is that the shooter simply missed the target. Bob himself is shot and immediately realizes that he has been framed. He manages to escape, encounters an FBI agent named Nick Memphis - a former sniper himself. Bob escapes Nick as well and it's Nick who soon doubts Bob's guilt. When Bob saves Nick's life, the two begin a quest to find the guilty and prove Bob's innocence. With proof in hand and the driving forces behind the assassination plot dead and Bob's newfound love safe, Bob refuses to hand over the documentation, knowing the graphic murder of men, women and children will be aired by the media. His honor refuses to let that happen and he decides instead to allow the justice system to do its work. His attorney, the elderly, country but competent Sam Vincent, soon demonstrates that the rifle Bob reportedly used in the assassination had been altered by Bob - who sensed a trap - and was incapable of firing. The case is dismissed with a judge's warning to get to the true facts of the case.

The facts are that RamDyne, an American agency used by CIA and FBI to do the "dirty work," had participated in a massacre of hundreds in Salvador as an incentive to guerrilla fighters to join peace talks. The Salvadoran archbishop who was assassinated had pledged to look into allegations related to the incident and the RamDyne officials felt the archbishop simply had to be eliminated.



Chapters 1 through 5

Chapters 1 through 5 Summary

The story opens with Bob Lee Swagger sitting uncomfortably in the sleet at exactly the point where he will encounter a trophy buck called "Tim" by the locals. He waits for hours, refuses to allow his teeth to chatter, and makes the perfect shot when the monster buck appears. The buck falls and Bob watches the downed animal, noting the fear and betrayal in its eyes, then cuts the antlers off and stands back.

Meanwhile, a group, including psychologists, are discussing who will make an acceptable recruit for a mission. Bob, who had been a sniper during Vietnam with more than eighty kills to his credit, comes up as a possibility, but it's pointed out that he now refuses to kill anything. He hunts using a special homemade bullet that simply paralyzes and stuns for five or six minutes. He removes antlers that eliminate the "trophy" so the animal is no longer hunted for this purpose. At that moment, Bob is watching as Tim, minus his antlers, runs away.

Colonel William Bruce arrives at Bob's house and asks him to test a new sniper bullet he plans to sell to police. Bob hesitates, knowing that sooner or later he'll have to rejoin the real world, though he hasn't been off his mountain in five years except for a few necessary trips. He finally agrees, mostly because he wants to try the bullets. He does check out Bruce through a friend and finds that he was a war hero. Bob makes his travel arrangements and isn't nervous about the trip until the final night before leaving. He makes the trip, retrieves his gun and car, and finds the motel with no problems, though he is aware that he has been followed by "a very good surveillance team."

Bob spends the first day trying out various bullets, including his own personal loads and those of the company being promoted by Bruce, Accutech. He is soon able to distinguish between the various loads, though he doesn't reveal that knowledge. He also soon knows that the loads were hand produced, that no mass production can include that level of accuracy, but again doesn't reveal that he is aware of that fact. That evening, he dines alone and wonders about the real reason he's here. He guesses he's going to be asked to "hunt" again and plans to refuse.

The following day, Bob is presented a scenario in which an agent named Nick Memphis took a shot at a man holding several hostages but missed. Bob's interest is piqued because he wants to know what went wrong with the shot and whether he could make it. He soon realizes that there are too many distractions, that "base" continues to talk to Nick and to demand answers, and that Nick would have been unable to concentrate on the scene for all these events. Bob ignores "base" on his own radio and makes the shot, though he admits it's much easier to shoot a watermelon with balloons representing hostages than to shoot a real person. That afternoon, he's taken to yet another range where he's told that it's a DEA scenario. Bob makes the long-range shot but knows as soon as he pulls the trigger that it wasn't really a DEA situation. The scene is a replay of



what happened to Bob and his spotter. When Bob was shot in the hip, his spotter, Donny, was shot and killed rushing to Bob's side.

Meanwhile, Nick Memphis, the FBI agent who botched the shot causing the deaths of several hostages, learns that he's received a call from a man named Eduardo. Nick returns the call, finds it's from a motel room, gets no answer and drives over there instead. He arrives to find the man dead in the room with blood everywhere. Eduardo is on the bathroom floor and Nick sees that the has written a message in blood that reads "ROM DO."

Chapters 1 through 5 Analysis

Bob talks of his "long night," but notes that it's a state of mind in which he relives the events of Vietnam. His spotter, Donny, had been killed right after Bob was wounded. Another of Vietnam's casualties, Bo Stark, had returned from the war physically unharmed but mentally unhinged until the night he killed a man in a bar fight and then himself. Bob visits his grave in the cemetery of a black church - the only church in town that would accept the burial of the white boy. What Bob doesn't yet know is that Bo's body will eventually be his way out of trouble and that one of the guns he fired during his testing of bullets is a collector's item that most believe to be no longer in existence. The gun is the Tenth Black Knight and will later play a pivotal role in the story.

Nick Memphis married Myrna, the woman he accidentally shot in the foiled attempt to shoot the man who was holding her hostage. As Nick is introduced, Myrna has just died and Nick continues to work saying he can't stand to sit around the house.



Chapters 6 through 12

Chapters 6 through 12 Summary

Bob soon discovers that Colonel Bruce isn't really a colonel at all and describes himself as someone willing to get even unpleasant things done. He learns that the man who shot Donny was a Russian named T. Solaratov. Bob is told that the man who made the shot that wounded Bob and killed Donny is planning to assassinate the United State President. Satellite photographs show a simulation in which the shooter is obviously practicing the shot and Bob is asked to calculate the position of the shooter. He agrees to do so because he wants revenge for the death of his best friend and spotter. Bob spends some time going over three possible locations for the assassination. He calculates that there can't be buildings that would create a wind tunnel, that there couldn't be a significant drop because the trajectory would be too difficult to calculate, and that it couldn't be too cold because extreme temperatures also affect the bullet, gun and shooter. He finally comes up with only one possible location. It will be some time before he learns that he has to scope out the locations because the real sniper is wheelchair bound and can't do it for himself. He will also eventually learn that the President isn't the real target, that the sniper will kill a Salvadoran archbishop who wants to open the investigation into the slaughter of men, women, and children.

Nick returns to work soon after Myrna's funeral. He argues that the murder of Eduardo deserves another look because of Eduardo's insistence on having the room by the Coke machine, which Nick has come to believe was done in an effort to disrupt listening devices, but didn't work. He is granted tentative permission to pursue his case. Nick talks to a man named Tommy Montoya who works for various agencies and sometimes private concerns. Tommy says that the ROM DO message left by Eduardo reminds him of the old code names used by the military which included "Romeo Dog." Tommy suggests that the dying man was living in his past. Nick is also assigned to work with Howard Utey, nicknamed Howdy Duty and discovers that he'll be serving as a liaison officer to the Secret Service when the President arrives in town.

Bob visits each of the three cities where it's suspected the sniper might strike - Washington, Baltimore, and New Orleans. He finds fault with all the options, knowing that the sniper will have to be a long distance out to escape Secret Service detection. He returns to Arkansas, spends some time with his dog, then produces a twenty-two-page document outlining his observations, including his opinion of where an attempt would be staged. He includes a seven-point plan to counteract the event but admits that the one intangible thing that can't be planned for is luck.

Nick, to his humiliation, is nothing more than a "gofer" for both Howard Utey and the Secret Service, including the senior member of the Secret Service team Phillip Mueller. Hundreds of potential threats to the President are identified and Secret Service agents begin to check them out. The list is long and Utey volunteers Nick to check out the lowest priority list, which Nick discovers includes Bob Swagger. Nick investigates the



reason Swagger's name is on the list and finds out that he reportedly wrote a letter demanding that he be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The fact that he used exclamation points in his letter prompted his placement on the list. Nick discovers that Bob has no telephone and finally contacts Polk County Sheriff Vernon Tell who says that Bob never gives anyone any trouble, had a drinking problem that is now under control, and would never be concerned with having a medal.

Nick later goes on a stakeout with Secret Service officers that turns out to be a wild goose chase initiated by the local police who resent the presence of the Secret Service. As they prepare to leave the stakeout, one of the agent mentions RamDyne, an agency that might or might not exist but that pays very well for the elite few who are asked to join.

The man Bob knew first as Colonel Bruce returns and tells Bob that his name is really Colonel Raymond Davis. He says that they need Bob to be part of their team to help locate the sniper but that they plan to take the sniper alive, so Bob will not be allowed to shoot him. Bob agrees.

Chapters 6 through 12 Analysis

Bob's attitude when he discovers that he's been "played" to take the shot that killed Donny is furious. A psychologist who has evaluated Bob's ability to perform as part of this team is named Dr. David Dobbler. Dobbler had a profitable practice but seduced several women and was subsequently imprisoned and was on parole when he was invited to join this team. It's important for the reader to realize that the members of this "team" bent on recruiting Bob for his ability as a sniper is shrouded in mystery at this point. Bob notes that they have "agency" written all over them but doesn't really confirm any affiliation. Dobbler noted that they must be affiliated with the government in order to have gotten him out of the orders of his parole but also doesn't confirm it. It will be some time before Bob realizes that he's been set up.

Howard Utey was the "base" at the other end of the radio when Nick missed the target and hits a hostage. But Nick notes that Utey does everything by the book and has lived his life furthering his career. Though the meeting between the two could have been awkward, it isn't.

In the middle of the night after creating the document outlining his observations and recommendations, Bob awakes and is unable to go back to sleep. He rereads the document and is satisfied with it but then turns his thoughts to his employers. He admits that he isn't comfortable with them but that they're all he has. He then spends some time trying to think of a way to protect himself against them if things go wrong, but is unable to think of how to make that happen.

The letter that was reportedly written by Bob demanding that he be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor is accepted by Nick as fact. Nick, who knows Bob by reputation, says that it seems Bob - like every other person - wants the accolades he



believes he's due. Nick notes that simply doing a good job is never sufficient and that people want recognition for performing well. Nick hasn't yet met Bob in person or he would likely have seen red flags on this point. Nick already knows that Bob has visited New Orleans in recent days and that fact is confirmed by the Secret Service though they can't tell him who provided the information. That does seem odd to Nick and he wonders how the information reached Washington so quickly.

It will eventually be revealed that the man now known as Raymond Davis is actually Colonel Raymond Shreck. It's unclear whether Bob now believes the man is who he told Bob, but Bob remains wary of his involvement and seems concerned. He considers again how he might protect himself and comes to a conclusion. He has a gun that is not shooting true and his efforts to find out why have failed. He now reassembles the weapon, a Remington .308, and places it in the gun vault. Though he doesn't reveal his plan, he does note that he would "like to see the look on somebody's face when they pulled the trigger on that one," and that the action allows him to sleep peacefully.



Chapters 13 through 17

Chapters 13 through 17 Summary

Nick is in his car on St. Anne's Street, outside the real range of the President's motorcade. He forces himself to remain alert though he wishes to be part of the action such as the Secret Service patrol checking and rechecking the crowd waiting to see the President. At the same time, Bob is in the attic of a house on St. Anne's Street watching the church tower where he believes a sniper to be waiting for the correct moment to shoot the President. Also in the room are Payne and a New Orleans officer named Timmons. Just as Bob says he sees the sniper, the man named Payne - who has been introduced as the colonel's bodyguard - shoots Bob in the chest at point blank range. Bob falls and hears Timmons report that he's shot the assassin and calling for backup. Bob pulls from all his reserves, stands up and tries to run but is shot again before he manages to crash through the window. Nick hears the shot then the glass breaking. Nick encounters Bob, who takes Nick's gun and car. Timmons tells Nick that he's from the Traffic Division, that he went into the building because there was a report of movement, and that he shot the man. Nick realizes that the man now being called an assassin was Bob Lee Swagger.

Bob drives the car into the Mississippi River where it sinks. He then lashes himself to a log and pushes off into the water, amazed that he's still alive. He floats throughout the night, undetected. While the President was on the scene, he was not shot. Instead, the sniper's shot killed Salvadoran archbishop Jorge Roberto Lopez. The papers mourn the passing "of a great man" and call for tighter gun control. Most seem to accept that Bob was the shooter. News reporters find anyone who knew Bob and is willing to talk about him. His ex-wife says that she doesn't know where he is and doesn't expect him to seek her help. She then says that she doesn't believe that Bob was the sniper because he "never missed nothing he aimed at."

Nick echoes that sentiment but is in the minority. He's also waiting for discipline from the FBI for allowing Bob to take his gun and car. He joins a group of agents watching a newsreel of the shooting and someone suggests that the shot looks "dead on" for the archbishop and asks if he might have been the intended victim rather than the President. Utey warns against supposition that will result in a replay of the rumors surrounding Kennedy's death. Nick realizes that the target wasn't the President, that Bob would have no reason to shoot at the archbishop, and that means Bob is actually innocent. He knows these things but doesn't say them yet, noting that his career is hanging "by a pubic hair."

While the FBI are trying to find Bob, Colonel Shreck and his team are trying to figure out what went wrong. They experimentally shoot a cow just as Bob had been shot and now say they understand why he could have survived. Shreck, who is planning a trip out of the country, orders Dobbler to figure out where Bob is headed and latches onto the fact that he sent flowers to a particular address each year. Meanwhile, Nick begs Utey not to



fire him and promises that he'll never make another mistake like the one that allowed Bob Swagger to escape. While everyone is trying to figure out how to catch him, Bob comes out of the Mississippi River miles downstream, finds a small, ugly pig and kills it with Nick's gun, eats the liver raw and survives for several days in that fashion.

Nick can't get past the coincidence of having a Salvadoran archbishop murdered shortly after a Salvadoran agent was cut to shreds in a local motel room, but can't find time to fully pursue the connection. The connection is explained as Colonel Shreck visits Esteban Garcia de Rujijo, who thanks the Colonel for having taken care of the assassination of the archbishop. Rujijo then reveals that he faced the problem of a traitor. He says that Eduardo was tracked to New Orleans and killed using the elite surveillance equipment. As Shreck prepares to leave, a third man, Hugh Meachum, tells Shreck that Swagger must be found and eliminated and suggests that he use the surveillance equipment in his "quest."

Chapters 13 through 17 Analysis

After he's shot, Bob sees his own rifle in the floor and realizes that he's been completely set up. It will be some time before he pieces together the full plot, that he used the sniper's rifle during the testing phase, and that the sniper is a former target champion named Lon Scott, who couldn't do his own planning because he is wheelchair bound. The police officer in the room is yelling that the sniper has also been shot and it's evident that Bob is going to take the blame for the assassination. Bob feels his life slipping away but calls on the same strength he used when he was shot in Vietnam to pull himself back. It's that burst of energy that propels him to his feet. When Nick catches him, Bob continues to mutter that they "fucked me," over and over, but doesn't try to explain what he means. As he drives away from the scene in Nick's car, he hears Timmons saying that he's at 514 St. Anne, but the house was actually 415. Bob soon realizes that Timmons can claim to have been confused in the heat of the moment and that the delay of backup will give Payne and the Colonel time to get away from the scene. Bob instinctively knows how to get away as well because he studied the scenario so many times himself as he did his research.

That research comes back to help build the case against him as the FBI checks into his notes. They find his beloved dog, Mike, dead at Bob's trailer and speculate that he killed it because he knew he wouldn't return and had no one to care for it. Attorney Sam Vincent says Bob would never have shot at the President and that he was framed. He adds that whoever is responsible went too far in killing the dog because that makes it personal.

When Bob kills the pig with a single shot, he has time to reflect on the animal and his ability to kill it. He says that Payne made a critical mistake when he shot Bob in that he didn't "use enough gun." There's some additional insight into Payne's life. He had been attacked during his tour in Vietnam and had managed to get off seven shots from a pistol, missing seven times. He'd expected to be killed but was saved by fire from his own men. He'd wet and shat in his pants then and was teased about it. He now reflects

that again he's been humiliated by his inability to shoot with a pistol. Payne's one solace now is that he's going to get even with Bob and that he's already killed Bob's dog.

There are several points made during these chapters, some explaining things that have come before and some leaving open-ended questions that won't be answered for some time. For example, it's learned that RamDyne is a real place but apparently operating under a bogus name. This is where Shreck, Dobbler and Payne work. The Salvadoran, Rujijo, gives Shreck a tape of his battalion's operations on the Sampul River, and the gift makes Shreck angry, but he hides the emotion. Meachum tells Shreck that Rujijo is a cocaine importer and war criminal, but says that he's not alone in his responsibility for what happened on the Sampul River, adding that "we must clean it up." It will later be revealed that the incident in question involved the slaughter of men, women and children.



Chapters 18 through 23

Chapters 18 through 23 Summary

Bob continues to drive until he reaches a desert area. He's stolen several cars, lived on candy bars and Cokes and is glad he had two hundred dollars in his wallet. He arrives in a trailer park, sees Julie Fenn's name on a mailbox and is relieved to know she hasn't moved. The flowers he sent every Christmas went to Julie, though he doubts she accepted them. She always returned his letters unopened. Now he tells her he didn't try to assassinate anyone and she takes him in. A registered nurse, she bandages his wounds, gives him antibiotic to prevent infection, and cares for him for days as he begins to recuperate. She says that she knows he wouldn't have killed the archbishop because Donny would have sniffed out any evil in Bob during their time together. As he begins to recover, he searches for a plan to extricate himself from the situation and Julie agrees that he can remain with her until he recovers.

In New Orleans, Payne and New Orleans Police Officer Timmons are in a strip club. Timmons, credited with shooting Bob, is famous and is promised a meeting with a stripper. Payne leads him there and they interrupt what appears to be a fight. Timmons, drunk, tries to break it up and is shot. The shooter, Morgan State, winks at Payne as he passes by and Payne fades into the darkness as police arrive.

Nick, in Mena, Arkansas, continues to chase his theories about the Salvadoran while working officially on the search for Bob. Bob is reading everything Julie can bring him that might help him figure out who set him up and how. He comes to the conclusion that the bullet he shot at the range in Maryland was preserved and used for the assassination. At one point, he and Julie connect though she says that he will not remain with her but will soon go off "to be a man." When Nick is able, he goes to Tucson, disguised behind a beard and sunglasses, and begins to do research on the type of gun used in the assassination at a gun shop with a stack of shooting magazines. Bob then announces that he has to leave. He says his tasks are to go to the mountains to dig up his cache containing thirty thousand dollars and some guns, and to bury his dog. Following Bob's instruction, Julie calls and insists on talking to Nick, catching him just at the moment he's about to be sent back to New Orleans. Using facts that convince him she knows Bob, she tells him that Bob is on his way to Mena to retrieve his dog.

The FBI set up what they believe is a trap. As Nick and Utey are talking to a receptionist at the health center where the dog's body was autopsied and is being held, they think they have at least another day before Bob is to arrive. Instead, Bob is standing at the counter as well and Nick recognizes him. He forces Nick and Utey to go with him to the morgue, retrieves the dog and knocks out Utey when he tries an attack. He then forces Nick to go with him through service tunnels to a waiting truck and then to rush through a wooded hillside to a church yard where the truck wrecks and Nick has a shot at Bob but doesn't take it. Bob runs into a church and police lob in gas canisters, set the building on fire and watch as it goes up in flames. A body identified as Bob's is found the



following day, and it's noted that he shot himself in the head before being burned. Nick refuses to "body bag him." When he discovers a reporter filming the digging up of the dog's body, Nick slugs the reporter and Utey suspends him, effective immediately. Back in New Orleans, Nick watches television reports of the case including a statement by one of the few who know him well saying that the entire dog incident doesn't make sense. The man notes that Bob was always practical and that it doesn't seem possible he would have gotten himself killed over a dead dog. Nick returns to FBI headquarters, clears out his desk and signs exit forms.

Chapters 18 through 23 Analysis

Almost his first words upon waking were whether Julie knew anything about Bob's dog. When she tells him newspaper reports indicated the dog has been shot, he's angry and Julie finds that interesting. Bob says that he was stupid and allowed "smart boys" to exploit his weakness.

Bob and Julie make love every night once he's sufficiently recovered. He knows that he's falling for her and finally tells her that he has to leave now or he never will. Julie counters that of course he'll leave because men like him always do. He says that he can't hold onto her because he sees in her an alternative way of life that doesn't include being alone and mistrusting everyone he meets. He says that longing for her could take the edge he has as he seeks out the men who set him up. He says that the sooner he leaves, the sooner he'll return but she counters that he'll be killed and won't return at all. Bob tells her that he has to clear his name but that it's more than that. He says that even if he could clear his name, he has to catch those responsible.

Back at RamDyne, Dobbler tells Shreck that he believes Bob will refuse to be taken alive, and that if he is the strain will likely drive him insane. Shreck counters that Dobbler, a Harvard graduate, is at least consistent in that he's "full of shit," and Shreck says that Bob now has more in his life than at any time since his return from the war because he's now "engaged" in life rather than hiding from it.

When Nick has yet another shot at Bob that he doesn't take, he analyzes the reason. He says that it takes one of two things for him to take a shot - a fear for his life or a conviction that the man is guilty. In the case of his encounter with Bob, Nick is convinced of neither. Payne is among those from RamDyne who watch and listen as the church burns. When a young tech operating the surveillance equipment says that Bob is now "toast," Payne tells him to shut up, but can't say why he is angry at the man for stating what seems to be the obvious.

Utey suspends Nick for searching for information on RamDyne. Utey says that RamDyne is a top secret organization with agents who sometimes do little bad things to keep bigger bad things from happening. Utey tells Nick that his job isn't to see the "big picture," but to do what he's told. For his initiative in trying to seek out the details of RamDyne, he's suspended without pay. Nick returns to New Orleans and clears out his desk. He is told that a records clerk named Sally Ellion wants to see him. Sally says that

she took the liberty of having Utey sign clearance forms to allow Nick access to RamDyne information - though she admits that Utey didn't realize what he was signing - and says the file on RamDyne has now arrived, then hands it over.



Chapters 25 through 28

Chapters 25 through 28 Summary

Colonel Shreck is told by Hugh Meachum that there's a problem and learns that Nick Memphis was in the truck with Bob for several minutes. Though it was a stress-filled time, there's a concern that Bob might have given Nick some information based on the fact that Bob had an opportunity to shoot Nick but didn't. Now, even though there are dental records that seem to prove Bob's death, Shreck's people worry that Nick will be working to solve the crime. The concern is further amplified by the fact that Nick has in his possession the file given to him by Sally from the FBI.

At that moment, Nick is reading the file which includes information about the Black Panthers, the fact that Shreck had trained an elite fighting unit with methods that included animal sacrifice and voodoo worship, and several references to a report that is not included in the file. Later, Nick is walking down the street when Tommy Montoya calls out to him. Nick, answering Tommy's call, finds himself kidnapped. He refuses to answer questions until he's drugged, then tells everything he knows about RamDyne and his work during the Presidential visit. He's then told to empty his bladder because the drug will cease to show up in a high concentration once he does this. Then he's taken to the edge of the water where he's to be shot by his captives. He can see that they plan to make it appear as if he's committed suicide and fights but knows he's going to die. Then Tommy's head explodes a second before they hear the report of a rifle and the second man is killed as well. Nick looks around to see Bob walking toward him. When Tommy's body is discovered, Shreck realizes that Bob is somehow alive and demands that Dobbler find a way to draw him out.

Nick is stunned as Bob dumps both bodies into the water, followed by the cars and everything else he can find in the area that would offer clues of the events. They walk down the road, retrieve Bob's truck and at a diner a short time later, he tells Nick of the events after his appearance at the hospital. He says he broke into his dentist's office, moved x-rays from the files of Bo Stark to his own, crawled through a tunnel under the church and was some distance away when the fire erupted. He says the burned body was Bo.

Bob and Nick soon visit Colonel Rathford Marin O'Brien, a gun connoisseur and former big game collector. Bob introduces himself as a cousin of Bob Swagger and promises to trade a particular rifle from Bob's collection (which he explains he will eventually inherit) for information about the Tenth Black Knight. O'Brien tells the story of ten guns manufactured by Winchester and given to various important people, including the tenth that was presented to Winchester's resident marksman, Art Scott, who won several trophies and accidentally shot and paralyzed his son with the gun. Art later shot himself with the same gun and the son, Lon, and the gun disappeared.



Bob and Nick hole up in a remote cabin in the Ouachita Mountains where Bob kills game for their food so they have time to rest. Meanwhile, Dobbler believes that airing an advertisement about a book on a specific topic could lure Bob into a trap. Shreck goes to Meachum who asks that the way be cleared for Salvadoran mercenaries to be brought in to kill Bob and that he be given some details about the sniper to lure Bob into a trap.

Chapters 25 through 28 Analysis

It's interesting that Bob explains that he knew the church members were trying to raise money for a new church. It's another example of his inherent sense of justice.

When Bob and Nick begin to discuss options, Nick offers the belief that Bob's best chance to escape the charges is to hire a good lawyer. Bob interrupts with the reminder that "they killed my dog." Nick says that Bob can't simply start a war because someone killed his dog, but Bob counters that he didn't start it. This seems typical of the attitudes of each of the men and of their handling of the situations in which they find themselves. Another interesting point is that Nick considers Bob's request to join him and comes to the conclusion that he will. The thought that seems to make up his mind for him is that "he'd been dying to get back on a SWAT team."

Nick points out that law enforcement are often turning to psychiatry to answer questions and create doctrine related to crime solving. The RamDyne officials are doing that very same thing, though Dobbler, a Harvard graduate, has no clue about Bob's real nature and continually predicts incorrectly. With the realization that Bob is alive, Dobbler correctly notes that Shreck is afraid, though fear seems to be entirely foreign to his nature.

Nick and Bob soon clash to some degree. Nick says that the Tenth Black Knight - the gun he shot while testing for "Accutech" that belongs to Lon Scott - is the key to the puzzle. Bob believes the "Annex B" that was referenced in the file about RamDyne is the key. In this instance, Dobbler's analysis is correct. Bob is more aggressive about his intention to focus on the gun and Nick doesn't confront him. However, Nick does resolve himself to trying to figure out how to get access to that document. It's also interesting that Dobbler, a person who would never be fascinated by the gun culture, finds himself fascinated nonetheless. He says he understands the lure and seems very interested in the fact that there's someone who goes to the trouble to research and catalog an obscure topic such as Japanese guns, and then to write a book on the subject.

It's now apparent that Shreck doesn't know the identity of the sniper, though he does have some clues, including the fact that the sniper can't get around by himself. It's now revealed that Bob's role in the planning was essential because the sniper couldn't do the tours for himself.



chapters 29 through 33

chapters 29 through 33 Summary

Over the next few days, Nick and Bob locate a list of one thousand original subscribers to a famous grass-roots gun magazine in their search for Lon Scott, who Nick now believes to be the real sniper. They check the names against state databases of people with disabled parking plates and reduce that list to seven names, then prepare to check out those seven people. Bob comes up with the idea that false identities usually begin by using the birth certificate of a child who died, so they begin cross referencing the names of the seven with death records. It's sheer luck that put them in contact with a conscientious records clerk in North Carolina who finds a matching last name and discovers that she has a death certificate for a child named Robert Parrish Albright and that several years later, there was a petition to change the name from Robert Parrish Albright to James Thomas Albright. At the same moment Nick is getting that information, Bob is reading an advertisement in a grass-roots magazine called "Shotgun News." The ad is for the biography of Art Scott, but Bob recognizes it immediately for what it is - Dobbler's effort to lure Bob into a trap. The ad calls for those interested in the book to call a certain number, leave their name and credit card information, and wait for a return call. The calls are being screened for voice match to either Bob or Nick as both their voices are on file. Several days pass before Dobbler is notified that there's a voice match to Nick. Dobbler asks what name the caller used and the technician with the information hesitates and then says, "he left the name Special Agent Nicholas Memphis."

The message left by Nick indicates that he is seeking Lon Scott and that Albright will be required to help in the investigation. Dobbler, pretending to be "Thomas Albright," returns the call, says he doesn't know where the Tenth Black Knight could be, and says that he has some items that belonged to Art Scott, including diaries, and agrees to allow Nick access. Nick says he'll be there in two days. On that day, he and Bob arrive and in town and are immediately under surveillance. Lon Scott refuses to allow someone else to meet Bob when he arrives and the expectation is that Shreck's force of one hundred twenty men will chase him up a mountain at the rear of Lon's home.

Conversations between Nick and Bob are being recorded by Payne. Nick rushes to Bob's room the day before they are to go to Lon Scott's house saying he needs to return to New Orleans. Bob objects but then tells him to go ahead. Nick reminds Bob that he's only going to be reading some boring diaries and that Nick's presence isn't needed. Bob appears at Lon's home as planned. Lon gives the prearranged signal that summons Shreck's attack force and Bob runs up the mountain, all as planned. When he arrives near the summit, Nick is waiting with Bob's sniper rifle and rather than continuing to run, he turns and waits.

Dobbler discovers a video tape secreted in Shreck's office and watches as Shreck oversees an operation in which men burn a village and then - on Shreck's command to



"get it over with" - murder a group fleeing the village. The victims are mostly women and children.

As de Rujijo prepares to give the order to attack, he is shot in the head. Shreck drops for cover as two more men are shot. Lon, watching the operation, turns his wheelchair too quickly and turns over. He watches and listens as Bob shoots unerringly, killing target after target, taking down a helicopter and then more men on the ground. Lon knows that at some point Bob will have a moment's respite and that he'll then turn the rifle back toward the house and Lon will be killed. He says that he'd thought he was ready for death but discovers that he isn't and his cries for help are eventually answered by Shreck who carries Lon to safety.

Bob continues to fire until the advancing line is broken. Eventually Nick is forced into action as they're approached from the side but he misses his first shot and Bob takes over on that angle as well. Then Bob says that he sees a spotter on a distant hill, a mile away, calculates drop and wind quickly and fires several rounds. Bob unthinkingly begins calling Nick "Donny." Nick tries to correct him but Bob doesn't listen. Then they encounter one of the victims, Eddie Nickles, who believes that he'll bleed to death before help can arrive. Bob tells Nickles to relay a message to Shreck. The message is that if anything happens to Julie, "what's gone before will seem like Sunday School." He says that Shreck should meet him in the Blue Eye town square at nine A.M. in two weeks.

At Julie's trailer, Payne receives a phone call and reports to Julie that Bob is alive and that he killed forty-four men on that hill. Payne says that Julie is coming with him and that if she refuses she'll simply be killed. She tells Payne that Bob will "chew you up and spit you out," and predicts that Payne will be killed. In Washington, D.C., Utey is pondering the fact that no suspended FBI agent has ever done what Nick has done - failed to show up for his own hearing. Utey is just about to sign Nick's termination papers when he's told that the investigation into a shootout the previous day in North Carolina, thought to be a drug deal gone bad, has taken a turn. Bob's fingerprints were found on shells and a car at the scene was rented by Nick. Meanwhile, Bob says that Nick's approach to the situation would likely have been better and tells Nick that he must go to New Orleans to find the elusive document, Annex B. He instructs Bob to meet him at the cabin in the mountains the day before the show down in Blue Eye. Nick's mind immediately goes to the message left by Eduardo and he wonders if there's something he's missed.

Utey calls in some favors to have himself assigned to oversee the operation of the task force that will try again to capture Bob. Nick's partner, Hap Fencl, questions whether Nick could be deep undercover and says he can't believe Nick would go rogue, citing Nick's desire to be an FBI agent above all else. Utey worries about that attitude, fearing that agents would be sympathetic toward Nick. Hap then begins to theorize on the Salvadoran angle, Nick's involvement, the statements from the survivors of the North Carolina shootout, the strange man named Albright who owned the property who has no paperwork and seems to have no identity, and questioning how - and why - Bob would be involved in that shootout. Utey stops the conversation by saying that their first priority



is to catch Bob, and they agree that he's going to return to Arkansas. Hap is assigned the task of making arrangements for the task force to set up at Mena as before and paving the way with local officials.

chapters 29 through 33 Analysis

There are lots of things that aren't explained as they are happening. The elements of surprise have become a trademark of the book and continue to be so at this point, though there are often clues. When Nick says he knows Lon Scott's new identification, Bob says that he knows it as well. That indicates that he knows the ad prompting his visit to Lon's home is a set up but makes all the outward signs of going there anyway, leaving the reader to wonder if he's about to be killed. There are other mysteries that remain, including how Lon Scott became caught up in the situation. Lon says that he owes Meachum, and there seems to be some connection between the two men deep enough that Shreck respects it. That could be the motivation for Shreck's heroic rescue of Lon, but that point is not yet explained.

Dobbler meanwhile discovers the identity of the woman Bob sends flowers to every December and Payne is sent to Arizona. There's no indication of what his orders are and Payne notes that it's a wasted trip because Bob will be dead before Payne can reach Julie Fenn's house. It's also interesting that Payne admits to himself that he's afraid of Bob. He compares it to his fear when he was attacked in Vietnam.

As Shreck and his men are waiting for Bob to appear at Lon Scott's house, Dobbler believes there's no way for Bob to escape. He also believes he's played an important role in the events and fears that he won't get the credit he's due. With that in mind, he writes a lengthy memo outlining his role and delivers it to Shreck's office. While there, he notices that the office is a replica of his own, down to a wall safe. On a chance, he turns the knob of the safe with his own combination and it opens. That's how he comes to find the video. That tape is the one given to Shreck by the Salvadoran de Rujijo, and it shows the events that set the assassination plan in motion. The men carrying out the orders are members of the Black Panthers, and it's now clear to the reader that the Salvadoran archbishop had planned to spearhead an investigation into this very event. The death of that official means that he can't lead that investigation, and there is no one else who is going to take on that role. This piece of information pulls the plot together, but Bob still has to find a way to clear his name and to catch those responsible.



Chapters 34 through 36

Chapters 34 through 36 Summary

Nick makes the drive as Eduardo would have done upon his arrival in New Orleans and comes to the conclusion that Eduardo must have stashed something in the taxi that drives him into town. Nick catches up with Sally Ellion and has her do a search through city taxi records, hoping to find a name or license plate that the clue Eduardo left in blood would fit. As he looks over the names, Sally recovers one that might possibly fit his clue. Nick suddenly realizes that the blood, seeping onto the clue in the grooves of the linoleum, had changed the letters and that what was really written there was RONI instead of ROM. He locates a cab driver named Roni Ovitz, discovers that he was shot and quit driving, but the cab remains in operation. The cab is recalled to the taxi base and Nick finds rolled up papers under the rear seat, including a letter from Meachum to Rujijo and Annex B.

Dobbler goes to Blue Eye in search of Bob but has no luck. When he returns to his motel room at the end of the day, Bob is waiting, having been alerted by those in town who believe in his innocence. He and Dobbler leave town with Dobbler handing over the tape of the massacre. Dobbler says that he'd thought RamDyne to be overall good and that he hadn't realized their true nature until he'd seen that tape. He says they have to be stopped and that he believes Bob to be the only one who could stop them.

Lon is to serve Shreck as a sniper when the showdown in Blue Eye occurs. He spends his days shooting and working out the details of the land, finally settling on Hard Bargain Valley as his vantage point. Meanwhile, Nick arrives at the cabin and after hours of talking with Dobbler comes up with information about the situation. Through the letter, Annex B, the tape and Dobbler's own observations, Nick knows the motivations behind Shreck's actions in the Sampul River Valley. The guerillas of the area were being supported by the peasants and refused to participate in peace talks. The massacre of the peasants meant that no other peasant groups would help the guerillas for fear of retaliation which forced the peace talks. Nick says the information proves the motive for the assassination but might or might not prove Bob's innocence.

Shreck has come up with a plan to drop Lon, Eddie Nickles and an ATV into Hard Bargain Valley the night before their planned meeting. They'll then tell Bob that he is to watch for a flare, go to that position, fire a flare of his own and repeat the process. The objective will be to move Bob into Lon's range. When Lon shoots Bob, Shreck will kill Nick. Payne asks about Julie and is told it's "a stupid question."

Shreck meets Nick in Blue Eye and tells him the plan for keeping Bob moving, calling it mutual "deterrence" that will keep everyone alive. He promises the trade will be made at a secure location away from any potential sniper attack. Shreck says that once they trade Julie for the tape and the documents, they can all simply walk away. Shreck suggests Bob consider a move to Montana. Lon makes the drop but is alone for a few



minutes and thinks that it would be ironic if Nickles were killed on impact, leaving him alone in the woods and unable to complete his task. Then Nickles appears and Lon realizes the boy opened his chute too soon and had to walk back to the drop point.

Shreck and Payne watch for Bob's approach; he's three minutes late to the first flare point. That's when they discover that Dobbler is along. They continue to watch from new vantage points along the way until an hour past noon when Dobbler lays down and refuses to go. Payne notes that Bob is a pansy and that both Payne and Shreck would simply have killed Dobbler and been done with the situation. Nick hands Dobbler a canteen and the two move on without him. It will later be revealed that what appeared to have happened here wasn't what really happened.

Lon is situated in his "spider hole" where he'll take the shot that he hopes will kill Bob Swagger. He admits that it's an incredible distance, that no man has the right to make that shot, and that he will because he's done it before. He is interrupted by the sight of a deer that walks into the clearing directly in front of him. It's Tim, the deer Bob captured in order to saw off his horns. Lon notes that the deer looks at him "haughtily," though there's no way the animal could see him. He recalls hunting trips with his father and wants to shoot but refrains. Then his attention is again taken by the situation in the valley and he watches as the final flare goes up.

Payne tapes a shotgun to Julie, covering her entire face with electrical tape in the process. He's now protected because no one can shoot him without risking that he'll reflexively kill Julie. Utey has met with resistance, though he's received several reports that indicate Bob is in the area. He learns that Bob's attorney, Sam Vincent, might have been in contact, but Sam refuses to talk and an injunction is issued precluding Utey from having Sam under surveillance. Then they learn that the Forest Service has investigated reports of flares over a stretch spanning some twenty miles leading to Hard Bargain Valley and Utey immediately plans to parachute in.

From a vantage point above Lon, Nick takes his position and hopes he can make the shot. On the ground, Shreck realizes that the man he'd taken for Nick is really Dobbler and gives the order to fire. There's a shot but it's Nick shooting Lon. His next objective is Shreck, but he finds that he can see only heads and can't tell which is Shreck. At that moment, Shreck tells Bob that nothing has changed. He says that they can still make the exchange and Bob agrees to lay down the weapon on the count of three. At two he fires, severing Payne's arm at the elbow so that he is unable to fire the weapon, then firing a second shot at point-blank range and killing Payne. He then turns and shoots Shreck before Shreck can get off a shot. Bob then carefully cuts away the tape holding the gun to Julie's head, ever conscious of the fact that if he jars the gun, it could still go off.

When Julie is free of the gun, Bob gives Dobbler a money belt with seven thousand dollars in it. He says that if Dobbler is put on the stand, he'll be involved in a mess that will ruin his life. He tells Dobbler how to get out of the woods to intercept a bus that goes to Oklahoma City and tells him to go before "that boy" shows up, referring to Nick. Nick arrives minutes later and Bob burns the Annex B, then breaks open and burns the tape.



When Nick arrives yelling about the burned evidence, Bob says that the two men are now in body bags where they belong and that Nick will have to trust him on this. Nick hears the arrival of the helicopter and says that it's "Howdy Duty time."

Chapters 34 through 36 Analysis

The details of the story begin to unfold more quickly at this point, though several mysteries remain that won't be revealed until the trial against Bob is concluded.

Sally tells Nick that he's known in the office as "AB Nick," or "All Business Nick." She says that it's been noted how he stood by his wife and that he never looked at another woman during his marriage. She seems to admire that loyalty. When Nick catches up with her he says that she is "the most popular girl in New Orleans" and that he's lucky she didn't have a date that evening. Sally then asks for a quarter and when Nick hands it over she says that she did have a date and that she's now going to break it for something better.

Nick seems to immediately realize that Dobbler, who swears he came forward because RamDyne must be stopped, is really trying to save his own life. Nick says that the tape Dobbler found means that Dobbler's life was in danger, and that prompted Dobbler's actions to help stop RamDyne. Dobbler is also disappointed that Bob doesn't seem to want information from him. When he asks if Bob wants him to predict Shreck's actions, Bob asks if Dobbler can tell him how to kill Shreck. When Dobbler says he can't, Bob says Dobbler has no information he wants. Dobbler says that the one thing Bob and Nick should know is that Payne and Shreck are more than sociopaths because they also aren't afraid to die. Bob says that describes a great number of soldiers and most of the world's criminals.

Bob's actions are very typical as he sends Dobbler away with the money and instructions to "start a new life." His decision to destroy Annex B is not yet explained other than the suggestion that Payne and Shreck were now dead. It seems possible that he simply remembers that they were war heroes before they fell to this level and that he somehow believes that should be honored. His motives on this point are left for the reader to decide or wait and see if it is eventually revealed. It is evident that he destroyed the tape to prevent the airing of the sordid scene by the media. He earlier imagined it being played again and again, being analyzed and discussed, and seemed to find this idea reprehensible.



Chapters 37 through 39

Chapters 37 through 39 Summary

Nick is taken to a safe house where he's grilled, first by Hap Fencel and other agents then by two who are less friendly. Then comes the psychiatrist and Nick takes a polygraph and gives statements while hypnotized and then drugged. One day Sally comes to visit and tells Nick that she wants to see him when this is over and he promises that he will. Next, Utey visits with Meachum in tow and offers Nick any assignment he wants. He says they are seeking the death penalty against Bob. Nick, remembering Meachum's name from the Annex B, can't bring himself to look at the man. Then Meachum tells Nick that the document is a fake that was peddled to several newspapers. Howard promises that if Nick cooperates he'll be touted as the hero who infiltrated Bob's operation. If he refuses, he'll be called as a hostile witness, his testimony limited to his encounter with Bob in New Orleans so that he can't give any of the other information, Nick will be fired in disgrace and Bob will be convicted anyway. When Nick continues to object, Utey says that Nick will then be prosecuted for impersonating a federal officer, and Sally will be prosecuted for espionage. Nick almost caves in but yells at Howard that he's not interested in the Bureau, but only in saving himself. He accuses Howard of being part of the Lancer Committee and says that he knows Meachum gave Shreck his orders. He says that he won't testify against Bob because he didn't shoot the archbishop. He returns home and Sally calls, saying she's being threatened with prosecution. Nick says Utey won't really prosecute, that he's just trying to get Nick to turn on Bob, though Nick knows that he probably isn't correct in that statement. Nick and Sally agree to go to Bob's preliminary hearing together the following day.

Bob is held in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. He talks to Julie who is frightened because no one wants to hear her side of the kidnapping. Bob is upbeat, says that his government will take care of him and that he trusts the FBI to do their job, and tells Julie that he thinks he'd like to settle down in Arizona once he's freed.

Bob enters the courtroom manacled and in prison garb. The preliminary hearing is held so a judge can determine if there's sufficient evidence to hold the matter over for trial. Sam Vincent objects to the prosecution's statement that handwriting experts matched points of the forged letter that prompted the beginning of the investigation into Bob prior to the Presidential visit, saying that he could produce experts who say there are also dissimilarities.

The prosecution try to enter Officer Timmons' testimony but Sam interrupts, saying he can't possibly cross-examine Timmons and citing rumors of Timmons involvement to organized crime. The judge agrees and Nick is called to the stand. Just before he's called, he receives a written note from Howard that it's not too late. He wavers, believing that Bob has lost his case, but resolves to try anyway. He is limited to his testimony though he argues that he needs to give more details until Bob tells him to stop and just



tell the truth. He does so and Sam says he has no questions, then appears to change his mind and asks if Nick saw Timmons go into that building. Nick says he didn't and Sam seems to let it go, saying only that it's "damn strange" and commending the ability of an officer to turn invisible. The judge says he'll note Sam's observation for further study.

The next prosecution witness is an FBI gun expert who testifies to the minute details of the gun. Sam asks him how it shoots and the man says he hasn't fired the weapon. There's then a brief argument over whether the FBI properly handled the gun and whether it remains in exactly the same condition as when it was collected as evidence. With the expert promising it hasn't been altered, Sam inserts a cartridge before the judge can object and pulls the trigger. Nothing happens and Sam reveals that Bob had filed down the firing pin a fraction so that the gun wouldn't fire after having noticed a shell missing and worrying that the Accutech situation was going to leave him in some sort of trouble. Sam goes on to say that he doesn't know who really fired that shot and that Bob might tell if asked. He also points out that three men died in the Ouachita Mountains on the first day of deer season, and that it seems a bit strange but that justice comes in many forms. The judge berates the prosecution, ordering them to get busy solving the crime.

Three days later, Meachum dies of a heart attack. Utey was "unceremoniously retired." Nick is reinstated. RamDyne is dissolved as is the Lancer Committee. Shreck and Payne are buried in military cemeteries and Lon Scott buried near his parents, his guns donated to museums. Dobbler is never found and Nick prefers to think he is living under an assumed name in California. Bob disappears from public sight but makes good on his promise to Colonel Rathford Marin O'Brien, delivering the promised rifle to his Oklahoma doorstep. One day Nick receives a package containing a gun used by Bob. Another day, Bob and Julie are discussing their new life that will include air conditioning and iced tea. He suggests they stop somewhere and get a dog and she says that they can raise the pup with the baby she's carrying.

Chapters 37 through 39 Analysis

Sam seems to be badly out-manned. He sits alone at the defense table with Bob while there's a team at the prosecutor's table. Nick notes that Sam seems to "sally" toward the bench to offer opening statements. He doesn't object to statements about the letter though Nick silently wishes him to. Nick thinks Sam should point out that the letter classified Bob only as a mild-level risk. Sam also drops country phrases, saying that they could poll "more experts than a mama possum has teats" and continue to get different opinions. He also points out that Bob is a product of rural Arkansas education in the 1950s and has no college behind him. Sam says that Bob's handwriting shows that detail. He calls it "infantile cursive" as if he was making that word up but it seems clear he's done his homework and is prepared with a better defense than Nick is giving him credit.



As Nick and Sally sit in a diner during a break in the court proceedings, he tells her that he believes Bob to be in trouble and that he wants her to turn herself in, offering to testify against him. He says that will be her way out. She refuses, saying that she has watched Nick and knows that he is loyal. She pledges to now be loyal to him and that if going to jail is part of that, so be it. She also says that she knows men like Bob Lee Swagger and that she still believes he has something up his sleeve that will surprise everyone.



Characters

Bob Lee Swagger

Nicknamed "Bob the Nailer" during his term in Vietnam, he had made his thirty-ninth and fortieth kill on June 10, 1972, in Vietnam. Bob is an excellent sharpshooter and continues to shoot after a debilitating hip wound forced him from the military. He no longer hunts to kill but does hunt deer, anesthetizing them and sawing off their antlers to save them from trophy hunters.

Bob is living quietly when he's approached by a man who says there's going to be an assassination attempt and that the assassin is the man who shot Bob and killed his best friend and spotter, Donny Fenn. Bob agrees to help catch the assassin because he wants revenge for Donny's death. He walks the areas where he's told the assassination might occur and finds the only spot available for the shot. He later realizes that he's done the leg work for the assassin and is framed to be killed and to take responsibility for the death of a Salvadoran archbishop.

Bob is a quiet man, honorable and completely loyal to the people and things in which he believes. He sends flowers every year to Donny Fenn's widow. He believes that his country will not wrongfully convict him. Aside from that, he is also resourceful. He thinks quickly in any situation and is able to put together plans that will save him and those he cares about while costing the opposition many lives.

Nick Memphis

A special agent with the FBI who is SWAT trained. Nick was responsible for a long shot in a hostage situation, but he missed and hit a woman in the vehicle. The target then shot several other hostages before killing himself. Nick marries the woman he shot, Myrna, who dies as the story opens. Nick learns that his nickname is "AB Nick," or "All Business Nick." A co-worker tells him that it's noted that during his years married to a cripple he never looks at another woman.

Nick is forced at gunpoint to carry the body of Bob's dog, Mike, to his vehicle. When the truck they're in is wrecked, Nick has the opportunity to shoot Bob but admits that there are two situations in which a man can fire a fatal shot. He can either be in mortal danger or have ultimate belief in the guilt of the other man. Nick finds that neither are true and he doesn't take the shot. Nick later finds himself faced with the decision to stand up for Bob or to save himself. He fantasizes what it would be like to fold and do as the FBI wants, but can't bring himself to do so. It seems that he does want to help Bob, but even faced with the likelihood that Bob will be convicted, Nick can't tell the lies the FBI wants him to tell, even though it would mean paving the way for his own future and career. He eventually admits that he's lost faith in Bob's ability to escape his current situation but has it renewed by his newfound love, Sally.



Colonel Raymond Shreck

Shreck first introduces himself to Bob Swagger as Colonel William A. Bruce, a retired military leader and Arizona State Trooper. It's Shreck who recruits Bob on the pretense of having him try out some new bullets. He later says that his name is Raymond Davis and that he is a senior planning officer for the CIA. Shreck is a formidable enemy and is ruthless. He claims that he is willing to do whatever has to be done. That includes ordering the slaughter of hundreds of Salvadoran men, women and children in order to force guerrilla fighters to participate in peace talks. When an archbishop threatens to open the case of the slaughter, Shreck leads the planning of an assassination, recruiting Bob and creating the situation in which he planned to kill Bob. Shreck dies at Bob's hand in the Ouachita Mountains.

Howard Utey

Nicknamed Howdy Duty, Utey is the man manning the "base" when Nick Memphis misses the shot and injures a hostage. Utey never lets Nick forget that he missed the shot. It's not until Nick is picked up after the deaths of Shreck and Payne that Nick admits he missed the shot because Utey was yelling and his excitement spilled over to Nick in the sniper's position. Utey wants fame and glory for himself and is willing to do whatever it takes to gain that.

Lon Scott

The son of Art Scott, Lon is paralyzed in a freak accidental shooting at the hands of his father. He turns bitter and hides away, taking a new identity. He is the sniper who kills the Salvadoran archbishop, but his confinement to a wheelchair precludes his ability to scope out the site for himself. That's why Bob is needed. Lon dies atop a mountain near Blue Eye at the hands of FBI sniper Nick Memphis.

Sam Vincent

An attorney in Arkansas, Sam represented Bob in a lawsuit against a magazine that won Bob a thirty-thousand dollar settlement. At eighty, Sam looks the country attorney and Nick worries that he isn't competent to handle Bob's defense in court. Sam redeems himself with the demonstration that the gun Bob allegedly used in the assassination would not fire.

Julie Fenn

Wife of Donny Fenn, Julie is a registered nurse who lives in a desert area. Bob finds her, still living where she'd lived for years, after he is shot. As a nurse, she is able to care for him, tends his wounds and provides antibiotics so he doesn't get an infection.



It's also Julie who provides information and helps Bob catch up with news reports that are released during the time he is out. She quickly falls in love with Bob but knows he is the kind of man who will have to prove his innocence and to stop those who set up the assassination. She's taken hostage but is rescued by Bob. The two return to Arizona where they plan to get a dog, and Julie announces she's expecting a baby.

Jack Payne

The man who serves as "body guard" to Colonel Raymond Shreck. Payne is a war hero who turns into a mercenary under Shreck's tutelage. He seems willing to do anything Shreck orders though he admits at one point he is afraid of dying. Payne is killed by Bob in the Ouachita Mountains.

Donny Fenn

Bob's spotter during the Vietnam war. Donny is killed trying to reach Bob after he is shot during the war. It's the lure of giving Bob an opportunity to help catch Donny's killer that drags him into the situation.

Art Scott

The original owner of the Tenth Black King, a set of ten rifles manufactured by Winchester. Art, as the best marksman of the Winchester company, received the tenth of the set of guns as a gift. He and his son, Lon, used the gun in competitions.

William A. Bruce

A retired United States Army colonel who worked for sixteen years with the Arizona State Police. Shreck uses his name when he first introduces himself to Bob Swagger in an effort to induce Bob to work with him.

Earl Swagger

Father of Bob Lee Swagger. Earl died when Bob was young though Bob continues to claim to be very proud of his father. Earl won the Congressional Medal of Honor during World War Two for service on Iwo Jima. He was killed in the line of duty as an Arkansas State Trooper when Bob was nine years old.



Objects/Places

Hard Bargain Valley

A tabletop mountain high in the Ouachita mountains of Arkansas where Bob Lee Swagger is hunting as the story opens. It's also the point Lon Scott chooses as his vantage point for the final showdown between Bob and Shreck.

Tim

The name given an old buck in the Ouachita Mountains.

Blue Eye, Arkansas

The town near the home of Bob Lee Swagger where the final showdown between Swagger and Shreck is set.

New Orleans

Where Nick Memphis is stationed with the FBI and where Bob Swagger decides an assassin would most likely attempt to kill the President.

Louis Armstrong Park

The place where the archbishop is assassinated.

St. Anne's Street

The location of both Nick Memphis's car during the President's visit and the house where Bob is watching for the sniper.

Mena, Arkansas

The Arkansas town where the showdown between Bob Swagger and the FBI come to a head when he comes out of hiding to reclaim his dog's body.

The Tenth Black Knight

One of the guns fired by Bob Swagger during the "testing" of Accutech's ammunition and the gun that disappeared from sight the same time as its owner, Lon Scott.



Ajo, Arizona

The town where Julie Fenn lives and where Bob goes to recover from his gunshot wounds.

Lancer Committee

The committee that serves as liaison between the CIA and FBI.

RamDyne

An organization that exists to perform "dirty work" for the CIA.



Themes

Good versus Evil

In many ways, this story is the epitome of "good versus evil." While Bob Lee Swagger is being called a fugitive and assassin, he continues to work toward clearing his name. He is ultimately a good person despite the fact of having been a sniper in the army, and he is an honorable person. One example of his goodness occurs in his role in the burning of the church. The church is destroyed because Bob runs into the building. He later says that he knew the building would burn and that he selected that building for two reasons. One was the fact that tunnels existed below the building, dating back to the days when the church harbored runaway slaves in their quest for freedom. The other reason he selected that location was that the church members were trying to raise money to build a new church. Though he doesn't say so, it seems likely that Bob would have looked for some other way to carry out his plan if he were harming the church and church members.

The Resourcefulness of the Southern Man

Bob is the epitome of the resourceful Southern man. It's Sally Ellion who says that she's known men like Bob and that they all have one common trait - slyness. Bob is well trained by the U.S. Marines, but it's important to realize that many of his attributes can't be taught. There is, for example, his ability to fire quickly and accurately under pressure. The skills of accurate shooting can be taught, but the ability to remain calm under the pressure of more than one hundred attacking military men, including several in a helicopter cannot be taught. That battle resourcefulness is only one aspect of Bob's character.

Another is his ability to think ahead of his opposition. Perhaps the most important example of this is the feeling that prompts him to file down the firing pin on his gun. It's important to note that this leaves the gun completely useless for shooting. If Bob had been wrong in his assumptions, he would have had to replace the firing pin before ever again firing the gun. But he has puzzled out the reasons he was approached by Shreck and come up with nothing but more questions. The fact that someone - he assumes it was Shreck's men - took a single bullet from his home makes him wary. It's the idea that the bullet might someday be used against him that prompts his action.

There are many other examples of his resourcefulness and forethought. He doesn't feel the need for the insurance provided by the existence of the Annex B document and the tape, already knowing that he has the proof needed and trusting that it will work.



The Need for Companionship

Bob Lee Swagger lives alone in a trailer in Arkansas. He lives quietly, spending his time with guns and in the wilderness around his home. His one friend is Mike, his dog. While he is ultimately practical on the death of his dog, he also exhibits a sorrow regarding the death of the dog and an anger that someone would kill an innocent animal.

Outwardly, he seems to want nothing more from life than to be left alone, but a deeper look reveals an apparent craving for companionship. Bob has sent flowers every December to Julie Fenn, wife of his deceased best friend and spotter, Donny. Bob admits to having had dreams of spending the rest of his life with Donny and Julie. It seems evident that he is on some level resigned to remaining alone but continues to wish for companionship. He says that having been out of the country setting for the initial trip to the Maryland shooting range, he's starting to feel revived. Later, when he's made his initial escape, it's Shreck who points out that Bob has something he hasn't had in a long time - contact with the world outside the tiny community of Blue Eye.

Bob isn't the only one who admits a need for companionship. Nick was ultimately faithful to his wife, Myrna. After her death he admits to feeling a deep longing for her companionship.

Style

Point of View

The story is written in third person from a limited omniscient point of view. The biggest limiting factors are setting and time, used primarily as a tool to keep the reader interested. For example, there is a scene in which Bob, Nick and Dobbler are walking toward the next flare location and Dobbler simply refuses to go on. That's all told from the perspective of Payne and Shreck, watching through binoculars from some distance away. In truth, the scene was staged in order to allow Nick to peel off from the group and seek out the sniper. Limiting the perspective in this manner lends suspense to the reader though it is somewhat misleading. It's important to remember that the book was made into a movie and might have been written with that objective in mind. Scenes such as the one just described do lend a sense of urgency when acted out and would be a very effective tool on stage as well.

The perspective is also limited by time. For example, Nick and Bob carry on a conversation in North Carolina in which Bob agrees that Nick can leave the area because Bob is going to be tied up for hours reading a diary that might or might not offer any clues. The reader is left to believe that Nick actually leaves and it's not until Bob encounters Nick that the reader discovers the conversation was carried on merely for those they knew would be listening in.

Setting

The story has multiple settings, including New Orleans, North Carolina and the Ouachita Mountains. With the exception of the assassination site, the New Orleans descriptions and settings are fairly general. The fact that there are few vivid details means the setting probably exists but could also be fictional. The same is true of the North Carolina mountain where Lon Scott lives and where Bob Swagger faces down more than a hundred soldiers, killing forty-four and announcing to law enforcement that he hadn't actually died in the church fire.

The setting in Arkansas includes more details. While there is a town called Blue Eye, it is not near Mena as described in the story but is actually located in the northern part of the state, just south of the Arkansas-Missouri border. The town of Mena does exist and is, as the story describes, several hours west of Hot Springs. There are several small towns in the vicinity that could be the equivalent of Blue Eye. Amity, located between Mena and Hot Springs, even has a town square that could be that described in the story.



Language and Meaning

The book is written in a very straight-forward style that most will find easy to read. Comprehension will not typically be a problem, and a reader with an average vocabulary will have little difficulty. The story line is complicated and that produces the biggest challenge for most readers. Things that appear to be happening one way will later be revealed in some other. Things presented as "fact" may or may not be true. For example, Bob Lee Swagger is told a story about a planned assassination that includes photos of a sniper practicing for the event. That story is actually a fabrication used in an effort to get Bob's cooperation. Some readers may simply have trouble keeping track of the plot twists. In some ways, the twists are so frequent that they become predictable. By the time the group is on the mountain for the final showdown, few readers will be taken in by the story that Dobbler falls out of the lineup and refuses to go on. Bob, ever resourceful, would have known whether Dobbler would be sufficiently in shape to keep up.

In some cases, the book becomes ploddingly slow as details and terms related to shooting are presented and discussed. In most passages, the information seems to serve no purpose other than to make the story seem authentic. Some readers may simply gloss over those sections, skimming them rather than reading. While that may be tempting, details about people and places are sometimes slipped into those plodding descriptions and readers may miss some subtle points unless they read all parts of the book.

Structure

The book is divided into thirty-nine chapters of varying lengths. The majority of these chapters range from eight to sixteen pages with a few slightly longer or shorter. The chapters generally cover one event or period of time, typically from several viewpoints. The chapters are also divided into sections. Only a line between sections indicates the divisions. This is not typically confusing but some readers may find it distracting. For example, Colonel Shreck is approached by Hugh Meachum who says, "We have a problem." The perspective then switches to Nick Memphis and the reader is left to wonder what the "problem" is for several pages. While it's a very effective journalism tool for building suspense, some readers may not appreciate being left to wonder for that length of time.



Quotes

"He wasn't an inspiring leader, he didn't save lives, he didn't rise in the chain of command. He was simply and explicitly an extraordinary killer. Almost certainly for that reason, he never got the medals and acclaim he deserved." -A description of Bob Lee Swagger, Chapter One, Page 12

"Bob knew what the figure was. He sometimes pretended he didn't but he know, exactly." - On Bob's number of kills, Chapter Six, Page 88

"No, son, Bob Lee Swagger don't give two damns and a jar of cold piss bout medals. I've been out to his place a time or so and you'd be hard pressed to find an indication anywhere that this man was one of the bravest heroes our country ever produced." Polk County Sheriff Vernon Tell, Chapter Eleven, Page 144

"You're telling me Bob Swagger aimed at a man and missed and killed another man? Bob Lee Swagger never missed nothing he aimed at his whole life and that's the Pure-D truth.;" - Bob's ex-wife, Chapter Fourteen, Page 188

"Because he now knew Swagger was innocent, and that the reason he saw compassion in the sniper's eyes as he stood above him with his big Smith was because the sniper was still, by his own lights, a moral man, an honorable man - a man who did not shoot the innocent and Nick, stupid and bumbling, had been of the innocent." Chapter Fifteen, Page 189

"As that church burned, I was twenty feet below it and a hundred feet to the west, in a limestone cave, drinking an RC Cola and eating a Moon Pie." - Bob explaining why he wasn't burned in the fire, Chapter Twenty-Six, Page 346

"Nothing soft and feminine about guns: they were too direct, too brutal. The phallic business so provocative to Freudians didn't seem to him to be very helpful; if these guns were penises, their purchasers were too self-oblivious to know or care." -Dobbler's observations, Chapter Twenty-Eight, Page 369

"A private stood to shame his comrades into the advance; Bob rewarded him with 168 grains of hollow point delivered at two thousand feet per second." Chapter Thirty-Two, Page 433



"What's on the tape?" The doctor paused. "Auschwitz in the jungle." - A conversation between Dobbler and Bob, Chapter Thirty-Four, Page 466

"See what he's got. I'm getting out of here for a time. You two geniuses of education jawing away like piglets in the slop could give me a serious pain in the eyes." Chapter Thirty-Five, Page 478

"He lay on his back in the yellow grass. He thought of landing zones, frontals, good men dead in far places, K-rations and C-4, and that bitch duty whom he'd never once betrayed, always doing the hard thing." - Shreck's dying thoughts, Chapter Thirty-Six, Page 515

"We don't have a thing to worry about. We can trust the U.S. Government." - Bob from his Louisiana State Penitentiary cell, Chapter Thirty-Seven, Page 529

"Well, hell, sir, if they say he's a shooter then damned if they oughtn't to point out it was the U.S. Marines that taught him to shoot and who gave the boy a chestful of medals for it." - Attorney Sam Vincent to the judge, Chapter Thirty-Eight, Page 543

Topics for Discussion

Describe Bob Lee Swagger. What are the attributes that make him a good sniper? a good Marine? a good friend?

Describe Bob's hunting trip as the story opens. What is his motivation?

What is the "bait" that convinces him to participate in the operation being spearheaded by Shreck's team? What does he later discover about the assassin?

How did Lon Scott come to be confined to a wheelchair? How does Myrna Memphis come to be confined to a wheelchair? Compare the attitudes of the two.

Who is Earl Swagger? Bruce Williams? Raymond Shreck? Sally Ellion? Donny Fenn? Julie Fenn?

What is Bob's reason for sawing off the firing pin in his gun? Does the gun still work? Describe the courtroom scene in which the pin's flaw is revealed. Was it effective?

Describe three scenes in which Bob is one step ahead of his enemy.

Create a time line that describes the events leading up to the assassination, and another for the events after the assassination.