

# **The Power of One Study Guide**

## **The Power of One by Bryce Courtenay**

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# Plot Summary

This novel was published in 1990 and is the first in a number of books written by Bryce Courtenay.

The story takes place in the South Africa of Courtenay's youth, an incredible and majestic land that has experienced many different cultural and racial divisions and tensions.

Into this land, a young boy is born and grows up affected by the different cultures around him, including both Boer and his own English heritage, and by the colored people of South Africa, including Indians and the various African tribal groups including the Zulu, Swazis, Sangaans, and Ndebele.

The boy is the very center of the story, which is told from his point of view from the time he is five years old until he is eighteen. There is a special focus placed on his education, both formal and informal. Formally, he attends two different boarding schools; a school for young children populated mostly by Boer boys who are hostile to him, and the Prince of Wales school which he attends from the age of nine and which is mostly composed of wealthy English boys. His informal education comes at the hands of many different acquaintances and friends in his life, both young and old, black and white, Boer and English, male and female, captive and free.

Through one of his very first human friends, the boy realizes a dream of becoming the welterweight boxing champion of the world. From the age of six, he works doggedly towards this dream.

On a very real level, this story is one of self-discovery and identification. The reader never actually learns the real name of the main character; one only knows him by what others call him and by what he calls himself.

As for family, the boy lives with his grandfather and his mother, and he is thrust out into the world when his mother suffers a nervous breakdown. Although she recovers, the time in between proves to be very difficult for the young boy, and thus his feet are set on a certain path very early.

Precocious and athletic as well as determined, Peekay, as he is eventually called, overcomes many obstacles he encounters both within himself and in the culture he has been born into in order to provide some highly relevant insights into the world in which he lives. Eventually, the tale of his life will come full circle and he will understand that through the power of one, he can achieve all of the goals that he sets for himself.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

The story is told from the point of view of a single person, and the first chapter does not reveal the name of this young boy. What the reader does know is that he is born of parents of English ancestry into the culturally diverse world of South Africa three generations after the Boer Wars.

This young boy is raised for the most part by his Zulu wet nurse, who later also becomes his nanny. When the boy turns five, he is sent away to boarding school as his mother has had a nervous breakdown. This move is an incredible alteration to the way that the young man has lived his life up until this point.

Everything that he has known is now gone, and even the food at the boarding school is different and plain compared to what he has known. Worse still, the child is younger than any other boy in the school by a full two years. Finally, he can only speak English, which sets him apart from the vast majority of the other boys at the school, who have Boer origins. The travesties committed by the English against the Boers during the wars have never been forgotten, and many of the Dutch boys at the school feel that it is their duty to avenge the deaths of their grandparents.

In order to exact this revenge, and because he is an easy target, the young boy is quickly singled out. Dragged from his bed by a mob, he is subjected to a kangaroo court presided over by an older twelve-year-old who the boy sees as "the Judge". He is sentenced to what he presumes is death, a fact of which he is even more convinced when he encounters the shower room (having never seen a shower before, he believes the room is a slaughterhouse). What really happens is that the Judge and his Jury pee on the boy and then leave him to find his way back to his quarters.

Unfortunately, the boy still has no idea how a shower works, and so the next morning he wakes up to the wrath of Mevrouw, the mistress of the young kids' dormitories. She drags him into the cold shower and turns it on. Terrified at first, the young boy believes that she is pissing icy water upon him. When he opens his eyes, it is to see the Judge and Jury in the room with him, along with several other boys. They begin to make fun of his uncircumcised penis, giving him the nickname *pisskop*.

The boy continues to wet the bed throughout the term, and is persecuted always by the other boys, although only a little at a time. At one point, he takes pride in the fact that he holds the record for the number of times someone has been thrashed. At the end of the term, he is picked up by his town's doctor, Henny Boshoff, who is taking care of his mother and is a star athlete on the rugby team. When the Judge sees this, he appears to take on a greater respect for the boy.



Back at home, Nanny decided to seek out the help of the great witch doctor Inkosi-Inkosikazi rid the boy of his bedwetting habit. The medicine man comes on his way to appeal for rain in his region. During this time we are introduced to the boy's grandfather, who lives at the same farm and who is indebted to the old man, whom he respects.

The medicine man performs a ceremony that involves hypnotism in order to cure the boy of his bedwetting. He also shows the boy how a certain trick can be achieved whereby a chicken can be made to lay down in a circle. Inkosi-Inkosikazi tells the boy that through this shared knowledge, they are brothers and can communicate in the place of waterfalls where the boy lost his bedwetting habit. The boy also acquires a scrawny chicken, which he names Granpa Chook. The bird appears to be a smart chicken, and soon learns to lie down in the circle before the boy even performs the rest of the trick.

## Chapter One Analysis

The fact that the reader is not yet told the name of the young boy around whom the story revolves indicates that the main thrust of the book is going to center around finding an identity. Certainly, the age and the family background of the boy are indicative of this fact, as he appears ripe for molding.

This chapter gives an incredibly revealing look at the solitude of South African life through the limited understanding of a child but aided by the background knowledge of the author. Making this work seamlessly is a great feat. There appear to be several cultural divisions among the people of the nation: the proud Zulus, whom Inkosi-Inkosikazi and Nanny represent, the Boers, the English, and other African tribes, known as Shangaans (or derogatively as kaffirs). All of these cultures appear to be held in different degrees of respect or disdain by each other, emotions that the boy feels but cannot yet put into words.

The opening chapter also signifies the beginning of the end of the truly innocent times, when a young boy is forced into a world outside of what he has known and begins to grow up. Not only is he forced to face cruelty, he must also come to terms with the fact that the people to whom he has looked to as powerful his whole life (Nanny) are really not much, especially in comparison to others (such as Inkosi-Inkosikazi). In turn, the great are also honest about their role within the scheme of things, as the medicine man indicates when he says he cannot bring rain.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

It is time for the young boy to go back to school after spending the holidays on the farm. He is understandably upset and sheds a few tears with Nanny, but he is feeling somewhat braver as he has a friend in Granpa Chook. The first order of business is to find Granpa Chook a place to hide, and the boy (back at school he is Pisskop once again) finds a spot in a small citrus orchard. After concealing the rooster, he makes his presence known to Mevrouw, who is skeptical about his recent healing but nevertheless concludes that his grandfather's beatings must have been more effective than her own.

After Mevrouw dismisses him, Pisskop returns to the orchard and is terrified by the behavior of Granpa Chook. The rooster is hopping up and down and squawking frightfully, and Pisskop thinks he is being killed. It turns out that instead it is the rooster who is doing the killing, as the aggressive Chook dispatches a grass snake with some relish. Pisskop hangs the headless corpse by his window, and as the other kids come home, he builds a shelter for the rooster.

That night, the Judge and his jury accost Pisskop. Pisskop is unafraid, buoyed by his time with Inkosi-Inkosikazi as a young warrior. His newfound nerve soon gets him in trouble, though, as he makes fun of the swastika tattoo that the Judge has had engraved over the holidays. This earns him a cuff and the promise that when Hitler comes to restore South Africa to the Boers, Pisskop will be the first to die. They swear this on an oath taken on Pisskop's bloody nose. Back in the little kids' dorms, the other boys tell Pisskop that he is in a lot of trouble and that Hitler is probably the new headmaster.

The next morning, Granpa Chook's cover is blown when he crows to greet the sun, up on a window ledge in Pisskop's dorm. The other boys, of course, notice, but the real danger is from Mevrouw. Mevrouw is alerted that something is amiss when she sees that there is chicken dung on Pisskop's pillow. She later sees Pisskop with the rooster and makes the correct deduction that they are friends. Pisskop tries to convince her that the rooster is not like other kaffir chickens by showing her different tricks Granpa Chook can do, but she is unimpressed and out comes a cleaver. Fortunately for Chook, two cockroaches jump out at Mevrouw when she claims the implement of his execution. The rooster quickly kills the vermin, much to the relief of Mevrouw, who appears to be deadly afraid of the big bugs. She agrees to let the rooster live as long as he cleans out the insects a couple of times a day.

Back in school, Pisskop is left mostly unmolested as long as he acts as the Judge's slave. He also learns that it is important for him to play dumb, as the Boer teachers such as Miss du Plessis will not tolerate an English child mastering reading in Afrikaans better than the Germans.



In the larger world, Britain declares war on Germany. This has a direct effect on the school, as the headmaster is overcome with emotion after declaring that all of the English will now pay for the Boer War with their lives. Pisskop cheers along with the rest until he remembers that he himself is English. The headmaster has to be escorted out of the dining hall and the Judge takes over the space in his absence, declaring that Pisskop is their first prisoner of war.

For the moment, things do not change much for Pisskop, but he is bent on finding a way to escape before he is marched into the sea. Distracted, he unintentionally ignores Miss du Plessis and then accidentally blurts out knowledge of advanced arithmetic that sends her into a fury. In this state, she beats Pisskop and draws blood from his ear. Horrified by this sight, she faints. The other boys and some teachers lead Pisskop to think that he has killed her, and he faints in horror.

When Pisskop comes to, Mevrouw tells him that the doctor is coming and that he must tell the doctor that he came by his injuries falling out of a tree. The doctor turns out to be Dr. Henny, who Pisskop trusts but dares not tell the truth. The doctor suspects, however, and when Pisskop clearly seeks a friend who is English, the doctor tells him that they are all South Africans, and that no one should tell him different.

At the end of the chapter, Pisskop is convinced that he causes women to have nervous breakdowns, as he has caused both his mother and Miss du Plessis to collapse. Along with the need to escape, the thought is a heavy one for a five-year-old to bear.

## Chapter Two Analysis

Most people reading about the decision to bring Granpa Chook to the school surely feel a premonitory tingle down their spine, but it looks as though for the time being the rooster is safe.

The same cannot be said for the developmental state of the young boy. Clearly, there is a division between the healthy life on the farm and the world of the school, and still the only identity the reader has been allowed to define with certainty is that of Pisskop. While he is most definitely showing some signs of personal will, one can't help but think that it is going to be very hard for a person who undergoes such treatment at the hands of others to recover. Indeed, in this chapter it is the adults even more so than the children who commit the gravest sins against the five-year-old English boy.

In terms of the attitudes of the society in general, some reason for optimism can be found in the attitude of Dr. Henny. While he is an Afrikaner, the doctor takes a real interest in the boy's health and concern over his environment. He is also clearly not susceptible to the racial overtones (at least not the European ones, how he feels about Africans is not established) that dictate the actions of many of the rest of the people in the young boy's life.





# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

Miss du Plessis was generally disliked among the school population, so her exit briefly gains Pisskop some reprieve. However, the Judge is soon back on the scene again, in his self-appointed role of Hitler's South African general. The little boy is humiliated when the Judge reminds him of the different circumstances of his penis. The Judge then decides that Pisskop should march every day after classes, four to five thousand steps. As he marches, Pisskop formulates a plan to get him out of the marching and keep him safe from the wrath of Hitler.

One afternoon, Pisskop demonstrates to the Judge that he can do the advanced arithmetic that so stymies his nemesis. Pisskop up until now has been worried that since the Judge is so dumb he will not graduate and thus will not leave the school, thereby staying to torture the English boy for an infinite period. By showing the Judge his mastery of fractions, however, the boy earns himself a way out of the marching, a promise that the Judge will not tell Hitler that Pisskop is English until the term is up, and a way to get the Judge out of the school when he graduates.

In the wider world, there is a disease loose amongst the chicken population and Pisskop learns that Hitler has swarmed over Poland. Pisskop thinks that this is an area in South Africa occupied by the Po tribe. Because of the ongoing war, the Afrikaner boys keep up their training. Pisskop is regularly taken out to the meetings of these storm troopers, where he is beaten, shot at with slings (catapults), made to hold iron bars in his extended hands for long periods (when he drops his arms he is beaten), and has red ants dropped down his pants. He is also subjected to humiliating verbal insults, and forced to confirm that he is dog shit. Through all of it, he never cries, as he has sworn to himself. He deals with the indignities by going to the land of the waterfalls in his mind.

At the end of the term, the Judge is a star on campus. He has risen from an academic zero to hero through the work of Pisskop, who does all of his homework for him. With the end of the term, however, any gratitude is gone, and Pisskop is subjected to the worst torture yet. He is forced to eat dog shit by the storm troopers. Sometime during the term, Pisskop turns six.

During the process, the Judge is overcome with animal emotion and raises his head to cry "Heil Hitler". At that moment, Granpa Chook (who is also brought to the sessions but is hard to torture, given that he is a chicken and that he is under the protection of Mevrouw) poops into the Judge's mouth. The Judge is overcome with rage, and it comes out that his real name is Jaapie Botha. Pisskop screams to his rooster to run, but instead the bird comes down to sit on his shoulder. He is caught and the Judge sentences him to death by catapult.



Begging for the life of his friend, Pisskop tells the judge first that he will tell Mevrou, and second that he will tell Mr. Stoffer that it is Pisskop who has been doing all of the Judge's work. The first attempt meets with the Judge's disdain; the second earns Pisskop a stone in the stomach courtesy of the Judge's catapult. Other missiles are soon loosed at Granpa Chook, as Pisskop begs the other boys to take his own life instead.

The Judge then attempts to further humiliate Pisskop, but the boy is too angry over the death of his friend, and insults the Judge and the Judge's mother. The Judge is enraged by the retorts and by Pisskop's refusal to cry, and starts to beat him severely. The other boys carry him away.

Pisskop buries his friend and feels a great loneliness overwhelm him. He is looking forward to it all ending with his return back to the farm. Although the chapter does not say outright what happens next, it is clear that this is not what is going to happen next in the life of the boy.

## Chapter Three Analysis

This chapter shows the first conscious attempts at manipulation in his young life. The reader is also shown that Pisskop is a very clever boy, not just in terms of book smarts but also in adaptation.

The death of Granpa Chook is bound to weigh heavily for at least the next few chapters in the story, and certainly where school is concerned. The chapter again highlights the incredible emotional frenzy that overcame followers of Hitler and which has been attributed at least in part to his meteoric rise.

The reader also continues to see large events as they unfold in the eyes of a child. Pisskop continues to see South Africa as the only world, and he is constantly sure that Hitler is only a few miles away and quickly approaching. That he would come under the special scrutiny of the *fuehrer* is never even a question in the mind of Pisskop.

Revealing the name of the Judge will also probably have great importance, and it is important to consider that the real identity of Jaapie Botha was revealed before Pisskop's identity has even been established.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

Pisskop is still at the school, but the term is all but over. After supper, Mevrou summons Pisskop. She notices the blood on his shirt, and when she takes it off, she sees the mark that the stone from the Judge's catapult made. She is quite willing to believe the lie that the boy offers, telling her that he fell and landed on a rock.

As she is dressing the wound, Mevrou tells Pisskop that he is not going back to the farm as he thought. He learns that the outbreak of Newcastle disease killed all of his grandfather's chickens, whereupon the farm was sold and his grandfather relocated to the town of Barberton, in the Eastern Transvaal. The boy's grandfather has sent Mevrou some money so that she can buy him some new shoes and get him a ticket for the train; the town is two days and two nights away.

Before embarking on the road to his new home, Pisskop first must get some new shoes from town. In doing so, he comes face to face with some new elements that he must fit into his idea of what South Africa is. The first is the sight of a sign that says *Blacks Only*. He wonders why whites are not allowed in. The second element as far as culture is concerned in Pisskop's South Africa is the introduction of the cobbler Harry Crown. Crown is a Jew who obviously runs a few successful businesses, as he appears to be very rich. He is also kind towards the boy, and is appalled when the boy introduces himself as Pisskop. Mevrou is quick to push the name aside, and instead chooses to concentrate on buying a pair of tackies that are far too large for the six-year-old's feet. Crown turns out to be very kind, and he supplies the boy with several suckers for his journey. As Mevrou and Pisskop leave, Crown says goodbye to the boy, abbreviating the name given to Peekay. Both speak in English, which incurs the wrath of Mevrou. She threatens the boy, but he reminds her that the ear she is holding is the one that Miss du Plessis cut. She forgets about her rage in consternation. Back at the school, the boy adds some more stones to the grave he has constructed for Granpa Chook.

The next day, the boy leaves on the train for the Eastern Transvaal. He is not sad to say goodbye to Mevrou, and is given in to the care of guard and conductor Hoppie Groenewald. It turns out that Hoppie is the nicest white person that the boy has met to date. When asked his name, the boy tells Hoppie that it is Peekay. Hoppie tells Peekay that he can take off the oversized shoes now, that Mevrou will never know. Peekay responds by offering Hoppie a sucker.

As the two sit and visit, Peekay learns that Hoppie is a boxer, and quite a good boxer at that. Before Peekay can put this into perspective, he must first find out from Hoppie what boxing is. He is surprised to learn that with the right technique, even a small person can defeat a big one. When he asks about the probability of beating up an anonymous bigger boy (who the reader knows is the Judge), though, Hoppie points out that boys do not have the punch that a man has. Hoppie wonders who it is that Peekay



wants to box and why, but Peekay is ashamed of his origins and does not want his new friendship to be compromised by Hoppie finding out he is English. Instead, the two pretend to spar. After hitting Hoppie with his best shot, Peekay finally lets his tears out. Hoppie asks no questions but only offers some comfort.

When Peekay is done crying, Hoppie gives him a pair of boxing gloves, telling the boy that they are the great equalizers, and that when he can wear them he will not need to fear any man. They then arrive at a station and Hoppie treats Peekay to a milkshake and a big supper. Peekay also gets to meet two ladies who appear to be big fans of Hoppie: Anna and her mother. After dinner, Peekay goes back to the train and Hoppie tucks him into his compartment.

## Chapter Four Analysis

This is clearly a pivotal chapter in the book. The train ride is a metaphor for the transformation of Pisskop's life as he leaves the school and his old life behind for the new town. This includes a new identity for him as Peekay. Peekay notes this as he reflects on how everything seems to slide away in the dark on a train.

Hoppie is destined to play an important part in Peekay's life over the next seventeen years, as he notes. Finally giving in to the urge to cry means that Peekay has entered a transformative state and is ready to embark on some new learning experiences. It seems obvious that boxing will play a critical role in the rest of his life, as he seeks to emulate his new idol and to use the concept of the great equalizers.

Noticeably absent on the train ride is any reference to ethnicities, other than the usual disdain for Africans and Peekay's hidden reluctance to reveal his true background. Hoppie is a friend indeed, and is helping to put Peekay back on a road of healing after the horrible loss of his other friend, Granpa Chook.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

Peekay wakes up on the train in the morning and Hoppie gives him some coffee. Peekay is horrified when he realizes that he is not wearing his pants, and therefore is in danger of being exposed as a *rooinek* due to his circumcised penis. He tries to deflect Hoppie as the railroad man tells him that they are going to get breakfast, but Hoppie reads the bluff, not realizing why Peekay is so reluctant. In jest, he rips the blanket off of the bed and Peekay breaks down in horror as he confesses to his idol that he is not the next welterweight champion, as Hoppie has proclaimed, but is just an English boy. Hoppie says nothing and eventually Peekay has to look up. It is evident to the reader, though not the little boy, that Hoppie has guessed exactly what has happened to Peekay and feels very sorry for him indeed. He comforts Peekay and tells him that the only fight where a man has beaten him (in his Kid Louis persona) was against an Englishman with a great left hook, much like Hoppie himself. The two go out for breakfast.

At breakfast, Peekay is introduced to the concept of betting on sports events. Hoppie also tells Peekay that it is good to be a little frightened before important events like boxing matches, because it makes you think. He also points out to Peekay, though, that it is the heart that matters, not the head. He also tells Peekay the strategy he uses to fight against bigger men, throwing rights all night until the chance to connect with a left uppercut. Peekay believes Hoppie when he says that the boy will be able to do the same thing.

After breakfast, the two go to Hoppie's quarters where the man astounds Peekay with his skill against the speedball. Peekay is again amazed at lunch when he is treated to a steak, courtesy of the railroad. The steak is from the cook, who has bet a lot of money on the outcome of the night's match. Hoppie talks Peekay into betting his grandfather's shilling on the outcome of the match, saying that in life the thing we shouldn't do is sometimes the emergency.

Hoppie takes Peekay out to replace his shoes in the town. They go to a shop owned by a family of Indians, and Peekay immediately realizes that Hoppie looks down on the people who own the store. Peekay himself is mesmerized by the beauty of the woman who is tending the counter when the two enter the shop. After some bargaining, Peekay gets some new shoes. When the Indian store owner (who has a son at university in Bombay) realizes who Hoppie is, he immediately wants to return the money, as he has bet ten pounds on "Kid Louis" for the night's match and does not want bad luck. He gives the money to Peekay, and his daughter gives Peekay a yellow sucker. Outside the shop, Hoppie baldly states that a coolie is better than a kaffir, but not as good as a white man.



The two continue to a pool hall, where they meet both railroad and mining men. Hoppie and his opponent, Jackhammer Smit (who is a huge man), have a stare down and Smit throws out some threats and insults. Hoppie maintains his composure, jesting back at the big man and sending him into a rage.

Back on the train, Hoppie tells Peekay that he needs to bring him a glass of water every ten minutes, and force Hoppie to drink it even if he does not want to. He explains that this will help him to keep hydrated during the fight, a trick he learned from American boxer Joe Louis (it is this Louis to whom Hoppie refers in his fighting name). To Peekay's confusion, Hoppie informs him that unlike black people in South Africa, black Americans are worthy of respect and admiration. They are white men with black skin, Negroes not kaffirs. Peekay is confused.

On the way to the fight, Peekay asks about Hoppie's relationship with Anna. Hoppie says that they like each other, but nothing is certain as he has to go to war. Peekay is shocked that someone as nice as Hoppie would go fight for Hitler, but Hoppie explains that he will be fighting against Hitler. Hoppie tells Peekay that the English do have lots to answer for, but Hitler is an evil man. Once again, it appears as though Hoppie understands exactly what Peekay went through at school.

## Chapter Five Analysis

It is clear that Hoppie is an enlightened individual, but still is hampered by the preconceptions of society. Unlike most of the Boers in Peekay's limited experience, Hoppie can move beyond the past and see that not all things German are good, and not all things English are bad.

It appears that even Hoppie has his limits though, and this confounds the boy. He found the Indian lady in the shop to be quite beautiful and does not really understand why she and her family are inferior. He also cannot reconcile the two different ways in which black people in America and those in Africa are regarded by Hoppie. One has to wonder what a white person in the southern States would say to Hoppie's thinking about American blacks.

Peekay is also learning several lessons when it comes to strategy; both mental and physical. He astounds Hoppie by predicting the strategy that the welterweight will use against the huge Smit at the evening's fight. Although it is not yet clear if Peekay understands the undertones of Hoppie's stare down and verbal exchange with the other boxer, it is assured that it has left an imprint on the boy's mind.



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

It is fight time, and Peekay is amazed at how many people are at the match. He estimates that there are two thousand men in the stands, with even more people when the Africans underneath the stands are counted. He accompanies Hoppie into the tent where Jackhammer Smit and his seconds are already, along with the referee, who Peekay is surprised to see is a grown man but only his own height, a dwarf.

Smit and Hoppie again exchange a couple of verbal blows, with Smit coming out enraged once again. The inference in the previous chapter is solidified when Hoppie says that every once in a while the shots from the mouth are what will decide a fight. He also demonstrates to Peekay that part of being a great fighter is by playing to the crowd, even when it comes to putting the gloves on.

At the ring, Peekay sits with a Boer woman, Big Hettie. She is the cook at the railway mess who had given Peekay some extra dessert. She drinks Irish whiskey throughout the fight as she cheers on Kid Louis.

The fight starts according to the plan laid by Hoppie. He uses his speed to stay out of the reach of his huge opponent, and hits him repeatedly above the right eye. The mining man does not realize how to respond until the third round, when his left eye is almost closed. He then starts to wait in the middle of the ring for Hoppie to come to him. This way, Jackhammer can feed Hoppie some devastating body shots when Hoppie goes after his right eye. Midway through the fight, Smit deals a devastating blow to Hoppie's body. Hoppie falls, but Smit does not go into his corner when told by the referee. He stands over Hoppie for a long time until going back. Then the ref starts the count, but a lot of time has passed. Hoppie gets up and the round ends, with Hettie commenting that Smit isn't much of a fighter after all; he counts only on his hits, not his brains. Still, Peekay thinks about Granpa Chook and how even the small and seemingly indomitable can be overwhelmed by the big apes.

The rest of the fight sees the two men worn out, with Smit taking the worst of it and throwing up between rounds. In the eleventh, he knocks the referee off his feet and then head butts Hoppie, sending the smaller man to the ground. The crowd goes wild, with both railway men and miners trying to get at each other to fight. When the dust settles, the referee declares Hoppie the winner on a foul, but Hoppie elects to keep fighting. He beats on the big man for the rest of the match, until being knocked off his feet in the fourteenth. He is not beaten, however; instead, he uses his recovery from the fall to put power into a punch that fells Jackhammer.

Peekay is delighted at his idol's triumph, noting that Kid Louis used his head the whole match. Still, just as Hoppie said, the heart carried the day. Big Hettie is swinging from drunk to sober and back again, and Gert the bookkeeper is paying out the bets, having



made a killing as the odds were against Hoppie. Hoppie catches Peekay's eye and makes sure that he can get through the crowd to his side. The rest of the night is spent in celebration, and Peekay falls asleep on the truck ride home.

## Chapter Six Analysis

The big fight solidifies in Peekay's mind what Hoppie has been saying all along, that little really can beat big. Peekay sees that with a good plan, by keeping your cool, and above all, by believing that it can be done, you can overcome great odds.

He has also explicitly learns the importance of taking every advantage that you can in an uneven fight, even in the time leading up to the match. It would not be surprising if this clever boy were to apply this to other areas of his life apart from boxing.

Big Hettie is the third example of a matronly force within Peekay's life. As is the case with Nanny and with Mevrouw, she is a buxom lady with a booming voice. She is also kind (unlike Mevrouw) and appears to have a deep love for the people with whom she surrounds herself. Her high spirits and her drinking clearly leave an impression on the boy.





# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

Chapter seven opens up as Peekay wakes up, still on the train. Hoppie is gone now, though, having pinned a note to Peekay's shirt with ten shillings attached that Peekay had won by betting on Hoppie the night before. The note also reminds Peekay of the lessons that Hoppie has taught him: "little can beat big", and "first with the head, then with the heart". Peekay feels sad that his friend is gone.

As he reflects on Hoppie, Peekay gradually becomes aware that there is a strange sound in his compartment. He realizes that Big Hettie is also on the train with him, and she is deep in sleep. Peekay goes about his morning routine and when he comes back to the sleeping chamber, he finds that Hettie has fallen half off of her bed, and that she appears to be having trouble breathing. Through a great effort, he manages to get her legs off the bed and her breathing returns to normal.

The new guard comes by to check tickets. It turns out he is not at all like Hoppie. His name is Pik Botha, and he is interested only in doing things by the book when it will reflect well upon him, and in a superficial but highly vocal relationship with Jesus, who he has found through the Apostolic Faith Church. He is critical of Hoppie, and Peekay comes to his idol's defense by pointing out that both men hate kaffirs. Pik Botha is also very dismayed to find that Big Hettie is on his train. Much of the morning is spent trying to rearrange the huge woman, with the help of a waiter on the train named Hennie Venter. This is attempted both while Hettie is unconscious and while she is awake.

When she wakes up, it is clear that Hettie has no fondness for the retentive Pik Botha, a sentiment that is shared by Venter. Awake, Hettie again establishes that she has an interest in Peekay's well being. She tells him that she came along because she did not want him alone on the train. She also tells him a bit about her past, how she has dated many men who mistreated her. One in particular, a featherweight boxer, was with her for a very long time many years ago but died in the ring. Hettie also teaches Peekay about what courage and pride mean.

It turns out that Hettie has a very strong habit for compulsive eating, which makes Peekay feel ashamed. When the train pulls into the next stations, Peekay, Botha, and Venter all make further attempts to dislodge the woman from the floor of the compartment, to no avail. The men go to enlist further help, but after they leave, Hettie dies from what appears to be a heart attack in front of Peekay.

Peekay is affected by Hettie's death, but his tears are for the spirit of her even more than for the person. He does not feel the pain that he felt upon the death of Granpa Chook, but he does realize that people with a spirit like the big woman's do not come around very often. As he contemplates this, he can hear the men coming back with tools and more help to pry Hettie out of the compartment.



## Chapter Seven Analysis

While Peekay feels some sorrow over Hoppie's departure, he appears to take it in stride. He seems to be coming to terms with the fact that losing the people you love tends to happen in life much more often than one would like.

Pik Botha is Peekay's first encounter with religious fervor, and it appears to be mixed in with a fair measure of hypocrisy. It is sad that the only way that Peekay can reconcile the attitude of this man and that of his hero is by appealing to their mutual disdain for black Africans.

Big Hettie offers Peekay some important advice about pride and courage, which he does not yet understand but which he files in his memory. Her demise comes at the end of his train ride, which seems again to finalize the fact that he is leaving behind one life and entering another. The train ride lasted for less than two whole days, yet it utterly changed the young boy's life. It is fitting that it should be marked with an end, much as the death of Granpa Chook put a final punctuation on his time at the boarding school.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

Peekay arrives at Barberton station, where he is surprised to find out that it is his mother who is waiting to pick him up. She is a tiny woman, a stark contrast to the other women in Peekay's life who he has had in the roles that a mother would traditionally play. Pastor Mulvery of the Barberton Apostolic Faith Church accompanies her. It appears as though his mother has converted to that faith, and both she and the Pastor are much given to loud exhortations about the Lord. Peekay is unimpressed with the church as he has seen it through its members thus far.

Peekay immediately asks about his Nanny, and his mother replies that boys of six no longer need nannies. Peekay is shocked, both by the fact that he is six and that his Nanny will no longer be with him.

The Pastor drives Peekay and his mother to the place where they will now reside with his grandfather. It is a smaller house in town, and Peekay can't tell much about the exterior in the dark. The furnishings in the main room are much as he remembers from the rooms on the farm, though, with some of Granpa's trophies and pictures as well as an old grandfather clock. He encounters his grandfather, who tells Peekay that all of his prize Orpington chickens had to be killed due to Newcastle disease. Peekay responds by telling his grandfather that Granpa Chook is also dead, and his mother overhears. She thinks that Peekay is talking about his grandfather's chickens, and does not realize he is talking about his friend.

The next morning, Peekay goes about exploring his new home. He goes through the kitchen and out into a large garden, in which there are six beautiful trees and many roses growing. He walks out of the garden, climbs the hill behind the house, and encounters a breathtaking view of the town and of the veldt beyond, right out to the mountains. He realizes that his grandfather is probably out and about by this time, and he heads back to the house to ask about his Nanny.

Peekay encounters his grandfather in the garden, tending to the roses. Peekay gives Granpa the shilling in change left from the purchase of his shoes, and then asks about his nanny. Granpa answers that life always changes, and then goes into a talk about a frail woman, and Peekay realizes that he must be talking about his wife, Peekay's grandmother. She died after having Peekay's mother. Apparently, she loved roses, and the house where they are now living had been their home before she had died and Granpa had moved out to the farm in the countryside.

Realizing that he is not going to get a clear answer about his nanny from Granpa, Peekay goes back into the house. He is surprised to find that the two kitchen girls from the farm, Dee and Dum, have also come to the house in the town. They do not look as they did on the farm, and they tell Peekay sadly that his mother made them remove



their bangles and their traditional dresses. They tell Peekay that she is very different than the woman who left after the nervous breakdown. When asked about where his Nanny is, the girls reply that they cannot say as they have been ordered not to talk to Peekay about her disappearance by his mother. They do, however, tell Peekay that Nanny is indeed still alive.

Peekay finally goes to confront his mother about the departure of his nanny. He finds her in her sewing room, where she makes dresses to sell in order to supplement the meager income the family now has. He asks her where Nanny is, and his mother replies that she has gone to Zululand. Peekay's mother sent her there after a lot of prayer; she disagreed with the fact that Nanny still retained her tribal clothing and decorations and was infuriated when she found out that Nanny had asked Inkosi-Inkosikazi to assist with Peekay's bedwetting. Peekay is infuriated with what his mother has done, and with the pious intonations she continually utters. He declares that the Lord is a shithhead and then runs out of the house and back into the hills. As he cries, he realizes that in the past few minutes he has grown up.

## Chapter Eight Analysis

In this chapter, the reader is finally acquainted with Peekay's mother, who is a stark contrast to the women who have really brought him up. It is clear that, when paired with the influence of Pik Botha, her religious leanings are going to have a negative effect on Peekay's view of Christianity. It is also interesting that the reader is still not told Peekay's real name; there is now every indication that his Peekay identity, which he forged for himself, will be the one that he is always known by.

Peekay's grandfather again appears to be a man of few words, speaking beside the issue when he speaks at all. He appears to have a very hands-off relationship with the boy, offering advice when asked but never going too deep, or at least not meeting the boy on the level of a child.

The final verdict on Peekay's nanny forces him to a new level in his mental development. The most visible aspect of his childhood is now gone forever, and with the return of Nanny to her Zululand home, any chance at a comforted existence that is due small children is now gone. Because of this, Peekay grows up, and he realizes that he will no longer be a servant to loneliness, although loneliness will always be a part of him.



# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

As Peekay is recovering from his cry, he is surprised to hear someone talking to him. It is a German man who introduces himself as Professor von Vollensteen. He has taken a picture of Peekay while the boy was sitting on the rocks. Peekay likes him and detects no secret motivations beneath the friendly demeanor (Peekay has discovered that by really listening, one can tell whether or not someone is being genuine, and that people are almost always talking about more than what they are actually saying). It turns out that the professor is an amateur botanist, with a special interest in cactus. He is also a music teacher, and he and Peekay are destined to become good friends; the Professor tells Peekay to just address him as "Doc".

The two talk for quite a while, with Doc telling Peekay the names of several different kinds of cactus species (it happens that the rock on which Peekay was sitting for his cry was sheltering a particularly rare type, much to the professor's delight). They talk about what it means to be a professor, and Doc informs Peekay that he in fact has a whole garden full of cactus, much the same as Peekay's Granpa's rose garden. Then it is time for the two to part ways, as it is dark outside.

When he arrives home, Peekay is met by Dum and Dee, who tell him that his mother wishes to see him. It is obvious that they expect a lot of trouble for the boy, and they tell him they have hidden some food under his bed. Peekay is unafraid of his mother, having been through the ringer already in the boarding school. As it turns out, she does not intend to give him a thrashing, but she does tell him he has to go to bed without any supper because of his outburst against the Lord. She also reveals some intense jealousy over Peekay's relationship with Nanny. At this point, she begins to act a bit hysterical, and Peekay feels relieved as he knows how to deal with that side of his mother.

The next day, events of the wider world are again brought to Peekay's attention as some soldiers move into a military camp nearby. The English in South Africa fear treachery by their neighbors, the Portuguese. Peekay again has some of his old fears resurface, about being marched into the sea by Hitler, and he decided to write Nanny in Zululand, and sends her the ten shillings he won betting on Hoppie.

After watching a military convoy go by, Peekay realized that Doc is standing at his front gate. The Professor wished to go in and talk to Peekay's mother. It turns out that he wants to give Peekay piano lessons (before he mentions this, he calls the boy "Peekay", which utterly confuses his mother). He also shows her the picture he took of Peekay on the rock, and she is saddened by how sorrowful the boy looks. She is annoyed by the professor's accurate presumption that boarding school has caused that sadness, and she is also immediately defensive. This at first causes her to be reluctant to accept the professor's offer. However, the professor proves to be a charming man and wins her



over by saying that the lesson would be free if she would be willing to let Peekay come with him and look for cactus on his trips in the hills. She is also pleased that her son will allow the family to be noticed for the aspect of culture his music might bring.

Through the summer, Peekay and Doc roam the hills looking for cactus and carry on with piano lessons, although both realize that Peekay will never be a star, as he is average at best on the instrument. They both enjoy their botany time, though, and become familiar with Mrs. Boxall, the librarian for the Barberton library and a contributing columnist to *The Goldfields News*.

Peekay gives several recitals at the piano during town gatherings, which are something of a triumph for the English-speaking people of the community as the Boers are much more musically gifted than the Anglos. Mrs. Boxall always covers the performances in her columns.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

Peekay clearly has a new influence in his life in the form of Professor von Vollensteen. The older man adds to Peekay's knowledge both in the physical world and the world of the arts. Moreover, like Hoppie, Doc appears to have a genuine interest in helping Peekay realize his full potential and appears to have a sixth sense as to the type of life and family the boy has lived in.

Peekay makes it obvious that he does not have a future as a pianist, but one can't help but to wonder if this is only because he has already made up his mind to become the welterweight champion. Certainly, he alludes to a certain degree of success in music, both in foreshadowing future achievements and in mentioning the success of the recitals (at this time, remember, the boy is only six years old and yet his performances are the toast of the English part of the town).

The wider world is bound to have an effect on Peekay's life once again, as there is definitely some suspicion of outsiders within the English parts of town and Doc is himself German.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

The chapter starts out with a brief look at Peekay's new academic life. Enrolled in school, it is soon obvious that he is well ahead of other boys his age, and he is bumped up to grade three. He has let some of his camouflage drop at the urging of Doc, who says it is a great sin to hide a great mind.

Doc, it turns out, is an alcoholic, although Peekay never sees him drunk. Doc tends to get drunk at night, and the reader later finds out that this is due to some historical demons from his days as a maestro in Germany. At one point, he was giving a concert and had a panic attack in the middle of a piece of music. Booed off the stage, he tried to re-master that piece every night and when he couldn't, he would begin drinking. He referred to his hangover as the "wolves in his head", which Peekay would find out when he went to the Professor's house in the morning.

One morning, as the professor and Peekay are returning from the hills, they find two military men waiting at the professor's house. It turns out that they are there to arrest Doc as a spy. Doc is quite willing to go but first must pack up some things, including some of his whisky. He offers some to the sergeant who escorts him into the house, but does not want any for himself. The sergeant dumps some of the drink onto the keys of Doc's piano in imitation of something the military man saw on a movie, and this sends Doc into a rage. He smashes the sergeant's wrist with his walking cane and then walks out towards the van. The sergeant is now totally enraged and rushes at Doc, calling him a child molester. The military man knocks Doc over and tries to kick him, but Peekay intercepts the blow and is rendered unconscious.

Peekay comes to in the hospital and is immediately concerned for Doc. He questions Marie, his nurse, about where they have taken the Professor, but the nurse is under strict orders not to discuss it. Peekay is also not to have any visitors outside of his family (in the hospital there is once again an incident involving the boy's name, but the name that appears on the chart is never revealed).

It turns out that Peekay is regarded as a hero, because the military has put out a statement that says that Doc was a spy and that Peekay was injured by the professor while he tried to escape. Peekay knows this to be untrue but has no way of communicating the truth to anyone, because his jaw is broken and because he is allowed no visitors. Finally, though, Mrs. Boxall the librarian is allowed in to visit him, and he is able to write down what happened on a note to her. They do not see each other or communicate for several days, and it turns out that she is being prevented from seeing him due to her bringing the matter of the lie that led to Doc's arrest to the attention of the public. There is to be an inquest into the matter, although Peekay's reliability is in doubt due to the fact that no one can believe a young boy could remember the events with such clarity or know so much about cactuses and swear



words. During the hearing, however, Peekay is able to convince the colonel in charge of the truth of what transpired. Doc, however, is still to be incarcerated, as he is still an unregistered German. He is to be sent to a concentration camp for the duration of the war.

Events end up playing out that make the situation much less dire than they seem. Doc turns out to be a bit of a celebrity in prison, due to the fact that he is German in a prison that has a mostly Boer staff and because he is a famous musician. Peekay is allowed to visit the professor, and when he does it turns out that the kommandant of the facility, as well as the guards, are all kindly disposed towards the old man and want him to play in a recital in the town square. Doc is reluctant, but does want to please the prison staff in order to make his life more comfortable and to curry favor, which is necessary for survival in prison. He plays at the concert, and in so doing, he exercises the demons from his past and also his liquor habit. Peekay is granted leave to visit Doc whenever he wishes.

During his first visit to the prison, Peekay also meets several of the staff, including the brother of the man whom Hoppie defeated, Jackhammer Smit. Lieutenant Smit is in charge of the local boxing team, made up mostly of Boer boys and the guards at the prison. Peekay asks if he might join the squad, but is told by Smit (also known as Klipklop because of his solid head, which takes a lot of shots but the boxer never goes down). Smit denies Peekay due to his age, but Peekay implores kommandant van Zyl to let him on the team. Van Zyl reverses Smit's decision, which makes the lieutenant mad. In fact, he is enraged until he realizes it was Peekay who accompanied Hoppie in the fight against his brother. After realizing this, he agrees to train Peekay but only with the agreement that Peekay will not have a fight or spar with a real partner until he is ten years old.

The racial divide between colors in South Africa is also brought into light in this chapter as Smit brutally beats one of the black prisoners.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

Chapter ten is a stark reminder of the tensions that fill South Africa along racial lines, both among Europeans and among Africans. Doc's arrest and the subsequent cover-up has the whole town saying that he is a German spy and that they had suspected it all along, with the adult exceptions of Mrs. Boxall and the professor's attorney, Mr. Andrews. Although this is disproved, the incident still reveals the deep divisions.

The prison explicitly demonstrates the dire straits of the black population in the nation, as the beating that Klipklop gives the black prisoner when he assumes he stole biscuits demonstrates. As it turns out, the prisoner did not steal the biscuits, but another of the prison staff ate them. Still, the incident is laughed about rather than apologized for.

Another important development is Doc's ability to move on past the failed concert that lies in his past. Although his concert was the site of a riot and a total breakdown in



municipal communications, he earned the right to see Peekay whenever the boy wished and he exorcised his personal demons.



# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Eleven Summary

Peekay outlines his daily routine. He gets up early in the morning and reports to the prison for boxing practice. He trains diligently with the equipment, eventually getting a feel for the speedball. Although he is making progress, he is impatient with the pace of his schedule and eager to get into the ring. Doc often helps him with his frustrations by reminding him that all great piano players must first learn the basics so well that they become second nature. For his part, Doc is virtually a free man in the prison, where he has elected to stay instead of going to a concentration camp. He gives Peekay piano lessons after his boxing practice each morning. Doc is also very interested in watching Peekay at his boxing lessons.

After school, Peekay often tends to the professor's cactus garden by pruning, cataloguing, and sometimes eliminating pests. Marie the nurse is now living with Peekay and his family, and she often brings goods from her family's farm to the household, including tobacco. Peekay soon learns that in prison, tobacco is a much sought-after commodity, and he strikes up a relationship with a 'yellow' man in the prison, Geel Piet.

Geel Piet is half black and half white, and thus hated by both races. He has spent most of his life in the prison system, although as it turns out, when he was free he helped with many boxing teams. Much later on in life, Peekay realizes that Piet had long planned his ingratiation process first with the boy and then the professor in order to solidify his position as the man within the prison. The book points out that without the influences of the older prisoners, many prison systems would break down. Doc and Peekay both become key components in the smuggling system of the prison. Although powerful within the prison, Piet is still a slave of the system, as is graphically pointed out when Peekay wins his first match. When he exults in the victory, he is beaten severely by Lieutenant Smit. He is used to that kind of treatment, however, and recovers.

Time goes by, and eventually Geel Piet is given the job of coaching the boys' squad of the boxing team. He concentrates especially on Peekay, teaching the boy the importance of defense. Peekay is able to throw a fifteen-pound medicine ball over Smit's head before he turns ten, thus meeting the condition Smit set in order for him to be able to fight. The first opponent he takes on in the ring is a big eleven-year-old called Snotnose Bronkhurst. Peekay technically masters the older boy and thus wins the fight. As he is going back to his corner, Snotnose launches a sneak attack, which Peekay eludes and turns to deal a crushing blow to the bigger boy's solar plexus. Snotnose is defeated, but made angry by the showing, he tries to jump Peekay the next day at school. Peekay avoids getting badly hurt mostly through luck, but is shaken up and wants to learn some dirty tricks. Geel Piet is reluctant to teach any of these moves to the boy, as he believes it will ruin the boxer in him. Eventually, though, he does teach Peekay the art of the head butt.



This trick is to come in handy, as Peekay once again finds himself picked on in school for being different. He eventually must face two of his biggest tormentors. After thrashing one cleanly, the other backs down. Then, Snotnose (who had been acting as Peekay's second) also wants to fight Peekay. Peekay defeats him through using the Liverpool Kiss that Piet had shown him. After these incidents, Peekay is well respected at school and becomes a mediating figure between Boers and English, although he still has to fight a Boer on occasion.

Peekay, Doc, Piet, and Mrs. Boxall also begin a system of exchanging letters from the prisoners to their families outside. This system launches Peekay into a stratosphere of fame with the black inmates, as they often doubt they will get to see their impoverished families again. The boy becomes a kind of folk hero. The inmates call him the Tadpole Angel and sing to him when he appears.

Towards the end of the chapter, Peekay learns that he is to participate in the under-twelve division of a boxing match in Nelspruit.

## Chapter Eleven Analysis

Doc is virtually a free man within the prison, in stark contrast to the colored men of the facility, who are closely watched and often brutalized for petty infractions. Even Geel Piet, who proves indispensable to the boxing team, is severely beaten whenever he steps over the narrow and invisible line that is determined by the white guards.

Peekay is taking his first huge strides towards his goal as he reaches an age and strength at which Smit feels that he can be pitted against opponents. It is clear from the way he deals with Snotnose and the boys at school who bully him that the (now nine-year-old) boy is taking his boxing lessons very seriously, along with Hoppie's advice to use the head and then the heart. Peekay is constantly developing his personal work ethic, which he has christened the power of one.



# Chapter Twelve

## Chapter Twelve Summary

Peekay is almost ten, but still there is doubt in the mind of Smit if he can stand up in a competition against boys who are almost two years older than him and also, being Boers, are much bigger. One day, though, Snotnose does not show up for practice and Peekay is therefore awarded his spot on the team. Geel Piet, who is almost as happy as Peekay, delivers this message. Smit tells Peekay that he is going to lose, but that will be all right as no one should win their first match.

Peekay is very concerned about obtaining his mother's permission to go to the competition, as he is not sure where boxing stands in the eyes of the Lord. It turns out, however, that Smit has already approached his mother and that she has discussed the matter with his grandfather. Although she has received no clear heavenly direction in the matter, Peekay's mother decides that he can participate in the event.

Many people participate in getting Peekay ready for the fight as far as equipment. Dee and Dum attend to his workout clothes, as well as Geel Piet. The black prisoners make Peekay a beautiful pair of boots in their workshops, and the team provides him with his own singlet and shorts.

The match takes place in a different town, but the guards and the team conspire to bring Doc along (Geel Piet, of course, must stay behind). The rules of the tourney are simple; three rounds per fight, and any knockdown means that the fallen fighter is out. He wins his first two fights much to the surprise of everyone at the event, his own coaches included. He does this by using his head, staying out of reach, and tiring his opponents while landing crucial blows whenever he can. His politeness earns him the handle "Gentleman Peekay".

The final match is between Peekay and a huge Boer boy, Killer Kroon. The fight is so mismatched that the referee at first refuses to let Peekay participate, saying that he is going to be a great boxer and that they cannot afford to ruin that by letting him get crushed. Smit explains that Peekay has never missed a practice and has done all that was asked of him, and that he deserves to be allowed to fight. The ref agrees and the fight is on.

Although Kroon knocks Peekay down several times, the rules to end the fight are overruled by the referee, who is himself once again very impressed with Peekay's skill and his heart. Kroon takes many punches from Peekay, and starts to become very worn out. After Peekay falls to the mat a second time (his pants fall down due to a dirty move by Kroon) he cannot come out of his corner and Peekay is declared the winner of the competition.



## Chapter Twelve Analysis

It is clear that Peekay has the skill and the determination to make his dreams of becoming the welterweight champion a reality. All of the boys whom he defeated in the tournament were much larger than himself, a fact that almost precluded anyone from letting him fight at all. In addition, he was much younger than his opponents.

An interesting thing happens in the final match against Kroon. Peekay's shorts fall down, and it is clear that he is wearing no underwear. A few years ago, Peekay would have been scrambling to cover up the evidence of his different status because of his experience at boarding school. However, the whole time at the school appears to be merely a memory and no longer a driving force behind the formulation of life strategies. Peekay barely minds the fact that his shorts are down, aside from the fact that they hinder his balance. No mention at all is made of any embarrassment or of the need to cover up. It seems as though his need for camouflage has been greatly diminished through his many successes.



# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Thirteen Summary

The chapter begins with the team still at the competition in Nelspruit. The Barberton Blues have won five of the eight finals and the final match is in the heavyweight division, where the Afrikaner warder Gert will be taking on a boxer who outweighs him by thirty pounds. Although Gert puts up a game fight, the bigger man knocks him out in the third round, and the blow is so hard that he must ride back to Barberton in a separate car. Doc notes to Peekay that Gert fought too much with his heart and not enough with his head. On the way home from the competition, Peekay replays his matches in his head, detail by detail. He notes that this skill is to his advantage when it comes to boxing, as he can remember and make corrections for any mistakes.

The next day is church, and Peekay goes out of respect for his mother, although he remains unrepentant. He also mentions some of the concerns he has with the church. Specifically, he struggles with the idea that the church does not treat everyone as equals. He has been known on occasion to trouble the staff with questions regarding where black people will live in heaven. He also notes that once someone is converted, they all of a sudden become socially respectable, unless of course they backslide.

While Peekay remains a sinner, his mother is as zealous as ever. She has converted Marie, and together the two ladies start an outreach within the hospital, often converting people on their deathbeds. One day, Marie breaks down about her problem with pimples, and she and Peekay's mother pray for the Lord to clear her skin. To Peekay's amazement, her condition is gone within the year, although he later realizes that it had more to do with some nutritional advice from Doc rather than divine intervention.

Back at the prison, Geel Piet tells Peekay that he did not expect the boy to make it even to the semi-finals, and that he is very pleased with his victory. Everyone at the jail is talking about how the African inmates seemed to know of the victory even before word of the fight had been announced. Many of the wardens point out that they have seen this before, that the People (which is the name that Africans and those who respect them apply to their collective tribal identities) always seem to know about important events in advance. It seems as though their collective energy is capable of great achievements.

At the practice, a photographer has showed up to take pictures of the team. After he has snapped several, Lieutenant Smit invites Geel Piet to join them in the pictures. Sergeant Oudendaal refuses to have his picture taken with the colored man, and one by one, most of the other team members back out as well, with the exception of Smit, Peekay, Gert, and Doc. Each of the people in the picture received a copy, but Smit refused his and Peekay instead gives it to Geel Piet. Smit is promoted to captain a few weeks later, and takes back the copies of the picture from the other men, as he does not want any records that might taint his career. The promotion of Smit opens up a vacancy that is



filled by Sergeant Borman, an older guard who vehemently hates Africans and openly resents Geel Piet and his freedoms, which come by way of Doc and Peekay. He is especially brutal, and takes a narcissistic joy in badly beating the black prisoners both mentally and physically. Geel Piet is certain that one day Borman will get him.

Up until now, Peekay's main teachers have been Doc and Mrs. Boxall. A new teacher has joined the staff at Peekay's school, however. Her name is Miss Bornstein, an extremely beautiful Jewish woman with whom Peekay immediately falls in love. She has already heard of his abilities and tests for herself to see if he is as intelligent as everyone says. Finding that he is, she also begins to take an active part in his education above and beyond what he could learn in the small Barberton school. She also engages Doc in games of chess by exchanging moves written on paper. When he proves impossible to beat, she sets him up to play matches against her father. The two old men prove a good match, both taking games from each other often.

The war in Europe is coming to a close, and with its end, Doc will be a free man. Still, while he is in prison he is subject to the rules, a point driven home when Borman inspects the piano stool that he thinks may be the method by which the group is smuggling letters into the prison for the black prisoners. Finding nothing, he leaves Peekay and Doc with an ominous warning.

## Chapter Thirteen Analysis

The promotion of Smit is a good thing for the man himself, but his replacement is brutal and there is a lot of foreshadowing that he is going to do some serious damage to the little world that Doc, Peekay, and Geel Piet have created within the prison walls. Doc's freedom is so close that he can taste it.

Peekay's distaste for Christianity continues to grow as he sees how easily mere words can change how the church population feels about a person. He also believes that the members of the Apostolic Faith Mission are born losers and need to justify that by saying it is what God wants.

Miss Bornstein is a new influence on Peekay's life both personally and educationally.



# Chapter Fourteen

## Chapter Fourteen Summary

The prison is in an uproar, because the inspector of prisons for all of South Africa is scheduled to pay a visit. Lieutenant Borman has been put in charge of the preparations and is working the clack prisoners very hard to put out the impression that the facility is neatly and tidily run. He is a confirmed member of the Oxwagon Guard, a Neo-Nazi group committed to the idea of a superior white South Africa. In fact, he is a leading member in the secret society, of which Kommandant von Zyl is also a member.

Part of the proceedings for the inspector will include a display by the boxing team. The kommandant also wishes Doc to perform a concert, but Doc refuses to give his guarantee (he might be free by then, if Germany surrenders) that he will perform unless he is allowed to have a concert for the African prisoners. Von Zyl agrees, and Doc reveals to Peekay that he has written a piece of music that he has entitled "Concerto of the Great Southland". It is a piece based on the songs he has heard the four tribes that make up the black population of Africa singing when they are out in the exercise yard. He will play on the piano, while Peekay will conduct the singers. Geel Piet will communicate to the prisoners when they are to come in and the words they should sing. The night of the concert comes, and it is a huge success. The black prisoners believe the entire concert to be the result of the effort of the Tadpole Angel, and everyone is very emotional at the end of the night. To make his legend grow even further, the sky explodes with fireworks as the ovation is drawing to an end and the prisoners are going back to their cells. These they believe are stars to honor the Tadpole Angel, although really they are only fireworks celebrating the end of World War II. Doc is now a free man.

To the consternation of Peekay and Doc, Geel Piet is a no-show for the concert. Doc is especially frustrated at his absence, and intends to give the little criminal a piece of his mind. Peekay goes to the gym to return the gloves that he had used at the concert, and finds Geel Piet dead in the middle of the boxing ring. He has bled everywhere, and in his hand is the photograph that Peekay gave to him. Peekay is overcome with grief, and he is found by Captain Smit, who promises that the death will be avenged.

The inspection of the prison comes, and although Doc feels too distraught over the death of Geel Piet to play, von Zyl reminds him that he had made a promise. The inspection goes very well. The inspector has heard about the concert for the prisoners, and Gert tells Peekay that they all expected to be in a lot of trouble, but were surprised when the inspector called it a great example of prison reform. Doc puts on his recital, which includes the "Concerto of the Great Southland", which he has renamed "Requiem for Geel Piet". There is a great irony when the inspector says that Geel Piet must indeed have been a great man, and that he is not sorry to shed tears for his passing (no one tells the inspector who Geel Piet really was).





The final part of the inspection is the boxing exhibition. Arranged by Captain Smit, it too goes off very well. As Peekay and the team are in the showers, Klipklop comes to them and informs them that when they are cleaned up, they must go quietly back into the gym and sit in the dark. They do, and they see that the ring is lit up. Klipklop, Lieutenant Borman, and Captain Smit all step into the ring. It is clear that Smit is going to fight Borman, although the lieutenant tries his best to get out of it. Borman fights dirty, and while he has the upper hand from a low blow he begins to exult about how he killed Geel Piet, because the colored man would not tell him how the letters were being brought in and out of the prison. He beat Geel Piet very badly, and then shoved his night stick up his anus so that he bled to death. Smit proceeds to beat the tar out of Borman. After the beating, everyone realizes that not only is the team in the gym, but there is also a witness for the African prisoners as well. The other watchers realize that Borman is now a dead man.

A final surprise comes about when Mrs. Boxall informs Doc and Peekay that the inspector has officially endorsed the letter writing service and that it will now be allowed to continue.

## Chapter Fourteen Analysis

Lieutenant Borman had thought that the inspection would be his finest hour, but instead it led to his ultimate downfall. The very ideas that he had opposed, such as the concert for the Africans and the letter writing, turned out to be the ideas that the inspector liked best. Instead of looking great in front of von Zyl, Borman looked boorish. In addition, he was outed as the brutal murderer of Geel Piet, and it is obvious that his death is imminent.

There are also several ironies again in the way that racism dictates the thought processes of people. Although the reader is never told what the reaction would be, most can imagine how the inspector would react if he ever found out that Geel Piet was in fact just another colored criminal, instead of a great white man of South Africa.



# Chapter Fifteen

## Chapter Fifteen Summary

Peekay is working hard to convince his mother to let him be a part of the new letter writing service. She is not sure about the proceedings, believing that the Lord's work cannot be concerned with adding to the comfort of criminals. Most arguments fail, until Granpa suggest that through the letter writing, there is also a chance to redeem the prisoners through tracts. She accepts this idea readily, and several tracts in different languages are printed each time Peekay goes to the prison to write letters. Unbeknownst to the faithful, most of the tracts are also used to conceal leaves of tobacco.

The success of the program means that von Zyl is promoted to the rank of full colonel. Lieutenant Borman has also begun to develop piles, which some of the warders, such as Gert, feel is the retribution of God. Most of the other people involved with the prison, including Peekay, believe that the painful disease is a direct result of the pure hatred focused on Borman by the People. Eventually, Borman starts to hemorrhage, and he ends up dying from the complication. Before he passes, however, Marie converts him to the Lord.

A free Doc is eager to get back to wandering the hills in search of cactus and other natural phenomena. He is working on a new book and he and Peekay spend a lot of time working on the boy's higher education, and conversing in Latin about the great poets. Peekay is accepted into an English boarding school, the Prince of Wales school. He is somewhat nervous about going back to a boarding school, but is also intent on getting the best education he can. He also passes his musical examinations.

Although he has won a scholarship, there are still significant financial hurdles for Peekay to overcome in order to attend the school. He must bring with him a wide range of specific clothing, and his family cannot afford to get the items for him. However, his mother and Marie enter into prayer and his other friends begin the practical end of things, and all the purchases that need to be made are.

## Chapter Fifteen Analysis

This is another transitive chapter in the book and in Peekay's life. Preceded by the death of Geel Piet, this will mark the true end of Peekay's boyhood and the beginning of manhood. He is also about to conquer some of the demons of his past by facing a boarding school on his own terms, not frightened and alone, but empowered both by his athletic and academic success (and, though he downplays it, his musical success). There is no train ride to clearly demarcate the transition, but nevertheless the journey is implied.



Once again, Peekay feels that it is necessary to make a distinction between the Godsend and the human sent. It appears that he-or perhaps the author-cannot quite come to terms with the fact that perhaps God is just as apt to work through humanity as He is to send manna from the sky.



# Chapter Sixteen

## Chapter Sixteen Summary

At the Prince of Wales school, Peekay meets a new ally, Morrie Levy. Morrie is a Jewish boy whose father is very rich and who is somewhat haunted by the past of his people, including the recent Holocaust, which is just becoming known. He is also determined to make his own way, without the assistance of his father, as he knows that that is too easy and he does not want people to credit the riches of the Jews for his own personal success. This fits perfectly with Peekay's own concepts of the power of one, although the two do not always agree when it comes to Morrie's offers to help Peekay out financially. Morrie is very susceptible to insults when it comes to fixing events such as betting on boxing matches, and becomes immediately angry whenever someone suggests that he might have rigged any matches (which he never does; instead, he just has an incredible capacity to read the next move that other people will make). The two form a friendship with five other boys who they will be close to throughout their time at Prince of Wales. It is Morrie who teaches Peekay that instead of working outside the system, it is often better to use the system to achieve one's own goals. Morrie believes that the possibility to do this is always present.

In juxtaposition to his knowledge about how it feels to be persecuted, Morrie is highly apt to stereotype. He has no respect for blacks and openly hates Boers, although Peekay tries to convince him that there are good Boers and bad Boers, just like there are good and bad people of every background.

One area in which the school is sorely lacking is its boxing team. The team has not won a single match in two years, and is a bit of a laughingstock among the students and the staff. Peekay's prowess is the means by which the sport becomes accepted at the school and even launches the fame of the institution into the stratosphere. It is also the first scheme that Morrie and Peekay work out together to make money and fund their time at the school. Morrie quickly devises a way of making book on the fights Peekay gets in; and, more often than not, for the first two years of being on the team the two make quite a lot of money, not just for themselves but also for the boys in their school who bet on their own man. Peekay's success serves to build up the confidence in the rest of the team, and several new boys join and all have a renewed idea about their prospects for victory.

Peekay's first fight sees a small contingent of black Africans attend, and the boy realizes that the legend of the Tadpole Angel has followed him even here. He soon finds that his table receives the finest food during meals, and that often the duties he is to perform as a first year for older boys are taken care of for him. The other boarders at school never really understand why the servants seem to watch over him, and for his part, Peekay does not explain. He believes the less that is explained, the better the mystery, and people are more willing to follow or believe if there is mystery involved.



## Chapter Sixteen Analysis

At the Prince of Wales school, Peekay is finally making friends his own age. Morrie in particular proves to be a good friend, honing Peekay's survival instincts while also showing him ways to improve his lot in life.

Peekay is also starting to recognize his abilities as a leader, abilities which it seems he has decided to embrace rather than hide. Unlike at the other boarding school he attended, in fact, his intelligence is looked upon as giving him a significant status rather than something to be treated as suspect.



# Chapter Seventeen

## Chapter Seventeen Summary

Morrie and Peekay have turned the boxing process of the Prince of Wales school into a science. They keep careful records on the fighters from all the different teams. This helps the school fighters when it comes to strategy, and it helps the two boys to make money with their bookkeeping business. However, less and less people are beginning to bet against Peekay, as he remains undefeated through his first two years.

In order to keep the supply of pocket money flowing, the two boys must think up new schemes. Peekay points out to Morrie that all of the boys in the school are usually out of money the day after receiving it from home. He suggests that they start a lending business. Due to his Jewish history, Morrie is dead set against the idea, but eventually Peekay talks him into it and thus the Boarder's Bank is created. It is a huge success, with the boys lending out at ten percent, and it is enough to keep pocket money flowing to Peekay for the rest of his time in the school.

The boxing team continues to grow stronger, with several other fighters besides Peekay winning most of their matches against the neighboring Afrikaner schools. Matches are usually well attended, and it is Peekay who continues to draw the most attention, especially from the black population of the area. They are usually silent while watching the other fights, but when the Tadpole Angel steps into the ring they begin to chant and sing. They are then silent for the fight, after which a tall black man, the same man everytime, salutes Peekay with an upraised fist. Eventually, though not for a long time, people begin to wonder what the black people are saying about Peekay. When the name is translated, some choose to make fun of him, but these are mostly Boer boys dedicated to his downfall as revenge for their defeats.

At fourteen, Peekay is suddenly paralyzed by the onset of the emotions of puberty. Sex takes over all his thoughts, and all of his friends with the exception of Morrie are similarly afflicted. They talk often of girls and of having sex with girls, although none of them appear to ever really make any kind of move to back up the talk.

Peekay keeps up with his friends and family back home through weekly correspondence, which includes chess moves from Mr. Bornstein and tutelage from his daughter. It is the learning that Miss Bornstein provides that gives Peekay and Morrie an edge in their classes; they are able to question the presuppositions of some of their teachers; and in particular, their history teacher. After one debate about the Crimean War, the name of Miss Bornstein becomes famous. Peekay and Morrie capitalize on this by creating a study guide based on her notes and selling it to the other students.

The head of the school is St. John Burnham. He is a liberal thinker who likes to teach and has staffed the institution with other socially minded professionals but who has always been frustrated with the way that racism cannot be overcome. Called Singe 'n'



Burn by the boys, or else Sinjun, he has selected from the fourth form a group of boys each year to receive his special training. These boys are always the best in the school, and both Peekay and Morrie are expected to make the list of six. To capitalize on the selection process, which is one of the biggest events of the school year, the two make book with the other students about who will be chosen with an incredible pot offered to anyone who can guess the boys who will be picked one and two. Most people feel that Peekay will be in the top two, while none think that Morrie will. As it turns out, Morrie uses his knowledge of human nature to manipulate the head into picking him first and Peekay last, so that they turn an incredible profit on the process.

## **Chapter Seventeen Analysis**

The years are flying by for Peekay at the Prince of Wales school. He continues to learn important lessons from Morrie on how to turn any given situation into an opportunity to reap great reward. His election to Sinjun's People is a great feat, as he will be given extra attention in the coming years to add to the already considerable prestige that is attached to his name.



# Chapter Eighteen

## Chapter Eighteen Summary

Peekay is back at Barberton during his holidays, and he always finds that the town changes very little. There are some differences, like the fact that the two white races of the country seem to be coming to terms with each other; the Boers no longer leave the building when *God Save the King* is played at the end of concerts, for example. The prison is much improved, with the letter-writing program in full swing and is now incorporating a tutorial session. These proceedings are conducted by two Pentecostal missionaries, although they strenuously object to the distribution of cigarettes to prisoners who do well at their studies. Peekay claims his spot on the boxing team every holiday, and although he continues to win, he feels that his progress as a boxer is beginning to stagnate.

After practicing with the team each morning, Peekay goes over to Doc's and the two talk and plan the hiking trip they are going to take that weekend. Then Peekay goes over to the Bornstein's and has a game of chess with Mr. Bornstein and a tutorial session with Miss Bornstein, who has decided that Peekay will gain a Rhodes scholarship. His afternoons are free, and he often hangs about with the other neighborhood boys who are close to his own age. He is beginning to understand how his intellect separates him from others, though, and he dearly misses the conversations with his friends back at school, especially the quixotic Morrie.

## Chapter Eighteen Analysis

This chapter is the shortest in the book, which points to the fact that Peekay is beginning to outgrow his roots. While it is clear that he still loves the people back home, he is beginning to find that he longs for time spent with his peers, both in age and in intellectual ability.





# Chapter Nineteen

## Chapter Nineteen Summary

Peekay and Doc set out on their weekend hike, a twelve-mile long trek over Saddleback Pass to a waterfall that they know of. Doc has taken some careful notes on the location and believes that there must be limestone present, which is a very rare occurrence in their part of the world. They leave on a Friday and intend to be back by Saturday evening. Peekay has expressed concerns over Doc's physical ability to complete the journey, but Doc argues him into it on the grounds that they still have many discoveries to make.

That night they make camp near to the waterfall, overlooking a valley filled with rain forest. They talk into the night about Doc's musical ambitions for Africa, how he has tried all his time in the country to write a piece that is worthy of the beauty that it represents and all that it has given him. Peekay points out that Doc wrote the incredible "Requiem", to which Doc responds that all he did was put the melodies and harmonies of the Africans into the ivories of the piano. He says that Africa is too large for the classic European instruments, that the only instruments that begin to touch what Africa is are the drums.

The next day, the two friends set out to explore the cliffs around the waterfalls. They look for hours, climbing higher and higher, and it is beginning to look as though one of Doc's theories will at last prove to be wrong. Peekay, however, makes an attempt at a difficult climb across the last ledge that they encounter. He finds a cave, and then builds a rope walk for Doc to cross over on. They enter the cave and are immediately astounded. Stalactites and stalagmites cover the entire area, some of them absolutely huge. There is a wide flat expanse right in the middle of the big room, and Peekay remarks that it looks just like Merlin's cave might have in Arthurian legend.

Doc finds the cave haunting, and begins to speak of it as his burial chamber. Peekay is alarmed at such talk, and numerous times asks Doc to stop speaking of his death. Doc, however, is enthralled with the thought that if he lay down to die on the flat spot, in a hundred thousand years he might become a part of the crystal cave himself. Finally, Peekay talks him into leaving and starting for home. Doc tells Peekay to leave the different types of equipment that they used to gain entrance to the cave, and Peekay is amused by the thought that that in centuries to come, people might find rusted elements of iron and have no idea how they got there, although they will attempt to guess. He also reflects on the fact that it is a full moon, and the thought makes him sad; there was also a full moon the night that Granpa Chook died.

When they get back to Doc's cottage, Peekay realizes that this will be the last long hike that he and his friend will take. The professor collapses into his chair, exhausted. Peekay tends to some of the small wounds the professor gained on the journey, including some blisters on his feet and a cut over his eye.



## Chapter Nineteen Analysis

This chapter reaffirms the close relationship that Peekay has with Doc. It also is an obvious foreshadowing of whom Peekay will lose next in his life, although he is very reluctant to accept the fact that Doc might not be around much longer. It is clear that the discovery of the cave has had a profound effect on Doc, who sees it as his ideal resting place in Africa. Wild and beautiful, it is a visual representation of the Africa that Doc has so long struggled to portray in his music.



# Chapter Twenty

## Chapter Twenty Summary

Peekay is now back at school for his second term. Sinjun's group of six attend regular tutorials that last for an hour; they discuss the work from previous discussions and the resulting points will lead to more reading assignments.

Morrie tells Peekay that he has asked Solly Goldman, the best boxing coach in South Africa, to coach him and that Solly has agreed. When Peekay asks why, Morrie tells him that they are going to pay him. Peekay knows that he does not have the money, even with the proceeds from the bank, and he refuses Morrie on the grounds that he vowed to himself when young that he would never depend on someone else. Morrie and he agree that if they can cook up a scheme to get the money, Peekay will consider the hiring legitimate and will go to Solly for coaching.

The moneymaking idea that Morrie cooks up this time is again book making, but this time it is on the rugby team. While the school has had a lot of success in boxing, in rugby it has continued to be mediocre, especially against the Boer schools. Their record is especially dismal against Helpmekaar. This school is the one that the first boy Peekay beat at the start of his Prince of Wales career goes to; his name is Jannie Geldenhuis. Despite the fact that Peekay has consistently beaten the Boer boy, Geldenhuis is something of a friend. Because of their connection, Morrie is able to arrange a great book on the results of the next rugby match. Before the betting starts, though, Geldenhuis demands that he and Peekay have another boxing match. The bet on the match is the fee that Morrie agreed to pay him for assisting with the book, a whopping fifty quid. Peekay defeats the Boer once again, with the first knockout that he ever achieves.

The rugby match is a big one, with the Prince of Wales school barely scratching out a victory. As Morrie had predicted, though, the numbers were in their favor and they were able to take the day. There was very little betting on their own team, even from other boys from Prince of Wales, because of the previous record. As a result, the boys make a killing. With his half, Peekay can pay Solly Goldman for lessons for two and a half years, the time remaining for him at the school. The gym at which Goldman teaches is training grounds for both white and black, and Goldman is impressed by what a good technical boxer Peekay is. Peekay gives all the credit to Geel Piet.

By the time of the Christmas holidays, Peekay has made great strides as a boxer, a fact that is duly noted by the people back home, including Captain Smit. All of Peekay's friends back home attend the East Transvaal championships, where Peekay is awarded the trophy for best boxer. On the ride home with Gert, Peekay is alarmed to hear the warden talk about how old Doc is and his increasing inabilities to take care of himself. His worries are compounded by the professor himself, who reminds Peekay that on his next birthday, Doc will be turning eighty-seven. Peekay tells Doc that he has to live until



he claims the welterweight title. Doc laughs. Over the next few days, the two putter around the foothills for short walks.

## Chapter Twenty Analysis

A long chapter detailing the second term includes a very short part about the holidays back at Barberton. The rugby and boxing match victories mean that Peekay can rest assured that the additional help he will receive in his boxing ambitions due to the coaching of Solly Goldman are earned entirely on his own merit.

Back home, it is becoming depressingly clear that Doc is not going to be a visible part of Peekay's life for very much longer. Both Gert the guard and Doc himself gently broach the subject with the boy who, despite all of his past experiences, finds it hard to believe that his friend could leave him.



# Chapter Twenty-One

## Chapter Twenty-One Summary

This chapter begins with a detailing of the political climate in South Africa. The newly elected Nationalist Party is bad news for the black residents of the country, as the party's policies are stringently racist and separatist. The party gained power largely through the promise to bring white bread back to the country.

The boys spend Easter holidays at Morrie's house, and thus Solly can still help with Peekay's training. A few days into the holidays, Solly suggests a match to Peekay involving a professional, black boxer. The opponent is only a year older than Peekay, and has only fought in three pro fights. Both boys are concerned, as the match is clearly against the law and there are worries about getting caught. They also question Solly closely on why he wants the fight, and it turns out that the tall black man (Nguni) who salutes Peekay after all the matches is himself a boxing promoter. He is also a representative of the People, who say that Peekay is now a man. They wish to find out if the spirit of the Tadpole Angel resides in the man as it did in the boy. In order to determine this, Peekay must fight against one who is destined to become a leader of the Zulu people, Gideon Mandoma. Because of the legend behind the fight, Peekay agrees to it.

It turns out that Gideon is the son of Peekay's Nanny, who died four years before the fight. Peekay realizes that this gives his opponent an advantage, as there is some resentment about the fact that his own mother was taken from him to nurse a white baby. The fight is the first one Peekay has been in for over six rounds, lasting for six. Both boys fight well, and Peekay is truly worried that he is in danger of losing his first match because of the powerful punches that Gideon lands, which cause him to reel. Peekay emerges victorious, however. The two boys also acknowledge each other as brothers, and the People are excited that the legend of the Tadpole Angel lives on in the man the boy has become.

After the fight, when he is alone with Morrie, Peekay begins to have alarming premonitions. The first is of the brutal place that South Africa is about to become, the apartheid and the oppression that will fall upon the shoulders of the People who believe in his power and who love their land with a passionate fire. The second premonition is that Doc has died; this is confirmed when the boys return to Morrie's house and find that Mrs. Boxall has left a message that the professor has disappeared. While he is not officially dead, Peekay knows that he has gone to the crystal cave, and he cries himself to sleep.



## Chapter Twenty-One Analysis

Peekay enters into his manhood in this chapter, and as always when a major bridge is crossed in his life, a death signals a new chapter; in this case, it is that of the beloved mentor and friend of his boyhood, Professor von Vollensteen.

The legend of the Tadpole Angel is to follow Peekay throughout his life, as it continues from the man to the boy. This is proven to the people through the fight. There is also a sense of completion in the fact that Peekay is now aware of the fate of his Nanny, and he has forged a bond in battle with the son that allowed her milk to sustain him. It is ironic that there has been no thought given to this boy until now, and the fact that he is destined to be a great leader among the Zulus nicely complements the leadership role that Peekay has among the tribes.



# Chapter Twenty-Two

## Chapter Twenty-Two Summary

Peekay rushes back home to tend to Doc's affairs. At first, he helps with the search attempts for Doc himself, and then for Doc's body, but he keeps his promise and tells no one of the crystal cave. He is having difficulty coming to terms with the death for the simple fact that it was peaceful and even expected, whereas in his experience death has always been sudden and somewhat grotesque. He realizes that Doc had fooled people into giving him sleeping pills, which he had not taken but rather had stored up for his trip to the cave. Several people, such as Gert, suspect that Peekay knows where Doc is, but they do not press the issue. The Apostolic Faith Mission has a funeral which most of the people in the community attend in order to pay their last respects.

Doc has divided his things amongst several people. He gives the twins, Dee and Dum, a twenty-pound life insurance policy and his piano, and everything else goes to Peekay. Peekay realizes that Doc would surely have left him something to say goodbye, and so he must make a trip to the crystal cave himself to find out what Doc had to say. This gives Peekay a chance to perform a ritual of his own to mark the passing of the man who played such an important role in his life. Looking hard at the entrance to the cave, Peekay finds Doc's knife, his watch, and a note. The note tells Peekay goodbye, and asks that when it is Peekay's turn, he join Doc in the crystal cave. He also leaves Peekay a sheet of music. Peekay is greatly comforted by the reminders of his friend.

When he arrives back at Granpa's, Peekay attempts to play the music. He is surprised to realize that the music includes the chant to the Tadpole Angel, which Doc had never actually heard.

When he gets back to school, Peekay finds that Morrie has been hard at work on business. He has convinced Solly to take on twenty black fighters in his boxing retinue, including Gideon. Gideon and three other black men train specially with Peekay, and Gideon asks Peekay to help him learn English. The request sparks an idea in the head of Peekay, who tells Morrie they should start a special school to teach blacks English. With the help of Gideon, they manage to convince the headmaster that it is a good idea for the school to house an educational session for black Africans on Saturday nights. It is not long before the police raid the sessions, however, and they are put into jeopardy. The head decides that it is too risky to everyone to keep the sessions going, which is a terrible blow to the boys. However, they soon hit upon the idea of starting a correspondence school, which is destined to become the biggest school of its kind in South Africa.



## Chapter Twenty-Two Analysis

Peekay has to come to terms with the death of Doc in this chapter, and by doing so, he is able to see what a beautiful end it was. Doc is going to become a part of the mystery of Africa. This is further evidenced through the fact that somehow Doc managed to incorporate the chant to the Tadpole Angel in his last composition, a testament to the mysterious energy of the native part of the nation.

The question of the black school addresses the age-old concern that once a people is empowered through knowledge, it is difficult to hold them down. Every society that has sought to elevate one race above another knows this to be true, and thus the elements of power always conspire to ensure that the side deemed inferior has no choice but to remain inferior.





# Chapter Twenty-Three

## Chapter Twenty-Three Summary

It is the final year at the boarding school, and Peekay and all the boys in his group are concerned with their futures after they leave the school. Peekay writes out the application for the Rhodes scholarship, although Morrie and he both agree that he is not a likely candidate as it is often given to a man who has already earned at least one degree. It turns out that this is prophetic, and being denied the scholarship is really the first defeat that Peekay has suffered. He does not seem to mind much, although the people around him are disappointed and he chooses to see their disappointment as evidence of the fact that their investment in him comes at a price; namely, the price of fulfilling their ambitions for him. Being turned down for the scholarship means that Peekay is financially unable to attend Oxford. He turns down Morrie's offer of funding, to Morrie's dismay, once again asserting the fact that he believes he must accomplish things on his own. Although he is asked to attend two different schools, it is Oxford where Peekay wants to go.

Peekay is now at a loss of where to go next. In order to make a decision, he realizes that he must go to the crystal cave and consult Doc. The journey brings up strong memories of his experience with Inkosi-Inkosaki long years before. Once he reaches the cave, he has a close encounter with a black mamba, a snake with one of the most deadly bites in the world. Believing that the mamba is a sign from Doc, and he makes a decision to work for a year in the mines of Northern Rhodesia in order to fund his higher education aspirations.

Peekay comes to this decision through talking to the brother of Gert, who works as a diamond driller in the mines. The area is filled with tropical forests, very different from the sprawling grasslands that make up much of the region that Peekay calls home. While he lacks the size to be a diamond driller, the highest-paid job in the mines, his age and reflexes make him a perfect candidate for the second-highest paying job as a grizzly man. These men are responsible for bringing a certain tonnage of raw ore out of the mine every night, in a job that is extremely dangerous and in which the odds of surviving are lowered for every month that is spent in the ground. Once again, Peekay boards a train toward a new chapter in his life.

The mining life is very different from anything that Peekay has experienced thus far. Unlike with every other area in his life, boxing does not come first. In fact, Peekay does not tell anyone that he is a gifted boxer, and practices where no one can see him.

The mining town is full of drifters, there for quick money and a fast lifestyle. Peekay passes his training as a grizzly man and as usual comes out top in his groups, even restoring some glory to his trainers by passing a more difficult version of the exam.



Peekay makes his quota and more every night that he works, to the delight of his driller. Unspoken mine custom dictates that a driller never meets his grizzly man, and though Peekay knows his driller is called Botha, he knows little else about him. Every month, however, the driller sends a case of brandy to Peekay as a compliment for the work he does during the night. This brandy Peekay passes on to a huge Georgian named Rasputin, a neighbor in the next hut. The two play chess and pass the time mostly in silence, Rasputin carving out balls from pieces of wood with an axe. He also makes Peekay rabbit stew, which Peekay learns is actually made from cats. Peekay has been warned that he should work no longer than three months at a time underground, as the odds in the dangerous job begin to catch up. However, he is tempted by the extra money he can earn through bonuses, and thus when asked he agrees to return to the grizzly.

## Chapter Twenty-Three Analysis

It would seem that the mines are going to be the last step in terms of Peekay's formation. All of the signs are there, from the death of a friend to the train ride, and the formation of a new relationship, this time with Rasputin. This is undoubtedly going to be one of the most dangerous undertakings Peekay will ever embark on, as the survival rate for grizzly men is clearly not something to wager on.

It is interesting to note that all of the lessons that Peekay has learned up until now are put in limbo in the mines. There is certainly no need to camouflage himself, and he shines in his only chance to use his brain. Otherwise, he must use his physical capabilities to meet and exceed the demands of his driller. His boxing is suspended, although he still practices, and along with the symbolism of the underground mine this signifies the fact that he seems to have deliberately put his life on hold. Add to this the fact that he is clearly going against the advice of his best friend Morrie in taking chances when the facts are not known and the odds are against you, and the situation is full of portent.



# Chapter Twenty-Four

## Chapter Twenty-Four Summary

Peekay has now been on the grizzly job for eleven months, much to the delight of his driller and the dismay of everyone else around him. A notable exception is his crew, made up of black men from the Rhodesian jungles. The crews are formed around the grizzly men, and when a grizzly man dies the crew generally believe that they are destined for death as well and often quit the mines to hide in the forest once again. It is not uncommon, Peekay says, for the grizzly man to take his number one boy with him, as the two often work in close proximity in the dangerous situations that the grizzly man will find himself in.

For Peekay, his time comes after he receives a premonitory dream. He dreams that the piece of dynamite he is about to light turns into a black mamba like the one at the crystal cave and that it is about to strike him. As he has learned to trust these subtle proddings of the subconscious, he informs his shift boss that he will spend one more week and no more in the mines. Because of all the extra money he has earned, he will have enough to pay his tuition anyway. The shift boss offers no argument, saying that Peekay has already done more than his share of time underground.

That night, Peekay again has a vision of the mamba as he lights a stick of dynamite to dislodge a block in the ore. The vision helps him to realize that the dynamite is a running fuse, one which has lit but which appears not to be burning. He tackles his first boy out of the blast range just in time, and the two watch in amazement as it explodes where they were seconds before. Elijah, the man who is Peekay's first assistant, is more convinced than ever of Peekay's good fortune, which is also brought upon the members of the crew. The Tadpole Angel is present even in the country of Northern Rhodesia.

For his part, Peekay is elated by his near miss, so much so that he decides that he is not going to quit the mines after all. As he stands shining his light on the plug up, he realizes it is about to come down. He quickly gets out of the way but is hit by a large rock, which send him off balance and down into the shaft. The fall would have killed him, but some light shale, the result of the earlier dynamite blast, cushions him. Nevertheless, Peekay is buried under tons of ore.

A rescue attempt is launched, but most feel that it is hopeless. Elijah is the only one who takes bets on both the rescue attempt and on Peekay's survival. Only one man makes the rescue attempt. At his own insistence, Rasputin is the only person who moves the rock that Peekay is under. All on his own, he moves pieces for minutes on end, far longer than any one man could have lasted. Rocks tear him up and the physical effort he exerts actually causes him to sweat blood. Nevertheless, he recovers the unconscious body and cradles Peekay until others come down to lift the grizzly man out. By this time, Rasputin is dead.



Peekay wants everyone to wait to hold the funeral for Rasputin until he is out of the hospital, but the climate will not allow for this. Instead, Peekay must content himself with placing a marker on Rasputin's grave, a marker that includes all seven hundred balls that the huge Russian carved in his time at the mines. As he prepares to leave the mines, Peekay instructs the town children to make sure they repaint the marker every year.

Peekay is making farewells in the local bar when he runs into his driller. Unfortunately, Botha is in a homicidal state of insanity, brought on by the dust and the noise created by the huge drill. The huge man tries to kill Peekay, and after his first lunge, Peekay realizes that the driller Botha is none other than the Judge, Jaapie Botha, tormentor of his youth. Peekay relies on his boxer instincts and beats the Judge soundly in front of a huge crowd of minors. When Botha lies unconscious at his feet, Peekay uses Doc's knife to carve out the swastika on the Judge's arm and replace it with the British flag and his own initials.

## Chapter Twenty-Four Analysis

Peekay's career in the mines comes to a tragic end, at least for his friends. Again, a chapter that ends in the life of Peekay is marked by the death of a friend.

The discovery of the fact that his diamond driller is none other than his childhood nemesis allows Peekay to put the last of his childhood demons at rest. He avenges Granpa Chook and his marred childhood, and carves his own destiny out of the mark that Botha left upon him.



# Characters

## Peekay (Pisskop, Tadpole Angel)

The entire story is told from the point of view of this character. The reader is introduced to him when he is at the age of five, right after his mother has had a nervous breakdown and he is sent to a boarding school in which he is an English speaking minority, as well as being younger than anyone else in the school by two years. In addition, he is small for his age. Taken together, all of these factors mean that he is ripe to be picked on by the other boys at his school. He is picked on indeed; in fact, his scourging is so extreme that many modern readers will wonder if he can ever recover from the indignities that are rained down upon him. Through the horrible experiences he endures at the school, the young boy, who is called Pisskop at the school, determines that he will never cry and that he will never rely on anyone else.

Eventually, Pisskop's time at the school ends. He boards a train to go to his new home, as his family has been forced to move after an epidemic breaks out among the chickens in the countryside. To get to the town of Barberton, he must take a train. It is on this train that he meets the man who will become his idol, Hoppie Groenwald. This man is a conductor on the train and is a very good boxer. Watching Hoppie fight, and reacting to the kindness the man shows him, Peekay (as he has renamed himself) determines some major guiding principles about his life. The first is that he will one day become the welterweight champion of the world. All of his energies are focused throughout the remainder of the book to this pursuit. He also comes to realize that despite his experience with the Boer boys at school, little can defeat big, by using one's head and by having a lot of heart.

After leaving the train, Peekay never sees Hoppie again, but he does form important relationships with other people. He is met at the station by his mother, who has recovered from her breakdown and is once again ready to live with him and his grandfather in an old house in town. In the town, Peekay meets many people who help to guide his life, such as Professor von Vollenstein, Mrs. Boxall, Miss Bornstein, and Geel Piet.

The years in the town are full of different experiences that contribute to Peekay's growth. When his friend Doc is sent to prison, Peekay is allowed to join the boxing team and through the tutelage of one of the inmates and the wardens, he begins to make his welterweight dream a reality. He is doggedly determined in his boxing pursuits, and throughout the book, he is not defeated in a single match, including informal fights that take place with other boys. He is also incredibly intelligent as well as clever, all characteristics which contribute to his survival and his learning curve. He becomes a legend among the black population of South Africa, and indeed never embraces the prevailing racial presuppositions that infect almost everyone else that he becomes involved with.



Peekay continues to hone his skills as a fighter and his skills as a thinker when he attends the Prince of Wales school as a boarding student. Here, he makes the first peer friend of his life, who teaches him how to work within the system. Through his contacts in the jail, Peekay has already learned how to beat the system, so the combination of the two strategies makes him virtually invincible.

## **Professor von Vollenstein (Doc)**

The professor is the first adult with whom Peekay becomes close, over an extended period. Doc, as he asks Peekay to call him, is an expatriate German. He is also a concert pianist and a botanist, fascinated with natural ecology and in particular the cactus life of South Africa. He instills within Peekay the power of observation and a love for the natural world, and Africa in particular, as they wander the hills around Barberton together.

Doc is sorely pressed by his past. In particular, he is driven to drink by memories of a concert in Berlin in which he experienced a panic attack and botched the piece of music he was playing, getting booed off the stage in the process. To flee his shame, he traveled around the world, eventually ending up in South Africa. During his whole time living in the country, he attempted to write a piece that would do its stark majesty justice, but it is not until near the end of his life that he realizes that the natural melodies of the African people are testament to the land in themselves. To make a living, he teaches piano to some of the little girls in the town.

Because of his heritage, Doc is suspected and arrested for espionage when Britain declares war on Germany. He is arrested, and though he is cleared of the charges, he is still incarcerated for the remainder of the war. His time in prison is not all bad, however, as he is treated as an honored guest by the staff. He also is able to put on several concerts. The first concert sees him put an end to his haunting memories, the second allows him to compose his ode to his beloved adopted land, and the third allows him to say goodbye to a friend.

Doc dies while Peekay is enjoying Easter holidays at a friend's house. Feeling weak and old, he takes his life by ingesting sleeping pills in a crystal cave that Peekay and he find on one of their hikes. While he is gone, the mysteries of African appear to allow him to communicate to Peekay at least once, through the sending of a snake while Peekay is looking for a sign on where to turn next.

## **Morrie Levy**

Morrie is the first friend his own age that Peekay ever makes, and remains close to Peekay throughout the rest of their lives. He is the only son of a wealthy Jewish carpet merchant, who also owns several chocolate factories. Because he is deeply concerned over the reputation his people have been saddled with, Morrie insists on making his own way in the world. This comes naturally to him, as he is gifted with uncanny perceptions



and insights into others as well as a quick intelligence. He teaches Peekay that the system can be defeated by within as well as from without.

Morrie is the mastermind behind most of Peekay's financial successes at the Prince of Wales school. He is a master book keeper, a natural manager for the boxing team, and a constant fountain of ideas. With Peekay providing the punch, Morrie is able to lift the school boxing team from nobodies to the stars of the school. He is also able to help Peekay convince first the headmaster of the school and then a lot of other people that South African blacks should be given the opportunity to learn English. Along with Peekay, he is named as one of Sinjun's people, a group that receives special tutelage from the headmaster himself. He and Peekay part ways after their graduation, although from the way the author presents Peekay's view, it seems that they are not parted for much more than a year.

## Hoppie Groenwald

Hoppie is the guard on the train that takes Peekay away from his old life at the boarding school and to his new one in Barberton. He is Peekay's first human friend, and although he is only with Peekay for two days, he has more impact on Peekay's ambitions than anyone else in the boy's life.

Hoppie is a boxer in addition to being a guard on the railway, and is a very good boxer at that. In his career he is only beaten one time, by a man that goes on to become the champion of all South Africa in his weight division. Hoppie does not observe the traditional country Boer stance against the English, and he is the first person to show Peekay some real kindness. He seems to have an uncanny knowledge of just what Peekay had gone through during his year at the boarding school.

In addition to his example, Hoppie teaches Peekay that little can beat big, and that one should always use one's head, and then one's heart. He also introduces Peekay as the welterweight champion of the future to anyone they meet, and this becomes Peekay's biggest ambition in life.

Despite his special spot in Peekay's eyes, Hoppie has one major fault; like most South Africans, he is an unrepentant racist, deeply disrespectful towards all people of color.

Hoppie is drafted to fight against Hitler in the war, and Peekay never hears from or about him again after they part ways the night that Hoppie defeats mining champion Jackhammer Smit.

## Geel Piet

Geel Piet is a lifelong criminal, a black and white mix who is hideous in appearance and who is a genuine survivor within the brutally oppressive South African jail system. He is one of the oldest lags in the system, and thus has strategies laid out that take years to fulfill, which he cultivates patiently. Included in these strategies are ways to further his



position in the prison through beginning and maintaining a relationship with both Doc and Peekay. The three of them soon start a system of smuggling letters, food, and tobacco to the black inmates, which gives Piet an even higher status within the Barberton prison.

In the short times that he was living outside of prison, Geel Piet was also a fan of boxing and often assisted at local rings. He uses this knowledge to gain a spot managing the Barberton team, and his skill as a coach proves invaluable to the development of Peekay and the rest of the team.

Geel Piet is also responsible for building up the legend among the People of the Tadpole Angel surrounding Peekay. He gives Peekay credit for the letters the inmates receive from home, for the concert they are given by Doc, and for the fireworks in the sky.

Geel Piet is beaten to death by one of the worst guards at the prison on the night that Doc is freed. His death is avenged by Captain Smit, and the lessons in both boxing and life that he taught Peekay stay with Peekay forever.

## **Captain Smit**

Smit is the one of the first guards that Peekay meets when he goes to visit Doc in prison. Smit is a lieutenant at the time, and the manager of the Barberton boxing team. When Peekay learns this, he asks if he can be part of the team, but Smit says he must wait until he is older. Peekay asks the kommandant of the prison to let him on the team, and the boss acquiesces. Smit is at first infuriated by the fact that Peekay went over his head, but Peekay's toughness and the fact that Peekay was with Hoppie when he beat Smit's Brother Jackhammer at the boxing match cause him to change his view of the boy and let him on the squad.

Smit is eventually promoted to Captain of the guards, and it is he who beats up Lieutenant Borman, the man who beat Geel Piet to death.

## **Mrs. Boxall**

Mrs. Boxall is the librarian at the Barberton library. She is also a regular contributor to the local newspaper, and in her column, she regularly extols Peekay's piano performances. As a close friend of Doc's, she also takes an active interest in furthering Peekay's education beyond what he can receive at the local school.

When Doc is arrested, Mrs. Boxall is instrumental in helping Peekay to clear the professor's name. She is also a founding member of the letter exchange program, and sticks with it when the prison system recognizes it as a legitimate enterprise.





## Big Hettie

Big Hettie is a cook with South African Railways who Peekay meets during Hoppie's match against Jackhammer Smit. She is a huge woman, prone to incredible indulgences in both food and drink. Her obsession with boxing started when she went with a featherweight years before joining the railway. She is a blithe spirit, and she dies of a heart attack in front of Peekay after Hoppie leaves.

## Granpa Chook

Granpa Chook is Peekay's first friend, although when Peekay knew him Peekay was called Pisskop. Granpa Chook is the old rooster who the witch doctor Inkosi-Inkosikazi uses in a ceremony to cure Pisskop of his bedwetting problem. In Pisskop's opinion, he is the cleverest bird ever and he helps to show the little boy how to survive by using one's head. The same gang that persecuted him for being English kills the bird on Pisskop's final day at the boarding school.

## Miss Bornstein

Miss Bornstein comes into Peekay's life while he attends the school at Barberton. She is largely responsible for setting his path towards many of his educational achievements, including the application for the Prince of Wales school and his successful application to Oxford. A brilliant and beautiful lady, she is Peekay's only real love interest in the story.

## Nanny

The young boy's first real female influence is his nanny, who also served as his wet nurse. She is a Zulu who introduces the boy to many of the African concepts of life and the living of it. It is she who calls the great witch doctor to cure Pisskop of his bedwetting issue. When Peekay arrives in Barberton, he is distressed to find that his mother has dismissed Nanny on the grounds that she has refused to give up her heathen trappings and has even gone so far as to subject her son to the influence of the devil in the form of the medicine man.

## Gert

Gert is a Boer guard at the Barberton prison. He is the one of the few people willing to have his picture taken with Geel Piet. At first he speaks poor English, but he learns it well through the rest of the book. He is also a great mechanic, and a heavyweight. He is promoted along with others after Captain Smit receives his promotion.



## **Gideon Mandoma**

The first black boxer Peekay faces, and the first opponent with whom Peekay contends for more than six rounds. Gideon is heir to the Zulu nation and is the son of Peekay's Nanny. At first resentful of Peekay, after their match, he and Peekay have a good relationship. He is the reason that Peekay and Morrie begin their correspondence school.

## **Mr. Nguni**

Nguni arranges the fight between Peekay and Gideon. He is a black boxing promoter in Johannesburg, and often salutes Peekay as the Tadpole Angel after his school fights.

## **Lieutenant Borman**

A savage warden, Borman is anxious to curry favor and a leading member of the Oxwagon Guard. When he is frustrated by Geel Piet's refusal to tell who is supplying letters to the prisoners, Borman beats Geel Piet to death with a nightclub. He is cursed by the people for doing so and dies in great pain.

## **Mother**

A frail lady, Peekay's mother does not play much of a role in his formation. At first lost due to a nervous breakdown, her eventual recovery leads to a religious fervor that Peekay finds repugnant. She is a frail lady, in contrast to the women who serve as nurturers to the boy.

## **Granpa**

Granpa is the head of the house where Peekay lives, first on the farm and then in Barberton. He has always lived in South Africa, and fought in the Boer Wars. He lost his wife when she gave birth to Peekay's mother, and the loss caused him to move into the country. When he lost his beloved chickens, he went back to town to embrace his other love, roses. He is a gruff man who talks little but nevertheless has some very liberal opinions. His constant insistence on speaking beside the issue does little to offer Peekay any practical advice, although it seems as though the boy understands much of what his grandfather says later on.

## **Inkosi-Inkosikazi**

This is the witch doctor who cured Pisskop of his bedwetting problem. A very powerful man among the Zulus, the medicine man also has the respect of the boy's grandfather.



He shares some of his tricks with Pisskop, and offers the boy a strategy in order to escape his trials.

## **The Judge (Jaapie Botha)**

The Judge is the ringleader of the boys who persecute Pisskop at the boy's boarding school. A large Boer boy, he hates the English and is an ardent admirer of Hitler. He terrifies the small boy, beats him up, shoots him with a slingshot, and eventually kills his first friend, Granpa Chook.

Eventually, the Judge and Peekay cross paths at the gold mine in Northern Rhodesia. Peekay realizes that his diamond driller is none other than Jaapie Botha when the huge man tries to kill him in a stupor. Peekay thrashes him and carves out the tattoo on Botha's arm. It is clear during the fight that Botha remembers exactly who Peekay is.

## **Rasputin**

This huge Russian is Peekay's neighbor at the mining camp in Northern Rhodesia. He doesn't speak much English, but loves Westerns and carving perfect balls out of wood every night with an axe. He is also a competent chess player.

His job at the mines is a timber hauler, and he saves Peekay's life at the cost of his own when Peekay gets in an accident with the grizzly.



# Objects/Places

## South Africa

Located at the bottom of Africa, South Africa typifies the beauty to be found in the ruggedness of the continent and the diversity of its people. Originally home to several tribes, including the mighty Zulu, the country was "settled" first by the British and then the interior by German people known as Boers. The British and the Boers entered a series of great conflict as to who should control South Africa. The conflict was known as the Boer Wars, which were eventually won by the English. The Wars were the first places in the world where concentration camps were used.

The results of the war deeply divided the country's two main white groups, and in addition, all of the black people were held to be lower forms of life. The result was an incredibly divided nation along several lines: color, race, and tongue. The Nationalist Party eventually instated a system of total apartheid that was brutal upon the black people of the country. This system was still in place when the book was published, but was overturned less than a decade later. Today, South Africa is the worst nation in the world in terms of crime rate and types of crime.

## Northern Rhodesia

A country north of South Africa, where the many gold mines were located.

## Barberton

A town in South Africa where Peekay lived with his mother and grandfather.

## Johannesburg

The capital of South Africa, where the Prince of Wales school and Morrie's home were located.

## Prince of Wales School

The school where Peekay boarded from the ages of nine to fifteen. The school was located near Johannesburg in South Africa.

## Sweets/Treats

An important part of the life of young Peekay. Some of the people who were the first to be kind to him gave him suckers, and Hoppie bought him a sundae. Later, he would



reject peppermints, and Mrs. Boxall foolishly brought gobstoppers to him when he had a broken jaw.

## **Joseph Rogers Knife**

Originally Doc's, he left it to Peekay carefully buried in the cliffs surrounding the crystal cave. Peekay used the knife to cut open the Judge's arm.

## **Steinway Piano**

Doc's beautiful instrument, the reason he attacked a sergeant, and which he left to Peekay on his death.

## **Camera**

Doc's camera was the means by which the two were first introduced, and accompanied them on all trips into the hills. Doc's accusers said he was taking pictures for the Portuguese invasion on the side of the Germans.

## **Donkey Dicks**

Night sticks used by the guards at Barberton prison.

## **Barberton Prison**

The place where Peekay begins his career in boxing. A brutally oppressive place for black prisoners, but the racist warders treat Doc as a sort of hero.



# Themes

## The Power of One

The power of one is the lifelong strategy developed by Peekay. This theme has its formation in Peekay's brutal time at the first boarding school, where he learns that only by counting on himself can he avoid heartache and misery. This is to become his main creed in his formative years, to the point of fanaticism.

In its conception, the power of one dealt primarily with hiding abilities from others in order to avoid persecution. As he grew, however, Peekay realized that the skills that he possessed were something of which he should be proud, and he was no longer reluctant to claim his gifts as his own.

With the power of one as his basis, he rejects any help offered financially by his friend Morrie, even though it means that he will have to work harder to stay at the level Peekay wants to be at both intellectually and in his pursuit of boxing. Through depending on himself as an outsider in most groups, Peekay sees that he has a perspective that most lack, and therefore an ability to make decisions that are right, although they might go against the grain.

It is probably the power of one mentality that causes Peekay to be so aggressive against God in general and Christians in particular. Peekay sees all of the people of the Apostolic Faith Mission as losers because they depend on a God they cannot see instead of on themselves. Peekay's attitude extends towards those around him, as he eventually comes to believe that even the people who try to help him are out for themselves, really; this includes Doc, Mrs. Boxall, and Miss Bornstein.

## Overcoming Odds

At first, due to his experience at the first boarding school, Peekay believes that his life is destined for misery because he is so small. He sees his size as a real handicap, as it is by this characteristic that the Judge is so easily able to victimize him.

His meeting with Hoppie helps him overcome this attitude. He hears about what a great fighter Hoppie is and then witnesses it for himself when the smaller man defeats the gigantic Jackhammer Smit. Hoppie tells Peekay that nothing is impossible, especially when you combine the skill of your brain with the power of your heart. This is the new idea that Peekay takes forward through the rest of his life, as he is constantly up against opponents that are larger than himself. He finds these opponents in the ring as well as throughout his life. There are obstacles when he first tries to join the Barberton Blues, when he wants to establish a school for blacks, with his relationship with Doc, and finally in the mines of Northern Rhodesia.



## Ethnic Tensions and the Intricacies of Racism

Courtenay wrote this novel at a time when South Africa was still deeply mired in the apartheid system. Most people are aware of apartheid as the division between black and white, but they are not familiar with the further tensions that split along ethnic as well as racial lines.

The ethnic tensions were experienced by both black and white. The Boers and the English hated both each other and, to a certain degree, the Jews; although it was the Boers who tended more towards fanatical anti-Semitism. They both also regarded people of color as dirty kaffirs; this included Indians, Africans, and white/black mixes. This racial divide existed and the wall could not be climbed no matter how worthwhile the colored individual was. It also proved difficult to justify, as Peekay continually found out by asking questions in church and in other areas of life.

On the part of the blacks, it is pretty clear that there was a hierarchy in which Zulus sat on the top and the Sangaans at the bottom, with Ndele and Swazis in between. Unlike the divisionary thinking of the whites, the tribal superiority of the blacks was never questioned by Peekay or anyone else.

# Style

## Point of View

This story is told in the first person from the point of view of Peekay. However, while it is told from his point of view, it is told from the perspective of some point in the man's future. This is evident in the way that historical facts are mixed in with current events, although the people at the time of the events could not be aware of what was happening or what ended up happening.

The story is a blending of African techniques and English techniques, concerning both myth building and historical reporting. The legend of the Tadpole Angel, for example, is uniquely portrayed in the African way of taking things as they are without questioning them. On the other hand, the European elements of the story demand that lessons are learned on any number of levels, including on perspective, on history, on theology, and on morality. The author takes quite a bit of license in his myth building.

## Setting

The novel takes place entirely in South African, with the exceptions of the last two chapters occurring in Northern Rhodesia. The reader is taken to the countryside and its rural folk, then to a small city, to the school located near the more urbanized areas, and to the large city of Johannesburg. Readers are introduced to prisons and boarding schools as well as the various ecosystems of the country.

## Language and Meaning

The story is a mix of styles, so the language takes some adaptation on the parts of the reader. Since this is a story with adaptation at its heart, the language seems apt. The author uses the different language approaches when dealing with the different ethnic groups represented. The Boers use language that is heavy with colloquialisms and colorful local language. The English speak as English always do when they speak at all. The Africans use a flowing poetic voice, as well as a lot of music, and often speak in an unhurried manner. Doc speaks with the broken English and amusing muddled sayings that are often a part of the German speech in literature. There are also Indians who speak, again in the English tongue adapted by their own first language.

Peekay himself is well versed in almost all of the languages that are spoken in his native land, which means that the reader has everything translated, with some exceptions that are defined in the glossary at the back of the book.



## Structure

The novel has twenty-four chapters divided among three books. Each chapter focuses mainly on the present, but there are some looks forward to the future as well as backtracks. Often the author's voice in the form of an adult Peekay is used to reconcile the actions of a young Peekay with the enhanced understanding of an adult.



## Quotes

"I was still alive, and in my book, where there's life, there's hope." Chapter One, p. 7.

"It was all very exciting. To think that this man, Adolf Hitler, who was going to save us all from the accursed English, was going to be our new headmaster!" Chapter Two, p. 33

"It was all very complicated, beautiful ladies with skin like honey who were not as good as us and black men who were white men underneath and were as good as us. The world was a complicated place where people were concerned." Chapter Five, p. 87

"Even then I instinctively understood that the blithe spirit was rare among humans and that, for the period of an evening and a day, I had been with a part of the human condition at its best." Chapter Seven, p. 128

"I love wild animals" Chapter Ten, p. 213

"The warder unwittingly depends on the old lags to run the prison system, for it is they who restrain the younger prisoners, who lack the patience to go along with the system or who see violence as the only solution to getting what they want." Chapter Eleven, p. 214

"If Geel Piet and Hoppie could have been there, everything would have been perfect. Not that it wasn't perfect. But more perfect." Chapter Twelve, p. 264

"The photograph captured the exact moment when I understood with conviction that racism is a primary force of evil designed to destroy good men." Chapter Thirteen, p. 275

"Snotnose couldn't tell me why the Oxwagon Guard hated the Jews, but Bokkie de Beer said it was because they had killed Jesus. Well, all I could think was, the Boers had mighty long memories and it was news to me that the Boers were around at the time of Jesus." Chapter Thirteen, p. 285

"Whoever this Geel Piet was, we know from his name that he was an Afrikaner who is honored by this music. He was also the spirit of South Africa, the fatherland, and as Afrikaners we should all honor him and his death." Chapter Fourteen, p. 309

"It wasn't until I went to boarding school the second time that I learned that survival is a matter of making the system work for you rather than attempting to survive it." Chapter Sixteen p. 335

"You bloody fool! They'd do anything to be like you. So would I. To have done the things you've done, led the life you've led?" Chapter Seventeen, p. 391



## Topics for Discussion

Peekay's "granpa" tells him at one point that the Bible is good for matters of the heart, but hopeless for those of the head. Reconcile this view with that held by Peekay to lead with the head but finish with the heart, and his uncompromising approach to his mother's church.

Does Peekay become harder as he gets older? How does the time in Northern Rhodesia demonstrate his decision to suspend the life that he has known?

Consider racism. Does it apply to only color barriers, or can it apply to the divisions between the same colors as well? Can it apply to people of color discriminating against each other or people of other colors? Give some examples from the novel.

Discuss the significance of death in the novel, giving examples of the people in Peekay's life who passed away, the manner of their passing, and the significance of timing.

Peekay goes through several transitions within the novel. Give examples of these transitions and how the author handles them.

Peekay seems conflicted in his opinions of Geel Piet. Is he a good man, or is he evil? Is it significant that, although readers are told that the men in the prison have done wrong, the crimes for which they are incarcerated are not known? Can a man take on an aura of goodness because he is being oppressed in the system to which he has surrendered his life?

Is the power of one simply selfish, or a legitimate means of survival? Give examples from the book.

We are often given an image of racism being solved from the top down (at the government level). With examples from the novel, discuss how racism is addressed at a grassroots level.