

Rule of the Bone Study Guide

Rule of the Bone by Russell Banks

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Plot Summary

Rule of Bone is a coming of age story, set partly in the teenage wasteland of upper New York, and partly in the sunny and seedy paradise of Jamaica. Chappie is a thirteen-year-old misfit with a burgeoning drug habit, living with his mother and his abusive stepfather Ken in Au Sable, a small town in upstate New York. Chappie's flight from his abusive home is a tale of delinquency, crime, friendship, and heartbreak.

To support his growing dependence on marijuana, thirteen-year-old Chappie begins pawning items from the home of his mother and stepfather. After pawning off a collection of rare coins given to his mother by his grandmother, Chappie is kicked out of the house. He finds a chaotic home in the apartment of his friend Russ, a sixteen year old run away who works at a video store in the same building. Russ sublets the apartment to a biker gang called the Adirondack Iron. The bikers begin dealing in stolen electronics, but keep the boys from taking a cut. Russ starts stealing electronics from the bikers in small amounts, but is found out by the biker's leader Bruce. Chappie and Russ escape from the bikers, in the process starting a fire which burns down the building and kills Bruce, who ran back into the fire to try to save Chappie.

Chappie and Russ are now presumed dead by their parents and the rest of Au Sable. Chappie gets a tattoo depicted two crossed bones, and takes on the new name Bone. The boys break into an empty summer house in nearby Keene and live for several months, before disorder, boredom, and lack of entertainment force them to go their separate ways. Russ returns to Au Sable, but Chappie journeys to Plattsburgh, rescues a young girl from the clutches of a seedy porn producer, and together they begin living in an abandoned school bus with an older Jamaican Rastafarian named I-man. I-man teaches Chappie and Rose, the young girl, about vegetarianism, and about thankfulness. Chappie puts Rose on a bus to Milwaukee to be reunited with her mother Nancy, says goodbye to I-man, and returns to Au Sable to attempt to reconcile with his mother and Ken.

Chappie's return to Au Sable is a debacle. Ken and his mother have separated, and his stepfather is drinking heavily and has trashed the house. Chappie's mother blames their separation on Chappie's delinquency. Chappie is unable to tell his mother or his grandmother that Ken sexually abused him. He demands that his mother choose between himself and Ken. His mother tells Chappie that she will reconcile with Ken, and Chappie leaves Au Sable.

Chappie returns to Plattsburgh and to I-man's school bus. The two decide to travel together to I-man's native Jamaica. Once there, Chappie is reunited with his biological father, a drug addict who practices medicine for the government. I-man initiates Chappie into Rastafarian manhood. After a botched drug deal, I-man is killed and Chappie begins panhandling in Montego Bay. To compound his grief, he learns that Sister Rose died of pneumonia shortly after returning to Milwaukee.

Chappie settles peaceably with his delinquent father and I-man's killer before sailing away to begin his new life accompanied by the everlasting memory of his friends.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

When the story begins, Chappie is attending summer school to avoid failing the eighth grade. He is thirteen and he has recently become infatuated with marijuana. Russ, his best friend, has already left home, dropped out of school, and is working at the Video Den. He rents the apartment above the store and sublets it to several older bikers.

Chapter 1 - Just Don't Touch Anything

Chappie is a rebellious 8th grader with a Mohawk, nose piercing, and a predilection for marijuana. His mother works as a bookkeeper and, having divorced Chappie's father when Chappie was five, remarried Ken, an airport maintenance staffer. The family lives above the poverty line, at the bottom end of the lower middle class. Chappie is taking summer school to avoid failing the 8th grade. His desire for marijuana leads him to begin pawning off items from the house that he deems will not quickly be missed. While scouring the house for valuables, Chappie finds a series of letters sent by his father to his mother. The letters are filled with Chappie's father's contrition over the affair that broke up the marriage, and his desire to make amends. Chappie then finds two small briefcases in his mother's closet. One contains a rifle with scope, which Chappie assembles and toys with. The other contains many small bags filled with old coins. Chappie begins hocking the coins a little at a time to the pawn shop, using the money to buy pot to get high with his older friend Russ, who is crashing in the apartment of several adult bikers. Chappie continues to sell off the coins, cutting most of his summer classes and spending his days in a pot addled stupor with Russ and the bikers.

One day he returns home to find his mother in tears. Thinking that Ken has been beating her, not an unprecedented occurrence in the house, Chappie tries to attack Ken. Ken rebuffs his attack and forces Chappie to sit down in the living room, where he and Chappie's mother confront the boy about the stolen coins, heirlooms passed down from his grandmother, and which were going to be part of Chappie's inheritance. Ken, whose relationship with Chappie was already poisoned by what he considered to be Chappie's indolence, begins beating the boy for showing such little consideration for his mother's feelings. Chappie flees the house and spends the night with Russ. He goes back the next day, while Ken and his mother are at work, to collect his things. He takes the rifle out and, while in tears, shoots up the bedroom. He then pockets the few remaining precious coins and leaves.

Chapter 2 - All Is Forgiven

Chappie's pot supplier, Hector, allows Chappie to become a small time dealer and Chappie deals pot for the rest of the summer and into the fall, sleeping on a couch at the apartment of Russ and the bikers, in exchange for supplying them with weed. As Christmas approaches, Chappie thinks longingly of reconciliation with his mother and



Ken. He decides that nice gifts will bring about their forgiveness. He is caught shoplifting a silk nightgown for his mother from a store in the mall. The mall officers call his mother and she and Ken come down to the mall. Chappie's mother convinces the mall officers not to arrest Chappie if he will apologize for the theft and promise to return home. Chappie is released, but on the way to the car, tells his mother that he still owes twenty dollars to his landlords for rent. He promises her that he will go get his things, pay his debt, and come home, and demands the twenty dollars from her. She reluctantly and tearful proffers the money, and Chappie breaks his promise of returning home.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

Chappie's first offenses, the pilfering of his mother's coin collection and extorting of twenty dollars from her, an act that in his mind he acknowledges makes him a real criminal, are in many respects his worst. The rest of the events in the novel either stem from these initial mistakes or are out of his control entirely. The severities of Ken's abusive crimes against Chappie, which are the primary reason for his rebelliousness, are kept from the reader until later. It is almost as though Chappie, who is telling the story to the reader in the past tense, must grow to trust his audience before revealing the abuse. This foreshadows his inability to reveal the secret in several subsequent opportunities.

The shooting up of his mother and stepfather's bedroom while in tears over his situation is a type of destructive act that Chappie will commit several more times, a pattern he will repeat whenever he confronts injustices, even those committed by himself. Before shooting up the room, Chappie aims the rifle at his cat, Willie, and pulls the trigger, only to find that the rifle is not yet loaded. The realization of what he has almost done powers the subsequent tearful expression of his frustrations with his home life and with himself and his growing addiction.



Chapter 3-4

Chapter 3-4 Summary

Chapter 3 - Canadians

Chappie begins hanging out at the mall, though he is constantly harassed by Black Bart, the mall cop who stopped Chappie for shoplifting and who, conversely, is one of Chappie's frequent pot customers. One day Chappie see an unctuous man leading a dazed young girl around the mall. Chappie is immediately suspicious of the couple and his concern for the young girl leads him to follow them around. He approaches the man, who he thinks must be Canadian, a label that Chappie uses pejoratively, and asks for spare change. The man amicably offers to buy Chappie a meal. He says his name is Buster Brown and that the young girl with him, who Chappie recons cannot be more than seven or eight, is named Froggy. Froggy seems languid and slow, and Chappie suspects that Buster Brown is doping her and using her for child porn. Buster says that he's an actor, though he's been mainly directing these days. He offers to give Chappie a screen test and Chappie agrees, because he thinks he will be able to take Froggy's place and spare the girl or help her escape. Buster and Chappie walk to the parking lot, Buster having seemingly forgotten all about Froggy who he left behind in the food court. Outside, Chappie and Buster walk past a department store display that is in the process of changing. The denuded and scattered pieces of the mannequins cause Chappie to change his mind, and he runs from Buster, who chases after the boy, to whom he had already given twenty bucks. Chappie hides in the food court and sees Buster reclaim Froggy and leave.

Chapter 4 - Adirondack Iron

A bodybuilder named Bruce Walther moves into the apartment rented by Russ and the bikers, where Chappie has been sleeping on a couch. The bikers and Bruce form a biker gang called Adirondack Iron, but do not allow Russ, who is eager to join, into the gang. The apartment is in the building owned by the Lagranges, the same couple that own the video store that employs Russ. Russ pays half of the rent and struggles to collect the other half from the bikers. One night, during a particularly loud party thrown by the bikers, Wanda Lagrange calls Russ and Chappie down to the video store, where she fires Russ for repeatedly stealing from the till. She tells them that the rent on the apartment is two months past due, and that she wants them and the bikers out. When Russ bulks at trying to get the bikers to leave, Wanda tells him that she will call the cops. Russ point out that if Wanda lets the cops into the building there is a possibility that they will have the place condemned, as the apartments are fire traps. Wanda gives them one week to come up with the back rent. Chappie tells Russ that he will help by trying to deal harder drugs to the bikers.



Chapter 3-4 Analysis

The mannequins that Chappie sees in various states of assembly in a shop window when he is leaving the mall with Buster Brown for his screen test are an excellent example of symbolic imagery. The sexless and nude figures with their lack of pigmentation and hair are symbolic of children, just as their blank faces suggest both innocence and emotional immaturity. Chappie sees in their forms the hideousness of child pornography and is also reminded of the sexual abuse he has already suffered at the hands of his stepfather.

Bruce Walther acts as a buffer between the boys and the older, violent bikers. One of the bikers, Joker, wears a choker chain as a symbol of his ferocity, and Chappie remarks about how Bruce is constantly grabbing hold of the chain and mocks using it to restrain Joker. This action, though performed in jest, is a physical translation of the role Bruce plays in the apartment. When the bikers start stealing electronics, Bruce keeps Russ and Chappie from helping unload the goods partly to avoid having to cut them in, and partly as a futile attempt to keep the boys from being implicated in the biker's criminal doings. There are also moments when Bruce, who is a repressed homosexual, shows almost loving affection for Chappie, though he does not abuse either of the boys sexually, and maintains a strongly heterosexual façade with the other bikers.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Chapter 5 - Presumed Dead

Chappie and Russ managed to hang onto the apartment with Bruce's help. One night in April, Chappie comes home to find the living room filled with stolen electronics. The bikers have partnered with Black Bart to take new electronics off the loading dock of the Service Merchandise in the Plattsburgh mall and fence the stuff to a buyer in Albany. Bruce keeps Chappie and Russ from even touching a box. Russ points out that Chappie and him are already implicated and that, as they are assuming the same risk as the bikers, they should get a cut. Bruce threatens Russ with violence, but Chappie manages to pull Russ away. Russ thinks this is particularly unjust, as he has effectively joined the gang already, and been allowed to get an Adirondack Iron tattoo.

Russ forms a scheme whereby Chappie and he can take one or two items at a time and fence them. But Chappie does not want to run the risk of angering the bikers. Russ begins to take VCRs off the stacks in the early mornings. After a week or two, Bruce gets wise to the fact that the piles are smaller, and, as Russ is out at the time, confronts Chappie. Chappie plays dumb, but Bruce quickly deduces that it is Russ who has been stealing from the stacks. He binds Chappie up in Russ's room, and the bikers wait for Russ to return home.

Russ returns home, but uses his window to enter the building and rescue Chappie. In the process of leaving, the boys accidentally start a fire. The building burns, with the boys watching from the basement of a nearby building, in which Russ has stashed all of his stolen electronics. As the town gathers to watch the fire, the boys overhear Joker saying that Bruce went back into the building to try to save Chappie.

Chappie convinces Russ to leave his Camaro and the electronics behind, and the boys sneak out of town.

Chapter 6 - Skull and Bones

Chappie and Russ steal a truck on the edge of town and drive to Plattsburgh. Russ removes the tags and they park the truck in an industrial lot on the edge of town. Russ takes them to an old school bus nearby that has been converted into a small home. James and Richard, brothers and college dropouts, live in the bus, and Russ has spent the night there before. He convinces James to take them in by offering him the groceries Chappie and he found in the stolen truck.

The next morning, James shows them a copy of the day's paper. In it, they read about the fire in Au Sable that destroyed a building and left one dead and two missing.



Russ sells the stolen license plates and the truck to the brothers, and Chappie and he use part of the money to visit a tattoo parlor, where Russ gets a panther to cover up his Adirondack Iron crest. Chappie, browsing through the book of sample tattoos, see a Jolly Roger and is reminded of Peter Pan. He decides to get the tattoo, although he dispenses with the skull, and just gets two crossed bones. He and Russ attempt to come up with new names and Russ suggests, because of the new tattoo, that Chappie's new name should be Bone.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Despite his tendency to lash out almost sadistically when he is hurt or confronted, Chappie is neither psychopathic nor even a sociopath. He feels genuine remorse for every bad thing he does, and experiences sorrow for events that affect those around him even when they are out of control. Russ has to stop Chappie from racing back into the fiery building when they learn that Bruce has gone back in, obviously because he believes that Chappie is still tied up in Russ's bedroom. Afterward, he mourns Bruce, despite the fact that at the time of Chappie's rescue by Russ, it was unclear whether or not Bruce was going to kill both of them.

Chappie explains that his interest in Peter Pan is based on the fact that Peter and the kids best the cruel adult Captain Hook. On the surface, he identifies with the story because as a kid facing adversity, he wants to best the adults around him. But, below the surface, there is also the fact that Peter Pan is a fairy tale about children refusing to give up their innocence and grow up. Chappie, who has had his innocence taken away from him by force, cannot help but envy the rebellious Pan, who freed himself from the tyranny of adults with his innocence intact. Chappie hopes for this freedom and return to childhood, but knows that he has already lost, and he gets only part of the tattoo, signifying that in his case, the dream is already incomplete or fractured.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Chapter 7 - The Bone Rules

The boys use the rest of the money to buy bus tickets to Keene, where Russ's aunt and uncle are caretakers for the summerhouse of a rich family who rarely used it. The boys sneak into Keene and break into the house, finding it empty. The boys begin squatting in the house, living off the non-perishables in the pantry and slowly wrecking the house. On the first night, while searching the house for pot, Chappie finds a handgun, which he conceals from Russ. They keep the lights off in the evenings, and the blinds in the front windows closed. Russ's uncle drives by a couple of times a week, but never gets out and checks in the house. As spring passes into summer, the house becomes messier, and the boys, with only one static-filled television channel to watch, begin to fight. Finally, Russ tells Chappie he is going to live with his aunt and uncle, hoping that things have blown over enough and that he will not be connected with any wrongdoing.

Chappie feels betrayed, and walks through the house crying. He packs up some camping equipment and searches the house for small sellables. He settles on a small stuffed gamecock and a stack of classical CDs. He shoots up the living room and shoots out the back windows with the handgun. He steps outside and shouts, "The Bone Rules!" and then leaves.

Chapter 8 - The Soul Assassins

Chappie hitches east, toward Albany. A van with a Christian ministry seal stops and Chappie climbs in eagerly, only to discover that Buster Brown is the driver. Froggy is curled up on the floor in the back of the van, clearly doped. Buster mentions that Chappie owes him money. Buster is managing bands now, and he is on his way to meet a rap group that he owes money to from a previous gig. He suggests that Chappie contribute to this payoff, but Chappie refuses, and asks Buster if he'll buy Chappie's classical music CDs. Buster decides to have Chappie conceal Buster's money from the band, so that Buster can negotiate a new contract before handing it over. Buster is worried the rappers will shake him down for the money, but thinks they'll ignore a kid like Chappie. Chappie hides the money inside his stuffed gamecock.

Buster drives them to a bar in Plattsburgh. They park the van and wait for the band to arrive. Chappie sees Joker and several of the other ex-Adirondack Iron bikers go into the bar. The rap band arrives, and Buster escorts them into the bar to negotiate. Chappie begins trying to persuade Froggy to take the opportunity to flee with him, but she tells him that if she does, Buster will be mad. Joker and one of the rappers crash through the front window of the bar, and as a brawl breaks out in the parking lot, Chappie pulls Froggy away. Chappie takes Froggy to James and Richard's school bus, but the brothers have vacated it. A Jamaican named I-man is living in the bus. Froggy



goes to sleep on one of the mattresses, and Chappie and I-man smoke weed and get to know one another.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

On their way out of Plattsburgh, having just gotten new tattoos and decided to begin new lives, Chappie and Russ walk through the park. Chappie talks about how the spring sun and all of the new growth makes the boys feel as though they are leaving the long dark of a ruinous winter behind, and entering the spring of their new lives. This rebirth is aborted by their experiences at the summer house, where their lack of a real plan and their understandable immaturity leads them to part ways. Russ falls back into his life in Au Sable, and as the reader later learns, is able to pick up right where he left off with little or no consequences. Chappie, by contrast, chooses a different route, and is beset with one setback after another. The irony of this forking of ways comes later, at the end of the story, when the reader learns about the effects that the disparate choices have on the boys.

Froggy's trepidation at running away from Buster Brown reveals the psychological manipulation to which she has been subjected. Chappie feels no remorse at stealing Buster Brown's money, though he will feel guilty every time he uses it. The money carries for him the taint of child pornography and also reminds him of the secret he is keeping about his sexually abusive stepfather.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

Chapter 9 - School Days

I-man is a Jamaican with a temporary permit to work in the states who has run away from the work farm because the food served to the workers was making him sick and was against his Rastafarian religion. He takes the children in and starts to teach them about the Rastafarian religion. I-man has converted the school bus into a greenhouse for seedlings, which he has grown most of the spring. In the first few weeks, Chappie and Froggy help him transplant the seedlings. They panhandle at the nearby shopping center and scavenge expired food from the bins, but most of their food comes from I-man's garden. I-man teaches Chappie about moderating his use of marijuana to promote spiritual enlightenment rather than abusing it to deaden his senses, and I-man's strict vegetarianism coupled with hard work in the garden begins to work wonders on the children's health.

Chappie coaxes Froggy into revealing her real name, Rose Riley. She is from Milwaukee, and tells them that she was given to Buster Brown by her mother. Chappie is immediately suspicious of the woman, but concludes that returning Rose to her mother is better than her continuing to live homeless in New York, dependent on an illegal immigrant and a thirteen year old presumed dead runaway. Rose tells him her mother's name is Nancy, and Chappie, finding an N. Riley in the listings for Milwaukee, calls her. He can tell right away that Nancy Riley is a drug addict. She suspects Chappie is putting her on, till he mentions Buster Brown. Nancy Riley says that she is sick, and does not have the money to take care of Rose. They finally agree that Chappie will put Rose, or Sister Rose, as Chappie now calls her, on a bus for Milwaukee and that he will send some cash along with her.

I-man, Chappie, and Froggy celebrate the 4th of July by watching the fireworks display from the roof of the supermarket. The three friends part and Chappie puts Rose on a bus, after already deciding that he too will return home to Au Sable.

Chapter 10 - Home Again, Home Again, Jiggety-Jig

Chappie hitches toward Au Sable. He is picked up by a wealthy couple in a convertible that he soon realizes are the owners of the summer house that he wrecked in spring. Feeling ashamed, he spends an uncomfortable trip up 9N to his hometown.

Chappie returns home to find his mother's home in an extreme state of neglect. Ken has lost his job, and Chappie's mother, sick of Ken's drinking, has moved in with his Grandmother and joined a support group for people with alcoholic spouses. Ken greets Chappie amicably, but Chappie soon sees that his stepfather is intoxicated and that Chappie's arrival has coaxed an erection out of him. Chappie remembers back to all of



the nights when Ken would slip into bed next to him and would either make Chappie give him a handjob or would masturbate onto Chappie's back. Ken tells him that the cat, Willie, is dead, and then taunts Chappie by insinuating that he might have run Willie over with the car intentionally. Chappie gets angry and pulls the gun on Ken. Ken backs down and starts to cry. Chappie leaves and heads back across town to the clinic where his mother works.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

After the false start living with Russ in the summer house, Chappie finally experiences the promised new beginning when he takes up with I-man and Froggy in the bus greenhouse. I-man is the most caring, benign adult the two children have ever been exposed to, and they flourish under his tutelage and friendship. Chappie proves that he is capable of both hard work and serious study. He absorbs everything I-man teaches him about plants, the Ital diet, and the history and practices of the Rastafarian religion, and even begins to adopt the more difficult practices of peace of mind and thankfulness. He also learns an important lesson about the abuse of drugs and after I-man's instructions on moderation of pot use, Chappie will never again be overcome by addiction.

The parting with Sister Rose is bittersweet, and some readers may question Chappie's decision, especially in light of Rose's subsequent fate, which is later revealed. Yet, it also seems a great deal to ask of a young boy who is homeless himself that he should also charge himself with the care of an even younger child. Chappie, as the narrator, finally reveals to the reader the secret of his sexual abuse at the hands of his stepfather.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

Chapter 11 - Red Rover

Chappie has a tearful reunion with his mother, but it soon sours when he learns that she intends to work things out and return to Ken. Chappie cannot find the courage to reveal his secret about the sexual abuse Ken had subjected him to for years. He calls Ken a pervert and demands that his mother choose between the two of them. After a heated argument, during which his mother says that his delinquency was the cause of her problems with Ken, Chappie's mother tells him that she will not let him bully her into leaving Ken and that he had better leave.

Chapter 12 - Over the River and Through the Woods

Chappie visits his grandmother. He stomps about her house, paying little attention to her and misbehaving in general. He asks her for fifty bucks, but then tells her he's just kidding. She says that he is acting like his real father. Chappie settles down and starts asking her questions about his dad. His dad was named Paul Dorset, and when he had met Chappie's mother he was working as an x-ray tech. He made good money, but Chappie's mom, who was the receptionist at the hospital that hired Paul, knew that Paul's education credentials were fraudulent. They fell in love and married, but shortly after Chappie was born, his mom learned that Paul had been sleeping around. They tried to make the marriage work in spite of Paul's infidelities, but ended up divorcing when Chappie was five.

Paul had won visitation rights, but never exercised them because he refused to pay alimony. Eventually, when a warrant was issued for his arrest for back alimony and for writing bad checks, Paul Dorset left the country. Chappie's grandmother tells Chappie that the last she had heard of Paul, he was living somewhere in the Caribbean. Chappie tells his grandmother that Ken is a pervert, but, though she shows interesting in hearing the details of this accusation, he again can not reveal the secret. Chappie tells his grandmother that he would love to find his real father, if only so he could tell him about Ken. He leaves his grandmother's and walks out of Au Sable in a rainstorm.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Chappie's willful sabotage of his reunion with his mother and grandmother is caused by his inability to tell them the secret of his sexual abuse at the hands of his stepfather Ken. Like many victims of abuse, Chappie feels as though he is responsible for the abuse, and that to reveal the secret would be shameful. But part of him knows that the situation is unjust, and he is being asked to resubmit himself to Ken's authority and lusts. His powerlessness in the face of this injustice causes him to lash out. Having failed to summon up the courage to tell either his mom or his grandmother the secret,



he allows himself to become fixated on the fate of his real father. This allows him to escape the situation and not place himself under Ken's authority. It also allows him to think of his father as a solution to the problem. If Chappie can find him, his father can make up for abandoning him with Ken by confronting the abuser for Chappie.

Chappie's walk out of Au Sable in the rain is a symbolic opposite to his walk out of Keene with Russ in the sunlight of spring. The summer with I-man had filled Chappie with strength and a new hope, most of which had been dashed by the disastrous events in Au Sable.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

Chapter 13 - Mister Yesterday

Chappie walks toward Plattsburgh in the rain, the whole time plagued by fantasies of returning to Au Sable and killing Ken, his mother, and even his grandmother. He pauses on a high bridge overlooking a river gorge. He climbs the rail and contemplates jumping, slips, then regains his balance and spills safely back over the rail. He takes the gun from his backpack and flings it off the bridge.

Chappie returns to Plattsburgh and the comfort and safety of I-man's garden. I-man continues to teach the boy about the Rastafarian religion and, as the garden is in full bloom, they have no need for panhandling or scavenging, though I-man continues to sell the pot that he has grown in carefully spots carefully integrated among the normal wild growth vegetation.

I-man tells Chappie that he needs to return home to Jamaica, where he has a woman and several children in the village of Accompong. Chappie gives I-man \$740, which is the last of the money he stole from Buster Brown, to buy transportation back to Jamaica.

Chapter 14- Crossing the Bar

Chappie and I-man ride the ferry into Vermont, where I-man hopes to get a flight to Jamaica. Chappie considers hiking around Vermont and then returning to the school bus, but is now entertaining ideas about going with I-man to Jamaica. He decides that if the money they have is enough to buy two tickets, then he will go.

When they get to the airport, Chappie finds that he is able to buy two tickets to Jamaica, with one stopover in Philadelphia. They are then asked for their passports. I-man presents his expired temporary work passport, and Chappie hands over a fake driver's license he stole years ago. Somehow, this appeases the attendant, though she tells I-man that he will not be able to take his Jah-stick, a tall walking stick on which he carved the head of a lion, onto the plane. I-man tells her that no one else can touch the stick safely, and when the woman reaches out to take it, she recoils as if stung, and puts her finger in her mouth. She allows I-man to board with the Jah-stick, and Chappie begins to wonder if his friend and companion has magical powers. When he asks I-man how he made the stick bite the woman, I-man shrugs and does not supply an explanation.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Chappie's dangling over the side of the bridge is a metaphor for his choice of whether to respond to the events in Au Sable with violence. If he returns to the town and kills his



stepfather, as he is fantasizing about doing, he will be in essence throwing himself into the dark and destructive abyss of violence. He struggles with these fantasies, but then decides to toss the gun over the side. He has faced both an emotional and a physical point of peril, has avoided the descent into darkness, and is now ready to finish crossing the bridge to the rest of his life.

The lion on I-man's Jah-stick symbolizes Haile Selassie I (1892-1975), the black Emperor of Ethiopia, who Rastafarians regard as the second coming of Christ, and from whose original surname the Rastafarian religion takes its name.

The ease with which I-man and Chappie board the plane is perhaps unbelievable to the post 9-11 reader, though it should be noted that the events of the story, though it is not explicitly stated, seem to take place in the mid-1990s. Still, I-man and Chappie's encounter with the security desk seems almost magical, an impression that is reinforced by the incident involving I-man's biting Jah-stick, the very non-magical mechanism of which Chappie will later learn.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

Chapter 15 - Sunsplashed

Chappie and I-man arrive in Jamaica, and I-man uses his connections at the airport in Montego Bay to bypass customs. He leads Chappie out of the port town along the coastal highway. After a few hours of walking, he slips into the jungle and shows Chappie to a large communal house built into the side of a hill. Chappie thought the place resembled an ant farm because of its myriad interconnected rooms. I-man introduces Chappie to the other Rastas living in the ant farm. The ant farm was a marijuana distribution focal point for the area. I-man and the other Rasta grew the weed in farms at villages like Accompong, further inland, then had it flown to the ant farm and dealt the stuff to the locals and tourists in nearby Montego Bay. Chappie sees some similarities between these men and the Adirondack Iron bikers. The Rasta are a more mellow crowd in general, but they all carry weapons, both machetes and guns, even I-man, and they can become violent in their quests for dominance over each other and control of drug dealing territories on the island.

After several weeks of living at the ant farm, I-man takes Chappie out to see more of Jamaica. On their first stop, back in Montego Bay, Chappie is hanging around the local market while I-man sells ganja. Chappie sees I-man sell to a white couple whose bronze skin and dress marks them as residents of the island. Chappie is sure that the man is Paul Dorset, his father. The couple climbs into a range rover and drives out of town, with Chappie running after them futilely.

Chapter 16 - Starport

I-man tells him that the man goes by the name Doc, and is a doctor who works for the government, primarily in Kingston. The woman's name is Evening Star, and she owns a small estate up the road in Montpelier, where she entertains a constant stream of artsy American tourists.

I-man and Chappie take a bus to Montpelier and walk to the estate, which has a sign out front identifying it as the Starport. The Starport is a large manor house, from the plantation days, complete with extensive grounds and a swimming pool. When I-man and Chappie enter, a party is in full swing in the backyard, and loudspeakers are filling the air with reggae music. They meet Evening Star, and I-man tells her that Chappie is, in his words, "Baby Doc." She goes to get Doc, who it turns out, is indeed Chappie's father Paul Dorset. His father is genuinely thrilled that Chappie has found him.



Chapters 15-16 Analysis

The reality of I-man's way of life on his home island of Jamaica is something of disappointment to Chappie, who does not seem to be able to escape from life on the criminal margins of society. In his first night in the ant farm, he is so overwhelmed by this confusion and disappointment that, high on the extra potent ganja used by the Rasta, he stumbles away from the house and finds his way to the beach, where he spends the night. I-man finds him the next day and from that point on, helps Chappie integrate more slowly into the reality of Rasta living.

During his drug addled first night, Chappie kills a dangling spider in the ant farm by moving a candle beneath its thread. When the thread melts and breaks, and the spider drops into the flame with a sizzle, Chappie is overcome with the horror of his brutal act. The moment is a repeat of the incident in the first chapter, where Chappie points Ken's rifle at his cat Willie and pulls the trigger, only to find that the gun is not loaded. The incidents can be interpreted in several ways. First, they could be used to prove that, while Chappie has adopted a more compassionate attitude and that he abandoned violence when he tossed the gun into the river outside of Au Sable, he is still haunted by the abuse he has suffered and consequently can still react violently in dynamic situations. Second, the repetition of these similar acts of senseless violence could be the author's way of illustrating the point that human beings are simple prone to this sort of random behavior.

Contrasting this illustration of randomness in the human psyche is the repeated occurrence of non-random, seemingly improbable events that befall Chappie. He is constantly stumbling into encounters with people he knows. This serendipity is well illustrated by his most improbable reunion with his father.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

Chapter 17 - Happy Birthday to the Bone

Chappie begins to think of the house as the Mothership, because of the way Evening Star runs it. The house is constantly full of people and animals that she has taken in, and though she partakes in some of the late night partying, she is also the primary caretaker and cook for everyone. There are always white tourists, often women, staying at the house, and a steady stream of young Rastas hang around for free meals, booze, and drugs, often trading sexual favors with the often as not older women. I-man is contemptuous of these younger men, calling them Rent-a-Rastas. Everyone treats I-man with reverence, and Chappie learns that the older Rasta is famous for his vision. Chappie learns the trick of the Jah-stick. I-man has embedded two small sewing needles in the mane of the lion, which are difficult to see but which he can use to stick anyone that grabs for the staff.

Chappie's father works several days of each week in Kingston. He tells Chappie that he does not have room for him at his Kingston apartment, but Evening Star gives Chappie his own room at Starport. When he is in Montpelier, Chappie's father lets him run errands with him. These usually involve negotiations about drugs or guns, and Chappie learns that his father is addicted to cocaine. His father calls him Bone, which Chappie loves.

One day, Evening Star, who is teaching Chappie about Astrology, learns that his fifteenth birthday is the next day. She decides that they must throw a party for him. Most of the village shows up for the party, but Chappie is disappointed when very little attention is paid to him and there is no birthday cake. Toward the end of the party Chappie walks in on I-man and Evening Star having sex. Chappie finds his father and tells him. Doc says that he will have to kill I-man, and arms himself. Chappie, feeling guilty for betraying his friend, gives his father false information about where he saw I-man and Evening Star having sex. When his father leaves to find them, Chappie seeks out I-man, and tells him that Doc wants to kill him because he found out that he had sex with Evening Star. I-man tells Chappie that he will be heading into the deep bush, and asks if Chappie wants to come. Chappie agrees and the two flee the Starport.

Chapter 18 - Bone Goes Native

I-man leads Chappie inland to his home village of Accompany, which is located in a pock-marked, ruddy area known as Cockpit Country by the natives. It was to here that the rebelling slaves of the former Ashanti tribes fled and established their own communities away from the white owned plantations. The people of Accompany distrust foreigners, even a youth like Chappie, so I-man sets him up in a small bamboo cabin



outside of town, and assigns Chappie the job of watering and watching over the large ganja plot owned and tended by I-man and the other Rasta men in the village.

Chappie spends many happy months in the cabin. He begins to grow his own dreadlocks as with I-man's guidance, he delves further into Rastafarian religious practices. One night, I-man and the other Rastas lead Chappie into the jungle for a Rastafarian initiation into manhood. They enter a deep cave, and Chappie is made to smoke a special herb while the other Rastas beat on ceremonial drums.

Chappie has an extended vision of being a slave on a Jamaican plantation. He drives a sugar wagon past a platform where black youths are being auctioned, then up to a manor house, where he witnesses blacks being abused by the white land owners. Chappie himself is pulled off the wagon and taken by a white man who looks much like Bruce, and who drags him behind the manor house and forces Chappie to give him a handjob. Chappie continues to drive the wagon back and forth between the sugar cane fields and the manor house all day. Every time he is away from whites, when he is driving beside the languid sea, or talking with the blacks in the fields, it is peaceful and calm. Every time there is a white person nearby, even one, the scene becomes chaotic and violent.

At night, he is made to wait on the white people at their table in the manor house, where they spend the meal complaining about the laziness and immorality of their slaves. Once the white people have gone upstairs for the night, Chappie leaves the manor house. Outside, he finds a gathering mob of blacks, armed with machetes and farming implements. I-man and the other Rastas of Accompany are at the head of the mob as it advances on the manor house. Chappie wants to join them, but finds that he is unable to summon up the will to follow the mob. The mob enters the manor and Chappie hears screaming as fires begin in the upper stories. A young white boy slips out of the house and, terror stricken, takes off for the fields at a run. Chappie grabs the young boy, puts his hand over his mouth and pulls him into the shadows as the black mob emerges from the house with machetes and clothing drenched in blood. In the field closest to the beach, an armed white posse assembles on horseback. The blacks slip into the jungle and I-man urges Chappie to come, but Chappie is reluctant to leave the terrified white boy. I-man tells Chappie that the decision is his, and walks into the bush. Chappie releases the white child, who runs up to the approaching posse and points out Chappie's hiding place to the men. Chappie, angered at the betrayal, sprints away from the posse. He stumbles upon a deep hole in one of the nearby fields and squeezes in as the posse approaches. Crawling through the hole, he finds himself in a cave. The cave widens and the noise of the pursuing mob fades and Chappie suddenly finds himself back among I-man and the Rastas. The steady beat of the ritual drum, which had not quieted throughout the vision, ceases and the ritual ends.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

Chappie's betrayal of I-man was a moment of weakness induced by his newfound and largely misplaced respect for his father. Chappie's regret is instantaneous, and is now



preempted by Doc's flat declaration of his intention to kill I-man. Doc's responses to Chappie are laced with both racism and misogyny. He uses the word 'nigger' repeatedly when referring to I-man and all of the other blacks on the island, and he seems to have no difficulty regarding Evening Star as his property. His response is calm and calculated, and is motivated not by revenge against I-man, but by the need to re-establish the correct positions of the social order which the incident has disturbed.

Chappie's extended vision of life on the slave plantation and the rebellion illustrates his need to marry the injustices committed against him to the Rastafarian movement of which he has become a part. The slave auction and the abuses of the blacks by the whites are mixed in Chappie's mind with sexual abuse at the hands of men. He also sees a white man who looks much like Ken beating a black woman who is on her hands and knees. This is an obvious reinterpretation of Ken's abuse of his mother.

Chappie's willingness to help the white boy, and his hesitation at abandoning him indicates that he does not completely identify with the struggle of his new peers, and perhaps that he still considers himself an outsider to the Rastafarian culture. This foreshadows his eventual fate, when he will detach himself from the Rastas and fight his own battles.



Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary

Chapter 19 - Second Thoughts

The current ganja crop is ready for harvest. Chappie and the other Rastas spend almost a week picking and drying the weed, and then planting the next batch, while I-man is away arranging for the bales to be airlifted out.

I-man returns and the next day an airplane piloted by a man named Nighthawk arrives to collect the drugs. Chappie helps load the bales while I-man talks to Nighthawk, who is a fat white man and carries an Uzi. When Nighthawk asks about the young white kid helping, I-man identifies Chappie as Baby Doc.

I-man and Chappie return to the ant farm outside of Montego Bay. Chappie begins trying to hang out around the hotels and resorts frequented by white tourists. He hopes to help I-man by specializing in dealing to white tourists. One day, he walks back from Montego Bay to find a Mercedes Benz parked outside the ant farm. Chappie is excited, thinking that the car must belong to the rich white ganja distributor who bought the bales from Accompany, and that the distributor had come to pay I-man. Chappie hoped that all the work he did on the Accompany plot would entitle him to a portion of this loot.

He knew that something was wrong the minute he entered the ant farm. He worked his way to the deepest rooms, and quickly stumbled upon a party of three, consisting of Nighthawk, still armed with his Uzi, Jason, one of the Rent-a-Rastas that frequented the Starport, and another armed white man who must represent the distributor. They ask Chappie how they get out of the maze of rooms, and threaten to shoot him. Nighthawk says that Chappie is Baby Doc, and Jason confirms this, but the other white man says that killing a white kid would bring an investigation. Chappie tells them how to get out, and they leave, but not before the white man informs Chappie that if he had been black, he would be dead.

Chappie knows what he will find inside, but feels that he must see it for himself. In the back room, he finds one of the ant farm Rastas and I-man shot dead. I-man has a bullet hole in his forehead that Chappie knows must have come from Jason's handgun. Chappie takes I-man's Jah-stick and boom box and leaves.

Chapter 20 - Bone Phones Home

Chappie reads in the local paper that two unidentified black men were found dead in a hovel outside of Montego Bay. There is no other report about the incident. Chappie feels obligated to return to Accompany to tell the other Rastas and the mother of I-man's children about his fate. He hitches in country to the village, but is greeted with stony indifference by the Rasta and the other natives. He collects his things from the bamboo



cabin. While sitting on the main road waiting to hitch back to Montego Bay, Chappie uses the machete that I-man had given him to cut off his dreadlocks.

Back in Montego Bay, Chappie starts panhandling at the tourist spots. He discovers the purse of a white woman, abandoned by a pursued pickpocket. The wallet inside contains a pre-paid calling card. Chappie uses the card to call Russ. Russ is working in construction, has managed to get his Camaro back, but is still living in his aunt's basement. He tells Chappie that Chappie's mother and stepfather got back together and then moved away to somewhere near Buffalo, and that Chappie's grandmother died. Chappie tells Russ he is ready to return to Au Sable and go straight. He asks Russ if he can borrow plane fare home, where he will immediately seek employment, the completion of his schooling, and will pay Russ back at the first opportunity. Russ tells Chappie that he is crazy for choosing Au Sable over Jamaica, and, against Chappie's better judgment, they make plans for Russ to come to the island and meet up with Chappie instead.

Chappie finds a scrap of paper in his backpack with the name N. Riley and a phone number with a 414 area code on it. Thinking that it is a secret message from I-man, Chappie calls the number. When Nancy Riley answers, Chappie suddenly remembers that she is the mother of Sister Rose. Chappie can tell over the phone that Nancy Riley is still a drug addict. He asks about Rose. Nancy tells him that Rose died of pneumonia last September, shortly after she arrived on the bus from New York. Nancy tells Chappie that he must have put Rose on the bus sick, but a heartbroken Chappie tells her that she will rot in hell for what she did to her little girl. Chappie hangs up, puts the scrap of paper in his mouth, and swallows it.

Chapters 19-20 Analysis

I-man's murder severs Chappie from deeper involvement with the Rastafarian movement. He will carry the teaching with him, and he will still observe some of the practices, but he will do so for his own purposes. The shearing of his dreadlocks off by machete rather than careful cutting with a safer instrument is symbolic of the fact that the faith was taken away from him by violence. This is the same kind of violence and abuse that he fled in Au Sable.

His last moment of weakness in the story occurs when he briefly entertains the idea that he can return to Au Sable and put everything that has occurred behind him. His phone call to Russ dispels some of this delusion, and the news of Sister Rose's death dispels the rest. He can not put the events behind them. He must make the sorrows a part of him. There is no such thing as beginning anew; we are always what a product of what has happened to us. This is the low point of the story, and yet like the foundation of a house, which sits below and provides support, it is these events that will empower Chappie.



Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary

Chapter 21 - Bone's Revenge

Chappie decides to settle up with his father and Jason. When he arrives at the Starport, the house is empty, and Chappie uses his father's CD player to finally listen to some of the classical CDs he's been lugging around. His father returns to the house, ill from his addiction to cocaine, and is quickly followed by Evening Star who arrives with a new group of white women tourists and the Rent-a-Rasta Jason.

While his father sleeps on the couch and the evening's festivities begin around the pool, Chappie talks to Evening Star as she prepares dinner in the kitchen. Evening Star tells him that Jason told Doc and her that he saw Chappie at the ant farm the day I-man was killed, and that the rumors had it that I-man tried to swindle his wealthy, white drug distributor. Evening Star believes that Doc does not know which distributor it was and she is convinced that he was not involved. Chappie asks Evening Star if she will have sex with him and she agrees. They have sex in the laundry room, and Chappie asks her if she knows whether he has any half-brothers and half-sisters on the island. Evening Star tells him that she knows that Doc has a Jamaican wife in Kingston, and that the couple of at least two children. Chappie tells her he is going to leave the Starport. Evening Star asks him to stay, promising that she will remain his lover and make it worth his while if he does so.

Chappie finds his father passed out on the couch. He takes the stuffed gamecock he stole from the summer house and puts a note in it that reads, "The Bone Rules, Never Forget-tee!" and places the bird on his father's chest. He then walks outside and, brandishing his machete, approaches Jason, who is operating the barbeque by the pool. Jason sees Chappie coming and picks up his own machete, but Chappie lays his weapon down in front of Jason. He curses Jason, telling him in Rasta tongue that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword. Jason tells Chappie that it was Nighthawk that killed I-man, and that Jason couldn't prevent it. Jason takes both machetes and jumps up on the edge of the barbeque pit, mocking Chappie by brandishing the weapons and laughing. Chappie jabs Jason with the Jah-stick and Jason topples onto the open grill. Chappie grabs the burning man and flings him into the pool, then flees.

Chapter 22 - Shipping Out

Chappie returns to Montego Bay, where he gets a berth as the only crew member of a small tourist boat called the Belinda Blue. Captain Ave lines up a job ferrying a wealth Connecticut family from Jamaica to the nearby island of Dominica. He gives Chappie money and sends him into Montego Bay to buy food for the trip. In the market, Chappie spots Russ, but he is reluctant to greet his old friend. Russ is eventually picked up by Evening Star, who drives him off in her range rover for a stay at the Starport. Chappie



feels sorry for Russ, but decides to allow him to learn his own lessons and live his own life. He returns to the Belinda Blue. During the voyage to Dominica, Chappie sleeps on the deck of the ship, out under the stars. He makes constellations for all of the people he has known, including his dear, departed friends I-man and Sister Rose. He concludes that though they are gone, their brief influence on him will affect him every day for the rest of his life, and that he is beginning a new life penniless and yet with immense wealth.

Chapters 21-22 Analysis

As the narrator, Chappie explains his calculated betrayal of his father in precise terms. When he betrayed I-man, he temporarily placed himself on his delinquent father's side; he temporarily assumed the role of the abusive white men from whom he has been running. By having sex with Evening Star in the very same location that I-man did, he is placing himself back on I-man's side both literally and figuratively.

By, in essence, laying his weapon at his enemy's feet, Chappie is walking away from violence forever. When he is mocked for his decision, he responds with humor, by literally poking fun at the violence. His action results in the downfall and injury of violence, as personified by the Rent-a-Rasta Jason, but Chappie helps to mend this wound by pushing the burning man into the pool. Chappie delivers the curse in full Rasta speak.

His decision to settle up with his father and move on is later confirmed by what Chappie sees as the naivety and gullibility of Russ. When he sees Russ climb into the range rover with Evening Star, Chappie notes that Russ is simple what Chappie would be like if he had not know I-man and Sister Rose. Thus the irony of the separate fates of the two boys comes full circle. Russ, who chose to return to the relative safety of Au Sable, has learned little, and has nothing in life to hold onto. Chappie, whose choice was fraught with missteps and peril, has been tempered by the fire of experience, and moreover, has been endeared to life by the people he has loved and lost.



Characters

Chappie

Chappie, whose real name is Chapman, is a rebellious boy, just entering his teen years, who lives with his mother and stepfather Ken in a small town called Au Sable in upstate New York. When the story begins, Chappie's rebelliousness has him sporting a nose ring and Mohawk. Chappie is taking summer school to avoid failing the eighth grade. His attitudes toward life are colored by his poor education, his youth, and the fact that his stepfather Ken has been sexually abusing him for years. His rebellion has led him to abusing marijuana.

Chappie is also haunted by the abandonment of his father, who left when Chappie was only five. He blames his father not only for abandoning him, but for abandoning him to the sexual perversions of his stepfather Ken. Chappie's inability to inform his mother or for that matter any other adult about the sexual abuse he suffers at Ken's hands, fuels his desire to act out against an establishment run by adults that would sit idly by while he is made to suffer such abuse.

Chappie's rebellious nature will eventually result in his expulsion from his mother's home and in a long, at times harrowing journey full of sorrow, friendship, criminal behavior, and self discovery.

I-man

I-man is a middle-aged Rastafarian who Chappie meets when he takes refuge in an abandoned school bus in the fields outside the city of Plattsburgh with a young girl named Froggy. Originally from Jamaica, I-man has a temporary visa to work in the states, but has run away from the work farm where he was employed, because the food they served was making him sick and was against his Rastafarian religion.

I-man is a member of the Bobo Ashanti sect of the Rastafari movement. Like most Rastas, he believes that Haile Selassie I was the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. He tells Chappie of his reverence for Selassie and for Marcus Garvey. While most Rastafarians do not abstain from meat entirely, I-man does. He teaches Chappie that it is unhealthy to eat food that contains what he calls "deaders." Most Rastas, even those of the more strict sects, only abstain from the meat proscribed by the Abrahamic law, which includes pork and shellfish.

I-man is kind to Chappie and Froggy, but he falls far short of the traditional idea of the parental figure. He allows the children to make their own decisions. He has a wife and children in Jamaica, but he often refers to his wife as simply the mother of his children. He tells Chappie that he is homesick for Jamaica and his family and friends, yet when they arrive on the island he is in no rush to return to Accompany and greet them. His penchant to go where the wind takes him makes him an unstable caretaker for Chappie,



but the lessons he does teach, like thankfulness and moderation, along with the Ital dietary regiment, are profoundly beneficial to Chappie.

Sister Rose/Froggy

Chappie first spots young Rose in the mall, being led around by a suspicious man named Buster Brown. Chappie immediately suspects that there is something sinister in their relationship, and he tries to separate Froggy, as Buster calls her, from her seedy provider. His first attempt fails after Chappie balks at the implications of taking Froggy's place in whatever pedophilic schemes Buster uses her. He finally succeeds in separating her from Buster, and they live together with I-man for the summer, before Chappie reluctantly ships Rose back to her addict mother. He later learns that she died shortly after returning to her mother's care from a bout of pneumonia most likely induced by neglect.

Chappie guesses that Rose is no more than eight, though he never learns her actual age. When he first meets her, she is being doped by Buster and is glassy-eyed and largely unresponsive. When she and Chappie begin living in the school bus with I-man, and after the effects of Buster Brown's constant drugging wears off her, Rose begins to open up. Her health returns and Chappie notices her smile and laugh, especially when she is helping I-man in the garden.

Ken

Ken is Chappie's stepfather. He is an alcoholic and is physically abusive of both Chappie and his mother, as well as sexually abusive of his stepson.

Chappie's mother

Chappie's mother works as a receptionist at a clinic. She met Chappie's father when she helped him get a job as an x-ray tech at the hospital where she worked. When Chappie was five, his mother, who could no longer tolerate her husband's infidelities, divorced. She remarried Ken, who moved in with her and Chappie and proved to be an abusive alcoholic.

Chappie's Grandmother

Chappie's grandmother is suspicious of as suspicious of Ken as she was of Chappie's biological father, Paul Dorset. She urges Chappie's mother to join a support group for people whose spouses are alcoholics, but she seems to be unaware of the physical and sexual abuse that occurs in the house.



Nancy Riley

Rose Riley's mother is an unemployed single mom who is addicted to crack cocaine.

Buster Brown

Buster Brown identifies himself as an actor, but he is primarily a con artist and Chappie suspects that he is using the young Rose Riley to make child pornography.

Bruce Walther

Bruce Walther is the leader of the Adirondack Iron biker gang. Bruce is an Iraq war vet who is a consummate bodybuilder and a closet homosexual. He is protective of both Russ and Chappie.

Joker

The most violent, unpredictable of the Adirondack Iron bikers, Joker tells Bruce Walther that he will have to kill both Russ and Chappie when it is discovered that Russ has been stealing electronics out of the apartment.

Wanda Lagrange

Wanda and her husband own the Video Den, which employs Russ, and the apartments above it in the same building where Russ lives along with the bikers in the Adirondack Iron gang.

Black Bart

Black Bart is a corrupt mall cop, who busts Chappie for shoplifting a gift for his mother, despite the fact that he is one of Chappie's most frequent marijuana customers. He later hatches a conspiracy with the Adirondack Iron bikers to steal electronics from the mall where he works.

James and Richard

James and Richard are brothers, drug addicts, and college dropouts, who occupy the school bus turned hovel outside of Plattsburgh.



Paul Dorset/Doc

Chappie's real father is a doctor with dubious credentials who works for the government of Jamaica. He is also involved in running drugs and weapons and is himself a drug addict.

Evening Star

The owner and caretaker of the estate called the Starport, in Montpelier, Jamaica, Evening Star is the lover of Paul Dorset, Chappie's father. She is a heavy-set but healthy woman who loves to entertain.

Jason

Jason is one of the young black men that hang around the Starport, mooching food and drugs off of the estate. He is one of the young men that I-man refers scathingly to as Rent-a-Rastas.



Objects/Places

Au Sable

This is Chappie's hometown, which is a small, dead-end community in upstate New York.

Plattsburgh

Plattsburgh is a larger community, just up the road from Au Sable. It contains the shopping mall used frequently by Au Sable residents, and is situated on the New York and Vermont border.

Montego Bay

Montego Bay is the second largest city in Jamaica, after the capital Kingston, and is located on the northwest coast of the island. It is here where Chappie and I-man enter the country, and I-man's base of operations, the ant farm, is in the country nearby.

The Starport/the Mothership

Evening Star's estate is an aging plantation manor with multiple stories and ample grounds complete with swimming pool.

Accompang

Accompang is a village established by runaway slaves from the former Ashanti tribe of Ghana. The village is composed of a short dirty road surrounded by bamboo huts in a small jungle clearing.

Jah-stick

I-man's walking stick is topped by a lion's head, which represents Jah, an alternate pronunciation of Yahweh, the Abrahamic god. I-man has embedded small sewing needles in the lion's mane which allow him to magically inflict pain on anyone who tries to touch the stick.

The Ant Farm

The ant farm is a large hovel, grown over many years to include an elaborate series of interconnected rooms which wind around and into the hilltop behind it.



I-man's School Bus

The bus originally squatted in by the brother James and Richard was wrecked in a deadly accident when the brothers were in grade school. The seats have all been removed and the floor is lined with old mattresses. After I-man moves in, the bus begins to also serve as a greenhouse.

Keene

Keene is south from Au Sable, down highway 9. It is here where Russ and Chappie spend a regrettable spring squatting in an empty summer home.

The Stuffed Gamecock

One of the items Chappie steals from the summer home that he and Russ wreck, Chappie lugs the stuffed bird around throughout his adventures, along with a small collection of classical CDs.



Themes

Pedophilia and Child Abuse

The abuse of children by their caretakers is one of the central forces at play in the novel. For Chappie, life with his sexual abusive stepfather Ken has driven him to engage in all manner of self-destructive behavior, including drugs and petty crime. His inability to tell the other adults in his life about Ken's transgressions locks him in a cycle of guilt and shame, and at the same time colors his view of the world, which, because of the abuse, seems at all times unjust to him. In his final confrontation with his mother, Chappie is unable to tell her what Ken has done, yet he gained enough independence and strength that he will not submit again to the abuser's authority. He demands that his mother choose, trying to eliminate Ken from his life without telling the shaming secret, and when she refuses, he leaves for good.

The nature of the abuse Froggy receives from Buster Brown is never spelled out explicitly. What is clear is that he used her mother's addiction to crack cocaine as leverage to acquire the girl, and he kept her drugged and psychologically trained her to submit to his authority. Froggy never had the opportunity to acquire the independence that Chappie used to defy his abuser. She required a rescuer, and when Chappie came to her aid, it was everything he could do to drag her away from Buster.

The starkest reference to pedophilia and child abuse is in the vision that Chappie has while looking into the changing department store window. The hairless, naked, mannequins, childlike in their innocence, lie in pieces on the floor of the display window, exposed and awaiting manipulation. They are pawns whose fate has been removed from their control by more powerful forces.

Violence

From his home in Au Sable to the paradise of Jamaica, violence is Chappie's constant companion. Violence forces him into delinquency and into fleeing the home of his abusive stepfather. He is immediately thrown into another dangerous environment when he lives with the aggressive and violent Adirondack Iron bikers. He accepts the shelter and protection of Bruce Walther, but he is in constant fear of the other men, especially the reprehensible Joker. He first uses a weapon when he finds his stepfather's rifle and shoots up his parent's bedroom, but it is not until he acquires his own gun from the summer house that he and Russ squat in, that he must face the stark decision about whether or not to participate in the violent, whether or not to fire back.

His final confrontation with his mother, Ken, and grandmother in Au Sable brings the matter to a head. After he is crushed by his mother's decision to reconcile with Ken, despite his objections, Chappie walks out of town in the rain and is consumed by



thoughts of violence. He eventually abandons the gun and decides that, though violence may still occur around him, he will do his best not to participate in it.

Violence continues to follow him, or, perhaps it is simply that violence is present everywhere, at any place he would choose to go. When he escapes with I-man to Jamaica, he finds himself surrounded by even more violence. Even I-man, who up until this point, has carried no weapon and displayed nothing by benevolence and compassion, chooses to arm himself in his home country. He dies a violent death, a fate which Chappie narrowly avoids. Yet, when Chappie has the opportunity to confront his friend's killer, he chooses to set his weapon at Jason's feet, and not participate in the cycle of violence. His curse upon Jason, that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword, is more of a warning from someone who has experienced more than his share.

Moderation and Ital Diet

Diet and physical activity is often over looked as a positive remedy for psychological trauma. As a society, we have become use to relegating mental damage to the ministrations of the therapist, the psychoanalyst, or the pharmacist. Yet, there is evidence, both ample and time-honored, that physical activity and diet, that is, what a person puts in his body and what he asks his body to do, can have just as much affect on mental healing as on physical health.

When Chappie is living with the bikers, he often eats at the food court in the mall. The pizzas, hotdogs, hamburgers, and sugary drinks that he consumes add to and symbolize his misery. At the same time, he is abusing marijuana, using it as an anesthetic against the misery he is feeling.

Much of this changes when Chappie meets I-man, among whose many instructional gifts to his young friend is exposure to Ital, the Rastafarian diet. I-man's diet is composed principle of raw or minimally cooked fruits and vegetables. He does not consume meat, which he calls "deaders," and he will eat nothing for the sea "that does not know how to swim," meaning oysters, and shellfish. Chappie's work in I-man's garden in the fields outside Plattsburgh and his consumption of the vegetables that the garden produces works a miraculous change on the boy's health. It is one of the reasons he is able to gather the strength needed to confront Ken and his mother, and though that attempt fails Chappie takes the dietary changes to heart. He does not foreswear meats entirely, but he follows Ital much of the time. He serves as cook on the ship on which he escapes Jamaica because of the knowledge he has acquired of Ital and the passengers wealthy passenger's status as vegetarians.

Almost as vital is I-man's instructions regarding the moderation of marijuana use. He teaches Chappie that marijuana's great virtue is not in its ability to numb the mind, which it can do at high doses, but in its ability to open the mind, which often only requires one hit. Eventually, Chappie takes this teaching to heart, and most days takes only two hits of the drug, once at sunrise, and once at sunset. Moreover, this lesson of

moderation keeps Chappie from progressing to harder drugs and becoming addicted, which is one of the common perils of the pot smoker.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in the past tense and in the first person. Chappie is the narrator and the story takes the form of a confessional, where an older, wiser Chappie relates the improbable adventures of his youth. He jumps outside the narrative only a few times. At the beginning, he gives the reader the caveat that they will not believe his story, because it is the kind of tale that is far from the norm. In one other instance, toward the end of the story, just before his final confrontation with his real father and with Jason, I-man's murderer, Chappie tells the reader that, if allowed to choose again, he would still choose to go back to the Starport, even knowing what he now does about the events to come.

There is only one instance of Chappie being an unreliable narrator. During the first half of the story, he withholds from the reader the fact that Ken has in the past abused him sexually. This omission makes much of Chappie's delinquent behavior in the beginning of the story seem reckless and immoral. When the secret is revealed, his motivations are laid bare. At all other times and in all other ways, Chappie is honest with the reader, even when that honesty brings to light his own failings or immoral acts.

Setting

The story is divided between a series of small towns in upstate New York and the Caribbean island of Jamaica. The towns are not described in any detail by the narrator, but several individual locations are described.

The abandoned school bus that Chappie lives in with I-man and Rose Riley is a typical yellow school bus which was damaged in an accident. The brothers James and Richard had the bus hauled out to an empty field next to the dump just outside of Plattsburgh. The bus was dropped off unceremoniously on a small embankment, and thus lists slightly to one side. The brothers pulled all of the seats out and lined the interior of the bus with old mattresses. I-man, while still using the bus as a shelter, turned the interior into a greenhouse for his seedlings.

The large hovel that I-man and his fellow drug dealing Rastas use as a residence and point of pot distribution for Montego Bay is a makeshift building built into the side of a porous hilltop. The structure has been built up over time, and contains a labyrinth of passages and rooms. Myriad pillows of various sizes serve as the only furniture.

The Starport is the name given to her Jamaican estate by Evening Star, Chappie's father's lover. The building is a large multi-story manor house from the plantation era. The exterior is far from immaculate, with paint chipping off its tall columns and some crumbling stonework. Evening Star keeps the interior clean, but the house still suffers from its status as a come and go location for people and animals.



Language and Meaning

The story is narrated by an uneducated thirteen-year-old. The author stays strictly within this framework, allowing the sentence structure to stomp about while keeping the vocabulary to middle school levels. Sentences are strung together one after the other, run onto each other with multiple conjunctions. The story is told in the past tense, and its style indicates that the older Chappie, who is telling us about his adventures, though wiser, is no better educated than his younger self.

Some words from the Rastas dialects of Jamaica make frequent appearances in the text. These include 'Ital,' the dietary regiment of Rastafarians, 'I-and-I' a term Rastas put in place of most pronouns, especially "I", and which is used to symbolize the union between man and the divine, and "ganja," a term based on the Sanskrit word for cannabis. I-man's talk is peppered with Rasta words, but he is a quiet man, and speaks infrequently. Chappie adopts more and more of the Rasta speak, and delivers the longest selection of the language in the book when he curses Jason, "In a low dark voice I heard myself say, Me nyan come fe slay a mon when Jah con do de job more properly. Lissen mi, Jason. Mi come fe place a curse 'pon you, mon. Lissen mi, dis be de curse of Nonny, dat him who live by de sword shall die by de sword."

Structure

The story is presented in only one book which is divided into numbered chapters, each of which bears a name. The names are sometimes straightforward in their description of the coming action, School Days, Shipping Out, The Bone Goes Home, and sometimes more abstract like Sunsplashed, The Soul Assassins, Mister Yesterday.

The chapters are divided on point of change in the storyline, and often herald changes in scene. The overall structure exhibits the kind of peak and plunge story structure common to fiction literature. Hopes arise, then are dashed, resulting in sorrows and lows for the character or characters to endure before a new way forward is found and another peak begins. The greatest valley occurs near the end, the death of I-man and the news of the death of Sister Rose, but the story ends on the way up, with Chappie leaving Jamaica for a new life and being comforted and strengthened by the memory of his lost friends.



Quotes

"Then I came out of it like I'd been in a hypnotic trance. I stopped crying and put the rifle on the bed and got down on my hands and knees and tried to get Willie to come out of the closet but he was too scared. I was talking to him like he was my mom saying, I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry, real fast and high-pitched like when I was a little kid and similar stuff happened" (Ch 1, pg. 14-15.)

"Listen, Mom, just give me the money. I need the money.

What are you saying?

Give me the money.

What?

The money.

She looked at me in this strange fearful way, like she didn't recognize me but almost did and I got this sudden new feeling of power and didn't even feel guilty for it"

(Ch. 2, pg. 23.)

"Basically people don't know how kids think, I guess they forget. But when you're a kid it's like you're wearing these binoculars strapped to your eyes and you can't see anything except what's in the dead center of the lenses because you're too scared of everything else or else you don't understand it and people expect you to, so you feel stupid all the time"

(Ch. 3, pg. 29-30)

"The new rule was basically you don't bother your parents and don't bother the cops or one of them will sic the other on you" (Ch. 4, pg. 49.)

"The whole thing was scary. It made you feel like once you stepped across the line you could never get back and were doomed from then on to a life of crime. Since everybody stepped across the line and did a wrong thing at least once in his life then everybody was doomed. Everybody was a criminal. Even my mom. You had to be a cat like Willie or a little kid like I once was not to be a criminal and for a human being like I was now that was impossible" (Ch. 5, p. 69.)

"The more power you've got the more you're able to do the right thing which is whatever you can get away with and at that point in my life I had no power whatsoever, I couldn't get away with anything so I had to do the wrong thing and tell the truth. I was the ultimate little dog and it was all I could do to keep from pissing down my own leg" (Ch. 5, pg. 73.)

"Russ goes the whole route with me, my partner in crime and then all of a sudden he decides that he can't pay the price anymore which is basically that regular people, the Ridgeways and the Aunt Dorises and Uncle Georges of the world don't respect you anymore. Tough. Big fucking deal. They never did respect us in the first place unless we were willing to want the same things they wanted. They never respected us for ourselves, for being humans the same as them only kids who people are constantly



fucking over because we don't have enough money to stop them. Well, fuck them. Fuck him. Fuck everyone" (Ch. 7, pg. 129.)

"Loyalty is weird, it kicks in when you don't expect it and the people who deserve it the least seem to get it the most especially when it's coming from little kids" (Ch. 8, pg. 147.)

"For I-man religion was mainly a way to give thanks and praise for being alive because nobody exactly deserved life. It wasn't like you could go out and earn it somehow" (Ch. 9, pg. 155.)

"No, actually it was more like I was this human mirror walking down the road and all people could see when they looked in my direction was some reflection of themselves looking back because the main effect was nobody saw me myself, the kid, Chappie, Bone even, no one saw me except as a way to satisfy their desires or meet their needs, the nature of which sometimes they didn't even know about until I showed up on the scene, like my stepdad's needs for instance" (Ch. 12, pg. 215.)

"It's a tat. A tattoo.

Lemme see it, he said and he drew my arm toward him and turned it over like a mainliner looking for a vein to shoot. That's because of the name? Bone?

Vicey-versie.

Then he dropped my arm and looked at me from way up there and he laughed. Ah, you little devil. Yeah. Yeah, you're my son all right! he said and he hugged me again" (Ch. 16, pg. 284.)

"I hadn't figured out yet why I'd done it and I couldn't ask I-man the way I usually did when I couldn't figure something out so I was slipping into blaming white people generally and saying to myself I must've done it because of my background in lying and betrayal that I'd learned as a child from my stepfather and other adults who all happened to be white" (Ch. 18, pg. 309.)

"My main man I-man had flown back to lie beside his ascendants in Africa where I could never go. And all the doors of Accompong were close to me forever and the ant farm was a busted-apart house of death that I never wanted to see again. Sister Rose was gone to wherever little kids go when they die, and I was too old to go there now and start life over with her—I almost wasn't a kid anymore and knew too much and was too strong and wily now to die without a struggle" (Ch. 20, pg. 355.)

"When I told Doc the night of my birthday that I-man'd screwed Evening Star I'd separated myself from I-Man and joined up with Doc. It only lasted a minute and I did it because Doc was my father but still I'd betrayed my best friend and teacher and he'd died for it maybe. Now though, by committing the same crime against Doc as I-Man'd done, which was to steal something that Doc thought was his but actually wasn't since it was a person, I'd be separating myself from Doc and joining up with I-Man again" (Ch. 21, pg. 366.)



"They were the only three people I'd chosen on my own to love, and they were gone. But still, that morning in Mobay when I saw Russ for the last time, I saw clearly for the first time that loving Sister Rose and I-Man and even Bruce had left me with riches that I could draw on for the rest of my life, and I was totally grateful to them" (Ch. 22, pg. 384.)



Topics for Discussion

How does Chappie's inability to tell his mother and others about his abuse by Ken drive his misbehavior? Are any of the actions he takes justified by his situation?

A several key points in the story, Chappie is forced to choose whether or not to employ violence to solve his problems. Identify these key moments and discuss Chappie's decisions.

Draw and label a diagram illustrating the various peaks and valleys of the plot line of Rule of Bone.

How has Chappie's early life affected his view of authority figures? Is he justified in his beliefs?

Discuss the beliefs and practices of the Rastafarian religion taught to Chappie by I-Man. How do these practices benefit Chappie?

Discuss Chappie's relationship with six individuals from the story. Select three that you believe were a negative influence on Chappie, and three that you believe where a positive influence.

Give examples of acts of random violence committed by Chappie and others in the story.

Described the narrative style employed by the author. What are its positives and negatives?

Supply a brief retelling of the first part of the story from the point of view of Chappie's mother.