

Sanibel Flats Study Guide

Sanibel Flats by Randy Wayne White

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Plot Summary

SANIBEL FLATS is the story of the adventures of a man named Marion Ford, a biologist who lives in Sanibel, Florida after a long stint in Masagua, Central America. After his friend Rafe Hollins contacts him and tells him his son is missing and he is in desperate trouble, Ford leaves his quiet life in Sanibel to pursue Jake Hollins and rescue him from a Central American guerrilla leader. Called "Doc" by many of his friends, Ford's main focus is the study of various marine biology animals. However, after Rafe's call, he begins to do some amateur investigating, which intensifies after he finds Rafe's body hanging from the trees, an apparent suicide. When it becomes clear that the town of Sandy Flats is illegally declaring the suicide too quickly, Ford begins his investigation with the sheriff there.

Ford fortunately has connections in the Sandy Flats/Sanibel area since he grew up in Sanibel. It is through these connections that he learns more about Rafe, his history and what might have happened to his son, Jake, who is only 8 years old. Hollins had kidnapped Jake from his ex-wife in an attempt to save him from her drug and alcohol abuse-infused environment. When Rafe runs to Central America on the way to live in Costa Rica, his former business partners steal Jake as a piece of collateral because Rafe has stolen precious pre-Mayan artifacts from them. Hollins tells Ford this information on a phone call just before he commits suicide.

Steadily, Ford pieces the information together and thanks to a connection in Masagua, returns to Central America with a friend named Tomlinson to try to determine where Jake Hollins is. He talks to another revolutionary leader and guerrilla fighter that he is friendly with — Juan Rivera — and learns that Juan Zatul has Jake. Posing as artifact dealers interested in obtaining more illegal artifacts for sale, Ford and Tomlinson are brought to Zatul's camp. They find Jake in a holding tent for prisoners and eventually free him. Zatul dies from poison, and Jake, Tomlinson and Ford make it safely back to Sanibel. Shortly after his return, he finds Rafe alive and well with his sometime-girlfriend Jessica McClure. Jake is sent to his uncle Harry Hollins and Rafe is relieved that Ford has saved his son for him. Ford, meanwhile, returns to his sleepy life in Sanibel.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

Dr. Marion Ford is crawling in a hidden tunnel from the convent connected to the Presidential Palace to a park outside. He is wearing no pants but has managed to grab his shoes in his rush. Pushing aside a stone disk, he is greeted by an old man who is praying to ancient Mayan gods outside the convent. Seeing Ford, he speaks to him in the ancient Tlaxcen Mayan language, but Ford immediately corrects him that he is a mere American tourist and can he buy the old man's pants? The old man is suspicious, thinking Ford has been in the convent defiling nuns but agrees to give him the pants anyway. Ford promises to return the next day to give him money. While the police are searching for him, he rolls up the pants and pretends to be a jogger, intent on his run, and literally races by all the policemen looking for him.

The next day, Ford returns to the park to give the old man his money and then goes to the American Embassy. There, he finds a parcel with his pants, some money and a note from Pilar Santana Fuentes Balserio, the young wife of the President Don Jorge Balserio, saying that she will not be joining him as planned.

Ford rides in the cargo portion of a DC-3 into Miami and promises himself that he will forget all about Pilar and Masagua; he wants to find a place where he can work and have a quiet life. He buys a cheap truck while in Washington D.C. and heads to Sanibel, Florida where he purchases a home on stilts and settles down. He is a regular at Dinkin's Bay Marina and makes plenty of friends, ingratiating himself into the community. This easy integration into society is a shock to Ford since he has been living a life of professional deceit and constant suspicion until that point. Shortly thereafter, Rafe Hollins calls him. It will be a phone call that will change his life and set the tone for the rest of the novel.

Prologue Analysis

Immediately, the action in this thriller novel begins. The reader is instantly put into the scene where Ford is racing from the police after a shady dalliance with the young wife of the President. He is running from a convent and away from the police in a race for his life, but thanks to his cunning, he easily escapes. This wit and creative way that Ford escapes from a bad situation is a foreshadowing of the future events of the book, specifically Ford's escape from Zacul's camp. In addition, his quick thinking and trustworthy personality are also shown and will play an important part throughout the novel. The reader now knows that Ford is more than a mere biologist.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

The story resumes in Sanibel Florida in May. Ford has spotted vultures flying overhead and wonders what Hollins has gotten himself into. He continues cruising his small skiff towards the island and continues to worry about what Hollins has done, having a sense of foreboding.

Rafe Hollins had called Ford three times the day before, finally reaching him while at the Marina. He explains that he has been living at Sandy Key but mostly traveling because it keeps him from killing his ex-wife. Ford notes that there is an edge of desperation in Hollins' voice, which was not there when Ford knew him in high school. Ford hadn't really seen Hollins that much since high school, although they had been best friends. They had run into each other in Central America once and again in Costa Rica during a chance meeting, but Hollins had acted aloof and only asked for references of people he could work with to make some money.

Hollins tells Ford about his ex-wife and her spending habits. As he is talking, Ford realizes that Hollins is calling him from a pay phone since he can hear cars racing behind him over the phone. Cutting the small talk, Ford asks why Hollins needs him. Hollins explains that he needs someone he can trust and someone that knows how to speak Spanish well. Ford goes on the defensive and says he doesn't want to be involved in illegal drug smuggling, which Hollins assures him is not the case.

Hollins tells Ford about his ex-wife and the divorce proceedings that landed him in so much trouble. The judge was heavily biased in the case as he was having a relationship with the ex-wife and gave her full custody of Jake Hollins, including a large alimony payment and all the assets. Hollins has trouble paying the alimony payments and loses the brief chances he has to see his son, Jake. In desperation, Hollins kidnaps his son with the dream of taking him to Costa Rica to live out the rest of their lives. Instead, the Masaguan Indios kidnap Jake because Hollins has been doing business with them and their illegal activities have soured. He cannot go to the authorities because they are already looking for him for kidnapping Jake from his ex-wife. He needs Ford because he is aware that Ford has the necessary connections in Central America and can speak Spanish well; also, he needs someone he can trust. He asks Ford to meet him at their old hiding spot because he needs to meet with some people in Sandy Key to get some money before he can go to Central America to save Jake.

Ford concentrates on maneuvering the skiff through the troublesome passage onto Tequesta Bank. He remembers coming there with Hollins when they were in high school together. As he walks onto the main area of the island, Ford sees Rafe hanging from the tree. The vultures that he has spotted are feeding on Rafe. However, the longer he studies the scene, he realizes that the body is a murder and not a suicide, despite a fake suicide note pinned to a tree. He reaches into the small tunnel that Hollins and



Ford would use to hide things and finds emeralds and some ancient artifacts inside. Before he leaves, he makes sure to adjust the body to show that it was a murder and not a suicide and leaves the island.

Chapter One Analysis

The impetus behind Ford's future adventure has been set in place with Hollins's phone call. Ford immediately knows where to go when Hollins needs him, which shows the strength of their bond during high school. However, since Ford finds it nearly impossible to recognize Hollins' body or face, it's also evident that Ford and Hollins have not been in close contact over the years. Regardless, it is a telling piece of Ford's personality that he goes to help his old friend without question, even though illegal activities and danger will undoubtedly be involved as well.

When Ford is at Hollins's body, he forces himself to review the crime scene from an analytical perspective. Although this is supposed to be one of his best friends, he still takes the time to look for clues that the man was murdered. He notices slight nuances and errors that lead him to conclude that Hollins was murdered rather than suicidal. These activities allow the reader to again understand that Ford is an intelligent, analytical and precise man whose talents extend far beyond that of an average "biology" doctor.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Ford jots down the registration number of the boat tied in a small cove on Tequesta Bank and checks for another hidden boat somewhere; he finds nothing. He travels to his neighbor Jessica McClure's home, his woman friend with whom he often chats. Unfortunately, she's on the way out the door with her ex-boyfriend Benny, Benjamin Rouchard, who has flown in for the weekend. Ford leaves her home and heads straight for Dinkin's Marina. He sees Jethro Nicholes there. Jeth tells him about a party of doctors who are in town for a convention and are looking for a good party; he wants Ford to come. He asks why Ford looks so odd and Ford tells him he's been drinking.

As he leaves the marina to return to his house, Jeth talks about Ford with MacCauley, the marina manager. They discuss how Ford is a man with a personality you can instantly trust and how his only concerns in the world are the bull sharks he studies.

Chapter Two Analysis

Jessica's relationship with Benny will prove to be an important part of the novel, but not in an emotional perspective for Ford. Instead, he will play an essential role in Ford's quest to solve the mystery of what happened to Jake Hollins. In addition, this introduction of Jessica as a neighbor will change and intensify as the novel progresses. Finally, it is a very interesting statement that Jeth and MacCauley see Ford as such a one-dimensional character and a rather boring person at that. Their perspective of Ford will change over time, but the reader can now establish that Ford is a difficult person to read and keeps to himself, which allows him to get away with the shady activities that he has successfully executed in the past.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Ford picked up Hollins' address book at the campsite and makes himself dinner as he flips through the names and contact information. He recognizes a few names but sees some of the people that Hollins had connections with are in Sandy Key.

While he is working, the sounds of the party with the doctors on vacation and local Sanibel residents floats across the water. As he is eating quietly by himself, his friend Tomlinson stops by. Tomlinson is a man who looks like he stepped right out of the Sixties. Tomlinson will often stop by to give Ford some company, reading his book or talking to him while he does his research with aquatic animals and bull sharks. While drinking a beer, Ford discovers that Tomlinson actually graduated with a doctorate degree from Harvard with a degree in Eastern Religions. By the end of the evening, Ford actually believes him.

Before he goes to sleep that evening at one in the morning, he looks across the water at Jessica's house and notices that her porch light is still on, which means that she is still out with her ex-boyfriend. When he gets up again at three, the light is still on.

Chapter Three Analysis

Ford's connection to Tomlinson is critical in the plot of the novel. Tomlinson plays a large role in the recovery of Jake Hollins. Although he doesn't look the type, Tomlinson's higher education is also important. He is a character who is easily stereotyped by those around him, yet offers much more than immediately meets the eye. In this way, Tomlinson's character is the perfect mirrored pair to Ford, as Ford also presents one persona to the Sanibel community that does not hint at how much deeper he is and how much more he actually has to offer.

Although Ford continually reminds the reader that he and Jessica are "just friends," he obviously feels strongly for her to continue watching her house and monitoring her actions while her ex-boyfriend is in town. Also, Jessica's loose commitment to Ford is quite apparent with her behavior with her ex-boyfriend Benny.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

Ford tries to reach a man named Harry Bernstein. He cannot reach him so he goes to the Marina and is reading a newspaper with MacKinley when he sees Hollins' obituary.

MacKinley figures out that Ford was once friends with Hollins and starts to tell him a little background about Sandy Key. In particular, he knows quite a bit about Mario DeArmand. Through MacKinley's knowledge, Ford learns more about the Sealife Corporation that essentially controls all of Sandy Key and their corporate developments. When Ford hints that someone should go to Sandy Key and poke around, MacKinley laughs at Ford, saying that he is not exactly the right person for the job.

Jeth is just coming in from his morning charter as Ford is walking outside. The men aboard his charter all look as though they are out-of-town salesmen, but the leader of the group is publicly humiliating Jeth's stutter. When he demands to be reimbursed because Jeth lost a tarpon, Ford steps in. He quickly helps Jeth and makes the leader look foolish. They eventually get into a fight, but Ford narrowly escapes with a few light punches. When the men threaten a lawsuit, Ford says that he will get the waitress they offended last night to press a suit against them. The men get flustered and leave quickly.

Jeth can't believe Ford knew about the offended waitress and Ford simply states that a man as obnoxious as that guy on vacation, there is undoubtedly a waitress offended on the island somewhere.

The phone rings in the middle of the fight and Ford misses Bernstein's call. His ribs hurt from the fight and he returns to his home. The phone man finally installs his own personal phone line and suggests some exercise to alleviate the pain.

Chapter Four Analysis

The fight scene with Ford and the out-of-town salesmen is a very important scene. Through his interaction with the out-of-towners, Ford simultaneously saves his buddy Jeth in a manner that is clever and honest. In addition, he accurately reads the man and knows how to diffuse the situation in a way that completely takes care of the problem. In this way, the reader and the rest of the community gain more respect for Ford and get a better picture of the man that he is.



Chapter Five and Six

Chapter Five and Six Summary

Ford takes a swim with a manatee in an effort to work off the pain from the fight. As he is fixing sharks for a shipment to a biology class for his business, he finally receives his call from Bernstein. It turns out that Bernstein was Ford's replacement in Central America. Ford asks him to put out feelers to see what information he can gather about Jake Hollins or Rafe in general to help with his search for the boy. In order to get Bernstein to help him, Ford makes up a lie that he saw what Bernstein did in the first two weeks he was in the country and has pictures to prove it. Bernstein quickly agrees to help him.

Next, he contacts his friend Sally Field, with whom he once had a relationship. She works in the Operations Data Board of National Security Affairs and helps him run a background check on three individuals: Mario DeArmand, Jessica McClure and Tomlinson (they cannot pronounce his first name).

He continues to make more phone calls and finds out what has happened to Hollins' body. He quickly realizes that Sandy Key officials are trying to cover up the body too quickly and not following legal procedures. Ford wakes up the next day and is at the marina when he spots Dr. Sheri Braun-Richards, a gynecologist from Iowa. He strikes up a conversation with her and tells her to stop by his house in about an hour; however, he gets a call from Jessica shortly after and she begs him to come to her house.

Ford asks if Jessica knew a man named Rafe Hollins, but she claims ignorance. Finally, she admits to knowing him because he was the pilot that showed her Sanibel when she moved down there from New York. He then tells her the entire story about Rafe and they end up having sex for the first time afterward. She tells him that she's going back to New York to an art gallery in order to help sell some of her paintings with Benny.

He goes home at 1am and puts on a kettle for hot tea and takes a shower. He is interrupted by a woman as he is coming out of the shower unclothed. It is Sheri Braun-Richards. Despite his recent relationship with Jessica, Ford makes time for Dr. Braun-Richards for the rest of the evening.

Chapter Five and Six Analysis

The depth and variety of Ford's connections is now plainly obvious to the reader. No other character would be able to track down Rafe's body nor have the connections to learn more about Jake Hollins than Ford. Through past relationships and an uncanny ability to know a person without actually knowing what they are guilty of, Ford is a mastermind of manipulation and getting more from people than they were intending to share with him.

Ford's trust in Jessica intimates that they are close friends and could possibly be lovers. However, when they do finally take their relationship to the next level, Ford immediately jumps into bed with another woman. Although he did not seek Dr. Braun-Richards, he does not turn her away either, and this fact plainly shows how Ford really feels about Jessica.



Chapter Seven and Eight

Chapter Seven and Eight Summary

Ford sits on a dock reading the newspaper when he sees the article that the Masagua President Don Jorge Balserio has been killed by a bomb placed in his briefcase. He remembers his dislike for Balserio, which brings him back to Pilar. Pilar hated her husband and was forced into marrying him. However, once in power, she was an efficient leader behind the scenes, making radical changes yielding positive moves for her people — while her husband took full credit for it. However, when Balserio finally hears rumors that Pilar was in love with Ford, he sent her to a convent. When she is gone, his government broke out into more and more violence and unrest, destroying all the good that Pilar had done for the country.

Ford calls Major Lester Durell, a cop who is fastidious in his work and who Ford knows from high school. Ford knows Durell is good at his job and is counting on it. Ford asks him to recommend a journalist that he would never want to cover his police work and reluctantly, Durell offers a name of a local reporter.

After that phone call, he tries Donald Piao Cheng, another friend working in the U.S. Customs Department. Ford asks him to bid on a painting at an upcoming art show in Manhattan — Jessica's — and tells Cheng to stay for the entire show to see what else might be sold.

Ford is out to catch sharks and catches a tarpon instead. He has fought the tarpon before, however, and knows their ending, so he lets it go before it is too defeated. He returns to his house and he and Tomlinson continue to check the salinity of the fish tank to determine why his fish are not living very long.

Later that evening, Tomlinson is still at his house and begins to tell him the history of the Masagua people. The story of the Kache and Maya mixed with the Conquistadors has set the stage for what is still happening in the area. Tomlinson knows that the core of the history for these people lies in a book called the Kin Qux Cho. No one has seen or read the book because the Masaguan government has kept it under tight wraps. Ford does not reveal this information to Tomlinson, but he knows exactly where the book is and who has it. He helped Pilar steal it the night before he left Masagua.

Chapter Seven and Eight Analysis

Ford explains to the reader that he is trying to stir up the waters. Although an outsider might get a little information from a particular group, it takes a lot more manipulation and maneuvering to get the full picture from many organizations. By tapping different resources and having multiple groups play off each other, Ford is using his deductive skills expertly in an attempt to learn more about Sandy Key and what has happened with Jake and ultimately Rafe Hollins.



The event with Ford and the tarpon gives the reader another important key point about Ford's character. The fight is more interesting to him than actually landing the prize. In other words, he enjoys seeing how the fish reacts and their instinctive processes rather than having a trophy fish that he can use to brag with friends later. He is not that kind of fisherman or individual.

Tomlinson provides the reader with the full background on the people of Masagua. It is quite convenient that he would be so interested in the region where Ford once lived and have such a strong understanding of what took place there. It's not clear why or how Tomlinson knows this information. The book, however, holds an important piece to the novel. Pilar will later use this book to reunite her people and use it for a greater good. In the meantime, it gives the reader a better understanding of the trust between Ford and Pilar and what their shared motivations were together.



Chapter Nine and Ten

Chapter Nine and Ten Summary

Ford receives a package the next morning from Sally Field, filled with information on the Sealife Development Corporation. In addition, the data on his associates Tomlinson and Jessica McClure are included as well as a biography of Mario DeArmand.

Ford goes to Hollins' funeral, where nine people show up, which is about what Ford expects, considering Hollins' former line of work and past relationships with women. Lester Durell and Harvey Hollins, Rafe's older brother, are two attendees. Ford drives along with Hollins' ashes in the car seat next to him. He is driving to meet the other guys at North Cut beach to throw Hollins' ashes in the water. However, the bones were never pulverized so they have to throw pieces of his bone into the water instead of just sprinkling ashes. The guys start laughing as they make throwing his bones into a competition of sorts.

Afterward, Ford walks off with Lester Durell to discuss Hollins' case and what might have happened to Jake. After talking for a little while, Durell asks Ford outright if he used to be in the CIA; Ford flatly denies it.

Ford leaves and tries to get a feel for Sandy Key. He doesn't manage to get into the Sealife Development office but does show up at a private home. He has come to see Helen, Hollins' ex-wife. She immediately tries to get him into bed and is only thwarted when the judge that presided over Helen and Rafe's divorce case shows up, Judge Robert Alden. Ford finds a way to leave quickly once the judge arrives but it's too late. The judge immediately has him followed. When Ford crosses back over the county line, the car turns around and drives away. The message has been sent to Ford to stay away.

Ford goes home and calls Henry Melinski, the investigative reporter. He tells him almost everything he knows. Moments later, Durell calls Ford, furious. Durell knows Ford has told Melinski important information and Durell resents Melinski being on his trail, despite the fact that he is a clean and good cop.

Harry Bernstein calls Ford. He's exhausted with the chaos in Masagua after the terrorist attack on President Balserio. He tells Ford he believes Zacul has Jake Hollins.

Chapter Nine and Ten Analysis

Ford needs someone smart and clean from scandal working with him and according to the papers from Sally Field, Tomlinson meets those requirements. She even goes so far as to write "Never worked for us or anyone else here" on the paperwork.



As Ford drives to Hollins' funeral, he makes general observations about the state of Florida and the impotence behind nostalgia. He didn't move to Sanibel again because it was where he grew up. It was the location and the benefits therein. However, it is because he used to live in Sanibel and has the connections that he is able to achieve as much as he does — and as quickly as he does about Jake's disappearance.

Ford is now fully immersed in the case of Jake Hollins. After burying Hollins, Ford's concentration on finding Jake speeds forward. He contacts the investigative reporter Melinski in order to spur on more information on Jake Hollins. He knows that by using a pit bull reporter, he'll be able to put pressure on key corrupt individuals like Mario DeArmand and Judge Robert Alden without their ever knowing that Ford is behind it. Also, with Bernstein's tip, he has a solid lead on the whereabouts of Jake.



Chapter Eleven and Twelve

Chapter Eleven and Twelve Summary

Ford takes one of his two boats out to Tomlinson's sailboat. Ford tells Tomlinson about his conversation with Bernstein and that he believes Jake is with General Zacul and his group called the Shining Path. He tells Tomlinson that he is leaving tomorrow to rescue Jake and wants to see if he will help him. Tomlinson agrees.

After getting Tomlinson's acceptance, he drives over to see Jessica. She knows about Dr. Braun-Richards and is upset that Ford was with her on the same night he was with Jessica. He ignores her complaints and warns her to stay away from her ex-boyfriend, Benny. Benjamin Rouchard (Benny) is one of the stockholders and is heavily involved with illegal smuggling of Mayan artifacts.

Tomlinson and Ford fly out the next day, touching down in San Jose, Costa Rica. Once there, Ford presents a bogus passport while Tomlinson shows his real one. They plan to leave for Masagua in the morning. He hears Tomlinson leave his room just before 9PM and goes into his room to look through his backpack. He doesn't find anything of interest. At ten-thirty, he goes to meet Rigaberto Herrera at a bar called the Garden of Eden. Herrera used to be a former CIA operative and is a good friend. He knows Wendy Stafford works there and that she was one of the contacts listed in Hollins' address book. They go back to her apartment and he has to pay her because she now works as a prostitute. Once there, Ford gets the information he needs as she gives him more detail about General Zacul since she used to be one of his many "girlfriends." Before he leaves her, he tells her to call her rich father and go home. Ford returns to their hotel and wakes up Tomlinson. It is just after midnight, but Ford says it's time for them to head to Masagua.

Ford drives until he can smell that Masagua is near. He pulls off on an old logging road and stops the car. He pulls a pistol out of his backpack to determine whether Tomlinson is who he says that he is. Tomlinson is genuinely surprised. When Ford leaves Tomlinson alone with the gun and he doesn't react, Ford knows he is honest. After that, he redoes Tomlinson's passport to give him bogus information. They easily pass the border guards, however, and move into Masagua.

They arrive at the Isle de Verde because Ford says he needs to talk with someone first. He and Tomlinson go to get some breakfast and while there, Ford hands the proprietor a message to hand to a friend of his. Moments later, they are accompanied by soldiers and instructed to ride on horseback.

Chapter Eleven and Twelve Analysis

Ford cares enough about Jessica to warn her against her ex-boyfriend, but Jessica pays him little heed, perhaps because her feelings are hurt. They had no commitments



to each other and when Ford leaves, he is relieved to be able to distance himself from her.

Taking Tomlinson with him to Masagua will prove to be invaluable for Ford. Tomlinson is exactly the right man to accompany Ford on his adventures. When Ford finds Herrera, the former CIA operative, the reader gets a better impression of what Ford used to do in Masagua. Also, he learns more information about Zacul that will be important. Wendy Stafford provides more personal information about Zacul and tells Ford he will have to endure a test from Zacul to see if Tomlinson truly knows about Mayan artifacts or not. Stafford is a former rich American "princess" who came to Masagua with the Peace Corps and an elevated sense of guilt with her prestigious upbringing and somehow lost herself in the country. She wants to go home, but her family has written her off. Ford leaves for Masagua early in the morning since he has a lot to accomplish and not a lot of time left to save Jake.

Obviously, Ford has been to this little village before. He knows the right way to send a message in order to contact General Juan Rivera. He knows the routine of eating at a particular establishment and how to contact the guerrilla leader. In this way, Ford is no mere outsider looking for a kidnapped boy; he is well versed in this society and knows its tricks and processes.

Also, Ford realizes how important it is to be sure that Tomlinson is exactly who he claims to be. It'd be much better to find out this information now than go into a revolutionary camp and be betrayed by Tomlinson then. Ford knows that ensuring Tomlinson's motives are true now is highly important and Ford wisely interrogates Tomlinson ahead of time.



Chapter Thirteen and Fourteen

Chapter Thirteen and Fourteen Summary

General Juan Rivera greets Ford and Tomlinson warmly. He offers them a bath and a woman but pulls Ford aside and asks why he is traveling with a hippie. Ford assures him that Tomlinson is fine and Rivera reluctantly lets him stay. Rivera tells Ford that before he can talk or ask any questions, they must first have a game of baseball.

After the game of baseball, Rivera and Tomlinson bond by talking about baseball long after Ford has left the field and taken a shower, four hours later. Ford tells Rivera their plan to rescue the kidnapped child from Zacul because he wants Rivera's help. After all, Zacul used to be a student of Rivera's and is now his biggest enemy. Rivera denies him.

That evening, Ford cannot sleep due to anxiety. He goes outside to look at frogs and insects and hears Rivera behind him. Rivera talks with him about what Ford was doing the last time he was in Masagua, including his affair with Pilar. Ford never answers his questions directly, but Rivera mentions that she only wants to unite the people of Masagua. When Ford asks if she is now an enemy of Rivera's, the General dismisses the notion saying that he could not be enemies with such an admirable woman.

Early in the morning, Ford takes off with two soldiers on horseback. After twenty minutes, they hear something on the road behind them. It is Tomlinson. Ford asked Rivera to keep Tomlinson in his camp to watch him, but Tomlinson sees Ford leave and races to catch up. Ford says he cannot be responsible for what might happen and Tomlinson dismisses the warning, saying he will be with Ford throughout the entire adventure.

They return to their car and drive 150 miles to central Masagua, near God's Eye lake. Ford leaves Tomlinson in a local restaurant while he goes to the only phone in the village and makes a phone call to Washington D.C. He tells Tomlinson to learn as much about the Mayan artifacts and architecture in order to pass the future test with Zacul. Ford talks to Cheng on the phone. The U.S. Customs employee went to the art show as Ford recommended and found an array of illegal artifacts. One of them is the important book, the Kin Qux Cho. Ford asks Cheng to put it aside for him and not allow it to be cataloged as potential evidence so Ford can use it later. Since Cheng owes Ford a favor, he very reluctantly agrees. Cheng mails the book to Ford's home in Sanibel.

Chapter Thirteen and Fourteen Analysis

Ford plays a game with Rivera, catering to his ego. He volunteers information that he knows someone who works with the Dodgers of Los Angeles. He and Rivera exchange comments about the possibility of Rivera being recruited to play on a major league team, although Rivera claims he could never leave because he could not leave his soldiers behind. This banter shows the close camaraderie between Ford and Rivera.



While Bernstein might have taken over Ford's former post, it is clear that Ford has better rapport with the General.

Rivera's conversation with Ford concerning Pilar has important consequences in future events of the novel. Rivera knows Ford loves Pilar, but Rivera also indicates that Rivera has great esteem for Pilar. He recognizes that she wants to unite the people of Masagua. This event is crucial to the final setting of the novel.

Just as Zacul will give Tomlinson a test in the future about Mayan artifacts, Ford tests Tomlinson now. He wants to be 100% certain that Tomlinson realizes and acknowledges what he is getting into. In order to not feel any guilt if something bad happens to Tomlinson at Zacul's camp, Ford leaves Tomlinson behind and literally forces him to race after him to continue with the adventure.

They are now in General Zacul's area. While Rivera was friendly and could protect them, the same is not true for Zacul. Now the reader sees why Ford sent a Customs agent to Benny's art show. He had a suspicion that Benny was dealing with illegal artifacts and that the important Kin Qux Cho book would be found there. We can now understand Ford's advice to Jessica to stay away from Benny as well. Cheng gets a great Customs bust, but Ford also tracks down the novel that will play an important role in the future of Jake Hollins as well.



Chapter Fifteen and Sixteen

Chapter Fifteen and Sixteen Summary

It is a holiday in Masagua and drunken celebrations are being held in the streets. Tomlinson is studying stone structures and calendar glyphs, fully immersed in his research.

Ford returns to his hotel and recommends that Tomlinson do the same thing. However, Tomlinson says he can't sleep yet and will go have a beer. At 2:35am, someone is banging loudly on his door and Ford springs out of bed. He realizes that Tomlinson is not in the room at the same time that Colonel Suarez barges into his room. Attacking Ford, he takes him away, telling him that now they will figure out why he and his friend want to speak with General Zacul.

Suarez forces Ford and Tomlinson to sit down and takes out their passports. He asks if their passports are real and Ford tells him they are obvious fakes. Suarez beats them and asks who they are and what they are doing there. Despite Suarez's attempt to catch Ford in a lie, Ford maneuvers his way successfully through the interview. He tells them that his call to Washington D.C. was to a potential dealer and that they want to see General Zacul because they want to deal in Mayan artifacts. He says he found Zacul's name after Hollins committed suicide, and he wants to fill the hole Hollins left.

The interview is over at 4:30am and they are loaded in the back of a truck with soldiers. They are unable to talk to each other still. Finally, they get the opportunity and Tomlinson tells Ford he's embarrassed because Suarez made him feel humiliated and that feeling made him want to kill Suarez. It upsets him to feel these aggressive feelings.

They arrive at the camp and are on the sacred ground where the God's Eye lake used to be before an earthquake moved it. Suarez sticks them in the prison camp on Zacul's grounds and leaves them. Here, Ford and Tomlinson see a young eight-year-old boy chained to the ground and Ford recognizes him as Jake Hollins.

Chapter Fifteen and Sixteen Analysis

During the celebrations, the locals do a dance they have done for centuries. In the end, it is the Mayans versus the conquistadors, and Tomlinson remarks how it makes the conquistadors look like the real heroes. The people of this town are still heavily influenced by what happened to their people and culture all those centuries ago. It makes Ford's quest all the more important as Jake's capture and the suffering of the local people will all come together through Pilar and other events.



Tomlinson's ignorance of his town and surroundings are revealed when he gets involved with Colonel Suarez. This mistake will ultimately let them gain access to Zacul's camp, albeit not in the manner that Ford had initially planned.

Tomlinson has gotten Ford in a very tricky situation; however, Ford is very clever and is familiar with men like Suarez. For this reason, he avoids being put in an even more dangerous situation.

Most people would be scared and nervous to be taken in a truck to Zacul's camp, but for Tomlinson, his biggest concerns are the negative feelings he has towards Suarez. In this way, Tomlinson's reaction supports the stereotypical vision of a hippie traveling with a savvy, former CIA agent. Tomlinson's stupidity and naivety have gotten them into a tricky situation. Finally, when they enter the prison camp, they see the young boy Jake and at least have the knowledge that he is still alive.



Chapter Seventeen and Eighteen

Chapter Seventeen and Eighteen Summary

Jake Hollins is a dirty mess and has a bad case of dysentery due to the mess surrounding him. In order to attract Jake's attention without calling attention to himself in case there was a spy in the prison camp, Ford tries to build a fort with twigs. After awhile, Jake finally does pay attention to Ford, which heartens Ford.

One of the prisoners introduces himself as a physician and gives the name and background story of all the other prisoners in the tent. The prisoners really aren't offenders at all but instead are all men who have had the unlucky fortune of running across Zacul in some way and ending up in the camp.

At three in the morning, Tomlinson and Ford are talking. Ford explains how the lake moved and how Ford explained the phenomena to Pilar in order to find the treasures and ancient clues to the past civilization that lived there. It is why now Zacul's men are there on location and why Pilar's camp was attacked and destroyed, driving her away. The next morning, General Julio Zacul enters their tent. His eyes are glassy and he does not look sane. He carries his gun and ammunition more for style than necessity, according to Ford's estimate. However, Zacul is obviously a man not to be disturbed unnecessarily.

Ford explains to Zacul that he is looking for pre-Columbian artifacts. He wants to smuggle these items rather than drugs because it is a lot safer, but you can still make a great deal of money. He knows Hollins used to work with Zacul and after Hollins' suicide, Ford wants to fill that opportunity. Zacul starts to get bored with them as he listens to Ford's story. Then suddenly, Tomlinson's test arrives. Zacul presents artifacts to Tomlinson and asks how much money he would pay for such items. Tomlinson passes the test without a problem. When Zacul learns that Ford has the Kin Qux Cho, he demands that Ford send it to him before they leave the camp. Zacul then tells his men to tell the cook they will be having a special dinner tonight.

Ford begins to look for frogs. Specifically, he is looking for poisonous ones to help get him out of the situation with Zacul. While he and Tomlinson look for the frogs, they wade to a pool. Looking up, they notice men walking on the ledge high above them. One by one, they watch as all the men in the prison tent are executed except for the physician, who jumps to his death, and Jake. Seeing this carnage, Ford abandons the idea of looking for frogs and starts fishing instead.

Chapter Seventeen and Eighteen Analysis

The introduction of all the prisoners allows Ford and Tomlinson to truly understand what kind of trouble and danger they are in. This man will kill them without another thought. However, they have Jake in their sights and know the boy is at least nominally healthy



and safe. The additional background of the God's Eye lake and explanation of why Zacul would be in this location helps the reader understand what motivates Zacul — Mayan artifacts. These treasures are important to Zacul and the main way that their camp makes money while continuing their terrorist attacks.

Zacul's ruthlessness is again demonstrated with his merciless execution of the members of the prison camp. Fortunately, Jake is not among those executed, but it tells Ford they do not have much time. Tomlinson's test was literally a life-or-death situation for both Ford and Tomlinson and now it is apparent why Ford had to be truly certain that Tomlinson is who he claimed to be. Ford's knowledge of nature and poisonous animals will come in handy, saving their lives. While Tomlinson might have helped them to avoid death moments ago, Ford will now use his knowledge of nature to help them escape.



Chapter Nineteen and Twenty

Chapter Nineteen and Twenty Summary

Ford catches ten fish and starts to fillet them right away. He needs to create enough poison to be effective. Ford tells Tomlinson to pick up shells in case Zacul wants to know why they are down by the lake.

Ford goes to visit Oscar, Zacul's chef. He tells him that he wants to see how a real chef can cook in these conditions. By appealing to his ego, Oscar unknowingly allows Ford access to the food that he is about to serve to Zacul and his main officers. Ford finds the ocean bouillabaisse and dumps the poisonous fish in the pot, which is ideal because it will go undetected.

While Tomlinson is back in camp, he sees Suarez take off with Jake. It upsets him, but he is powerless to save the boy. Later that evening, Zacul runs into their camp and says that he and his officers are sick. Since he has heard Tomlinson refer to him as "Doc," he wants Ford to come and save them. Promising Tomlinson that he will not kill any of the guerrillas, Ford agrees to help. When he enters the room, he can clearly see that many of the men are already dead. Ford convinces Zacul to take everyone to Tambor and suggests that Jake go along as well. Zacul suddenly realizes that Jake is their true intention for being in his camp and nearly shoots the boy. Ford tells him that he will save Zacul only if he promises not to hurt Jake. Tomlinson nearly gives their position away by suggesting that Zacul has already been given the antidote, but Ford elbows him in the gut to prevent him from talking.

The soldiers outside are running around frantically. Ford and Zacul cannot understand what is going on, but he can hear guns firing like fireworks in the distance. Zacul is continuing to sicken and losing his edge on reality simultaneously. Whatever is approaching them on the road from Tambor, it is cutting off Zacul's escape route and making his soldiers leave him and the camp as fast as they can. The mortar rounds get closer and closer while Zacul continues to lose his mind.

He suggests they take a boat to escape as the road to Tambor is trapped. He takes them to an eighteen-foot boat with a forty horsepower engine on the back. It's not fast, but it will help them get out of the bombing and chaos. They climb onto the dock and a round of mortar hits the dock right after. Ford stares transfixed as emeralds sparkle and cover the entire area. The emeralds are the final straw for Zacul. He has found the pre-Mayan calendar finally after all of his years of searching. He demands that Ford help him pick up the emeralds. To comply, Ford scoops up some emeralds and put them in his pocket.

While Zacul is distracted by the emeralds, Ford tackles him and tries to prevent his gun from firing. They get into a fight with Ford eventually taking possession of the gun. Although he thinks Rafe Hollins would have wanted him to shoot Zacul, Ford doesn't.



Instead, he offers the pistol back to Zacul and as the General races for him, he gently steps aside and pushes him into the waters of God's Eye. Ford knows that the waters are filled with aggressive bull sharks that will eat him alive. Ford continues to race towards the boat, but he never makes. Instead, a bomb hits the ground behind him and he flies through the air, blacking out.

Chapter Nineteen and Twenty Analysis

Finally, the pieces of Ford's plan are coming together, although it is a messy and chaotic solution. For someone as planned and organized as Ford, this situation is one where he is continually thinking on his feet, rather than enjoying a planned process. His experience in the country and in similar situations has prepared him for this moment, however. Convincing Zacul to take Jake to Tambor in order to save him and the boy at the same time is a brilliant strategy that helps Ford accomplish two tasks at the same time — remove Jake from the camp and get Zacul in his power.

Zacul is finally destroyed, but keeping his promise to Tomlinson, Ford does not play a direct role in his death. His actions lead to Zacul's death, but ultimately, Zacul kills himself through his own actions. The emeralds that Ford is forced to put into his pocket provide a huge benefit to Tomlinson and Ford later in the conclusion of the story. Again, Ford's clever and fast thinking are what save him from certain death during the chaos.



Chapter Twenty-One and Twenty-Two

Chapter Twenty-One and Twenty-Two Summary

Ford is awake but he cannot seem to open his eyes and wonders if he is dead. Something is moving beside him and it is a woman. She is dressed in white and it is Pilar. She is kissing him and begging him to wake up. She tells him that she is frightened and admits to being the one that killed her husband with the bomb in his briefcase. In addition, she tells him that she set up the guards to break into their room while they were making love because she was scared that once she really loved him, she wouldn't have the strength to make him leave. She cannot accomplish what she needs to unless he left her. Her life is not her own and she hopes he will understand that. She tells him that she loves him and then he slips away again.

When Ford awakes again, he can hear voices singing. He is tied to tubes and surrounded by walls of wood and stone. He is in a convent again, but it is not the convent next to the Presidential Palace. He can hear someone coming, so he lies down again and pretends to sleep. When the man gets closer, he snaps his eyes open and yells "Rivera!" It scares the General, but he quickly recovers. Rivera gets him some clothes and then tells him what has happened during the four days he was in a coma. Tomlinson pulled him out of the water after the bomb exploded. Rivera's soldiers had been the ones attacking Zacul's camp and wanted to execute Ford, but one of them recognized him from the baseball game. He tells him that Tomlinson and Jake are now both in the United States since Jake was sick and desperately needed medical attention. When Ford asks about Pilar, Rivera tells him she is dead and gone.

Ford stays in the convent for four more days, and although Ford tells Rivera that Pilar visited Ford, Rivera denies it. He tells him to not talk about Ixku in such a manner, saying he would not have given up his rightful place as president for anyone other than Ixku. Finally, Ford recovers, finds his Land Rover exactly where he left it and flies back to the States and is happily restored to his home in Sanibel.

Someone has broken into Ford's house while he was out of town. He sees two notes. One is from Tomlinson with a theory about why the water in his fish tank was not correct and the second is from Jeth, telling him that he is taking Jake to Harvey Hollins in West Virginia. He gets a note from Cheng telling him that the Kin Quo Cho is in the mailbox, waiting for him. When Ford calls Durell, he learns that an investigation has been made and the ex-wife (and mother to Jake) and Judge Robert Alden — along with many other members of the Sealife Development Corporation — are in trouble for their illegal and suspicious activities in Sandy Key.

He sees Jessica is at home and contemplates taking his skiff to her house to see her. He decides it would be too loud and bikes to her house instead. Pulling into the driveway, he sees that her car's engine is too cool to have been used recently, but her boat engine is warm. She is with a man on her couch. After fifteen minutes, he hears



them finish and Ford grabs a whelk shell. When the man leaves her home in a hurry and heads towards the boat, Ford hits him in the face with the shell. The man drops.

Ford looks down and sees Rafe Hollins. Immediately angered, he grabs him and asks what he has been doing while Ford has been saving his son's life. He realizes that Hollins had put him up to the whole thing. Hollins admits to breaking into Ford's house, but Ford says he already knew it was him.

Chapter Twenty-One and Twenty-Two Analysis

The dream of Pilar does actually happen and finally gives Ford some answers to his questions. This visitation by her closes the relationship for him, although her white dress is significant since it represents her next stage. She explains that she will not have the opportunity to speak with Ford again and that her life is not her own; she belongs to her people. These words make more sense in the final sentences of the novel.

Rivera is the one who comes to Ford's aid and again, his relationship with the guerrilla leader is integral. It was Rivera's soldiers that caused the chaos in Zacul's camp that helped to destroy Rivera's enemy. In truth, Rivera had been planning an attack on Zacul's camp for some time, but Ford's arrival was the additional advantage they wanted to be successful. Rivera has always wanted to be the president of Masagua, and yet now someone named Ixku has taken over the power — with no rebuke from Rivera. Whomever has taken over the country is someone that Rivera feels so strongly about that he has decided to waive his right to take full control of the country that he loves. Whether Ford knew that Rafe was still alive or not — and with Jessica — when he headed over to her house is not clear. But it is clear that he knew that whoever was with Jessica was dangerous since he grabbed the shell. Knowing that Rafe was alive throughout Ford's adventure to save Jake puts the entire book in another perspective and Hollins immediately goes from a sympathetic character to a despicable one.



Chapter Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four

Chapter Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four Summary

Hollins explains himself by saying he needed money and that's what got him into the situation. He knew Ford couldn't help him with the money, but he could help him find Jake. The man that was hanging by the tree on the island was a thug hired by the Sealife Development Corporation to kill Rafe and instead, Hollins got him. Since the man was about his size, he hung him from the tree, changed clothes with him and let everyone think that he had committed suicide. Mario DeArmand was the one coming after Rafe, so he quickly pushed the body through the coroner's office in order to have the situation fixed faster.

After Hollins is finished talking, Jessica tries to explain her actions by saying that Benny had taken videos of her when she was on drugs and vulnerable. She is trying to get the videos back from him and that's why she continues to do business with him. Ford says nothing, but it is clear their relationship is over. Ford is making dinner and listening to music when Tomlinson arrives, giving him a newspaper article. Pilar is not dead; in fact, she is presiding over the Ceremony of Seven Moons, an important ancient ritual for Mayan people as she now has full control of the Masaguan country. The bloodless revolution has been a wonder and covered by every major paper in the world. By saying that she is the incarnation of Ixku and having the knowledge and book of the ancient peoples, she was able to heal her people and be the symbol they could all believe in after centuries of turmoil and hatred that stemmed from the actions of the conquistadors.

Ford listens and then asks Tomlinson to leave since he's expecting a woman to come over any moment. Tomlinson goes but urges Ford to look at the pictures in the article. He looks at the paper and stares. Suddenly, he hears a woman calling his name and turns to see Dr. Sheri Braun-Richards who has come down again at his invitation. She looks at the paper and teases him for staring at a lovely Latin beauty but tells him that she is already obviously taken since she is holding a fat, healthy blonde baby in her arms.

Chapter Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four Analysis

Rafe's sudden appearance is a huge shock to the story but a disappointing revelation. His intentions were less than admirable, and he used Ford and Ford's connections and intellect to find his son without having to risk injury or life for himself. Tomlinson, who had no blood connection to Jake, was a better parent and had more resolve to find the boy than his own father did.

Jessica's behavior is better explained with her revelation of the videos that Benny has. Regardless, she is obviously not the right woman for someone like Ford and it is clear

that Ford knows his relationship with her is completely over, whether she realizes it yet or not. The final destiny of Pilar has become clear. She has brilliantly found the one thing for which all the people in Masagua — including Rivera the revolutionary general — all truly wish. By incarnating the old and ancient religion, she unites the people while ensuring her survival, since no one will want to assassinate the religious leader. Her baby, however, is obviously Ford's child, the blond hair being a clue.



Characters

Dr. Marion Ford aka Doc

The main character of the novel, Ford is a biologist who specializes in studying a variety of marine animals. Throughout the novel, he is primarily interested in sharks, but his knowledge of marine animals will play a crucial role in the plot of the novel. In addition, his role as a biologist allows him to be someone the other characters immediately trust and not believe he could be involved with underhanded activities.

He is living in Central America for years studying bull sharks at the God's Eyelake in Masagua, when he meets a woman named Pilar who is the wife of the president of the country and falls madly in love with her. He helps her to kidnap an important book that is crucial to the lives of the Kache indians and her Mayan ancestry. However, when the husband gets word of their affair, Ford is chased out of town and returns to Sanibel, which is where he lived growing up. His return to Sanibel is not a sentimental choice; he returns to continue his study of bull sharks in the area. However, Ford is also part of a CIA operation within Masagua that watches revolutionary leaders under the pretense of his biological studies.

Ford receives word from his former best friend in high school, Rafe Hollins. Hollins tells him that his son has been kidnapped due to some shady business dealings in which Rafe was involved. He needs help and needs Ford. Ford agrees to help, but when he finds Hollins' body hanging from a tree after an apparent suicide, Ford works hard to find and rescue Jake, Hollins' son.

Through the help of his former high school friends, his friends at the local marina, his friend Tomlinson and a woman named Jessica McClure, Ford uses his wit and superior intelligence to solve the mystery of where Jake Hollins is and the overall corruption involved in his kidnapping. Ford uses his deductive reasoning and intelligence about a number of subjects and cultures in order to successfully save the boy and understand a complicated situation with the illegal artifacts.

Ford is a single man who wants to live a quiet life in his house on stilts. He does not want any attachments or love interests after his affair with Pilar and avoids establishing a relationship with his neighbor Jessica McClure. He is often found at the marina with his friends Jethro Nicholes and MacKinley. Overall, Ford is a smart man who is trustworthy and responsible; he is an admirable character that other characters respect and whom the reader can admire.

Rafe Hollins

The impetus behind Ford's new mission in life, Hollins calls Ford to ask for his help after his son is kidnapped. Hollins needs someone he can trust and asks Ford to meet him at their old hiding spot, Tequesta Bank. When Ford arrives, Hollins' body is hanging from a



tree after an apparent suicide, although Ford immediately recognizes the body as a murder.

Hollins is a pilot who is flying pre-Mayan artifacts that have been illegally recovered. After divorcing his wife, he is dealt a hard blow after the judge presiding over the divorce proceedings has a relationship with the ex-wife. Due to his bias, the judge awards the ex-wife full custody of their son, Jake, and huge alimony payments to her - despite the fact that she is a drug and alcohol abuser. Hollins turns to illegal activities in order to make enough money to afford the alimony, while becoming more depressed that he cannot see his own son.

Hollins steals emeralds and pre-Mayan artifacts from General Julio Zacul, a ruthless guerrilla revolutionary in Central America in order to force Zacul to pay him money. In response, Zacul kidnaps Jake from Hollins. Hollins cannot go to the authorities because he is already in trouble for smuggling pre-Mayan artifacts and for kidnapping his son from his ex-wife. When he shows up dead, however, Ford takes over to save Jake. After Jake is saved and the situation is over, Rafe suddenly appears — with Ford's sometime girlfriend Jessica McClure. Hollins feels horrible about the situation and tells Ford that the reason he wasn't around and faked his own death was because he realized that there were people going after him. He went into Ford's house after Ford left for Central America.

Jethro Nicholes

A local fishing guide at the Dinkin's Marina near Ford's house, Jeth is a friend of Ford's. He considers Ford to be highly trustworthy and helps to hook him up with Dr. Sheri Braun-Richards when she's in town with other doctors on vacation. When Jeth gets into a fight with an out-of-town salesman at the marina dock, Ford shows his intelligence and quick wit when he protects Jeth and gets him out of a potentially bad situation.

Tomlinson

An ex-hippie from the '60s, Tomlinson has a first name that no one can pronounce — and thus it is never revealed in the book. Although he has obviously taken numerous drugs in the past, he only drinks beer with Ford now and mentions smoking weed, but then remembers that he gave it up.

Tomlinson is not as simple as he might seem. He has a doctorate degree from Harvard in Eastern religions and is an incredibly smart man. In fact, he plays a critical role in saving Jake Hollins by pretending to be an expert in Mayan artifacts in order to gain entry into General Zacul's camp. He passes the test and his loyalty proves invaluable when he carries an injured Ford and bruised Jake Hollins back to the States.



Jessica McClure

Ford's friend next door, they make an attempt to have a serious relationship, but it finishes before it really gets going since Ford has a liaison with another woman on the very same evening Jessica and Ford have their first experience together. Regardless, Jessica has connections to the art world and specifically to Benny and his Manhattan gallery. These connections will actually come back to tie in with Hollins' and Jake's kidnapping. In the end, Ford finds Hollins alive and well and very much with Jessica. It is a move that permanently severs her relationship with Ford, although initially they were close friends.

Jake Hollins

Although he never speaks throughout the novel, Jake Hollins is one of its main characters. He is more of a symbol than an actual contributor to the plot of the novel, but it is through his father's actions that he ends up in the prison camp of a Central American guerrilla. Ford solves the mystery and brings Jake home on his own with no help from Rafe, who is still alive.

Pilar Santana Fuentes Balserio

The young wife of the Masagua President Don Jorge Balserio, Pilar is forced into marriage through a contract between her parents and Don Jorge's. Although her husband is a poor leader, Pilar is an efficient one and makes tremendous changes and positive movements within the country. She and Ford fall in love while both are studying at God's Eye lake in Masagua and Ford helps Pilar find the ancient book for which she is searching. They make love exactly once before Pilar arranges for her guards to break them up and have Ford run out of the country in fear for his life. She later explains that it was because she knew that if she let him stay, she could never let him leave.

In the end, Pilar is believed by native Masaguans to be the incarnation of Ixku, the Mayan goddess. She creates peace in her country after her husband's death by terrorist bomb (that she admits to planting) and in-fighting by the local guerrillas. She holds a baby in her arms for the newspaper picture and it is a child that looks similar to Ford.

General Julio Zacul

The guerrilla leader who kidnaps Jake Hollins in order to get Rafe for taking some of his Mayan artifacts. He and his soldiers were once a part of General Rivera's group but splintered off and are now firm enemies. Both factions are working to take over control of the country; however, Zacul is a coke addict, effeminate, homosexual, abusive and extremely volatile. He executes prisoners without question and will kill anyone he doesn't trust.



Dr. Sheri Braun-Richards

A gynecologist from Iowa, Ford first meets her while she is visiting on a convention. He enjoys her confidence; she is a much better match for Ford than his neighbor Jessica. For this reason, perhaps, he makes love to her right after he is with Jessica one evening. In the end, after it is clear his relationship with Jessica is over, he calls her back down to visit him after he returns from Masagua.

Lester Durell

A local detective in Sandy Key, Durell is very good at his job. He reluctantly listens to Ford when he tells him that Hollins did not commit suicide and that something is afoot in Sandy Key. Using the information Ford provides, Durell tells him that a large investigation is being conducted on all the major Sandy Key people by the end of the novel.



Objects/Places

Sanibel Biological Supply

The name of Ford's new company when he moves to Sanibel. He find sharks and supplies them to biology classrooms across the country for a living.

Dinkin's Bay Marina

The marina beside Ford's home where his friends MacKinley and Jeth work.

Tequesta Bank

The island where Rafe and Ford would spend many hours hanging out in high school, Ford finds Rafe's body hanging from a tree after an apparent suicide here.

Isle de Verde

The small village in Masagua where Ford finds General Juan Rivera.

God's Eye Lake

The area where the Mayan religion and artifacts are found. This is where General Zacul's guerrilla camp is also located.

Kin Qux Cho

The ancient book of Mayan rituals and religious beliefs, there was only one publication containing this information in the world. Pilar and Ford stole the book shortly before Ford left Masagua the first time and it is a very important book for the Mayan people.

Botete Entrails

The poisonous fish that Ford puts in the bouillabaisse sauce to sicken and kill Zacul and his officers.



Ford's Fish Tank

Ford's company supplies bull sharks to different schools across the country and has a fish tank to keep the sharks alive. Ford spends the entire novel trying to get the water in his fish tank correct.

Ford's Skiff

His main form of transportation, Ford's skiff helps him get to Tequesta Bank, Jessica's house and the Marina, helping him fit into Sanibel society.

Urn

When Rafe is cremated, Ford and Rafe's friends spread his ashes and bones out at North Cut beach in Sandy Key

Sanibel Flats

The name of the painting that Jessica creates with Ford as the main topic



Themes

Mayan Culture

A central theme throughout the novel is Mayan culture and the historical events that play a key role in the Masaguan culture. Although the conquistadors robbed the Mayans of their unique culture and society centuries ago, its impact is still being felt by the local residents. At the time that Pedro de Alvarado arrives in the land of the Kache, they are friendly with their neighbors, the Tlaxclen. The friendliness ends when Alvarado arrives and the residents believe he is Quetzalcoatl. Through Alvarado's manipulation, the two groups fight and kill one another, destroying their society forever.

Worst of all, the important Kache religious beliefs and knowledge is nearly wiped away. A single priest writes the important Kin Qux Cho book detailing the important facts and figures discovered by the Mayans, but the book is lost until Pilar and Ford find it in the vaults of the Masaguan government and steal it. In this way, the stage is set for Pilar's eventual control of the entire country — through a remarkable bloodless revolution — and strives to unite her people for the first time since Alvarado arrived centuries ago. Ford, with his knowledge and experience of the Masagua country and its people, is central to the new era that Pilar brings with her Mayan knowledge and fight for her people and their lost culture.

Corruption

Corruption is rampant throughout the novel. Rafe Hollins sets the bar with his life filled with illegal activities and corrupted behavior, but even his actions can be excused after suffering an unfair decision in his divorce agreement. Since his ex-wife was having a relationship with Judge Robert Alden at the time of their divorce proceedings, Rafe is not only deprived of everything, he owes his ex-wife a great deal of money as alimony. In order to pay the alimony and see his son, Rafe turns to illegal activities to get the money he needs.

This betrayal and unfair justice puts Rafe on the path towards Sandy Key and their corrupt Sealife Development Corporation. By running illegal pre-Columbia artifacts into the country, he can avoid border patrols that look more for drugs and still make a great deal of money. Through these actions, he miscalculates his interactions with General Zacul in Masagua, who kidnaps his son Jake when things go awry.

Desperate, Hollins knows that the only way he can get out of his illegal actions and corrupt activity is by bringing Marion Ford into the situation. He knows Ford has the connections needed to save Jake while avoiding any danger for his own life. By faking his suicide and leaning on Ford's conscience, Hollins ultimately gets his wish — Jake is saved and Ford is responsible for his rescue — while never getting into any danger himself.



Animals in Nature

Ford's knowledge of nature and animals in general play an important role in the novel. First, through his supposed role of researching bull sharks at God's Eye lake, Ford introduces himself to Masaguan culture, especially Pilar Balserio. In this role, he knows about the bull sharks' behavior, which leads to Zacul's eventual demise. If Ford had not known that the bull sharks were so aggressive, his seemingly innocent pushing of Zacul into the lake would not have made much sense.

In God's Eye lake, there are a number of poisonous botete fish. Ford uses this knowledge to his advantage by poisoning Zacul and his officers through the ocean bouillabaisse during their celebratory dinner. If Ford had not used this poison to his advantage, the plot of this novel might have had a very different ending.

Finally, Rafe Hollins uses vultures to his advantage while faking his own suicide. Although the man that comes to kill him on Tequesta Bank matches his size, the vultures take bites out of the body that helps distort what the man looked like while living. For this reason, Ford cannot tell that it is not actually Rafe Hollins.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told with a third-person narrator. For the most part, the story follows Ford's actions throughout the novel. There are some flashbacks that better explain parts of the novel, but for the most part, the entire story happens in real time as the events themselves are occurring. One key back flash in the novel is after Ford meets Zacul. The history of Zacul and his upbringing is described while he is yelling for Suarez, but this is a rare event in the novel.

In fact, the only real character analysis and in-depth coverage in the novel is the character of Ford. The other characters are essentially only what Ford perceives of them. For instance, MacKinley's life, feelings and thoughts are never covered in the story. Rafe Hollins' sudden appearance is a surprise, but his true motives are not revealed since we never get his point of view. In addition, although he is no doubt affected by the events happening in his life, Rafe's son Jake never utters a word in the novel.

Setting

The setting of the story is in Sanibel for the beginning and end of the novel, as it is where Ford lives. However, the nearby Sandy Key plays a key role since this is where Hollins gets in trouble and has his illegal contacts. Masagua is also an important location for the novel and Ford's history with this area of the world is important.

If Ford were not familiar with Masagua and its society, this novel would have a very different plot. Most likely, Ford would have spent a bigger part of the novel trying to figure out who to talk to in Masagua. However, since he knew the culture and its most powerful members, Ford can go right to the source of the guerrilla leaders.

Language and Meaning

The novel is told using good descriptions and realistic dialogue. Some of the descriptions border on being extraordinarily poetic, in particular, the scene where Ford suddenly catches a tarpon. These descriptive scenes help to tell the reader more about Ford and his personality without stating it outright. However, although the dialogue is realistic, there are some characters that never speak at all. For example, Jake Hollins plays an important part in the novel, but he never speaks a single word.

Structure

The structure of the novel is linear and there are few backstories or alternate plots other than Ford's finding Jake and Ford's potential love life. The events are described as they occur. The novel begins with Ford running from Masagua, which is ironic because after a short period of time in Sanibel, he ends up running back to the country again.

Ford begins with his life in Sanibel and from there, takes on the adventure of finding Jake Hollins, which takes him back to Masagua and its important people. Once he solves the problem with Jake, he returns back to Sanibel to a presumably quiet and peaceful life again with no commitments.

The novel has 24 chapters and an important prologue at the start of the novel. The chapters help the reader move on as each chapter ends with a mini cliffhanger that makes the reader want to keep reading on to find out what happens next with Ford.



Quotes

"'I should take the word of a man who defiles nuns?' The man was already taking off his pants, resigned." pg3

"'I like women da-da-da-doctors,'" said Nicholes to no one in particular, all three men staring out the window. "They always look like they grew up taking vitamins and ba-ba-brushing their teeth.'" p. 37

"Looking at Tomlinson was like stepping into the past and seeing a child of the Sixties with that look in the eyes, still hearing music, an old hand at psychedelic visions, a man about Ford's age who had weathered badly but had visited God often enough not to care." p. 43

"Nicholes was back in this skiff, moving things that didn't need to be moved, burning nervous energy. 'We lucked out. That bastard woulda had us in court all year, and I can't afford no lawyer. It's a good thing you know that waitress.' Ford was rubbing his ribs. 'I don't know the waitress.'" p. 61

"'If you're looking for romance, you're blinder than I am.' The sea cow submerged, rubbed past again, then camp up behind him whoofing warm air." p. 63

"Across the bay, Tomlinson was meditating on the bow of his sailboat, sitting naked, blond hair hanging down. Naked? Yeah, no doubt about it, naked. Holding a stick of incense, too." p. 67

"Nothing overt, but not coy; aware that a subliminal process of selection was going on; aware that, because she was on vacation, there was no time for the normal presexual proprieties. Ford liked that awareness." p. 77

"She married him when she was twenty-one, abandoning an already brilliant academic career at the Universidad de Costa Rica to fulfill a marriage contract arranged by her father." p. 100

"It wasn't the cop office you see on television. It was the office of an organized executive, competent in his work. Ford was counting on that." p. 101

"Some of the American princesses lost themselves because of promiscuity. Or because the promiscuity had gotten out of hand and, in their own minds, made it impossible for them to return. Or it was because of drugs." p. 168

"Late the next morning there were voices outside the stockade. The door was pushed open and an unfamiliar figure stood staring in, lean in the bright column of light which jarred through. It was Julio Zacul." p. 244



"He could hear Zacul yelling as he ran for the boat, then an abrupt scream like death itself, but Ford didn't hear anything more because another mortar round hit the dock behind him and suddenly he was flying..." p. 280



Topics for Discussion

Rafe Hollins fakes his own suicide and lets Ford rescue his son for him. How different would the plot have been if Ford had known that Rafe was still alive? What key events would have been different?

What role does Jessica McClure play in the novel and in Ford's life? Why do you think he invites Dr. Sheri Braun-Richards to his home for dinner rather than Jessica by the end of the novel?

What role does the fish tank and the Sanibel Biological Supply business play in the story? Why are they essential elements of Ford's life in Sanibel Island?

Describe Ford's tarpon fishing episode. Why does Ford let the fish go? What does this event symbolize and show the readers about Ford?

Pilar uses a unique method to reunite her people and install the Mayan culture once again into their society. How does she manage to accomplish the nearly impossible feat of successful manufacturing a bloodless revolution in her country after the death of her husband?

Tomlinson is a unique character in the novel. His unusual intelligence and personality complement Ford well in his adventure to save Jake Hollins. However, he is a novice in the Masaguan culture and in Ford's method of secret activity. In a way, Tomlinson can be seen as Ford's conscience throughout the events that happen in Masagua. What are some key giveaways that Tomlinson is the opposite of Ford, the former CIA operative?

Similar to Tomlinson and Ford, General Rivera and General Zacul are complete opposite characters in the novel. Describe these two men, including their motivations, and show what makes them different and what similarities they might share.

What if this story had been based in Miami — a city that Ford had not grown up in and where he had few contacts. Do you think Ford could have still accomplished as much as he did with the Hollins' adventure? What if he had been unfamiliar with the Masaguan country and its society—would he still have been successful saving Jake Hollins?

Mackinley and Jeth both believe they know Ford and what kind of man he is. Describe some of the ways that Ford has encouraged their perception of him while living in Sanibel.

Describe Ford's knowledge of animals in their natural habitat. How does he use this knowledge to his advantage? What about human behavior in its environment? Does his uncanny ability to read people change the plot of the story?