

Skink--No Surrender Study Guide

Skink--No Surrender by Carl Hiaasen

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Plot Summary

Skink: No Surrender is a young adult novel by Carl Hiaasen in which fourteen year-old Richard travels across Florida with the elusive environmentalist, Skink. They are on a mission to find Richard's fourteen year-old cousin, Malley, who has run away with an older man. When the novel begins, Richard is waiting at the beach for Malley. The two are supposed to watch over sea turtle nests to help protect them from poachers, but Malley never shows up. Instead, Richard encounters a man named Clint Tyree who goes by the name of "Skink." Skink, a former governor of Florida-turned-environmentalist, has long been presumed dead since a retired state trooper named Jim Tile reported finding Skink's body in the swamps.

Malley soon calls Richard, tells him she is okay, and tells him not to tell their parents that she has run off with an older man named Talbo Chock. She threatens to tell Richard's mom about the crime he committed on a trip to Saint Augustine if he calls her parents. Richard relates his concerns that Malley has run off with an older man to Skink, who urges Richard to tell his family regardless of Malley's threat. Richard tells his parents and Malley's parents what has happened. They notify the police.

Skink uses his old friend and contact, Jim Tile, to learn more about Talbo Chock. Skink learns that the name is stolen from a dead U.S. Marine named Earl Talbo Chock. At the same time, Skink has a violent encounter with a poacher, which brings Skink unwanted attention. He decides to track down Malley to get away from public scrutiny. Richard decides to join him. The two travel across the state of Florida, following what limited clues Richard can glean from Malley in her occasional phone calls. They are able to track down Malley to the Choctawhatchee River near Panama City. There, Richard receives another call from Malley. He is able to get her to tell him that she is being held against her will and that she needs help. Richard and Skink set off downriver and come across the houseboat where Malley is being kept. In a confrontation with Talbo, Talbo admits his name is actually Tommy Chalmers. He lies when he says that Talbo was a good friend of his, one whose death he could not get over.

In a wide-ranging struggle against Tommy, Skink, Richard, and Malley are ultimately successful. Tommy, who tries to escape, is ripped apart by an alligator. It is later learned that Tommy was not even his real name. His real identity was Terwin Crossley, a twenty-six year-old thug from Mississippi. Malley explains she ran away with him because he sounded different when she met him online. Also, she did not want to go away to boarding school in New Hampshire. The ordeal keeps Malley from going to school in New Hampshire. Skink makes a massive donation to begin a scholarship fund in the real Talbo Chock's name at a nearby college. At Skink's urging, Richard travels to Saint Augustine to make up for his crime by paying a store owner back for a stolen skateboard deck. The store owner, who had been friends with Richard's dead father, explains he always knew Richard would do the right thing. As the novel ends, Richard hopes that he will see Skink again someday. In the meantime, he enjoys watching over sea turtle nests with Malley.



Chapters 1 – 5

Summary

In Chapter 1, Richard waits for his fourteen year-old cousin Malley on the beach to watch over sea turtle eggs at night, but she does not show up. Although Malley can be wild, she is always on time. Richard tries to call Malley several times, but she does not pick up. Richard, with an Easton baseball bat for self-defense against egg poachers, settles down near a sea turtle nest. Suddenly, a one-eyed man named Clint Tyree jumps out of the nest, saying he was expecting to confront a poacher named Dodge Olney. He encourages Richard explains he is waiting for his cousin, and asks Clint to keep a lookout for her in case she shows up. Clint agrees, and tells Richard to head home for the night. Richard runs a search for Clint's name on his phone to make sure Clint isn't a criminal, but discovers Clint is famous, and believed dead. Richard runs by Malley's house around 10:30. He notices her lights are off. This is strange since Malley always stays up late. She later texts Richard to explain she is grounded. Richard knows her lights should have been on. At home, Richard stays up and watches television with his stepdad, Trent. Richard's father, Randy, is dead following a skateboarding accident. In the morning, Richard receives a text message from Beth, Malley's best friend from track team, saying Malley is gone.

In Chapter 2, Richard goes to see Uncle Dan and Aunt Sandy. Uncle Dan says Malley has left for early orientation at the all-girls boarding school, Twigg Acedemy, in New Hampshire. Richard then asks to retrieve a book he lent to Malley so he can get into her room. There, he finds that Malley's laptop and possessions are gone, but discovers a note to T.C. T.C. is Talbo Chock, an older guy and club DJ that Malley has met online but never met in person. The note urges him not to forget about her when she is in New Hampshire. Through Twigg, Richard learns that there is no early orientation at Twigg. Richard then speaks to Beth, who has received a brief call from Malley saying she has run off with T.C.

Richard then goes to see Clint Tyree. Richard reveals that Clint Tyree is a former governor of Florida who was a college football star, war hero in Vietnam, and who tried to end corruption in politics, but failed. Halfway through his term, he disappeared, only later to resurface here and there fighting animal poachers where he went by the name "Skink." It was a retired highway patrol trooper named Jim Tile who reportedly found Skink dead, and buried him in Big Cypress Swamp. Richard meets up with Skink, who explains he asked Tile to report his death. Richard explains what has happened with Malley, to which Skink says he will make a call. Richard later speaks to Malley on the phone, telling her he knows she is not at Twigg. Malley hangs up on him. She then sends Richard a text, threatening to tell his parents about what happened in Saint Augustine if he says anything to her parents. Richard then speaks with Skink, who says the situation is not alright.



In Chapter 3, Richard learns from Skink, who has made a call to a reliable source, that Earl Talbo Chock was a nineteen year-old U.S. Marine corporal who died in Afghanistan. The man that Malley is with has stolen Earl's identity, now going by the name Talbo Chock. Skink urges Richard to tell his parents, but Richard doesn't want the secret of Saint Augustine to come out. Skink says he has made many of his own mistakes, and tells Richard no secret is worth the life of his cousin. Richard then gets a call from Malley, who reveals she knows Talbo Chock is a fake name, and that she only needs a week before Richard tells everyone. Richard then sits his mother, a lawyer, down to tell her about what has happened. Richard's mom then calls Uncle Dan, Aunt Sandy, and the police. The police interview Richard. Richard then goes to find Skink, but Skink is gone.

In Chapter 4, the police launch an all-out search for Malley, including an Amber Alert. They discover security footage of Malley arriving at the airport for New Hampshire, but then getting into a white, two-door Toyota with a man wearing a blonde wig who remained inside, and with the car bearing a stolen license plate. Malley's phone is traced to a club in Dallas, but cannot be traced further as the phone has been turned off or broken. Richard meets with Detective Trujillo, who explains all possible leads, such as contacting the real Chock's friends and family, are underway. Richard lies, however, when Trujillo asks if Malley threatened Richard as a way to try to keep him quiet. Trujillo also wonders if Malley knows the impostor Chock better than anyone else does, and if perhaps running away was her idea. Richard does not know what to think of this. Richard is, however, worried that Malley hasn't called him to yell at him about telling her parents and the police. Richard's parents help pay for billboards and a reward for information. Each time the news carries the report of a body being found, Richard panics until he knows it isn't Malley.

Richard's mom decides to go and visit Richard's older brothers, who are at university for the summer. Richard stays behind with Trent, too worried about Malley to go. Richard later receives a call from Malley on a blocked number. Malley says she is okay and has just called her parents to let them know she is okay as well. She says that she and T.C. have arrived at their destination, and that it is beautiful. Malley will not answer questions about T.C.'s age, says that she was not going to Twigg under any circumstances, and that she will not blab about Richard's Saint Augustine crime spree. Richard hears a boat horn in the background. Malley speaks about everyone being relaxed on island time, and then yells at someone, saying not to ever "do that" again, then hangs up.

In Chapter 5, Richard speaks with Trujillo by phone, saying it was impossible to tell if Malley seemed scared or not because T.C. must have been right beside her. After Richard's mom leaves, Richard goes out on the family boat to Cutter Island to fish, then grabs McDonald's on the way home. He is very worried about his most recent phone call with Malley. At the beach, Richard sees paramedics taking away the unconscious Dodge Olney, who has been knocked out by what witnesses describe as a man hiding in a turtle nest. Richard heads down the beach, where he finds Skink. Skink asks Richard to pretend to be his grandson in case anyone asks, and that his contact, Tile, has left a gray Chevy Malibu for Skink at the corner of Askew and A1A. Richard agrees, and walks with Skink to the car. Skink explains that he will not go into hiding, but will



focus on a new project in order to keep moving. That project will be finding Malley. Richard immediately decides to go along.

Analysis

“Skink: No Surrender” is a young adult novel by Carl Hiaasen in which fourteen year-old Richard travels across Florida with the elusive environmentalist, Skink, to find Richard’s fourteen year-old cousin, Malley, who has run away with an older man. Richard immediately knows that Malley is in trouble because Malley, though a wild kid, would never do something this stupid or troubling on her own. Richard, who has always loved his cousin, quickly comes to realize how important family is with her absence. It is why he is so quick to decide to go along with Skink to rescue her.

In fact, it is Richard’s encounter with Skink which reminds Richard of how important family is. Richard, as the reader notes, is worried about revealing Malley’s absence to his parents due to the incident that occurred in Saint Augustine, but Skink reminds Richard that Malley’s life is worth far more than not getting in trouble for whatever happened with Richard. Richard comes to agree with this viewpoint, and quickly informs both his parents. It is through the efforts of Skink’s contact man, later to be revealed as Jim Tile, that Skink and Richard learn most of what they know about Talbo Chock –that the name was stolen from a dead war hero. This furthers the resolve of Skink to find Malley, since Skink –a veteran himself –finds someone stealing a dead Marine’s name and valor to be sickening, while Richard wants his cousin to be brought home safe and sound.

The journey that Richard decides to undertake with Skink will not merely be a journey to bring Malley home safe and sound, but will be a journey of self-discovery for Richard. Indeed, that journey has already begun. When Malley threatens Richard with revealing his Saint Augustine experience, Richard’s immediate reaction is to not tell his parents so he will not get in trouble. Yet, Skink reminds Richard that his cousin’s life is worth more than this, so Richard does the moral thing and tells his parents about Malley. Already, Richard has experienced important moral growth, and discovered that he has it within himself to make moral choices.

Fate also seems to play an important role so far in the novel, especially in conjunction with the past. Skink would never have ended up seeking to help Richard find Malley if he had never gotten into protecting the environment posing as a Wildman. He would never have gone into protecting the environment if he had not disappeared from his work as governor. He would never have run for governor if he did not think he could change things for the better. He would never have believed he could not change things for the better if he had not served in Vietnam. Each action that Skink has taken in his life has led him up to the present, and to the encounter he has with Richard as though it was meant to be.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Skink decide to go and find Malley? Do you believe his reasoning for doing so, or do you believe he could have found a different way to do this? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Malley threaten Richard if Richard tells their parents what she has done? Why does Richard initially hesitate? Why does he ultimately decide to tell his parents anyway?

Discussion Question 3

What troubling information do Richard and Skink learn about the man who has run away with Malley? What does this troubling information make Richard and Skink realize?

Vocabulary

punctual, rehabilitate, reliable, narc, ferocious, gaily, impostor, ballistic, menace



Chapters 6 – 10

Summary

In Chapter 6, Richard asks Trent to go camping with Blake and his family. Beth pretends to be Blake's mom on the phone, so Trent agrees to let Richard go. Richard then hops in the car with Skink, explaining that Malley must be on an island. Skink believes the loud horn Richard heard must mean she is on an island with a very big bridge. Skink drives toward Clearwater, since it is the most recent place Malley has used her phone. When Richard asks, Skink explains he lost his eye from some people who like to beat up the homeless for fun. As they drive, the former governor stops the car from time to time to collect roadkill. Richard, meanwhile, reflects on the fact that Malley has run away five times before, but that no boys have ever been involved. He also reflects on the fact that Malley is incredibly intelligent. He wonders why she would have run away with an impostor. Richard suddenly gets a call from his mother, who has learned of the ruse. Skink calmly speaks to Richard's mom on the phone to explain things. Richard later gets a call from Malley, who calls him "Ricardo." She says that she saw an ivory-billed woodpecker, which made her sad because it sounded lonely. Off the phone, Richard explains those woodpeckers are now extinct. Skink realizes that Malley is trying to reveal her location, and that there is only one place in Florida where those birds lived.

In Chapter 7, Detective Trujillo calls Richard to explain that, during the funeral service of the real Earl Talbo Chock, someone had stolen the pastor's 2007 white Toyota Camry, which contained a copy of the pastor's eulogy on the real Chock. Trujillo explains the Camry also has a small hole in the back windshield due to a pellet gun fired by his son. Richard does not explain where he is or what he is doing; however. Skink heads toward the site of the funeral and the burial place of the real Chock, Fort Walton Beach. When Skink sees a blue SUV rush past, whose occupant throws a beer can out of the window, Skink follows. When the SUV stops, Skink sneaks over and pours beer into the gas tank. Richard argues against doing something like that again, but Skink responds that people are who they are. Richard then receives an e-mail from his mother, explaining she does not like what Richard is doing, and that she has spoken to Tile about Skink. His mother urges him to come home and let the police handle things. Skink drives to the Tarpon Dock drawbridge on the Choctawhatchee River in Panama City, which raises for a shrimp boat to pass beneath. Richard says he does not want to go back. He is excited to be at the spot from where Malley must have called him. Skink gives Richard his snake-rattle necklace as a gift.

In Chapter 8, Richard reveals that people are still searching in hopes of finding an ivory-billed woodpecker still alive. Richard explains the last confirmed sighting occurred eighty years ago, and that the woodpeckers went extinct due to over-logging. Skink says he saw one with his own eye on April 17, 2009. Richard's mom calls to check up on him, but Richard assures her he is fine. Richard's mom then says Richard has seventy-two hours before she notifies the authorities as to his trip to find Malley. While out looking for food on the highway, a truck accidentally runs over Skink's right foot.



Richard and Skink then suddenly see a light-colored Toyota drive past in the dark. Skink refuses to go to the emergency room, deciding to put his broken foot in a splint instead. He will teach Richard to drive since Skink can no longer drive.

In Chapter 9, Richard does his best to learn to drive, finding it difficult at first because of his short height. He gets better after sitting on books. Camping out that night, Skink seems to have difficulty sleeping. Richard wonders whether this is because of memories of Vietnam, the pain from the broken foot, or both. Richard later asks about Skink's nickname. Skink explains that a skink is a kind of lizard, and that Jim Tile once called him "slippery as a skink." Richard and Skink then decide to head up the river, figuring that if Malley and Chock are camped out, it will probably be along the river. Richard gets a call from Malley, who mumbles as she speaks. She pretends to be speaking to her mother. Richard then tells Malley if she needs help, to ask about how her dad is doing. She does. Through similar coaching, Richard learns that Malley is along the Choctawhatchee River, south of the bridge on Road 20. A voice suddenly yells at Malley to hang up, which she does. At first light, Richard and Skink head out. They are pulled over by a plainclothes African-American police officer, who hands Richard a fake driver's license. The officer is Jim Tile.

In Chapter 10, Skink tells Richard three days is plenty of time to find Malley and get home. In the river, Skink finds the Toyota. Thankfully, no one is inside. Skink believes Malley and the impostor Chock have a boat. Skink then spots a couple, Dr. and Mrs. Capps, from Thomasville, Georgia, hauling their own canoe along. Skink tells them he is dying, that someone stole Richard's canoe, and purchase the Capps' canoe for five-hundred dollars. Richard and Skink take to the water, paddling downriver for hours. They come to a large tree draped by Spanish moss where Skink reveals he saw the woodpecker. Richard doubts this. They successfully catch three fish from the water, then meet a fellow boater named Etta. Etta reveals she passed a young, unfriendly couple at an old houseboat further downriver. Richard wants to call his mom to let her know, but his phone is dead while Skink's phone has been destroyed in the water from his dive to the Toyota. Skink says they will rest for the night, then continue on in the morning. Skink tells Richard that Richard must do as he says.

Analysis

Although the journey that Richard undertakes begins by deception, Richard's mother ultimately finds out the truth. The idea that no crime, no matter how small, goes unpunished, is explored. Richard's lie had been found out, and now Richard must account for what he is doing. He explains to his mother that he is undertaking a journey with Skink to find Malley. This troubles his mother. One member of the family has gone missing, so Richard's mom naturally worries that another might meet a similar fate. Richard immediately owns up to his deception, apologizes, and tells her the truth about his trip.

However, even in this Richard demonstrates his own, personal journey has taken another step in the right direction. Richard quickly owns up to the lies he has told in



order to get away from home to find Malley, and he apologizes for those lies. This is already a far cry from the Richard who was more concerned about being grounded than his cousin's welfare early in the novel. At the same time, Richard's moral growth isn't the only thing that occurs—he also has a growth of confidence in himself and in his abilities. Given the dramatic circumstance of Skink having his foot run over, Richard must find within himself the courage to learn how to drive at such a young age. The very fate of the mission to find Malley rests on Richard's efforts.

As Richard and Skink journey, the past catches up to them and begins to influence the present. For example, Richard discovers that Skink has nightmares relating to his time fighting in Vietnam. The war has resulted in terrible memories that Skink cannot escape. It is in large part due to these memories that Skink endeavors to make the world a better place in the present. That is his motivation for finding Malley. The simple backstory behind Skink's nickname is also told, as well as the journey of tracing the past steps taken by Malley and Talbo which Richard and Skink now follow.

The idea that fate has greater dominion over human actions than free will is again explored in this section of the novel. Once again, through an examination of the past, the reader is able to determine that the characters have arrived at their present circumstances primarily as a means of design. Skink's military service and experience in the wild now become critical to their survival and finding Malley. It is improbable that Richard could have gotten along in the wild with his stepfather or his uncle, while it is perfectly possible for Richard to get along in the wild with Skink.

That Richard and Skink spot a couple with a canoe almost as soon as they need a canoe seems more akin to fate than chance. Likewise, that Richard and Skink are following in the footsteps of Malley and her captor—following a preordained path they have set—means that there will be an encounter with fate itself. Either Malley will be alive, or she will be dead. The mission will be successful or it will be a failure. Whatever the fated outcome, Richard and Skink are fated to meet it. The appearance of the ivory-billed woodpecker is a clue that will become an important symbol.

Discussion Question 1

Although Richard's mom is terrified that her son has run off with a Wildman, she agrees to give Richard three days to complete his mission. Why does she agree?

Discussion Question 2

How do Richard and Skink track Malley and her captor to the Choctawhatchee River near Panama City? What is their next step in the mission to free Malley? Why?



Discussion Question 3

When Richard's mother urges Richard to come home and let the police handle things, what is his response? Why?

Vocabulary

inconspicuous, delusional, virtually, fugitive, prudently, fanatic, pulverized, morphed, berserk, lurching, mortified



Chapters 11 – 15

Summary

In Chapter 11, Skink has another bad dream which Richard wakes him from. Skink asks Richard about the crime Richard committed in Saint Augustine. Skink offers up his own secret, which Richard says he will not write down in “these pages” out of respect for Skink. Richard then explains he stole a skateboard deck that cost two-hundred dollars when his mother wouldn’t buy it for him. It was a deck that reminded Richard of the skateboard his father was riding when he was killed. Skink says it makes sense why she wouldn’t buy it for Richard. Richard goes on to explain that Malley pretended to choke on a Jolly Rancher, distracting everyone long enough for Richard to steal the skateboard deck and get away. Richard has never ridden the skateboard. Skink urges Richard to pay the shop back the next time he is in Saint Augustine. Richard agrees. That night, the canoe is taken away by a gator, leaving Richard and Skink without a boat. Skink dives into the water and says he will be back.

In Chapter 12, while waiting for Skink, Richard reads his book “Silent Spring” by Rachel Carson, which is a defense of the environment. Richard begins to worry when Skink does not return, knowing he is alone and unable to help Malley. Richard decides to head out on his own. He manages to flag down a man named Nickel passing in a boat, and asks about the houseboat. Nickel explains there is a houseboat not far down, and agrees to take Richard across the river. Richard offers Nickel money if Nickel will bring him to the houseboat. Richard says he will give Nickel the location of a box of money buried by Skink, and that Nickel can take what he thinks is fair once Richard is on the houseboat. Nickel agrees, after which Richard reveals limitedly that he thinks his cousin is on the houseboat, and that she is in trouble.

In Chapter 13, Nickel helps Richard check out the boat, but apart from clothing, no one is on board. After Nickel leaves for the money box, Richard hides on the houseboat to await the return of Malley and the impostor Talbo Chock, arming himself with a golf club. Richard sees Malley and the impostor return in the canoe that he and Skink lost, which makes him worry that Skink has been killed. To distract Talbo, Richard shakes his snake tail tie, which prompts Talbo to go get an axe. Meanwhile, Richard makes himself known to Malley, who is thin and has been handcuffed to the houseboat steering wheel. Suddenly, Talbo returns and demands to know who Richard is. Richard pretends his name is Carson, and that he is a runaway. Talbo grabs the rattle tie from Richard and throws it into the water. When Richard asks about Malley being chained up, Malley distracts Talbo by saying it is only a game they play. This forces Talbo to unhook her. Malley then introduces herself as “Louise,” and invites Richard to stay for dinner. Richard compliments the canoe, which Talbo says came floating to them empty. Richard then throws Talbo off his game by saying he knew a Talbo Chock back in Florida, who was killed in Afghanistan. Richard then accuses Talbo of stealing the name, causing Talbo to take a wild swing at Richard. Malley then intervenes, telling Richard it is none of his business.



In Chapter 14, Malley pretends to come clean, saying Talbo is really Tommy Chalmers, and that her name is really Malley. Tommy unloads a fake story about being friends with Talbo and going by the name Talbo to keep his memory alive. While Tommy explains this, Richard considers how to overpower Talbo. Talbo, meanwhile, injures his hand on the spine of the catfish he is attempting to carve up. Instead of taking the chance to act against Tommy, Richard nearly faints from the sight of Talbo's blood. The catfish manages to swim away. In the houseboat cabin later, Tommy asks Richard what he ran away for. Richard says he stole a yacht in Pensacola, and to look it up in the papers if Tommy does not believe him. Richard then heads out to catch a fish, and thanks God when he is successful.

In Chapter 15, when Tommy goes out for a smoke, Malley quickly explains that Tommy is insane, won't let her go, and that he smashed her laptop and phone. When Tommy comes back in, he prepares the fish for dinner. At dinner, he explains he works as a DJ, that the houseboat belongs to a friend, and that he and Malley are set to be married on Sunday on the beat at Destin. After dinner, Tommy orders Richard off the boat. Richard refuses. Tommy pulls out a gun to kill a nearby heron as a threat, but Richard headbutts Tommy in the ribs. The two struggle, during which time Tommy gains the upper hand. Skink suddenly arrives to stop the fight.

Analysis

The past remains heavily influential in the present. Skink continues to have nightmares about Vietnam, which in turn help propel him on to do better, be better, and rescue Malley. Interestingly enough, whatever massive secret that exists in Skink's past that there is, Richard breaks the fourth wall to address readers to say he will not set down that secret in writing. Richard reveals his own crime from Saint Augustine –the stealing of a skateboard deck. Richard stole the deck because his mother would not buy the deck for him, because the deck reminded both of them of the skateboard being ridden by Randy when he was killed.

That Richard is able to admit the past to Skink is also indicative of his journey of self-discovery. He is able to confess that which he has done wrong. Skink urges Richard to make things right by paying the shop back the next time he is in Saint Augustine. Richard agrees to do this, knowing that what he did was wrong, and knowing that he must now fix things. This is another immense step in the moral maturation of Richard. Given the fact that Malley was a part of the theft at Richard's urging, Richard feels all the more guilty about what happened, and doubles down in his efforts to find and rescue Malley.

The idea that justice always catches up with crime continues to remain strong. Richard's confession and decision to pay back the skate shop for the stealing of a skateboard deck is evidence that no crime goes unpunished –or righted. While Richard's act may not have landed him in jail, it has been weighing heavily on his conscience. As Skink notes, guilt is a bear. The only way to get rid of that guilt is to find a way to make things right. The crimes that the impostor Talbo has committed are finally catching up to him, in



the form of Richard and Skink. No more evidence is needed to know that Malley is being kept against her will than by the fact that she is handcuffed to the houseboat steering wheel.

In his reflection on the Saint Augustine incident, as well as the current struggle he finds himself in to find Malley, Richard comes to consider friendship and family once more. He is desperate to find Malley to make sure she is alright, knowing that Malley has always been by his side through thick and thin, right and wrong. Richard has also clearly developed a strong friendship with Skink at this point, not merely in the mutual mission to find Malley, but in shared interests and the grandfatherly advice and role that Skink is now playing in Richard's life. Richard is grateful for Skink's friendship and emergence as a grandfather figure, and so it is only natural that Richard comes to worry about Skink's safety as well as Malley's. This is especially clear when Skink goes after their canoe and discovers that the gator that has taken it.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways has Skink become a grandfather figure to Richard? What is Richard's reaction when Skink goes missing after pursuing the canoe and the gator that took it? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Although Tommy presents himself as Talbo Chock, Richard knows he is lying. When Tommy attempts to create a new backstory to cover his assumed identity, Richard knows he is lying. How does Richard know that Tommy is not telling the truth?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Richard attempt to rescue Malley without waiting to see what has become of Skink? Would you do the same thing if you were in Richard's place? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

full disclosure, treacherous, liberated, rogue, gloomily, carnivorous, abruptly



Chapters 16 – 20

Summary

In Chapter 16, Tommy turns the gun on Skink, who is bloody and bruised from his fight with the alligator in the river. He demands to know what is going on. Thinking fast, Richard introduces himself as Carson to Skink. Skink recognizes the ploy, then asks Malley for her name. He then explains the canoe they have is his, and that it got away from him. Tommy says the canoe belongs to him now. He orders Skink and Richard to sit down so he can tie them up as a storm comes on. Richard can see that Tommy is beginning to sicken from the catfish injury, but refuses to rest. Richard recognizes that Tommy is evil to be holding a fourteen year-old girl hostage, in addition to himself and an old man. To calm everyone down, Malley explains she met Tommy online in a chat room where he was calling himself Talbo, and the two started talking. She explains she did not want to go to school in New Hampshire, to which Tommy suggested a road trip that she agreed to. Tommy says Talbo was a friend of his who was killed in Iraq. Malley then reveals that Tommy is twenty-four, which Skink says is old enough to know that blue herons are not game birds. While Skink keeps Tommy busy, Malley sneaks Richard a pocketknife to cut himself free. Richard then sneaks the knife to Skink as the storm causes the boat to lose its anchor.

In Chapter 17, the boat's engine will not start since the battery is using so much power to pump water out. It is then that Malley announces Richard is not Carson, but actually her cousin. She says some people worry about others and have a conscience. Tommy says no girlfriend with a conscience would ever hit him in the face. Malley declares she never was, is, or will be Tommy's girlfriend. She continues to egg Tommy on, saying she has been giving Richard clues to find them all along. Skink then joins in, challenging Tommy on every step of his actions in the past several days, from abducting a young girl to assuming the identity of a dead war hero. Suddenly, the boat hits a submerged tree stump, knocking Tommy off-balance. Skink rushes to tackle Tommy as the gun goes off, telling Malley and Richard to get off the boat. As Malley and Richard swim to shore, Skink smiles and waves with one hand while clutching Tommy with the other.

In Chapter 18, on shore, Malley points out what she thinks is an ivory-bill woodpecker. Malley then asks what they should do next. Richard suggests waiting for a fisherman to come along so they can borrow his phone. Malley worries about Skink, at which time Richard tells her all about him. Malley says she hopes that Skink hurts Tommy. Richard then asks if Tommy hurt her, but Malley says he only kissed her a couple of times which is why she punched him. She explains that he was very different and very kind online, though not in real life. Malley then apologizes for threatening to tell Richard's mom about Saint Augustine. She then explains that Tommy promised to bring her home as soon as she wanted, but that he lied. Richard and Malley then decide to hike through the swamp rather than wait around. It is then they realize they are being chased by a feral pig.



In Chapter 19, a feral pig continues to give chase to Richard and Malley. They become separated. Richard races up a Maple tree to avoid the pig, but rather than give up, the pig lays down at the foot of the tree and goes to sleep. Malley appears a short time later. She sings and does a wild dance, which frightens off the pig.

In Chapter 20, Richard and Malley arrive at the gray Chevy Malibu by the Road 20 bridge. Richard discovers the money box is still heavy, meaning that Nickel took none or very little money. Richard drives off with Malley, explaining that Skink taught him how. The two drive to a payphone to call home to let Uncle Dan and Aunt Sandy know they are okay. Instead of going home, however, they decide to go back to check on Skink to make sure he is alright since he risked his life for them. They then drive to rent a boat for \$250 from a man named Dime, the brother of Nickel. They use the Malibu as collateral in case something goes wrong. They head upstream.

Analysis

Fate once again seems to be in play as it is Skink who proves to be the difference in rescuing Malley. His military service and time spent in the wilds of Florida have conditioned him to the point that he is physically tough and relentless –things invaluable against the deranged Tommy. Perhaps no greater statement of fate taking control of things can be found in the book than when the houseboat loses its anchor and begins to drift, causing Skink to declare that they are all a part of something bigger now. The only thing bigger than free will is a plan, a design, or fate. Indeed, the actual act of the houseboat drifting along, powerless, on the river current is symbolic of the lives of Richard, Malley, Skink, and even Tommy being forced to endure whatever changes and situations the currents of life throw their way.

Nevertheless, the intervention of God, made apparent by the discovery of the believed-extinct ivory-billed woodpecker, is illustrated by Richard and Malley looking up to the bird, which is to be seen as metaphorical for looking up to God, thankful for their deliverance and in amazement to know God is still around despite the torrents of fate. Secondly, the finding of the elusive woodpecker as safe and alive becomes symbolic of Malley being found, safe and alive.

The fact that crime is always fated to be dealt with is also seen in this section of the novel. The kisses that Tommy gives to Malley –surely the precursor for more dangerous intents –results in Malley rightfully punching Tommy in the face. That Tommy has attempted to run away with an underage girl against her will under assumed names are crimes which also catch up to him, as his entire plan is now totally derailed by Richard and Skink. Tommy's attempted killing of a blue heron –which would have been a crime if Tommy had actually hit the bird –enrages Skink, ever the environmentalist, who uses the attempt as one more reason to hate Tommy.

While the journey to stop Tommy and save Malley may have succeeded, the journey of self-discovery is still far from over. Although Skink has ordered Richard and Malley to get away, Richard and Malley decide they cannot leave Skink behind. It is a question of



moral rightness and moral growth that they should be more concerned about Skink than their own present safety. Their decision to head back speaks of moral growth on the part of Richard, as well as Malley. Malley's decision to rush back toward the place where her kidnapper hid out kept her against her will speaks of Malley's growing bravery and courage –both elements required for self-growth.

A large part of the desire to return to see about Skink's welfare comes from the fact that Richard, Malley, and Skink are now all in the same boat, so to speak, regarding the trouble with Tommy in which they have found themselves. As noted earlier, in times of trouble, family and friendship become essential to survival. Times of trouble compel people to recognize that which is most valuable. In this case, the friendship that Skink has afforded Malley, and the grandfather figure he has become to Richard, cause both teens to turn back to ensure that he is alright.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the character and moral growth of Richard and Malley occur in this section of the novel, particularly as it relates to returning to the boat? Why does this matter?

Discussion Question 2

What statement of fate does Skink make regarding the houseboat and events, in general? Do you believe he is accurate in his observation? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Despite the terror that Malley has so recently faced on the houseboat with Tommy, she agrees to return to the place with Richard. Why?

Vocabulary

afflicted, redeeming, sullenly, insinuating, vigorously, chortle, triangulated, telemetry, integrity, interjected, inevitable, idiotic, quizzical



Chapters 21 – 24

Summary

In Chapter 21, Richard and Malley head upriver. In the water, they find Tommy's suitcase. Inside are license plates, a blonde wig, credit and debit cards, disposable cell phones, and other such items. There is also a binder full of photos and e-mails between Malley and Tommy, which she throws into the water against Richard's advice, saying it is her stupidity, not evidence for the case against Tommy. As they head upriver, they discover Skink standing on the roof of the now-sunken houseboat. Skink explains that Tommy managed to shoot him and escape. Skink explains he will now go after Tommy. Richard and Malley insist on coming along.

In Chapter 22, Tommy begins shooting as Richard, Malley, and Skink veer into the creek where Tommy has gone. Meanwhile, Dime has taken the Malibu for a joyride and is pulled over by Tile. Dime confesses the boat rental to Tile. At the same time, Richard, Malley, and Skink discover that Tommy, deliriously sick, has climbed a tree to get away from a pig. Malley coaxes Tommy down from the tree, then slugs him in the stomach. Skink then leaps onto Tommy, tackling him and taking away Tommy's gun. Skink smashes the gun, then has a fit and collapses. While Tommy tries to crawl off, Richard and Malley administer CPR to Skink, who begins breathing again.

In Chapter 23, Tommy manages to drag himself to the river and get back into the canoe. Richard uses a fishing pole from Dime's boat to hook Tommy. Richard cannot stop Tommy, and must let go. An alligator suddenly surfaces and attacks Tommy, killing him. Skink tells Richard to stay close to Malley, then heads off on his own. While waiting with Malley, Richard and Malley both see a male ivory-billed woodpecker above them. Suddenly, around the corner of the river in a boat comes Mr. Tile, along with Nickel and Dime.

In Chapter 24, Mr. Tile watches over Richard and Malley to ensure they get back home safely. Tile explains the money in the cash box was Skink's from his former life. Tile also says he and Skink are friends from way back. A call comes in on the remains of Tommy Chalmers, which turns out to be the assumed name of twenty-six year-old Mississippi native Terwin Crossley, with a rap sheet including burglary, forgery, and aggravated stalking. Back home, leaving out details about Governor Clint Tyree, Richard and Malley tell all they know to Detective Trujillo. Some time later, on a trip to Saint Augustine, Richard learns his grandmother campaigned for Clinton Tyree for governor all those years before.

Richard also pays back Kenny, owner of the skate shop and an old friend of his dad's, for the skateboard. Kenny explains he saw the theft on security camera footage. He knew that Richard would be back to pay eventually. Meanwhile, Malley's parents decide she does not have to go away to New Hampshire, while Richard goes out on a date with Beth. Mr. Tile then alerts Richard to an article online about a strange, homeless man



who has opened a scholarship fund at Northwest Florida State College in honor of Earl Talbo Chock. Richard and Malley later spend their evenings checking on sea turtle nests, always hoping to meet Skink again.

Analysis

The thematic idea that no crime goes unpunished is borne to full fruition in the final chapters of the novel. Tommy does everything he can to get away from the crimes he has committed and the evil that he has done, but fate has other plans in store for him. In what is ultimately to be seen as an act of God's nature, an alligator gets hold of Tommy, and rips him apart. The crimes that one commits always catch up, sooner or later, in some form or another. The sheer evil of the acts committed consistently by Tommy manifest themselves in the form of the justice that is delivered to him.

Thankfully, Skink survives not only his heart attack, but the bullet wound he endures courtesy of Tommy. Skink has come to mean a lot to Richard and to Malley. For Malley, Skink is one of the two men who have rescued her; for Richard, he has found a grandfatherly figure that has helped to guide him in a moral direction, the sort of which he never had before. The fact that Skink has become such an important role model and grandfather figure to Richard is reflected in the fact that Richard sincerely hopes to see Skink again. At the same time, the kidnapping ordeal has brought Malley closer together with her parents, and closer together with Richard. Family becomes central to both of their lives.

Richard's journey also comes to an end as the novel concludes. Not only has Richard come to value family more than he ever has before, and not only has Richard come to believe in himself as he never did before, but Richard completes the moral task he knows he must. When he returns to Saint Augustine, he pays back the shop owner for the stolen skateboard deck, and apologizes for what he did. Richard has not only taken responsibility for what he has done, but has also managed to ensure that the crime he committed has a fitting, and just end. Additionally, Skink ensures that a memorial fund is set up to honor the name of Earl Talbo Chock so that his name is not forever linked to the thug, Tommy.

Discussion Question 1

What ultimately becomes of Skink? What does he do with respect to the real Earl Talbo Chock? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What does Richard ultimately do about the skateboard deck that he stole? Why? What does this say about his moral character?



Discussion Question 3

How does Richard's attitude toward family change as a result of the journey he has undertaken? Why?

Vocabulary

temptation, bulky, mystified, provoked, vigilance, dubious, improbable, abnormally, meandering, regally, surreal



Characters

Richard

Richard Sloan is the fourteen year-old main character and narrator of Carl Hiaasen's novel *Skink*. Richard is a generally kind, compassionate, environmentally-conscious, and intelligent though hesitant and uncertain kid who spends much of his free time with his rebellious cousin, Malley. Richard gets along well with his family, including his mother and stepfather, while missing his dead biological father deeply. It is while waiting for Malley at the beach that Richard first comes to suspect something must be wrong, and inadvertently meets Skink. When Richard learns that Malley has run off with an older man, it is Skink who urges Richard to let his parents know. When Richard learns that Skink is setting out to find Malley, he decides to go along. In his journey with Skink, Richard becomes more courageous and more morally-astute, coming to value doing the right thing over the easy thing. This includes not only rescuing Malley, but paying back a skate shop for a skateboard deck Richard once stole.

Skink

Clint "Skink" Tyree is a seventy-two year old hermit environmentalist, slippery as a skink, living off roadkill and keeping to the wild in order to thwart poachers and polluters. A combat veteran in Vietnam and former governor of the State of Florida, Skink grew disenchanted with politics and disappeared. Now presumed dead thanks to a report filed at his request by his best friend, Jim Tile, Skink is now free to do as he wishes. He encounters Richard on the beach while seeking to stop a particular poacher, and later relies on Richard to help him escape the authorities when he knocks the poacher unconscious. Skink decides to find Malley as a way to avoid scrutiny over the poacher, and becomes a grandfather figure and moral guide to Richard, urging Richard to always do the right thing. Skink and Richard are successful in freeing Malley, after which time Skink disappears once more so that he can establish a memorial scholarship fund in the name of Earl Talbo Chock.

Malley

Malley Spence is the nine-day-younger, fourteen year-old cousin of Richard. Brilliant and rebellious, pretty and spirited, Malley is due to be sent away to a boarding school in New Hampshire even though she does not want to go. While online, she meets a man claiming to be named Talbo Chock, and develops a crush on him. She agrees to run away with him when she explains her boarding school situation, only to discover that Talbo is actually Tommy, and that Tommy is nothing like his online persona. She places frequent calls to her parents and to Richard, dropping clues about her location. She is ultimately rescued by Richard and Skink, and is thrilled to return home where she grows closer to her parents and her family.



Tommy Chalmers/Talbo Chock/Terwin Crossley

Terwin Crossley is a twenty-six year-old thug from Mississippi who has a rap sheet that includes everything from burglary to aggravated stalking. He assumes the name Tommy Chalmers, and later Talbo Chock, to commit crimes and to have a fake online persona. It is online that he meets and becomes obsessed with Malley, lying about who he is and what he does in order to convince her to run away with him. He then holds her captive and refuses to let her go. He is ultimately confronted by Richard and Skink. When he tries to escape, an alligator eats him.

Earl Talbo Chock

Earl Talbo Chock is a dead U.S. Marine who was killed while serving in Afghanistan. It is Chock's identity that Tommy comes to steal, as well as the eulogy and car of the pastor presiding over Chock's funeral. By all counts, Chock was a good, decent, and honorable young man who was a hero to all who knew him. Skink later begins a memorial scholarship fund in Chock's name to ensure that the crimes of Tommy will not ruin Chock's good name.

Jim Tile

Jim Tile is a retired Florida State Trooper who is also good friends with Skink, going way back. It is Jim Tile who helps provide for Skink, and ensures that Skink is able to get around and survive when he cannot do so on his own. It is Tile who arranges a driver's license for Richard, and who later helps track down Richard, Skink, and Malley, ensuring they have a way to get out of the swamp by the Choctawhatchee River.

Trent

Trent is the stepfather of Richard. He is a kind, simple, and casual man who gets along well with Richard. Trent has an obsession with Bigfoot. When Richard's mother goes to visit his older brothers at college, Richard stays home with Trent. This allows him to get Beth to trick Trent into believing Richard is going on a camping trip rather than a rescue mission.

Richard's Mom

Richard's mom, a sweet but firm woman, is a lawyer in a small firm specializing in environmental cases. She is horrified by Malley's abduction. She is terrified when her son heads off to find Malley on his own. She constantly urges him to come home. She reminds him that he only has so much time before she contacts the authorities about what is going on.



Nickel

Nickel is a gruff but kindhearted fisherman who plies his trade on the Choctawhatchee River. It is Nickel who helps Richard reach the houseboat, and it is Nickel who accepts only a small payment for his services. It is later Nickel and his brother, Dime, who guide Jim Tile to the location of the houseboat so that Richard, Malley, and Skink can be rescued.

Detective Trujillo

Detective Trujillo is the police detective in charge of the investigation into Malley's disappearance. He is helpful, intelligent, and kind. He struggles to keep ahead of the case. Nevertheless, he provides a source of reassurance and comfort for Malley's family, as the authorities seek to recover her safely.



Symbols and Symbolism

Letter to T.C.

A letter to "T.C." is discovered in Malley's room by Richard. The letter apologizes for her having to leave for boarding school. The letter is designed either as a red herring –as a way to throw everyone off from the fact that Malley has run away with Talbo –or as a clue to reveal everything she didn't do –going away to school in New Hampshire. Richard is never able to fully decide which, but is able to piece together what must have happened because of the letter.

Eulogy

A eulogy celebrating the life of Earl Talbo Chock is written by the pastor presiding over his funeral. A copy of the eulogy is kept in his Camry, which is then stolen by Tommy Chalmers. The eulogy contains important information about Chock's life, which Tommy uses to pose as an impostor.

Toyota Camry

A White 2007 Toyota Camry is driven by the pastor who delivers the eulogy at Chock's funeral. The Camry is distinguished by the small, pellet-sized bullet hole in the back windshield, accidentally caused by the pastor's son with his pellet gun. The Camry is later stolen by Tommy, who then uses it to kidnap Malley. To avoid capture and being followed, Tommy later sinks the Camry in the Choctawhatchee River.

Skink

A skink is a kind of lizard that is slippery, quick, and agile. It is Jim Tile who describes the elusiveness of Clint Tyree as being similar to a skink. As a result, Clint Tyree takes on the nickname "Skink," which makes his elusiveness all the more legendary. "Skink sightings" occur all across Florida, and are always reported online.

Cashbox

A cash box containing almost ten-thousand dollars is given to Skink by Jim Tile following departure from Loggerhead. The cash is part of the money earned by Skink during his previous life. Tile keeps it, in case Skink need it again. Following the rescue of Malley, Skink begins a memorial scholarship fund in the real Earl Talbo Chock's name with the money to ensure that only positive things are associated with Chock's memory.



Handcuffs

Handcuffs are kept by Tommy Chalmers during his abduction of Malley. He uses the handcuffs to keep her chained to the steering wheel of the houseboat. The handcuffs leave horrible bruises and raw skin on Malley's wrists. The marks demonstrate to Richard that Malley has been kept against her will for a long while.

Gray Suitcase

A gray suitcase belonging to Tommy is discovered by Richard and Malley in the water of the Choctawhatchee River. The suitcase contains stolen license plates, credit and debit cards, two disposable cellphones, and a binder full of photos and correspondence with Malley. The gray suitcase is essentially the possession which enabled Tommy to carry out his kidnapping scheme.

Ivory-billed Woodpecker

An ivory-billed woodpecker, also known as the Lord God Bird, is spotted by Richard and Malley on the banks of the Choctawhatchee River. The bird is symbolic of both the intervention of God and the rescue of Malley. As Richard and Malley look up to the woodpecker, it becomes metaphorical for looking up to God and for being thankful for their deliverance. As such, they are amazed to know God is still around. Secondly, the finding of the elusive woodpecker, presumed extinct, as safe and alive is reflective of Malley being found, safe and alive.

Alligators

Alligators roam the waters of the Choctawhatchee River. They are a symbol of justice in God's natural world. At the end of the novel, Tommy Chalmers is ripped apart and eaten by an alligator when he tries to flee to escape justice. The end he encounters is considered fitting, given the evil and heartache that he caused in the world.

Memorial Scholarship Fund

A memorial scholarship fund in the name of Earl Talbo Chock is established at Northwest Florida State College by Skink. Skink anonymously donates nearly ten-thousand dollars to set up the fund. It is his way of honoring not only the military service of Chock, but a way to ensure that only positive things are associated with his name.



Settings

Florida

Florida is the southernmost state in the United States. It is known for its warm weather, beaches, wilderness areas, and alligators.. It is in Florida that Skink: No Surrender is set. The beach at Loggerhead, the town of Loggerhead, Panama City, and the Choctawhatchee River can all be found in Florida. The events of the novel entirely take place within the state of Florida, and the search that Richard and Skink conduct to find Malley and bring Tommy to justice brings them across the state, from Loggerhead to Panama City, and then a little farther up the coast to the Choctawhatchee River.

The beach

The beach at Loggerhead is located outside the town of Loggerhead, Florida. Loggerhead's beach is a popular spot for locals and tourists to enjoy during warm weather days, and is popular place for locals and environmentalists to protect sea turtle nests at night. It is at the beach at night that Richard originally arranges to meet Malley at a certain time to watch over a sea turtle nest, but Malley never arrives. This is what first causes Richard to suspect that something may be wrong. It is also on the beach that Richard first encounters Skink, who is buried in the sand disguised as a sea turtle nest, hoping to trap a notorious poacher.

Loggerhead

Loggerhead is a small town located on the coast in southern Florida. Loggerhead is known as a town popular with tourists who come to see the beaches during the day, and with environmentalists at night who wish to protect sea turtle nests. Loggerhead appears to be a close-knit community, for word of Malley's disappearance travels quickly. However, the small town atmosphere also means the local police force isn't entirely prepared to handle Malley's disappearance, as Richard and Skink end up being able to track down Malley when the police are not.

Panama City

Panama City is a city located in the Florida panhandle, not far from the Choctawhatchee River. Panama City appears only briefly in the novel as Richard and Skink stop on its outskirts by its bridge. There, they discover one of the places where Malley has called Richard due to the drawbridge that can be seen, and the tugboat horns that can be heard. This leads them on farther up the coast to the Choctawhatchee River.



Choctawhatchee River

The Choctawhatchee River, located in northwestern Florida's Panhandle, is where Malley is taken by Tommy due to its relatively remote landscape, most of which is only accessible by boat. Most of the river is surrounded by swamps and heavy swamp forest populated by wild pigs and alligators. There, Tommy holes up in an old boathouse with Malley, where he keeps her against her will. Richard and Skink later confront Tommy at the houseboat, where during a struggle, Richard and Skink help Malley to escape. It is later down the river that Tommy tries to escape, but is eaten by an alligator.



Themes and Motifs

Journey to Find Oneself

Carl Hiaasen explores the thematic idea that journey is a means to find oneself in his novel *Skink: No Surrender*. In the novel, not only does Richard undertake a physical journey to find his cousin, Malley, but the journey becomes a process of self-discovery and self-growth for Richard. This is, in large part, thanks to the grandfatherly influence of Skink.

When the novel begins and Richard learns that Malley has run away with an older man, he hesitates to say anything because he doesn't want to get in trouble for the crime he committed in Saint Augustine, which Malley threatens to expose him for. It is only through conversing with Skink that Richard comes to accept the fact that his cousin's safety is far more important than being grounded or getting in trouble in some other way. Even before he leaves on the actual, physical journey, Richard has already begun his journey of moral growth.

Richard's moral growth isn't the only thing that occurs on the journey. Richard also experiences growth by way of his confidence in himself and in his abilities. With the dramatic situation where Skink has his foot run over, Richard must find within himself the courage to learn how to drive at the age of fourteen. It is something he has never done before, but knows that the very fate of the journey to find Malley rests on his efforts. With Skink's help and encouragement, Richard learns how to drive, and gains confidence in the things he thought he could never do.

Although the journey to stop Tommy and to save Malley has been successful toward the end of the novel, the journey of self-discovery has not yet concluded for Richard. Even though Skink has ordered Richard and Malley to get away from the houseboat, Richard and Malley decide they cannot leave Skink behind. For Richard and for Malley, this is a question of moral rightness rather than personal safety. It is a clear sign of moral growth that they should be more concerned about Skink's life than their own safety. Later, Richard's decision to pay back the shopkeeper from whom Richard stole a skateboard deck is testimony to his moral growth and maturation as a person.

Trouble, as the Reminder of the Importance of Family and Friends

In the novel, Carl Hiaasen uses trouble as a way to remind people of the importance of family and friends. While Richard and Malley may love their family and appreciate one another, it is only in troubled times that they truly come to value that which is most important. This occurs when Malley is kidnapped. Her sudden absence is deeply felt, especially by Richard.



Richard and Malley are not just cousins, but best friends. When Malley disappears, Richard's world is rocked. He realizes how much he really does love Malley, and how important in his life she is. When Skink announces that he is going to head out to find Malley, Richard cannot be deterred from going along with him. The love of family—and the desire to see a heartbroken family made whole again—drive Richard on to do whatever is necessary to ensure that Malley is returned safe and sound.

Richard, who has fast struck up a friendship with Skink, soon comes to see Skink as a grandfather figure. This occurs not only because Skink and Richard are united in a common cause, and not only because Richard pretends to be Skink's grandson, but because Richard truly feels a connection with Skink. Skink not only teaches Richard how to drive, but delivers important lessons and moral advice, the kind of which Richard has not previously received. Richard, who does not have a grandfather figure in his life, quickly finds such a figure in Skink as a result. While everything else may be chaotic around him, Richard knows he can depend on Skink.

When Malley is rescued, she too quickly comes to befriend Skink not only because Skink has helped to rescue her, but because she senses in Skink a good person. Upon her return home, Malley reconnects with, and grows closer to her parents. She has learned her lesson about valuing others—especially strangers—over family. Richard, meanwhile, honors the memory of his father and his own moral compass by paying back the shopkeeper for the skateboard deck that he stole. Richard also continues to consider Skink a grandfather figure, hoping that he will see Skink again someday.

Effect of the Past on the Present

The past has significant bearing on the present in Carl Hiaasen's novel, *Skink: No Surrender*. The past—essentially a person's history—is critical in understanding who that person is in the present, and what present circumstances are. The kidnapping of Malley brings up the past in many ways.

When Richard discovers that Malley has run off with an older man, his impulse is to tell his parents and Malley's parents. Malley, however, threatens Richard with his past, saying she will expose his theft of a skateboard deck in Saint Augustine three years before if he says anything about her departure. Richard, with Skink's encouragement, ultimately decides to overcome his fear of the past by telling his parents about Malley. The theft, which has long haunted Richard, is set right by Richard at the end of the novel when he overcomes the past by paying for the skateboard deck that he stole.

Skink, who has a lifetime of mistakes behind him, reminds Richard that it is always important to do the moral thing. Skink's past includes not only a combat tour in Vietnam, but an incomplete term as Florida governor, which he ran for in order to do away with corruption in politics. Unable to make progress, Skink simply disappeared from the limelight. Whatever Skink's greatest past mistake might be is never revealed due to Richard's desire to protect Skink, but it is clear this past mistake compels Skink to do



any good thing he can in the present to atone for it. Skink directly experiences his past on an almost nightly basis in his dreams.

The man that Richard and Skink confront –the man who has kidnapped Malley –has his own past as well, though much of it is largely unknown. What is known is that the man, Terwin Crossley, is twenty-six years old and a thug from Mississippi. He has a rap sheet a mile long, with crimes ranging from burglary to aggravated assault. Somewhere along the way, he assumed the name Tommy Chalmers, which he then began to shed in exchange for the name Talbo Chock. All of the crimes, cruelty, and evil things Terwin was responsible for ultimately catch up to him in the present, as he has no qualms about lying to and kidnapping a fourteen year-old girl, which ultimately results in his death by alligator.

No Crime Goes Unpunished

No crime goes unpunished or unaccounted for in Carl Hiaasen's novel, *Skink: No Surrender*. This includes crimes both large and small, serious and simple. While it is often believed that sometimes criminals of any stripe escape justice, this is clearly not the case in Hiaasen's world.

First, Malley believes she is going to effortlessly be able to run away with an older man without any ramifications. This quickly turns out to be false, as the man she runs away with turns out to be a hardened, evil, and mentally unstable criminal. Malley's rebelliousness has turned against her, for she now relies on the very people she was running away from –her family –to save her. At the same time, Richard lies to his parents about what he is doing so that he might travel with Skink to track down Malley. Richard's mother easily discovers the ruse, and holds Richard to account. Richard apologizes and vows to be home within seventy-two hours.

While on vacation in Saint Augustine a few years before, Richard stole a skateboard deck from a local shop when his mother would not buy it for him. The act has eaten away at Richard for the past few years –the kind of guilt which Skink describes as a bear. Richard refuses to let the situation go, as at the end of the novel, he holds himself to account for his crime. He returns to the skateshop not only to apologize, but to pay the store owner back for the stolen merchandise.

The greatest form of justice in the novel comes against the criminal Terwin Crossley. Not only did Crossley impersonate another man (Tommy Chalmers) who impersonated yet another man (Earl Talbo Chock, and a war hero at that) who ran away with an underage girl, but Crossley has a long rap sheet of convictions for things like burglary and aggravated assault. Richard recognizes that Crossley has an evil streak in him. While trying to escape from Richard, Skink, and Malley, Crossley is mauled and eaten by an alligator. It is the most basic form of justice imaginable, as God's nature claims that which is unnatural –Crossley.



Fate Is More Influential than Free Will

In Carl Hiaasen's novel *Skink: No Surrender*, fate is more influential than free will. Fate is the idea that things primarily happen by design and intent, sometimes according to a higher plan rather than by free will, which posits that human actions and human choices decide how world events and situations work out. With fate, the choices made by people do not matter because they are seen as having been bound to happen anyway.

Fate can be seen through an examination of the events of the novel in reverse. Malley would never have needed rescuing by Skink and Richard if she had never run off with an older man-turned-kidnapper in the first place, or if she had not been rebellious. Richard would have never made it to the houseboat on the Choctawhatchee River to rescue Malley without Skink's assistance. Skink's assistance would have been worthless if Skink had never served in the military in Vietnam, or had spent the last thirty or forty years roaming in the wild. Skink would never encountered Richard if Skink had not gone into the wild with the intent to ruin the effort of poachers and polluters.

Likewise, Skink would have never committed to environmental efforts if he had not been governor. Skink would never have been governor if he had not decided to run to clean up politics and help the lives of Floridians. He would not have been inspired to help people if he had not served in Vietnam. His inspiration to help people would not have resulted in his election to the governor's mansion if he had not been swept to victory with help from people like Richard's grandmother, who campaigned for Skink. Additionally, if Skink had been successful in cleaning up politics as governor, he never would have disappeared and gone into the wild.

At the same time, Malley would never have been kidnapped had Terwin Crossley not preyed upon her. Terwin's ability to prey on Malley was made possible only by his decision to adopt the identity of Talbo Chock. This was necessary because of a criminal record he had accumulated under his assumed name, Tommy Chalmers. His real name, Terwin Crossley, was connected to various crimes.

Terwin Crossley never would have met his fate in the jaws of an alligator if he had not kidnapped Malley. He might have gone on to commit other crimes. The entire situation is later attributed by Richard and Malley to God's plans. They see a metaphorical representation of God in the ivory-billed woodpecker that appears above them. No matter what man does, God prevails.

The Danger of Trusting/Meeting People Online

Carl Hiaasen makes the case for young readers that it can be dangerous to trust and meet people online in his novel *Skink: No Surrender*. He does this through the underlying catalyst for Richard's journey to find Malley -Malley's own encounter with a man she met online. What Malley hopes will be an escape from boarding school in New Hampshire turns out to be the most terrifying ordeal yet in her young life.



When she first meets Talbo Chock online, Talbo seems especially kind and interested in listening to the things that Malley has to say. This is in contrast to her own parents, whom Malley feels are only interested in deciding things about her life without her consent. When Talbo offers to take Malley away, she agrees to go along on the condition that he will bring her back if she asks. Malley believe she can trust Talbo, especially when Talbo reveals his name to be Tommy Chalmers. Malley unwittingly accepts Tommy's false story about Talbo being his best friend as proof that Tommy is honest and can be trusted.

However, things go south for Malley fairly quickly after Tommy picks her up from the airport. Within a few days, the romantic air around running away with Tommy fades as Tommy begins to control and restrict her access to her phone. He refuses to bring her home. Tommy goes thorough such lengths to keep Malley around that he actually handcuffs her to the houseboat that he steals. Who Tommy is in real life is far different than his online persona, as Malley herself readily admits to Richard later in the novel. In other words, she confesses that she has been fooled.

As the reader later learns, this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Tommy Chalmers. Tommy's real name is Terwin Crossley. He has a long criminal record, which includes stalking. Crossley is far older than he pretends to be, both online and then again in person as Tommy Chalmers. This further reinforces Malley's consideration about how easily she was fooled online and how she will not trust anyone online again.

Styles

Point of View

Carl Hiaasen tells his novel *Skink: No Surrender* in the first-person, reflective, narrative mode from the point of view of main character and principal protagonist, Richard Sloane. With the authorities unable to make real progress in the search for Malley, Richard and Skink become the people who ultimately bring about Malley's return. Because of this, Richard comes to record the story of how he and Skink managed to free Malley. Given that Richard was one of those involved in Malley's release, it is only natural that he should write in first-person since he is writing about something he directly, personally experienced. He directly references himself consistently throughout the book. Readers know that what they are reading is something that Richard has written because, in Chapter 11, Richard breaks the fourth wall to tell readers that he will not set down Skink's darkest secret "in these pages." The writing also takes on a reflective tone because Richard is writing about things which happened in the past. For example, in Chapter 22, he notes that some of the events he describes he did not learn about until later. For that reason, he has filled in some of the details on his own.

Language and Meaning

Carl Hiaasen tells his novel *Skink: No Surrender* in language that is simple and straightforward. It is laced with teenager's vernacular. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the novel is told from the point of view of main character and principal protagonist, Richard Sloane, who is a fourteen-year-old boy. The language utilized is reflective both of his age and his level of education. In addition, words common among teenagers in 2010, such as "super cool" and "super awesome," among others, can be found throughout the course of the book. This adds a sense of realism and authenticity to the novel, making the characterization of Richard as a teenager very believable. Secondly, the novel—which falls into the young adult category—is principally aimed at an audience of young adults. It is only natural that the simple and straightforward language used be reflective of that age range and level of education.

Structure

Carl Hiaasen divides his novel *Skink: No Surrender* into twenty-four consecutive, linear, chronological, numbered chapters, beginning with 1 and ending with 24. The simple and straightforward structure of the novel is common among books in the young adult genre, and is reflective of the simple and straightforward language utilized by the author. The basic approach to the actual structure of the novel's chapters allows the reader to easily transition between the events contained in each chapter, chapter by chapter, and to remain focused on the plot of the novel. This is also reflective of the step-by-step approach that Richard and Skink undertake in their journey to find Malley. They must

work from clue to clue to find her, just as the reader must work from chapter to chapter to pursue the events of the plot.



Quotes

I walked down to the beach and waited for Malley, but she didn't show up.

-- Richard (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: Malley's disappearance is treated from the very start of the novel, setting the stage for Richard's journey to find her. Malley, though a wild child, is always on time. When Malley does not arrive on time to meet Richard, Richard immediately worries where she is. As he will later learn, she has run off with an older man she met online named T.C.

Except the man was still alive.

-- Richard (Chapter 2 paragraph 52)

Importance: Richard meets former Florida governor Clint Tyree on the shore while waiting for Malley. Having been unable to change politics, Clint left office and disappeared after which he surfaced from time to time fighting poachers and began going by the name "Skink." He is believed dead, but as Richard learns, Clint "Skink" Tyree is very much still alive. Richard's encounter with Skink will have important consequences, as Skink ultimately becomes a part of the search for Malley.

And now somebody had stolen his name, somebody who'd tricked my cousin Malley into running away with him.

-- Richard (Chapter 3 paragraph 3)

Importance: Through Skink's help, Richard learns that the man Malley has run away with is not really the man she thinks she has run away with. The man is using the name of a dead U.S. Marine, Earl Talbo Chock. Who the man is himself is unknown. Skink urges Richard to tell Malley's parents, but Richard has a secret he doesn't want to come out.

We are who we are.

-- Skink (Chapter 7 paragraph 40)

Importance: Richard protests when Skink empties beer into the fuel tank of a polluter's SUV. He is worried not only about getting in trouble, but losing time from finding Malley. Skink responds that people are who they are and that they will do what they will do. Skink's observation is a simple, but very true statement. It was in his nature to seek revenge against a polluter, because that is who he is. It is in Richard's nature to want to find his cousin to make sure she is safe, because that is who he is.

How's Dad doing?

-- Malley (Chapter 9 paragraph 56)

Importance: Richard finally manages to get Malley on the phone again, but she sounds tired and out of it. He is able to learn about her location by asking her loaded questions.



For example, he asks Malley if she needs help to ask about how her Dad is doing. She does this, causing Richard to recognize that Malley is indeed in trouble, and in need of serious help.

Guilt is a bear. You'll feel liberated afterwards.

-- Skink (Chapter 11 paragraph 77)

Importance: Skink learns that Richard's Saint Augustine crime consisted of stealing a skateboard deck his mother wouldn't buy for him because it reminded them of the one Richard's father was riding when he was killed. Skink tells Richard that he must pay the shop back the next time he is in Saint Augustine, and that it is the moral thing to do. Richard agrees. Skink goes on to explain that guilt will tear someone apart like a bear, and that to confess and come clean is liberating.

He was gone. I was alone. And Malley was still out there, in trouble.

-- Richard (Chapter 12 paragraph 6)

Importance: When Richard and Skink lose the canoe, Skink jumps into the river, says he will be back, and begins swimming. Skink does not return right away, which causes Richard to worry and lose hope. He recognizes he is now alone in the middle of nowhere, and that even worse, he is unable to help Malley.

Whatever personal issues Tommy Chalmers might have had during his life, it was a streak of pure evil that made him go after my cousin.

-- Richard (Chapter 16 paragraph 74)

Importance: When Tommy holds Malley, Richard, and Skink hostage, Richard comes to recognize that Tommy is evil. No normal person would kidnap a fourteen year-old girl, and hold her cousin, and an old man hostage at gunpoint. This demonstrates the true depravity of Tommy, as well as his recklessness which makes him very dangerous.

We're all a part of something bigger now.

-- Skink (Chapter 17 paragraph 5)

Importance: Here, Skink, Richard, Malley, and Tommy are all onboard the houseboat which has lost both its anchor and its engine power. They are adrift on the river, prompting the governor to say that they are all a part of something bigger, now – something beyond their control or intentions. Skink's philosophical observation can also be applied to the overall situation. Skink, an environmentalist, is now trying to help free Malley. Richard, a normal kid, has also been caught up in the situation. Malley, a rebellious teenager, never though she would end up a hostage.

Skink had survived war and a multitude of other perilous adventures. My cousin had survived a kidnapping, and I'd survived the hunt to track her down.

-- Richard (Chapter 22 paragraph 51)

Importance: Richard recounts the ordeals that he, Malley, and Skink have been



through. They are now engaged in a hunt to track down and stop Tommy from escaping. They have each found inner strength that they never knew they had to do these things, and rely on this strength to track down Tommy. As Skink once said, people are who they are.

I'm not sure what I heard, but for whatever reason we both raised our eyes. Poised high in a moss-draped cypress was the Lord God Bird, one bright eye slanted down toward us.

-- Richard (Chapter 23 paragraph 52)

Importance: After Tommy is eaten by an alligator, Richard and Malley settle down on a tree stump on the shore of the river. Both look up to discover an ivory-billed woodpecker above them, still alive and watching them. This scene can be viewed in two ways. First, Richard and Malley look up to the bird, which is metaphorical for looking up to God, thankful for their deliverance and amazed to know God is still around. Secondly, the finding of the elusive woodpecker as safe and alive is reflective of Malley being found, safe and alive.

Terwin Crossley had acted alone, and died alone.

-- Richard (Chapter 24 paragraph 51)

Importance: Following Tommy's death by alligator, it is revealed that Tommy is actually the assumed name of Terwin Crossley, a convicted criminal from Mississippi. With Crossley dead, there is no need for a court case or any kind of follow-up investigation. Crossley had acted on his own and died by his own evil work.