

The Simple Art of Murder Study Guide

The Simple Art of Murder by Raymond Chandler

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Plot Summary

The Simple Art of Murder, by famous American mystery author Raymond Chandler, is a collection of short stories revolving around murders and the criminal world. Centered on the city of Los Angeles and the surrounding area in the 1950s, Chandler's life and knowledge of the criminal underworld was one of intimate familiarity, and nearly all of the stories in this collection involve the film industry and politics in one way or another. In fact, politicians in Chandler's stories are commonly responsible for grave criminal acts, such as blackmail and murder.

The police in Chandler's time were equally corrupt, as many of the characters featured in these stories readily demonstrate. As stated in his essay of the same name, American detective stories were often viewed as second rate, until the introduction of Dashiell Hammet in the early twentieth century, whose attempts at realism helped to change the structure of the American mystery story. Chandler follows this tradition, and is a famous mystery novelist himself, and continues to emulate Hammet in many ways throughout his career.

The stories presented in this collection are best articulated through the understanding of a formula introduced briefly in Chandler's essay. Each story revolves around a crime, which usually consists of a series of murders. The perpetrator is almost always a character well-known to the protagonist, who is almost always a detective with connections to the underground in some way (the notable exception in this collection being "Pearls are a Nuisance," which seems to intentionally flout the structure and tone of Chandler's other stories). This detective usually has a romantic interest, and generally receives help from at least one close confidant, whose life is almost always sacrificed while trying to help the main character figure out who was responsible for the original murder. Bodies tend to pile up quickly in all of the stories, the villains wind up dead, sometimes even from each other, and none of the main characters ever allow the police to deal with matters directly. This is because the world that Chandler has created in these stories runs rife with corruption, so that the only justice the murder victims will ever get comes from the determination of a single detective. These detectives are motivated by a broad and flexible sense of right and wrong, since there is already so much wrong with the world in which they live, but they are determined in their individual quests and always steadfast in helping those they view as innocent or undeserving of the brutal crimes inflicted on them. Their grisly nature sets them apart from British mysteries just as much as their dialogue and dramatic structure, for English mysteries had begun to drift away from plausibility long before Chandler had his start as a writer. This fact marks this collection of a perfect example of early American crime fiction. Although the genre has been carried on by a number of excellent authors since Chandler's time, he remains nonetheless one of the most renowned of all, making The Simple Art of Murder a perfect collection by which to judge the rest.



The Simple Art of Murder

The Simple Art of Murder Summary

Fiction is typically meant to be realistic. Detective stories are no exception, though they do not generally succeed in lifting the reader's spirits or adding to their enjoyment of life. Additionally, they seldom succeed in having the appearance of reality in the first place, having to possess a series of convenient coincidences and massive oversights in order for the mystery to work at all, and they also tend to be very self-contained, somewhat formulaic works. There are many avid readers who resent how quickly classic works of literature are forgotten, but for the most part, genuinely well-written detective stories don't go out of style in the same way as other classics, while detective stories of much lower quality tend to get published in comparison to other works of literature. Even more so, there is a large difference between a good novel and a bad one, while there is only a slight difference between a good detective story and a bad one. Authors of detective stories tend to be experts in one subject only, which can create massive deficiencies elsewhere in their work. All detective stories function as puzzles and brain-teasers, and even the best written works have major errors in them.

Whatever the case, the stories have changed very little over the decades. In reality, the easiest murder cases to solve are generally the ones represented in detective stories, as the murderers tend to leave incredible amounts of clues in the process of the murder, and the most difficult ones are when the murderer decides to kill only moments before he or she does so, but writers cannot write about these murders because they do not make good stories. Attempts to qualify this type of literature as "literature of escape" overlook the fact that all forms of art are one form of escape or another. The most successful author of the detective novel is an author known as Dashiell Hammet, who gave his readers the impression that his characters actually lived in the real world. This novelist's writing actually follows a trend that began in other forms of literature long before he began writing. Many critics of Hammet insist that he was not even the author of detective fiction, and define works of detective fiction as ones in which the story revolves around a single murder. Yet, even Hammet's stories exist in a world where crime is extraordinarily common, and Hammet's only true difference from non-American authors is that he is highly capable of making these worlds seem real. Naturally, even though these worlds are somewhat grim, elements of heroism exist, and the reader does glean a sense of resolution at the end of the novel, even if things are not entirely successfully brought to a close. The main characters of a strong detective story must possess certain traits that reflect both a common person with flaws and fears and a heroic one at the same time.

The Simple Art of Murder Analysis

This essay is a brief but informative and insightful deconstruction of the genre of detective or mystery stories. The author has written with a very subdued and



unassuming voice here in many places, but Chandler is at least as famous of a mystery writer as Dashiell Hammett, the writer he uses as an example of a well-regarded mystery author. Chandler examines Hammett's career after taking apart several other once popular mystery stories and uses Hammett to support the idea that fiction is at its best when it appears to mimic reality, and that Hammett's so-called uniqueness is just this very observation applied in the service of the detective story. The main idea of Chandler's essay is to suggest that detective stories represent a class of fiction that is by no means an important or critical one, as even the stories that are well-written lack a sense of grounded realism. At the same time, Chandler also argues that aside from the fact that the world of a detective story must necessarily be different from our own, the distinctions between this type of fiction and literary fiction are often made far more important than they are by critics.



Spanish Blood

Spanish Blood Summary

Big John Masters plays blackjack with Dave Aage. Aage suddenly gets a call, and afterwards tells Masters that one of their political rivals, Donovan Marr, is dead. At the site of the murder, Sam and Pete investigate. Sam had once been friends with Marr. They discover Imlay's name on the appointment dockette. Imlay is a judge running for election with Masters and Aage. A forensics expert enters, and while he doubts that the murder will stay much of a mystery for long, Sam believes it may have been a romantic conflict. A phone call comes for Sam and he's called off of the case. Though he tells Pete he wasn't given a reason why he was taken off the case, he believes it has to do with his old friendship with Marr. He passes Marr's secretary on the way out and sees that she has been crying. From there, he travels out to the Marr's house to check on the victim's wife. Her name is Belle, and Sam knows her from his friendship with Marr. He tells her that everyone is under the impression that Imlay is the murderer, but that he isn't entirely sure himself, and that he's not supposed to be working on the case. Afterwards, he travels to the Marr cabin, where the victim spent much of his time. He finds a body underneath a pile of wood, then covers the body up and returns to his car. From there he goes to a bar where he meets up with a man who has been following him since he left the Marr cabin. The man announces he's a game warden, and discovers a young doe in the back of Sam Delaguerra's car. Sam shows him his badge and tells him he's a police officer, and the warden rides back towards town with him. On the way, Sam intentionally veers his vehicle off the road, catching the warden by surprise and throwing him out of the vehicle.

Back at his office, Sam has a number of calls waiting for him, but leaves for home and gets another call from Belle Marr when he arrives. She's afraid for him and wants him to come see her. On his way out he destroys several phone messages from someone named Joey Chill, then he goes back to the police station where Marcus tells him that the chief wants to speak with him. Sam asks Marcus if he saw the police commissioner find the photos at the crime scene, since whoever committed the murder was smart enough to remove the shells, but somehow managed to forget evidence that could make the situation look very bad for them. When Sam goes to the chief, he gets scolded for that way he treated the game warden and is made to hand in his badge. Sam insists that the game warden planted the dead animal, and that he's being kept from the case because he was friends with Marr, and that everyone assumes he was taking bribes from him. Drew tells him that Imlay has already admitted to the murder, and that all Sam needs to do to get his badge back is apologize to the game warden. Delaguerra refuses.

From there, Delaguerra goes to Stoll's Billiard Parlors to visit Max Chill, and finds that Joey Chill is there also. He's attacked by a man suddenly, but fights him off, then goes to see Joey, who tells him that his sister, Stella Chill, was the girl in the photos with Imlay. Stella framed Imlay for possession of heroin, taken from the same person who



attacked Sam at the pool hall. Stella and his man, known as the Caliente Kid, drugged Imlay, and Joey followed him to Aage's apartment later. Max Chill also knows the story, but paid Stella to leave town so that everyone could stay out of trouble. Joey plans to leave town because he's afraid of Aage, but he's shot suddenly in the head. He returns to the pool hall and asks Stoll where Max Chill is, and Stoll tells him he lives at the Mansfield.

Meanwhile, Toribo, the Caliente Kid, is already at the Mansfield looking for Max. He threatens a bellhop to obtain Max's hotel number, then forces his way into the room. He shoots Max several times, but is caught by Delaguerra who knocks him out and ties him up. He chokes the Caliente Kid with wire until he agrees to talk. Delaguerra goes to Toomey, where Stella is. The two fight briefly before Sam is knocked out. When he wakes up, he finds himself surrounded by Masters, Stella, Aage, and Drew the police commissioner. They plan to kill Sam, but he tells them they don't even know what they are trying to cover up. He tells them that Imlay was dead before Marr, and that he found Imlay's body at Marr's cabin. Marr is responsible for Imlay's death, and Stella is the one who killed Marr. Stella shoots masters, and Aage manages to shoot Stella, then tries to shoot Delaguerra, but Delaguerra shoots him first. Drew says that their story will be that Sam had to go undercover and Delaguerra had to be framed in order to draw out the real killers.

Later, he goes back to Belle and tells her he always had a hunch that a woman shot Donny. He's gotten his badge back, and he's also figured out that Belle is the one who killed him for cheating on her with other women constantly. She offers to give herself up, but he tells her that the city is better off with the story as it is.

Spanish Blood Analysis

This is a detective story set amidst a backdrop of political corruption, with city officials acting like nothing more than members of the mob. In fact, it is made painfully clear that the people in charge of the city make routine use of criminals to blackmail and murder people they view to be threatening. In the middle of the corrupt politicians, thieves, drug dealers, and murderers, is Delaguerra. From his interactions with his partner, Marcus, we know that Delaguerra is an honest detective. He takes no bribes, concerns himself with the truth of the cases he investigates rather than the most convenient explanation, and works tirelessly towards that goal. He is also experienced, as evidenced by discussions about his record and his connections to the informants throughout the city. However, the powers that be within the city are so corrupt themselves that they assume anyone in Delaguerra's position would be just as corrupt. This is the reason he is called out of the investigation while in the office, and he is, as he understands, sent up the hill to be kept away from the bulk of the investigation.

He discovers the body of Imlay very early on in the story, and although Imlay is not named at the time of this discovery, the careful reader can match some of the description of Imlay with the corpse that Sam finds in the woodshed. This fact, alongside Delaguerra's revelation that the Marrs were not getting along before the



murder, can allow the reader to make large inferences in the story. What makes this story an actual mystery requiring the work of a detective like Sam is the fact that the politicians, for all their corruption and obvious criminality, are not the murderers of Donovan Marr, even if they are responsible for the deaths of the Chill brothers. To make matters even more chaotic, Aage and Masters don't even know for certain who killed Marr, and remain under the mistaken impression that Imlay is the one who killed him. Even Sam Delaguerra takes an incorrect guess before he figures out his wife was the real killer. His decision to let Belle go stems from a number of reasons. As he said to Belle, the authorities prefer the outcome as it stands. Being corrupt as they are, they would also likely use force to threaten anyone who challenged the outcome in the first place. He also very likely sympathizes with Belle and the humiliation she suffered as a result of her husband's behavior.



I'll Be Waiting

I'll Be Waiting Summary

Carl is the night porter at the Windermere Hotel. The hotel detective, Tony Reseck, stands and walks over to Miss Cressy, turns off the radio that she's listening to, and warns her that the last woman who stayed in a tower suite by herself jumped off a balcony. She tells him that she's waiting for a man she once accidentally hurt. She also assures him that she isn't planning on jumping. Carl comes over to tell Tony someone is outside to see him, named Al. Tony goes to him, and Al tells him to get Eve Cressy out of the hotel quickly. Al is Tony's brother, and he also tells him that Cressy was once married to Johnny Ralls, who just got out of prison, and that Eve is partially responsible for putting him there. Tony goes back inside, and Carl comes down to speak with him once again. There is a man in 14-B, next to Cressy, although Tony doesn't have anyone in that room on his records. According to Carl, the man in 14-B is armed. Tony checks with the clerk, whose records indicate that the room was occupied while Tony was out. The clerk also says that the man asked for a swing band. Tony goes to the room, hears a man inside, but when no one opens the door, he uses his master key and unlocks it. On the other side is a man pointing a gun at him. Tony introduces himself as the house detective, and tells him that Eve Cressy has been waiting. He also tells the man, Eve's current boyfriend that armed men are coming for him, and gives the man, Johnny Ralls, a card to the garage, in order to help him escape. He wants to see Cressy before he leaves, but Tony refuses, and tells him to leave immediately. Tony returns to Cressy, who is still listening to the radio, and they speak briefly until she falls asleep. Tony goes to the garage to check that Ralls has left, and gets a phone call shortly thereafter informing him that the people after Ralls caught him outside the garage, and Al was killed in the shooting. Tony returns to the radio room to watch Cressy sleep.

I'll Be Waiting Analysis

This is a somewhat mysterious story that ends quite tragically. Tony is average in every way, described as not handsome, and he is certainly not young. Perhaps for these reasons, at least partially, he responds so strongly to Cressy, who genuinely seems to like him. The reader is never given several pieces of critical information the story actually revolves around, and again, as in the previous story, much of it is implied rather than stated explicitly. One of the most important pieces of the story is why Al would want Cressy and not Johnny to leave, but it is easy enough to imagine Tony deciding to get rid of Ralls because of his feelings for Cressy. Al's unexpected death clearly shocks Tony, and the reader can infer that his feelings of guilt lead him back to the reading room in shame.



The King In Yellow

The King In Yellow Summary

George Millar apologizes to one of his hotel's clients over the phone, then hangs up and calls after the house detective, Steve Grayce. Someone is on the eighth floor causing trouble by putting a music show on with several friends. The offender's name is Leopardi. Steve goes up to the eighth floor and confronts them. One of them is a girl, whom Steve grabs and runs away with down the hall. He unlocks a room and lets her go once they are inside. There is another girl already on the bed inside the room. Steve asks her how they knew Leopardi was going to be present in the hotel, but they don't answer and demand that he leaves. The blonde, who he carried back to the room, throws a mirror at him. He leaves, and hears trombone music from room 815, Leopardi's room. He goes back to Leopardi and confronts him, but the man refuses to stop playing and Steve threatens him. They get into a fight. Leopardi strikes Steve over the head with his trombone, and Steve manages to knock him back very hard. When Leopardi pulls a gun on Steve, he fires and grazes Steve's cheek. Steve manages to wrestle the gun from him and subdues him. After collecting his things and packing them, Steve throws Leopardi out of the hotel and then returns to his room and searches it. He takes the pistol that Leopardi shot at him with, then finds a threatening letter directed at Leopardi. From there, he goes back to the girls' room and finds the black-haired girl awake, and discovers that she'd only been pretending to sleep off too much alcohol earlier. He checks one of their bags and finds a gun alongside a name and address. Steve asks her if she knew Leopardi, but she throws him out of the room once again. He goes downstairs to see Peter, the manager, talking to another hotel employee, Carl. Steve explains what happened to Leopardi, but Peter is upset because he threw the musician out without consulting him first. He fires Steve on the spot since Leopardi is connected to the Hotel's owner.

A few days later, he goes to the address he found in the girl's room. It is in Bunker Hill near a funeral parlor. He discovers a room that has been recently used, and then determines Marilyn, the black-haired girl, lives there. He searches some more and discovers her dead in the bed. He goes downstairs to tell the building's manager, Jake Stoyanoff, and also to see if Jake may have been responsible for the girl's murder. Jake pulls a gun on him. Suddenly, there's a knock at the door and Jake goes to see who it is. Steve hears gunshots from the other room, and goes outside to discover Jake still alive, but dying quickly. Steve sees a gray sedan speed away. The next day, Steve travels to Club Shalotte in search of Leopardi. He finds him in the club with a very attractive girl. Leopardi is furious to see him again, and begins attacking him before Steve can explain himself. Dockery, the club's bouncer, tries to throw Steve out, but he doesn't budge, instead he apologizes to a girl for accidentally knocking over her drink. She invites him to sit down with her and gives him a crumpled piece of paper. That evening, the story of the dead woman Steve found is in the paper. The police are looking for him in order to question him. He gets a call from Dolores Chiozza, who is the girl he met at Club Shalotte, who wants Steve to come and get Leopardi out of her



room. He arrives, and waits in a common room for her to come out. She tells him no one else knows Leopardi is there, but that the musician is dead, and that he has her gun in his hand. He goes with her to investigate. Leopardi has clearly been shot directly over the heart. She explains she found him that way when she came in. Steve believes that the maid sold someone a spare key to her apartment. He leaves to get a description of the man Agatha sold the keys to. However, at her house, when he tells her parents that Dolores would like Agatha to stay overnight with her. They don't know where she is, but agree to pass the message on to her for him. He goes for a brief walk outside Agatha's home, and finds her dead in a nearby car. He calls the police from a pay-phone, then returns to the Carlton hotel. He has Quillian, another employee, call the Normandy to find out what happened just before Leopardi's death, but keeps the fact that the musician is dead a secret from him. Quillian tells him that a woman shot herself two years ago in room 815, and Steve asks for more information on it. He goes to George Millar's cabin where he finds a gray sedan. Millar invites him inside. He's with a friend he introduces as Gaff. Gaff is large and burly. Steve tells them both about Leopardi, and Millar seems shocked, but Gaff doesn't react to the news at all. He also tells them that he knows Leopardi was meant to have been killed in 815 several nights prior, but Steve kicked him out of the hotel room just beforehand. Gaff pulls a gun on him and takes Steve's own gun away, but when Gaff pulls the trigger he discovers the gun is empty. George admits to emptying it just before Steve arrived, then shoots his brother with Steve's gun. Steve knocks him over and retrieves his gun, then has Millar write up a letter admitting his guilt. Millar flees, but the gray sedan is found soon at the bottom of a very deep ditch, presumably with Millar inside.

The King In Yellow Analysis

The crux of this story revolves around the relationship between Steve and Cressy, though the murders are driven by family connections of the Millar brothers and their deceased sister. The King in Yellow is something of an up-and-coming celebrity in the music world, which turns out to be fortunate and not a little ironic for Steve Grayce, since he loses his job as a result of Leopardi's violent actions, yet he might have a good reputation as a private detective if he is able to solve the mystery of Leopardi's murder. The killing of Leopardi, is, in a sense, incidental. His character is known for his violent outbursts and irrational behavior, to the extent that his murder seems almost inevitable, given the way he treats the people around him. As Steve himself admits, he doesn't have such a problem with the King in Yellow's death. The emotional resonance that draws Steve—and the reader, ideally—into the story is the fact that Dolores is in danger, and two women associated with the murder have already been killed. Steve almost seems to regret the fact that Millar is involved, and true enough, by the end, Millar himself is torn apart with grief to the point that the shooting of his brother comes premeditated, once Millar realizes that Gaff will kill Steve if something isn't done to prevent it. Gaff admits to having underestimated Steve's investigative abilities, before he is killed, and again, as in most of these stories, there are many clues regarding the mystery throughout the text. The message that Steve finds in Leopardi's room, for example, indicates a threat from someone's brother, and Millar is already suspect for allowing Leopardi to be surrounded by people who like to party and make noise. All that



was really needed in the end was to make clear that Millar's sister was involved with Leopoldi before her death two years ago. The large hand-prints on the victims were naturally the work for Graff, Millar's brother, and the one to turn Leopardi's death into an outright conspiracy. The discovery of this individual does come as something of a surprise, but does preserve George Millar's sense of tragedy, especially upon his death at the end of the story.



Pearls Are a Nuisance

Pearls Are a Nuisance Summary

Walter gets a call from Ellen Macintosh, his fiancé, one morning to tell him that someone stole Mrs. Penruddock's pearls. He tries to get her to call the police instead, but she threatens to break off their engagement. He goes to Mrs. Penruddock's home, where Ellen serves as a nurse. He and Ellen discuss the theft briefly. It turns out that the pearls are false, and she believes she knows who stole them already. Mrs. Penruddock's former Chaffuer by the name of Henry Eichelberger. He agrees to investigate Henry for her, and goes to the Ada Twomey Domestic Services Employment Agency who recommended Henry in the first place. There, he learns Henry's address and heads for Santa Monica. There, he waits inside Henry's hotel room and looks for the pearls. They aren't in the room. Henry shows up and the two fight briefly, but Walter trips and falls. He asks Henry for some brandy, then tries to fight him again and falls down again. Henry wakes him a second time and they discuss the missing pearls. Henry insists he does not have them. Walter invites him back to his own apartment to help him find the pearls and drink more. He wakes up several hours later, then wakes Henry and tells him his plan for recovering the pearls. He wants to put the word out that he's willing to pay for their return. He is also aware of an article in the paper stating a local tavern owner by the name of Lou Gandesi has been questioned in a number of jewel thefts. They head to his establishment, find him, and offer to buy the pearls from him, since they believe he's the one responsible for stealing them in the first place. Gandesi first tries to have them thrown out, then tries to shoot them, but Henry subdues him. From there, Gandesi insists that he does not have pearls, and directs them to a man named Melachrino. Gandesi calls Melachrino for them, but Melachrino's heard nothing about Mrs. Penruddock's theft. After this, he tells them to see Jack Lawler. From there, Henry and Walter return to Walter's apartment and continue to drink. Suddenly, he gets a call offering to sell back the pearls for five-thousand dollars. He decides to visit Lansing Gallemore the next day. Lansing is the man who made the imitations in the first place. The next morning, Henry calls to say he'll be in touch later, and Walter goes to see the jeweler. Once at Lansing's, he tells the man that he's figured out the pearls are real. Lansing admits to only pretending to make fake pearls. He actually paid for the pearls and then gave them back to Mrs. Penruddock, because the two are very old friends and he cares about her. Lansing also agrees to pay five-thousand for their safe return, and gives him a check. Walter cashes the check at the bank and grabs a roll of quarters. Henry is waiting for him when he gets back, and he's already gotten drunk. Walter fills him in over his meeting with Lansing. The phone rings again, and it's the same person who called offering to return the pearls earlier. The man tells him to go alone to the Pacific Palisades at eight o'clock that same night. Then Ellen calls to apologize for being rude to him earlier, and also praises him for helping with the pearls. Walter is supposed to go by himself to get the pearls, but Henry refuses to hear of it. He gets Walter drunk, and Walter then agrees to let Henry hide in the car under a rug. When Walter wakes up, Henry is gone, but returns with two bottles once Walter has finished showering. He's also brought a gun with him. After making sure that they aren't



being followed, Walter heads down to Sunset Boulevard towards Beverley Hills. He waits for the call inside the drugstore and he is told where to drop off the money. He returns to his car and goes out a ways as directed. He arrives, and waits a long time, before Henry gets out to look around. They both decide that they've been fooled. Henry complains about it, but after a while Walter knocks him out with the roll of quarters he brought from the bank. He finds the pearls wrapped around Henry's ankle. He leaves Henry with a hundred dollars and the rest of the whiskey. He goes back to Ellen with the pearls. Several weeks later he gets a postcard from Henry apologizing for his actions.

Pearls Are a Nuisance Analysis

This is a light-hearted story that serves to make fun of the genre, especially as it existed at the time in England. The mannerisms of the protagonist, first and foremost, are quite unlike those of the author's typical stories. The main character of the story does not seem to be a detective. Walter appears to be independently wealthy, or possibly a writer. His speech patterns are completely apart from the typical dialect of Los Angeles during that time, and many of the characters go far enough as to make fun of it. Just as important, there is no murder present in the story, either, and even if Henry had planned to murder Walter, the two were good enough friends that he doesn't go through with it at the end of the story. Friendships between villain and protagonist are very common in mystery stories, but this one is satirical due to the amount of alcohol imbibed by both characters throughout. Ellen represents a strong, caring woman, concerned for her very generous and dignified employer, much the same as Lansine is honest and concerned for the pearl-owners' welfare. There is a great deal more altruism and good will present in this story than in the other stories present in this collection, and even the criminals represented herein are relatively benign. This story is an example of the more humorous ones in the genre, and as a result the characters must all be much less threatening in order for it to work on the appropriate level. Hence, while Walter is intelligent enough, he is easily the poorest fighter in the collection, and generally that he's also a bad detective.



Pickup on Noon Street

Pickup on Noon Street Summary

A man and woman are walking together late at night. The man, called Smiler, wants the woman to come home with him, but she demands liquor. He sends her back home to wait for him, and then goes to a hotel where he goes into a drunkard's room. The drunk man took all of his money gambling earlier. His name is Peter Anglich, and he is an undercover narcotics officer sleeping off too much alcohol. However, as Smiler takes all of his money, Peter wakes up and there is a brief fight between the two before he shoots and kills Smiler. He quickly gathers his things, then makes the clerk agree not to say anything about the fight. Later that morning, Pete goes to eat breakfast and accidentally frightens an attractive woman next to him. He spots her again outside as he leaves. She's clearly afraid of something about a car nearby. He also spots a package, and realizes she's afraid to pick that up. Pete gets it for her, and suddenly the woman screams as there is a bright flash. He's swarmed by police who are led by detective Angus. He tells the police that he was once a private detective and that he saw a package tossed out of John Viduary's car, which is why he went to pick the package. Viduary is a former movie star, and someone has threatened to pour acid onto his face if he doesn't pay them \$1,000. Viduary hits Pete weakly since the undercover officer is being rude and accusatory towards him, but the detectives on duty remove him from the house. Pete quickly realizes that he and the detectives are not going towards headquarters. They drive him a distance, then take off the handcuffs. After returning his gun to him and apologizing for acting like they didn't know who he was, they let him go, and he goes to meet the woman he saw earlier. He demands to know about the package. A man name Trimmer Waltz approaches, and the girl gets very nervous around him. He invites Pete and the woman back to his den. When he leaves, the woman introduces herself as Token Ware. She leads him back to Trimmer's den after a few minutes. Trimmer then suggests opening up some curtains, and suddenly a black man appears from behind them, threatening him and Token with a gun. He takes Pete's weapon then strikes him, knocking Pete out even as he hears Trimmer call the man Rufus and tell him to take it easy. Pete regains consciousness and sees Rufus pour liquor onto his face. From there, Rufus goes to a payphone to report a shooting. Meanwhile, Pete hears the door latch click open and grabs his gun. He finds a girl dead in a nearby bed and hears police approaching his room. He escapes quickly and drives away. Meanwhile, Trimmer scolds Rufus for allowing Pete Anglich to escape. Trimmer explains that since Rufus lives where the woman was killed, he is going to be the first suspect unless they can find Pete with the gun still on him. Waltz goes outside to his car, but Rufus attacks him suddenly. Waltz manages to shoot him, then Pete appears, and confronts him. Trimmer tells him to leave Token Ware alone, but Pete refuses. Trimmer tries to bribe him, but Pete demands the girl once again. Finally, he pretends to accept the money, but then knocks Trimmer out cold and goes through his things until he discovers an address and instructions involving a person named Reno on Noon Street. He heads toward the street, and finds Reno. He asks her for Token Ware, and Reno brings him inside where he finds Token sobbing, but she's completely relieved to



see Pete. Later, Viduary is having pictures taken for the newspapers. The photographs leave. A woman is with Viduary, and she teases him for taking out a crystal ball, then knocks it from his hands and demands to be taken riding. On their way out, Viduary gets a call. He suddenly demands that the girl leave him alone, and tells Waltz, who is on the other end of the line, to come over immediately. Not much longer afterwards, Pete arrives with Token to see Viduary. He tells Viduary that she was the one supposed to pick up the package with Viduary's money in it, but that she got nervous. Pete demands Token's money and Viduary pulls out a gun. Pete tells him that he knows the threats were all a publicity stunt, and Waltz comes in and puts his gun to Pete's back. Waltz tells Viduary to get his hat and coat, but Viduary refuses, then tells Waltz to leave. The two shoot at each other, and Viduary kills Waltz. Pete tells Viduary to send Token to San Francisco with money and he'll drop the whole thing. Viduary thanks Pete, then passes out.

Pickup on Noon Street Analysis

The most notable passage in this story is clearly at very beginning, as it is introduced by the point of view of Smiler, who has no obvious connection to the rest of the story after his death at the hands of Pete. At first glance, this scene may even seem to be out of place, except that it does establish Peter Anglich's connection to the underworld. Through this encounter, the reader can determine that Peter Anglich has a criminal side to him, and is far from a hero. His attempts to uncover the plot between Viduary and Waltz are fueled by his interest in Token. As is obvious by the end of the story, he is only interested in protecting her. The fact that Peter Anglich is a police officer is barely established at all, except that Smiler spots his badge during the break-in. Token may have been interested in him earlier on in the story, but by the end she is more interested in the former movie star, Viduary. This interest was especially obvious after Viduary's change of heart and subsequent agreement to help her return to family in San Francisco. Viduary, in fact, is the character who experiences the most profound change in the story, for the murders begin because of his vanity, and end because of his personal growth. When he holds Waltz at gunpoint to prevent him from harming either Pete or Token, he winds up saving them from death. This is the reason that Pete decides to let him go, as even an unscrupulous cop has a sense of justice, and feels obligated to those who uphold it just as they do.



Smart-Aleck Kill

Smart-Aleck Kill Summary

Johnny Dalmas enters the Hotel Kilmarnack and meets Derek Walden, his employer. He tries to quit the job. Someone has been trying to blackmail Walden recently, and Dalmas suspects Walden isn't sharing all of the information with him. Walden insists, however, that Dalmas only needs to make Eclipse Films think that the problem is taken care of. Someone has been tailing Dalmas, and Walden denies doing so. The door buzzes and two men enter with guns. Noddy and Ricchio take Dalmas' gun and tell Walden he's late with the money. Ricchio used to work for Walden as a bodyguard, and he and Noddy taken Dalmas hostage. Just after they leave in the car, however, they get into an accident with a taxi-cab, and during the confusion he takes Ricchio's gun from him. From there, Dalmas gets into the taxi. It turns out he is friends with the taxi driver and the accident was staged in order to free Dalmas in the first place. They go back to his room at Merrivale, and Dalmas gets a call from a woman named Mianne Crayle, who warns him that he needs to go see Walden again, but instead Dalmas just complains that Walden refuses to answer his phone. He eventually returns to the Kilmarnack, but finds Walden dead in his room from a shot to the head. Dalmas takes the gun held by the corpse, checks a serial number on it, then puts the gun back in Walden's hand. He goes to see Minnie Crayle, who is at a place called Sutro's, and he finds her just outside. The two leave together to discuss what has happened. She was aware that Walden was dead when she called him, but needed for him to see it himself. They go to Carli's, which is a small club. They continue to discuss Walden. Dalmas knows that Walden is left-handed, but found him with his gun in his right hand. That means someone put the gun there, not knowing which hand Walden would have used to shoot himself. Crayle is afraid that the police will suspect her. Dalmas offers to go with her to the station to help explain what happened. Later, back at the Merrivale, another private investigator, Denny, comes to see Dalmas, and agrees to tail someone for him, and Dalmas tells him about Derek Walden's death, and that the serial number of the gun was filed off from one place, but not another, so that the gun was traceable to special permits. It was once registered to a reporter named Dart Burwand, who died, but his wife was given back the gun, and so Dalmas wants to see if she knows anything about the murder. Dalmas asks Denny to tail the wife after he speaks to her, and Denny agrees, even though he dislikes the idea. Dalmas visits her. Her name is now Helen Dalton, and she denies knowing anything about the gun at first, but finally claims to have given it away to a pawn shop, though she cannot remember which one. When Dalmas tells her that a serial number was left on the gun, she suddenly tells him to leave. He does so, but not before seeing a picture of Johnny Sutro in her room. Sutro himself comes in, aiming a gun at Dalmas, but Dalmas throws the door open. Down in the street, his friend Joey, the taxi-driver, finds him and begins describing what he saw, but they are shot at from a nearby car. Denny appears, and Dalmas tells him to get an ambulance. Back at the station, Dalmas is questioned by Weinkassel and Lonergan, but refuses to talk, even though both of them think he could help them with the case. Dalmas insists on speaking to his client, Walden, before telling them everything,



because he doesn't want them to solve the case before he does. He returns to his car and calls Denny from a payphone. He has the girl, Helen, with him. Dalmas heads over to Denny's to question the girl, already thinking it's very strange that Denny has Helen. When he arrives, Denny tells him he went to spy on her and found her calling Gayn Donner, and that he pretended to be from Sutro in order to convince her that she should leave town immediately. Dalmas asks Helen if she knows anything about the gun once more. Then, he points a gun at Denny. Dalmas has realized he's in a trap, because Denny is large and clumsy, and Dalmas has spotted the other detective following him over the last couple of days. Helen attacks, but Dalmas makes her stop and demands to know who Denny has been working for. Men dressed as police show up suddenly and draw everyone out of the house. One of them fires a submachine gun at them, destroying the house. Then, the vehicle holding their attackers drives away. Dalmas finds that the woman is okay, but Denny is hurt. According to him, he's only been clipped on the hand by a bullet. Denny tells him that Sutro is behind everything. Dalmas goes to see a Mister Donner, pretending to be from Sutro in much the same way that Denny had claimed to do. He's led into a room and searched for weapons, but suddenly pulls a gun away from his searcher and disarms it. He tells the bodyguard to act as if nothing has happened, and then lets himself get led into another room with four people waiting inside. Ricchio is tied up and bleeding. Noddy is also there alongside Sutro, and Donner is in the corner. He is angry with Ricchio because he believes he is responsible for the shooting earlier. However, Dalmas doesn't believe the story. Donner is shocked when Dalmas reveals that Walden has been shot, and that he was once a drug smuggler who used to work for Sutro. Donner believes Ricchio is responsible for the killing, but Dalmas corrects him, telling him that a street thug like Ricchio would never leave the second serial number on the gun. Noddy attacks him suddenly, but Dalmas fights him off and knocks him out. Dalmas insists that Sutro is the one directly responsible for Walden's murder. Sutro removes his gun and fires, and Donner fires back at him. Dalmas calls the police. Both Sutro and Donner manage to survive the shooting, but Sutro's wife kills him later on. The police chief is angry with Dalmas for using their records to discover who Walden's gun belonged to, but doesn't charge him with anything.

Smart-Aleck Kill Analysis

This is another story dealing with drug-smuggling and political corruption in Los Angeles, and it also has a great deal to do with the film industry and its connection to organized crime in the 1940s and '50s. As with the other stories in the collection, the main character is a detective, intelligent and highly streetwise. Curiously enough, however, Dalmas lacks the personal investment in this story that other characters have, and his one real ally, the taxi-driver Joey, is killed fairly early on in the story. Instead of having a romantic or a moral drive, Dalmas is driven by a desire to save himself and perhaps avenge Joey in some small way. This does not prove difficult once the killer turns out to be inexperienced. The main villain in this story, Sutro, can be detected by the reader very early on. It doesn't take much more than for Helen to try to throw him out of her residence when Dalmas notices Sutro's picture. It is equally suspicious of Denny to force his way into Dalmas' investigation, even if the reader is unaware that the large,



clumsy man has been the one following him since he began working for Walden. Again, in this story, the number of murders and amount of violence becomes staggering very quickly, but then again, cities in the early twentieth century were still quite shockingly violent, and in fact they remained so for quite a long time. The amount of crime and corruption might seem highly unlikely, but the author has only to have stretched the truth a little. Los Angeles in particular was a hotbed of criminal activity, and public officials were in fact commonly involved.



Guns at Cyrano's

Guns at Cyrano's Summary

Ted Carmady returns to his hotel. As he gets off at his floor, a man nearly collides with him as he runs into the elevator, and Carmady suspects he's on drugs. He goes down the hall and finds a girl knocked out in room 914. He gives her her gun, which he found on the floor. She introduces herself as Jean Adrian and says that she does a show at Cyrano's. She also tells him that her boyfriend has been getting threats that he must intentionally lose a fight. Carmady agrees to help her, and gets access to her boyfriend Targo's boxing match and goes to see it with the bellhop, a young man named Tony. Before the fight, Targo goes to see his friend Adams, and asks for news articles about a state senator named Courtway, and gets a photo of him. He asks if Courtway ever had any children, and Adams doesn't believe that he ever did. At the fight, Carmady and Tony watch Targo defeat a man named Deacon Werra. As the seats around them empty, Carmady follows Targo back to his changing room. He encounters the Duke's bodyguard, Shenvair, and the two being to fight. Targo comes out of the shower and Carmady introduces himself and tells Targo that he's probably in trouble for not throwing the fight the way he was instructed. Targo sends Carmady away, so Carmady goes back to the car with Tony and they travel from there to Cyrano's. They meet Gus Neishander there, who informs them that Tony told Benny about Carmady's visit just before. Benny is Cyrano's owner and a financial backer for his fights, and since Gus is his floor manager, he asks to leave Targo alone, but Carmady insists that the situation is weird, and that Targo may be in serious danger. Gus leaves him and Tony. The two watch a dance number, then Carmady spots Targo after Adrian finishes her number. Shenvair appears at their table and threatens Carmady, but a waiter catches him and pulls him back to his table. Carmady and Tony see the man who ran from Adrian's room before. Carmady goes to confront him, but he's attacked by Shenvair again. He manages to knock the drunken Shenvair out and has Tony watch him. He hears two shots and runs toward Targo to discover that Targo has shot the man who attacked Jean in her hotel room earlier. Detectives arrive and try to get tough with the boxer, but he fights back. The dead man is identified as Torchy Plant, who is in fact a hitman. Targo explains what happened, and the police take him downtown for further questioning and a statement. After Targo leaves, Carmady wants to know why someone would attempt to murder the boxer on a night when so little money changed hands. He leaves and looks for Tony, but can't find him anywhere. Neither Tony nor his vehicle are at the hotel when he returns, but Carmady discovers Tony's body in room 411. Carmady finds a letter left by Tony that says Tony tailed someone to 28 Court Street, and that he shot him, but the attacker still managed to get away with Carmady's car. He leaves the hotel and finds his car near an intersection with the keys still inside of the ignition. He goes back to Jean's room, and she tells him Targo started fighting with police again at the station. Carmady asks Jean why she shot Plant, knowing he was the one who actually did so. She insists that she thought someone was going to be killed. Carmady suspects that Shenvair is tied up in the business, and that he was the one who shot Tony. Jean faints at the news, but shouts at him to leave when she regains consciousness. He



insists that she could be in a lot of trouble, and that Courtway is probably not dead. He leaves, but is stopped by two men with guns in the hall. They take Carmady back into the room with Jean, and they are both taken to a funeral parlor in little Italy owned by a man named Paolo Perrugini. They are taken upstairs to see Doll Conant, who Carmady once knew through his father. Conant shows him Shenvair, dead in a bathtub. Carmady also finds and picks up Shenvair's gun. Conant plans to frame Carmady and Jean for the shooting. After a brief fight, Carmady pulls the gun on Conant. Jean admits to blackmailing Courtway and pretending to be his daughter. She blames herself for all the deaths and just wants Courtway to know she won't bother him anymore. Carmady asks Conant if the hood who came to Cyrano's was his. Conant's servant, the albino who let Carmady in, comes through the door with a gun. Conant takes Carmady's gun away from him and the other gunmen are called up from the bottom floor. Carmady and Jean are taken to meet Courtway. Conant tells Courtway that Shenvair was killed, but they don't know who exactly did it or why. He also suggests they just send Carmady and Jean out of state, but Courtway wants to frame them for the killings. Carmady insists that will not work. The shooter was really supposed to get Jean, and Targo was just a distraction. Conant refuses to be responsible for that, but Carmady reveals that it was Courtway's plan all along. Targo, who is also there, leaps up and attacks Courtway but is shot. Courtway goes to shoot Targo a second time, but Conant shoots him in response. Later, Jean admits that she wasn't Courtway's daughter, but that she was a friend of the daughter's, who was always very sick.

Guns at Cyrano's Analysis

Another story focused on political corruption. Carmady's interest in Jean is evident almost immediately, but the twist in this story is centered on Jean's involvement in the situation that comes to threaten her life. Jean never asks for Carmady's help. Nor does Carmady hold any false hopes about a possible relationship with her, either. Jean is from the streets, and she's had a very difficult life to show for it. Through her conversations with Carmady, it is known that she uses men, like the unfortunate Targo, in order to protect her and provide for her. Carmady may be another one of these men, but she's made very clear from the beginning that she is not interested in knowing him. Though Targo's headstrong nature wound up getting him killed, he did manage to save both of their lives. Jean is perhaps the strongest female character presented in this collection, due to her active role in the story. Many of the previous female characters have been almost dimensionless, with very little said or done to establish their characters at all. Tony is another example of a well-crafted character, and the scene in which Carmady discovers him is surprisingly upsetting, especially after the note that Tony managed to leave behind is discovered. Carmady clearly regrets this death and his role in it, since he was the one who involved Tony in the first place. But Carmady is known to have a fairly generous spirit, and is seen giving extra money to his employees on several occasions. He describes himself as a "sucker" for these incidents, making it clear to the reader that he views his own charitable nature as a weakness. He spares no time blaming himself for Targo's death, either, even though Targo has been established as unwise and rash. The reader is also meant to understand that Carmady

is more jealous than serious when he refers to the boxer as a "bum," since Targo appears to have Jean's interest more than Carmady at the beginning of the story.



Nevada Gas

Nevada Gas Summary

Hugo Candless and George Dial play squash until Candless wins. They finish, and after they leave the showers Dial asks for a ride home, but Candless refuses. He gets into his car which is being driven for him. He realizes they are going the wrong way, and he cannot roll down the windows. Poison gas leaks through vents in the passenger area as the car drives through a forest.

Later, Francine Ley visits Dial, who explains that he thinks he can get plenty of money from Candless for gambling. His plan is to encourage Zapparty, the brother of a man Candless sent to prison for murder, to blackmail Candless. Francine tells him not to do it, and Dial complains about her current boyfriend, a man named Johnny De Ruse, who comes in as they are speaking about him. Johnny quickly packs a suitcase and then takes a gun from his room, and when he comes back out to the living room, Dial has already left. Johnny tells Francine that he's going alone on a trip, and leaves her only to be attacked by men downstairs. He's held at gunpoint, forced into a car and is driven off by two men. At a red light, Johnny draws a gun from his leg holster, then holds it on Chuck. He strikes Chuck with his own weapon, and Chuck warns him to stop or the driver will turn on the gas. He smells bitter almonds suddenly and puts a rag up to his face, then shoots through the glass at the driver. The car crashes into a tree and one of the doors next to Johnny springs open. He dives through the exit and shoots the driver, then searches the vehicle and finds a hotel key for room 809 at the Metropole. He gets back into the car and drives to Hollywood, where he calls a taxi to take him to Chatterton. He calls a man named Werner at the Chronicle and asks him to look up the license plate he saw on the car, number 5A6. The vehicle is registered to Candless. Werner gives him the address and tells him that Candless is completely crooked. When Johnny calls Candless, his wife says he left town suddenly, and though she doesn't know where he went, he was last seen at the Delmar Club. Johnny goes there, and the doorman tells him that Candless was driven off in the Lincoln earlier that night, and that he had a new driver. From there, Johnny drives to Casa De Oro, but doubles back to the garage and sneaks inside. He finds the Lincoln inside, only the engine is cold, which means it has not been driven recently enough for the car that he'd been caught in to have made it back to the garage. He speaks to the attendant who tells him Candless' chauffeur is at the Metropole, where Johnny goes next. He asks a girl at the cigar counter there to find out who stays in 809. She tells him it's a man named Mattick, and he goes up to the eighth floor. Nobody answers, so he lets himself in and finds a dead body stuffed in a bureau, then leaves quickly.

Later, Francine returns to her room to find Johnny back at the Chatterton, and he tells her that Dial's boss has been killed, and that the same people who killed Candless are trying to kill him. Francine tells him about George Dial's offer to blackmail Candless and mentions Zapparty, who Johnny recognizes as a man who runs Club Egypt. He thinks that a man named Mops Parisi is working with Zapparty to kill both him and Candless.



De Ruse takes Francine out to a club where he intentionally starts a fight. He discovers that the dealer has been cheating, then goes to see the owner with Francine and his friend Nicky. Zapparty and Mops Parisi are inside the room. Johnny tries to question them about the Lincoln, but the bodyguard enters and forces Nicky and De Ruse to drop their weapons. Parisi starts beating Johnny, but Johnny pulls his small gun from his leg holster and shoots Parisi. Zapparty then tries to shoot Johnny, but Francine slams into him and takes Parisi's gun. They take Zapparty out of the gambling hall and back to the Lincoln where he sends Francine home. Zapparty tells Nicky to drive to a house on Castle Road. They travel there and Johnny goes into the house, which has been damaged by floods. He finds Candless' body under a bed. Back at the car Zapparty explains the whole idea was Parisi's, but Johnny doesn't believe him and finally Zapparty admits to planning it instead, having wanted Candless dead for years. Johnny has Nicky to drive Zapparty around some more until he has a chance to check some facts, and goes to investigate Candless' apartment. He bribes the apartment staff and tells them that George Dial is inside Candless' room and that he wants to get inside unannounced. One of the staff members, Kuvalick, goes to pick the lock for him but doesn't return after quite a while. Johnny finds him tied and gagged. Kuvalick explains that he got tied up and shoved in the closet by Dial and Mrs. Candless. Suddenly, Dial appears from the shadows with a gun. He shoots Kuvalick, but when Dial tells Johnny he was warned of his coming by Francine, Mrs. Candless knocks him out in a jealous rage. Kuvalick shoots Dial, then shoots Mrs. Candless in the shoulder. Johnny returns to Francine and confronts her, but ultimately forgives her for warning Dial.

Nevada Gas Analysis

Similar in many ways to the other stories of the collection, Nevada Gas contains intrigues of murder, theft, deception, and the criminal underworld. The main character, Johnny De Ruse, is not a private detective, but instead is a gambler and appears to be something of a con-man. He begins the story bored and not a little fed up with his girlfriend Francine, though the reader is not made to know exactly why. Francine considers him cowardly and soft, but she is mistaken. Once Johnny's life is threatened, he works tirelessly to uncover the responsible parties and then proceeds to confront them until the threat has been dealt with. His determination and intelligence are quite like most of the other protagonists in the story, but since he is neither a police officer nor a private detective he must use bribery and charm to learn the information that he seeks. The main antagonist, George Dial, appears as something of a ladies' man. Francine is clearly interested in him, and it is not until the very end of the story that his relationship to Candless' wife is revealed. Candless himself is very important to the story, for bringing Mops Parisi and Zapparty together against Johnny, and is described as something of an inconsiderate employer by Dial and several others. His connection with Parisi and Zapparty is tenuous, and the only way Johnny is able to determine his involvement in the murder of Candless and attempted murder of himself is through intuition. Candless' wife was right to be jealous when Dial mentions Francine, because Dial had intended to eliminate Johnny as a possible threat to a new relationship with the woman. Since Dial was defeated by Johnny, it is unclear whether or not he and

Francine will resume their own relationship, but they have clearly gained a better understand of one another.



Characters

Sam Delaguerra

Sam Delaguerra is a homicide detective of Spanish descent who discovers that Donovan Marr's wife is responsible for his murder. He was once friends with Marr, and was taken off the case because it was assumed he was accepting bribes from him, but he worked the case regardless.

Pete

Pete is Sam's partner, and represents another honest police officer on the force. He plays a minor role in the story itself, but is certain Sam doesn't take bribes from anyone, even Marr.

John Masters

John Masters is a corrupt politician responsible for trying to cover up Marr's death.

Dave Aage

Dave Aage is a corrupt politician responsible for trying to cover up Marr's death.

Belle Marr

Belle Marr is Donovan's wife. She is responsible for his murder, but Sam lets her go at the end of the story.

Joey Chill

Joey Chill is the brother of Max and Stella. He convinced Stella to attempt to blackmail Marr with photos, but became afraid and left town.

Max Chill

Max Chill is the brother of Joey and Stella. He wants no part in the blackmail attempt and informs Sam of his sibling's plans.



Stella

Stella Chill is a drug addict who gets blamed for the death of Donovan Marr. She is the sister of Joey and Max.

Drew

Police Commissioner Drew is working with Aage and Masters to help them cover up what they believe to be the truth behind Marr's murder.

Caliente Kid

The Caliente Kid is a thug who helps Stella, then works with Aage and Masters.

Tony Reseck

Tony is the house detective for the Winderemere Hotel. He is middle-aged and average looking, and has feelings for Eve Cressy that lead him to convince her ex-husband Johnny Rawls to leave instead of her.

Eve Cressy

Cressy is a resident of the Winderemere Hotel and listens to the radio constantly. She feels bad for having put her ex-husband, Johnny Ralls, in jail and waits for him there so that they can talk.

Al

Al is Tony Reseck's brother, and a member of organized crime. He plans to confront and kill Johnny Ralls.

Johnny Ralls

Johnny is Cressy's ex-husband and recently released from jail. He is convinced by Tony that he needs to leave the hotel, but is attacked by Al and his gang.

Carl

Carl is the night porter at Hotel Winderemere



Steve Grayce

Steve is a hotel detective who throws Leopardi out on the streets after the musician attempts to shoot him. He is summarily fired, but continues working as a private detective when he discovers Leopardi has been killed.

Leopardi

Leopardi is a well-known trumpeter who is just as well-known for his awful temper and impulsive behavior. He is killed by George Millar and his brother Gaff for revenge against their sister's suicide.

Dolores Chiozza

Dolores was an associate of Leopardi who gets framed for his murder. Steve works to ensure she is not blamed for the trumpeter's death.

Peter

Peter is the hotel manager who fires Steve Grayce after the hotel detective throws Leopardi out of his room.

Jake Stoyanoff

Jake is the manager where Marilyn lives. Steve suspects him of murdering the girl, but Jake himself is killed shortly after the two meet.

Agatha

Agatha is Dolores' maid. She sells a key to the Millar brothers and is killed by Gaff.

George Millar

George is a hotel employee who, alongside Gaff, plans and executes the murder of Leopardi.

Gaff

Gaff is George's brother. He is a big man and very strong, and is responsible for the deaths of Leopardi, Marilyn, and Jake Stoyanoff.



Walter

Walter is a relatively wealthy man. He is engaged to Ellen, and agrees to look for Mrs. Penruddock's pearls when they are stolen. He also becomes good friends with Henry, even though Henry stole the pearls in the first place. He is a profound alcoholic, and cannot function without first drinking heavily.

Ellen

Ellen is a nurse for Mrs. Penruddock. She cares greatly for her employer and has her fiancé Walter look for her pearls when they are stolen. She immediately suspects Henry Eichelberger.

Henry Eichelberger

Henry is a large, gruff man. Although he is responsible for stealing Mrs. Penruddock's pearls, he befriends Walter quickly, and fails to go through with the robbery he'd planned originally. He leaves California by the end of the story and sends Walter a postcard.

Gandesi

Gandesi is a jewel thief Walter suspects of having taken Mrs. Penruddock's pearls. He turns out to be less than helpful to both Walter and Henry.

Lansing

Lansing is a jeweler and a close friend of Mrs. Penruddock. He allowed her to keep the real pearls and pretended to make her false ones, and also raises \$5,000 for the pearl's safe return.

Pete Anglich

Pete is an undercover narcotics agent who becomes involved in a money exchange between Token Ware and former movie star John Viduary that goes wrong. He works toward exposing the scam.

Token Ware

Token is a woman supposed to pick up money from John Viduary in order to make the threats against him look real.



Timmer Waltz

Trimmer is the mastermind behind John Viduary's publicity scam, but goes too far in the process and begins killing people.

John Viduary

John is an aging movie star who schemes to have someone make threats to pour acid into his face. Though the threats are in reality a stunt for publicity, John regrets them deeply in the end and refuses to go along with Trimmer's plans.

Rufus

Rufus is Trimmer Waltz's thug. He is directly responsible for the murder and tries to kill his boss when things go wrong.

Angus

Detective Angus is in charge of the police who catch Peter while he is picking up the package on noon street.

Johnny Dalton

Johnny is a private detective who works for Walden to investigate the blackmail attempts against him. When he finds Walden dead, he works to discover what happened to him.

Derek Walden

Walden is a wealthy film-maker who winds up dead after being blackmailed by Donner.

Ricchio

Ricchio is a violent thug who works for Sutro and Donner. He eventually gets beaten for killing Joey the taxi driver. He used to work for Walden as a bodyguard.

Noddy

Noddy is a thug who works for Sutro and Donner.



Mianne Crayle

Mianne is a former friend of Walden's who warns Dalmas to go see him again after she realizes he is dead.

Denny

Denny is another private investigator who pretends to work with Dalmas, but really plots with Sutro.

Sutro

Sutro is a politician and drug smuggler who kills Walden for what he knows. He tries to blame Ricchio for the murders but Dalmas figures it out and Donner kills him as a result.

Joey

Joey is a taxi driver who works with Dalmas but is shot by Ricchio in the streets.

Donner

Donner is a crime boss who wanted to blackmail Walden, and becomes furious with Sutro when he realizes the other man has killed their target.

Ted Carmady

Carmady is a wealthy man and part owner of the hotel where Jean Adrian stays. He becomes involved in the threats against her boyfriend Targo. He eventually solves the mystery.

Jean Adrian

Adrian is a woman who grew up on the streets and had a difficult life as a result. She claims to have many boyfriends, and is actually the one who shoots her attacker at Cyrano's.

Targo

Targo is a hotheaded boxer who winds up killed for trying to fight both Conant and Courtway.



Tony

Tony is a bellhop at Carmady's hotel and a friend of his who helps him through the first part of his investigation. Nonetheless, he winds up dead, killed by Shenvair.

Courtway

Courtway is a state Senator bribed into place by Doll Conant. Adrian once claims to be her daughter in order to blackmail him.

Shenvair

Shenvair is Targo's bodyguard, but is in on the plot to kill Jean Adrian.

Conant

Conant is a mob boss who is responsible for Courtway's political career. Thus, he works with Courtway to keep Jean Adrian away from him.

Johnny De Ruse

DeRuse is a gambler and con man. Mops Parisi tries to kill him with the same car that was used to kill Candless, but DeRuse escapes and discovers what Parisi, Zapparty, and Dial have been up to with the poison-rigged Lincoln Limousine.

Hugo Candless

Candless is a crooked businessman who is murdered by his employer, George Dial, and two criminals by the name of Mops Parisi and Zapparty.

George Dial

George is a friend of Francine's and Hugo Candless' employee. He plots the death of his boss, Candless, and is having an affair with Candless' wife.

Francine Ley

Francine is Johnny's girlfriend. She breaks up with him at the beginning of the story, and even though she warns George when De Ruse goes to find him, De Ruse forgives her since she didn't know about the plot to kill him.



Zapparty

Zapparty is the owner of Club Egypt. Years ago, Candless was responsible for sending his half-brother to jail, and Zapparty works with Dial and Parisi for revenge.

Mops Parisi

Parisi is a criminal who works with Zapparty and Candless to kill Johnny De Ruse. De Ruse ratted on him to the police, and Parisi harbors an intense dislike of him.

Nicky

Nicky is De Ruse's friend. He helps him against Zapparty and Parisi in the club Zapparty owns.

Kuvalick

Kuvalick is the house detective for the former residence of Hugo Candless. He tries to help De Ruse enter Candless apartment to catch Dial by surprise, but is tied up, and eventually shot by Dial.



Objects/Places

Guns

Guns are a part of every story in the book, with most characters being threatened with guns near the end of each story.

Hotels

In the 1950s, it was far more common for people to live in hotels on a long-term basis. Many are featured throughout the stories in the books.

Clubs

Clubs are a common feature in the book. Much like they are today, the clubs of Chandler's time were places where people went to drink. These clubs are commonly owned by organized crime.

Cigars/Cigarettes

Many more people smoked in the early twentieth century than do now, which made smoking in Chandler's stories almost always present.

Ransom Notes

These and other threatening letters are featured in most of the stories.

Pearls

Recovering stolen pearls is the story behind *Pearls Are a Nuisance*.

Hard Liquor

In addition to smoking more commonly, drinking was also far more widespread in the 40s and 50s.

Hollywood

Hollywood was already a large movie town in the 1950s.

Riverside

Near Los Angeles, many of the characters live in or near this inland city.

Long Beach

Long Beach is another large city in Los Angeles county, similar in corruption to LA itself.



Themes

Murder

As the name of the entire collection implies, murder is featured commonly throughout the collection. It is important to note, however, that the form of murder Chandler is primarily concerned with is not merely the unlawful killing of just anyone. The murders that move the characters to action in these stories always involve someone who, in Chandler's crime-ridden streets of Southern California, is relatively innocent and honest. Relative is the operant word here, however, as even most of the victims are petty criminals in one way or another. The characters that most of the detectives sympathize with are often thieves or liars, but Chandler's world forgives these small crimes in light of all the more serious crimes that happen every day. For example, Belle is forgiven the murder of her husband by Delaguerra, simply because Delaguerra knows that Donovan Marr must have been a very difficult man to live with. Thus, murder, in Chandler's world, is not genuinely murder if the victim himself (or herself, for that matter) is responsible for deaths or other serious crimes against people. To make matters worse, if anything can make murder worse, the police cannot be trusted to bring many of these criminals to justice, so that murder in Chandler's world is also one in which the only appropriate way to bring the murder to justice is to confront the murderer himself. The murderers themselves often wind up dying by shooting each other, where collaborations have occurred, since the natural inclination for all of these criminals is to turn on one another immediately.

Investigation

Just as important to the nature of these stories as murder itself (arguably more so, since one of the stories in the collection does not even involve a murder), is the investigative nature of these works. The detectives concerned with solving the crimes in these stories make frequent phone-calls, find unlikely notes and letters, and have unbelievably informative conversations with minor characters, all of which reveal what the detective should do next or where he should go. The fact that the main character must investigate in order for the story to actually be a murder mystery does, in fact, tend to distort many of the stories into something of a formulaic process, going something like, character hears of murder, character goes to investigate murder by seeing the last place murdered character was alive, character then finds first clue that leads him to where murder victim went before being killed, and so on. There is almost always a confrontation between the detective and the criminals as well, and these too can be a little formulaic, such as character gets weapons taken away, but manages to hide or find one, then a fight breaks out, and the bad guys shoot each other if the detective doesn't do it first. The clues that are revealed through the investigative techniques are often tremendously obvious and somewhat contrived, as they generally are in stories of this kind. This is not an accident, for Chandler wishes the reader to be able to guess what happened to the murder victim and why before the detective announces the whole story.



This is the crux of the mystery story itself, and though Chandler's style differs a great deal from many of his contemporaries, he still keeps this type of climax very alive in each of his stories.

Corruption

Another constant theme present in the stories is that of corrupt politicians and criminals in city and state governments. In the 1940s, corruption in the Los Angeles Police Department was widespread and well-known, just as it was in the city council and typically across all levels and forms of government. Thus, while many of Los Angeles' wealthier inhabitants were protected and kept safe from harm, the poorer elements of society were forced to struggle their own way through life, often turning to illegal means in order to make ends meet. This way of life was, in fact, so common, that no official state body or even newspaper took much in the way of steps toward exposing the extraordinary corruption that existed at the time. Los Angeles was not the only city to face such corruption. Other places like Chicago and New York were also infamously corrupt, with many prominent government figures often involved in one form of scandal or another. In a sense, Chandler was exposing the real-life corruption all around him when he wrote his fiction, which though clearly exaggerated to make his stories work, still did their best to mimic situations that were more common during the time of his writing than they are now. Corruption serves as the impetus for most of the murders that are committed, and Chandler makes no distinction between politicians and criminals in any of his stories.



Style

Point of View

The majority of the stories are recounted in the third person, with the notable exception of *Pearls Are a Nuisance*. This serves to keep tension high throughout the storylines and works well within the overall framework of a detective story. The detectives are often aware of facts long before the reader, which is a large part of the reason these stories exist. The reader, after all, is meant to keep guessing at who is responsible for the killings, and any insight into the character's thoughts would ruin that aspect of reading them.

The stories are told almost exclusively through action. That being said, a great deal can transpire on a single page, so that these stories are typically far more fast-paced than a usual short story. Most of them take place in the space of a few hours, and there is very rarely any break between one scene and the next, making it a common occurrence for the reader to be privy to a character's drive over to the next critical scene, for example. The point of view does severely restrict the internal workings of the characters' minds, however, which tends to make the reads bland for people who search for emotional responses.

Setting

Nearly all of the stories are set in or near Los Angeles, in Southern California, during the late 40s, as the work was published in 1950. Back then, Los Angeles was still comparatively every bit the giant metropolis it is today. Huge hotels with numerous stories tower into the air amidst traffic-ridden streets. Downtown areas are lined with clubs owned by members of organized crime. Indeed, crime in the city of Los Angeles was actually a very large problem, as many city officials and government employees were involved with drug smuggling or some other form of illegal activity. Poor people were far less likely to be protected under the law, and city police paid far less attention to the deaths of poor people than they do now. While it is certainly safe to say Chandler's version of events is a bit of an exaggeration, it is still true that corruption and criminal activities were very widespread throughout the area. The hillside and surrounding areas near Los Angeles were also far less populated than they are today, so that certain places (Marr's Cabin, for example) could be in the middle of a suburb today, but regardless, Chandler was very familiar with the city of Los Angeles, and thus it featured prominently in most of his stories, not just the ones featured in *The Simple Art of Murder*.

Language and Meaning

Chandler made a strong effort to make his dialogue sound exactly the way in which it would be spoken in real life. That being said, the dialect present in the underworld



during the 1940s is somewhat difficult to pick up at first. Most of the characters speak in this fashion, with the exception of Walter, who is a satirical poke at the language which was used in Chandlers mystery-writing counterparts in England. Since most of the characters use this form of slang, it can take a while to get the hang of understanding exactly what is being said. This can be even more difficult in situations where characters utter a single word or two to themselves, as the nature of each of the stories is fast-paced enough that a lot can have changed in even that small amount of time. Fairly important revelations made by the main characters are often understated in this fashion, so that the reader must be careful not to skip ahead, especially during action sequences, which can become confusing early on.

The language used in the stories makes perfect sense, as Chandler was trying to capture the life and times he was most familiar with, but one may not agree with him that Sherlock Holmes is more of an attitude than a character after having read them. After all, each of these detectives has a more or less identical outlook on the issues of justice, and while the stories are inarguably well-written, movie companies are not reworking any of Chandler's characters into new movies the way they are with the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Structure

The book is divided into an essay and eight separate short stories. The essay is presented at the beginning of the book as a brief introduction to what makes murder stories interesting for the reader. Chandler makes clear in his essay that he does not believe in so great a divide between good and mediocre murder mysteries.

Each of the stories runs between twenty and forty pages, and although many of them are divided into smaller sections, these breaks do not account for large gaps of time within the storylines, so that they are each generally told from beginning to end, and usually from a single point of view, though that does change briefly in some sections. The stories are typically arranged thus: a murder occurs, detectives investigate, and one develops a vested personal interest in solving the case. After seeking help from friends, one or more of them is killed during the detective's search, which brings out more evidence yet further drives the detective to solve the mystery personally. At the end, there is a confrontation, and the detective is usually taken hostage, and must fight to survive. Though each of the stories possesses variations on this particular structure, the main pieces are hit frequently enough that the formula becomes readily visible, to the extent that a story like *Pearls Are a Nuisance* becomes a welcome break from the monotonous dropping of cadavers in poorly-lit private dens.



Quotes

"The detective story (perhaps I had better call it that, since the English formula still dominates the trade) has to find its public by a slow process of distillation" (The Simple Art of Murder, p. 4).

"The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in" (The Simple Art of Murder, p. 19).

"He was lying back in a padded blue office chair. A cigar had gone out in a tray with a bronze greyhound on its rim. His left hand dangled beside the chair and his right hand held a gun loosely on the desk top" (Spanish Blood, p. 21).

"Nothing changed in McKim's face. Not a muscle of it moved. Drew dragged a pink and polished fingernail across the front of his throat and made a tearing sound with his tongue and teeth" (Spanish Blood, p. 34).

"He smiled his toy smile. His quiet sea-gray eyes seemed almost to be smoothing the long waves of her hair" (I'll Be Waiting, p. 55).

"The girl slept on, motionless, in that curled-up looseness achieved by some women and all cats. Her breath made no slightest sound against the vague murmur of the radio" (I'll Be Waiting, p. 67).

"He went over to the desk with them and sat down. A few minutes later he had the torn scraps put together like a jigsaw puzzle and could read the message that had been made by cutting words and letters from magazines and pasting them on a sheet" (The King In Yellow, p. 72).

"Police thought Jake Stoyanoff might have strangled the girl, but she had not been attacked. She was described as a stenographer, unemployed at the moment. There was no picture of her. There was a picture of Stoyanoff that looked like a touched up police photo" (The King in Yellow, p. 88).

"It is quite true that I wasn't doing anything that morning except looking at a blank sheet of paper in my typewriter and thinking about writing a letter" (Pearls Are a Nuisance, p. 109).

"I arose feeling a little stiff and dissipated, for I was still wearing my dinner suit. But I am a healthy man with very steady nerves and I did not feel as badly as I expected" (Pearls Are a Nuisance, p. 130).

"The girl stood up, came along the stools, put a dime on the counter. The fat cook punched his cash register, put down a nickel change. Pete Anglich stared casually at the girl" (Pickup at Noon Street, p. 151).



"Waltz's face got cold and hard and expressionless. His eyes become the expressionless eyes of the killer. He moved the Savage a little more" (Pickup on Noon Street, p. 175).

"There was death in the big room. Dalmas went towards it slowly, walking softly, listening. There was a hard light in his gray eyes and the bone of his jaw made a sharp line that was pale against the tan of his cheek" (Smart-Aleck Kill, p. 182).

Ricchio opened his mouth and spit a stream of blood against Donner's hand and wrist. Donner's face twitched and he stepped back and away, holding the hand straight out in front of him" (Smart-Aleck Kill, p. 204).

"The first five had been anybody's fight. The big blond boy, Duke Targo, wasn't trying. The dark one, Deacon Werra, a powerful, loose-limbed Polack with bad teeth and only two cauliflower ears, had the physique but didn't know anything but rough clinching and a giant swing that started in the basement and never connected" (Guns at Cyrano's, p. 214).

"The car slowed in front of a big frame house with a trellised porch, walls finished in round shingles, blind, lightless windows" (Guns at Cyrano's, p. 232).

"Candless dropped back on the seat and lifted his foot to kick hard at the glass partition in front of him. The kick was never finished. His eyes no longer saw" (Nevada Gas, p. 248).

"Zapparty stood with his hands empty, a terrible expression on his face. There was a long red scratch on the back of his right hand. His revolver lay on the floor beside Francine Ley" (Nevada Gas, p. 267).



Topics for Discussion

What is Chandler's main point in his essay, "The Simple Art of Murder?" Does he view detective stories favorably? Does he think the genre is important?

Discuss the main characters' sense of justice. Is it really justice, or is it simply a form of vigilantism? None of the characters make the attempt to include the authorities, even the ones who are authorities. Why is this so?

Why does Delaguerra decide to let Belle Marr go even though he knows she killed her husband? Why does she offer to turn herself in?

Is Walter an alcoholic? How does the amount that he drinks seem to effect his relationship with Ellen and ability to make judgements overall?

Many of the villains, or "bad guys," have similar traits. Think of the villain you remember the most from this collection and list three things that made him (or her) memorable.

Does Tony Reseck get rid of Johnny Ralls knowing what would happen to him? What is his reaction when he learns about his brother Al?

Carmady is not upset when Jean admits to not being Courtway's daughter. Why is this the case? How can someone like Courtway be considered "clean" by political standards?

Do Johnny De Ruse and Francine Ley wind up back together at the end of Nevada Gas? Why or why not? What changes between them that makes Johnny come back to her in the first place?