

Thank You for Smoking Study Guide

Thank You for Smoking by Christopher Buckley

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Plot Summary

Thank You for Smoking by Christopher Buckley is a farcical novel that travesties American government and the lobby system that thrives on it. It follows Nick Naylor, chief spokesperson for a powerful tobacco lobby, as he rises to media stardom resulting from a kidnapping attempt before becoming embroiled in a vast Washington conspiracy.

The story begins with Nick receiving an ultimatum from BR, his new boss at the Academy for Tobacco Studies, to develop a new means of promoting tobacco or lose his job. After discussing the matter with Bobby Jay and Polly - respectively the spokespeople for firearms and alcohol in a cohort they call the MOD Squad (Merchants of Death) - Nick comes up with the idea of reintroducing cigarettes into popular movies in a positive light. BR is unimpressed and intends to give Nick's job to his ambitious colleague, Jeannette.

He is saved at the last minute, though, by a successful appearance on Oprah that grabs the attention of the Captain, the elderly president of Agglomerated Tobacco. The Captain hires him back at double salary, and Nick finds himself in an auspicious position. He starts an affair with a young newspaper reporter, Heather Holloway, and gets a spot on Larry King. While on air, Nick receives an anonymous call threatening his life. Days later, he is abducted outside the Academy and plastered with nicotine patches, nearly killing him. Nick somehow survives the attack and finds that the media loves him, as does his boss. He does interview after interview, and his idea to put cigarettes in movies goes into effect. Nick, meanwhile, begins an affair with Jeanette. As all this is happening, he is receiving regular visits by two FBI agents who seem convinced that he kidnapped himself.

Nick heads to Los Angeles to pitch the cigarette placement idea to venal movie mogul Jeff Megall. Jeff is excited by the idea and the revenue it could bring in. Nick is called back to Washington DC to deal with a bill going through Congress requiring a skull and crossbones be stamped on cigarette packs. He gives stellar interviews on Nightline and at the Senate hearings, all but decimating their political rival, Senator Finisterre. Still, the bill passes, and FBI pressure on Nick is mounting. BR and the Captain tell him to retain legal counsel.

Eventually, Nick is arrested, the FBI having discovered a Virginia cabin rented in his name with boxes of nicotine patches in it marked with his fingerprints. He realizes that BR and Jeannette, lovers themselves, are trying to bounce him from the Academy. First they tried to kill him; that having failed, they're trying to get him arrested. Nick breaks the terms of his bail, going to Winston-Salem and imploring the Captain to help. The Captain agrees but dies the next day. Nick is fired by BR.

Gomez O'Neal, a former CIA spook and information man for the Academy, comes to Nick's aid. He provides information regarding BR's past murders of cigarette litigants and Nick's attempted murder. Nick, by now, is disillusioned by the tobacco industry and decides to plead guilty. First, though, and with the help of the MOD Squad, he kidnaps



BR's hit man and convinces him that BR is behind it. The hit man murders BR and frames Jeannette. Nick married Polly and publishes a book about his experiences with the Academy called Thank You for Smoking.

Prologue; Chapter 1

Prologue; Chapter 1 Summary

Thank You for Smoking by Christopher Buckley is a farcical novel that travesties American government and the lobby system that thrives on it. It follows Nick Naylor, chief spokesperson for a powerful tobacco lobby, as he rises to media stardom resulting from a kidnapping attempt before becoming embroiled in a vast Washington conspiracy.

Nick Naylor, chief spokesman for the Academy of Tobacco Studies, is preparing to speak at the 2000 Clean Lungs Convention. He is aware of the stigma against his pro-tobacco position as he listens to the lukewarm introduction by the chair. Nick begins his speech by thanking the panel for including his voice in their discussion, but he is interrupted by an audience member, who recounts the story of a relative who has died of lung cancer. Nick responds by recounting the story of the Turkish Sultan, Murad the Fourth, who would regularly behead citizens who were caught selling tobacco.

Nick returns to the Academy to find an abundance of messages from television and magazine writers asking for comments, most annoyingly from USA Today, requesting a comment on a new report linking smoking to a rare circulatory condition. Gazelle, Nick's assistant, informs him that Budd Rohrabacher, the new Director of the Academy, wants to see him. Nick decides to let BR stew while he makes his calls. He calls USA Today, tossing out the usual talking points regarding insufficient test groups and foregone conclusions. He notices the tuition bill for his son, Joey, who attends St. Euthanasius.

Gazelle informs Nick that BR wants to see him immediately. Nick does not particularly like BR, who replaced JJ Hollister, an old tobacco-man who brought Nick on board. BR, meanwhile, is a health nut who does not smoke, and he is in the process of cutting staff. BR asks how the Clean Lungs conference went. It is clear that BR is considering firing Nick, who recently sent out a memo suggesting that the Academy concede publicly that cigarettes are a health risk. BR demands that Nick, as chief spokesperson, stop playing the reactive game of responding to every new crisis and accusation. He gives him until 6:30 AM Monday to present a new media plan for the Academy.

Prologue; Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel begins with an introduction to Nick Naylor, the protagonist. Buckley occasionally digresses from the action of the novel to give an expanded bit of exposition for important new character, but more often than not, he allows the action of the story and the dialogue to define his subjects. Such is the case with Nick.

Nick Naylor is the most three dimensional figure in a novel that is, in the end, a farce. Most of the other characters are stand-ins for familiar archetypes (the venal politician, the delusional producer, the born-again gun nut), but Nick is acutely aware of the reality of his position in this farcical universe. He is aware of the crimes of the tobacco industry,

knows cigarettes are a health risk, knows the data. This gives him power as a spokesman; he knows what to expect from his enemies. Moreover, he is a student of tobacco industry. Nick may be in his early forties, but he understands men like the Captain and JJ Hollister, and he is capable of mourning the passing of their world to people like BR.

BR is the chief antagonist of the novel, a corporate stooge living by the numbers and spouting platitudes like, "Don't think about what you can't do. Think about what you can do. You're spending your whole time stamping out wastebasket fires when you ought to be out there setting forest fires" (17). For him the world of tobacco is just another business model to be streamlined, which makes him repugnant to Nick.

The ultimatum that BR makes to Nick in chapter 1 will seem like an isolated misunderstanding by chapter 7, but this friction exists below the surface of the novel throughout. BR does not like Nick Naylor and wants to sack him. He has a star waiting in the wings.

Chapters 2-3

Chapters 2-3 Summary

Nick is having dinner at Bert's with the "MOD Squad." The MOD Squad (MOD stands for Merchants of Death) consists of Nick, Bobby Jay Bliss (Chief Spokesman for SAFETY, a firearms lobby) and Polly Bailey (Chief Spokeswoman for the Moderation Council, an alcoholic beverage lobby). Weekly, they meet up at Bert's to eat and commiserate.

Bobby Jay is the son of the sheriff of a small Louisiana town. After the Kent State shootings, he joined the military and served two tours in Vietnam, where he lost most of one arm. Upon returning home, he became born again and was hired on as a spokesman for SAFETY. Polly Bailey came to Washington to work with a congressman on the House Agricultural Committee. After deftly maneuvering for better appropriations, she was passed over for a promotion and immediately accepted a job with the Moderation Council. She smokes regularly, giving her voice a sexy rasp, and dresses to entice. For years, she dated Hector, a former Washington player who went on to fight overpopulation in the developing world. They have recently separated.

Nick tells Polly about BR's ultimatum, and they determine that he wants to give Nick's job to Jeannette, an ambitious colleague at the Academy. Polly, meanwhile, is concerned about her beer wholesalers who are coming to DC to protest a new excise tax on their products. She is also scheduled to debate Gordon Craighead, Director of the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, a perpetual boogie-man.

Bobby Jay has his hands full with a developing news story regarding a postal worker in Texas who shot up a church. The postman is currently on the run. Bobby Jay, however, is unperturbed, as he recently heard an older woman on the radio who was in the church and contends that if Texas law had allowed her to have her gun with her, the tragedy could be avoided. Bobby Jay flew down to interview her for a SAFETY video, which is being sent to every member of congress and many media luminaries. The MOD Squad is impressed when Bobby Jay's phone rings. Evidently, the shooter has been arrested and a SAFETY member card was found on him and photographed by CNN. Bobby abruptly leaves Bert's in crisis mode.

Nick is on his way to pick up Joey from St. Euthanasius. He receives word that Oprah wants him on her show on Monday to discuss the surgeon general's call for a tobacco ad ban. Nick calls Jeannette to inform her he will be out of town, and a moment later BR calls him. BR suggests that perhaps Jeannette should go in Nick's place, but Nick convinces him against that. Nick is late picking Joey up. Reverend Griggs, headmaster of the school, asks him if the two can meet some time next week. Griggs does not approve of Nick's work, and Nick begs Joey to tell him why Griggs want to meet, without success. Nick and Joey settle on The Sands of Iwo Jima for an evening movie, which they watch over a pizza dinner. At the end of the film, John Wayne turns to his men and

asks for a cigarette right before being shot by a sniper. Nick is spellbound by the moment.

Chapters 2-3 Analysis

The MOD Squad is introduced. Polly Bailey and Bobby Jay Bliss are the only two people with whom Nick can really relate. Even his own father considers him a prostitute to an evil industry. His son doesn't care, and everyone else in the world has a pretty fixed opinion of him. Polly and Bobby Jay, however, understand him because they, too, are used to spending their days spinning human death so that they product is not to blame.

These lunches are all very nonchalant in their discussions of church shootings and fetal alcohol syndrome, but by the end of the novel one realizes that all this casual cynicism masks some underlying psychic damage. Nick Naylor himself spends the whole of the novel trying to articulate his reasons for remaining in the employ of the Academy. Polly Bailey is something of a kindred spirit, uncertain of her reasons and infuriated by the retailers she defends, who are always at each others throats to gain greater leverage over the market. Bobby Jay, on the other hand, is more of a caricature than Nick and Polly. He has faith in the Lord to defend his constituency. He reeks of the approaching neoconservative movement, which makes his occasional lurid comments about women so amusing.

This section also includes one of the few interactions with Nick's son Joey. Nick used to use photos of his son to curry favor with curt interviewers, but the charm has worn off. Joey, for his part, is entirely unconcerned with his father's career. He is a teenager annoyed at having to hang out with his father.

Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

Nick is in BR's office for his Monday morning meeting. BR is humorless towards Nick's attempts at banter. He insists Nick get on with it. Nick argues that the solution to the nascent advertising ban is the reintroduction of cigarettes to movies in a positive light. He cites the smoking boom that occurred when films began having sound and directors needed actors to do something while they talked. Nick argues that this innovation, combined with World War I and the beginning of dieting among women, led to the largest smoking boom in history. BR is underwhelmed and indicates to Nick that Jeannette will be taking his position as chief spokesperson. He tells him to go ahead with the Oprah show and be sure to mention that the industry is committing \$500,000 to an underage-smoking prevention campaign.

Nick is backstage with Oprah, who jokes with him and seems unusually friendly. Nick heads to the stage, where he is seated next to a teenage kid dying of lung cancer. Also on the panel are the head of Mothers Against Smoking and Ron Goode, an aide to Gordon Craighead at OSAP. Nick is momentarily terrified, but he opens the show with a joke about smoking, which the Cancer Kid laughs at. Ron Goode castigates Nick, but Nick immediately fires back that people like Goode - people who want to control people's lives - profit from tragedies like Cancer Kid. Nick dominates the whole proceeding, driving Ron Goode to an attempted physical attack. As the show is ending, Nick mentions that the tobacco industry will be committing five million dollars to an underage-smoking prevention campaign.

Nick is at Chicago O'Hare airport, on his way back to Washington, when BR calls. BR is livid that Nick committed them to five million dollars. Suddenly, BR gets a call from the Captain - his boss - who wants to meet with Nick.

Nick takes a flight to Winston-Salem to meet the Captain, whose real name is Doak Boykin and who is a legend in the industry. He is an old-style tobacco man who enjoys private clubs and was on the frontlines against the first Reader's Digest articles linking smoking to cancer. Recently, the Captain underwent quadruple-bypass surgery for a heart attack. Nick arrives in Winston-Salem to discover that he is a hero of the local tobacco community. He meets the Captain at the Tobacco Club, where the old man immediately takes to Nick, and they enjoy mint juleps together. At lunch, the Captain mentions Nick's past as a television reporter. Evidently, as a local newscaster in DC, Nick incorrectly reported that the President had died, causing the stock market to plummet. Nick tells the Captain that he came to the Academy for the challenge, and Doak responds with a laundry list of historical figures who suffered in their defense of tobacco.

The Captain asks Nick his opinion of BR. Nick is deferential, and the Captain tells him that BR has come up with a great plan to combat the impending ad ban: reintroducing

cigarettes to movies. Nick is angry, but says nothing. The Captain goes on to ask Nick to head up the project. Nick agrees and says goodbye to the Captain, who arranges for him to fly back to DC on his lavish private jet.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

This section centers on Nick's first reversal of fortune in the novel. After his failed pitch to BR on Monday morning regarding cigarettes on film, Nick seems all but finished at the Academy. BR, however, tells him to go ahead with his appearance on Oprah, where Nick shows why he makes his money.

The reader was given a glimpse of Nick's gift for framing the argument in the Prologue with his story about Murad the Fourth, but here he goes head-to-head with one of the main apparatchiks in the antismoking movement. The ongoing battle between these two camps - and the corrosive effect it has on public discourse - is one of the central themes of the novel. Ron Goode accuses Nick of profiting from the deaths of children, and Nick accuses Ron of doing the same. The goal is not to have the better argument, but the louder one. In this case, Nick wins definitively.

Doak Boykin, the Captain, is introduced. It is the Captain who will become Nick's benefactor of sorts, protecting him from the machinations of BR - for a time. The Captain signifies a disappearing world: not only that of the tobacco-man, but also the mint-julep-drinking casually racist Southern gentleman. He is a man unperturbed by the moral questions surrounding the cigarette issue. He exists in a world of tobacco growers and retailers in a town built on the industry; so the reader, along with Nick, can forgive his personal failings. After all, this kind old man does not even have a male heir to carry on his legacy. He knows his days are numbered.

The Captain's functional purpose in the novel is what he does for Nick, which is reward him for his faithful service to the industry with job security and better pay. As he will say many, many times throughout, tobacco takes care of its own.

Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Nick returns to the Academy to find BR chastened by the Captain's new affinity for his chief spokesman. The Captain has also doubled Nick's salary. Nick goes to his office, passing through an entire workplace that is uncertain whether he is a pariah or a hero. Upon arriving, he gets his messages from Gazelle, with whom he apparently had sex with shortly after she arrived. He has been invited on Larry King, and a reporter from the Washington Moon, Heather Holloway, wants to interview him. Most of the other messages are death threats. Jeannette drops by to congratulate him. Nick looks at some of the boards for the upcoming underage smoking campaign and phones Sven at the advertising agency. He convinces him that the campaign needs to be less effective.

Later, the MOD Squad meets at Bert's. Polly is pleased that the Pope has announced that wine should not be considered an immoral drink. Nick, meanwhile, asks Bobby Jay what he knows about Heather Holloway. Bobby Jay has seen her - she did a piece on his boss that was relatively complimentary - and says she has a great body. He and Polly take bets on whether Nick will reveal anything to her in the interview. Polly is nervous about an interview with Diane Sawyer about fetal alcohol syndrome, and Nick walks her out when she has to leave. She looks good tonight, and Nick suggests they get a drink later. She declines.

Nick goes on the Larry King Show. Sammy Najeeb, the producer, informs him that the other guest is Lorne Lutch, the former Tumbleweed Man of cigarette ads. He is now breathing through a hole in his throat, and he is a fervent advocate against smoking. Nick is irate, but he goes on. Among the callers-in to the show, a man from Herndon, Virginia, calls and announces to the show that within a week he will kill Nick.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Nick's appearance on Oprah seems to be a major boon for him, with both the media and the Captain taking to him as the new, fresh face of the cigarette industry. Over the next several chapters, the sun appears always to be shining on Nick's shoulders, even when he is kidnapped. In reality, backroom dealings are underway to bring him down, officiated by people getting ever closer to him.

One mistake Nick makes in these chapters is letting his guard down and taking these gifts at face value. He recognizes that BR is waiting out the ailing Captain's life-span to get rid of Nick, but this elicits little concern in him. Like Sherman McCoy, the arrogant stockbroker of Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Nick thinks he is a master of the universe, incapable of defeat by his enemies. In a more tangible sense, Nick's downfall comes in part because of his libido. He has a thing for strong women in stockings, and here, Bobby Jay warns him to watch out for the sexy Heather Holloway, who will use her

body to get information from him for her article. That same night, Nick tries to convince his long-time friend, Polly, to go home with him.

The fateful Larry King show, is the reader's first indication that Nick is getting in over his head as spokesman for the Academy. One of the first things one learns about him in the novel is that he is used to being antagonized by his enemies, being compared to a Nazi or the devil. He gets death threats mailed to him, but this is the first time someone has delivered it via phone on a national television program. Nick will respond with levity in the next chapter, but clearly this threat is real.

Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

The next day the Larry King threat is already making news. BR approaches Nick as soon as he walks in the door to talk about their response to the death threat. BR wants to assign a security detail to Nick by order of the Captain. Nick is incredulous, thinking bodyguards will make him look weak. BR apologizes for the last few days and asks Nick wholeheartedly to accept the security. Nick returns to his office and calls the Captain, who confirms that the security request came from him. The Captain asks Nick how far he has gotten on the Hollywood plan, suggesting he leave as soon as possible.

Nick meets Heather Holloway at for lunch at Il Peccatore, a restaurant now infamous for a sex scandal involving a young senator from a political dynasty, Senator Ortolan Finisterre. Heather is, as Bobby Jay indicated, very attractive and very professional. Nick asks her the topic of her article, and she says it is about him, specifically. As they talk about his reasons for his career, Heather grows aroused. She tells him that amorality turns her on. He calls for the check.

Heather Holloway's article comes out, and it is not complementary. Nick meets Bobby Jay and Polly at Bert's, and Bobby Jay is particularly amused by the story. Gordon Craighead, quoted in the article, calls Nick dangerous and compares him to Goebbels.

After lunch, Nick goes to Dr. Wheat, his osteopath. From time to time, Nick develops stiffness in his neck to the point that he cannot turn his head. This afternoon, the regular adjustments do not work to relieve the stiffness. Dr. Wheat attaches electrodes to him to stimulate muscles in his back and neck, and, again, there is no effect. As a last resort, Wheat injects Nick with Novocain and gives him a prescription for Soma. Leaving the doctor's office, Nick races to St. Euthanasius, playing a game of trying to lose his security detail. At St. Euthanasius, Nick meets with Reverend Griggs. Griggs delicately asks him if the Academy of Tobacco Studies would be willing to make a donation to the school, which is risking a shortfall. Nick is amused, thinking about the Church's relationship with tobacco, never a friendly one. He pointedly asks the reverend if he can smoke and agrees to arrange a donation under an appropriate pseudonym. Griggs is elated.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

The BR here is completely different from the BR from before. Hardly callous or scheming, he now openly apologizes to Nick to taking him for granted in the past. Moreover, he is more than eager to enact the Captain's directive to assign a security detail to Nick until the threat has passed without incident. Nick, as he does when Jeannette starts to warm to him or he gets a raise, assumes that this is all a natural

offshoot of his string of successful interviews. In reality, something is brewing under the surface.

Once again, Nick is enticed to recklessness by a strong-willed attractive woman, Heather Holloway. Despite Bobby Jay's warning that her sex appeal is a means to extract information from him, Nick goes to bed with her, reasoning as he goes that he can keep her close and use her as a mouthpiece for the industry when needed. In reality, he has brought an outsider - one whose job it is to investigate him - into the heart of Academy operations.

One learns that Nick suffers from chronic back and neck pain that he cannot explain, and for which he sees an osteopath recommended by others in his profession. In many ways, this pain is a physical manifestation of the lingering, subconscious loathing Nick is developing for himself. By the end of the novel, he will consider killing himself and even go to jail as a sort of penance for his sins at the Academy, but now all he has is the pain, which is getting worse.

Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

Driving away from St. Euthanasius, Nick loses his security detail. He gets a call from Jeanette, telling him that he is needed at the office for a meeting on the Academy's response to an EPA report on second-hand smoke. Nick stops at a coffee shop near the office as he is feeling groggy from his pain meds. Coming out he sees a homeless man and gives him a dollar and a cigarette. The homeless man puts a gun in Nick's back and directs him to a limo. Nick walks to the limo, then spins on the homeless man and throws his coffee at him. Unfortunately, the coffee lids do not come off, and Nick is dragged in to the limo, where he is hooded and his hands are tied. A man who sounds like Peter Lorre tells him he is being taken so he cannot kill any more people.

Arriving at some sort of safe house, Nick is tied to a chair and stripped. He offers the Peter Lorre man money for his release, but the man is not interested. Nicotine patches are placed all over Nick's body. Forty in total - the equivalent of forty packs at once - are left there. Peter Lorre begins reading Nick a list of side effects. As Nick's heart begins racing and his stomach churns, he loses consciousness.

Two Washington DC policemen happen upon Nick wandering through the Washington Mall. They take him for a junkie until they notice a sign around his neck stating "Executed for Crimes Against Humanity." They take him to a hospital where he goes in to cardiac arrest and has to be revived with electricity.

Recuperating in the hospital, Nick is interviewed at length by two FBI Agents, Monmaney and Allman. He fantasizes about them, executing his assailants. Dr. Williams, his new cardiologist, explains to him that the patches would have likely killed him had he not been a heavy smoker. Gazelle stays by his bedside, and he receives the MOD Squad regularly, who sneak him food and drinks from Bert's. Jeannette and BR visit him, too, assuring him that they and the Captain are putting pressure on their friends in the government to ensure the FBI stays on the case. Heather visits him at night so as to avoid people from the Academy. She has an interview with the Washington Sun coming up.

One day, Jeanette calls to inform Nick that Katie Couric wants to interview him on the Today Show. The whole attack has been a boon for the Academy, garnering sympathy for its chief spokesman and dividing the anti-smoking community. On air with Couric, Nick says that he will not press charges if the kidnappers turn themselves in. He simply wants open and free dialogue. The interview is a hit, and Nick confides to Polly that he'd love to see his attempted killers executed.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Chapter 11 details Nick's kidnapping and attempted murder from his point of view. Later, the reader will learn the truth behind it, but for now one only knows that a homeless man forced Nick into a limo where he was blindfolded. There, a man who sounds like Peter Lorre rails against the crimes of the tobacco industry and Nick's personal culpability in those crimes. His abductors try to kill him with nicotine patches, a tactic that fails, ironically, because Nick is a heavy smoker and can absorb much of the nicotine. What neither the reader nor Nick knows - nor will anyone ever find out - is why the attackers let him go in the Washington mall before he dies. They even hang a sign on him indicating that he has already been "executed."

Monmaney and Allman, the FBI agents assigned to Nick's case are introduced here. They are cold and unsympathetic when they question him, which initially seems merely rude but will later appear justified based upon the misinformation they have already received. BR assures Nick that he is in regular contact with the two men, but the nature of this contact is not what Nick expects. Jeannette brings him flowers and begins making vaguely sexual overtures to him.

Nick's association with Heather Holloway is shown to not an isolated fling; they are beginning something of a relationship. Heather is looking for a job with a better paper, a singular objective that will dominate their relationship going forward.

Nick's conciliatory interview with Katie Couric is the first of many fawning television interviews Nick will have after the kidnapping. The upward trajectory of his career that began with Oprah is now coming to fruition with the positive response to the industry his near-death brings about. Nick Naylor has become an indispensable part of the tobacco brand.

Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

Nick returns to work after his hospitalization. He is greeted by the entire staff, and BR makes a welcome-back speech which Nick likens to a battlefield address. He also announces that there will be major security changes. Academy workers will park in a new lot. They are given pepper spray, and everyone will be sent on a weekend anti-terrorism training retreat. Gomez O'Neill, the Academy's information-retrieval man, asks Nick publicly if he's giving up smoking. Nick takes a drag off of a Camel and grows dizzy.

Nick has become a media darling in recent days, appearing on all the major shows. BR is pressuring him to do some interviews for the Asian market, and Larry King wants him back. Meanwhile, Penelope Bent, former Prime Minister of England, is joining the Agglomerated Tobacco Board of Directors, and the Captain wants Nick to coach her on talking to the media. He also wants Nick to give Lorne Lutch a bribe to gag him while Nick is in California. Sven, from the Academy's advertising agency, calls with the plans for the underage-smoking prevention campaign. The look is resolutely un-cool with subliminal tobacco-endorsement messages embedded.

Nick meets the MOD Squad for lunch, and on his way there a woman passes him on the street, saying he deserved to be killed. At lunch, Polly is aggravated by a publicity storm surrounding a fetal alcohol syndrome function. She makes an off-hand comment about being kidnapped herself. Nick takes issue, saying neither her product nor Bobby Jay's kills nearly as many people as cigarettes. He still feels very ill and hates his new undercover bodyguards. Bobby Jay, meanwhile, is annoyed at the gun control op-eds coming out around the anniversary of the assassination of President Finisterre. Bobby Jay and Nick walk Polly out, and after she is gone Nick asks why she is so short-tempered. Evidently, her ex-husband contacted her, wanting to reunite. When Nick returns to his office, Gomez makes a cryptic statement that Nick should watch his back.

Nick calls the Captain about Lorne Lutch and finds that the Captain is in the hospital again, this time to have a valve in his heart replaced. Nick tells the old man that he is concerned about bribing Lutch. The Captain argues that they are just going to give the man a briefcase full of money with no strings attached. He believes that such a gesture - if kept quiet - will persuade Lutch to quiet down in his last months of life. Later that day, Monmoney and Allman from the FBI come to Nick's office. They question him about his smoking habits, and he begins to feel like he's being interrogated. The two agents imply that he may have kidnapped himself as a publicity grab.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Until now, Nick's work has only been as unpleasant as the message he has to deliver. In the coming chapters, he will have to face the true dark side of the business, like bribing Lorne Lutch personally. To make matters worse, Nick is feeling genuinely ill. His mouth always tastes like an ashtray, and he cannot smoke - or be around a lot of cigarette smoke - without nearly passing out. Moreover, Monmaney and Allman continue their interrogation of Nick, seeming to imply that they suspect him of his own kidnapping.

In the midst of this darkening atmosphere, the reader is introduced to the eerie, ambiguous character of Gomez O'Neal. Gomez is a former CIA spook, now working for the Academy as an information man, compiling dossiers on litigants and enemies.

This section also includes two examples of the half-fictionalized world Buckley has created. Throughout the novel, one has heard familiar names: Clinton, Oprah, Larry King, Goebbels. Now, one learns of two prominent fictional political figures: President Finisterre and Lady Penelope Dent. Lady Dent is clearly a stand-in for Margaret Thatcher, a former conservative Prime Minister with ongoing dealings with the IRA. Finisterre is a Kennedy-esque figure (though not a stand-in for JFK, who is mentioned in the novel), an assassinated President and romantic icon in a flawed dynasty. Both Lady Dent and President Finisterre's senatorial nephew will meet with Nick throughout the novel. As such, Buckley chooses not to create fictional encounters with real politicians.

Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

Nick is stressed and goes out on his office's balcony to look at girls hanging around the nearby fountain. He imagines an entire orchestra of nude women playing an ode to cigarettes from Carmen, and atop the fountain, he imagines himself and Heather. He leaves a message for Heather, asking her to join him for dinner, and then proceeds to work. He is interrupted by Jeanette, who wants to run an idea by him. Her idea is a commercial magazine for smokers about smokers, with a sexy, youthful edge. Nick finds himself turned on by her and asks her to join him for a bite to eat after work. After she leaves, Nick gives an interview to a Japanese men's magazine. He panics momentarily, realizing that he invited two women to dinner, but Heather calls back to say she cannot join him.

At dinner, Nick and Jeanette share two bottles of wine. She mentions that Senator Finisterre, nephew of the slain president, is hatching some sort of anti-tobacco legislation. After dinner, she suggests they get a drink at his apartment. As they have sex that night, Jeanette insists that they keep all the lights out. She also has some sort of latex fetish, wearing latex gloves and making Nick use box after box of condoms.

The next morning, Jeannette has cleaned up the condoms and left, and Nick is showering when BR calls. He wants Nick to fly to New York immediately to meet with Lady Bent. The tobacco companies want to export to the Pacific rim, but trade regulations are making it difficult, and the Captain wants her front-and-center arguing for it. Nick first needs to make a speech for the Puffers, one of several "grassroots" smokers' groups secretly funded by the Captain. In the midst of the speech before hundred of people smoking, Nick goes into a coughing fit. He races out afterward to catch the 10 AM shuttle to New York. In the bathroom at the airport, he thinks he hears Peter Lorre's voice behind him.

Arriving at Lady Bent's floor at the Hotel Pierre, Nick is greeted by the former PM's viceroy. He wants to know the business of Nick's meeting, and Nick, sensing an opportunity, lures the viceroy into the bathroom to avoid "bugs." He informs the viceroy that due to his encounter with the "nico-terrorists," Agglomerated Tobacco is concerned with Lady Bent's safety as a spokesperson for the industry. He says as much to Lady Bent who - having found against the IRA in the midst of many bombings - is defiant against maintaining silence. At a dinner that night, she speaks at length about the importance of allowing free tobacco trade.

Back in DC, BR is amazed at Nick's effectiveness, and the Captain again raises his salary. That night, Nick and Jeannette again have sex, and he leaves for Los Angeles in the morning.

Chapters 15-16 Analysis

In Chapter 15, Nick starts an affair with his former Academy rival, Jeannette Dantine. Jeannette has showed a significant amount of concern since his kidnapping and regularly runs ideas by him. She no longer seems to be bucking for his position. When push comes to shove, Nick's great undoing is his trusting disposition towards women he wants to sleep with. Now, he finds Jeannette more to his liking, less severe and just professional enough to pique his interest.

Nick and Jeannette's sex scenes in the novel - occurring in the pitch blackness of his darkened bedroom - are unlike any other passages in the novel. They consist entirely of short statements between the two lovers. They reflect at once the absurdity of the things people say during sex and the ambiguity of the actions taken between Jeannette and Nick. She loves latex, she says, and hands him a strange box that he opens to find condoms. Logic would dictate that it is a condom box. Time and events will reveal the truth.

Chapter 16 shows the new, more cavalier tactics that Nick is using to advance the Academy's agenda. Even as he is being played by BR and Jeanette, he is fine-tuning his ability to play off other people's neuroses. He knows that Penelope Bent became a national stalwart by refusing to shrink in her criticism of the IRA, even after they killed her dogs in a bombing. Nick manipulates this inclination of hers toward defiance by insisting she not speak in favor of tobacco interests for fear of retaliation by the "nicoterrorists." It works, and Nick will use this same tactic again, with Lorne Lutch and Heather Holloway.

Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

Nick flies to LA, first class, with a satchel full of money. On the flight, a producer who is a friend of the president recognizes him and makes a nasty comment. Expecting a rental Mustang, Nick is disappointed to see that Jeff Megall - the producer he is there to meet - has reserved an ostentatious limo. Inside the limo is a big-screen TV streaming Jeff's verbose, fawning assistant, Jack Bein, who is very concerned about Nick's comfort. They arrive at the Encomium, a swanky hotel where Nick is given a private suite and a butler. He is also given a masseuse, Bernie, who gives him an incredibly painful massage while babbling about dolphins before having sex with him.

The next morning, Nick goes to Jeff Megall's sprawling office building with Jack. Jack gives him a long tour before arriving at the waiting area outside Jeff's office, where a celebrity (presumably Sean Connery) is waiting. Nick is admitted to see Jeff before Sean, and Jeff Megall indicates immediately that he is excited to be working with Big Tobacco because he wants to preserve the traditional world of the tobacco farmer. Nick indicates that the Academy wants to place cigarettes in a positive light within a modern-day film. Jeff mentions that a studio is working on a futuristic thriller-comedy with two big-name actors. He will talk to the talent involved and get back to Nick.

The next day, Nick is driving a rented Mustang to Lorne Lutch's avocado farm with his security behind him. Arriving, he convinces his bodyguards to wait for him while he delivers the money. Lorne meets him at the door with a shotgun but lets him in to talk. After discussing the industry and Nick's place in it, Nick comes clean to Lorne about the "gift" from the Captain. He explains that the money is Lorne's regardless of what he does with it, and he suggests the most effective way to tell the media that Big Tobacco is trying to buy him off. Nick offers the caveat; however, for the indictment to stick, Lorne has to do it quickly and cannot keep any of the money. Lorne seems torn.

The next day, Nick gets a call from Gomez in DC. Lorne Lutch has cancelled his next speaking engagement. Nick calls Lorne, who is still confused about what to do with his blood money.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

Chapter 17 begins Nick's extended sojourn to the West Coast. In previous chapters, Nick has ventured out of Washington DC to Winston-Salem and New York City, and the Winston-Salem scenes, in particular, reflect a definite shift in tone, particularly in the dialogue. Those scenes with the Captain are lazy and loquacious. These scenes in LA are conversely frenetic, with a syntax typified by Nick's description of his masseuse Bernie's inflection:

She had the habit of turning into a question, even the most basic declarative sentences, just in case you weren't able to follow along? (163)

Such it is in Hollywood with Jack Bein and Jeff Megall. They speak in a sort of hyper-engagement style, speaking at length with intense focus, as if constant assurance that you are present will render their words meaningful.

The first frenzied scenes in LA are juxtaposed - on the day after his meeting with Jeff - against Nick's bribe of Lorne Lutch. Nick uses the same reverse-psychology technique he used with Lady Bent, acting as though he is certain of Lorne's moral rectitude even as he is planting the seeds of doubt in his mind.

Chapters 19-21

Chapters 19-21 Summary

Jack Bein calls Nick and tells him the Jeff Megall wants to meet the next morning first thing. That morning, Jeff tells him that for both of the name stars to smoke overtly in the space picture, the studio will require twenty-five million. Nick is taken aback by the figure, and Jeff doesn't help with his next issue. The other major backer of the picture will be the Sultan of Glutan, a monarch decried in the media of late for slaughtering a large number of his native population. Nick says that the cost is too high for his people to stomach, and he will have to get back to Jeff.

Back at the hotel, Nick returns a message from the Captain. Evidently, Senator Finisterre is putting forth legislation requiring all cigarette packs be sold with a skull and crossbones label. Nick calls BR, who is irate and asks Nick to come back on the next flight. He then returns calls to both Polly and Heather, who have both been interviewed by the FBI about Nick. Heather says she wants to do a story about the FBI's harassment of the tobacco industry. Nick calls Jeannette next, who has not been interviewed and runs a preemptive response to the Finisterre announcement by him. Jack calls him next and invites him to Jack's house that night for sushi made from a rare transparent fish. The producers and stars of the space picture will be there, but Nick declines.

Nick is at Bert's with the MOD Squad, and he is despairing. Bobby Jay suggests that he can help with the FBI, since SAFETY has a lot of former agents as consultants. Polly tries to rally him regarding the Finisterre situation, but to no avail.

That night, Nick appears on Nightline with Senator Finisterre. According to Nightline protocol, they are in separate studios. Finisterre outlines his proposal and the reasoning behind it: effective warnings for the illiterate and non-English speakers. Nick fires back that if cigarettes must carry the warning, so should other potentially dangerous products like Vermont - the Senator's constituent state - cheddar cheese, which leads to high cholesterol.

Jeanette meets Nick after the show, and they go back to his place to have sex. While in the throes of passion, Jeannette hears Heather, Polly, and the Captain all leave messages of congratulations for Nick.

The next morning, Jeannette has already cleaned up the room and left when Nick wakes up. Gazelle wakes him up by phone to tell him to get in to the office. Arriving there, he finds that Vermont is in an uproar about his defamation of their cheese. BR is concerned that they may sue the academy, but Nick does particularly care. BR also tells Nick that the FBI wants to look at his phone records. Nick is appalled but agrees, and BR suggests that retain a well-known trial lawyer, Steve Carlinsky. Back in his office, Nick gets a call from Jack Bein, who says that the studio is on board with the movie



cigarette placement, but there is a hitch. Nick meets up with the MOD Squad, who were unable to confirm anything with the FBI. Nick tells them about his movie issue: the two stars have "qualms" about "glorifying smoking." As a solution, Jeff Megall is arranging to shoot two versions of the scenes, adding the smoking for Asian distribution. Also, he's guaranteed Nick two Christmas movies with smoking.

That night, Nick has dinner with Heather with the intention of convincing her not to run the story about him. She has confirmed with an independent source, though, and is intent on doing it, without quoting Nick. As Nick walks her home, he makes several cryptic comments implying that he did, in fact, kidnap himself. Heather is perturbed, and he figures she won't run the story if there is a chance he is guilty.

Chapters 19-21 Analysis

In Chapter 18, Nick comments that he is in awe of Jeff Megall's moral ambiguity, that he can make a deal with so amoral an institution as the Academy without batting an eye. In Chapter 19, Megall brokers his deal with Nick, casually broaching the fact that a mass-murdering autocrat will be a partner in the process. For the bemused Nick, this reflects a truly perverse values system that is the quintessence of nineties existence. This mogul is truly distressed by the fact that the President will not lunch with him, but he has no qualms about dealing with two mass-murderers on a film.

At the heart of this section, perhaps the most cutting of the novel, is the genuinely disturbing twist of ethics that the modern power brokers live by. Buckley, for all his lampooning, seems to be righteously indignant beneath. Megall is goofy, but underneath he is far more grotesque than Nick. Nick is aware of the ramifications of his work; Jeff has no moral compass to speak of, his interest is only money and the desire to acquire more.

In Chapters 20 and 21, Nick returns to Washington DC to discover that the seemingly frivolous allegations implied by Monmaney and Allman are gaining momentum. Nick does not understand the calls from the Captain and BR for him to retain legal aide. After all, no evidence that he kidnapped himself exists. Still, in these chapters, the novel takes an ominous air to it. A storm is gathering, just outside of Nick Naylor's sight, soon to engulf him.

Chapters 22-24

Chapters 22-24 Summary

Nick is waiting to speak at Senator Finisterre's hearings. The senator has kept him waiting for six hours and is about to conclude without seeing him when the pro-tobacco Senator Plum presses him to let Nick speak. During the hearings, Nick and Senator Plum both imply that Nick's kidnappers may have been in the employ of Finisterre.

Back at the Academy, BR and Nick conference with the Captain; the bill requiring the skull and crossbones label is likely pass regardless. Nick says they should start thinking about designing their own skull for cigarettes, something friendlier. Gazelle interjects that the FBI agents are in Nick's office, and Allman wants to search his apartment. Nick is inclined to allow them to do so, but he realizes he has hash brownies in his freezer. Hesitantly, he goes with the agents to his place. At Bert's that day, Nick is very nervous. The agents did not find the brownies, but they did find something that satisfied them, and Nick does not know what it is.

Nick is back in LA, on his way to Jeff's building when he notices a billboard advertising Death cigarettes, a popular brand with a skull on the box. Arriving at Jeff's, he meets the two producers of the space picture. They run through the scenes involving smoking, including one where the heroine blows a smoke ring around the hero's penis. As Nick heads back to the airport, the Captain calls him. He's fishing and recommends - based on something BR told him - that Nick retain Carlinsky as his lawyer and take some time off. Nick is concerned. On the flight, he calls Jeannette, who is no longer flirting with him. He then calls BR, who will not tell him what he told the Captain. Arriving back in DC, he goes to Carlinsky's office and tells him everything. Out the door, he receives a call from Heather, who wants a comment on the story that he is retaining a lawyer for an impending FBI investigation. He tells her that Finisterre is probably behind the investigation. Returning to the office, Nick is met by Sven with some boards with possible skull and crossbone packaging. He likes the one with a skull based on Mr. Rogers.

An unflattering article about the FBI investigation by Heather Holloway comes out. Nick is at Bert's with Polly and Bobby Jay, stewing that his strategy with Heather has failed. He takes a call from Gazelle, who says the FBI is on its way to him. They arrive with officers in tow and handcuff Nick. Bobby Jay starts arguing with them and they find a handgun on him. Both Bobby Jay and Nick are taken to county jail.

After he makes bail, Nick meets with Carlinsky. In Nick's apartment, the FBI agents found a number to a cabin in Virginia rented from his office phone. In that cabin were several boxes of nicotine patches with Nick's fingerprints on them. Nick realizes the boxes Jeanette gave him in bed were not condom boxes. He bolts to the Academy.

Chapters 22-24 Analysis

In this section, the other shoe finally drops. Chapter 24 has Nick Naylor taken in to custody by the FBI for kidnapping himself. In the preceding days, both Jeannette and Heather Holloway have all but cut him off. They are all business when he calls them, refusing any flirtation or appeal for sympathy. When, after posting bail, Nick meets with Carlinsky, all of the pieces of the puzzle fall into place, and the antagonism of Allman and Monmaney makes sense. What they found in Nick's apartment was the phone number to the cabin, proving that he had rented it. Those strange boxes filled with condoms that Nick opened while in bed with Jeannette were nicotine patch boxes, explaining why she always cleaned them up before he woke up.

Most devastating - and revelatory to Nick - is that even as his enemies are destroying him personally, he is still effective professionally. He makes mince-meat of Senator Finisterre at the hearings, and when the bill passes, he deftly works out a way to soften the blow to Agglomerated Tobacco. Back in Hollywood, Nick and Jeff work out the particulars of his cigarette placement in the space film. This demonstrates the extent to which Nick has been used: every plot against him - the kidnapping, the affair with Jeannette - has only made him more effective and more useful to the industry. He has raised everyone's market share; now, he is being dispatched for good.

Chapter 25-26

Chapter 25-26 Summary

Nick arrives at the Academy. He storms in to BR's office, where BR is meeting with Jeannette. BR tells him that he should take a leave of absence, but Nick dismisses it, saying that he has too much to do. He wants to talk to the Captain, who by now is in the hospital. Returning to his office, Nick finds FBI agents upturning the contents in a search. Nick orders Gazelle to reserve him the next flight to Winston-Salem, even though it is a violation of his bail.

Nick hops in to a cab with a Muslim driver. As they head to the airport, Nick notices an FBI car tailing them, and he convinces the driver that the FBI is rounding up Muslims in response to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. The driver flees, making many illegal turns and eventually losing the tail. He gets Nick to the airport safely and secretly.

Nick arrives in Winston-Salem and goes directly to the Captain's hospital, where he poses as the old man's grandson. Once inside, he tells the Captain what he believes has happened. He thinks that after the Oprah taping, BR decided to have Nick killed to plant Jeannette in his place. When Nick survived, BR determined to pin blame for the kidnapping on Nick himself, which he achieved by having Jeannette seduce him and place his prints on the nicotine patch boxes. The Captain has a spy in the Washington office and knows that BR and Jeannette have been sleeping together for some time. He will have this spy look into Nick's story. He also is concerned about the house-fire deaths of three litigants against the tobacco industry. He incentivized the prevention of cancer trials for BR, and Nick wonders if the same person who tried to kill him did kill them. The Captain agrees to fire BR and Jeannette and asks Nick if he will take the fall for the FBI charges in exchange for monetary compensation. Nick says he'll have to think about it.

The next day Nick is back in Washington. At the Academy, Monmaney and Allman are waiting to question him about breaking the conditions of his bail. He argues that his wallet was stolen, and the plane ticket was bought by someone else. After the agents leave, Nick strolls to BR's office and openly attacks him and Jeannette. Returning to his own office, he is stopped by Gazelle with news that the Captain has died.

Nick immediately goes to Carlinsky to tell him everything he told the Captain last night. Carlinsky is honest that the story leaves little room for a court defense as there is little to no evidence and no witnesses. Carlinsky gets a call from BR informing him that Nick has just been fired by the Academy of Tobacco Studies and that the Academy would like to hire Carlinsky's firm as legal counsel. This causes a conflict of interests for the lawyer, who drops Nick as a client.

Nick returns to the Academy and is stopped by the doorman. He is not allowed to enter the building or attend the Captain's funeral. Heather Holloway has written a scathing



article about Nick's reversal of fortune, all but indicting him for his own kidnapping. Nick meets the MOD Squad, who are now meeting at a Serbian restaurant to avoid media attention. Nick despairs and says he needs to find a way to get to the Captain's funeral.

The next day, Nick sneaks down to Raleigh in disguise to attend the funeral and cremation. He is disgusted to see BR giving the eulogy. As the ashes are being scattered, Nick is recognized and taken away by a Raleigh policeman. The policeman is Gomez O'Neal.

Chapter 25-26 Analysis

In the previous section, Nick realized that he had been used by BR and Jeannette. In this section, he realizes that they are in control and will not let him escape. By the end of Chapter 16, pretty much all hope for his avoiding ignominy has dissipated.

He gets very close to avoiding jail in Chapter 25. Under the BR's thumb, Nick's only recourse is an appeal to the Captain, a powerful man who rewards hard work and loyalty. Tobacco takes care of its own, after all, and as far as the world is concerned, Nick Naylor is tobacco. It is to his great fortune that Doak Boykin has never entirely trusted BR, a man with ties to organized crime from his vending machine days. The Captain has a spy in the Academy that will ultimately be Nick's guardian angel.

Chapter 24 consists largely of Nick's most naïve choice: conferring with Carlisky after the Captain dies. BR is now in charge of all decisions for the Academy; so, logic would state that his first move would be firing Nick, denying him free legal aid. Still, Nick chooses to discuss what will be his entire legal defense with the man who will be representing the Academy in any suits against him.

At the end of Chapter 26, Nick recklessly sneaks to Raleigh to attend the Captain's funeral. He is disgusted by BR's cliché- and error-ridden eulogy; the death of Doak Boykin has become synonymous with the end of the old-tobacco era. Going forward, Nick mourns, corporate stooges like BR and Jeannette will be running the show, trampling over anyone who does not meet their standards of productivity. This is not taking into account, however, the Captain's loyal spy: Gomez O'Neal.

Chapters 27-30, Epilogue

Chapters 27-30, Epilogue Summary

Nick and Gomez eat fried catfish at a hole-in-the-wall in Raleigh. Gomez is the Captain's spy in Washington. He confirms that BR hired someone - a failed actor - to set fire to the houses of people who were suing the tobacco industry. This person is known as Team B (BR is Team A). Gomez gives Nick his name and address. Nick asks him why he is doing this, and Gomez responds that he likes his job and doesn't want it ruined by BR and Jeannette.

Nick has lunch with Polly and Bobby Jay. Heather has just released an article about the MOD Squad. Polly is livid, and Nick admits that he told Jeannette about them after she heard Polly leave a message on Nick's machine. Jeannette likely fed the information to Heather. Polly is infuriated, as much by the idea that Nick slept with Jeannette as his betrayal of her. Nick blacks out after a night of drinking at the Serbian restaurant and wakes up in Arlington cemetery with his jumper cables. He has decided to commit suicide but cannot build up the will to do it. As he sits among the graves, he sees a homeless person lighting a cigarette at the JFK eternal flame.

Nick decides to plead guilty to the FBI charges that he faked his own kidnapping. He knows he is not guilty of the charges, but he feels he must suffer for his crimes at the Academy. He tells as much to Bobby Jay and Polly and convinces them to join him in destroying BR.

The MOD squad stakes out the New York theatre where BR's "Team B" is appearing in a mounting of HMS Pinafore. On opening night, Polly catches the actor on the way out the door by impersonating a hooker and propositioning him. Bobby Jay knocks him unconscious by shooting him with a rubber bullet. They hood and bind him, and when he wakes up, Nick plays an audio recording of two men discussing how BR wants them to kill the actor and dump him in a swamp. They then simulate a crash and toss the actor from the car, speeding off.

There is a new headline from the Washington Sun - which has hired Heather Holloway - that BR has died in a house fire and a search is underway for the lead suspect, Jeannette.

The Epilogue has Nick Naylor appearing on Larry King to promote his new book, Thank You for Smoking. He now runs an anti-smoking coalition and is married to Polly, who runs a fetal alcohol syndrome foundation. Bobby Jay now runs religious outreach to prisons, and Jack Bein - who has split from Jeff - has optioned Nick's book as a film. Nick served his term in prison, and he has dedicated his book to the Captain and Lorne Lutch.

Chapters 27-30, Epilogue Analysis

In Chapter 27, the plot surrounding BR thickens. Evidently, murder is nothing new to him; he has been knocking off tobacco litigants since he took over the Academy from JJ Hollister. Gomez O'Neal - the former CIA operative - is fully aware of this activity, and he is sick of BR's tenure.

In this section, armed with Gomez's information, Nick finds himself unable to act. His fall from grace has made him acutely aware of his own iniquity. He drinks until he blacks out and wakes up in Arlington Cemetery, preparing to hang himself with his jumper cables. Looking back on his life since being fired by the local news station, he realizes that he has done nothing that has been good for the world. He gave up everything in his life to promote a product that kills people, and now he has been fired. Nick does not kill himself. He chooses to pay penance by going to prison.

The Epilogue of the novel wraps up every loose end in the story, like a Dickens novel. The good and loyal characters come off unscathed. The wicked are punished for their sins, and the MOD Squad moves on to greener pastures. Thank You for Smoking is at its heart a novel about a sick political system, but Buckley takes pains to state clearly in the final pages that all the data surrounding smoking are correct.

Characters

Nick Naylor

Nick Naylor is the central character of the novel, and the story follows him the entire time. He is the chief spokesman for the Academy of Tobacco Studies, a pro-tobacco lobby in Washington DC. He was a local newscaster in DC until he accidentally announced the death of the President on air, precipitating a plunge in the stock market. He regularly has lunch with the MOD Squad (MOD means "Merchants of Death"), an informal coterie consisting of him, Bobby Jay Bliss, firearms spokesman, and Polly Bailey, beer, wine, and spirits spokeswoman.

At the beginning of the novel, Nick is spared firing by his new boss, BR, by a successful appearance on Oprah that grabs the attention of the Captain, the elderly president of Agglomerated Tobacco. Nick's salary is doubled, and he finds himself giving more interviews, in the process starting an affair with a young newspaper reporter, Heather Holloway. One evening, he is abducted outside the Academy by a radical "nico-terrorist" group and plastered with nicotine patches, nearly killing him.

Nick somehow survives the attack and finds that the media loves him, as does his boss. He becomes a globe-trotting cigarette advocate, hobnobbing with industry-leaders, movie moguls, and former heads of state. He begins an affair with Jeanette, his former rival at the Academy. As all this is happening, he is receiving regular visits by two FBI agents who seem convinced that he kidnapped himself. Nick also, unsuccessfully, argues against a new bill requiring cigarettes carry a skull and crossbones label.

Eventually, Nick is arrested, the FBI having discovered a Virginia cabin rented in his name with boxes of nicotine patches in it marked with his fingerprints. He realizes that BR and Jeanette, lovers themselves, are trying to bounce him from the Academy. First they try to kill him; when that failed, they try to get him arrested. Nick breaks the terms of his bail, going to Winston-Salem and imploring the Captain to help. The Captain agrees but dies the next day.

Nick is saved by Gomez O'Neal, a former CIA agent and information man for the Academy, who provides information regarding BR's attempted murder of Nick. Nick, by now, is disillusioned by the tobacco industry and decides to plead guilty. First, though, and with the help of the MOD Squad, he kidnaps BR's hit man and convinces him that BR is behind it. The hit man murders BR and frames Jeanette. Nick marries Polly and publishes a book about his experiences with the Academy.

Throughout the novel, Nick is unsure of why he works as a spokesperson for an industry he knows causes many deaths. In the end, he realizes no job is worth the moral price this one causes him to pay.



Budd Rohrabacher (BR)

BR is the new Director of the Academy for Tobacco Studies. He comes from the world of cigarette vending machines, a cut-throat and mob-ridden portion of the industry. When the Captain hires him to take over the Academy, he gives the whole office a corporate makeover, cutting staff greatly. The Captain incentivizes cigarette litigation that doesn't go to trial for BR; so BR hires a hit man to murder litigants by setting their beds on fire.

At the beginning of the novel, BR attempts to fire Nick, replacing him with his lover Jeannette Dantine, but the Captain takes to Nick after the successful Oprah taping. BR is incensed, implicitly telling Nick that once the ailing Captain dies, he's history. BR next tries to murder Nick using his hit man. When that fails, BR makes peace with the newly media-beloved Nick, but he secretly puts plans in place to frame Nick for his own kidnapping. He has a cabin rented in Nick's name and sends Jeannette to sleep with Nick to obtain his fingerprints. Meanwhile, through various sources, he funnels information about the FBI investigation to the Washington Moon. After the Captain dies, BR fires Nick.

BR is not aware, however, that the Captain has a mole watching him in the Academy, Gomez O'Neal. Gomez uncovers his hit man - code-named "Team B" - and gives the information to Nick. Nick tricks the hit man in to thinking that BR wants him dead. The hit man sets BR's house on fire one night, killing him.

Jeannette Dantine

Jeannette is an ambitious colleague of Nick's at the Academy of Tobacco Studies, and BR's secret lover. BR, at the beginning of the novel, intends to fire Nick and give Jeannette his position.

When this and Nick's kidnapping fails, Jeannette makes a large show of support for him. As Nick's star rises, Jeannette begins to hit on him. One night, the two go out to dinner where they swap ideas and drink two bottles of wine. Back at his apartment, they have sex, and Jeannette insists on keeping all lights off. She seems to have a latex fetish, wearing gloves and making Nick use box after box of condoms. They continue sleeping together, and in the morning, Jeannette always cleans up and leaves before he wakes. As it turns out, she is acting on orders from BR, and the boxes she hands Nick in the dark are nicotine-patch boxes (nicotine patches being the weapons used in his attempted murder). She plants these boxes in a cabin rented under his name to make it appear that he kidnapped himself.

After Nick is arrested by the FBI and makes bail, Jeannette cuts off relations with him. She stays close to BR, and once BR fires Nick, she is promoted to executive VP. Nick discovers the plot against him and contrives to turn BR's hit man against him. When the hit man kills BR, he frames Jeannette for the murder. At the end of the novel, she is working as an escort in Asia.

Polly Bailey

Polly Bailey is the chief spokeswoman for the Moderation Council, a lobby for beer, wine, and spirits, and she is a member of the MOD Squad, that meets every week for lunch.

Polly came to Washington DC to work as an aide to a Southern congressman, for whom she brokered a major deal increasing his federal agriculture allocations. When she was not promoted, she moved to the Moderation Council. Polly dresses sensually and smokes often to develop a sexy rasp, intimidating her male colleagues. She was long involved with a former politico golden-boy turned developing world crusader against overpopulation. At the beginning of the novel, the two have recently separated.

Polly, Nick, and Bobby Jay meet at Bert's regularly to discuss their most recent challenges with the "Neo-Puritans." She quietly loves Nick, but does not give in to his many attempts to get her home with him. When he admits to sleeping with Jeannette, Polly is openly disgusted. When Heather Holloway releases an article revealing the existence of the MOD Squad, the group has to move their lunches to an out-of-the-way Serbian restaurant, and Polly is furious with Nick. When Nick needs help getting back at BR, Polly helps by dressing as a prostitute to lure BR's hit man to the car where they kidnap him. At the end of the novel, Polly marries Nick and starts a foundation for fetal alcohol syndrome.

Bobby Jay Bliss

Bobby Jay is the chief spokesman for SAFETY (Society for the Advancement of Firearms and Effective Training of Youth), a gun lobby, and a member of the MOD Squad.

Bobby Jay grew up in the tiny town of Loober, Mississippi, the son of a stringent sheriff. After the Kent State Shootings, he decided to join the army, serving two tours in Vietnam, where he lost most of his left arm. He got the only victory parade of the Vietnam War in Loober, attracting the attention of Stockton Drum, founder of SAFETY, who took him on as a spokesman. In recent years, Bobby Jay has become born again.

Throughout the novel, Bobby Jay warns Nick against the temptations of the flesh, particularly concerning the reporter Heather Holloway. When Nick is being investigated by the FBI, Bobby Jay looks into the matter with his law enforcement contacts, but he finds nothing. He is arrested along with Nick by the FBI when they find a concealed weapon on him. Later, he accompanies Nick and Polly to New York to catch BR's hit man. Bobby Jay shoots the hit man with a rubber bullet to incapacitate him.

At the end of the novel, Bobby Jay has quit SAFETY and is doing religious outreach for the prison system.

Doak Boykin, aka: the Captain

The Captain is the head of Agglomerated Tobacco, and BR's boss. He installed BR as the President of the Academy of Tobacco Studies to streamline the troubled PR portion of his business, but he keeps a spy at the Academy in the form of Gomez O'Neal. Longing for a male heir, the Captain has nine daughters. At the beginning of the novel, he has had quadruple bypass surgery for a heart attack. He lives in Winston-Salem.

The Captain takes a shine to Nick after Nick's Oprah appearance. The Captain is an old Southern tobacco man and invites Nick to join him for mint juleps at his Tobacco Club. He doubles Nick's salary and takes him under his wing, giving Nick carte blanche to enact any measure he deems helpful. Throughout the novel, the Captain's health deteriorates, necessitating - much to his dismay - the transplanting of pig parts into his heart. When Nick realizes he has been framed by BR, he turns to the Captain for help. The Captain agrees to fire BR and asks Nick to take the fall for the kidnapping. Nick is not sure he can do so, and the Captain agrees to help him any way he can. That night, he dies.

The Captain is a gentleman who lives by the motto that tobacco takes care of its own. He even pays off Lorne Lutch, a former cigarette advertising actor with cancer, with no preconditions. His death marks the end of an era for the industry.

Heather Holloway

Heather Holloway is a young reporter for the Washington Moon who begins a relationship with Nick Naylor while interviewing him for a profile after his Oprah appearance. She is apparently attracted by his moral ambiguity.

Their relationship cools, however, after she begins interviewing for a job with the Washington Sun and presses him to give her privileged information. They all but cut off ties as Nick begins an affair with Jeannette and faces investigation from the FBI. Heather wants to write a scathing piece about the FBI's persecution of the tobacco industry, but Nick convinces her not to by implying that he may be guilty of kidnapping himself. BR and Jeannette, however, leak information about his "kidnapping" to her and she breaks the story that he is guilty. Jeannette also leaks information about the MOD Squad to Heather. At the end of the novel, Heather receives a job with the Washington Sun.

Gomez O'Neal

Gomez O'Neal is a former CIA spook, working at the Academy of Tobacco Studies as their information man, building dossiers of litigants and major industry critics. He is also the Captain's mole in the Academy to spy on BR.



Throughout the novel, Gomez remains quietly on the sidelines of the action, occasionally cryptically telling Nick to watch his back. After Nick is fired and the Captain dies, Gomez intercepts him in Raleigh at the Captain's funeral. He poses as a police officer and takes Nick away in cuffs. Gomez tells Nick about BR's "Team B" that kills litigants and tried to kill Nick. When asked why he is doing this, Gomez states that he likes his job and tobacco's role in "population control" and he doesn't want BR and Jeannette to screw that up.

Jeff Megall

Jeff Gemall is the hyper-rich movie mogul with a gift for self-delusion in matters of morality that matches Nick's. Nick meets with him in LA to discuss positive cigarette placement in modern movies.

Upon meeting Nick, Jeff says that he is excited to work with the Academy as he wants to do his part to save the livelihood of the tobacco farmer. He suggests, to avoid the stigma against cigarettes of today's world, that they use a big-budget futuristic thriller with two major stars in it. The price tag to add smoking to the love scene is astronomical though, and Jeff's other big financier is a Sultan recently charged with genocide. Nick negotiates down, and he and Jeff come to an appropriate price. Unfortunately, the stars express qualms about glorifying smoking; so Jeff has several scene filmed twice - once without smoking for America, once with smoking for Asia.

At the end of the novel, Jeff is outraged by his portrayal in Nick's tell-all memoir.

Lorne Lutch

Lorne Lutch is the former Tumbleweed Man, a cowboy actor in cigarette advertisements. He now lives on an avocado farm in California, breathing through a hole in his throat and dying of cancer. He has become a fierce anti-smoking advocate.

Lorne is on the same Larry King show as Nick, but Nick actually hides in a closet to avoid running in to him. Earlier that year the Academy of Tobacco Studies wanted to sue Lorne for defamation, but Nick convinced them not to. Later in the novel, the Captain orders Nick to deliver a satchel with one million dollars cash to Lorne's farm, no strings attached. Nick does so, speaking to Lorne about the industry and insisting that this is not a bribe. He suggests ways Lorne could inform the media about the payoff for maximum outrage, but Lorne is tempted by the money. He keeps half to give his family something.

After Lorne's death, Nick lies to the media, saying he only gave him half a million and Lutch refused it.



Senator Ortolan Finisterre

Senator Finisterre is a young congressman from Vermont, a member of long political dynasty and nephew to the slain President Finisterre. When the novel begins, he has just suffered a major political setback after being caught having sex with a mistress in a popular Washington restaurant.

Finisterre introduces legislation to require tobacco companies put a skull and crossbones on their product's packaging. It is an obvious ploy to gain popular support before the election, and it will likely pass. Nick debates with Finisterre on air during an episode of Nightline, infuriating the senator by suggesting that Vermont cheddar cheese is just as deadly as cigarettes. At the hearings for Finisterre's bill, a pro-tobacco Senator accuses him of being complicit in Nick's kidnapping.

Jack Bein

Jack Bein is Jeff Megall's fawning assistant. When Nick comes to Los Angeles, Jack calls him every hour or so to make sure he is happy. He gives Nick a tour of Jeff's office, speaking at length and frequently revealing things he "shouldn't." At the end of the novel, Jack breaks with Jeff and options the right to Nick's memoir.

Gazelle

Gazelle is Nick's put-upon assistant. She often openly contradicts him, which he puts up with in part because of white guilt and in part because he slept with her when she started. Gazelle is the person to inform Nick that the Captain has died.

Joey

Joey is Nick's sullen teenage son, who stays with Nick every other weekend. He attends the expensive St. Euthanasius School. One night, while Nick and he eat pizza and watch a John Wayne movie together, Nick has the cigarettes-on-film idea.

Reverend Griggs

Reverend Griggs is the headmaster of Joey's expensive Methodist school, St. Euthanasius. Griggs does not approve of Nick's career and generally regards him with cold politeness whenever they meet. Griggs asks Nick to meet with him in private. When they do so, Griggs gingerly asks Nick if the Academy of Tobacco Studies - under another name - make a donation to the ailing school. Nick agrees, privately amused, to broker a deal.



Agents Monmaney and Allman

Monmaney and Allman are the FBI agents assigned to Nick's case after the kidnapping. Monmaney is misanthropic and stoic, and Allman is more considerate. The agents interview Nick and all of his close associates. They search his office phone records and his apartment, where they find the address of the Virginia cabin where Jeannette has planted the nicotine patch boxes with Nick's prints. They arrest Nick, and after he makes bail and skips town to Winston-Salem, they harass him again at his office.

Steve Carlinsky

Carlinsky is the hot-shot media-darling lawyer whom the Captain retains for Nick when he is investigated by the FBI. Carlinsky became famous for successfully defending a man who sold toxic material to consumers. When Nick is arrested and figures out the plot against him, Carlinsky listens to his story before informing Nick that he's been fired from the Academy and Carlinsky cannot take his case as he is accepting a position as legal counsel for the Academy.

Team B

Team B is a failed actor from New York that BR hires to burn down the houses of tobacco litigants to keep their cases from going to trial. Later, BR sends Team B to kidnap and kill Nick with nicotine patches, but something goes wrong and Nick escapes. At the end of the novel, Nick and the MOD Squad kidnap Team B in New York and trick him into thinking that BR wants him dead. They let him go, and he proceeds to burn down BR's house, killing BR.

Lady Penelope Bent

Lady Penelope Bent is a Thatcher-esque former Prime Minister of England. During her tenure as PM, she was critical of the IRA, whose bombing campaigns killed her prized dogs. She joins the Board of Directors of Agglomerated Tobacco, and the Captain sends Nick to New York to meet with her and convince her to be more outspoken in support of tobacco export laws. Nick delicately suggests that — for her own safety regarding the "nico-terrorists" — she refrain from public statements supporting tobacco. She is defiant and does the opposite.

Objects/Places

Academy of Tobacco Studies

The Academy is a powerful tobacco lobby in Washington DC. It was founded at the behest of the Captain — ostensibly as a scientific institution to research all theories surrounding cigarettes —after the first Reader's Digest articles linking smoking to cancer.

The Moderation Council

The Moderation Council is a beer, wine, and spirits lobby in Washington DC, for whom Polly Bailey is the chief spokesperson.

SAFETY

SAFETY (Society for the Advancement of Firearms and Effective Training of Youth) is a powerful fire-arms lobby in Washington DC, for which Bobby Jay Bliss is the chief spokesman.

The MOD Squad

The MOD (Merchants of Death) Squad is an informal coterie of Nick Naylor, Bobby Jay Bliss, and Polly Bailey, with occasional guests. The MOD Squad meets at Bert's for lunch once a week to share stories and challenges.

Gaspers

"Gaspers" is the term used by the MOD Squad to refer to the "neo-Puritans," individuals who make a career out of decrying the crimes of the tobacco, alcohol, and firearm markets.

Agglomerated Tobacco

Agglomerated Tobacco is the cigarette manufacturing behemoth, headed by the Captain. The Academy of Tobacco Studies serves as a sort of PR firm for Agglomerated Tobacco.

The Washington Moon

The Washington Moon is the smaller of the two major papers in the Washington DC in Buckley's novel. It has a somewhat right-ward bent.

Nico-Terrorists

Nico-Terrorists is the term developed by the media to describe the individuals who kidnap and tried to kill Nick Naylor.

The Finisterre Dynasty

The Finisterre family is a political dynasty comparable to the Kennedy's. President Finisterre was assassinated while in office, and several of his relatives are active in the Congress. Senator Ortolan Finisterre — comparable, perhaps, to a young Ted Kennedy — is a lecherous self-promoter fond of popular public-health legislation.

Death Cigarettes

Death Cigarettes are inexpensive cigarettes, popular in urban areas. They have a skull on their packaging.

Bert's

Bert's is the upscale Washington eatery where the MOD Squad meets once weekly for their traditional lunches.

K Street

K Street is the street in Washington DC famous for being the home of many lobbying firms.

Themes

Everyone Has His Own Reason for Complicity in Evil

Early in *Thank You for Smoking*, Nick Naylor states that he is the chief spokesman for the Academy of Tobacco Studies to pay the mortgage. He later reflects that this has "the ring of a Nuremberg defense" (12). This is not the last time he is compared to a Nazi - Goebbels is a particular favorite among his critics - and this is significant. The Nazis have become something of a metaphor in our society: normal men who grew complicit within an evil system.

Nick spends much of the novel trying to revise his stated reason for complicity. He says that he likes the challenge. Later, he acknowledges to Lorne Lutch, a man who is suffering greatly because of cigarettes, that he stays on the job because he is good at it. By the end, Nick realizes that his reasons cannot outweigh the human cost of his collaboration, and he nearly kills himself.

Other characters in the novel give their own reasons for being involved with the Academy. The Captain, more than anyone, loves tobacco and the tobacco industry. He considers himself a standard-bearer for the farmers and distributors, living and dying by his creed: tobacco takes care of its own. Jeff Megall, the Hollywood mogul, claims that he wants to partner with the Academy to preserve the livelihood of tobacco farmers. In truth, his motivation is purely monetary; he needs to justify himself as a sort of Willie Nelson for tobacco.

The only character who seems genuinely at ease with himself is Gomez O'Neal, the former CIA man and information dealer for the Academy. He likes the work because it is easy, and he argues that, ideologically, he's in it for "population control." He doesn't want his peace disturbed; so, he helps Nick take down BR. Unlike the other characters, who like to think of themselves as good people and rationalize their ways out of hating themselves, Gomez is used to living moral shades of gray.

Everyone Looks Out for Number One

Hand in hand with the rationalizations every character uses to explain his or her actions is the reality that the only real justification is, "It benefits me." The Washington DC of *Thank You for Smoking* is a den of wolves, each trying to survive and flourish. Politicians, lobbyists, reporters - they all pull from the same pool of money and power, and each is keenly aware that another person's success is their loss.

The heart of the novel is the decline of Nick Naylor. At the beginning of the novel, Nick is wary of BR, Jeannette, and even his assistant Gazelle. He is aware that as chief spokesperson, his head is always on the chopping block, and there is a long line of people to take his place. When he experiences an upturn in positive press, first from his Oprah appearance and then resulting from his kidnapping, he loses perspective. BR

apologizes to him for attempting to fire him, and Jeannette is suddenly very concerned about his well-being.

Nick Naylor is a man who knows how to play in to other people's senses of self. He knows that Lady Bent's power derives from her intractability, and Nick exploits that. The same is true of Heather's thirst to stay ahead of the story and Lorne Lutch's commitment to his family. Still, in his own case, Nick is unable to see the motivation behind Jeannette's amorous affections and BR's concern. It costs him dearly and drives him to the brink of suicide.

In the world of Thank You for Smoking, everyone is looking out for himself, and those that fall hardest do so because they cannot see who is truly benefiting from events.

A Perfect Union Exists Between the Extremes

At the end of the novel, in an interview with Larry King, a reborn Nick Naylor makes this statement:

Though I don't advocate smoking, there are some very sanctimonious people lined up on the nonsmoking side ... Well, the Nazi war criminals were fairly normal, too. A lot of them were family types, you know, take the kids to the zoo on Sundays. Mondays, go back to exterminating people ... The new head of the Academy of Tobacco Studies, for instance, is very big in Boy Scouts. (pp. 271-272)

Thank You for Smoking is as much an indictment of the politics of the reactionary as of the tobacco lobby. It decries those who have turned the public discourse into a two-sided game of right and wrong for profit and power.

Nick Naylor is a product of this over-simplification, reaching for the rebuttal that turns his opponent into a Great Satan. He fires back at his opponents in the antismoking camp that they despise individual freedom or that they capitalize on the deaths of those with lung cancer.

On the other hand, people like Ron Goode and Senator Finisterre do just as much to deteriorate the discussion. They argue that cigarette distributors are merchants of death disease. Their worldview exists two extremes: the present, which is all abomination, and the ideal future, in which there are no cigarettes to be had.

This novel demonstrates that both sides of the argument render it meaningless and that, in the end, the faux debate is a ridiculously lucrative business for both sides.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of *Thank You for Smoking* is third person omniscient. The narrator has clear knowledge of the thoughts of Nick Naylor, the protagonist of the novel. As such, the novel takes the same effect as a first person narrative with descriptions of places, people, and situations colored by Nick's emotions and biases.

The first effect that this point of view has is that Nick assumes the reader's understanding of the world in which the novel takes place. This is a world in which fictional public figures like the assassinated President Finisterre, Jeff Megall, and former Prime Minister Penelope Bent intermingle with real-world figures like Oprah and Larry King. One hears references to these fictional politicians and players from the narrator but must determine from context clues who they are. Nick knows this world, and so the narrator does not feel the need for long exposition.

The other major effect is the injection of Nick's neuroses into the otherwise straightforward narrative of the novel. He is obsessed with women in stockings and often narration veers from the actual story to a description of a particularly attractive character's legs. He is a spokesperson of an industry of whose crimes he is acutely aware. Thus, when Nick is one air with Larry King listing the types of illnesses most smokers face in their lifetimes:

"They get colds and, you know, headaches and the normal sort of things, bunions" - Bunions? - "but they don't get seriously ill." (76)

That "Bunions?" reflects in microcosm the injection of Nick's psyche on to a third person narrative. This is what he said, but why did he say that?

Setting

Thank You for Smoking takes place, by and large, in Washington DC with occasional sojourns to New York, Los Angeles, and Winston-Salem. The events of the novel occur in a fictionalized mid-1990s.

The Washington DC of the novel is at once rooted in the reality of the reader's world, particularly the K Street world of congressmen and lobbies, and in an alternate reality. One hears the names Kennedy and Clinton, but can also hear the name Finisterre, a political dynasty of a family. There is a lot about the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, but also of the recent assassination of President Finisterre. One also learns that the first female Prime Minister is Lady Bent, and the biggest movie star in Hollywood is Mace McQuaid. This fictionalized DC allows Buckley to play fast and loose with history to suit his story. Still, it keeps the reader rooted in our real-world experiences of government and film



The changes in location throughout the novel reflect changes in the tone of the narrative. Washington DC is a menagerie of lobbyists, politicians, reporters, and ex-spooks. In essence, it's a powder-keg of methodical schemers with hidden agendas. Los Angeles, on the other hand, it all on the surface with people like Jack Bein. It is kinetic, bombastic, and laughably shallow. Winston-Salem, home of the Captain and the actual tobacco farms, represents a lost world of Southern manners and people who live off the land. These passages are slow and comforting, so that when the K Street-ers arrive there for the Captain's funeral, readers, along with Nick, are sickened.

Language and Meaning

The narration of the novel generally reflects the state-of-mind and personality of Nick Naylor, eloquent and peppered with political and pop culture references and stringing sarcasm. All and all, though, the sentences are simple and the world choice broad just to the point of quirk without slipping into prolix absurdity.

Characters from outside the DC area have distinctly different voices from Nick or the narration. Jeff Megall and Jack Bein from Los Angeles both speak in long sentences with many digressions and frequent questions that they themselves answer. The Captain, from Winston-Salem speaks in fluid southern colloquialisms with such staples as "sumbitch." Lady Bent and her viceroy speak in perfectly structured phrases, succinct and unyielding.

The paragraph structure is pretty straightforward, with two exceptions. One is the instances when Heather Holloway writes an article for the Washington Moon pertaining to the plot. In such cases, the headline is interjected into the text, after which all characters are aware of the information contained therein. The other case is when Nick has sex with Jeannette. These kinky scenes are comprised of monosyllabic statements between the two lovers, creating the sensation that the reader is listening in but only guessing at what is happening.

Structure

Thank You for Smoking is comprised of thirty chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue. The prologue sets up the character of Nick Naylor and society's reaction to him. The epilogue wraps up the loose ends of the plot. The thirty intermediate chapters are all between five and twenty-five pages long with the exception of Chapter 30, which consists of one headline by Heather Holloway.

The plot of the novel is linear and exclusively follows Nick. The story progresses quickly, with a half-page back story regarding every major new character. The novel has a lot of different points of action, but there are no subplots, simply the vast array of interlocking stories surrounding the central protagonist. As Nick travels from place to place, however, Buckley does not spend much time describing each new location. He allows the setting to be created by the interactions Nick has with its inhabitants.

The result of this is that Thank You for Smoking passes quickly for the reader even as its labyrinthine plot covers quite a bit of ground.

Quotes

"It sounds like you actually believe this stuff."

'It pays the mortgage,' Nick said. He offered this rationalization so many times now that it was starting to take on the ring of a Nuremberg defense. I was only paying ze mortgage ..." Chap. 1, p. 12

"[BR] had begun his tobacco career working in the grubby, rough-and-tumble — and not always strictly legit — arena of cigarette machines. He was known to have an inferiority thing about it, so staffers tended to avoid references to vending machines, unless it was unavoidable." Chap. 1, p. 13

"It was understood among them that at any given, somewhere, someone in the 'vast federal bureaucracy' was issuing regulations against them. They were the Cavaliers of Consumption aligned on the field of battle against the Roundheads of Neo-Puritanism." Chap. 2, p. 29

"Sometimes, rarely, you get a situation where a smokers are cool or sexy ... but, nine times out of ten, they're deviants, losers, nutcases, convicts, or weirdos with bad haircuts. The message that Hollywood is sending out is that smoking is uncool." Chap. 4, p. 40

"Nick could almost see the thought bubble rising above BR's head. [The Captain] won't be around much longer, Naylor, and ten seconds after they pronounce him DOA, your ass is mine." Chap. 7, p.65

"Larry, has anyone ever announced that they're going to kill someone on your show before?"

'No,' said Larry, 'but we get a lot of angry calls'

'Then this is your lucky day, because I'm here to tell you that within a week, we're going to dispatch Mr. Naylor for all the pain and suffering he's caused in the world.'" Chap. 8, pp. 79-80

"I find this all very ... stimulating."

'What do you find stimulating?'

'Your total absence of morality,' [Heather] sounded excited. Her eyes looked dreamy behind the glasses; she was leaning close to him. 'I get the feeling you'd do anything to pay that mortgage.'" Chap. 9, p. 92

"Dispatch? Dis? Patch? Nick grasped, reluctantly, that this lunatic had just covered him head to toe in nicotine patches. Which meant that a massive, indeed, probably lethal amount of nicotine was at this moment being delivered, through his skin, into his bloodstream. Not that there was any scientific proof that nicotine was bad for you ..." Chap. 11, p. 106



"He'd been called 'mass murderer' and worse by entire crowds of people, often simultaneously; but that was heckling ... but when pedestrians, total strangers, started coming up to you — at Washington's busiest intersection, in the middle of the day — and expressing solidarity with people who had kidnapped and tortured you, it could be taken as a sign that somewhere along your career path you had taken a wrong turn." Chap. 13, pp. 125-126

"He looked up from his dissimulations to see Jeannette's head sticking out from behind the door. She looked much more relaxed than she usually did ... Nick had to admit that Jeannette looked mighty fine this afternoon. Maybe one of her focus groups had told her to lighten up and lose the dominatrix look." Chap. 15, p 141

"Nick had to ask it — out of collegial admiration, he just had to hear the answer. 'You don't have any problem with the health question?'
Jeff responded without hesitation: 'I don't have the answers on that. I'm not a doctor. I'm just a facilitator. All I do is bring creative people together ...'
'Yes, right,' Nick said. He was dazzled. The man was a titan of ambiguity. He could learn from this man." Chap. 17, p. 170

"Nick slowly rotated and found himself facing Lorne Lutch himself. He was still recognizable as the Tumbleweed Man, even fifty pounds lighter and with yellow skin. He was in a bathrobe and slippers and wouldn't have looked at all threatening without the shotgun that was aimed at Nick's stomach." Chap. 18, p. 177

"Nick graciously thanked Chairman Finisterre for the opportunity to present his views before such a distinguished committee. How proud the founders would have been of the senators before him: over two thousand bounced checks between them, a seducer of underage Senate pages, three DUI's, one income-tax evader, a wife beater whose only defense was that she'd beat him up first, and a case of plagiarism, from, of all sources, a campaign speech of Benito Mussolini." Chap. 22, p.209

"Gazelle was sitting at her desk looking particularly woeful.
'Cheer up,' said Nick. 'Things are going our way.'
'You didn't hear?'
'Hear what?'
'The Captain died this morning.'" Chap. 26, p. 243

"Can we prove it?
'What's to prove? They're dead. The Captain's dead. BR is on top of the world. You're a yuppie dick facing ten to fifteen for fucking publicity stunt. Who's going to believe you?'
Chap. 27, p. 252

"Let's be honest kid — Gomez O'Neal seemed to be doing the voice-over for what was left of his conscience — you're a washed-out, forty-year-old snake-oil vendor on the payroll, until recently, of people who sell death for a living. On the Karmic food chain, you're somewhere between a sea slug and eel shit. You've fucked up two careers, one marriage, and two good friendships. Just think what you could have accomplished if

you'd lived to a ripe old age."
Chap. 28, p. 258

Topics for Discussion

Senator Finisterre introduces a bill intended to discourage smoking. Nick Naylor says that this type of action is an attempt to restrain personal freedom. Discuss the role of government in public health. Do politicians have a duty to discourage legal activity that is detrimental to public health?

Is Nick Naylor a trusting individual? His vocation is dependent upon deception, but he is easily deceived by his coworkers. He is a critical thinker, but he strays often when faced with women that express interest in him. Discuss the extent to which this worldly individual is an innocent in the plot.

Examine the reasoning people involved in the tobacco-lobbying industry are motivated by. Compare the objectives of Nick, the Captain, and Gomez O'Neal.

Polly and Nick do not carry on a romantic affair in the body in the novel. In the latter chapters, Nick becomes aware that she cares for him, and in the epilogue, he announces that they are married and expecting a child. To what extent are Polly and Nick kindred souls not only by their careers but also their attitudes toward these careers?

Nick defends the memories of both the Captain and Lorne Lutch, two men on opposite ends of the smoking debate. What do the Captain and Lorne have in common? In what ways do they reflect a bygone era, both for the country and for the industry?

One of Nick's undoings is his libido. Two examples of traps he falls in are Heather Holloway and Jeannette Dantine. Examine his romantic relationships with these two women. What does he think he is achieving? How do both Heather and Jeannette use his self-assurance against him?

Discuss delusion. Nick deludes himself that he can say anything or commit any atrocious breach of ethics in order to "pay the mortgage." In what concrete ways does Nick pay the moral price for his actions?

Buckley's novel has a strong sense of the speech idiosyncrasies of different regions and vocations. Contrast the verbiage Senator Finisterre, Jack Bein, Lady Bent, and the Captain. How do their manners of speech reflect where they are from and what they do?

Discuss self-interest. Does anyone in the novel act out of any motivation besides personal gain? What changes in motivation are reflected by Nick's discussion of recent events in the Epilogue?