

Visions of Sugar Plums Study Guide

Visions of Sugar Plums by Janet Evanovich

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Plot Summary

It's a couple of days before Christmas, and Stephanie Plum is in a panic. There is no Christmas tree in her apartment. Neither presents nor cards have been bought or distributed. As always, Stephanie is on the verge of screwing up big, just like she does every year.

Enter Diesel. Diesel is a gorgeous, sexy man with supernatural abilities. Diesel never fully explains these powers or how he happened to be in Stephanie's kitchen one morning. All Diesel will say is that he has come to help Stephanie. Desperate for money, and therefore to capture the only fugitive on the list, Stephanie agrees to let Diesel help. Rather, Stephanie can't get rid of Diesel and decides to accept it.

Stephanie's target is a bail jumper named Sandy Claws. Sandy is wanted for theft. Allegedly, the Santa wannabe broke into a hardware store to steal paint and other items he needed to finish up the toy making before the big day. Stephanie and Diesel make the rounds trying to catch the extremely aloof man. Elaine, Sandy's widowed sister is the only one at the house and all of her attention is focused on baking cookies for the elves.

Stephanie cannot figure out why Diesel has come to help. Along the way, Stephanie learns that part of Diesel's job is to apprehend those who are using their supernatural abilities for evil. Since every one knows that Sandy is a good guy, there must be someone else. That someone else is Ring, a man with the ability to make electricity. Ring is also Sandy's archenemy. It is Diesel's job to capture Ring and take him back to the home for aging "unmentionables". Since Stephanie can't get close to Sandy's workshop, the bounty hunter convinces a little person to apply for a job as one of Sandy's elves. Once the little person, Randy Briggs, gets the job, he refuses to help Stephanie capture Sandy. Briggs needs the job. There are several catastrophes involving elves, in which Stephanie is attacked and Stephanie's and Lula's Christmas trees are demolished. Stephanie and Lula both hate elves.

Ring escalates the campaign for revenge and begins to send firebombs and electric shocks to various places. However, since Ring is old, his aim is no longer true. A neighbor of Sandy's loses her garage thanks to a firebomb. Stephanie's new Christmas tree and car are blown up.

Stephanie and Diesel finally track down Sandy. Stephanie can't arrest him because it's Christmas Eve and he is Sandy Claws. As the group discusses Ring, the ceiling of the factory caves in. Thanks to Diesel, everyone is rescued.

With only four hours to go, Stephanie completes her Christmas shopping and Stephanie and Diesel go to the Plum house for Christmas dinner. The dinner is chaotic as usual. Morelli is still unsure about Diesel's presence. Grandma Mazur can't find her teeth. Mary Alice doesn't believe in Santa Claus any more.



After dinner, Grandma Mazur brings her new studmuffin to meet the family. It is none other than John Ring, the one who has been wreaking havoc on Trenton. Ring is nervous and is unable to control the electricity shooting out from his body. The Plum Christmas tree goes up in flames and Ring escapes. Diesel follows and apprehends Ring.

Mary Alice proclaims that she is going to wait for Santa. The rest of the family joins in. At midnight, Sandy Claws arrives with elves in tow, bringing presents for everyone. Sandy explains that Diesel had relayed the events of the evening and now it was Sandy's turn to try and make things right. There is a grand party.

The next morning, Diesel tells Stephanie that it's time for him to go now that Ring has been captured. Diesel also says that it was a very good Christmas and that he will be back someday.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

A man appears in the apartment of Stephanie Plum while she's mentally planning the day over a cup of coffee. The man is a total stranger who seems surprised to be in Stephanie's apartment. When Stephanie asks the man how he got there, the stranger replies that she doesn't want to know but that it's something akin to being beamed down a la Star Trek.

As a bounty hunter, Stephanie is used to weirdos and creeps showing up in unusual places. When Stephanie has time to think about it, she retrieves a gun from the brown bear cookie jar where it lives. The man acts indignant and tells Stephanie that it won't matter if she shoots. Besides, there are no bullets in the gun.

The stranger makes himself at home and flops onto Stephanie's bed. Diesel tries to convince Stephanie that he is real and that all his parts are in working order. The man finally introduces himself as Diesel - no last name. Stephanie makes a vain attempt to inform Diesel that she doesn't live alone. Diesel calls her on it, saying that Stephanie has "living alone" written all over her - then proceeds to point out the baggy sweats, messy hair, and bad attitude of his hostess. Thoughts of serial rapists and sex crimes begin to run through Stephanie's head.

Still unconvinced that the man in the apartment is real, Stephanie has a neighbor come in to make sure she's not seeing things. The neighbor sees Diesel, and Stephanie sends the neighbor away. Finally, Stephanie tells Diesel she is going to take a shower and throws his boots out into the hall, hoping that the man will follow. Diesel follows and Stephanie is shocked when he simply opens the locked door to let himself back in to the apartment. Diesel tells Stephanie that unlocking doors with a simple touch is one of his special gifts. Diesel does not elaborate.

Sensing that Diesel does not intend to leave, Stephanie explains her job as a bounty hunter and fills Diesel in on the current case, which is hunting a fugitive named Sandy Claws. Naturally, Diesel thinks Stephanie is hunting Santa Claus and she must straighten out the misunderstanding. Sandy Claws is wanted for skipping bail on a theft charge. Stephanie must capture him in order to get paid. Diesel listens patiently then reveals the secret that Santa has a dark side that no one knows about. Already confused about Christmas, Stephanie doesn't really know what to make of all of it. Diesel doesn't help by badgering Stephanie about the fact that she has no decorations, not even a tree.

The first stop for Stephanie and her unrelenting "assistant" Diesel is at the house of Sandy Claws. Sandy lives with a widowed sister in a house in Trenton. Elaine is a pleasant enough woman who always seems to be baking cookies. Elaine claims that she hasn't seen Sandy and that her brother is awfully busy at his workshop. While



Elaine knows the location of Sandy's toy store, she has no idea what the location is for the workshop.

There is banter between Stephanie and Diesel on the way to the toy store. Diesel is a notorious flirt and Stephanie, although annoyed with the strange man, finds him attractive. Stephanie must keep reminding herself that she has a boyfriend in Joe Morelli, Trenton cop. Stephanie also has an indefinable relationship with her bounty hunter mentor, Ranger. Ranger is even more mysterious than Diesel and more than a little dangerous.

Sandy Claws' workshop is desolate. Diesel uses his magic to open the door and the pair looks inside. The place is torn up with empty shelves and boxes strewn all over the floor. Diesel notes that there must be another location because the store contains almost nothing one would need to run Sandy's reportedly large operation. There is no information on the workshop, either.

Frustrated at the lack of evidence, Stephanie takes Diesel to her parents' house located in the 'Burg, a Trenton suburb. The Plum home is ugly but comfortable and is always welcoming to Stephanie and her various guests. Diesel meets Grandma Mazur and Stephanie's parents, Helen and Frank Plum. The Plum kookiness is immediately noticeable as both Grandma Mazur and Frank question Diesel. Everyone wants to know if Diesel is a replacement for Joe Morelli. No one believes Stephanie when she says that Diesel is a friend.

Chapter One Analysis

In Stephanie Plum, Janet Evanovich has created an average Jersey girl with a not-so-average life. Stephanie's first meeting with Diesel is bizarre, yet somehow ordinary for the heroine. Even Stephanie admits to having all sorts of people pop up in her apartment at all times of the day and night. While she is suspicious of Diesel, Stephanie seems to adapt to him rather quickly. Although Stephanie professes to dislike Diesel because he's obnoxious and arrogant, there is something about the man that sparks an attraction and some interest.

Since Diesel won't go away because he has been sent to help, Stephanie decides to take him on the search for Sandy Claws, a fugitive on her Failure To Appear (FTA) list. No matter where Diesel goes, he makes himself at home - from swiping beer out of Stephanie's refrigerator to barging into the Claws home and wheedling cookies out of Elaine. The trend continues when Stephanie takes Diesel to her parents' home in the 'Burg. Grandma Mazur takes to Diesel right away because he's "hot". Helen Plum, Stephanie's mother, tries to be polite at all times and never says much of anything. Frank Plum, Stephanie's father, says whatever comes to mind. Frank's comments are usually disparaging and rude, yet the man has a likeable quality. Diesel feels right at home among the kooky Plums.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Stephanie tries to make the best of the situation with Diesel and her family. Diesel is told to go into the living room and watch TV with Frank while the women bake cookies. Diesel admires the scrawny Christmas tree and strikes up a conversation with Stephanie's nieces, Angie, 9, and Mary Alice, a 7 year old who thinks she's a horse.

Conversation in the kitchen revolves around Diesel and Grandma Mazur's plans to attend a viewing at Stiva's Funeral Home. Stiva's is the social gathering place of widows and seniors in the 'Burg. Grandma Mazur reveals that she met a real studmuffin at the last viewing and was hoping to hook up with him again. Stephanie tries to block out the details spoken out loud by Grandma Mazur and decides that it's time to check in on Diesel. When Stephanie goes in to check on Diesel, Frank tells Stephanie that Diesel has gone out and will be back later. Stephanie is concerned that Diesel will get into trouble and wonders where he could have gone. Stephanie gets a thought and is upset to find that Diesel has taken her car.

Joe Morelli, Stephanie's boyfriend, pops into the house to join the family for dinner since Sunday is the traditional night for the entire family to get together. Joe does a double take when he spots Diesel, who has finally returned with Stephanie's car. The two men size each other up like dogs, much to Stephanie's annoyance. Joe and Stephanie get a few moments alone in which Stephanie explains, to the best of her ability, who Diesel is and why he's at the Plum house. When Stephanie tells Joe she suspects Diesel of being an alien, Joe feels her forehead and asks Stephanie if she has fallen down again. Knowing how quirky Stephanie can be, Joe takes as much as he can in stride. A phone call from work pulls Joe away from dinner.

Dinner with the Plums is an experience. Helen Plum takes the opportunity to badger Stephanie about her lack of readiness for Christmas. A neighbor hasn't received a card from Stephanie and Helen is sure that her daughter hasn't put up a tree or gone shopping. Stephanie does a poor job of defending herself.

Helen points out that Stephanie's sister, Valerie, isn't eating. Grandma Mazur says it's because Valerie keeps throwing up. Could she be pregnant? At the mention of pregnancy, Valerie runs upstairs to vomit while her boyfriend, Albert Kloughn, faints.

Mary Alice whines because it's too crowded at the dinner table - she needs to gallop. Helen Plum, who never raises her voice, yells at Mary Alice and informs her granddaughter that she will not gallop. Helen informs Mary Alice that she is not a horse, but a little girl. Mary Alice bursts into tears. Mary Alice then announces that she hates Christmas, that Christmas is poopy. Helen Plum makes an excuse to go into the kitchen where she sneaks a drink to calm her nerves.



After dinner, everything settled down. The children were put to bed and Stephanie prepared to go home. Diesel had vanished. Stephanie was secretly relieved that he might have gone home.

Diesel returned the next morning and stood over Stephanie while she slept. Stephanie awoke, startled. Diesel says that he has come back to help Stephanie find Sandy Claws. Stephanie insisted that Diesel wait out in the hall while she showered because Diesel had a habit of just popping up. Diesel said that he didn't need a thrill that bad, and waited.

Stephanie has an idea of how to nab Sandy Claws. There is a little person she knows who may be able to get a job as an elf at Sandy's workshop. The person she has in mind is Randy Briggs, a computer geek and complete pain in the ass. However, Stephanie is desperate. Briggs hangs up on Stephanie when she calls. Stephanie decides that she needs to see Briggs in person. Stephanie attempts to go without Diesel but Diesel manages to tag along. Once again, Diesel tries to convince Stephanie that he's not an alien, only supernatural.

Stephanie is shocked to see that Diesel has a black Jag in the parking lot. The pair takes the Jag to visit Randy Briggs. On the way, Stephanie explains that there had been an ad in the paper for assistant toy makers. Knowing that it was Sandy Claws, Stephanie called the number. She was immediately disconnected. Stephanie thinks that Briggs will have a better shot. On the way up to Briggs' apartment, there is a temporary blackout. Stephanie tells Diesel that she'd heard about the blackouts from Morelli. They were occurring all over town. Diesel comments that it's a pretty big deal but won't elaborate.

Briggs is not especially receptive to Stephanie's offer. When Briggs can't get rid of the visitors, he whacks Diesel in the knee with a soup ladle. Briggs is also upset because Diesel calls him a midget, then "little dude". Briggs informs Diesel that those terms are not politically correct and that he wants to be called a little person. Diesel asks if that's the best thing little people could think of when choosing a name.

After hearing Stephanie's explanation, Briggs agrees to make the call. Diesel and Stephanie leave the apartment before Briggs can change his mind.

Chapter Two Analysis

Stephanie is embarrassed by her family's behavior and is confused about how to handle Diesel in their presence. Knowing that Grandma Mazur would most likely grill Diesel about his job and why he was with Stephanie, Diesel is sent to the living room to watch TV with Frank Plum and the two nieces. Diesel can't get into much trouble with a man who barely speaks and two little girls who like to watch cartoons. Grandma Mazur entertains Helen and Stephanie with her tales of meeting a man at the funeral home, which amuses Stephanie and leaves Helen mortified.



Stephanie is both annoyed and relieved to find that Diesel has left the house. She's relieved to not have to explain his presence, annoyed because Diesel took her car.

Joe Morelli's appearance lends some normalcy to Stephanie's existence. With everything else topsy-turvy, Joe is a stable influence. While controlling his jealousy, Joe questions Stephanie after the two men take stock of each other. Stephanie attempts to explain Diesel's appearance and the fact that he has supernatural powers and is probably an alien. Much to Joe's dismay and relief, he is called into work to investigate a homicide.

Helen Plum is obviously cracking under the pressure of the holidays. Every day is crazy at the Plum house but the holidays add to the mix.

Randy Briggs is a reluctant and hostile man who wants nothing to do with Stephanie. Briggs had contact with Stephanie once before, when she saved his life. Stephanie brings it up in order to get Briggs to do the favor. Briggs points out that his life wouldn't have been in danger if it weren't for Stephanie. Stephanie chooses to ignore this fact. Briggs finally relents, in part to get rid of Stephanie and in part because he's afraid of Diesel.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Stephanie calls Connie Rosolli, the office manager at Vincent Plum Bail Bonds, to get information on Sandy Claw's utility bills in hopes of tracking the fugitive. Just as Stephanie hangs up, her mother calls in hysterics. Valerie has taken a pregnancy test and has locked herself in the bathroom. Stephanie tells her mother not to worry, that Valerie will come out when she got hungry. Helen insists that Stephanie come over and do something to coax Valerie out of the bathroom, because it's the only bathroom in the house and they need it. Stephanie agrees to help.

For a moment, Stephanie relishes in the fact that Valerie's life is in the toilet. All through Stephanie's childhood, Valerie was perfect. Stephanie could not compare. Valerie had married and had two grandchildren, while Stephanie's marriage had ended before her father had paid off the wedding reception. Stephanie tells Diesel what is happening and they go to the Plum house.

When Stephanie and Diesel arrive at the house, everyone is standing outside the bathroom, pacing, shouting, and banging on the door. Stephanie decides that Diesel should not open the door because there would be a stampede. Instead, Stephanie decides to go outside and climb in through the bathroom window. Diesel gives Stephanie a boost and Valerie lets Stephanie into the bathroom.

Valerie reveals that she has taken five home pregnancy tests and all of them had positive results. Valerie confesses that she did not take precautions, because she thought Albert wasn't man enough to have sperm. Stephanie tries to reassure Valerie by pointing out that Valerie was anxious to get remarried. Valerie says that she doesn't want to marry Albert Klough. After all, he lives with his mother and makes no money. Stephanie points out that Valerie has choices when it comes to the baby. Valerie reminds Stephanie that they live in a strict Catholic family and besides, having an abortion would cause guilt that would last for the rest of her life. Valerie finally decides that the entire episode is the fault of her ex-husband, who ran away with the babysitter.

Stephanie convinces Valerie to leave the bathroom. Not wanting to face the rest of the family, Valerie decides to climb out the window. Although Valerie is scared, she climbs up onto the roof. Valerie's foot slips on a shingle, she grabs Stephanie, and both women fall on top of Diesel, who is waiting to catch them. All three sprawl flat on the ground. When the rest of the family comes rushing outside, Helen Plum decides that the whole incident is Stephanie's fault. Stephanie is a bad influence on Valerie. After all, Stephanie was the one who jumped off the roof when she was seven; Valerie never did crazy things like this before.

Stephanie's pager goes off, and she finds that Randy Briggs has a job interview. Stephanie and Diesel leave the house. After explaining to Diesel the job as a bounty



hunter and what would happen to Sandy Claws when he was apprehended, Stephanie develops a twitch in her eye. Diesel tries to convince Stephanie that the twitch would go away if she bought a Christmas tree.

Stephanie and Diesel drive to the location of Randy Briggs' interview. There is a large group of little people preparing to interview. Stephanie wants to know that if the people are elves, why they don't they have pointy ears? Diesel teases Stephanie for believing in elves. Stephanie doesn't really believe in elves but then again, looking at Diesel, Stephanie's not sure what she believes in anymore. After all, she was sitting next to a supernatural being, and if she could believe in him then why not believe in elves?

Stephanie meets up with Randy Briggs, who managed to get the job. Briggs is reluctant to give Stephanie the location of the workshop, because he's afraid that she will screw it up. Stephanie decides to go into the office to apply for a job. Someone points out to Stephanie that she's too big for the job, that the job is for elves. Stephanie claims height discrimination. The elves attack Stephanie, and she flees.

As Stephanie and Diesel leave the site of the elf attack, Valerie calls Stephanie on her cell phone. Valerie had taken Stephanie's advice about retail therapy and is at the mall looking for Christmas presents. Stephanie makes a vain attempt to prevent Valerie from buying a horse for Mary Alice.

Stephanie and Diesel go back to the Claws house with to speak Elaine. Elaine is reluctant to talk and says that she's too busy making cookies. Diesel asks who the cookies are for and Elaine says that she bakes every day for the elves. Eventually, Elaine relays the message that Sandy does not want to talk to them and wishes to be alone. Elaine also explains that Sandy's real name is Sandor Clausen and after he retired, he decided to change it to Sandy Claws to promote the toy making business.

Diesel tells Elaine that he's trying to protect Sandy. Stephanie realizes that there is information she isn't aware of and wants to know what's going on. Diesel mentions that Sandy needs protection from Ring, who has been following him. Elaine seems concerned and says that she wasn't aware about Ring.

Stephanie and Diesel leave Elaine and return to the car, where Stephanie quizzes Diesel about this new information. Diesel lets on that Ring is a bad guy, more or less the opposite of Sandy. While they were once friends, Ring began to use his supernatural powers for amusement and domination. Sandy was one of the few people who had power equal to Ring's and did his best to stop his former friend. Now that the two men or older, both have begun to lose their powers.

Chapter Three Analysis

Stephanie is relieved to be able to rely on Connie for information. Connie is a valuable resource and Stephanie is glad to be her friend.



The news from Helen Plum both concerns and amuses Stephanie. Valerie used to be the perfect daughter who had the perfect marriage, the perfect husband, and never flunked a spelling test. Stephanie was exactly the opposite. Now that Valerie has gone a bit off her rocker, Stephanie can't help but enjoy it. For once in Stephanie's life, Valerie needs to be rescued.

With Diesel's help, Stephanie climbs through the bathroom window, reliving the days when she used that same window to sneak out and see her friends. Valerie is a wreck. Five pregnancy tests show that Valerie is pregnant. Valerie doesn't want to have a child out of wedlock and has no desire to marry Albert Kloughn, who Valerie sees as an ambulance chaser and is as doughy as a loaf of yeast bread. Stephanie suggests that there are choices for women these days. Valerie is shocked at the thought of getting an abortion. Not only will their mother's arms fall off from crossing herself so many times, but the guilt of such an action would haunt Valerie for the rest of her life. Valerie reminds Stephanie that they come from a Catholic family and things like that just aren't done. Valerie goes on to ask Stephanie how she would feel if Rex the hamster's mother had aborted him. Stephanie gets the point. Stephanie also realizes that being Valerie isn't as rosy as she thought. In the end, Stephanie is blamed for Valerie's crazy behavior because Valerie was always the good one.

Stephanie tracks down Randy Briggs who got the job as one of Sandy's elves. Randy, still afraid that Stephanie will screw up this great opportunity, refuses to give out information on the workshop. Stephanie decides that she must rely on her own resources to get the information. As usual, Stephanie's efforts are unrewarded and Stephanie learns her lesson when the elves attack.

Diesel reveals to Stephanie and Elaine that Sandy's archenemy has come out of retirement and is hot on his trail. The enemy, Ring, still bears unresolved anger toward Sandy for showing him up and for all the times that Sandy tried to prevent Ring from using his powers for evil. Ring is the cause of the electrical disturbances. Now Stephanie understands why Diesel was taking it so seriously. Elaine responds well to Diesel now that she knows the young man has information. Elaine wants to protect her brother.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

Stephanie and Diesel leave Elaine's house. As Diesel drives, he explains to Stephanie the powers that Ring once possessed. In addition to tampering with electricity, Ring could make lightning. Diesel doesn't know how much power Ring has but assumes that his powers have weakened with age. Diesel also says that he doesn't think Sandy will contact ask for help because he has always worked alone. During the conversation, Valerie calls from the mall to ask for advice on Christmas shopping.

Diesel senses something is awry and makes a u-turn. As Diesel nears Elaine's house, the pair notice smoke and hear rumbling coming from that direction. Ring has attacked. Fortunately for Elaine, Ring attacked the wrong house. Instead of hitting Sandy's house with firebombs, Ring managed to destroy the next-door neighbor's garage. No one is hurt. Sandy refuses to flee into safety and returns to baking cookies.

The only lead Stephanie has is that Sandy's production manager is one of the interviewers at the employment office. Diesel suggests that they return to talk to Lester, the production manager. Stephanie balks because of the elves. Half a block from the office, Stephanie and Diesel notice several emergency vehicles. Stephanie approaches two Trenton cops who relay the news that there was some kind of fire riot. No one was hurt and all the elves ran away.

Stephanie complains of the cold and wants to go home, despite Diesel's suggestions that she go Christmas shopping. Hoping to get rid of Diesel for the evening, Stephanie tells him that Joe Morelli will be coming over. Joe calls and cancels, so Stephanie is stuck with Diesel. Stephanie tries to object and tells Diesel that she isn't comfortable having him in the apartment. Diesel pleads his case and says that he hasn't even tried anything yet. Then Diesel kisses Stephanie. Stephanie's toes curl but she manages to push Diesel away. Stephanie reiterates that there will be no kissing or anything of the kind. Stephanie and Diesel go up to the apartment.

Stephanie continues to have anxiety over Christmas and the fact that she has screwed it up once again. Diesel is in the apartment when Stephanie wakes up and offers some helpful advice on the Christmas dilemma. Together, they go to Randy Briggs' apartment to tail the elf to work. Once there, Stephanie and Diesel go inside and ask for Sandy. The receptionist says Sandy is not in and has no idea when he will return. Diesel suggests that they stake out the building.

Diesel tells Stephanie that he had spent the night visiting some of Ring's old haunts to see if the super hero had been around. The search was unsuccessful. Diesel sleeps while Stephanie continues the stakeout.



Lula calls Stephanie and asks if she wants to go Christmas shopping. Diesel tells Stephanie to go. Lula picks up Stephanie and they go to the mall. The mall is crowded and there are no parking spaces open - until Lula makes a space by bumping two cars out of the way. The two women shop. Lula cleans out the store and Stephanie ends up with a pair of gloves for her dad. Stephanie had given all the good gift ideas to Valerie. On the way out, Lula stops so they can buy Christmas trees.

Lula and Stephanie return to Diesel who is still on stake out. The women offer to take over. Lula promises to be good although she freaks out when she finds out that the building being staked out is full of elves. Stephanie has to explain that even though Lula loves "midgets", it's not politically correct to call them that any more. Lula says that she can't keep up with the politically correct stuff and is confused about what to call herself these days. Regardless of what they are called, Lula wants to see them. The trip inside the factory ends in disaster when the elves once again chase Stephanie out the door.

Chapter Four Analysis

Stephanie shows a combination of tenacity and stubbornness by going to the factory to find Sandy Claws. Briggs is unhappy to see Stephanie and is still afraid that she will do something to get him fired. Briggs tells Stephanie to go away and even hangs up on Stephanie when she calls later.

Diesel shows even more trust in Stephanie when he tells of the previous night's search for Ring. Stephanie has trust in Diesel, even if it is tenuous and just plain weird.

Lula rescues Stephanie from the stake out to go to the mall. Lula is a whirlwind who says and does whatever she wants. Lula especially shows this side of herself when she pushes the cars out of the parking spaces. While Lula is a woman on a mission, Stephanie's frustration and hopelessness get the better of her. Even with one present and a Christmas tree in tow, Stephanie doesn't feel much better.

Stephanie and Lula relieve Diesel from the stake out. Diesel is wary of Lula even though the woman states that Decorum is her middle name. Lula's exuberance over seeing the fake elves gets the better of her, as usual. Stephanie confirms to herself that it was a mistake going back into the factory as the elves once again chase her away.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

Stephanie and Lula run from the factory to the safety of Lula's Firebird. The elves follow and attack. The elves pull the Christmas trees from the trunk of the Firebird and rip them limb from limb. The elves climb all over the car as Stephanie and Lula hide inside. Lula finally hits the gas and watches as most of the elves disappear in the rearview mirror. One elf hangs on. As Lula accelerates, the elf flies off the windshield taking the windshield wiper with him. Lula is no longer enamored with elves.

Stephanie returns to her apartment, only to get a message on the answering machine from her mother interrogating her about sending Christmas cards. Knowing that Stephanie is not prepared for Christmas, Frank Plum picked up a Christmas tree at the service station closeout sale. Could anything be worse than getting a Christmas tree from the service station?

Mary Alice and Angie are sitting in front of the TV when Stephanie arrives at her parents' house. Valerie is in the upstairs bathroom throwing up again. Helen and Grandma Mazur are in the kitchen where Grandma Mazur is telling how someone had stolen her false teeth. Everyone thinks Grandma Mazur has just misplaced the teeth and won't listen to the theory of theft. Completely ignoring her mother, Helen asks Stephanie about her day. Stephanie replies that it was an average day although she was once again attacked by elves. Valerie enters the kitchen and tells Stephanie that she has decided to have the baby and not get married right away.

Grandma Mazur asks how she can possibly eat pot roast for dinner without teeth. The old woman declares that if the teeth didn't appear by morning she plans to call the cops. After all, she has a date for Christmas Eve.

As usual, Helen Plum fixes a bag of leftovers for Stephanie to take home. Stephanie goes outside to find Frank attaching a nearly naked Christmas tree to the roof of the Honda CRV. As Stephanie is driving home, she notices Diesel following her in the black Jag. As Stephanie and Diesel stand outside in the parking lot of Stephanie's apartment building, there is a burst of electrical energy and the tree catches on fire. Diesel apologizes, saying that the strike was meant for him not Stephanie. Stephanie's neighbors look outside the window and are not surprised that yet another car is on fire. A neighbor asks if Stephanie is okay and says that the flaming Christmas tree is a nice touch. Fire trucks and emergency vehicles come to the apartment building with Morelli in tow. Morelli says that he heard the call come across the police scanner and somehow knew that it had to be Stephanie.

The next morning Diesel is waiting for Stephanie in the living room. In a morning fog, it takes Stephanie a minute to remember who Diesel is and why he is sitting on her couch. Diesel says that he plans to follow Stephanie around to help her out for the day.



To make up for the torched Christmas tree, Diesel had set one up in the kitchen fully decorated. As Stephanie admires the tree, Randy Briggs calls and relays information that Sandy Claws has shut down the factory and sent everyone home. Lester and Sandy are still at the factory. Stephanie and Diesel head for the Jag. At the factory, Diesel tells Stephanie that she should stay in the car while he goes inside to talk to Lester and Sandy. Stephanie objects and Diesel locks her in the car. Knowing that this is yet another trick involving superpowers, Stephanie lays on the horn until Diesel returns to let her out. Randy Briggs pulls in and the three enter the factory.

Lester and Sandy are sitting together at a workstation while Sandy works on carving a block of wood. Diesel asks Sandy what he's making and Sandy replies that it's a special toy for a special person. Sandy asks if Diesel has come to take him back to the home. Diesel says that the assignment is to capture Ring, not Sandy. Sandy says that he is surprised Ring still has power. Sandy knows that Ring is after him because of the electricity in the air. Knowing that Ring is out there is what caused Sandy to send the elves home. Lester is happy to see the elves go. Sandy says that he brought the elves in from Newark because the factory had been designed as a day care and it was easier to hire elves than to refit the furniture and bathrooms to accommodate normal size adults. Eventually Stephanie reminds Sandy about the missed court date. Briggs tells Stephanie to cut Sandy some slack until he realizes that unless Sandy is returned to jail no one gets paid. Stephanie realizes that she can't arrest Sandy on Christmas Eve. Before anything else can happen, there's a clap of thunder and the ceiling caves in. While everyone is OK, the debris from the ceiling has trapped them. After half an hour, the group realizes that no one knows they are trapped. Diesel realizes that he has to go for help and using his superpowers disappears from the factory. Diesel returns with emergency vehicles and everyone is saved.

Since the only present Stephanie bought was torched in the CRV, Diesel takes Stephanie to Macy's. After shopping, Stephanie and Diesel go to the Plum house for dinner. Grandma Mazur is still looking for the false teeth. Eventually Stephanie asks Angie and Mary Alice if they have seen Grandma's teeth. Mary Alice says she thought Grammy was throwing the teeth away so she took the teeth and gave them to the big dinosaur in Grandma's room. Grandma Mazur retrieves the teeth, which Mary Alice had decorated with markers.

Morelli and Albert Kloughn arrive. Grandma Mazur's date calls to change their meeting to Stiva's funeral home after dinner. For once, nothing catches on fire. Mary Alice asks that if there was a Santa Claus, would he bring presents to horses. Everyone agrees that Santa would bring to present for a horse. Grandma Mazur leaves early to meet her studmuffin.

Stephanie and Morelli step outside to have a private conversation in which Stephanie explains about Diesel and Ring. Morelli gives Stephanie a Christmas present, a small gold and platinum ring with sapphires. Morelli says that it's a friendship ring and that he knows it's not time for an engagement. Grandma Mazur and studmuffin arrive and Morelli tries in vain to bail out. Grandma introduces her studmuffin, whose name is John Ring. It finally dawns on Stephanie that this is the connection between Ring, Diesel, and



her. Ring is shooting off sparks of electricity and everyone tries to write it off to dry air. Knowing that Ring must be apprehended, Stephanie tries to get the man away from the rest of the family. Ring gets increasingly stressed out and more electricity shoots off his head. As Ring admires the dried out Christmas tree, the sparks set it on fire. By the time the fire is put out, the tree and all the presents are ruined. Ring and Diesel are gone. After the fire, Mary Alice comes into the living room and asks if the presents up that were ruined were from the family. Mary Alice states that it's all right and that she is going to wait for Santa Claus. Grandma Mazur says she thought Mary Alice didn't believe in Santa Claus anymore. Mary Alice says that Diesel talked told her that it is important to believe in things that make you happy. Diesel told Mary Alice that he was going away, but that Santa Claus would be arriving tonight. Grandma Mazur comments that they should clean up the living room. Helen says that they can do it tomorrow and that she's also going to wait for Santa. The rest of the family sits down and waits. At midnight, cars drive up to the house and excited voices fill the air. When the front door is answered, Sandy Claws stands on the stoop bearing gifts. Sandy is attended by elves, including Randy Briggs. Stephanie relays that Diesel has apprehended Ring. A party ensues. Sandy Claws reveals the special toy he was working on in the factory when he gives it to Mary Alice. It's a horse, made especially for a girl with special abilities.

Stephanie wakes up the next morning and slips out of bed, leaving Morelli to sleep. Diesel is in the kitchen. Stephanie knows that it's time for Diesel to go. Diesel says that they will see each other again and that it was a good Christmas. Stephanie says goodbye, but Diesel is already gone. Stephanie realizes that Diesel was right. It was a very good Christmas.

Chapter Five Analysis

As usual, Stephanie is plagued by bad luck and weird circumstances. The latest episode at the factory leaves Stephanie believing that she is not meant to have a Christmas tree. The news that Frank has purchased a Christmas tree at the service station leaves Stephanie filled with resignation.

Dinner at the Plum house is always an experience. Grandma Mazur always adds a touch of the absurd, this time tinged with a conspiracy theory involving the selling of false teeth on the black market. As usual, Frank Plum questions why all this must happen to him. Valerie makes peace with the pregnancy and over the sibling rivalry issue, Stephanie is happy for her.

Stephanie accepts the Christmas tree from her father with ambivalence. At least it's a tree, right? The torching of the CRV at the apartment takes care of the dried out tree, as well as Stephanie's CRV. Stephanie doesn't care about the tree but likes the CRV that is now burnt to a crisp. Diesel feels guilty about the incident. Morelli arrives, knowing that a car fire has to be related to Stephanie. Morelli seems to accept all of Stephanie, including all of her strange antics and car fires, albeit reluctantly.



The trip to the factory proves that people are willing to help when someone is in need. Diesel's attempts to protect Stephanie annoy her and Diesel finally relents to accepting the assistance. Sandy and Lester are trying to salvage what's left of Christmas while protecting the workers. Stephanie realizes that regardless of how much she needs the money, she cannot arrest Sandy knowing that it would be impossible to post bail again until after the holiday.

Diesel risks blowing his cover by popping out of the wreckage at the factory. Everyone denies seeing Diesel vanish, mostly to save face.

Christmas dinner at the Plum's is both trying and festive. Grandma Mazur shows once again that she isn't affected by much and believes that the newly decorated teeth are interesting. Helen is relieved that everyone is present and dinner goes off without a hitch, even if there isn't an opportunity to sneak a sip from the bottle in the kitchen. Although everyone is relieved that Grandma Mazur's studmuffin isn't at dinner, it is apparent that the family will meet the mystery man later.

Stephanie and Morelli share an intimate moment on the back porch as Stephanie opens the Christmas present. Morelli has thought of a way to express his love without terrifying either of the two who share a commitment phobia.

The appearance of John Ring is the last piece of the puzzle for Stephanie. Now it's clear why Diesel had shown up and involved her in the apprehension of the aging superhero. Ring knows that there's going to be trouble and shows it. Although the fire was accidental, Ring uses the opportunity to flee. Diesel follows and makes the apprehension, saving Christmas.

Mary Alice realizes that it's okay to believe in Santa Claus. Diesel has had a profound impact on the little girl and for that, the family is thankful. The rest of the family follows Mary Alice's lead and declares that it's important to wait for Santa. Diesel comes through again by letting Sandy know what has happened. Sandy shows true Santa Claus colors when he arrives at the house bearing gifts.

Stephanie is surprised to learn that Mary Alice has special abilities. It is not clear what those abilities are and Sandy doesn't say.

Stephanie is somewhat sad to see Diesel go but is happy that it all worked out in the end. Although Stephanie's holiday frustrations aren't cured, there may be a chance that next year will be much better.



Characters

Stephanie Plum

Stephanie Plum is a train wreck. As the main character in Janet Evanovich's "Visions of Sugar Plums", Stephanie is a masterful combination of today's modern woman, mixed with the characteristics of a traditional Jersey girl, who was raised in an Italian-Hungarian family. Professionally, Stephanie is a professional fugitive apprehension agent, otherwise known as a bounty hunter. The heroine is 30-years-old, has brown shoulder length curly hair, and considers herself to be average height and weight. Stephanie does not presume to be gorgeous, but thinks that on most days, she passes muster.

Stephanie Plum was raised in Chambersburg, New Jersey, which is a suburb of Trenton. People who live in the Burg believe in, big hair, big boobs and American cars. Stephanie's parents still live in the same house where she and her sister Valerie grew up. As dysfunctional as Stephanie believes her family to be, they remain a comfort and the family home is often a refuge.

Of the two Plum daughters, Stephanie was the wild child. Even as an adult Stephanie feels that she cannot compete with Valerie, who is considered the perfect daughter. Mrs. Plum is eager to point out that Valerie got married and had two beautiful granddaughters, while Stephanie gets shot at for a living.

Although the heroine is considered to be an average woman, she has a couple of things going for her defy reality. No matter how much cake, pizza or doughnuts Stephanie eats, she rarely gains more than a pound or two. Even though Stephanie is afraid of guns and danger, she often manages to catch the fugitive and keep from being shot. One of the most notable facts about Stephanie's life is that she has two men who are both gorgeous and dangerous. One is the steady responsible type with just a hint of bad boy, while the other is equal to death by chocolate.

Regardless of Stephanie's insecurities, screw-ups, and extraordinary need to be independent, she is one of the most likable and fun heroines out there today.

Diesel

Diesel is a man of mystery. Popping into Stephanie's kitchen out of the clear blue doesn't seem to surprise this man who claims to have some supernatural powers, although he is never clear on the extent of those powers. The most Diesel will say is that he has been sent to help. Powers include being able to pop in and out, of various locations, an uncanny sense of his surroundings, and the ability to unlock any type of door with the touch of a hand.



Much to Stephanie's dismay, Diesel keeps returning like a rash. Although he can be obnoxious, smarmy and pushy, Diesel is also dangerously charming with seductive eyes and a smile that could light up Broadway. It doesn't help matters any that Diesel is over 6 foot tall, with long blond hair held back in a ponytail, deep set brown eyes, an athlete's body, and a really nice butt.

Stephanie's family doesn't know what to think of Diesel. Mr. Plum hides behind his newspaper, Mrs. Plum is concerned about Stephanie's relationship with Trenton cop Joe Morelli, sister Valerie is too wrapped up in her own life to notice, and Grandma Mazur thinks Diesel is hot. There is much to be said about a man who can survive a traditional Plum family dinner, complete with fire, fainting and vomiting.

Lula

Lula is a file clerk at Vincent Plum's Bail Bonding Company. That is, when she's not riding shotgun with Stephanie, shopping, doing her nails, or checking out the newest bakery. She's a twenty-something black woman with a voluptuous size 12 body stuffed into a size 6 spandex

skirt, Lula is proud of her former profession as a "ho". Lula is loud, raucous, and willing to take no guff from any one, even if it's a fugitive with a gun. Lula believes that as a 'ho she gained more street smarts than any criminal skulking along Trenton's city streets and is eager to prove it. Usually, the attitude works for her. When it doesn't, the .45 kept in an oversized purse does the trick.

Although Lula means to help Stephanie, the woman is often the cause of many of the bounty hunters problems. However, Lula drives a mean getaway Firebird and is willing to jump into the fire if need be, as long as it doesn't interfere with lunch.

Grandma Mazur

Grandma Mazur is the mother of Helen Plum, Stephanie's mother. Grandma Mazur moved into the Plum family home when Grandpa Mazur went to the great poker game in the sky. Grandma Mazur is in her 70s, mostly slack skin and spindly bones, with a mop of tight curly gray hair. It is apparent that Stephanie gets some of her personality from Grandma Mazur, who is irreverent and wacky, much to the dismay of Frank Plum, Stephanie's father.

Grandma Mazur is often the comic relief in the Plum home. There is always a new scheme to be hatched or a new career or lifestyle to try. Grandma Mazur thrives on 'Burg gossip and lives to attend viewings and funerals at Stiva's funeral home, which she considers to be the premier social hot spot in the neighborhood.



Helen Plum

Helen is Stephanie's mother. Helen Plum believes that everything can be solved by a stiff drink, a little prayer, and a pineapple upside down cake.

Frank Plum

Frank is Stephanie's father. Frank Plum is a retiree who drives a cab in his spare time, mostly to get away from Grandma Mazur. Frank is known for watching TV, reading the newspaper and dishing out snide comments under his breath.

Joe Morelli

Joe Morelli is a former bad boy turned Trenton cop. Morelli is the one who took Stephanie's virginity and is the object of the heroine's on again off again lust.

Sandy Claws

Sandy Claws, a.k.a. Sandor Clausen, is a fugitive on Stephanie's list. Sandy is a modern day Santa Claus who is incredibly difficult to locate. All that is known about the man is that he, too, has supernatural powers that are used for good and that he only hires elves.

Randy Briggs

Randy Briggs is a computer geek and little person. Stephanie bribes Randy into applying for a job as an elf at Sandy Claws' toy factory.

Ring

Ring is the polar opposite of Sandy Claws. As a supernatural, Ring used his powers to create electricity and lightning for evil. Since coming out of retirement, Ring has returned to the streets to wreak havoc on Sandy's life.

Connie Rosolli

Connie Rosolli is the office manager at Vincent Plum Bail Bonding Company. Connie is a typical Jersey girl with big hair, big boobs, and a bigger attitude. Connie is friends with Stephanie and Lula.



Angie

Angie is Valerie's daughter and Stephanie's niece. Stephanie refers to the nine-year-old as a very short forty-year-old woman.

Mary Alice

Mary Alice is Valerie's daughter and Stephanie's niece. Mary Alice is convinced that she is a horse.

Valerie

Valerie is Stephanie's perfect but mentally unbalanced sister.

Albert Kloughn

Albert Kloughn is an ambulance chaser and Valerie's skittish boyfriend.

Rex

Rex is Stephanie's hamster and longest running relationship.



Objects/Places

Stephanie Plum's apartment

Stephanie Plum's apartment is one of twelve apartments in a three story red brick utilitarian apartment building located in Trenton. It is the site of many home invasions, torrid affairs, and the place where Stephanie often hides out from fugitives, or maybe even Morelli.

Although the apartment has good security, people are always popping in and out even when the deadbolt is turned. Regardless of what Stephanie might be doing, Morelli may saunter in using his key, Ranger or Diesel may simply appear, or various criminals may manage to crawl in the window through the fire escape.

The one bedroom apartment is sparsely furnished and usually contains little to no food save leftovers from Helen Plum's kitchen.

The Plum Family Home

The Plum family home is located in Chambersburg, a suburb of Trenton, NJ. Stephanie and Valerie grew up in the right half of the intensely ugly clapboard house, with two traditional parents and a neighborhood full of watchful eyes. The house attached to the Plum home belongs to Mable Markowitz, a bingo playing widow with clean windows and a plaster statue of the Virgin Mary in the front yard. Mrs. Markowitz's house is painted a hideous shade of green, which clashes perfectly with the Plum's yellow and brown combination.

If there were one thing that Stephanie would recreate and sell, it would be the smell of her mother's kitchen.

Vincent Plum Bail Bonding Company

Vincent Plum Bail Bonding Company is located in a strip mall in downtown Trenton. The office itself is non-descript. Connie Rosolli is the office manager and receptionist and often the first thing people see when they enter the office. Vinnie Plum's office is in the back of the space, from which odd sounds often emanate. With Vinnie's known fetishes and sexual curiosities, most keep away from the closed door.

Also in the office is a couch on which Lula is often perched while reading an entertainment magazine.



Sandy Claws' House

Sandy Claws lives in a single house in Trenton. The fugitive lives with a widowed sister who is forever baking cookies to feed the elves. The house is well-appointed and festooned with Christmas decorations. Stephanie and Diesel stop at the Claws house often during the search for Sandy. The house is also the presumed target of Ring, the villain, who instead firebombs the neighbor's garage.

Randy Briggs' Apartment

Brigg's apartment is home to the computer geek turned elf.

Tasty Pastry

Tasty Pastry is the bakery where Stephanie worked as a teenager and the site where she lost her virginity to Joe Morelli.

Stiva's Funeral Home

Stiva's Funeral Home is the hot spot for funerals in Trenton, considered to be a social gathering place for widows and seniors like Grandma Mazur.

Sandy Claws' Toy Store

Sandy Claws maintains a toy store in downtown Trenton, which gets destroyed by Ring.

Sandy Claws' Workshop

Sandy Claws' workshop is in an undisclosed location and the place where the would-be Santa is hiding from the law.

Stephanie's Honda CRV

The Honda CRV is the latest in a long line of Stephanie's vehicles, which often get blown up.



Themes

Christmas

The main theme running throughout "Visions of Sugar Plums" is Christmas. Stephanie Plum is confused by Christmas. Although Stephanie is grown up, she can't seem to get a handle on the important holiday. The apartment is not decorated, there is no tree, and not a single present has been purchased and wrapped. Some part of Stephanie wants to hang on to her childhood in which her mother, Helen Plum, always bakes the right cookies, sets a great table, and although there is usually some fiasco, things always turn out okay. Stephanie does not feel capable of taking on such a big chore. Therefore, every year, Stephanie methodically screws it up. This year, however, Stephanie has Diesel to help.

Diesel professes to hate Christmas and thinks that having kids is overrated. Diesel loves Christmas cookies, however. Aside from the religious connotations, Diesel believes that Christmas should be whatever makes that individual person happy and no one can really tell another how to do it. Despite the lack of love for Christmas, Diesel is relentless in making sure Stephanie will have a Christmas tree, presents, and holiday spirit.

Sandy Claws as a fugitive is a hilarious twist. The elves that attack Stephanie on a number of occasions add both obstacles and frustrations for the bounty hunter. Diesel revels in the fact that Stephanie is afraid of the elves after they attack her for the first time.

Eventually, Stephanie does get a Christmas tree. With the assistance of Lula, Stephanie gets to the mall and starts to look for gifts. Stephanie tries to convince everyone that there are still two days until Christmas, which means she has plenty of time.

While Stephanie is struggling with her own Christmas crisis, Mary Alice, Stephanie's niece, has learned that there is no Santa Claus. Mary Alice, who is 7, is not taking it well.

In the end, Mary Alice reluctantly regains her faith in Christmas. Stephanie rediscovers the childhood Christmas magic. Sandy Claws and his archenemy are both successfully dealt with and Diesel's mission is accomplished. Stephanie feels that it was a very good Christmas.

Family

Stephanie Plum's family is dysfunctional but loving in its own way. Frank Plum is a crotchety man, Helen Plum is a religious zealot with an anxiety disorder, Stephanie's only sister, Valerie, is straight out Stepford, Valerie's daughter Mary Alice thinks she's a horse, and Grandma Mazur is just plain kooky and unpredictable. Still, when the going



gets tough, Stephanie can always count on the Plums for help - or at least to let her hide out from the latest criminal.

Stephanie is most like Grandma Mazur in that she is unconventional to say the least. While Valerie was married and has two daughters, Stephanie has a hamster. Stephanie was married but the marriage ended before the ink on the marriage certificate was dry. Now Stephanie has a boyfriend in Joe Morelli, a Trenton cop. Stephanie and Morelli can't even stay engaged.

In the end, the only thing that's important is that the Plums love each other. That, and dinner is always on the table at six o'clock sharp. Everyone is welcome and there will always be cake.

Resourcefulness

Although Stephanie isn't a very good bounty hunter, she always finds ways to get the fugitive. Stephanie has many resources on which to draw. There is Joe Morelli and other members of the Trenton Police Department, Ranger, Stephanie's mentor; Lula, the gun toting ex-prostitute turned file clerk; and Connie the indispensable office manager at the bail bonds company. Occasionally even Grandma Mazur lends a hand. In a small community like the 'Burg, there is always someone to call for help.

Sometimes occasions arise when there is no one available to help. In those instances, Stephanie often takes things into her own hands and ends up with less than stellar results. No matter how bad things get, Stephanie always manages to pull through.



Style

Point of View

Visions of Sugar Plums is written in the first person from the perspective of the main character, Stephanie Plum. The first person point of view lends a sense of personal insight and feeling to the novel that would be lost through a third person narrative. The reader is able to see the world through the eyes of Stephanie Plum, which is imperative in understanding the character. The heroine has an unusual way of looking at things. This viewpoint is captured well in the first person where it might be misunderstood in any other form.

The narrative and dialogue are broken up so that the reader is always entertained while getting the necessary information that would not otherwise be revealed. Through this technique, the reader is able to grasp the simple story and enjoy the characters' wit at the same time.

There is a great deal of unspoken information available through this point of view. While one may miss some aspects of the story using the first person point of view, it is the only point of view that can do justice to this character.

Setting

Visions of Sugar Plums is set in Trenton, New Jersey and its surrounding communities. Stephanie Plum lives in a one-bedroom apartment located in a utilitarian brick building on the outskirts of Trenton. The Plum family home is located in Chambersburg, a suburb of Trenton. Chambersburg, or the 'Burg, as locals call it, is an old fashioned neighborhood. The community is a closely-knit group of families, predominantly Italian. It is the type of neighborhood where it was safe to grow up, children minded their elders, and everyone knew what everyone else was doing. For the most part, the community has not changed.

The Plum home is one-half of a duplex, painted yellow and brown. The neighbor's house is painted a sickly green, which makes for a visually horrendous pairing. However, it has been this way for so long that Stephanie finds its ugliness comforting. Living inside the house are Stephanie's parents, Frank and Helen Plum, their daughter Valerie and her daughters Angie and Mary Alice, and Helen's mother Grandma Mazur. As with most Italian families, there are usually guests for dinner.

Also included in the setting is Vincent Plum Bail Bonding Company, which is located in a strip mall just off the main thoroughfare of Hamilton Avenue; Sandy Claws' home, which he shares with Elaine, a widowed sister; and Sandy Claw's mysterious workshop, which was designed for children and easily accommodates the elves.



Language and Meaning

Janet Evanovich has utilized the best and the worst in New Jersey vernacular in creating Stephanie Plum. The informal language creates a relaxed atmosphere while letting the humor show through. Complementing the dialogue is a narrative language that is slightly more formal and structured but manages to flow seamlessly with the common language. There are different styles of speech from the old school to street slang. All are age appropriate and work together in a smooth fashion. One or two word non-sequiturs are rampant throughout the novel. The language also shows the level of intimacy between the characters, revealing relationships that are not always obvious.

The descriptions regarding people and places are excellent. The author paints a vivid portrait while not giving away so much that the reader is robbed of his imagination.

The overall feeling of the book is governed by the use of language. The tone and vernacular is unmistakably New Jersey and even if the reader has not had a New Jersey experience, the words and style make it real.

Structure

Visions of Sugar Plums is encapsulated in five chapters with an average of thirty-five pages per chapter. Although the chapters are fairly long for a book of this size, the text and the story manage to flow smoothly.

The main plot of the story involves the main character being assigned to apprehend a fugitive named Sandy Claws. Being the Christmas season, Sandy is often mistaken for the man in the red suit. While Stephanie Plum, the bounty hunter, struggles to find the fugitive, she is also struggling with how to get through Christmas with no gifts, no decorations, and no money. One morning a man appears in Stephanie's kitchen. The man, whose name is Diesel, apparently has some kind of supernatural powers although he can't levitate or fly, much to Stephanie's disappointment. As an "unmentionable", Diesel is assigned to track down other supernaturals who have gone down the wrong path. Somewhere along the way, Stephanie's and Diesel's assignments intersect. The pair tracks down Sandy while Diesel attempts to ward off Ring, another unmentionable who is out to get revenge on Sandy who is Ring's archenemy. Ring wreaks havoc while Stephanie and Diesel are on the hunt.

As the case ends, Stephanie has been given a sense of hope regarding Christmas, thanks to Diesel and her niece, Mary Alice. Sandy is allowed to be free until after Christmas and Diesel apprehends Ring, who had been dating Grandma Mazur.

Subplots include Stephanie's relationships with her family and boyfriend; Mary Alice's belief that she's a horse; Stephanie's reluctant attraction to Diesel; and Stephanie's issues with feeling inadequate.



Quotes

Fortunately, I work in bail bond enforcement, and I'm sort of used to scary guys showing up in closets and under beds.

Pg. 4

"You see, this is typical of the problem. Nobody believes in the mystical anymore. Nobody believes in miracles. As it happens, I'm a little supernatural."

Diesel to Stephanie

Pg. 13

"If you had a Christmas tree, Santa would bring you stuff...like hair curlers and slut shoes."

Diesel to Stephanie

Pgs. 14-15

"Boy, this is cheery," Diesel said. "This would make me want to buy toys. Right after I poked out my eye and slit my throat."

Diesel

Pg. 25

I dragged Diesel into the living room. "They think you've got a nice ass. That's different from liking you."

Stephanie to Diesel upon meeting her family.

Pg. 35

Rex looked like he was thinking "alien schmalien". I guess when you live in a glass cage you don't care a lot about aliens in the kitchen.

Pg. 56

The guy behind us honked the horn, and I cracked my knuckles. My eye was twitching like mad. "This isn't working," I said. "You're giving me heart palpitations. People in New Jersey don't do 'slow down'."

Stephanie to Diesel when he stops in the street to talk.

Pg. 81

"Real elves, fake elves...what's the difference? They all get time and a half after five o'clock."

Elaine to Diesel and Stephanie

Pg. 91

So here I am having a conversation about what? Superheroes! And I'm having it with a guy who rolled his eyes because I suggested the possible reality of elves.

Pg. 95



Sometimes when Lula got excited her eyes opened wide and popped out like big white duck eggs. This was one of those duck-egg-eye times. "Are you shitting me? Midgets? A whole building full of midgets? I love midgets. I've had a thing for midgets ever since I saw The Wizard of Oz."

Lula

Pgs. 120-121

My mother made the sign of the cross, and her eyes drifted wistfully to the cupboard where she kept her Four Roses.

Pg. 130

I was standing there admiring the tree, wondering if I could get jail time for grand theft spruce...

Pg. 135

"What with everyone having macular degeneration and cataracts, I don't even have to wear makeup. Being old has its advantages. Everybody looks good when you got cataracts."

Grandma Mazur

Pg. 154

Mary Alice wasn't the only one caught between a rock and a hard place. I had Diesel on one side of me and Morelli on the other, and I could feel the pull of their personalities.

Pg. 153

So we all sat and waited for Santa. We put the television on but we weren't really watching. We were listening for footsteps on the roof. Hoping to catch a glimpse of reindeer flying past the window.

Pg. 161



Topics for Discussion

How is it possible for Diesel to have magically appeared in Stephanie's kitchen?

How might the story have changed if Stephanie had located Sandy Claws at the toy store?

Why was Stephanie willing to believe that Diesel had supernatural powers?

Would the feel of the story had changed if Valerie wasn't pregnant?

How would Sandy Claws' life be different if Elaine wasn't living in the house with him?

What motivation did John Ring have to come out of retirement and stalk Sandy Claws?

What is the difference between Diesel's supernatural powers and the gifts possessed by Sandy and Ring?

How might things have ended up if Morelli had become jealous over Stephanie's relationship with Diesel?

Do you think that Stephanie would have been able to apprehend Sandy without the assistance of Diesel and Randy Briggs? Explain.