

The Water Knife Study Guide

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide refers to the Kindle Edition of *The Water Knife*, published May 26, 2015.

The Water Knife takes place in a near-future United States, where the southwestern states compete with each other for access to a reliable water supply during a period of extended and disastrous drought.

The novel is related in the past tense from a third-person omniscient narrator and alternates between focusing on the perspectives of its three central characters: Angel, Lucy, and Maria. Angel Velasquez is the “water knife” of the novel’s title. He worked as an undercover agent for the state of Nevada, infiltrating and sabotaging the water supplies of rival states. At the start of the novel, Angel had been sent to Phoenix, Arizona, by his boss Catherine Case to investigate some mysterious incidents in the city.

Lucy Monroe, a journalist, was living in Phoenix. After discovering that her friend Jamie had been murdered after he became involved in a shady scheme to sell water rights, she feared that Jamie’s killers would come after her next. Maria, a teenage refugee from the evacuated state of Texas, was living in Phoenix with her best friend Sarah. After a business scheme to sell water at a construction site went wrong, Maria and Sarah found themselves in debt to a local gangster known as The Vet.

When Angel arrived in Phoenix he met up with his colleague Julio who explained that one of his contacts in the Phoenix Water Board had been brutally murdered. The two men went to the morgue where they met journalist Lucy Monroe who was investigating the death of someone who had been tortured in a similar way to Julio’s colleague. Angel felt a powerful connection with Lucy which motivated him to let her leave even though she might have had information that he needed.

Lucy discovered that her friend Jamie had been doing business with a man named Michael Ratan, who lived in a luxurious apartment building called the Taiyang Arcology in Phoenix. Meanwhile, Maria and Sarah decided to have sex with Ratan so that he would pay them enough money to cover their rent and escape the wrath of The Vet. The morning after the girls slept with Ratan, two men broke into Ratan’s apartment, murdering Ratan and Sarah while Maria hid under the bed. Lucy came to the apartment while the men were still there and they kidnapped her. Angel arrived and interrogated Maria about what had happened to Lucy. Angel let Maria keep a book that she had found in Ratan’s apartment.

Following clues given to him by Maria, Angel realized that his colleague Julio was double-crossing him and had kidnapped Lucy. Angel tracked him down and saved Lucy from being tortured. Angel and Lucy shared what they knew about the water rights Jamie and Michael Ratan had been trying to sell. Lucy and Angel hid together in a Phoenix slum, during which time a sexual/romantic relationship began between the pair.



Lucy continued trying to investigate the mysterious water rights but was intercepted by agents from California who threatened to kill Lucy's sister Anna and her children if Lucy didn't agree to betray Angel and turn him over to California. Lucy led Angel into an ambush at a gas station, but he escaped. A group of disgruntled and mistreated Texan refugees became involved in the fight, having mistaken Lucy and Angel for fellow Texans, leading to a fire which quickly spread across the whole of Phoenix. Using the Texans and the fire as cover from the Californians, Lucy tracked down the wounded Angel and saved his life.

Angel realized that his boss Catherine Case had ordered his murder because she mistakenly believed he had stolen the water rights. Case agreed that she would let Angel live if he found the rights and brought them to Nevada. Angel realized that the rights were tucked inside the book that Maria had taken from Ratan's apartment.

Angel and Lucy found Maria in Carver City, where she was trying to cross the state border. Maria needed to escape Arizona because The Vet was going to kill her after she failed to pay him the money she owed. Angel told Maria that if she gave him the water rights he would take her to live in Las Vegas, where she would be safe. When Lucy read the water rights she realized that they could save Phoenix from being destroyed, so she decided to take the documents back to Arizona despite the suffering this would cause for Angel. Unwilling to lose her one chance to escape Arizona, Maria shot Lucy, allowing Angel to regain possession of the water rights. Maria sat on the riverbank listening to helicopters approaching which would take all three of them to Nevada.



Chapters 1 - 10

Summary

All page numbers refer to the Kindle edition.

Angel Velasquez lived in Las Vegas in a near-future United States of America in which the southwestern states of California, Arizona, and Nevada competed with each other for an ever-dwindling water supply during a historic period of drought. Angel worked as a “water knife,” a covert agent from Nevada sent to infiltrate and sabotage the water supplies of other states.

The narrative is related in the past tense from a third-person omniscient narrator and alternates between focusing on the perspectives of its three central characters: Angel, Lucy, and Maria.

In Chapter 1, Angel’s boss, Catherine Case, had instructed Angel to fly to Carver City in Arizona and destroy the headquarters of the city’s water supply. Angel obeyed her orders, cutting off the water supply of more than a hundred thousand people.

In Chapter 2, journalist Lucy Monroe awoke in her house in Phoenix, Arizona, a city on the brink of collapse due to a lack of water. Lucy received news of a murder and went to investigate. She discovered the dead man was her friend Jamie and that his body had been horribly mutilated. Lucy remembered Jamie telling her about a legal scheme involving water rights that would make him a lot of money. Lucy became suddenly fearful that she was in danger and left the crime scene wondering why Jamie had been killed and what his killers knew about her.

In Chapter 3, two teenage friends, Maria and Sarah, waited together at a water pump in Phoenix. Both girls were refugees from Texas, a state which had been completely evacuated due to the absence of any water supply. Maria’s father had recently died, leaving her to fend for herself. Sarah supported herself through prostitution, but Maria didn’t want to make money that way. After talking with one of Sarah’s clients who worked in the water industry, Maria developed a scheme to buy cheap water from the pump and sell it on at a profit elsewhere. Sarah and Maria spent a large sum of their own money purchasing the cut-price water.

In Chapter 4, Angel had a meeting with his boss Catherine Case. Catherine had first hired Angel straight out of prison and given him a life of luxury in a Las Vegas “arcology” – an artificial ecologically designed indoor environment. In the present timeline, Catherine told Angel that Julio, one of her agents working in Phoenix, had been acting suspiciously and asked Angel to go down to Arizona to find out what was going on.

In Chapter 5, Lucy spoke on her laptop to her sister Anna who lived in Vancouver. Anna told Lucy her husband could arrange a visa for Lucy to come and live with them in



Canada, but Lucy declined. Lucy noticed a truck outside her house. She went outside and yelled at the driver but the truck drove away.

In Chapter 6, Maria was confronted by her landlord Damien who demanded her rent. Maria told Damien about her plan to sell the water and offered him a cut of the profits. He warned her to make sure she paid tax to a man called Esteban.

In Chapter 7, Angel drove across the Mojave Desert on his way to Phoenix. Angel had been given several sets of false credentials and uniforms by Catherine Case so that he could go about his business in Arizona with ease. Catherine called him in the car to discuss her concern that she could no longer trust everyone she was working with in Las Vegas, but a dust storm interfered with the phone signal and the line went dead.

In Chapter 8, Maria sold her water outside the Taiyang arcology in Phoenix, alongside an African American man named Toomie who had a cart selling pupusas. Esteban saw that Maria was making much more money than he had expected and he demanded a bigger cut of her profits. He took away all of the money she had made so far, leaving Maria without enough money to pay back Sarah for her investment and without enough money to pay Damien her rent.

In Chapter 9, Angel arrived in Phoenix. He saw a billboard advertising the Phoenix Development Board which used the slogan "Phoenix Rising." He watched the local news and saw reports of a husband and wife team who had murdered hundreds of Texan refugees after taking their money and tricking them into thinking they would help them escape over the state border.

Catherine Case's agent Julio arrived at Angel's hotel room and told him that one of his contacts at the Phoenix Water Board had been brutally murdered and mutilated. Julio was scared and wanted to get out of Phoenix and back to Las Vegas as quickly as possible.

In Chapter 10, Lucy went to the Phoenix morgue to investigate Jamie's death. When she arrived, the place was in complete pandemonium because of all the bodies which had been discovered after the mass-murder of Texan refugees. Lucy saw her colleague, a photographer named Timo, who said they should work together on the mass-murder story and that they could make a lot of money.

Lucy asked the coroner Christine Ma to show her Jamie's body. Christine recounted the disturbing torture that Jamie had endured before his death. Two plainclothes detectives approached Lucy and Christine, telling them they were CID. They told Christine that they were looking for a body that had been similarly mutilated, but not Jamie's. Lucy followed them to the other body.

One of the detectives asked Lucy if she knew Jamie and she lied and said she was just there for the story. The man asked Lucy her name and she responded by telling him that she didn't believe he was a cop. The man held Lucy by the arm but when the other man came back over, he let her go and told her to leave.



Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces Angel, one of the three protagonists and the “water knife” of the novel’s title. Angel is immediately established as an anti-hero figure in this chapter through his involvement in the destruction of Carver City’s water supply and his apparent lack of remorse for the suffering that he will cause through his actions. There is a paradox at the heart of Angel’s character throughout the novel: he is depicted as a kindhearted man, who nevertheless carries out coldhearted actions. This split is articulated in Chapter 1 through the contrast between Angel’s name and his view of himself, which is stated in the final line of the chapter as he reflects on the damage he is inflicting on the people of Carver City. Despite his angelic forename, Angel concludes of his actions: “Guess that makes me the Devil” (19).

Chapter 2 introduces Lucy Monroe, another of the three main protagonists in the novel. Lucy is introduced in a strikingly different location to Angel. Whereas Angel’s story begins in the lush, opulent, fertile environment of a Las Vegas arcology, Lucy’s story begins in a dust storm in decrepit and dilapidated Arizona. This stark difference in their surroundings is a reversal of their status in life, however. Although Angel begins the novel living in luxury while Lucy lives in relative poverty, Lucy is the character with greater privilege. Her family and background mean that Lucy could choose a life of luxury at any moment, whereas Angel’s life of luxury is precarious and dependent on his obedience to Catherine Case and his willingness to commit immoral and violent acts on her behalf.

The murder of Jamie in Chapter 2 is the catalytic event in the novel that leads to Lucy, Angel, and Maria becoming embroiled in a widespread and dangerous conspiracy involving legal documents pertaining to water rights in the region.

Chapter 3 introduces Maria, the third of the novel’s main protagonists, alongside her best friend and love interest Sarah. The perspective of Maria’s chapters is markedly different to the perspective of Angel and Lucy’s chapters, because of the three characters’ relative status in society. Both Angel and Lucy are “in the know,” Angel through his connections to the shady underworld of working as a water knife, and Lucy through her role as an investigative journalist attempting to uncover these conspiracies. Maria, on the other hand, is an ordinary girl who is entirely disconnected from the political machinations of the powerful people whose decisions affect her life.

Maria’s growth as a character over the course of the novel is shown through her gradually increasing understanding of how little she knows about how the world works and what options are available to her in this world. In this way, Maria is in a similar position to the reader who is also uninformed and confused about this unfamiliar dystopian vision of the future. The reader, like Maria, does not yet understand the rules of this world or how the people who live in it operate.

Chapters 4 and 5 continue to underline the oppositions at the heart of Angel’s and Lucy’s characters. Chapter 4 reveals the desperate circumstances of Angel’s life when he was first employed by Catherine Case, allowing the reader to feel sympathy for



Angel despite the terrible actions that he commits in Chapter 1 and throughout the novel. This chapter shows that Angel takes unethical actions out of a lack of choice, not because of an inherently immoral personality.

Chapter 5, in contrast, demonstrates that Lucy, unlike Angel, has lots of options open to her. Through her family connections, she could remove herself from the horrors of Phoenix and the dangers posed to her through Jamie's death any time she wants to. Lucy has choices and chooses, at this stage in the novel, to take the moral choice rather than the selfish choice. As the novel progresses however, Lucy has fewer and fewer choices available to her, which brings her ever closer to Angel's less noble perspective on the world.

Chapter 6 continues the use of Maria's character as a way of introducing the reader to this unfamiliar futuristic world by depicting the difficulties that Maria and Sarah face in their struggle for survival.

The phone call in Chapter 7 between Angel and Catherine, which is interrupted by static as Angel drives to Arizona, is symbolic of the beginning of a breakdown in communications between these two characters which will ultimately lead to Case ordering Angel's assassination.

Chapter 8 continues to deal with the choices available to different characters by demonstrating that Maria has no choices at all. She is entirely at the mercy of the unfair system that surrounds her and discovers that her own intelligence and ambition (which she demonstrates through her plan to start a business selling water to construction workers) will not be able to help her escape the difficulties of her life. She is trapped in poverty with no way out.

The "Phoenix Rising" billboard first seen by Angel in Chapter 9 is a false symbol, misleading the reader into believing that the broken city of Phoenix will rise from its current difficulties to become great again like the mythological Phoenix rising from the ashes of fire in renewed form.

Chapter 10 marks a major turning point in the novel as it is the first occasion when any of the three main protagonists meet each other. As will occur throughout the rest of the narrative, it is not immediately apparent to the reader that the man Lucy is observing is Angel. Angel is identified here by the unusual scar running down his throat: a characteristic that will also be used to identify him when he meets Maria in a chapter focused on her perspective.

Angel and Lucy are contrasted with each other throughout all of the opening chapters: Angel lives in luxury and consistently does immoral things to protect his own welfare, whereas Lucy lives in poverty and consistently takes the moral course of action even when it could lead to her being harmed.

The author undercuts these apparent contrasts when the characters first meet in Chapter 10, by having both characters respond to each other with a feeling of recognition. Although the characters have been presented to the reader as opposites,



they both respond to each other as if they are similar. This feeling of familiarity sparks the romance which blossoms between the pair later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Is Angel a sympathetic character?

Discussion Question 2

How is Lucy's life different to her sister Anna's?

Discussion Question 3

What could Maria do to improve her circumstances in life?

Vocabulary

cache, compressed, benediction, pattering, gouge, brownouts, photovoltaic, mercenaries, predatory, intricate, algae, reclamation, oxidized, creosote, lurid, generic, whittling, prosperous, hysterical, desiccated



Chapters 11 - 20

Summary

In Chapter 11, Angel watched Lucy as she left the morgue and wondered what had made him decide to let her go. Julio pointed out two men from California (“Calies”) who were also posing as CID. They were examining the same bodies that Julio and Angel had come to see. Terrified, Julio left the morgue, but Angel stayed. He spoke to Timo the photographer who gave him Lucy’s name and phone number. Christine Ma pointed Angel out to the Calies. They chased Angel but he escaped.

In Chapter 12, Maria went to see “The Vet,” a gangster who controlled her neighborhood in Phoenix – to explain why she couldn’t pay her rent. Sarah had been to some of The Vet’s parties in the past and had seen people being torn apart by his pet hyenas as a warning to others not to cross him. The Vet told Maria that he had visions sent to him by La Santa Muerte (the Saint of Death) and she had told him not to harm Maria. The Vet gave her an extra day to pay her rent.

In Chapter 13, Angel googled Lucy and discovered she was a respected prize-winning journalist. Angel read some of Lucy’s work and saw how it had changed over the years. He realized that they saw life in the same way and that that was why he’d let her go when they met in the morgue.

In Chapter 14, Lucy followed a lead about Jamie’s death to a nightclub called Apocalypse Now! Lucy showed a bartender a photo of Jamie and the bartender pointed out a man who Jamie used to spend time with, named Michael Ratan. Lucy saw the man dancing with two teenage girls, one white, one Latina. Lucy met with Timo and asked him to help her find out more about Ratan.

In Chapter 15, Maria and Sarah went to Apocalypse Now! to see one of Sarah’s clients, Michael Ratan. Sarah believed Ratan would pay them enough money for their rent if Sarah and Maria had sex with him. Sarah gave Maria an illegal drug called bubble which she said would help her to enjoy the experience. They went back to Ratan’s apartment in the Taiyang and the three of them had sex.

In Chapter 16, Angel went to Lucy’s house. He waited outside until she came out to confront him. Lucy pulled a gun on Angel. Angel trusted that she wouldn’t shoot him and did nothing to protect himself, telling her that he just wanted to talk. Lucy lowered the gun and he followed her inside the house.

Inside, they discussed what they knew about Jamie’s murder and Lucy guessed that Angel was a Vegas water knife, working for Catherine Case. Angel told her that water knives were just a myth. Lucy told Angel about a time earlier in her career when she was offered money if she stopped writing critical things about California. Lucy received a phone call. She hung up, pointed her gun at Angel again, and told him to leave.



In Chapter 17, Lucy went to the Taiyang arcology. She didn't have the right credentials to get to where she wanted to go and the security guards started to become suspicious.

In Chapter 18, Maria woke up in Ratan's apartment in the Taiyang. Maria took a shower and washed her clothes. Maria told Ratan the story of how she ended up in Phoenix and he tried to give her a book called Cadillac Desert, which he said was valuable but Maria angrily refused. Maria went back into the bedroom and saw that Sarah was still asleep. Two men burst into the apartment and murdered Ratan. Maria tried to drag Sarah to safety but she didn't have time. Maria hid under the bed as the men shot Sarah.

In Chapter 19, the security guards at the Taiyang insisted that Lucy had to leave. But they became distracted by TV news about a big disaster at a reservoir in Colorado that had been sabotaged. Lucy took the opportunity to sneak upstairs to Ratan's apartment.

In Chapter 20, Maria continued to hide under the bed in Ratan's apartment as the men who had killed him searched for something. Someone knocked on the apartment door. The men opened the door. Maria heard a woman's voice and then heard the men attack her. The men left and Maria came out from under the bed. A man came into the apartment and Maria tried to attack him with a kitchen knife, but he was too strong. He tackled her and she hit her head on the ground.

Analysis

Chapter 11 continues the sequence at the morgue but switches the perspective focus from Lucy to Angel, confirming for the reader that the agents Lucy encountered were Angel and Julio. Lucy's fear during her encounter with Angel is contrasted with his fascination over Lucy.

The novel begins with Angel and Lucy living their lives from diametrically opposed perspectives, before bringing them closer together as they slowly adopt each other's perspectives and begin to behave more like the other than like themselves. This process begins for Angel in Chapter 11, when his fascination with and admiration for Lucy causes him to let her go despite it not being in his own best interests to do so. In the past, Angel has always managed to perform his unethical duties because he has always been alone in life with no family or other loved ones. As Lucy starts to mean more to him on an emotional level, he becomes less and less able to behave in selfish ways.

Chapter 12 introduces the character of The Vet who functions as the antagonist in Maria's character arc. Whereas for Lucy and Angel, the ultimate sources of power in their stories are powerful agencies and individuals like the government of California and Catherine Case, the ultimate source of power in Maria's life is much more localized and specific. The machinations of governments and states are irrelevant to Maria because it is The Vet who holds more control over her day-to-day existence.



Chapter 13 continues to deepen Angel's fascination with Lucy as he reads some of her writing and begins to get a sense of how Lucy has changed during the years she has been in Phoenix. Although initially Lucy had been naïve and uninformed, Angel senses through her words that she has since become hardened by what she has seen in Phoenix. This heightens Angel's sense that the two of them are kindred spirits, as he sees his own hardened and emotionally deadened state reflected in what has happened to Lucy.

Chapter 14 marks the first time Lucy encounters Maria in the novel, although the two women do not speak to each other until the very end of the narrative. The first encounter between Lucy and Maria reflects Lucy's attitude to the people of Phoenix who she makes a living writing about. Although Lucy feels sympathy for Maria and Sarah – by reflecting how sad it is that girls so young find themselves in a situation where they are working as prostitutes – the encounter is entirely impersonal.

Lucy notices nothing about Maria and Sarah other than their races. She knows nothing about their personalities or the specific circumstances that led them to be where they are and knows nothing about the specific challenges they face. Ironically, at this stage in the novel Lucy unknowingly has the power to solve all of Maria's problems. If Lucy only knew what was happening in Maria and Sarah's lives, she could give them the money to cover their rent, avoiding all of the tragedies which will befall Maria as the narrative continues.

However, Lucy sees the girls only as stereotypes: as examples of a wider social problem. Lucy's impersonal attitude here means that by the time she does encounter Maria on a personal level it is far too late for Lucy to be able to help Maria, causing Maria to take desperate actions to help herself.

Chapter 15 marks the moment that Maria becomes involved in the wider water rights conspiracy when she has sex with Michael Ratan in order to make enough money to pay her rent.

Chapter 16 is a highly charged encounter between Angel and Lucy, with the narrative focus on Angel's perspective. This chapter establishes Angel's intense attraction for Lucy, which makes his sexual advances later in the novel less of a surprise for the reader than they are for Lucy herself.

This chapter also establishes a repeated dynamic between Angel and Lucy in which they aim guns at each other but both feel a deep sense of trust that the other will not hurt them. This dynamic comes to a climax in the novel's closing chapters, when both characters have the opportunity to shoot each other in order to get what they want.

Chapters 17 – 20 draw all three of the main characters into the same location for the first time, in the Taiyang arcology. This brings to the fore a new stylistic technique from the author, in which the reader is given an outsider's perspective on the story of Angel and Lucy: Maria, unlike the reader, doesn't know who either of these characters is or have any sense of why they are doing what they are doing.



When Maria is attacked in Chapter 20, the reader is not yet aware that her attacker is Angel.

Discussion Question 1

What role does Sarah play in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Angel so fascinated by Lucy?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lucy's profession help and hinder her at different stages in the story?

Vocabulary

jostling, murmured, chittering, loping, muckraking, extraordinaire, gauche, postmodern, strobes, sheath, prying, gleamed, atrium, illegitimate, engulfed, gibbering, trespasser, rappelling, encrypted, seduce



Chapters 21 – 30

Summary

In Chapter 21, Lucy woke up with a sack over her head. She could tell that she was in a moving vehicle. The men in the vehicle asked her questions about Michael Ratan.

In Chapter 22, Maria woke up once again in Ratan's apartment. A scarred man was standing over her. He offered her a drink of water and asked what had happened in the apartment. Maria explained that the men had killed Ratan and Sarah while she hid under the bed. The man asked if there had been another woman there and Maria replied that the men had taken her away. The man explained that he had been following the woman. He left Maria alone in the apartment.

In Chapter 23, Angel left the young woman in Ratan's apartment behind and went out into the rest of the Taiyang, which he noticed had the same design as the Cypress arcology where lived in Las Vegas. He noticed that the whole of the Taiyang was being monitored by Calies (undercover agents from California) trying to blend in. Angel headed back toward Ratan's apartment and saw the young woman leaving. He grabbed hold of her and told her he needed her help. The girl took a book from the apartment and they left together, pretending to be a couple in order to slip past the Calies in the hallway. The other Calies in the Taiyang noticed the couple and started to move towards them.

In Chapter 24, Lucy was taken inside a house. She recognized one of her captors as the one of the two men who had pretended to be detectives at the morgue. The man threatened Lucy with torture and she said she'd tell him everything she knew. The man told Lucy that Jamie had double-crossed him. Jamie had discovered old legal documents providing water rights to the Colorado River. Jamie told the man he was going to sell them to Las Vegas and then went behind his back to sell them to California instead. The man tortured Lucy by electrocuting her. The man wanted Lucy to tell him about Ratan, but Lucy continued to protest that she didn't know anything about him.

In Chapter 25, Maria and the man jumped off a platform in the Taiyang into some water. The Calies jumped in after them. The man used his knowledge of the security and layout of the arcology to help them escape. They made it to the man's car. The man was kind to Maria and she could tell he was upset about the woman who had gone missing. She decided to tell him more details about the men who had broken into Ratan's apartment. She told him that one of the men had a tattoo.

In Chapter 26, Angel listened to the girl in his car talking about the men who had kidnapped Lucy. She said that one of the men had a tattoo. The girl described the tattoo and Angel recognized the description. It was Julio, Catherine Case's agent in Phoenix. Angel wanted to help the girl and he gave her all of the cash he had before dropping her



off. Angel raced to try to find Julio and save Lucy by checking all of the safe houses the water knives usually used in Phoenix.

In Chapter 27, Angel found the safe house Julio was using. He went inside and heard Lucy screaming. There were two men torturing her: Julio and another man whom Angel didn't know. Angel killed both of the men but got shot in the process. Lucy explained that Julio had wanted to take the water rights from Jamie and Ratan to sell to California, double-crossing his employers in Vegas.

Lucy tended to Angel's bullet wound and told him that the water rights Jamie had found gave Phoenix senior legal rights to the Colorado River, something which would destroy California and Nevada. Angel said they needed somewhere safe to hideout until they could figure out where the water rights had gone.

In Chapter 28, Lucy and the water knife went to stay in a squat owned by Lucy's friend Charlene. Lucy asked the man what his name was, and when he replied that his name was Angel she was startled because she realized he had told her his real name, not one of his fake identities. Lucy told Angel that Timo could help them hack into Ratan's laptop.

In Chapter 29, Maria went to Toomie's house and asked him to help her. She told him about everything that had happened with The Vet and what had happened to Sarah at Ratan's apartment. Toomie said that he would help her escape over the state border.

In Chapter 30, Lucy took the laptop to Timo and he agreed to hack into it. He left with the laptop.

Analysis

Chapter 21 marks the beginning of a shift in Lucy's life which gradually makes her more and more similar to Angel. No longer an impartial observer of events, Lucy is now personally involved in a situation which could lead to her being physically harmed. Although Angel finds himself in this kind of situation regularly, it is a new experience for Lucy.

Chapter 22 reveals to the reader that Angel was the man who attacked Maria in Ratan's apartment. As with the chapter set in the morgue, which was focused on Lucy's perspective, Angel is once again identified for the reader when Maria observes the unusual scar going down his throat. Although Maria remains terrified about her situation, the revelation that it is Angel reassures the reader that Maria is safe.

Maria observes what Angel has not yet admitted to himself: his feelings for Lucy are affecting the way he is doing his job, to the extent that Maria assumes that he was following Lucy because she is his girlfriend.

Chapter 23 switches the perspective focus inside the Taiyang from Maria to Angel. The author continues the technique of depicting his central characters from the perspective



of someone who knows nothing about them, this time by giving the reader Angel's perspective on Maria.

In an echo of Lucy's first encounter with Maria, Angel is unaware that this young woman is the answer to all of his problems. Maria takes the book Cadillac Desert because she thinks she can sell it to help her raise her rent money, not knowing that it contains legal documents that could cause political upheaval across the entire region. This reflects the different perspective Maria has to that of Angel and Lucy: Maria is by necessity focused on personal and individual matters rather than political and social matters. She will die if she can't pay her rent and therefore has no need or ability to think about the ramifications of the water rights which obsess the other characters.

Chapter 24 is a major turning point in the narrative as Lucy finally finds out what Jamie was doing and how he ended up in so much trouble, inadvertently dragging her into it as well. In contrast to the earlier chapters in the novel, Lucy is completely powerless in this situation, unable to extract herself from the horrors of her current reality. Her situation here is as close to Maria's day-to-day existence as Lucy ever gets. Unlike Maria, Lucy's period of helplessness is short-lived.

Throughout the novel, all of the characters are faced with choices about whether to help other people or act in their own best interests. In Chapter 25, for the first time, Maria is in a position where she can actually offer to help someone else. Showing sympathy for a stranger who is worried about someone he cares about, Maria does everything she can to assist him.

Ironically, in Chapter 26, Angel has it within his power to put everything right by helping Maria, but has no understanding of the fact that she is the answer to all of his problems. Angel shows his natural kindheartedness in this chapter. Although he initially uses Maria for his own ends, in order to help him escape the Taiyang undetected by the Calies, his care for her once they get to his car is sincere. However his focus on his job and – more significantly – his focus on Lucy, prevent him from getting to know anything more about Maria, thus causing him to miss this opportunity to solve his problems.

Chapter 27 shows Angel continuing to behave more like Lucy than like himself when he makes the decision to ensure Lucy's safety by shooting the stranger before he shoots Julio. This action results in Lucy being safe, but Angel being shot in the shoulder. Once again, in contrast to his usual behavior, Angel acts unselfishly rather than looking out for his own interests.

Lucy recovers very quickly from being tortured in one of the few moments in the novel in which the characters' behavior seems inauthentic. Although the author may be seeking to demonstrate that the physical and mental toughness of Angel is also present in Lucy - by showing her recovering quickly from something traumatic - it is irresponsible and unconvincing to suggest that human beings can recover from acts of brutality with such speed and ease. The chapter minimizes the horrific physical, emotional, and psychological after-effects suffered by real-life victims of torture.



In Chapter 29, Maria turns to Toomie as the only person she can think of who can help her. Angel's ability to help Maria is contrasted with Toomie's ability to help her. Angel has all the money he could ever need and could easily solve all of Maria's difficulties, if only he knew the details. Toomie, on the other hand, understands everything about Maria's life but lacks the power and resources to help her to the same extent that Angel can. However Angel's access to resources and power is dependent on him doing a good job for Catherine Case, meaning he doesn't have time to worry about the plight of apparently unimportant individuals like Maria.

Discussion Question 1

What are the differences between Angel and Maria's motives for helping each other?

Discussion Question 2

What techniques does the author use to show Angel's growing emotional attachment to Lucy?

Discussion Question 3

What impact does Lucy's experience of violence have on her character?

Vocabulary

overdrive, flinched, satanic, ballistic, hackles, stubborn, implements, straddling, heaved, hauling, incongruously, abruptly, stucco, ravaged, scavenged, squat, determinedly, anticipating, motley, narco



Chapters 31 – 38

Summary

In Chapter 31, Angel called Catherine Case. Case was angry with him because she'd been trying to get in touch with him but he hadn't answered his phone. Angel told her everything he knew about Julio double-crossing them to try to obtain the water rights, but told her that he didn't know where the rights were now. In Chapter 32, Lucy returned to the squat. She treated Angel's gunshot wound and he kissed her. They had sex.

In Chapter 33, Esteban threatened to kill Toomie unless Maria turned herself in to The Vet as punishment for not paying her rent. Toomie begged her not to leave with Esteban, but she did. At The Vet's compound, the men there forced her hand into the hyena cage and the hyenas ripped off two of her fingers.

In Chapter 34, Lucy and Angel waited in the squat for news from Timo. Lucy criticized Angel's work and expressed anger at the way Catherine Case and men like Angel were harming Arizona. Angel watched an action TV show on his tablet computer and Lucy told him it was propaganda paid for by the UN.

Lucy went to meet Timo. He left her in the bar to meet with agents from California instead. They threatened that they would harm Lucy's sister Anna and her husband and children if Lucy didn't turn Angel over to them. Lucy agreed to turn Angel in.

In Chapter 35, Maria was locked in a cage at The Vet's compound, waiting for the moment The Vet would choose to feed her to the hyenas. She asked Damien to help her escape but he refused.

In Chapter 36, Lucy and Angel drove in a car given to them by Lucy's friend Charlene. The car had Texas license plates. Lucy pulled over at a gas station and they both went inside. Angel chose some candy and tried to pay for it but his card was denied. Lucy paid and asked Angel to go back outside to keep an eye on the car.

Back in the car, Angel wondered why his card had been declined. A pickup truck pulled up next to the car and the people inside started opening fire on Angel. Angel tried to drive the car, but he had been badly wounded. In the distance he could hear lots of shots being fired. Angel started to crawl to safety, leaving a trail of blood behind him. Eventually he crawled into a residential area and fell into an empty swimming pool. When he opened his eyes he imagined he saw La Santa Muerte standing over him.

In Chapter 37, Lucy watched from the gas station as the pickup truck opened fire on Angel in the car. A number of Texans in the gas station – mistaking Lucy and Angel for fellow Texans because of the license plates on their car – intervened in the situation and opened fire on the men who were attacking Angel. The gas station exploded causing a fire which quickly started to spread.



Lucy had the chance to escape out the back of the gas station but decided to find out what had happened to Angel. She followed the trail of blood until she found him lying in the bottom of an empty swimming pool. Lucy dragged Angel out of the pool and saved him from the impending spread of the fire by using a trick she had learned from a firefighter she'd once interviewed.

In Chapter 38, Maria could smell the smoke of the huge fire engulfing Phoenix. The Vet and all his men left the compound to join the firefight, leaving Maria alone. Toomie arrived and helped her escape. Before they left, Maria set the hyenas loose on the compound. Toomie and Maria left the compound and Toomie began to explain his plan to help Maria escape across the border. He said the first thing he needed to do was to teach her how to shoot a gun.

Analysis

Chapter 31 continues to use literal breakdowns of communication between Angel and Catherine Case – such as poor signal and interruptions from people at Catherine's end – to symbolize the metaphorical breakdown of communication occurring between them. Unbeknownst to Angel, his behavior is making Case suspect that he has betrayed her. Ironically, the reader knows that everything that Angel is saying during the phone call is a straightforward and accurate account of the truth of the situation.

Chapter 32 focuses on Lucy's perspective and depicts Lucy and Angel's bubbling romance spilling over into something physical. From Lucy's perspective, Angel's advances come as a surprise. Through the chapters focusing on Angel's perspective earlier in the novel, however, the reader is well aware of his intense attraction to Lucy.

This chapter connects Lucy's physical attraction to Angel to danger and violence, through her focus on his gun on the floor and her desire for him to restrict her breathing, implying that Lucy's interest in Angel is about experimenting with the dangerous unknown underworld where he operates. This echoes an earlier moment between Lucy and Jamie in which Lucy reveals that Jamie – who was gay – once had sex with Lucy because he was interested see what it was like being with a woman. In a similar way, Lucy is interested in seeing what it's like to be with someone who is a real part of the dangerous underworld that Lucy has only observed in the past.

Chapter 33 presents Maria with another choice about whether to help someone else, or protect her own interests. Once again, Maria chooses to help the other person when she turns herself over to Esteban rather than allow him to kill Toomie. Although Maria has the fewest options available to her of all the characters in the novel, she is also the character who most consistently chooses to help others when the opportunity arises.

Angel's interest in the action TV hero Relic Jones throughout the novel – but especially in Chapter 24 – is a reflection of his true self, rather than the man that he has been forced to become. Like Relic Jones – and, in fact, like Lucy – Angel's instinct is to do the right thing, look after the little guy, and be the hero. However his life circumstances have



prevented him from being able to behave in a consistently moral way, unlike Lucy, whose privilege has allowed her to remain morally pure because her own safety and security has never been threatened by her actions.

There is a sweet touch of irony to Lucy's revelation that Angel's favorite TV show is a piece of UN propaganda, which reflects the changing roles the two characters adopt as the narrative progresses. Lucy began as the idealist while Angel was the cynic, a dynamic that is reversed in this moment where Lucy's greater knowledge about how the world really works dampens Angel's spirits and hurts his feelings in relation to his cherished action hero.

Chapter 24 is the biggest single moment for Lucy's character arc, as it is the moment where her privilege relative to all the other characters is removed from her. Lucy has been able to consistently act in a moral way because the consequences for not doing so were so much smaller for her than they were for Angel or Maria. When Lucy's sister and her family are threatened, Lucy instantly loses any pretense of selfless moral action and immediately agrees to betray Angel.

Chapter 35 deepens the reader's understanding of power in Maria's world when it is revealed that Damien – who had initially seemed like a powerful force when the reader first met him while he was attempting to collect Maria's rent – is really just a powerless cog in The Vet's machine, unable to really make his own decisions or do what he feels to be right out of fear of the consequences he would face.

Chapters 36 and 37 are the culmination of the news story, first mentioned in Chapter 9, about the mass murder of hundreds of Texan refugees. This incident creates a groundswell of resentment amongst Texans which comes to a head in these chapters, when the Texans rush to the aid of Angel, mistaking him for one of their own, and inadvertently preventing his assassination.

The intervention of the Texans also alters Lucy's situation. The threat to her family has now been removed because she did what the Calies asked her to do. However, Angel is still alive, offering Lucy the opportunity to do the right thing and save him. Now that her position of privilege has been reestablished, Lucy is once again happy to do the right thing and help another person.

In Chapter 38, Maria makes the decision to free The Vet's hyenas before she leaves the compound. Although initially presented as an act of potential violence against The Vet and his men, through the earlier comparison of Maria and the hyenas when they were all kept in cages, the act becomes another act of kindness from Maria despite the personal risks involved. Unlike Damien, she takes the risk to release others from the clutches of The Vet. Toomie announcing that he will teach Maria how to shoot a gun foreshadows her decision to use the gun in the novel's final chapter.

Discussion Question 1

What is the nature of Maria's relationship with Toomie?



Discussion Question 2

Is Lucy justified in betraying Angel?

Discussion Question 3

Does Damien have the power to help Maria?

Vocabulary

decamped, quadruply, paranoia, malevolent, disposable, claustrophobic, wincing, peddled, speckled, writhed, crippled, sweltering, etiquette, intensely, serenity, abutted, loping, relentless, bantered, revival



Chapters 39 – 47

Summary

In Chapter 39, Angel hallucinated having a conversation with his mother when he was a child. He then dreamed another conversation with a sicario (assassin) whom Angel had encountered when he was a child. The conversation was about how dangerous it is when a woman feels betrayed. Angel woke up and found Lucy by his bedside. Angel told Lucy he thought Catherine Case had ordered his death.

In Chapter 40, Angel guided Lucy to drive them both to one of the water knives' safe houses in Phoenix. Angel called in his location to his superiors and then he and Lucy hid in another house around the corner. Shortly afterwards, the safe house was bombed by helicopters.

In Chapter 41, Angel and Lucy closed in on the destroyed safe house so they could ambush the men searching through the wreckage. The men were the same two Calies that Angel had encountered in the morgue. Angel and Lucy threatened the Calies with guns and the men explained that Catherine Case had sent them to kill Angel because she believed he was double crossing her by trying to steal the water rights. Angel discovered that the water rights were paper documents, not digital as he had assumed. He called Catherine Case and said that he would bring her the rights. Angel told Lucy that he knew where the papers were.

In Chapter 42, Maria attempted to cross the border at Carver City. The city was in chaos because it was being evacuated. Maria planned to swim across the reservoir to get across the border. She went through her belongings deciding what to keep. She ditched some things but kept hold of Michael Ratan's copy of Cadillac Desert. She wrapped it in plastic to make sure it didn't get wet.

In Chapter 43, Lucy laughed at Angel for letting Maria take the water rights. They tracked down Toomie and Angel told him that if they managed to recover the book which had the rights tucked inside, Angel would arrange for Toomie and Maria to have visas allowing them to live in an arcology in Las Vegas. Toomie told Angel that Maria had gone to Carver City.

In Chapter 44, Lucy drove Angel and Toomie to Carver City which was being evacuated as a result of Angel and the other water knives destroying their water supply in Chapter 1. The chaos of the evacuation caused Angel to think that he would never be able to find Maria and recover the water rights tucked inside Ratan's book.

In Chapter 45, Lucy, Toomie, and Angel traded their car for some motorbikes. Toomie guided them to the spot where Maria had planned to cross the reservoir. They found a pile of Maria's things, but no sign of the girl herself.



Maria emerged from the weeds and ran into Toomie's arms. Angel grabbed her backpack from her. He pulled out the book and found the water rights, safely intact. Lucy asked if she could see them. She read the document and realized that if the rights remained in Arizona, it would save Phoenix by providing the city with a safe water supply. Lucy realized that Phoenix was her home and that although she had initially been an impartial observer, she had now become a "Zoner" (a nickname for people from Arizona).

In Chapter 46, Angel tried to take the water rights back from Lucy but she refused to give him them, drawing a gun. Angel explained that those rights were his lifeline and that he'd be a dead man without them. Lucy said she was sorry but that she had to do the right thing for the people of Phoenix. Angel aimed his gun at her but he didn't fire. Lucy got onto one of the motorbikes and started to ride away into the desert. Angel watched her leave, trying to come up with a new plan. He was startled by a gunshot.

In Chapter 47, Maria lowered her gun after shooting the woman who was leaving with the water rights. She walked up to the lady but she didn't move. The scarred man – who Maria now understood was a water knife - came up behind Maria and told her not to shoot him because they were on the same side. The water knife promised that he would take Maria and Toomie to live in Las Vegas now that Maria had stopped the lady from leaving with the water rights. Maria lowered her gun. Maria apologized to the water knife for shooting his girl, but he replied that she hadn't left them much choice.

Maria sat alone on the banks of the reservoir, listening to the sound of helicopters approaching in the distance.

Analysis

Angel's hallucinations warning him about women betraying him in Chapter 39 lead him to realize that his recent troubles have been caused by the breakdown of communications with Catherine Case.

Lucy is more troubled by her betrayal of Angel than Angel himself is. This is because her betrayal fundamentally alters the way Lucy sees the world, whereas it continues to confirm everything Angel already knew. Lucy thought she was a moral person who was motivated by a desire to do the right thing, but she discovered that her morality really stemmed from a lack of serious consequences. As soon as she was faced with the serious consequence of her sister being harmed, Lucy stopped behaving nobly.

Angel is unsurprised by this response and, therefore, forgiving of Lucy's behavior. He knows through his own actions that everyone will cave under the right kind of pressure and is therefore unsurprised when the Calies find a way to make Lucy betray him. From Angel's perspective, Lucy could have left him to die in the swimming pool and he feels grateful to her for doing the right thing when she had the choice, but is forgiving of her acting selfishly when her choices were limited.



Angel's forgiveness of Lucy foreshadows his forgiveness of Catherine Case in Chapter 41 for attempting to have him killed and his decision to try to get back in her good books by reclaiming the water rights for Nevada. The revelation that the mysterious water rights are made of paper is the moment in the novel when it becomes clear to the reader that it is Maria who is in possession of the rights, which she obtained when she removed the book from Michael Ratan's apartment.

Now that his own life and wellbeing are on the line in Chapter 43, Angel is now willing to do for Maria what Toomie had been trying and failing to achieve: getting her out of Arizona to live somewhere safe.

The return of Angel to Carver City in Chapter 44 is a symbolic and geographical return to the immoral acts that Angel committed in Chapter 1. For the first time, Angel is confronted with the reality and consequences of his actions and made to see firsthand the suffering that he has caused on behalf of Catherine Case. This appears to Lucy, as well as to the reader, as a piece of poetic justice: the carnage of the fleeing refugees, forced to leave their homes through Angel's actions, is now preventing Angel from finding what he needs to save his own life and ensure his own safety.

Chapter 45 is the first moment in the novel when all three protagonists are in the same place at the same time. The different perspectives of each character all come into play in this final chapter to determine what will become of the water rights which have caused so much intrigue and damage throughout the novel.

Chapter 45 focuses on Lucy's perspective and reveals her belief that she is no longer an impartial observer of events, which she had initially been when she first came to Phoenix as a journalist. Lucy believes in this moment that her desire to keep the water rights in Arizona and return them to the people of Phoenix is evidence that Lucy is herself a "Zoner," not an outsider as she had previously been.

Chapter 46 continues the motif of Angel and Lucy aiming guns at each other but by now both the characters and the reader are well aware that neither is willing to harm the other. Their unwillingness to directly harm each other leads to a standoff and Lucy's decision to abandon Angel to the consequences of his actions by removing his last remaining chance of making amends with Catherine Case. At this stage, it looks like the narrative has come full circle and Angel will be punished for his immoral deeds, while Lucy will be rewarded for her morality.

Chapter 47 brings the expected ending – as well as Lucy herself – crashing to the ground. Unlike Lucy, Maria really is a part of Arizona. From the perspective of the only character that has had to confront the day-to-day realities of surviving in Phoenix, the idea of going back there is so appalling that she is willing to harm another person in order to make sure it doesn't happen, despite all the prior evidence that Maria wants to help others whenever she has the chance. If Lucy really was a Zoner, like Maria, she would want to escape Phoenix, not go back there.



Lucy considers her actions to be noble, but in reality she can only make the choices she makes because she still always has the option of moving to the safety and luxury of Vancouver whenever she wants. Maria has no such option and when she is presented with a chance to get out of the hellish world that Arizona has become, she does not have the luxury of considering the morality of her options.

The “Phoenix Rising” billboard was a misleading clue earlier in the novel which suggested that the city itself would rise from the ashes of the great fire that engulfed it in Chapter 37. However, the real phoenix rising from the ashes of destruction is Maria, who finally manages to escape to a new life where she can become a new person.

Discussion Question 1

Does Angel show remorse for his actions?

Discussion Question 2

Is Lucy right to want to save Phoenix?

Discussion Question 3

Do you sympathize with Maria when she shoots Lucy?

Vocabulary

teased, delusion, jabbing, smolders, exclusive, hedging, whine, mingle, resourceful, satellite, inaccessible, heisting, marooned, stimulants, prophets, incline, shambling, refuge, destitution, preyed



Characters

Angel Velasquez

Angel Velasquez is one of the three central characters. Angel was born in Mexico but had to flee with his father when his mother and sister were murdered by gang members. As an adult, Angel was released from prison by Catherine Case on the condition that he would work for her as a water knife: someone who infiltrates the water boards of Nevada's rival states, sabotaging their systems and destroying their water supplies.

Angel is introduced as an immoral character capable of inflicting great harm on others whilst showing no remorse. After the destruction of Carver City's water supply in Chapter 1, Angel reflects that he is a devil. However, as the reader finds out more information about Angel's character and the world he inhabits, it becomes apparent that Angel's choices and his ability to do the right thing are limited. If Angel refuses to carry out the instructions of Catherine Case he will be left to a life of poverty, despair, or death.

Angel's character arc shows him moving from someone who is entirely self-serving to someone who is willing to protect someone else even when doing so is not in his own best interests. This is demonstrated through his emotional attachment to Lucy Monroe. After meeting Lucy and feeling an intense connection with her, Angel finds himself making decisions which put her safety ahead of his own. This relates to the central conflict at the heart of Angel's character: he is angelic by name and by nature, with an instinctive desire to do the right thing, as demonstrated by his obsession with the action hero Relic Jones, a fictional character who is able to use his physical strength to help others. However, Angel's circumstances and his dependence on Catherine Case force him to go against his true nature and behave like a devil.

Lucy Monroe

Lucy Monroe is a journalist and one of the three central characters. At the start of the novel, Lucy resides in Phoenix, Arizona. But, significantly, Lucy was not born in Arizona. Lucy is from New England which means she holds ID which allows her to leave Arizona any time she wants. Further to this, her sister Anna and her husband are well-connected in Vancouver and would be able to secure Lucy a visa to live in Canada if she wished to do so. This puts Lucy in the least dependent situation of any of the main characters: if she wanted to remove herself from the horrors of Phoenix, she could do so at any time.

When Lucy first arrived in Phoenix, before the start of the novel, she was naïve and inexperienced. By the time the reader is introduced to her character she has become hardened by the violence and despair she has witnessed during her time in Arizona. It is this quality that attracts Angel to Lucy, as he recognizes something about himself in the



quality of Lucy's eyes, which reveal to him that she has seen the same things that he has seen.

The conflict at the heart of Lucy's character is that her upbringing and her job require her to be an outside observer of events in Arizona, but she also has a deep desire to be a real and integrated part of Phoenix. This is a twist on the classic approach to journalist characters in film and literature that usually have a strong desire to remain objective observers, but then become unwillingly sucked into the world of their stories until they are as much a part of the story as the people they are writing about. For Lucy, the opposite is true. She takes actions in a desperate attempt to become a part of Phoenix, by writing stories which could get her into trouble with the criminal underworld, by refusing Anna's offer of a visa for Vancouver, and most significantly by trying to steal the water rights from Angel and return them to Phoenix. Although Lucy concludes that her actions are a sign that she has truly become a Zoner, the opposite is the case. As Maria demonstrates in the final chapter, someone who was really a part of Phoenix would never go back there if they had a choice.

Maria

Maria is a teenage refugee from Texas residing in Phoenix and is the third of the three main characters in the novel. Before the start of the novel, Maria and her family were forced to leave Texas when it was decided that no water supply was going to be provided to the state anymore. This made Maria and her family part of a hated group – Texan refugees – who were mistreated and despised everywhere they went by unwelcoming locals who were worried that the arrival of the refugees would mean that they themselves would not have enough resources to survive. The plight of the Texans in the novel is a clear parallel to the plight of refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East today.

Maria is Latina. Her lack of privilege in the novel is connected to the fact that she is Texan, rather than to her race, as her best friend and love interest Sarah is white but also faces the same challenges and lack of resources as Maria. Despite this, Maria's plight is a parallel to the plight of women from ethnic minorities in the United States today, many of whom are similarly trapped in poverty by their lack of options in comparison to white women like Lucy Monroe, who are better able to make choices which can improve their situation in life.

After the deaths of her parents, which are never explained, Maria was left to fend for herself in Phoenix. Maria is an intelligent and hardworking young woman and is intent on improving her lot in life by finding a way to make enough money to cross the border and escape Arizona. Maria's character arc shows her gradual realization that the world she inhabits is unjust and that none of her efforts will be enough to help her escape poverty. All of Maria's attempts to improve her situation in life are met with brutality or exploitation by people who hold more power than she does. Maria's harsh experiences in the novel make her final act of violence against Lucy understandable and more sympathetic.



Catherine Case

Catherine Case is the villain of the novel. Nicknamed the Queen of Colorado, she uses her power in her role at the Nevada water board to destroy the water supply of Carver City in Arizona. Through the use of her shady employees known as water knives, Case orders violence and destruction in other states which will protect the water supply of Nevada. Case is linked to La Santa Muerte, also known as “the skinny lady,” because Case is responsible for bringing about so much death and destruction and is described by Angel as being very small and thin.

Twice in the novel, characters tell Maria that she is similar to Catherine Case, implying that had she been born in different circumstances Maria could have used her intelligence and pragmatism to wield great power in the world like Case does.

Toomie

Toomie is a former construction worker, now working as a food vendor outside the Taiyang arcology in Phoenix. Toomie is a surrogate father figure to Maria after the death of her real father. Sarah encourages Maria to seduce Toomie in the hopes that he would take care of her in exchange for sex. Despite being physically attracted to Maria, Toomie rejects her advances on the grounds that he does not want to exploit someone so young and vulnerable, making him one of the only people Maria encounters who doesn't attempt to exploit her. Toomie attempts to help Maria escape Arizona but does not have the resources or influence to do so successfully, unlike Angel who eventually offers to take both Toomie and Maria to Las Vegas in exchange for the water rights.

Sarah

Sarah is Maria's best friend and eventually Maria concludes that she was really her girlfriend. Maria was intensely attracted to Sarah but never got the chance to develop their relationship on a romantic level because Sarah is murdered by the men tracking down Michael Ratan. Before her death, Sarah works as a prostitute and lives in hope that one of her clients will one day decide to take her away from Phoenix. Maria likens Sarah to an orphaned kitten mewing for milk that will never arrive. Maria had resisted Sarah's suggestions in the past that Maria should work alongside her, but after Maria's water scheme goes wrong, the girls can think of no other option than to sleep with Michael Ratan for their rent money.

Timo

Timo is a photographer who works for the “Blood Rags” in Phoenix: tabloid newspapers which print shocking stories rather than stories with serious social or political depth. Timo's mercenary attitude and lack of compassion to the suffering he sees around him is contrasted with Lucy's intense desire to do something to improve the lives of people



in Phoenix. Timo is responsible for putting Lucy in danger on several occasions, most notably when he gives her name and telephone number to Angel and again when he betrays her by handing over Ratan's stolen laptop to the Calies.

The Vet, Esteban, and Damien

The Vet, Esteban, and Damien are the three villains who cause Maria the most problems and who force her to try to escape Arizona. As Maria encounters each of these characters, she discovers that each is more dangerous and powerful than the last. Damien threatens Maria for her rent but Maria is ultimately not afraid of him. Esteban, however, is much more frightening and physically harms Toomie in an effort to get Maria to turn herself in. The most terrifying character of all, from Maria's perspective, is The Vet: an unstable and deranged character who takes pleasure in feeding his enemies to his pet hyenas. Although these characters are powerful within Maria's world, their influence is nothing compared to the likes of Catherine Case.

Michael Ratan

Michael Ratan is a "fiver": someone who lives in the Taiyang arcology in Phoenix. Ratan attempts to double-cross his home state of California by selling the historic water rights to Nevada, a scheme which results in his murder. Ratan is the character responsible for embroiling Maria in the main narrative when he agrees to pay her rent in exchange for sex and again when he offers her the copy of Cadillac Desert which contains the water rights.

Anna

Anna is Lucy's sister, who lives in Vancouver with her husband and two children. Anna functions as a contrast to Lucy and as an example of the kind of luxurious and privileged life that Lucy could choose to lead if only she would leave Phoenix. Although Lucy shows very little care for her own welfare in the novel, the threat to the safety of Anna and her family causes Lucy to behave in a different way, abandoning her principles and betraying Angel.



Symbols and Symbolism

Desert Cadillac

The book *Desert Cadillac* is symbolic of the chances to do the right thing and prevent catastrophe that individuals and societies as a whole fail to capitalize on. On a historical level, this is represented by the fact that the book warns about the consequences of the extreme droughts and unstable water supplies in the region, but governments and environmental fail to heed the warning. On a character level, the book represents Angel's missed opportunity to solve all his problems by paying greater attention to Maria and her troubles. Angel is distracted by his own concerns and fails to realize that Maria has the water rights tucked inside the copy of *Desert Cadillac*.

Clearsacs

Clearsacs are plastic containers used to convert human urine into drinking water and they are symbolic of poverty and desperation. The use of Clearsacs is a sign that a character has little power in the world or access to resources, forcing them to resort to pragmatic but unpleasant ways of surviving. Maria and Sarah, as two of the novel's poorest characters, often use Clearsacs and the containers are strongly associated with Texan refugees as well as those fleeing Carver City. Angel's fall from grace in the novel is symbolized by his willingness to drink water from a ClearSac, when he had previously been a character whose access to wealth, water, and other resources allowed him to avoid using them.

Swimming Pools

Swimming pools are symbolic of uselessness and the excesses of the past. In Arizona, a region that is starved of water in the world of the novel, the number of empty swimming pools is indicative of an extravagant and shortsighted approach to water in the past. Like the present day water fountains in Las Vegas which so shock Maria and Sarah when they see them on TV, the swimming pools are indicative of a time in Arizona when people took water for granted and used it for decoration and entertainment rather than survival. The swimming pools are often used as dumping grounds for murder victims (known in the novel as "swimmers") whose deaths are not properly investigated by police or reported by journalists. The disposability of the bodies is reflected by the uselessness of the swimming pools: both are things that society no longer deems important.

IDs and Uniforms

The IDs and uniforms provided to Angel by Catherine Case in order to assist him in his work as a water knife are symbolic of Angel's privilege as well as his inability to be his



authentic self. They symbolize Angel's privilege because they grant him access to places, people, and resources that are simply unavailable to people who do not have the wealth and influence of a state like Nevada supporting them. The difference in access is made clear when Lucy (who has no fake IDs and uniforms) struggles to get inside the Taiyang arcology, whereas Angel navigates the location with ease. However Angel's privilege comes at the cost of going against his own nature and his instinct to do the right thing. In order to survive Angel must literally pretend to be someone else via his fake IDs and uniforms, and spiritually pretend to be someone else by harming people and behaving in a way which goes against his natural instincts.

Bubble

Bubble is an illegal substance which Sarah gives to Maria in order to help her enjoy their experience with Michael Ratan rather than focus on how unpleasant and upsetting it is that the girls are selling their bodies in order to pay their rent. The name is a metaphor for the effects of the substance: the drug provides a bubble in which Maria can view events through a different perspective. However the bubble bursts after the effects of the drug wears off and Maria is once again confronted with the reality of her situation.

Blood Rags

Blood Rags are symbolic of the way people suffering extreme poverty and disaster are exploited for entertainment. Timo is a Blood Rag photographer and he covers stories of destruction and despair because he knows that it will make him a lot of money, without showing any concern for the welfare of the people who are involved in the story. In turn, the people who are involved in the reality of these stories, like Sarah and Maria, treat the Blood Rags themselves as disposable: the girls use the newspaper as toilet paper. Although the novel is somewhat critical of Lucy's approach to life, she is presented in a much more positive light than the Blood Rag journalists because of her sincere concern about the people of Phoenix.

Phoenix Rising Billboards

The Phoenix Rising billboards installed in the city by the Phoenix development board are a false symbol, intended to mislead the reader into believing that the story of the novel will involve Phoenix being restored to its former glory. The slogan recalls the mythical Phoenix which rises from the ashes of destruction to become something new and better. When the city of Phoenix is engulfed by fire, the slogan echoes this metaphor and implies that the destruction will be followed by some sort of renewal. However, this renewal never comes to pass, and the only things that rise from the ashes of the destruction of Phoenix are Angel and Maria.



Hyenas

The hyenas kept by The Vet on his compound are symbolic of the destruction of society and the return to values which are more animalistic in nature: survival of the fittest. In a different world, someone as intelligent and hardworking as Maria would be able to use her natural talents to make a better life for herself. In the world of the novel, however, Maria's physical weakness in contrast to her enemies makes her a target for brutality and exploitation. The men of Phoenix treat Maria more like an animal than a human being.

Arcologies

Arcologies are artificial ecological indoor environments which are a symbol of privilege in the novel. The ultimate privilege for all of the characters in the novel is a visa which will allow them to live in an arcology, free from the blistering heat of the desert with reliable access to water. Characters such as Angel and Maria are willing to harm others in order to be able to live in an arcology. In contrast, Michael Ratan has no understanding of the harsh realities of life in the rest of Phoenix and takes his life in the arcology for granted, seeking out even greater wealth for himself by selling the water rights.

Cell Phone Signal Interference

When Angel leaves Las Vegas to carry out his investigation in Phoenix he is physically removed from his boss Catherine Case. As the novel continues, unbeknownst to Angel, Case becomes more and more suspicious of his behavior, eventually ordering his assassination. The breakdown in trust between these two characters is symbolized by a literal breakdown in communication on their phones: the dust storms of Arizona interfere with the signal in Angel's car, meaning that he cannot continue his conversation with Case.



Settings

Las Vegas

Las Vegas is a location of great privilege and wealth as a result of the ruthless tactics of Catherine Case and her attempts to ensure that Nevada maintains more than its fair share of the water from the Colorado River. Angel lives in luxury in Las Vegas and commits acts of violence on behalf of Case in order to be allowed to stay there. For Maria, Sarah, and Toomie, Las Vegas offers a vision of paradise which they are willing to risk everything in order to reach.

Phoenix

Phoenix is the main location of the novel. Both Maria and Lucy live in Phoenix and Angel is sent to the city as an investigator early on in the narrative. Phoenix is on the verge of becoming a disaster zone, somewhere which will shortly become entirely uninhabitable, repeating the fate of Texas in Arizona. The billboards from the city's development board using the slogan "Phoenix Rising" give the reader the false impression that Phoenix will be saved before the end of the novel, but this does not come to pass. As Maria points out, Phoenix is beyond saving and is never going to get better.

Carver City

Carver City, Arizona, is the location of Angel's most unethical actions during the course of the novel. In Chapter 1, Angel participates in the destruction of Carver City's water supply leading to large numbers of refugees being forced to leave the city. Angel's actions come back to haunt him when the character returns to Carver City, where the sheer scale of the number of refugees make Angel fear that his own destructive actions at the start of the novel will prevent him from finding Maria and saving his own life at the end of the novel.

Taiyang Arcology

The Taiyang Arcology is an artificial ecological indoor environment constructed in Phoenix for wealthy residents. The lifestyle of those who live in the Taiyang (known as "fivers" due to their five digit addresses) is contrasted to the lifestyle of ordinary people from Arizona (known as "Zoners"). Whereas those in the Taiyang have air-conditioning and reliable access to water, Zoners are left in scorching and dry conditions outside, forced to rely on charity water pumps and Clearsacs for their access to water.



The Vet's Compound

The Vet's compound is a location of terror for Maria where she expects that her life will come to an end. The Vet keeps pet hyenas which he feeds his enemies to as a warning to others not to cross him. When Maria is caged at the compound alongside the hyenas it is symbolic of how little value The Vet and men like him place on Maria's life. She is treated as an animal rather than as a human being. This treatment will eventually come back to haunt The Vet as Maria sets the animals loose on the compound before escaping with Toomie.



Themes and Motifs

Water and Drought

The central motif of the novel is water and drought and all of the action in the narrative is motivated by the desire of different characters to secure a regular water supply for themselves or others. The author uses the depiction of different fluids or the lack thereof to show the relative status of each of the characters in society. When Maria and Sarah contrast their own lives to the TV show “Hollywood Lifestyles” (on an episode featuring Angel’s favorite action hero, Tau Ox), the detail that remains with both girls about the glamour of Tau’s life is the fountain outside of the building where Tau lives. Ornamental water features are a kind of luxury reserved for only the wealthiest and most successful people in this world, and the sight of such a waste of resources is impossible to comprehend for Sarah and Maria.

On the opposite end of the scale to Tau Ox are characters that rely on “Clearsacs,” plastic containers which filter human urine into drinkable water. Clearsacs are associated with refugees on the road, especially Texans but also those forced to leave Carver City, who do not have reliable access to water pumps. Maria’s poverty is shown through her reliance on Clearsacs prior to coming up with her scheme at the water pump. Later, Angel’s fall from grace after Catherine Case orders his assassination is symbolized through Clearsacs. After Lucy rescues him from the swimming pool he awakens asking for water, but she tells him that she only has Clearsacs: the only time in the novel Angel’s access to resources is low enough to make Clearsacs a viable option for him.

The most disposable members of society – the bodies found murdered whom Lucy is warned not to write about – are associated with swimming pools. Often referred to as “swimmers,” these disposable people, who no one will mourn and whose deaths will not be investigated properly by the police, are associated with the uselessness of something as decadent as a swimming pool in a place where people kill over access to water. Like the swimming pools where their bodies are dumped, swimmers are discarded, irrelevant, and no longer of use to society. Angel discovers his own disposability when Catherine Case orders his death: an event which almost results in Angel becoming just another dead body in the bottom of an empty swimming pool.

The contrast between Angel and Lucy is first introduced as a contrast between the relative wetness and dryness of their environments. Angel is introduced to the reader in a lush and fertile Vegas arcology, whereas Lucy is introduced during a dust storm in barren Arizona. Their geographical locations are the reverse of the way the characters are described, however. Although Lucy lives in drought-ridden Arizona, she is consistently described in watery terms (“To Angel her eyes were like discovered pools” [155]; “She’d been wet and soft then” [65]). In contrast, Angel is more strongly associated with the dryness of the desert, with the author describing the landscape of



the Mojave in terms which could also be applied to Angel: “The desert was different. It had always been a gaunt and feral thing” (80).

Choice

The central theme of the novel is choice and the extent to which some people have choices available to them, whereas others are extremely limited in the choices they are able to take. The theme is explored through the three central characters of Angel, Lucy, and Maria, all of which are faced with a series of choices wherein they can choose to behave selfishly or to risk their own welfare for the sake of others. Despite the fact all three characters are offered opportunities to choose their own course of action, the choices available to them are not equal and in many cases there is only an illusion of choice.

Maria is the character with the fewest choices available to her in life. She begins the novel under the impression that she will be able to use her intellect and hardworking attitude in order to bring about a positive change in her own life as well as in the life of her best friend Sarah. However, Maria’s attempts to make choices which will improve their circumstances lead her to the discovery that the society she lives in is unfair and corrupt and will prevent her from escaping poverty regardless of what choices she makes. Despite having the fewest life choices available to her of the three main characters, Maria is nevertheless the character who most consistently chooses to help others when she has the chance: volunteering information to Angel out of sympathy for his desire to find Lucy, turning herself in to Esteban in order to save Toomie’s life, and freeing the hyenas from captivity at The Vet’s compound.

Angel has considerably more choices available to him in life than Maria as a result of the resources made available to him by Catherine Case. Angel’s extensive choices are symbolized by the numerous different uniforms and forms of ID provided to him on his trip to Arizona: Angel can choose to go wherever he wants and choose to be whomever he wants when he gets there. Angel’s choices are still limited, however, because he is entirely reliant on the goodwill of Catherine Case in order to retain access to these resources. This means that his choices can never be fully his own: he must put his loyalty to Case ahead of other concerns in order to protect his own welfare. This causes inner conflict for Angel, who is naturally inclined to help others, as symbolized by his obsession with the heroic action character of Relic Jones. Angel’s choices are also limited by his emotional bond with Lucy. Having been alone and without any close family or loved ones for much of his life, Angel has previously found it easy to make choices which protect his own interests. His feelings for Lucy make this more and more difficult for him as the narrative progresses.

Lucy is the character who has the most choices available to her at any given moment. The most significant choice available to Lucy is that, unlike Maria or Angel, she could choose to live somewhere safe with reliable water access. Maria has no way of getting to such a place and Angel’s access to this lifestyle is dependent on his subservience to Catherine Case. Because Lucy has the option of moving to live with her sister in



Vancouver at any time, it frees her up to make more selfless and noble choices than Angel and Maria, in the knowledge that she could always free herself from Arizona if she wanted to. Lucy considers her choice to return the water rights to Phoenix to be a noble choice, but fails to see how much easier it is for her to make such a choice than it would be for Angel or Maria, whose lives are at stake.

Power

The theme of power is explored on many levels in the novel, which depicts power as a relative concept that will change in nature based on the perspective of those involved. There is no absolute power available to any characters in the novel, only a never ending hierarchy whereby even the most superficially powerful characters still feel themselves to be at the mercy of a more powerful entity elsewhere.

Power increases in the novel from a localized individual level to a level that covers all of the southwestern United States. The character with the least amount of power is Maria. No matter what she does, she is always at the whim of other people and their frequently violent attempts to exert power over her. This begins with Damien, her landlord, who threatens Maria and insists on a share of the profits from her water selling scheme. Above Damien is Esteban, who controls everyone doing business in this area of Phoenix. Esteban reports to The Vet who has ultimate control over this localized area. Although Damien's power over Maria appears large when he is first introduced, by the time Maria is held captive at The Vet's compound it becomes apparent that Damien is actually powerless and only able to follow orders of people more powerful than him. Maria's possession of the water rights in an ironic twist on the power plays of the novel, when the character with the least personal power accidentally gains possession of documents which would grant unheard of power on a governmental level.

Angel and Lucy have different kinds of power. Angel's power is largely connected to his physical strength and his willingness to inflict harm on others in order to ensure his own safety. The fragility of Angel's power is made clear in situations where Angel is wounded (when he is in the shoulder shot by Julio and later, more seriously, by the Calies) thus diminishing the power he gains through his physical strength. His power is also lessened by his decreasing willingness to commit behave selfishly and immorally which occurs alongside his growing emotional attachment to Lucy. Lucy's power stems partly from her fearlessness and her desire to risk her own safety in order to do the right thing but also, more significantly, from her family connections which provide her a safety net which the other characters do not have access to. Lucy has greater power than Maria within Phoenix due to her profession and her connections which give her access and insight into how the world works. Lucy has the power of knowledge, which is also denied Maria.

Ostensibly the most powerful character in the novel is Catherine Case who can order the destruction and decimation of entire cities. However, even Case feels powerless at times in the novel due to her lack of power relative to the wealthy and well-connected state of California. Although Case holds more power than Angel, she is still dependent



on him and the other water knives remaining loyal to Nevada in order for her to be able to exert her power successfully.

Privilege and Morality

The theme of privilege and morality is explored through the recurring incidents of characters in the novel being faced with a choice about whether to behave selfishly or whether to help other people. Rather than depict these decisions as being a reflection of each character's personality, however, the author depicts these decisions as being a reflection of each character's relative privilege.

This is most clearly explored through the character of Lucy. Lucy is both the character most likely to risk her own wellbeing for the sake of doing the right thing, whilst also one of the characters with the most privileged background. Lucy's knowledge that she could move to the safety and security of Vancouver whenever she chooses gives her a solid base from which to make her moral decisions. At every stage she has a real choice about whether to pursue her own safety or pursue "doing the right thing" and more often than not she chooses to do the right thing rather than protect her own interests. Angel, on the other hand, consistently chooses to commit immoral acts that seriously harm other people, most notably his destruction of the Carver City water supply in Chapter 1. However, Angel's ability to choose to do the right thing is relative to his privilege. If Angel made the decision to do what was right, instead of doing what was selfish, he would find himself living a life of desperate poverty similar to that of Maria. Although Lucy's actions are superficially nobler than Angel's, her ability to make moral choices is a result of her privilege.

Maria, in contrast to Angel, frequently chooses to take a moral course of action despite her complete lack of privilege. When faced with the option of leaving Angel to deal with the disappearance of Lucy on his own, she chooses to help him out of genuine concern and sympathy rather than out of a belief that it will be in her own best interests. Likewise, Maria sacrifices her own safety in order to save Toomie by turning herself in to Esteban.

The backgrounds of each character in terms of their privilege and morality are the defining aspects of the novel's final sequence. Although Angel has now seen the dire consequences of his actions in Carver City, he is still not in a position to take the moral course of action at the end of the narrative because unless he returns the water rights to Nevada, he will die. Lucy is once again in a position of privilege at the novel's climax. Her family is no longer in danger and neither is she: it is easy for Lucy to make a decision to return the rights to Phoenix, because doing so will not alter Lucy's position of privilege in the world.

The final chapter is the only moment in the novel when Maria deliberately harms another person in order to protect her own welfare. Although shooting Lucy could be seen as an unsympathetic action, the reader's understanding of Maria's desperate



position in life in contrast to Lucy's position of privilege makes Maria's actions entirely understandable and sympathetic.

Predicting the Future

Predicting the future is a recurring and reflexive motif in the novel which gives insight into the beliefs and worldviews of the characters while also reflecting the process that the novel itself is engaged in. As a work of science fiction, the novel is itself an attempt at predicting the future, observing elements of contemporary U.S. society and how they might develop in the future. Examples of this include the rise in popularity of Chinese actors (such as Angel's favorite action star Tau Ox) as Hollywood becomes more interested in capitalizing on the financial possibilities of marketing films in China. Further to this is the suggestion that The New York Times has been bought out by Google, reflecting the contemporary trend in journalism which sees news coverage moving away from print and into digital forms. The novel also grows out of the real life difficulties being caused by the severe drought in California today.

Beyond the novel as a work of science fiction, the process of predicting the future is also an important topic for characters within the novel. The belief that it is possible to predict the future exists on two levels: one rational, one spiritual. The rational belief in mankind's ability to predict the future is symbolized by the book *Cadillac Desert* by Marc Reisner, which is a real book that several of the characters in *The Water Knife* own a copy of. The book predicts many of the difficulties that the fictional society in *The Water Knife* is facing. Both Lucy and Michael Ratan own first-edition copies of the book and Angel comments that Catherine Case makes all of her new recruits read the book. However, Angel is cynical about people who own copies of the book and who insist on displaying them prominently, believing that such people are fraudulently claiming that they saw what was coming when in fact no one who read Reisner's book at the time heeded his warnings.

On a spiritual level, the topic of predicting the future is discussed through the visions that several characters receive during the course of the story. Most notable among these characters is Maria, who receives visions while she is asleep that later come to pass, although with slightly different details. She dreams the murder of Sarah and her inability to save her before it happens and also has a vision which predicts her escape from the Taiyang arcology with Angel. The Vet also has visions which he claims are sent to him by La Santa Muerte and tells Maria when they first meet that his visions had told him not to harm her. The spiritual depiction of predicting the future reflects the theme of power. Those who hold onto rational ideas about predicting the future, through their possession of *Cadillac Desert*, are holding onto a mistaken belief that they can control what is happening around them. Those like Maria, who see visions and experience other supernatural phenomena, are better able to realize the uncertainty of their society and their inability to assert control over what happens to them.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is related in the past tense from a third-person omniscient narrator and alternates between focusing on the perspectives of its three central characters: Angel, Lucy, and Maria. Each character has their own distinct perspective on the events of the narrative which changes the perspective focus in each of their respective chapters.

Angel is the character who is the most “in the know” of all of the three protagonists. He works for Catherine Case in Nevada and is therefore privy to top-secret information and background knowledge which allows him to have a deeper understanding of events in the novel than the other characters. However, a change occurs for Angel's character due to a breakdown of communications with Catherine Case and his progress in the novel involves him becoming less and less certain of what's going on, with his perspective becoming ever more similar to the perspectives of Lucy and Maria, who are both out of the loop, trying desperately to figure out how things work.

Lucy's perspective is defined by her profession as a journalist. She is better informed about the political machinations and crimes committed by the various state governments than Maria is, but she is still relatively in the dark compared to Angel. Lucy's perspective is all about hunting for clues and trying to figure things out. The information Lucy is searching for is usually information Angel already has access to and takes for granted.

Maria's point of view is starkly different to the points of view of Angel and Lucy. Whereas Angel and Lucy view the world through a political lens, Maria's perspective is more individual and localized. Maria is barely able to survive in Phoenix, which does not give her the freedom to be interested in the wider social and political forces at play. Maria's different perspective is shown through her outsider status in the chapters: when Angel and Lucy first encounter Maria neither bother to even find out her name. Even in the final chapter of the novel, Maria still doesn't know the names of Angel or Lucy, thinking of them only as “the water knife” and “the lady.”

Language and Meaning

The most distinctive note about language in the novel is the several slang terms used in reference to different people, places, and items, which make up this futuristic dystopia, such as “zoner,” “fiver,” “Clearsac,” “Merry Perry,” and “water knife.” The use of these terms adds authenticity to the story by portraying a world that has become used to things like Clearsacs and casually divides people along the lines of their access to water, in the case of “zoners” (regular people from Arizona) and “fivers” (the wealthy elite able to live in the Taiyang arcology in Phoenix which provides them with a five digit address). These terms also enhance the mystery and detective elements of the novel.



All three of the main characters are trying to uncover how the world works and what is really going on. The author uses these terms casually, without immediately defining what they all mean, which puts the reader in the position of an investigator, trying to decipher what these terms mean by paying attention to small clues.

The author uses language related to dryness and wetness in order to explore the simultaneous contrast and compatibility between Angel and Lucy. Angel is compared to sturdy desert plants, fighting for their survival in an inhospitable climate: “Here, plants spread their roots wide and shallow, starved for every drop. Their saps crystallized to hard shellac, fighting to keep every molecule of moisture from evaporating” (80). Whereas Lucy is strongly associated with water: “She’d been wet and soft then” (65), “her eyes were like discovered pools” (155), “He hadn’t even touched her, and she was wet” (270). This establishes Angel and Lucy as opposites who are also compatible: the dry desert plant still needs some water in order to survive.

Both Maria and Sarah are associated with language involving animals, which reflects the inhuman treatment that the girls are subjected to. Sarah is compared to a kitten and Maria encounters a number of wild animals including the coyotes near where Toomie lives and the hyenas at The Vet’s compound. Toomie compares Maria to a small animal incapable of coping with the larger predators of Phoenix: “You’re a tiny little mouse, in a big old desert... There’s hawks and owls and coyotes and snakes, and all they want to do is eat you up” (97).

Structure

The novel is told in the past tense in a mostly chronological order, with occasional overlaps in the action caused by switches in perspective focus among each of the three main characters. The majority of the chapters follow on from each other in chronological order with a few exceptions, in which these overlaps are used to heighten suspense and tension.

This technique is used most effectively during the series of chapters set in the Taiyang Arcology. All three of the main characters are present in the Taiyang at the same time, but for different reasons. Maria has spent the night in Michael Ratan’s apartment after she and Sarah decided to have sex with him so that he would pay them enough money to cover their rent. Lucy is at the Taiyang because she wants to ask Ratan some questions about his connection to her murdered friend Jamie. Finally, Angel is at the Taiyang because he is following Lucy.

The author switches between the perspectives of all three characters during the sequence of events at the Taiyang in order to heighten the suspense and the sense of danger. By depicting Angel’s arrival at Ratan’s apartment from the perspective of Maria, the author prolongs the sense of danger for her character by delaying the revelation that the man who attacked her was Angel. By moving to chapters focused on Lucy’s perspective, the author increases the sense of urgency in the chapters focused on

Angel's perspective, because the reader is aware that Lucy is in imminent danger and that Angel must hurry if he is going to save her.

The switches in perspective focus are also used to great effect in the final chapters of the novel which take place on the riverbank in Carver City. From the perspectives of Lucy and Angel, the characters have reached an impasse which cannot be resolved: Lucy is not willing to betray Phoenix by allowing Angel to take the water rights back to Nevada, whereas Angel will lose his life if he allows Lucy to take the rights back to Arizona but his emotional connection to her makes him unwilling to harm her.

The final chapter is focused on the perspective of Maria, who sees the situation in a much less complicated way: either Maria stops Lucy, or Maria dies. By switching between these perspectives, the author manages to make the ending seem like a twist. If the story had been told entirely from one perspective this ending could have seemed either too obvious (if the whole story had been told from Maria's perspective) or too unexpected (if the reader was only aware of Angel or Lucy's perspectives), but the structure of the chapters and the order in which the author switches between the characters allows the ending to come as a surprise.



Quotes

Guess that makes me the Devil.
-- Angel (chapter 1)

Importance: Angel's reference to himself as the Devil is both a pun on his forename and a reflection of the central conflict at the heart of his character. Angel is a good person who is required by his circumstances to do bad things: an angel playing a devil.

You can live with us, you know," Anna said. "Arvind can arrange it through the National Professionals Program. You can come to the university first. With your credentials, you'd be a shoo-in for visas.
-- Anna (chapter 5)

Importance: Lucy's sister Anna reminds her that she can leave Phoenix and move to Vancouver whenever she wants to. Lucy's options in life make her perspective on the world fundamentally different to the perspectives of Angel and Maria who must fight for their own survival, sometimes requiring them to do immoral things. Lucy has the luxury of moving somewhere safe and also has the luxury of making morally informed choices.

Those places had dreamed of being different from what they were. They'd had aspirations. And then the water ran out, and they fell back, realizing too late that their prosperity was borrowed, and there would be no more coming. The desert was different. It had always been a gaunt and feral thing. Always hunting for its next sip. The desert never forgot itself.
-- Narration (chapter 7)

Importance: This reflection on why the desert as a landscape survived in a way that southwestern cities did not also serves as a discussion of Angel's character. Angel is like the desert: he was always someone who had to fight to survive, so he finds it easier to cope with the destruction and despair of this new society than those who were accustomed to luxury and privilege do.

Above it all, a billboard blazed with the Phoenix Development Board's latest PR campaign: a picture of a fiery bird spreading its wings behind a collage of laughing children, solar fields, and the Taiyang Arcology. PHOENIX. RISING.
-- Narration (chapter 9)

Importance: The Phoenix Development Board's advertising slogan gives the reader the impression that the city of Phoenix will rise from the ashes of the great fire that engulfs it, recovering from the destruction to become something great again. This sets up the twist at the end of the novel, when Maria is revealed to be the symbolic phoenix rising from the ashes, rather than the city.

Maria glared at him. It was rigged against her. It was all rigged against her. She wasn't supposed to make money. She wasn't supposed to get out.



-- Narration (chapter 12)

Importance: Maria makes a painful realization about her place in the world, discovering for the first time that there is no way for her to improve her situation in life. This is in contrast to Lucy, who always has numerous choices available to her throughout the novel and could get out any time she wanted to.

To Angel, her eyes were like discovered pools, found deep in the shadows of a sandstone canyon. Salvation and stillness all in one. Cool waters that, when you knelt to drink, showed your own self looking back at you from the depths. Pure recognition. Something you could drown in and not regret.

-- Narration (chapter 16)

Importance: Whereas the author compares Angel to the dry desert landscape, Lucy is compared to water. Angel imagines her as a precious resource (water) through which he can recognize and discover things about himself. The reference to drowning foreshadows Angel's willingness to put himself in harm's way to protect Lucy.

He could see himself from her perspective. A scarred thug with a gun shoving her around, threatening her with torture and death if she failed to obey. It made him feel less than a man. The opposite of Tau Ox, playing the hero.

-- Narration (chapter 23)

Importance: Both the reader and the character of Angel are given a new perspective on Angel's actions by seeing him from the perspective of Maria. The encounter with Maria reminds Angel that he is not being authentic to his true self. He is acting immorally, rather than behaving like his hero the action star Tau Ox.

Under the right pressure, everyone breaks. You beat someone enough, they talk. You threaten someone enough, they move. You scare someone enough, they sign.

-- Angel (chapter 39)

Importance: Angel forgives Lucy for betraying him because he knows through his own actions that everyone will cave into the right kind of pressure. Although Angel has hurt people using the knowledge demonstrated in this quotation, the experiences have also given him positive character traits. His knowledge of how to threaten people has made him less judgmental and more willing to forgive others.

Why?" Maria stared at the woman, trying to understand what made all these people see the world the way they did. "Because I'm not going back to Phoenix. Maybe you think those papers mean something, but that place ain't never getting better, and I ain't going back.

-- Maria (chapter 47)

Importance: From Maria's perspective, the idea of going back to Phoenix when given the chance to go to Las Vegas seems absurd. While Lucy indulges her dreams of nobility and heroism by trying to take the water rights back to Phoenix, Maria



demonstrates how someone who had really suffered the realities of living in Phoenix feels about the city.

Sorry I shot your girl,” Maria said finally. “Yeah, well,” the water knife sighed, “she didn’t give you a lot of choices.”

-- Maria/Angel (chapter 47)

Importance: The contrast between how many choices in life are available to Lucy versus how few are available to Maria runs throughout the novel and comes to a culmination at this moment. Maria has been backed into such a terrible position that she feels forced to harm another person in order to ensure her own survival, a position which Angel understands through his own experiences.

In the blistering heat of the sun, the woman seemed too small and delicate to be the mastermind who turned towns into blowing dust.

-- Narration (chapter 4)

Importance: The description of Catherine Case contrasts her small physical form with her large and far-reaching power, linking her to the figure of La Santa Muerte (also known as “the skinny lady”) who causes death and destruction despite her small frame.

She reminded Maria of a kitten that she’d found mewling inside a banged-up trash can. The kitten hadn’t a mother, probably because some needleboy had caught and cooked her, and there this little kitten was, curled up and begging for something it would never get.

-- Narration (chapter 6)

Importance: Maria thinks of her girlfriend Sarah as a small helpless animal who – unlike Maria herself – lives in the deluded hope that someone will rescue her and provide her with the things she needs to survive. In contrast, Maria attempts to provide for herself and ensure her own survival.