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3. Chapter-by-chapter

Chapter 1

Plot development

Exposition and rising tension.

The setting of the chapter is Tsotsi's room. The main protagonist, Tsotsi, and his gang are introduced. The tension rises as the four fill in the time before the evening's operation. Tsotsi announces that the trains are the target for the day. It is clear from the response of the people on their route that they are recognised as having an evil purpose. The detailed description of their victim and the ways in which he unconsciously seals his fate contribute to the rising tension. The chapter ends with his (the victim's) murder.

Pre-reading

1. What does the title and the picture on the cover of your edition of the novel suggest about the focus of the novel?

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Reading

2. Explain why Butcher does not pay much attention to the stories Boston tells.

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3. What mood is created in the **first paragraph** and what does it lead you to expect?

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4. There is something of a contradiction here. Die Aap and Tsotsi are said to listen attentively, yet they do not seem really interested in the stories. Explain this contradiction.

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Post-reading

5.1 What is surprising about Tsotsi's hands?

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5.2 What is ironic about Tsotsi bringing his hands together as if he is going to pray?

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6. The four members of the gang are very different. What do their actions and words reveal about their chief characteristics?

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7. Comment on the effect that Tsotsi has on people when he walks down the street on his way to commit a crime.

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8. Explain why Gumboot describes his year away from Maxulu as a **short one** in some ways and a **long one** in others.

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9. Outline the reasons that Tsotsi chooses Gumboot.

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10. What is particularly tragic about the timing of Gumboot's death?

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Glossary

despondent (*adjective*)	feeling low
harbingers (*plural noun*)	signals of something unpleasant soon to come
impotence (*abstract noun*)	powerlessness
respite (*abstract noun*)	relief (usually short-term)

Table 4: Chapter 1 Glossary

Themes

Ugliness of life

The environment in the township is shown as a hostile and ugly environment. The old woman's harsh words are likened to stones rattling in a tin. The room is sparsely furnished and invites crude behaviour. The men belch. Their glasses add rings to the table. The corrugated fence outside is hot and the street they walk along is crooked and buckled.

Meaninglessness of life (tragic loss of promise)

The men simply mark time before they end yet another stranger's life. There is no real interest in the content of Boston's stories. When the target area is chosen, it is randomly done. Gumboot, who has worked hard for nearly a year, and seems destined to be a good and faithful husband and a responsible father, is killed a week before he returns home to create a stable home.

Search for identity

Boston is conflicted. He cannot identify with the criminal activity that has now become his life. It is far removed from the world of study and decency that he did all he could to triumph in.

Undermining effects of apartheid

Dehumanisation

Life in the township is bleak. It seems that those who have a job are viewed like machines who have to do hard work, uncomplainingly. They leave early and return late.

Destruction of family and community life

Maxulu and Gumboot have to part when he goes to the mines as a contract worker. Those who work underground are not able to bring their wives and families with them. Gumboot's contract requires him to be a migrant worker.

Gumboot's death means that their young child will never know his/her father.

Cycle of violence

The gang are engaged in violence that is likely to lead to counter violence. Sooner or later another gang will challenge them for territory.

Innocence and loss of innocence

Gumboot Dhlamini has a rude awakening. In his innocence, he does not take vital precautions. His death brings a horrifying end to his innocence.

Powerful force of caring and love

Maxulu has been sustained by Gumboot's letters and the money he sends home. He has been sustained knowing she is longing for his return. He is a happy man right up until his death.

Chapter 2

Plot development

Rising tension.

The contrasting attitudes the members of the gang have towards the murder are shown. Tsotsi is indifferent to it, Butcher revels in it and Die Aap enjoys being part of the team. Boston is sickened by it. While Butcher and Die Aap engage in a violent sexual act with a prostitute, Tsotsi uses the opportunity to brutally attack Boston, whose persistent questions about his past and his moral make-up have angered him because he is unable to answer them. When he is forced to stop the attack, Tsotsi walks off.

Pre-reading

1. How do you feel when you are asked very personal questions, especially by people who are not close friends?

Reading

2. What phrase in the second line reveals that Butcher's laughter is intended to belittle Boston?

3. Boston seems to dislike violence. What possible reason does he have for slapping Rosie?

4. Soekie does not know her birthday. Explain how this is possible.

5. People usually pay for their drinks once they have been given them. Why does Soekie collect the money before she pours a round of drinks?

Post-reading

6. Compare Boston's attitude to violence to that of the other members of the gang.

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7. What does the description of Rosie reveal about the life of some women in the township?

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8. Briefly explain what Boston means when he says that Gumboot Dhlamini has died because of his decency.

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    _____

9. Comment critically on Boston's warning to Tsotsi.

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10. Suggest a reason for Fugard's choice of "sprawling" to describe the effect on Boston of the first kick.

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Glossary

filament (*noun*)	thin thread that glows in a light bulb
irrationality (*abstract noun*)	argument or belief not based on clear reason
palpable (*adjective*)	can be touched or felt
scavenging (*adjective*)	searching for something useful among things that have been discarded or left behind
flinching (*adjective*)	pulling one's body away in fear
sprawling (*adjective)*	landing in an uncontrolled way

Table 5: Chapter 2 Glossary

Themes

Ugliness of life

Boston has been physically ill as a result of the vicious murder and is aware that Rosie will soon be violated. Her life is a reflection of the ugliness she has experienced. Her face and body show signs of the long years of abuse she has endured. She is reduced to prostitution to satisfy her need for alcohol. Although she is quite willing to have sexual relations with them, Butcher and Die Aap deliberately hurt her.

Inside the shebeen, the record player plays "broken shards of song" rather than pleasant sounds.
There is no bond between the gang members. Butcher and Die Aap jeer at Boston.
The shebeens make drink readily available, taking advantage of people's need to dull their senses.

Meaninglessness of life (tragic loss of promise)

For Tsotsi, there is no real point to life beyond striking fear in others. Survival is all he is interested in. There is only blackness inside himself.

He is actually indifferent to the murder that has just been committed. Other people's pain means nothing to him. Butcher and Die Aap tend to see their activities merely in terms of a demonstration of skill.

Boston is wasting his talent. He is using his very good brain to work to ensure that their criminal deeds are successful.

Redemption

Boston is concerned that Tsotsi seems to have no "soul" – no conscience or sense of morality – and asks nagging questions.

Search for identity

There is no chord of recognition struck when Tsotsi looks in the mirror. Unlike others, he is not even reminded of relatives.

Soekie does not seem to have a formal identity. This is because births are not necessarily registered at this point, particularly if they are the result of sex across the colour line (if the Immorality Act proves a child to be born from parents with mixed race, they'll be arrested).

Undermining effects of apartheid

Dehumanisation

Soekie does not seem to know her parents. It seems that they simply discarded her because mixed race relationships are illegal.

Destruction of family and community life

Apartheid is responsible for the breakdown of community life. This means that there is no sense of fellow feeling. We see the way in which the gang concern themselves only with their own interests. In a sense, they partner with the apartheid system because they use the opportunities created by apartheid (like overly full trains) to prey on their victims.

Violation of human rights

Die Aap and Butcher do not treat Rosie with respect.

Immorality

The law has made intimacy across racial lines a matter of immorality. Soekie, who is a coloured woman, is a product of this kind of liaison. It leaves her an outcast.

Cycle of violence

Rosie places herself in a position where she will have to endure violence as the price of a drink.

Tsotsi resorts to violence to put a stop to Boston's questions. He explodes with anger and gives full rein to his extensive repertoire of brutality.