

## Five Parts Dead

Tim Pegler

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Recommended for Secondary



### Resource Kit Contains

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### Synopsis

Dan is still grieving the deaths of his mates when he's dragged on a family holiday to a remote island lighthouse, where he feels the presence of a mysterious girl.

Is she part of his hallucinations? Or has he somehow hooked into the spirit world of the past?

The lighthouse logbook holds the truth about the girl's tragic tale. And a surprising friendship helps Dan find the answers he needs to start again.

*Five Parts Dead* is a gripping story about how a mystery from the past infiltrates the lives of teenagers today.

### About the Author

Tim Pegler is an award-winning journalist and author. After a decade at the *Age* and the *Australian*, he now works as a website editor and freelance journalist. His first novel for young adults, *Game as Ned*, was a Children's Book Council notable book in 2008. Tim lives in Melbourne.

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### Themes

- Survivor guilt. What is meant by this?. Why do we feel guilt when we survive a catastrophe that has destroyed others, especially if they are our friends? This guilt is not necessarily based on any wrongdoing on our part but it is very real and present just the same.
- Suffering and pain—not just the pain of the main characters in the book, but of people from the past who cannot rest in peace until their pain has been

expiated. John Donne wrote 'Every man's death diminishes me' and this concept, too, is explained.

- The far-reaching ripples of bereavement. The innocent suffer, too, and blame may be laid at the feet of the blameless. It seems that in grief we all need someone to be the scapegoat.
- Responsibility—for ourselves and for each other and for admitting our mistakes and being trusting and honest.
- Invulnerability—the sense that many young adults feel they are indestructible.
- The vexed question of drinking and driving and what young people often see as the hypocrisy of parents and teachers in their attitude to underage drinking.
- Relationships—between twins and parents and friends. Dare we dob on our mates? Where do our responsibilities lie? And the tentative sweetness of young love.

### Language and Style

The language is very deftly balanced between the voice of the narrator, which is always authentic, and some very vivid pieces of writing. For example:

*a lone wallaby with a bad attitude* (p.12)

*Through the flywire I can see a fattening moon. Almost full. The stars sizzle. Shreds of cloud skate in front of them.* (p.19)

*The bus farts away from the cottage.* (p.62)

Keep a collection of phrases that catch your imagination and make a note of them or create a classroom collage of them.

The novel is written in the first person, which means we see everything through Dan's eyes. Think about the consequences of writing in the first person.

Pegler has created another story within the novel. Consider what the purpose of this is and how it throws light and shadow on the main story.

### Questions for Discussion

#### P: ABOUT TO SAIL

1. What do you think is the significance of the chapter titles? Why are they all nautical terms? Think about how each one foreshadows the psychological progress of Dan.
2. How did the opening sentence make you feel? What did you think the story would be about?
3. What does the language suggest about the narrator's feelings? Is it effective? The novel is written in the first person. How is this kind of narrative going to affect how we feel about the protagonist (the main character of the novel)?
4. This first person narrative means that we only see the other characters through the narrator's eyes? He sees his twin as lucky and himself as cursed. Why has the author deliberately hidden from us both the name of the narrator and the reason for his being in a wheelchair?
5. What do you learn from him about Pip and Mel? How do we know that the narrator has a sense of the social injustice of the circumstances of Pip's life?
6. At this point in the story do you feel sympathy for the narrator or do you feel he is consumed by self-pity?
7. We do learn that three of his mates are gone? What do you think has happened to them and to him?

#### RU: KEEP CLEAR/MANOEUVRING WITH DIFFICULTY

1. We discover what has happened. *This summer was doomed, totalled.* (p.8) But why does the narrator think that his family is punishing him for poor decisions by taking him on this holiday. Do you believe his perceptions are correct or that he feels he deserves punishment?
2. Dan, for his name is suddenly revealed, is seared with bitterness. List at least six emotions that Dan is showing in these few pages.
3. How has his relationship with his twin sister changed? Do you think it is the result of the trauma of the accident?
4. How has the accident affected Dan's mother?
5. Have you ever been in a wheelchair or otherwise been utterly dependent on others, for example, in hospital? How did it make you feel? How does it make Dan feel?

6. How does the writer convey the noise and movement of the ferry docking? (p.10)

#### Z: REQUIRE A TUG

1. Why do you think Dan is again beginning to feel Pip's voice inside his head?
2. What signs do we have that Dan is depressed?
3. Why does Dan require a tug? What tug is he given?
4. Find two striking descriptions of the sunset as seen from the lighthouse. Write two more of your own.
5. Do you believe in ghosts? Why might it be easy to believe in ghosts in the lighthouse?
6. Why is going asleep for Dan like falling into a swimming pool? (p.20)
7. What is the significance of his dream of the ski camp episode in Year 9?

#### ZL: YOUR SIGNAL HAS BEEN RECEIVED BUT NOT UNDERSTOOD

1. Has Dan seen a ghost? How does the writing engage a sense of acute fear?
2. There have been other unnamed victims in the crash—most particularly an unborn baby. The unborn baby does not appear to have been counted as a fatality but the reality of it as another victim haunts Dan. The way his mates died and how Phan was injured are horrifically and graphically described. Is this description designed just to shock the reader or is it a very tangible reminder of how this scene will never leave Dan? He is the least damaged physically, but his psychological damage is seemingly irrevocable.
3. *Five of us were in the car and five of us were equally guilty as far as the media were concerned.* (p.28) Why were they all seen as guilty? Is this a fair assumption?
4. Is Dan justified in feeling angry at what he sees as trial by media? (p.29)
5. Is he justified in seeing those who teach about responsible drinking as hypocrites?
6. Why does he call the reaction from his school 'damage control'?
7. Why were Carlo, Boris and Aaron treated as heroes on Facebook?
8. Why does Dan feel that he and Phan were blamed for surviving? Was it his survivor guilt or a very true reaction?
9. Why did Dan go to the fatal party?
10. Dan is falling for Pip. Is this a good thing?

**W: REQUIRE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE**

1. Riddled with guilt, Dan visits the lighthouse and finds the logbook. He reads about the early landing of the keepers and of the problems between the families. What were some of the difficulties that life on the island posed? What effect does reading the logbook have on Dan?

**K: DESIRE TO COMMUNICATE**

1. Why does Dan hurt Pip's feelings?
2. Can you explain Dan's nightmares?
3. Why does Dan feel that it is so difficult to eat with his family?
4. Why does Dan put himself in the captain's shoes?
5. Dan relates to the September 11 disaster. Why does he see himself as the one *Death keeps hooking, kissing and throwing back?* (p.49) What were his other close shaves with death? Were these his fault? Do you feel that there are times Dan wishes he were dead, too? Why would that be?

**G: WANT A PILOT**

1. What is suggested by the phrase, *Morning bulldozes its way under my blind?* (p.55)
2. Do you feel at this point that Dan's parents are sufficiently aware of his mental and emotional trauma?
3. Dan reads more of the logbook, including the passage that speaks of the importance of implicit trust. Do you think Dan and his family have that kind of trust at this moment? Are there signs that the small community of his family is crumbling?
4. Lighthouse. Fog. Wrecks. Wind. How are these symbols of what is going on in Dan's life?
5. How is Mel trying to help her twin?
6. What is the importance to Dan of the idea that, like all of mankind, he is grieving and dying?
7. Why do you think the writer introduces the ideas of seances and ghost stories at this point?
8. What do you think is really happening to Dan in the sequence with the storm and the girl and the penguins?
9. Why does the darkness ooze sadness? (p.71)
10. Dan describes the night before as a feeling of incredible loneliness. Can you explain this?
11. Pip and Dan are able to talk to each other. They discuss the complications of the relationship between twins. What are Dan's issues with his twinship? Are his rivalries just in his head?
12. What was the horrific event that they read about in the logbook? Why does Dan feel the horror more

than anyone else? Is this becoming melodramatic or is it a real reflection of the turmoil in Dan's head?

13. Do you believe his honesty with Pip could lead to his healing? Will his feelings go anywhere if he can't express them?

**B: DISCHARGING DANGEROUS CARGO**

1. The sustained sadness and dread of the logbook is broken with a very funny episode. What is it?
2. Do you agree that the male solution to every problem is to ignore it and hope it goes away?
3. How does Pip know that Dan lied to the police and his family about the accident?

**J: ON FIRE KEEP CLEAR**

1. Why does Dan not feel happy about making new mates?
2. *I'm the only non-believer in a church full of happy-clappies.* (p.93)  
Dan wants out but is incapable of doing anything. Can you explain that?
3. Again the preamble to the accident is described with searing clarity. Dan feels responsible? To what degree is he responsible?
4. How is Pip different from Mel in Dan's eyes?
5. Why are Pip and Mel such good friends although they are so different?

**U: STANDING INTO DANGER**

1. Describe in your own words what happened before the accident. Pip saw what happened and in turn she feels guilty. Why do you think she did nothing?
2. Were Dan's reasons for not telling the police and his family what really happened justified?
3. Why does Dan feel that he is the ghost of the accident? Do you think his friends' families would really see him in this light—as the reminder, the walking, talking face? Why would this be?

**GD: I'M GOING AHEAD**

1. For apparently the first time, Dan begins to imagine Mel's pain and it seems he is thinking of the suffering of others rather than just of himself. Returning to the logbook, he reads of more suffering and he is forced to wonder how much can be endured. He is faced with the thought that his friends felt invulnerable, that nothing could happen to them. Do you believe that this is a common feeling among young people?
2. Pip says that despite her father's long illness, she and her mother were not prepared for his death. Why is it

so difficult to be ready for the death of someone we love?

3. Why does Pip feel so guilty after her father's death? Is this guilt an inevitable aftermath of death?
4. Dan is now aware of how the families of his dead friends must feel. How does death change a family forever?
5. How does the story of the plane crash remind Dan of the fragility of life?

#### **QX: REQUEST PERMISSION TO ANCHOR**

1. How do you feel about New Year's Eve? Why is it such a big thing? Why does New Year's Eve ripple with such possibilities (p.122)?
2. What are Dan's New Year's resolutions?
3. What is Hiroshi's background? He claims his meeting Mel on the ferry was fate. Do you believe in fate?
4. Why is it important to the structure of the novel to have this lighter chapter?
5. Why is Dan so nervous in approaching Pip on the beach? He describes himself as a loser (p 129) and of being incapable of taking action. Is he a loser? Why is he so afraid of himself?

#### **C: AFFIRMATIVE/CHANGE OF ACTION**

1. What is the affirmation he finds? How does the language underpin this positive note?
2. What positive notes does the tarot reader add? Where is the darkness? What action does she say Dan must take?

#### **A: I HAVE A DIVER DOWN, KEEP WELL DOWN & SLOW SPEED**

1. Why does Dan see himself as a courier for death? He still feels cursed. Why does the future seem so bleak and black?
2. What is the mystery in the logbook? Does it help Dan? How does Lily's death impinge on Dan's feelings? Do you believe she is calling Dan from the other side or is there another explanation?
3. Discuss the language which brings the fire to life. Why do you think Dan remembers the fire at this particular moment?

#### **T: KEEP CLEAR, ENGAGED IN TRAWLING**

1. What are the unspoken conversations that swirl around the dinner table? (p.154)
2. Why is it so important to solve the problem of Lily and the penguin men? How do they go about doing it?

3. What does the crow symbolise?

#### **FA: WILL YOU GIVE ME MY POSITION?**

1. What does Pip mean when she says, 'Strong on the outside doesn't always mean strong on the inside.' (p.162)
2. Why is Dan so furious that Pip told Mel the truth about the accident?
3. Why would he choose amnesia rather than do on his mates?
4. What is the meaning of the dream he has that night?

#### **O: MAN OVERBOARD**

1. What was the reaction of Dan's family to Mel's revelation?
2. How does the mystery of Lily's death unfold? How was it the result of a malicious witch-hunt?

#### **EF: SOS HAS BEEN CANCELLED**

1. Why does Dan need to spend time alone in the cemetery? Why does he feel such a bond with Lily?

#### **M: I AM STOPPED. MAKING NO WAY**

1. Why has Dan's relationship with Mel cemented again?
2. Why is it so very important that Dan tells Pip and his family everything that happened on the night of the accident?
3. What is the exact cause of his guilt?
4. He was forced into giving up the keys and into getting into the car. Does he still bear some of the blame? Is this fair?
5. Pip feels guilty and so does Mel for making him go to the party. Where can the guilt stop? Or is guilt something that can go on infinitely?

#### **Q: MY VESSEL IS HEALTHY. REQUEST PRATIQUE (PERMISSION TO ENTER PORT)**

1. Why was it important for Dan, Mel and Pip to leave symbols beside Lily and Sam's grave?
2. Why are symbols an important part of grieving?
3. Do you feel assured that Dan's vessel is healthy and that he is now ready to enter port? What problems might he still have to overcome in his future?

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**Essays and Debate**

1. *We're road warriors, rebels, risk takers. Unstoppable.* (p.93)  
Is it possible to instil a sense of reality and responsibility in young adults or must they first face tragedy?
2. How would you address the question of how to introduce the notion of responsible drinking to young people?
3. Pip says, '(Y)ou need compassion, no matter how much of a shit you're being....We all need it.... everyone of us, because we're all the same, all dying, all going through the same stuff.' (p.63)  
How would this philosophy affect our everyday life? Would it make us all better people and the world a better place?
4. *Awe and terror rushed in like a king tide, the first time I appreciated that life and death can pivot on as little as the direction of the wind.* (p.116)  
How do the events of the novel prove this statement? How does real life reflect this comment?
5. How does the story of the lighthouse keepers throw light on the themes and characters of the novel?
6. To what degree should Dan bear the responsibility of his friends' deaths? Was he totally innocent? If so, why then did he bear such terrible guilt?