

Dissecting Bathgate

by u/idore14

Hi all. This is a revised and more complete version of my first draft on the infamous scene in *Mad Dogs*, particularly Chapter 34 - *Foil*. I will dissect and analyze the content thoroughly, as it touches on sensitive topics of SA of teenagers, particularly boys. We will go through the event chronologically and discuss the facts, as well as answer the question I've seen a few people here confused about: *was it sexual assault?*

TL;DR: yes, it was. James was raped by Lois, and never told anyone the truth, possibly because he himself was unaware that he could be raped or otherwise assaulted as a man. When people around him suggested he initiated the interaction, lacking the full context of the event, he went along with it, slowly reimagining that moment in his own head. In the books, nobody except Lois and James knows what actually went down.

Before we begin, let's answer some basic questions:

1) Why "Bathgate"?

It's a reference to a comment on [this post](#), which is what came up for me when I first started looking into *CHERUB* content online. It's a laughing-through-tears kind of name, and a handy short title to use instead of "the one time James didn't consent to having his virginity taken by a random girl he just met after she put him in a bathtub". It's a little unserious, but it stuck with me as an overall name for the entire ordeal.

2) What are your sources?

Links will be provided throughout the blog, as well as compiled in a list at the very end. I'm doing this for fun, so don't expect academia-level neatness, but I can do my research and will show it. Most of the screenshots or quotations will be directly from my *Mad Dogs* ebook or other *CHERUB* books as needed. I will add a (book title, chapter, page number) in parenthesis, like so. I recommend rereading some of the material yourself for a refresher before this blog.

3) Why do you care?

I am a survivor of SA myself - but that's not why this blog exists. I'm making this analysis as an avid reader and critic of stories. I'm an active consumer, and I love dissecting what I see, why I see it and what is being said between the lines. Bathgate touches a particular crossroad of interests for me - a book character I care deeply about, and an emotionally taxing social topic that is often omitted. Due to assumptions and societal standards put on men and boys, this area of SA crime isn't discussed as widely. I want to add my little brick to this stifled but important case.

4) It was a different time, why bother unraveling it now?

Because many of us grew up back then or shortly after, and we're still talking about it. That means it meant something. Robert Muchamore describes the world in a realistic, almost naturalistic manner - and no, [naturalism isn't just about painting landscapes](#). In fact, when you look at the definition of this art movement, it matches almost perfectly with the way RM writes about the contemporary world. It's portrayed fully, with all of its moral incorrectness, flaws and gunk - because that's just how life is. Thanks to that bold style, *CHERUB* as a series becomes a message in the bottle from the 2000s - a time capsule of how people *generally* thought and behaved at the time in the UK.

If you need more proof of that, well, let's hear from Robert Muchamore himself - here's an excerpt from his response to an email I sent him a couple years back. Huge thank you to the man himself for allowing me to make it public for the sake of this blog!

Hi Adora,

Good to hear you're a fan!

You pose an interesting question, I think sensibilities around sexual behaviour and consent in particular have changed in the 20+ years since I started writing the first *CHERUB* book and I definitely look at things differently in books I am writing now. I'm also guessing that you didn't think about these issues when you were younger.

To give a few examples of how things have changed, there's the famous photo of an American navy man kissing a girl in Times Square on VJ day. It got made into a statue and for years nobody considered whether the woman was giving consent, but now it is really controversial. In my favorite book *Catch 22*, there's a rape scene which is written as comedy. When I first read the book in my teens, it seemed OK, but now we think about this stuff differently and it seems horrifying. And just a few nights ago I was watching the 1970s Clint Eastwood film *The Eiger Sanction* where the hero takes an air stewardess home and then casually threatens to rape her. No mainstream book or movie would depict stuff that way now!

[...]

The way we think about issues like sexuality, consent, equality etc, has changed massively for the better in the 22 years since I started writing my first *CHERUB* book. Hopefully it will continue to do so, even if it makes some of the attitudes depicted in my early books seem cringey and dated!

Cheers,

Robert Muchamore.

As you can see, the author himself is aware of how certain content in his books is dated, and it's simply because times have changed and the world presented in *CHERUB* no longer exists. But it used to, and as an art history nerd I can't deny its overwhelming value in that regard. You can learn a lot about society through the art it creates - and literature too is art.

CHERUB purposefully mimics the reality of the early 2000s, thanks to which we can analyze its problems as real world problems and see its characters as people that could exist. Those plotlines didn't come out of nowhere - they are the fruit of concerns and observations at the time.

But enough introductions. We're here to discuss some serious stuff. This is my reminder to you that we will be talking about sexual assault and rape, which are heavy, difficult topics. There will also be mentions of abuse, disordered sexual behavior, and more. You don't need to engage with this blog or read it at all, if you don't feel like it. I am writing about a teenage-aimed book, yes, but I am discussing it from an adult perspective. If you're a kid, I think it would be hypocritical to tell you to go away - after all, I myself read all of *CHERUB* aged 10-13, and if you're on this sub, you probably read the books as well. I think children should have access to civil criticism of their interests - this is how I myself learned to be observant and conscious of what I consume (shoutout to the *Danganronpa* blogging community).

What I'm trying to say is, if you read *CHERUB* - you're welcome to read this, too. I'm not anti-*CHERUB* or whatever. I love this series so deeply that it's all that I want to discuss with my art friends, and I look for ways to bake it into every new assignment.

I love it in a way that makes me want to tear it apart and see how it works. So, that's what I'm going to do - with one of its most disturbing topics and that one, cursed scene.

Part 1 - James and Hypersexuality

Let's start where all things do - with James Adams.

James is a perfect example of a Jungian Hero (1), and what that means is that he's made of the same stuff as heroes from mythologies all over the world. Carl Jung's theories inspired stuff like *Star Wars*, which directly wraps back to re-imagining myth (2). *The Recruit* is the perfect example of the Hero's Journey - a literary device that many books and movies use as the basis to their stories (3). It's a classic, recognizable arc that, once learned, you will start seeing everywhere.

While Jung's theories on the human brain and the "collective unconscious" are kind of unproven bogus, when it comes to fiction they reveal a perfect man that the protagonist has to be in order to satisfy the audience's imagination. He might stumble and fall into the pits of hell, but in the end he will slay the dragon, rescue the princess, and return with the elixir of life. This is the ideal straight man who goes from a nobody to a savior.

(Needless to say, this is a very Western idea made by a guy who really liked Freud.)

It's not that difficult to see James Adams in this power fantasy. He's the perfectly imperfect boy whose mom dies, his sister is taken by an ultimate evil man (Ron), and while he tries to do right, he can't, before he crosses the border to the secret world - CHERUB. Only when he starts improving himself in the story is his fate turned for the better and he's finally indirectly rewarded for the hardships he faced.

Romance and sexuality are a huge part of both Jungian Hero's and an average teenage boy's identity. James is portrayed as someone who's very strongly into girls and desires a relationship that would satisfy the mess that are his hormones. As he grows older, he becomes a cheating womanizer, unable to keep a stable relationship to save his life. After the first

heartbreak with Joanna and then another, significant one with Hannah in *The Killing*, he seems resigned and always circles back to Kerry, who is in turn the one constant in his life that he desires. She's *the* one that he will always return to, even as he realizes they're not that great together. She was chosen for him by the narrative, and in a realistically toxic way they keep recreating the relationship that has failed before. Somehow, he still wants Kerry, who has proven to be sadistic and borderline abusive, willing to harm him in anger (notice that he's relieved and tears up when Dana doesn't behave like Kerry, while he was practically begging for her to hurt him to sort things out and move on); Somehow, she still wants James, despite him being kind of a prick and a cheater.

Right, cheating. Why does James cheat so much? It seems unrealistic, *disordered* almost. Sure, it's a power fantasy to be wanted by so many girls, but unlike many other male heroes, James just... gives in, like it's outside of his influence. He knows it's bad, he knows it will mess up his relationship and he knows it hurts Kerry, but he still does it so many times, regardless of being discovered before. Why?

Well... It sounds weird, because it is. Many of these traits that James begins expressing as early as 13 align with symptoms of compulsive sexual behavior (4). It's an actual psychosexual thing that we can now check. Him being young is just one more factor that builds this case, for the lack of stability in early life is one of the environmental factors that lead to disordered developments in adolescent brains (11). An agent's life may be cushy and exciting, however it's anything but stable. Those are still kids and despite it all they will get at least a little attached and heartbroken, especially when they are forced to play a different kind of person than they actually are, or end up unable to be honest with their peer targets. Not to mention that agents and recruits are particularly vulnerable due to their family backgrounds usually involving death or separation.

Another factor that can lead to compulsive sexual behaviors is an experience of abuse - physical and sexual alike. We know well that James's home was far from perfect, largely thanks to Ron who beat him and made him feel powerless, but also one of the first romantic-esque interactions that James has in *The Recruit* is when a bunch of older campus girls kiss him, tickle him and give him hickeys. James immediately loves the attention he'd been lacking as an abandoned child, even if he didn't exactly ask for it.

That scene is sus as hell considering how young he is back there (barely turned 12), and sorry to be a party pooper, but that too is SA. The girls were drunk, but it doesn't excuse them. Tickling, all that BS - sure. But hickeys? That's a sexual act. That's creepy as hell, and inexcusable on a twelve year old boy they clearly recognize him as. Sure, James is in heaven - but he has no idea what is actually happening as a child among older teenagers, feeling safe and drunk himself. His best bet is to play cool and come along, if he wants to fit in - which he desperately needs in the first book.

So we already have evidence of both physical and sexual abuse, which are prone to mess up the chemicals in his brain. Add to that going through torture for a hundred days, being desynthesized to seeing his peers naked, having his crush (Amy) treat him like a little brother, and finally, forcibly breaking up with his first real girlfriend (Joanna) as the mission ends. And being threatened by the prospect of death, that too.

Throughout the books James becomes more and more confident with girls, to the point he believes he can be wanted by anyone, as long as he makes a move. He grows up to be conventionally attractive, in a way becoming what Dave Moss used to be - a tall, blond campus star, the popular kid. *CHERUB* as a fantasy is also about popularity in school environments. You may not notice, but folks from James's friend group are often the center of campus action. And as many of such friend groups, they don't realize just how desirable they are to other agents.

James can have anyone, and utilizes the fact multiple times. He cheats on Kerry, gets caught cheating, cheats again, gets broken up with, gets with another girl - rinse and repeat. This is one of the ideas of what being a cool guy is, and he doesn't fully comprehend that it's a downward spiral.

[*The Playboy's*](#) ending is the perfect example of where this kind of life leads. Surrounded by gambling, luxury and meaningless sex that gives him just a brief sense of bodily satisfaction, James the casino owner is still pining for his one true love, Kerry, whom he divorced. Meanwhile Bruce, eternally by his side and, despite having a family himself, envies James's confidence, looks and the ability to *have*, becoming an average man who observes the peak unreachable performance.

James can't stop cheating, because the chemistry in his brain is broken - but that doesn't mean he doesn't have feelings. Quite the opposite, he has some kind of sense that his behavior is wrong, going as far to say that "It's not really him"; he fears the return to reality every time, he shamefully conceals many of his relationships, he begs those who know not to disrupt what he'd managed to build. The guilt over inability to stop oneself is also one of the symptoms. Once he is cheated *on* for a change, he's pissed, too, and it's an instant deal breaker. He understands that cheating is morally wrong, but he can't stop himself. "That's just who James Adams is," everyone thinks, probably, and it becomes one of the reasons he never has to get help for it.

I started by bringing up James's sexuality, because it is relevant to build the background and social image of the very desirable and "out there" person. Bathgate catches him in an interesting moment because, for the first time, James has decided to try and be better. He's still dating Dana, and he promised her it wouldn't be like it was with Kerry. He's determined not to cheat, and he indeed doesn't make a move on anyone during the mission he's assigned.

—

James is fifteen in *Mad Dogs*. Lois Thompson is sixteen. Does it matter? Yes. By UK law, those under the age of sixteen may not have sex or experience other mutual sexual actions with anyone over sixteen (6). In addition, the law considers children under the age of thirteen unable to comprehend and fully consciously consent to any sexual activity at all, even amongst each other. That doesn't mean minors don't have sex - of course they do, because they're stupid and only just developing - but under law, they are not supposed to, because it can be dangerous.

Realistically the difference in mentality between fifteen and sixteen isn't that big of a leap as say thirteen and sixteen, but as you're a teenager, years still feel like decades and months crawl at a snail pace. James himself is paranoid about having sex before being sixteen, due to it being taboo in CHERUB. If anything, he cannot lose the organization that had "saved him", in his own words. He loosens up a little post SA, and gets sexually with Dana, an agent who has his back and he knows he can trust - who first and foremost didn't leave him after he "made a mistake" that would make someone like Kerry flip. As if he wanted to erase the technical first time from his memory, and overcompensate to show his loyalty to Dana. He

was expecting total fallout, but got a mature reaction he didn't expect - which he's not used to and which, in his mind, he doesn't deserve. He even goes as far as to offer to get intimate with Dana on the spot, which she declines and he apologizes.

James shook his head as he stepped off the bed and held his arms out wide. 'Take a swing,' he said. 'Break my arm, kick me in the nuts; I totally deserve it.'

'No,' Dana said thoughtfully. 'You only want me to hurt you to appease your guilt. You want me to do a Kerry, and go mental and throw stuff at you and punch you and call you every name under the sun. Then you think we'll kiss and make up and go on exactly like before. Well I'm sorry, but I'm not giving you the satisfaction.'

James felt his heart sink. 'You're dumping me?'

'Did you hear me say that?'

'I don't know *what* you're saying,' James said, holding his hands to his head. 'You're acting all weird. Can you at least tell me how you feel, or something?'

Dana scratched her nose. 'I don't know ... Hurt, confused. I can't just forgive you, but I'm impressed that you were honest when you didn't have to be. You wouldn't risk it unless you actually cared about me.'

'I hated all the lies between me and Kerry,' James explained. 'I don't want it to be like that with you.'

Dana rubbed a spot on the bed. 'I could do with a cuddle.'

James had a tear welling up as he sat down and pulled Dana tight. 'I'm really sorry,' he said. 'I missed you while I was away and I was so scared

(*Mad Dogs*, ch48, p275) - We'll be back to this chapter in the *Confessions and Fallout* section.

Dana whispered as her cool fingers slid under James' T-shirt. 'You're fifteen, I'm sixteen, pretty soon we're going to be doing more than kissing on this bed ...'

'How about now?' James grinned.

Dana gathered the fat on James' back and dug in her thumbnail. 'I *wouldn't* push your luck right now.'

'I'm a pig,' James admitted, holding up his hands as Dana pushed him away. 'Sorry.'

(*Mad Dogs*, ch48, p276)

‘Nice boobs though,’ James sighed. ‘And she was the first girl I slept with, so I guess she’s one I’ll always remember.’

Lauren smirked. ‘Didn’t you sleep with that other girl on your anti-gang mission?’

James laughed. ‘OK, I’ll rephrase it: Dana was the first girl I had sex with apart from two minutes of complete terror in a bathtub with a girl I never spoke to again.’

(*Brigands M.C.*, ch16, p104)

James gets sexually assaulted a few more times throughout the books, none of which is really addressed. He gets groped at the bar, forcefully kissed by Mr. Large’s daughter, and who could forget the, um, whatever the hell those two American soldiers did with the grenade in *The General*. That was genuinely set up like some kind of kink scene - though bizarre, it aligns with the sexual assault issue within the military (5). Research shows that this kind of environment is susceptible to SA due to the psychological strain and “survival of the fittest” mentality.

We know the way James is, we know the way he thinks. Led by an omnipresent narrator, we watch him like a wild animal on TV, or a train wreck that never stops giving. He is the Jungian Hero in all of his glory, strained and thrown into our reality, forced to be a boy that grows into a man he was always meant to want to become.

In the later volumes the more openly sensitive, conflicted and scared James disappears, choked out by puberty, expectations and abuse outside of his control. Rare displays of “weakness” are stifled, and he never cries anymore - the most he allows himself is tearing up if he’s pushed to the edge. He develops a reputation of an avid cheater no girl can resist, and who won’t restrict himself once he gets a green light to go.

Unfortunately, the girl who he spent his first time with did not offer him the same minimal patience.

Part 2 - Bathgate

This is the part where we zoom in on the actual SA scene, its surroundings, and analyze it all bit by bit. It might seem tedious, but I believe it's important to do the thing we never do in CHERUB: read slowly. So take a breath and let's get it done.

We need to rewind. Try to forget Kerry - James is with Dana now, and things are different, so he swears. He's fifteen, Gabrielle just got stabbed, Kyle is about to graduate from CHERUB and Mr. Large wants to kill a puppy (what's new). James gets introduced to part 2 of a high risk drug gang mission, with an objective to get in via Keith Junior, his old friend (target). Retaking an identity from a mission years prior, James dives in with Bruce as his pretend cousin.

The current plan is to get into Sasha's house by faking an injury on the soccer field. His wife is a nurse, so she'll be the boys' way in; While James gets patched up, Bruce will do the usual CHERUB things: check documents, take photos, snoop around. They have a backpack filled with tools waiting for them in hiding, planted by Chloe.

Besides James and Lois, Bathgate has one more human factor who cannot be omitted - Bruce. He acts as the shaky reasoning for James to follow Lois, but also the witness and a kind of an ultimate shadow.

For example - when they have to feign a believable injury for James, Bruce goes beyond what is necessary. It's left deliberately vague between James being known as soft in taking pain, and Bruce being known as violent in causing it - but I believe that James's shock is reasonable there. Bruce won't miss an opportunity to cause harm without consequences. In a very far-fetched parallel, I can see it connecting all the way back to their exercise in *Class A*, where James's softness leads them to nearly failing the test. This time Bruce holds the glass shard strongly, as if paying back for that humiliation - ignoring the fact that James himself helped take a thorn out of his palm when Bruce needed it most. James becomes an icon

outside of his own control; He's in a way innocent in a part of his image. He doesn't know how it feels to be someone next to him, how it feels to envy himself for his staged perfection. Bruce does.

But Bruce's underlying "beta" pipeline is a story for another day.

The boys make it to the house, just to learn that Sasha's wife is nowhere to be found. Instead his teenage daughter, Lois, is there, and claims to be capable of fixing the wound. She takes James upstairs to the bathroom, while Bruce remains on the ground floor, free to explore.

Lois cleans James's wound and runs him a bath, without any soap so his wound doesn't sting. And here comes my first observation, and a question - when did Lois decide she was going to have sex with James?

We know she doesn't have underwear on under her sweatpants (god knows what she was doing before this, because she couldn't know the boys were going to come over), and the bathtub is an odd thing to suggest. I get that James is sweaty and a little dirty from the training, but what sense does it make to have a bath *after* she'd looked at his wound and cleaned it separately? It seems like there is no reasonable excuse for the bathtub, except to keep James in a horizontal, disadvantaged and vulnerable position, in a private room. Which is already creepy as hell.

As to why she would have no underwear on – apologies to make you think about a 16 year old girl's pastimes, but in what situations do you lack underwear in your own home when you answer the door? She wasn't taking a shower because her hair isn't mentioned to be wet, nor are any other environmental clues in place, and her clothes seem random and loose, perfect for a chill day. Well, here is my theory, which, sorry to put this in your head - but I believe that Lois was using her private time to touch herself.

This explains the underwear, the haphazard, loose look like she pulled any nearby clothes on to answer the door, as well as the seemingly random decision to get with James. Her hormones are likely buzzing at this moment, and as a dumb teenager, she might have had the cruel idea to "use" her guest.

This is one of the interpretations I came up with directly while writing, and in my mind, it holds water and explains the blank spots - that Lois didn't have underwear on prior to answering the door, as well as her sudden and intense interest in James. She didn't know him at all, but after vaguely assessing him as fit and attractive, she decided he would suit her needs. Either that, or she's just a deranged creep who walks around without her underwear and decides to have sex with strangers on a whim. I don't know which one's worse, especially as it doesn't change her intent. She decided she was going to get with James sometime between her seeing him and saying that she'd run him a bath, which is this particular moment:

'Sit down,' Lois said, as she threw a bath towel over the bottom half of the lounge to keep the mud off. 'I'll sponge off the worst of it, then you can have a soak in the bath and I'll bandage it up when you're clean.'

'Cool,' James nodded, sitting down with his grubby legs stretched out in front of him.

'Raise your leg up, so I can see the cut,' Lois said, as she leaned over the bath and turned on the taps.

(Mad Dogs, ch34, p194)

I think it's pointless to put the blame on James here. He has a job - and letting Bruce roam downstairs unattended is ideal, so as long as he keeps Lois occupied, he's doing what he's supposed to do. If anything, Lois basically occupied herself, making all the offers on her own account. Another factor is his personality, that being bad with pain, and eager to be pampered, "soft". He lets his guard down at the offer of comfort after a difficult, painful situation, which is why he goes along with Lois's idea beyond covering for Bruce. She also compliments him and is gently affectionate, creating a false sense of security and appreciation.

Upstairs, Lois slid her hand across James' thigh as she stared at the clean rectangle of flesh around his cut.

'It's not all that deep,' she murmured. 'We've got some binding plasters that will hold the two halves of the cut together. It should heal up fine.'

Lois backed off and swished her hand through the clear bath water. 'Feels about right to me,' she said. 'I haven't put in soap or anything because it might sting if it gets inside the cut.'

'You wouldn't want that,' James smiled. 'I'm a total baby.'

'You don't look like a baby,' Lois noted admiringly, as James stepped towards the bath. 'Do you work out?'

'I lift some weights,' James nodded. 'Nothing major.'

(Mad Dogs, ch34, p196)

The first sign of hesitation that James expresses is when Lois doesn't leave when he is supposed to undress for the bathtub.

There was an awkward pause. He had to pull down his shorts and boxers before climbing into the water, but Lois stood less than a metre away and she clearly wasn't going anywhere.

'Don't be shy on my account,' Lois smirked. 'I've seen plenty of blokes in the nude.'

James didn't want to seem like a prude, but he didn't like the idea of being naked in front of Sasha's daughter. His solution was to turn towards the bath and drop his shorts quickly so that she only got a flash of his bum. Mercifully, Lois had backed up to the bathroom door by the

time he'd settled into the hot water. He figured she'd be out of the room by the time he'd soaped his arms; but instead of leaving she slid the bolt across and pulled Sasha's Luton Town shirt over her head, unveiling a bright orange sports bra as she approached the bath.

(Mad Dogs, ch34, p196-197)

James pulls his clothes off and submerges quickly, so Lois doesn't see him naked, and is a little relieved to see her go to the door, expecting her to leave the bathroom - but she does the opposite, locking them both inside. And I really, really hope I don't have to explain how terrifying this fragment is.

James's reaction tells us as such:

'Stop!' James spluttered. 'No offence, Lois, but if your dad found out about this he'd kill me ... Slowly.'

'It'll be OK,' Lois said reassuringly. 'Mum won't be back for ages and if Dad comes in he'll go straight down the basement to play cards.'

'But,' James said anxiously. Lois was sexy and completely up for it, but the image of what her powerfully built father had done to the councillor was fixed in his head.

(*Mad Dogs*, ch34, p197)

Here we are introduced to one of two reasons why James doesn't want to have sex with Lois at the moment: he's afraid of her father's reaction, reasonably so, as Sasha is a violent gangster who mangled the mentioned councillor. He considers Lois attractive, but his only input in this situation is "Stop!", "But," and dull questions as he tries to comprehend what is happening. James is not an active participant of this situation, rather the situation is happening *to* him.

Lois doesn't give him time to analyze his position, and she doesn't wait for him to consent. She throws a condom at him, not wanting to get any STDs - though it's left omitted if James did as little as put it on by himself. Given his nerves and utter lack of agency in a state of panic, I personally doubt so, especially with his hands covered in water.

It's a common misconception that many people stumble upon when trying to explain rape of male (or AMAB) victims - that since he was able to "perform" the act, a.k.a. got aroused/hard, that means he wanted it. This is a factually flawed idea, especially in teenagers, who get excited left and right, sometimes randomly, just because their brains are developing. The same can be said about female (or AFAB) victims; Predators will use excuses that she

liked it, she made involuntary sounds, she got wet. Those are just bodily reactions, like tearing up. Not every time you shed a tear it's because you're sad, though it's common - sometimes your eyes are just itchy and your body reacts to that information. Consent is not based on the perpetrator's perception of a bodily reaction, it's based on the human on the other side who makes the decisions for their own body (7).

Sometimes people *are* genuinely aroused, but still deny having sex for a plethora of reasons. Maybe they have a medical condition, or they're tired, or they'd rather try something else. Regardless, a good sexual partner will hear the other party. Doesn't matter if they are aroused, visibly or not - as long as there is no excited confirmation and invitation, you just don't do stuff with - or to - people.

All of this just to say that, no matter how you look at it, nothing excuses Lois Thompson. She ignores the fact she and James just met, the fact he doesn't say "yes" or otherwise consent, or seem positively invested at all. She just gets into the bathtub, and does it.

'I don't know where you've been,' Lois said, as she stepped into the water and kissed James on the neck. 'And your mate's wandering around downstairs, so if you want some action you'd better hurry up.'

(*Mad Dogs*, ch34, p197)

That is a crime. At this point it doesn't matter if she and James are close in age, that he's almost 16, that he's able to perform, that he finds her sexy. He didn't want it because of Sasha, and he didn't want it because of the promise he made to Dana. His brain and heart are working together to make him safer and happier in a new relationship. But Lois doesn't stop, and becomes James's first sexual partner - as well as a rapist.

—

The difference between SA and rape, if you're still wondering but don't want to ask at this point, is like the one with rectangles and squares. Not all SA (sexual assault) is rape, but all

rape is SA. SA as an abbreviation is used to encapsulate a wider range of improper, non consensual or dubiously consensual behaviors (8).

We all come from different countries and backgrounds, so you may be as shocked as me when you find out that, by UK law, women (or AFAB people), are often omitted as perpetrators of rape. In fact, the very definition that the [UK Metropolitan Police](#) offers limits rape to an event that includes penetration from the assailant's side, either with a body part or an object. Which is just... so cruel, and fucked up.

This right here is the reason why so many male (or AMAB) victims, or any victims really, don't get closure when their abuser is a woman (or AFAB). When the criminal is not the one doing the penetration, but rather enforcing it from the other party, the event suddenly falls into a loophole where it can be considered SA instead and result in a lesser charge in court. The definition excludes non-penetrative sex as well, which omits many forms of intercourse with the use of hands and tools on the exterior of the body. It's disgusting, frankly, that the criminals are given such a wide field of excuses.

If this situation would be terrible if the sexes of James and Lois were swapped, why should we deny male James justice? Just because he's a man, is he not a human that can be harmed and taken advantage of?

Many young male survivors face additional difficulty discussing what had happened to them due to the societal pressures built around manliness. "Suck it up", "be proud", "was it good?" - those and other terrible phrases have been thrown at men who admit the truth. We are used to men being portrayed as more aggressive and sexual than women, always ready for action (9). Those sentiments were way stronger in the times *CHERUB* takes place in, but are still around to this day. [This case](#), while not directly like James's situation, is the perfect example of how female (AFAB) predators view their own actions as incomparable to those of male (AMAB) counterparts, even in the modern day. "But it's the exact same situation in reverse," the interviewer points out, to which Mary Kay Letourneau, a convicted child rapist of her male thirteen-year-old student, replies "Uh, no, it isn't" (12).

Society has failed you, men and boys. And I'm so sorry we can have a woman on TV say that a man raping a girl is vile, but her raping a boy is different and somehow worthy of a

lesser charge. It's really telling, for Letorneau is obviously not the only person who thinks like this - she is just deranged enough to say it publicly. Her mindset is the result of years of perpetrating an extreme binary idea, where one of the sexes is inherently more cruel than the other, and the harm done to it is lesser.

James himself usually embodies this stereotypical, flirty, needy teenager - but he's more than that, as we know. He's a caring brother and a loving son, who does his best even when odds are against him. Those like him, the loud, confident boys, can be assaulted as well, just like anyone else. They are not less human because a part of their personality aligns with a version of an imagined Man of Men, nor are they guilty for trying to pursue this feeble, false, patriarchal dream.

—

Part 3 - Confessions and Fallout

—

James felt numb as he walked down the front steps of Sasha's house. He hadn't wanted to put his muddy kit back on after the bath, so Lois dug out one of Sasha's old tracksuits and a pair of trainers. Both were a couple of sizes too big, but that was the least of his worries.

The fact that he'd just lost his virginity felt like a three-hundred-kilo gorilla on his back. And to make matters worse, Lois had suggestively mentioned that he could *bring the clothes back any time he liked*.

(*Mad Dogs*, ch35, p198)

We know the second reason behind James's unwillingness to be with Lois was his promise to Dana. After a stormy break-up with Kerry, he decided to pull himself together. Dana is different, less explosive, and the first long-term relationship that James has - the only other meaningful one on campus, so something more permanent than a romance on a mission which is doomed to expire. He considers himself more mature and leveled, and actually

decides to actively try and not cheat. He's making an effort, and for someone with disordered behavior and lack of professional supervision, it's a big step.

But, well, now what? He slept with someone. What's done is done, and his first time is behind him. James exits the house in a heavy shock, his thoughts racing. Bruce catches up quickly, not giving his friend a lot of time to sort things out for himself, let alone a third party.

'You know what's weird though?' Bruce asked, raising one eyebrow slightly.

'What?'

'You know Lois asked me to make a cup of tea?'

James nodded.

'Well after I'd searched Sasha's study, I made a quick cuppa and when you didn't come down I started taking it up the stairs.'

'You *what?*' James gasped.

'It was really strange,' Bruce smirked. 'When I got up near the

bathroom I could hear water splashing everywhere. You were making this kind of low groaning noise, then afterwards I could have sworn that I heard Lois saying that you *weren't bad for a first timer.*'

(*Mad Dogs*, ch35, p198-199)

The saddest thing here is that James was really trying. He was, and we, as the readers, know it - and James knows it. But how is he supposed to explain what just happened?

Male victims of SA are very likely to be dismissed or not come forward about their situation at all due to social stigma and common but false belief that men cannot be raped - we already discussed that. Now we see it unfold in practice, as James is met with assumptions, disbelief and finally - his story is altered to fit his personality.

‘Do you reckon?’ Bruce laughed. ‘Sasha would hook you up by your scrotum and Dana ... Well, let’s just say she wouldn’t be too happy if she found out.’

James had grown to hate his reputation for cheating on girls and he really cared about Dana.

‘It wasn’t my fault,’ James shouted. ‘Lois locked the bathroom door and then practically jumped on top of me.’

Bruce wasn’t listening. ‘You’re such a jammy dog. She’s got a good body. Was it as amazing as everyone says it is?’

(*Mad Dogs*, ch35, p199)

Hurt doesn’t pick and choose who gets it based on character - it can come to anyone, no matter how good or evil you are. The fact James is an avid cheater doesn’t mean he can’t be hurt in a completely unrelated, unwanted manner. Notice that he’s right when he says: “It wasn’t my fault, Lois locked the bathroom door and then practically jumped on me” - that’s exactly what happened, but Bruce ignores him entirely. James’s autonomy is removed from him even as the main character telling his story, which is tragically aligned with the fate of many male (AMAB) victims.

Unfortunately, his reputation overshadows the real him. Bruce doesn’t stop joking for a second, even when James, clearly frustrated, asks him to shut up. He fails to see the amusing side of the event, instead being petrified, among other things, of CHERUB finding out, since another agent already knows.

It’s worth mentioning that Bruce *doesn’t* know what really happened - he only has audio cues from the sex itself, but has no clue what neither James nor Lois said beforehand, or that Lois really is the one who trapped James inside. From his perspective, it’s a peculiar collection of coincidences - so peculiar, that it in fact appears to be just another bad lie of his womanizer friend. For all he knows, James really did just lie.

But also - wouldn’t James goddamn Adams be the happiest dude alive right now, had he wanted this? Wouldn’t he be gloating about the fact he’s in the “adult realm” now, instead of the idea being pushed aside, like a consolation prize? This intercourse was nowhere near

wanted, for we know how James acts when he's excited and proud of himself - he shows off and brags, in more or less subtle ways, especially to his mates. We have none of that now, which is out of character, meaning that something is obviously wrong. Bruce misreads that timidity for fear of Sasha and disappointing Dana, but it clearly has that different, alien, overwhelming core.

Bruce's reaction is bad as he doesn't listen to his friend, not caring to realize that James is inherently acting unlike himself - but it's Dana's unfortunate assumption at the end of the book that is, in my opinion, the worst for James's coping.

'Listen,' James said. 'I've got something to tell you. Kind of a confession.'

Dana cracked a giant smile. 'Who was she? Not April Moore again?'

James was taken aback by the casual response. 'It wasn't April but, I mean ... How can you put it like that?'

'I know what you're like,' Dana explained. 'Your eyes are out on stalks every time something goes by in a short skirt and I'm a realist: you were gonna get up to something on a mission sooner or later.'

'But that's not *really* me,' James said. 'Well ... I *was* like that when I was with Kerry. But I cheated on her loads of times and it ended up that there were all these lies between us; and Lauren blackmailing me and people making comments behind my back. It got so that I could hardly look Kerry in the eye. I hated all the lying and I was never going to cheat on you.'

Dana looked confused. 'But you did anyway?'

James wrung his hands together. 'Well here's the thing. I was kind of... Well... I sort of *accidentally* had sex with this guy's daughter.'

Dana's mouth dropped before she burst out laughing. 'Accidentally,' she hooted. 'What, you were strolling along minding your own business when you tripped over and landed on a naked girl?'

James was completely thrown. He'd expected tears and violence.

'It wasn't like that,' James said. 'I was having a bath. She threw off her clothes and climbed in with me. She was pretty sexy and ... I mean, let's face it, no guy is gonna turn that away.'

(*Mad Dogs*, ch48, p274-275)

Not only does she *immediately* assume what James wants to tell her, but due to lacking better words to describe it, James goes along with the explanation right before his nose, beginning to embrace it as the easiest option. He actively changes the story from the accident version to an apologetic one upon seeing Dana's disbelief. He is aware of the truth sounding like elaborate lies, and he doesn't want Dana to think that he's making cheap excuses. That was with Kerry - with Dana, he aims to sound as honest as possible. In this situation, the truth sounds worse than a lie, which he already tested with Bruce.

So, James goes along with it. Other people around him say it was cheating - so be it, he cheated. Just one more James Adams branded step back, which no one will bat an eye on, no one will prod on. People might shake their heads at his hopelessness, but at least they will see that he had the gull to own his "mistakes".

Dana scratched her nose. 'I don't know ... Hurt, confused. I can't just forgive you, but I'm impressed that you were honest when you didn't have to be. You wouldn't risk it unless you actually cared about me.'

'I hated all the lies between me and Kerry,' James explained. 'I don't want it to be like that with you.'

(*Mad Dogs*, ch48, p275)

Once again, this aligns scarily well with the real world SA survivor experience. Re-imagining and ultimately misremembering the events in one's head is common with all sorts of abuse. It helps the brain digest the harm as something simpler, less challenging and weird, as well as is a natural bodily process (10). James experienced a traumatic, intimate assault, and was immediately treated like a cheap liar and a womanizer - it's simply easier, both socially and mentally, for him to think he was in control. Besides, how come he, James Adams, could *not* be in charge? That's ridiculous, he's always the one that calls the shots!

The ultimately powerful and confident in his sexuality character being abused in their own field of comfort is jarring. James of all people *should* be enthusiastic about this, but all we see is guilt and dread.

Moreover, to someone experiencing compulsive sexual behavior, who tried to get better but “failed to stay on the track”, this is a devastating blow. The rape acts like proof to James; No matter what he does, no matter how he tries and dreams of improving himself, he will always end up as the cheater and fraud. Those things “happen” to him anyway, so what’s the point in trying, in pushing himself, if all he’ll ever get is disappointment and confusion? Isn’t it so much easier to just accept that he’s inherently *like this* - that he doesn’t have to care about himself, or want to change, because it’s useless?

James never again has a big “I will change” moment like this one, with Dana as his love interest. And I think it’s because of Bathgate. Through assumptions and re-imagination, he was convinced that he might as well not try, for he will never get out of the loop, no matter what he actually wants. Between the lines Lois’s actions convinced him that he is only good for one thing, and there is no point in escape.

—

Something interesting that I can’t let go of is how James subconsciously *knows* it was all wrong. He has no proper vocabulary to describe such a complex for his time experience, but there are plenty of signs that he is aware that what happened with Lois was bad. Let us look at the stuff that gets entirely buried under the re-imagined events of confessions.

James got a kick out of the fact that he’d leapt into the adult realm, while Bruce was forced to remain curious. ‘It was OK,’ he shrugged. ‘I mean, it’s definitely nice to have done it. But Lois kept bossing me around, which wasn’t exactly how I imagined it ...’

‘The dominant female,’ Bruce giggled, ‘very kinky. Kerry’s gonna burst when I tell her.’

(*Mad Dogs*, ch35, p199)

But the weird thing about being fifteen – or maybe just the weird thing about being male – was that at the same time as James felt terrible about cheating on his girlfriend, he couldn't help wondering if he'd ever get another chance with Lois. She wasn't the most amazing person in the world, but she had a great body and he quite fancied trying out sex again when he wasn't numb with shock.

(*Mad Dogs*, ch36, p203)

'Nice boobs though,' James sighed. 'And she was the first girl I slept with, so I guess she's one I'll always remember.'

Lauren smirked. 'Didn't you sleep with that other girl on your anti-gang mission?'

James laughed. 'OK, I'll rephrase it: Dana was the first girl I had sex with apart from two minutes of complete terror in a bathtub with a girl I never spoke to again.'

(*Brigands M.C.*, ch16, p104)

James, due to his hormones and disordered behavior, is still obviously interested in sex after the SA (not uncommon even outside of these factors). However, he makes and repeats the point that he didn't expect to be so passive, "numb with shock". He mentions the feeling of terror; All that Bruce had witnessed from James was groaning, not even a coherent voice. Clearly, something went wrong with Lois back there, and James can feel it under his skin. It's in his nature to take the initiative, but here he is deliberately stripped of one of his defining character traits. It's unnatural and wrong to him.

Obviously, as a horny teenager, James wants to have sex. He makes an offer to Dana as soon as he confesses about the "cheating", as if he is trying to replace those bad memories, try the real thing where he can co-create, instead of just receiving. He only really had sex in theory; It's more realistic to say that sex has been done to him, and it didn't really mean anything. He's still excited to try and find himself in it, in a proper setting, with someone he loves and who loves him.

Years down the line, he fully internalizes the event as something he had actual agency in. Again, that's easier for him, especially as memories fade. But there is always time to

reconcile the difficult feelings and gain closure with oneself, which I believe many of us should do with the childhood and teenage events we try not to worry about, in fear of fallout.

It's never too late to tell somebody, say it out loud. It doesn't even have to be a therapist, it can be a friend, a pet, your own damn wall. That weird itch, the feeble TV glow coming from the other room, perhaps it remains felt for a reason, waiting to be unearthed. The truth is and will always be priceless.

I really, really want to imagine a future where James gets to reconcile all the weird shit he'd been exposed to, work through it, and become a healthier, happier man. I care about this idiot. Sure, he'd probably call me some kind of slur if he were real and we got to meet, but still. I think he's neat, and it's those kinds of nuances in his story that make me appreciate the unflattering yet carnal writing of Muchamore.

—

Closing

—

One factor I want to underline here is that we have no clue to which extent *CHERUB* books were edited and censored. We know that things had to be changed via publisher demand, so who knows what this plotline originally read like? I can vaguely point to a few areas that I think were trimmed - even in book one, I believe the moment James and Kerry start fighting on the training assault course had been made less explicit, and that is why it reads a little awkwardly. God forbid a boy and a girl wrestle on top of rocks, leave some room for Jesus in that hopeless hellhole full of cold mud. I'm sure he would love to hang out at the training compound!

Seriously though, I'm really curious just how far-fetched or how correct my interpretations are. I'm aware that these books aren't supposed to be read into to this extent by its target audience, and I know that maybe even RM himself didn't think about it so deeply - but I just can't help myself. Man, I love overthinking and stuff. It's my and my friends' favorite! (The

three-and-a-half-hour-long *CHERUB* presentation went great by the way, they all love me and I totally did not sound insane!)

This blog is obviously not meant to shame anyone, or be the definitive case-closed legal document. I am still just one person writing about difficult stuff we all read, and there is room for civilised discussion to be had. Text analysis is hard.

Okay, wow. Well, I have work tomorrow, and my head hurts. This final draft was written in just a little over two days. 48 hours, out of which I slept maybe 8 total, with classes in between. I'll sit to proofread tomorrow, and we'll see. Putting my college education to real world use huh (editing me here, it was worth it!)

Shout out to the one and only Robert Muchamore; again thank you for allowing me to show your email, for being so open about your older books and for engaging my insane rambling. Much appreciated!

Finally, thank You all for reading, for patience and engagement. I'm looking forward to hearing what you all think! I'm counting on civilised discussions. Make the ghost of blogging proud!

Over and out.

—

[Bibliography](#)