

Boy's Life Study Guide

Boy's Life by Robert R. McCammon

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Contents

[Boy's Life Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 1, Before the Sun, Chapter 2, Down in the Dark, and Chapter 3, The Invader.....8](#)

[Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 4, Wasps at Easter, Chapter 5, The Death of a Bike, Chapter 6, Old Moses Comes to Call, and Chapter 7, A Summons from the Lady.....10](#)

[Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 1, Last Day of School, Chapter 2, Barbershop Talk, and Chapter 3, A Boy and a Ball.....12](#)

[Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 4, I Get Around, Chapter 5, Welcome, Lucifer, and Chapter 6, Nemo's Mother and a Week with the Jaybird.....14](#)

[Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 7, My Camping Trip, Chapter 8, Chile Willow, and Chapter 9, Summer Winds Up.....16](#)

[Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 1, Green-Feathered Hat, Chapter 2, The Magic Box, Chapter 3, Dinner with Vernon, and Chapter 4, The Wrath of Five Thunders.....18](#)

[Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 5, Case #3432, Chapter 6, Dead Man Driving, Chapter 7, High Noon in Zephyr, and Chapter 8, From the Lost World.....20](#)

[Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 1, A Solitary Traveler, Chapter 2, Faith, and Chapter 3, Snippets of the Quilt.....23](#)

[Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 4, Mr. Moultry's Castle, Chapter 5, Sixteen Drops of Blood, and Chapter 7, The Stranger Among Us.....25](#)

[Part 5, Zypher as It Is.....27](#)

[Characters.....28](#)

[Objects/Places.....32](#)

[Themes.....35](#)

[Style.....38](#)

[Quotes.....40](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....41](#)



Plot Summary

Boy's Life is a novel by bestselling author Robert R. McCammon. In this novel, Cory Mackenson shares with the reader his experiences in the twelfth year of his life. The year begins when his father attempts to rescue a driver as his car plunges into Saxon's Lake, only to discover the man has been beaten to death. Cory spends the rest of the year, despite multiple distractions, attempting to find out who killed this stranger before his father's dreams drive him into the depths of the lake too. Boy's Life is a story of coming of age in the south, an all too real reality mixed with the magic and fantasy of childhood.

Cory gets up early to help his father work his milk route. As they discuss Cory's plans for the future, they drive through their little town of Zephyr, Alabama. When Cory's father begins to drive past Saxon's Lake, they are both shocked when they see a car race across the road in front of them and plunge into the lake. Cory's father dives into the water to rescue the driver only to discover the man has been horribly beaten and strangled. Someone has stripped the dead man naked and handcuffed him to the steering wheel to prevent his body from ever rising to the surface again. Cory and his father rush to the nearest house, which happens to be a brothel managed by a woman named Grace, and call the police. Unfortunately, there is little the police can do without a victim, a name, or a motive.

People talk about the murder for weeks, disturbed that such a thing could happen in their small town. However, with no progress on the legal end of things, people soon forget. Easter comes. Cory and his family attend church with both sets of grandparents. The day is extremely hot and the church is packed. Within moments of the pastor beginning his sermon a nest of wasps become agitated in the attic and wasps begin invading the church. Within moments the entire congregation is rushing for the doors, hoping to escape their horrible stings.

Not long after Easter, Cory's bike dies. Cory goes to retrieve it with his father, but they learn that the junk man has picked it up. At the junk man's house, Cory learns that his bike has already been crushed. However, Cory and his father get to see a tooth that possibly came from the mythic creature that lives in the Tecumseh, Old Moses. Not long after this, rains bring a swelling of water in the river, leading to a flood. The whole town of Zephyr rushes to Bruton to build a temporary dam to hold the waters back. While there, Cory goes to the home of a local woman whose father is having a heart attack. Cory is left alone with a little boy while his mother and the boy's mother move the old man to dry ground. A creature floats into the house and attempts to attack Cory and the boy. Cory manages to fend him off with a broom, shoving it so far in the back of its throat the creature backs off. As a result of his heroics, Cory is invited to visit the Lady, the honorary leader of Bruton, and promised a new bike.

School finally gets out. Cory and his friends rush off to make plans for their summer. When Cory gets home, he discovers that he has received the promised bike from the Lady. The bike is new and has everything a boy could want, including what Cory



believes is a golden eye in the headlamp. A few days later, Cory and his friends meet at the baseball field. A new boy in town, Nemo Curliss, watches them toss the ball for a time. Cory invites him to play too. Nemo turns out to have a powerful pitching arm, strong enough to bruise Davy Ray's hand when he catches Nemo's pitch. As they play ball, the Branlins come upon them. The Branlins begin to tease the younger boys as they often do. When the Branlins begin picking on Nemo, Cory and his friends defend him. The Branlins begin to beat the boys, leaving Cory and Davy Ray hurt, but Johnny Wilson with a concussion.

One afternoon at the public pool, Cory hears a new song by a new group called the Beach Boys. Cory is excited by this new song. However, a local preacher is not as impressed. In fact, he has a special church service to lecture the community on the evils of this new music. Cory and his family attend out of curiosity. During the sermon, the preacher pulls out a monkey he calls Lucifer. Lucifer becomes frightened by the crowd and attacks the preacher. Lucifer then attacks the congregation before escaping through the open door.

A short time later, Cory spends a week with his paternal grandparents, Jaybird and Sarah. Cory dislikes his Granddaddy Jaybird because he always wakes him before dawn and makes Cory do some of the harder chores around the farm. On Cory's last day at the farm, Granddaddy Jaybird takes him to the store to buy ice cream salt. However, instead of going home, Granddaddy Jaybird takes Cory to a house where an illegal poker game is going on. Cory waits for several hours outside and finally gives up, deciding to walk home. Finally Cory is picked up by the local doctor who drives him back to the farm.

As a deal with his father to go to Jaybird's, Cory is allowed to go camping alone with two of his friends. The boys walk deep into the woods and settle down for the night. Cory tells a scary story. In the middle of the story, they see a car drive past their campsite. The boys follow the road and find two men waiting in their car. The boys watch as another car drives up and the men transact some kind of business with these new arrivals. Ben becomes covered with spiders and screams out, attracting the attention of the men. The men chase the boys through the woods. Cory is separated from his friends. The following day Cory comes across a girl skinny dipping in a pond. The girl takes him home, cleans his wounds, and arranges for him to get a ride to a phone.

Cory wins third prize in a writing contest. The mayor calls and asks Cory to meet him at his office. Once there, Cory sees a hat with a green feather in it and jumps to the conclusion that the mayor is the killer. Cory becomes frightened and runs off. However, the feather on the mayor's hat does not match the one Cory found at Saxon's Lake. Cory wins a plaque and has to read his story at a ceremony. A few days later, Cory is invited to have dinner with Vernon Thaxter, the son of the local bank owner.

Back at school, Johnny brings his collection of arrowheads. After school, the Branlins attempt to steal the arrowheads. Johnny fights Gotha, using the boxing techniques he learned from a book during his long recuperation from his concussion. At the same time,



Cory leads Gorda off on his bike and causes him to fall into a ditch filled with poison oak. Neither Branlin ever teases or bullies Cory and his friends again.

One afternoon Cory comes home from school to learn that Rebel, his dog, has been hit by a car. Cory rushes to the vet to see his dog, only to learn he is dying. Cory prays death away. Rebel recovers, but he is never quite right. One night Cory hears someone talking to his dog. Cory realizes it is a young boy who once lived down the street, but died in a fire. Cory realizes it is time to give up Rebel. Cory arranges to have the vet put Rebel down. A short time later, Cory is riding his bike in town and is kidnapped by Donny Blaylock, one of the men he saw transacting business during his camping trip. Donny plans to hurt Cory, but instead he is distracted by the memory of a man he killed on that road. There is a car accident and Cory is freed. However, Donny is arrested for murder.

The sheriff, it turns out, has been taking bribe payments from the Blaylocks. As a result, he is leaving town. However, before he leaves, the sheriff wants Donny to be taken by the state police. The sheriff asks Tom Mackenson for help. At first Tom refuses, but later agrees. There is a shootout that ends when Biggun Blaylock's ammunition turns into green garden snakes.

A short time later, the Brandywine Carnival comes to town. At the carnival, Cory and his friends see everything from the haunted house to a baby with one eye. Cory drags them off to see a creature that appears to be a triceratops. Davy Ray is deeply affected by seeing this animal, so when Cory learns the next day that someone helped the animal escape, he suspects it was Davy Ray.

That fall, when hunting season begins, Cory finds himself thinking about parrots and green feathers. However, before Cory can investigate his suspicions, he learns that Davy Ray has been shot in a hunting accident. Cory and his family rush to the hospital. Cory tells Davy Ray a story about a solitary traveler. The following morning, Cory learns that Davy Ray has died. Cory does not know how to deal with the death of his friend, especially when his mother and pastor tell him he must have faith that Davy Ray is somewhere better.

When Cory learns that the vet and his wife had a green parrot in their home the night the stranger from Saxon's Lake was killed and that they both are allergic to milk and therefore would not have thought of seeing a milk man out before dawn, he begins to suspect they killed the man. At the same time, Cory's father finally goes to see the Lady after he goes to her for help dismantling a bomb. At this meeting, Cory's father is told the number thirty-three is important. The only thing Tom can find with that number is a bus that comes to town every other day. Tom takes a job at the gas station where the bus drops off passengers and waits. On the day someone finally gets off the bus, Cory goes to the vet's house to spy on him, to try to prove he killed that stranger.

Tom learns that the dead stranger was a Neo-Nazi who helped hide a couple of German officers in Zephyr years before. The man came to town to blackmail these Germans to start a new life. Tom cannot imagine which of his neighbors might be German officers



who could be so cruel as to pick and choose which Jewish prisoners should die. However, when Tom learns the German officer was a veterinarian, he begins to suspect Dr. Lezander, the local vet. Tom and his new companions go to the vet's house where they discover Cory is being held against his will. Dr. Lezander takes off with Cory. Tom follows. When they reach the road that runs beside Saxon's Lake, the triceratops comes out of the woods and attacks Dr. Lezander's car, pushing it into the water. Tom saves Cory, but can do nothing for Dr. Lezander.

Cory returns to Zephyr many years later with his own family. The town was abandoned after the paper mill closed down in the 1970s. Cory drives to all his familiar haunts, finally stopping at his family's home. Before leaving, Cory decides to drive to the Thaxter mansion. There, Cory discovers that the mansion was given to an orphanage for boys and several people he knew in childhood still live there, working with the little boys.



Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 1, Before the Sun, Chapter 2, Down in the Dark, and Chapter 3, The Invader

Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 1, Before the Sun, Chapter 2, Down in the Dark, and Chapter 3, The Invader Summary

The book begins with a brief introduction that tells the reader that the story contained in this novel is one of childhood, of coming of age, of a time when the narrator still believed in magic. This introduction also discusses with the reader the fact that the story is written in a first person narrative, but includes information which the narrator could not have known, but learned later.

In chapter 1 of part 1, Cory Mackenson's father, Tom, wakes him so he can help with the milk delivery that morning. Cory likes to help his father with his milk delivery, so he does not complain about the early hour. Cory and his father are discussing what Cory might like to do when he is older when a car darts out in front of them. The car plunges into Saxon's Lake, a lake that was once a quarry but filled with water when the miners hit a natural water source. The lake is extremely deep. Cory's father jumps out of the milk truck and dives into the lake in hopes of rescuing the driver. However, the driver is already dead, beaten and strangled, handcuffed to the steering wheel to prevent him from ever floating to the surface of the lake. While watching his father struggling in the lake, Cory sees someone watching from the road where the car came from. Cory turns to call to his father, but the person disappears. Cory goes over to the road to look around but sees nothing. Tom climbs out of the lake and takes Cory up to the nearest house, a brothel run by a woman named Grace, and calls the police. As they wait, Cory finds a green feather under his shoe.

In chapter 2 of part 1, Cory hides the green feather in a box in his dresser without telling anyone about it. A few days later, the sheriff comes to visit Tom, telling him he could not find any records of a missing man in town or any of the nearby towns. Without an identity, the sheriff has nothing to investigate. Tom is disappointed to realize the case is now closed pending any new information. Over the next few months, Cory becomes aware that his father is having nightmares starring the dead man.

In chapter 3 of part 1, Cory and his friend, Ben Sears, go to the movies. The first movie is a Tarzan flick. The second, however, is an alien movie called Invasion from Mars. Cory and Ben are disappointed at first, but are scared by the plot that follows a young boy who knows aliens are taking over everyone in town but he cannot get anyone to believe him. Cory goes home and refuses to tell his parents about the movie. This causes Rebecca Mackenson to think Cory and Ben had a fight, so she arranges for



them to spend the night together at Ben's. At first, the sleepover is fun. However, Donny Blaylock arrives and talks Mr. Sears into going off with him, supposedly to see a meteor that crashed outside town. Ben and Mrs. Sears are upset and beg Mr. Sears not to go, but he ignores their pleas. Late that night, Cory learns the reason for their fear. Mr. Sears returns drunk and abusive, saying terrible things and hitting his wife.

Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 1, Before the Sun, Chapter 2, Down in the Dark, and Chapter 3, The Invader Analysis

The first two chapters introduce murder in a small town. Cory and his father, Tom, are out delivering milk when a car plunges into the depths of Saxon's Lake. Tom tries to rescue the driver, but discovers he is already dead, clearly murdered. This causes great distress for Tom because he thought he lived in a small enough community that this kind of thing did not happen. However, it is clear that not only did the murder take place, but that it had to have been committed by a local person because a stranger would not know that Saxon's Lake would be deep enough to hide a car and body. This upsets the equilibrium of Tom, a man who did not think he had to worry about this kind of horrific event in his hometown or near his family. This sets up the conflict that will drive the plot surrounding Tom and his family.

The third chapter introduces Cory's friend, Ben Sears. Ben is a chubby little boy with the same fears and interests as Cory. The two boys go to the movies together and see a movie that frightens them, making them worry that the adults in their lives might not be what they seem. Cory learns later, however, that this is true but not in the sense he believed from the movie. Cory learns that alcohol can steal a person's personality as well. It is a moment of growth for Cory that comes unexpectedly, but opens the theme of coming of age to the reader, preparing the way for bigger moments of growth.



Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 4, Wasps at Easter, Chapter 5, The Death of a Bike, Chapter 6, Old Moses Comes to Call, and Chapter 7, A Summons from the Lady

Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 4, Wasps at Easter, Chapter 5, The Death of a Bike, Chapter 6, Old Moses Comes to Call, and Chapter 7, A Summons from the Lady Summary

In chapter 4 of part 1, it is a few days before Easter. Cory goes into town and watches the parade made of the black people from Bruton. These people march every spring in a ceremony that brings food to the creature known as Old Moses. The Lady, the unofficial leader of Bruton, drops tons of food into the river to feed Old Moses and waits for a response to show that Old Moses accepts the sacrifice. This day Old Moses does not give the signal of acceptance. On Sunday morning, Cory goes to church with his parents and both sets of grandparents. During the sermon, the church becomes overheated and filled with the various scents all the congregants are wearing. This irritates a hive of wasps that have been living in the attic. The church is filled with wasps and the congregants are stung over and over before they finally escape.

In chapter 5 of part 1, it rains and rains for days at a time. On one of these afternoons, Cory is riding home from school on his bike when the bike suddenly dies in front of someone's house. Cory leaves it on the lawn and goes home where he tells his dad. Cory's dad insists the old bike can be fixed. They return for the bike, but find it missing. The owner of the house tells them Mr. Sculley, the local trash man came and got it. Cory and Tom drive out to the trash man's house to ask for the bike back. On the way, Cory thinks he sees Little Stevie Cauley in his car, Midnight Mona. However, Cory knows Stevie was killed in a car crash on that very road less than six months before. When they arrive at Mr. Sculley's, they learn that Cory's bike has already been crushed. While they are there, however, Mr. Sculley takes them in his office and shows them a tooth that he claims came from Old Moses.

In chapter 6 of part 1, the constant rain causes the river to swell dangerously. The town alarm goes off, calling everyone to the courthouse. The dam up river has broken and Bruton is about to flood. The town leaders want everyone to go help build a temporary barricade to save the town. There is some resistance by citizens who do not believe they should waste their time helping a bunch of black people. Vernon Thaxter arrives,



naked, and tells the citizens that those who help the people in Bruton will receive preferential treatment when it is time to review their accounts at his father's bank. Everyone from Zephyr goes to Bruton. Cory sits on the shore of the river and sees a man in a hat with a green feather. Cory is afraid that man is the killer about to kill his father, but cannot convince anyone of that fact. Instead, Cory finds himself dragged off to help his mother assist a woman whose father is having a heart attack. Cory and his mother go to Nila Castile's house to help get her father to the hospital. Nila and Rebecca leave Cory alone with Nila's son, Gavin while they take Nila's father to the pick up spot for the truck taking people to Zephyr. As they wait, Cory becomes aware of a creature that has floated into the house on the swollen river water. Cory grabs a broom and protects himself and Gavin by shoving the broom into the creature's mouth.

In chapter 7 of part 1, word that Cory fought Old Moses and won spreads all over town. No one seems to believe his story, however, until Mr. Lightfoot, the local handyman, arrives with an invitation from the Lady. The Lady wants to speak with Cory. Tom is not happy with this invitation and refuses to go, but Rebecca decides to take Cory. The Lady thanks Cory for saving Gavin. The Lady asks Cory what he might like for a reward. Cory asks for a new bike. The Lady promises to give him one. The Lady then asks Rebecca about Tom's nightmares. When Rebecca confirms he is having nightmares, the Lady encourages Rebecca to bring Tom to her so that she can help him figure his dreams out.

Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 4, Wasps at Easter, Chapter 5, The Death of a Bike, Chapter 6, Old Moses Comes to Call, and Chapter 7, A Summons from the Lady Analysis

The Lady is introduced in these chapters. The Lady is a black woman living in Bruton who is rumored to be more than a hundred years old. The Lady appears to be the unofficial leader of Bruton, a woman who is highly respected by the people of her community, but feared by the people of Zephyr. This is illustrated by Tom's refusal to go to see the Lady with his wife and child when they are invited to visit her. However, the Lady appears harmless to the reader, even kind and compassionate. The Lady only wants to help Tom. This leaves the reader wondering what the Lady might do for Tom should he ever get over his fear and come visit the Lady.

Cory proves himself to be very brave when he saves himself and Gavin from Old Moses. However, no one believes that Old Moses exists, let alone that he attacked Cory. This brings into the story the idea that Cory might see things differently than others. However in this case, the reader knows that some adults believe in Old Moses because of the tooth Mr. Sculley shows Cory and Tom. Cory is brave, strong, and has a firm moral base, showing the reader that he is very much like his father and will most likely grow up to be a good man like his father.



Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 1, Last Day of School, Chapter 2, Barbershop Talk, and Chapter 3, A Boy and a Ball

Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 1, Last Day of School, Chapter 2, Barbershop Talk, and Chapter 3, A Boy and a Ball Summary

In chapter 1 of part 2, it is the last day of school. The teacher, Mrs. Neville, asks Cory to consider entering the Arts Council's writing contest that summer. Cory promises to think about it. Once out of the school, Cory joins up with his friends, Davy Ray, Johnny, and Ben. They go up into the woods and pretend to fly over the treetops with their dogs.

In chapter 2 of part 2, Cory and his father go to the local barbershop to have their hair cut by Mr. Dollar. Mr. Dollar tells them about a new family that has just moved to town, including a young boy who is small enough to need to sit on a special chair. Then Mr. Dollar begins to tease Mr. Cathcoate about his claim to have been at the shootout at the OK Corral. Mr. Cathcoate says that he shot a man who was about to shoot Wyatt Earp in the back. Later Wyatt Earp gave Mr. Cathcoate Billy Clanton's pistol. Mr. Cathcoate claims that he used that same gun to kill fourteen men over the next few years as the gunslinger, the Candystick Kid. In fact, Mr. Cathcoate claims to still have that gun.

In chapter 3 of part 2, Cory returns home to discover that Mr. Lightfoot has dropped off a bike for Cory. Cory is so excited he goes for a ride immediately. Cory rides too fast and falls off the bike. When Cory checks the bike for damage, he discovers what he believes is a golden eye in the headlamp. Cory also discovers that if he had fallen any later he would have been cut by a broken bottle, so he believes the bike spilled on purpose to save him.

Cory takes his new bike to the baseball field. Cory's friends Johnny and Davy Ray are tossing around a ball. Cory joins in. After a while, Cory notices a boy in the stands and thinks it must be the boy Mr. Dollar told him about. Cory talks to the boy and learns his name is Nemo Curliss. When a ball gets away from the boys, they call for Nemo to toss it back. Nemo proves that he has an incredible arm. They begin tossing the ball and Nemo throws so hard he hurts their hands. As they play, the Branlin brothers come up. The Branlins are bullies who are known for beating on smaller kids. Cory knows the boys are going to hurt Nemo, so he throws the ball at one of them. A fight breaks out. Cory, Davy Ray, and Johnny fight back. Nemo disappears. Finally the mailman comes up on them and breaks up the fight, rushing Johnny to the doctor because he seems to have suffered the most damage.



Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 1, Last Day of School, Chapter 2, Barbershop Talk, and Chapter 3, A Boy and a Ball Analysis

Summer begins and Cory finds himself thinking about the long days ahead. Cory does not think about the teacher he is leaving behind or her request that he enter a writing contest. However, this idea will return to him later. At the barbershop, Cory has his first experience with the discussions that often take place between men. This one has to do with a local man who claims not only that he once saved Wyatt Earp's life at the OK Corral, but that he was a gunslinger named the Candystick Kid. This story seems unbelievable and the barber swears it cannot be true. However, the reader will later learn there is a degree of truth to the story.

Cory gets a new bike that he calls Rocket. The bike seems magical to Cory and he thinks he sees an eye in its headlamp. This touches again on the magic that little boys believe in and the magic the author talks about in the introduction to the book. The boy then goes to play ball with his friends as he often does, only to be tortured by the local bullies. Cory again proves his bravery by fighting back. However, this time fighting back only gets Cory a bad beating that will define the rest of his summer.



Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 4, I Get Around, Chapter 5, Welcome, Lucifer, and Chapter 6, Nemo's Mother and a Week with the Jaybird

Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 4, I Get Around, Chapter 5, Welcome, Lucifer, and Chapter 6, Nemo's Mother and a Week with the Jaybird Summary

In chapter 4 of part 2, the sheriff is called on the Branlins, but he is unable to convince the boys' father to keep them in line. Johnny suffered a concussion and will have to spend a few weeks in bed. This puts a cramp in the boys' summer plans. One afternoon Cory looks through some old Life magazines and sees pictures of the civil rights struggle in Birmingham and the assassination of JFK and Oswald, introducing him to the horrors of real life. One Saturday, Cory goes to the public pool with his parents. While getting a milkshake with Davy Ray, Cory hears the song I Get around by the Beach Boys for the first time. Cory is touched down to his soul by the music. However, a local preacher thinks the music is the devil's music. The preacher breaks a radio at a baseball game to prove his point.

In chapter 5 of part 2, Cory learns the KKK burned a cross in the Lady's front yard. It reminds Cory of the night Carl Bellwood died when his house burned down. Later, Cory asks his parents to take him to hear Pastor Blessett preach against the Beach Boys song. They reluctantly agree. The pastor plays the song one line at a time, pointing out how the song encourages promiscuous behavior. To emphasize his point, Blessett brings out a monkey named Lucifer and instructs it to dance. Lucifer becomes frightened and attacks Blessett. Lucifer then attacks several other members of the church on its way out the door, disappearing into the trees.

In chapter 6 of part 2, Cory is riding his bike through town and sees Nemo in his front yard playing ball by himself. Cory joins him and they toss the ball back and forth. Cory asks if Nemo might play little league with them next summer. Nemo says his mother would not let him. Then Mrs. Curliss comes out and yells at Nemo for playing ball, insisting that her child is too fragile for such play. When Cory tries to come to Nemo's defense, she yells at him.

Cory spends a week at Jaybird's farm every summer. Cory does not want to go, so he makes his dad promise that he can go camping with his friends if he agrees to go. At Jaybird's, Cory has to get out of bed early every morning and do chores. On his last



day, Jaybird and Cory go to the store to get ice cream salt. On the way back to the house, Jaybird stops at a house where the Blaylocks host an illegal poker game. Jaybird takes Cory inside at first, but Bodean Blaylock makes him leave. Cory waits outside for several hours before finally walking. Cory walks more than two miles before he is picked up by the local doctor. Once back at the farm, Cory learns that his teacher, Mrs. Neville, has died of cancer. That night Cory dreams that Mrs. Neville asks him again to enter the writing contest. The following day Cory's parents pick him up and take him home.

Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 4, I Get Around, Chapter 5, Welcome, Lucifer, and Chapter 6, Nemo's Mother and a Week with the Jaybird Analysis

The setting of the novel comes into the plot in a big way in chapter 4. First the burning of a cross on the lawn of the Lady's house represents the dark tensions that existed between blacks and whites in 1964, especially in the deep south. Then the reaction of the local preacher when the Beach Boys song begins hitting the airwaves illustrates the fear the people of this time era had of rock and roll music and the influence it had over their children. When Lucifer is brought out to illustrate this influence and instead attacks those who claim to have God on their sides, it becomes more of a comedy than a metaphor.

Cory spends a week at his granddaddy Jaybird's farm and discovers exactly the kind of cowardice and selfish man his grandfather is. Cory is disappointed to learn this, but this is just another example of Cory's becoming more aware of what is happening around him and becoming more mature with that knowledge. This also includes Cory's sudden awareness that his teacher has died, having suffered cancer in secret. Cory learns from her death, however, and commits himself to submitting a story for the writing contest she mentioned at the end of the school year. Also important to note is the dream Cory has reminding him of the contest. Dreams will become a frequent tool used by Cory's subconscious or other forces that will help make other connections. Dreams also plague Cory's father, causing him great distress and fear.



Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 7, My Camping Trip, Chapter 8, Chile Willow, and Chapter 9, Summer Winds Up

Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 7, My Camping Trip, Chapter 8, Chile Willow, and Chapter 9, Summer Winds Up Summary

In chapter 7 of part 2, Cory spends most of one day writing a story for the contest. Cory has trouble picking a subject, but finally decides to write about the dead man in Saxon's Lake. Cory shows the story to his father who is surprised to learn of the figure Cory saw watching them that morning. At first Tom refuses to allow Cory to submit the story, but then changes his mind. A couple of nights later, Cory asks for permission to go camping alone with his buddies. Cory's mother refuses immediately, but Cory's father considers the idea. Finally Tom decides that Cory is old enough even though his mother is still reluctant. Davy Ray and Ben both get permission, but Johnny cannot go because of his concussion.

The boys go deep into the woods, walking most of the day and late into the evening until they find the perfect camping spot. The boys make a fire and then Cory begins to tell them a story. As they listen, Davy Ray sees lights in the woods. Suddenly a car passes them on a dirt road they had not noticed. Davy Ray decides to follow the car, so the others follow him. The boys hide in the bushes and watch as two hooded men talk with Biggun Blaylock and his three sons. The Blaylocks sell something to the two men, whom Cory recognizes as the mailman, Mr. Hargison, and another local man, Mr. Moultry. Ben becomes nervous, insisting that something is crawling on him. In a minute Ben gives away their location by screaming about spiders crawling on him. The boys run and the Blaylock boys follow. Cory is separated from the others, but manages to hide all night.

In chapter 8 of part 2, Cory begins walking out of the woods, but he cannot find the others and does not know where he is. Cory comes to a pond where a beautiful girl a few years older than him is skinny dipping. Cory reveals himself to the girl and tells her he is lost. The girl takes Cory home where she treats his wounds. Cory is fascinated with this beautiful girl and imagines himself becoming her boyfriend one day until he discovers that she is already married and has a baby boy named Bubba. When the girl's husband comes home, Chile Willow talks him into driving Cory to a phone. Chile gives Cory a dime for the phone, but he refuses to use it, instead keeping it as a souvenir. At home, Cory tells the sheriff what he saw, who he saw, and what happened. The sheriff,



however, tells them that there is nothing he can do because he does not know where to find Biggun Blaylock.

In chapter 9 of part 2, Cory gets a call from one of the judges of the writing contest. She informs Cory that he has won third place in the short story portion of the contest. Later Cory goes to the baseball field to play with his friends. Nemo comes and tells Cory that he has to move again. Nemo's mother has decided that no one in town wants to buy the white shirts her husband sells, so they should move. Nemo is deeply saddened by this, but has no choice. As he leaves, Nemo throws a ball up into the sky, but it never comes down.

Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 7, My Camping Trip, Chapter 8, Chile Willow, and Chapter 9, Summer Winds Up Analysis

Cory and his friends go on a camping trip by themselves for the first time, proving to both themselves and their parents that they are old enough to care for themselves. However, they witness a criminal transaction and have to run from the Blaylocks, the local crime family, and Cory is separated. Cory proves himself to be brave and resourceful again when he manages to find a way home. Not only that, but Cory insists on naming the criminals he saw to the sheriff. It is important the reader note the sheriff's odd reaction and his unwillingness to go up against the Blaylocks.

Nemo has to leave. Cory is saddened by this because he recognizes that Nemo's home life is not ideal. However, they are still children, so there is little they can do. Nemo throws a ball into the sky and it never comes down. This becomes symbolic of Nemo's strength and talent to Cory; he will touch on it again later in the novel.



Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 1, Green-Feathered Hat, Chapter 2, The Magic Box, Chapter 3, Dinner with Vernon, and Chapter 4, The Wrath of Five Thunders

Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 1, Green-Feathered Hat, Chapter 2, The Magic Box, Chapter 3, Dinner with Vernon, and Chapter 4, The Wrath of Five Thunders Summary

In chapter 1 of part 3, school has begun again and Cory finds himself sitting in front of the Demon, a little red haired girl who likes to pick her nose and put boogers on those she likes. Cory tries to ignore her, but finds it difficult. One day after school, Cory goes home and learns that the mayor would like to see him. Cory goes to the mayor's office and answers questions about his story. It is raining outside so the secretary comes back to borrow an umbrella. When she searches the closet in the mayor's office, Cory sees the hat with the green feather that he saw the night of the flood. Cory becomes convinced the mayor is the killer. When the power goes out due to the storm, Cory panics and runs out of the building. The mayor is confused and concerned that Cory has a mental problem, but Cory reassures him that he only allowed his imagination get out of control. It turns out the feather from the hat does not match the one from Saxon's Lake.

In chapter 2 of part 3, Cory must attend a ceremony and read his story aloud to receive his plaque. Cory is nervous, especially when all his friends arrive. However, Cory gets up and reads the story, finding himself fascinated with the awe that his story appears to have over the crowd. Afterward, the Lady comes up and congratulates Cory. Once again she attempts to convince Tom Mackenson to come see her about his dreams. However, Tom continues to resist. Finally the Lady tells them about the museum she is raising money for in Bruton, a museum that will showcase black history, including artifacts from the days of slavery.

In chapter 3 of part 3, a butler from the Thaxter mansion invites Cory to have dinner with Vernon Thaxter. Cory's father will only agree as long as he can go along. On the appointed night, Cory and his father find Vernon playing with an elaborate train set that is designed to resemble Zephyr. When it is time for dinner, Tom is relegated to the kitchen while Cory dines with Vernon in the dining room. Vernon talks about the book he wrote, years before, that he was forced to change for the publishing company. The book



did poorly and Vernon was forced to admit his father was right all along about his writing.

In chapter 4 of part 3, it is show and tell day at school. Johnny brings his arrowheads. In the morning, before class, Cory makes up a story about the Indian who made the nicest arrowhead, one he calls Five Thunders. After school, the boys are preparing to go home when the Branlins come across them. The Branlins begin taking the arrowheads out of the box and throwing them around the schoolyard. Johnny refuses to allow them to do this, so he throws a punch at Gotha. It turns out Johnny studied boxing from a book while he was recovering during the summer. Johnny and Gotha fight and Johnny wins. At the same time, Cory angers Gordo and then takes off on his bike. Gordo follows. Several times Cory tries to direct Rocket toward home, but Rocket will not go. Eventually Rocket leads Cory up a road that is transected by a ditch filled with poison oak. Cory manages to jump the ditch, but Gordo falls in. Cory returns to the schoolyard and helps Johnny collect his arrowheads, all but Five Thunders.

Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 1, Green-Feathered Hat, Chapter 2, The Magic Box, Chapter 3, Dinner with Vernon, and Chapter 4, The Wrath of Five Thunders Analysis

Cory thinks the mayor killed the man in Saxon's Lake, but discovers that the green feather he found is nothing like the fake feather's in the mayor's favorite hat. This leads the reader to believe the feather might be real, perhaps a bird feather. The investigation into the Saxon's Lake killer seems to have stalled, but now the reader can see that it has been under the surface of the plot all along. This includes the Lady's desire to have Tom Mackenson to come visit her in order to help him with his dreams. Somehow the Lady knows how tortured Tom is from what happened at Saxon's Lake and she believes she can help him learn some truth.

Cory has dinner with Vernon Thaxter, the son of the richest man in town, and learns the source of his odd behaviors. Vernon wanted to be a writer, but his father ridiculed that desire until Vernon found himself unable to sell his novel because of changes requested by the publisher. Vernon has allowed people to push him around all his life, therefore he has decided to walk around naked and do as he pleases. Vernon is an interesting person and Cory believes he can learn a great deal from him. At the same time, Johnny has learned to box and he defends himself from the local bullies, changing the way things happen in Zephyr. This is another important step toward maturity, even if the step is taken with a little magic when Cory finds himself driven through town by a bike that appears to have a mind of its own.



Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 5, Case #3432, Chapter 6, Dead Man Driving, Chapter 7, High Noon in Zephyr, and Chapter 8, From the Lost World

Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 5, Case #3432, Chapter 6, Dead Man Driving, Chapter 7, High Noon in Zephyr, and Chapter 8, From the Lost World Summary

In chapter 5 of part 3, Cory returns home from school one fall afternoon and learns that his dog was hit by a car. Cory goes to Dr. Lezander's office and learns that the damage is so severe that the doctor can do nothing for Rebel. Dr. Lezander asks Tom to sign the release to have Rebel put down. Before he does, Cory asks to see Rebel. Cory cries on the floor, begging death to leave his dog alone. Rebel stops breathing. However, Rebel recovers. Over the next few weeks Rebel recovers completely and is able to return home. Rebel is different, however. Rebel does not eat, does not play with Cory, does little, but stare off into space. One night Cory hears a noise in the yard. Cory goes outside to find a little boy talking to Rebel, asking Rebel to be his dog. Cory realizes the kid is Carl Bellwood. Cory realizes that Rebel has remained in the living world only for him and that this is not fair. Cory decides to have Rebel put down.

In chapter 6 of part 3, it is October and Cory is delivering a pie to the Lezanders for their care of Rebel. However, Cory learns that the Lezanders are allergic to milk and cannot have the pie. This causes Cory to recall something Vernon Thaxter said about the Saxon's Lake killer. Vernon said the killer must not drink milk because he did not think about the milk man being out at dawn, and that he must be a night person, which Cory also learns Dr. Lezander is. As Cory is thinking this over, Donny Blaylock forces him into his car. Donny then goes to Grace's and gets a girl named Lainie whom he thinks of as his girlfriend. They begin driving on the section of Highway 10 where Little Stevie Cauley died. Lainie begins talking about him even as Cory and Donny become aware of Midnight Mona behind them. In his shock and fear, Donny admits to having run Little Stevie off the road. Not only this, but when Lainie threatens to tell the sheriff, Donny says that his family pays the sheriff to leave them alone. As Donny continues to drive too fast along the road, Little Stevie Cauley drives up against his fender. Little Stevie forces them off the road.

In chapter 7 of part 3, Cory learns from his dad and the sheriff that Little Stevie Cauley was Lainie's boyfriend and Donny saw him as a threat. The sheriff has arrested Donny Blaylock, but he has also admitted to taking bribes from the Blaylocks. The sheriff is leaving town in disgrace and a new sheriff will be appointed. However, in the meantime, the sheriff wants to be sure the state police come to get Donny Blaylock safely. The



sheriff asks Tom for help. Tom initially refuses, but when he sees Cory's reaction, Tom changes his mind. On the morning the state cops are to arrive via the Trailways bus, Cory goes out to the gas station where the bus stops to watch. A few minutes later, the sheriff arrives with Chief Marchette, the fire chief, as well as Tom and the Moon Man, who is the Lady's husband. A few minutes after the bus is due to arrive, Mr. Cathcoate arrives and orders Cory to come home. Instead, Cory hides behind some tires. The Blaylocks arrive and begin shooting. Mr. Cathcoate comes up from behind and fires. A shootout begins. Suddenly the Moon Man approaches Biggun Blaylock and speaks to him. Biggun starts to fire his weapon, but it is jammed. It turns out all the bullets have turned into small green garden snakes.

In chapter 8 of part 3, the Blaylocks go to jail and the sheriff moves on, opening his job to Chief Marchette. The Brandywine Carnival comes to town. Cory and his friends make plans to go, but have to wait an extra half hour because Ben has piano lessons with Miss Sonia "Blue" Glass. While Cory and his friends are waiting for Ben's lesson to be over, Miss Blue Glass has a fight with her sister, Miss Katharina "Green" Glass. The fight is over Miss Blue Glass's parrot, who apparently dislikes the song Beautiful Dreamer. When the next student arrives her father, Mr. Osborne, asks how the parrot learned German.

Cory and his friends go to the carnival, eat too much junk food, go in the haunted house, and go through the freak shows. Cory sees an attraction that he is curious about and talks his friends into going as well. Inside they find a creature that looks like a triceratops. Davy Ray is sickened by the abuse and the horrible conditions in which the animal is kept. When Cory hears the following day that the creature escaped its pen, he believes that Davy Ray sprang it.

Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 5, Case #3432, Chapter 6, Dead Man Driving, Chapter 7, High Noon in Zephyr, and Chapter 8, From the Lost World Analysis

Cory's dog is hit by a car and killed. The little boy in him wants to keep the dog no matter what, so when it returns to life he holds on to Rebel despite the fact that the dog is clearly only holding on to life for him. Cory again shows some maturity when he decides to allow his dog to die in order to move into the afterlife and be Carl Bellwood's dog. It is a touching chapter that not only shows growth in Cory, but also touches once again on the idea of magic and how it touches the lives of children.

Cory is then kidnapped, and again magic touches his life when Little Stevie Cauley saves him and his girlfriend from his own killer, Donny Blaylock. This leads to a confession of murder and the ousting of the sheriff. The sheriff takes bribes, but this does not change his moral fiber. The sheriff wants to arrest at least one of the Blaylocks before he leaves. With Tom's help he arrests all of them. Not only that, but the Candystick Kid gets to prove his own true past by helping save the lives of four innocent men. Finally, Davy Ray also shows his own courage by rescuing an animal believed to

be a triceratops. It seems magic touches all aspects of this novel, even the real moments.



Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 1, A Solitary Traveler, Chapter 2, Faith, and Chapter 3, Snippets of the Quilt

Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 1, A Solitary Traveler, Chapter 2, Faith, and Chapter 3, Snippets of the Quilt Summary

In chapter 1 of part 4, Cory learns his father has lost his job. Cory goes to Saxon's Lake where his father is sitting alone, drinking grape juice, and thinking about his life. Tom has reached the end of his rope, no longer sure he can continue to cope with his dreams and reality. Cory thinks of telling him his suspicions about Dr. Lezander, but thinks this is a bad time. On the way home, Cory stops by the Bright Star Café to ask Mr. Osborne about what he said the bird was saying the night of the carnival. Mr. Osborne told him the bird was mostly cussing and saying a name, Hannah Furd. As he is leaving, Mr. Osborne tells Cory that the bird died that same night of a brain fever. Cory rushes home to call Miss Blue Glass and ask her about the bird. However, before he can Mrs. Callan calls and tells his mother that Davy Ray has been shot. At the hospital, Cory learns that Davy Ray tripped while hunting with his father and his gun went off. They wait most of the night for Davy Ray to get out of surgery. Cory goes to see him in recovery and tells him a story about a solitary traveler who can go anywhere just by thinking of where he wants to go. The following morning, Davy Ray dies.

In chapter 2 of part 4, Cory struggles to understand Davy Ray's death. Cory's mother tells him that Davy Ray has gone to a better place, but cannot explain how she knows this. The preacher tells Cory he must accept that Davy Ray is better off because of faith. Cory still does not understand. At school, the teacher begins picking on Cory. Cory becomes angry and hits the teacher. Cory is suspended and told to write an apology. Cory refuses. That night Cory goes to visit Davy Ray's grave. While there, Cory has a dream that he jumped a train and went to the big city, but he saw horrible things and realized he was not old enough to go there alone. When Cory wakes, he realizes home is not such a bad place. The following morning, Cory is told that his suspension has been lifted because of calls about the teacher from other parents.

In chapter 3 of part 4, Cory returns to school a hero. The Demon uses a special formula of glue to glue the teacher to her desk. A few weeks later, Cory goes to visit Miss Blue Glass. Cory arrives just as Miss Blue Glass has learned that her sister ran away with Miss Blue Glass's own beau, Mr. Cathcoate. Despite Miss Blue Glass's grief, she answers Cory's questions about the parrot, including the fact that Miss Green Glass had a green parrot like Miss Blue Glass's blue parrot and that parrot was at Dr. Lezander's office the day of the murder because of a brain fever. Cory also learns that Mrs. Lezander was taught to play piano by Miss Blue Glass and that she could play Beautiful



Dreamer. Cory goes home and realizes that the birds were both at Lezanders and that they heard the murder while Mrs. Lezander was playing the piano, explaining the blue parrot's aversion to the song.

Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 1, A Solitary Traveler, Chapter 2, Faith, and Chapter 3, Snippets of the Quilt Analysis

Davy Ray dies. This death has a huge impact on Cory, even bigger than his own father's depression and job loss. It is one of the most defining moments of Cory's life, pushing him over the edge from child to adult. Cory handles the death as well as a person can, struggling with the idea that Davy Ray has gone to a better place. At the same time, Cory becomes aware of his father's troubles, of his deep depression, and does all he can to help him except telling him his suspicions about Dr. Lezander. Cory wants to be sure about Dr. Lezander before he begins pointing fingers. An interview with both Mr. Osborne and Miss Blue Glass helps Cory put the facts together, but he is still missing the motive.



Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 4, Mr. Moultry's Castle, Chapter 5, Sixteen Drops of Blood, and Chapter 7, The Stranger Among Us

Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 4, Mr. Moultry's Castle, Chapter 5, Sixteen Drops of Blood, and Chapter 7, The Stranger Among Us Summary

In chapter 4 of part 4, the Mackensons are invited to a reception for the Lady in Bruton. While there, Cory and his mother get a personal tour of the new museum that is due to open the day after Christmas. While looking at a picture of the girls who died in a church bombing in Birmingham he realizes they are the same girls he has been dreaming about for months. Looking at the picture, Cory puts something together from the dreams and tells the Lady.

On Christmas Eve, a plane from the local air force base flies low over Zephyr and drops a bomb on the home of Dick Moultry. The mayor orders an evacuation of both Zephyr and Bruton. Tom sends his family to Rebecca's parents and then goes to the Moultry home. As Tom and the new sheriff study the situation, attempting to figure out how to free Moultry from his basement where he is trapped under the bomb by falling debris, Mr. Hargison arrives. Hargison keeps stressing to Mr. Moultry that something is to happen at ten on the day after Christmas. As he leaves, Hargison drops a Christmas ornament on the bomb, causing it to begin ticking. Tom and the sheriff quickly leave. However, Tom insists they go to the Lady to ask for help. The Lady sends Mr. Lightfoot to deactivate the bomb despite the fact that the Lady knows Moultry was behind an attempted bombing of the museum on opening day.

In chapter 5 of part 4, Tom finally agrees to visit the Lady. The Lady asks him about his dreams. When Tom tells her that he often hears the dead man telling him to join him down in the dark, the Lady tells him the man is not talking to him, but the killer. This lifts a huge burden off of Tom's shoulders. Then the Lady pricks Tom's finger and has him drip eight drops of blood on the same paper she dropped another eight of her own blood on. The Lady has Tom crumple the paper. When she opens it, the Lady draws a line between the drops and makes two threes. The Lady tells Tom these threes are a clue to the killer's identity. Tom begins the next day trying to find people who live at addresses with the number thirty-three. When this does not work, Tom goes to get gas while thinking of what to do next. At the gas station, Tom learns that the Trailways bus is number thirty-three. Tom takes a job at the station while he waits to see who might get off the bus in Zephyr.



In chapter 6 of part 4, January comes. Cory is supposed to go to the movies, but decides to stop by the Lezanders first and peek in the windows. Mrs. Lezander comes home from the store and catches him. Mrs. Lezander makes Cory help her with the groceries. Dr. Lezander gets up and asks Cory to speak with him in his office. Dr. Lezander offers Cory a job for twenty dollars a week in exchange for Cory returning the feather to him. At the same time, two people get off the Trailways bus for the first time. Tom offers them a ride into town, stopping for lunch on the way. Over lunch, Tom learns that they are there looking for a man named Hannaford, the brother of one of the men. It turns out Hannaford was a neo-Nazi who helped relocate a couple of Nazi soldiers in Zephyr. Hannaford came to blackmail the Nazis for money to start a new life. The older of the two men then goes on to tell how these Nazis worked in a concentration camp and were responsible for deciding who would live or die.

Tom recognizes some traits of the Nazis and directs the men to the Lezander home. When they arrive, Cory cries out to his father. Lezander forces Cory into his car in an attempt to escape. They are followed through town and up toward Saxon's Lake. As they approach the lake, the triceratops comes out of the woods and rams the car, forcing it into the lake. Lezander is pinned, but he helps Cory out of the car so his father can save him.

Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 4, Mr. Moultry's Castle, Chapter 5, Sixteen Drops of Blood, and Chapter 7, The Stranger Among Us Analysis

Cory begins investigating the death that took place in the first chapter. Cory figures out the who, but cannot figure out the why. At the same time, Tom begins to trust the Lady, going to her for help with the bomb in Moultry's basement and then for help for his own demons. The Lady gives Tom advice that frees him from the obsession that the dead man in the lake wants him to join him. Tom is then given the number thirty-three and promised it will lead to the killer's identity. In fact, the number leads to two men looking for Nazi war criminals who once picked who would live or die. This finally gives Cory the why.

Cory uses a dream to stop a bombing in Bruton. Cory has been having recurring dreams about the girls killed in a bombing in Birmingham. The dream leads Cory to the realization that the thing bought by Hargison and Moultry on the night Cory was camping with his friends was a bomb designed to stop the opening of the black museum in Bruton. The crime is stopped, thanks to Cory, and the Lady shows her compassion by saving Moultry's life, despite his desire to kill everyone in Bruton.



Part 5, Zypher as It Is

Part 5, Zypher as It Is Summary

Cory is now in his late thirties. Cory and his family left Zephyr in 1966 to find work in Birmingham. The family did well there, but Cory's father died in 1978 of cancer. Cory's mother remarried and is happy, but it is not the same for Cory. Cory has married and has a daughter of his own. Cory has reconnected with Ben, a stockbroker in Atlanta, and Johnny, a police chief in Florida. The Branlins moved on. Gordo died in a stickup, but Gotha has settled down in a productive life. The Demon became a chemist with DuPont, but quit to become a performance artist in New York.

Cory and his family drive through what is left of Zephyr. The paper mill closed in the late seventies and most people moved on. The old family house is still there and the ball field. Cory stops briefly at each place before moving on. There is one last place Cory wants to see. Cory drives up to the Thaxter mansion. Cory is surprised to find the mansion still lived in. In fact, Cory learns that Vernon left the house to an orphanage for boys. In fact, Miss Blue Glass teaches piano there and Bubba Willow, Chile's baby, is a priest there.

Part 5, Zypher as It Is Analysis

Cory returns to Zephyr and discovers as most people do that you can never go home again. However, Cory finds that a good change has come to the Thaxter mansion. Cory is pleased to find a small piece of home is still there and he feels as though he has been welcomed back.



Characters

Cory Mackenson

Cory Mackenson is a twelve year old boy in 1964. This novel follows Cory's adventures that year, including his attempts to solve a murder by which his father has been haunted since inadvertently witnessing the disposal of the body. Cory is precocious, a young man who wants to be a writer, so he spends a great deal of his time investigating the people and events taking place in the little town where he lives.

Cory fights off Old Moses, a large aquatic creature that swims into a house in Bruton during the flood. Cory later goes camping alone with a group of friends and overhears a bomb transaction that allows him later to save the people of Bruton from a hate crime. Cory loses a good friend that year and gains another. It is an amazing summer that will remain with Cory the rest of his life, bringing him back to Zephyr twenty years later with his family, only to find several friends still living there.

Tom Mackenson

Tom Mackenson is Cory's father. Tom saw a car drive into Saxon's Lake early one morning and dove into the water to save the driver. What Tom saw that day will haunt him for the rest of the novel. The man in the car is beaten, has a piano wire around his throat, and is handcuffed to the steering wheel. Tom will have nightmares for months, telling him to join him down in the dark. Tom believes the man wants him to commit suicide, but learns from the Lady that he is speaking to the killer. In fact, Tom will later learn that he is not saying down in the dark, but Dahninaderke. These dreams will lead Tom to the identity of the killer and solve his nightmares.

Rebecca Mackenson

Rebecca Mackenson is Cory's mother. Rebecca is an overprotective mother who has trouble adjusting to the idea that her son is growing up. Rebecca does not want Cory to go camping on his own, but finally relents when her husband agrees to it. Rebecca is a force in her son's life, not always the one to say no but occasionally the one who encourages her son. When the Lady invites Cory to visit her, Rebecca insists that they go even though her husband disagrees. This meeting allows the Mackenson family to discover that the Lady is actually a kind woman who only wants to help.

Vernon Thaxter

Vernon Thaxter is the eccentric son of the richest man in town. Vernon once wanted to be a writer despite his father's disapproval and even published a book once. However, the publishers talked Vernon into changing the book to fit their market, a change that



caused the book to not sell well. As a result, Vernon had a mental breakdown that brought him back home, living as though he were a child again. Vernon can often be seen walking through town naked. However, Vernon has a clear mind when it comes to watching the people in town and he manages to give Cory some insight into the killer of the mystery man in Saxon's Lake that helps him identify that person.

Davy Ray Callan

Davy Ray Callan is a friend of Cory's. Davy Ray is the friend who likes to tease the others, often voicing doubts about the games and theories the others entertain. Davy Ray has a strong opinion on everything, including the stories that Cory often tells, forcing him to stay honest to his story. The fall of 1964, Davy Ray is hunting with her father when he trips and accidentally shoots himself. Davy Ray dies during the night after the accident.

Ben Sears

Ben Sears is another of Cory's friends. Ben has a father who drinks moonshine with the Blaylocks, causing a great deal of tension in the home. Ben is the friend who always seems to be lagging behind, who is slower than the others. However, Ben remains a close friend to all, especially Davy Ray who delights in teasing Ben for his slowness. Ben grows up to be a successful stock broker.

Johnny Wilson

Johnny Wilson is a friend of Cory's. Johnny is beaten badly by the Bralin boys, leaving him with a concussion that excludes him from many of the summer activities the other boys indulge in. As a result, Johnny teaches himself boxing with a book written by Sugar Ray Robinson. When Gotha Branlin attempts to beat Johnny again over some arrowheads, Johnny fights back, teaching Gotha a lesson. This causes Gotha to go straight and stop beating smaller kids. In the end, Johnny grows up to be chief of police in a city in Florida.

The Lady

The Lady is a highly respected black woman who lives in Bruton. It is said that the Lady is over one hundred years old and that she is an expert in voodoo magic. Most white people are afraid of the Lady, including Tom Mackenson. However, Cory becomes good friends with the Lady after the flood that wipes out a portion of Bruton. Cory rescues a small black boy from a monster fish known as Old Moses. In return, the Lady gives Cory a new bike he names Rocket. The Lady also claims to be able to help Tom with nightmares he has suffered since he saw a dead man sink into Saxon's Lake. The Lady gives Tom a reading that comes up with the number 33. In the end, Tom uses this



number to solve the mystery of the dead man, proving the Lady's powers of the unknown.

Granddaddy Jaybird

Granddaddy Jaybird is Cory's paternal grandfather. Granddaddy Jaybird is a loud, obnoxious man who is obsessed with practical jokes and animal carcasses. Cory comes to realize as he grows that Granddaddy Jaybird is a selfish person who cares for no one but himself. In fact, Cory's first lesson in this is when Granddaddy Jaybird abandons Cory in the heat of a summer's day in order to play illegal poker with Bodean Blaylock. Cory understands that Granddaddy Jaybird is not a good person, but he also believes that his curiosity that helps in his writing comes from Jaybird, therefore he respects his grandfather for his gifts to his own personality.

Gotha and Gordo Branlin

Gotha and Gordo Branlin are the local bullies in Zephyr. Gotha and Gordo like to pick on boys younger than themselves, which means Cory and his friends. On the baseball field one day, the Branlin boys attack Cory and his friends mercilessly, causing one boy to suffer a concussion. As a consequence of this episode, one of those boys learns to box from a book and he attacks Gotha Branlin in the schoolyard. Gotha learns from this experience and never attacks these boys again. In fact, Gotha straightens out his life and becomes a decent citizen when he grows older. Gordo, on the other hand, never learns his lesson and eventually dies in a holdup when he is shot by the owner of the convenience store he is trying to rob.

Nemo Curliss

Nemo Curliss is a young boy who comes to live in Zephyr for a few short months during the summer of 1964. On their first meeting, Cory comes to discover that Nemo has a talent when it comes to throwing baseballs. However, Nemo's overprotective mother refuses to allow him to play because she feels her little boy is too fragile to play rough sports like baseball. Cory and his friends are deeply disappointed because Nemo could have helped them win the season that summer in little league. During their brief friendship with Nemo, Cory and his friends are attacked by the Branlin boys while defending nemo, an event that causes the boys terrible injuries and leaves Johnny looking for revenge.

The Blaylocks

The Blaylocks, Wade, Donny, Bodean, and Biggun, run the moonshining business in Zephyr. The Blaylocks also run the local brothel and several other illegal businesses. The town of Zephyr lives in fear of the Blaylocks because they know that they will not hesitate to kill in order to protect their businesses or each other. Even the sheriff is



under the control of the Blaylocks, taking payments from them every month in a promise to leave them be. In the end, however, the sheriff finds himself forced out of office because of the Blaylocks. Before he leaves, however, the sheriff is insistent that he take Donny Blaylock to jail for the murder of Little Stevie Cauley. There is a shootout, leaving the Blaylocks wounded and arrested. This leaves Zephyr free from their criminal for the first time in many years.

Dr. Franz Lezander aka Dr. Gunther Dahninaderke

Dr. Franz Lezander is the veterinarian in Zephyr. Dr. Lezander cares for Rebel when he is hit by a car. Cory is overwhelmed by Dr. Lezander's care of his dog and is so impressed that he entertains the idea of becoming a vet himself. However, when Cory learns that Dr. Lezander is allergic to milk and that he is a night owl, Cory begins to wonder if Dr. Lezander could be the mysterious killer who killed a man and dumped his body in Saxon's Lake. Later, when Cory learns that Dr. Lezander had in his care the parrots of the Glass sisters, he realizes that the green feather he found at Saxon's Lake that fateful day came from Lezander's house. Before Cory can do anything with all this information, his father learns that Dr. Lezander and his wife are really German soldiers who were cruel to Jews at a concentration camp. Dr. Lezander's real name is Gunther Dahninaderke, a German doctor who choose who would live or die in the concentration camp. Dr. Dahninaderke killed the mysterious man for blackmailing him and threatening to reveal his true identity.

Brenda Sutley aka The Demon

The Demon is a young girl several years younger than Cory who has a crush on him. The Demon picks her nose and is known to offer boogers to the boys she loves, including Cory. Cory is grossed out by the Demon and is happy when she focuses her affections on another boy. The Demon is a brilliant young girl who is moved up to Cory's grade in the heat of her crush on him and placed in the seat behind him, making his life miserable for the better part of the year. Later, Cory learns that the Demon becomes a chemist for DuPont, but gives up her job in favor of becoming a performance artist.

Chile Willow

Chile Willow is a very beautiful sixteen year old girl Cory sees swimming naked in a small pond while lost in the woods. Chile takes Cory home with him to the small shack where she lives with her mother, husband, and baby, Bubba. Cory falls instantly in love with Chile even as he is aware he will never see her again after he leaves her home for his own. However, Cory does meet Chile's grown son twenty years later and learns that Chile has become a teacher.



Objects/Places

Rocket

Rocket is the name of the bike the Lady gives Cory for saving the small black boy during the flood of Bruton. Cory believes Rocket is magical and can protect him from dangers.

Green Feather

Cory finds a green feather on a road leading to Saxon's Lake where he sees a figure watching his father's attempt to rescue a murder victim from the water.

Arrowheads

Johnny collects arrowheads. One day, Johnny brings the arrowheads to school and the Branlins try to steal them. Instead, Johnny fights back and teaches Gotha Branlin a lesson.

Old Moses

Old Moses is a creature that lives in the Tecumseh River near Zephyr. The Lady makes a sacrifice of food to the creature every year in a ceremony just before Easter in order to keep it from harming the people of Zephyr and Bruton. However, in 1964, the creature does not accept this sacrifice and later attacks Cory and a young boy during a flood.

Triceratops

Cory and his friends see what they believe is a triceratops at the carnival. Davy Ray feels sorry for this animal and its confinement. When the animal is freed from its pen, Cory assumes that Davy Ray did it, but he never confirms this fact. The creature saves Cory from Dr. Lezander when the animal attacks his car while Dr. Lezander is trying to escape Cory's father.

Monkey named Lucifer

Reverend Blessett in Zypher uses a monkey named Lucifer to illustrate the evil of the Beach Boys' Runaround. This monkey attacks Blessett and escapes the church, reigning havoc on Zephyr for several months until a farmer finally shoots it.



Rainbow Colored House

The Lady and her husband, Moon Man, live in a rainbow colored house in Bruton.

Midnight Mona

Midnight Mona is a large, dark car owned by Little Stevie Cauley. This car is in an accident that kills Little Stevie. It is later discovered that Donny Blaylock caused this accident to keep Stevie away from a young girl they both loved.

Mr. Cathcoate's Gun

Mr. Cathcoates, an old man who hangs out at the barbershop, claims to have shot a man in order to save Wyatt Earp's life during the shootout at the OK Corral. Afterward, Wyatt Earp gives Mr. Cathcoate the nickname Candyman and Clanton's gun.

Before the Sun

Before the Sun is a short story Cory writes for the Zephyr Arts Council Contest. Cory wins third place for his story, the youngest person to win, and he receives a plaque from the council.

The Beach Boys' I Get Around

The Beach Boys' song, I Get Around, becomes the target of a local reverend when it is released in the summer of 1964.

Green Meadows Dairy

Green Meadows Dairy is the dairy for which Tom Mackenson is a milk man. However, the dairy begins to go under when a grocery store opens nearby that sells milk in plastic jugs.

Big Paul's Pantry

Big Paul's Pantry is the grocery store that sells milk in plastic jugs, causing Green Meadows Dairy to begin losing customers. Tom Mackenson ironically is forced to take a job stocking shelves in this store after losing his job as a milk man.



Brandywine Carnival

The Brandywine Carnival is a carnival that comes to Zephyr every fall. Cory and his friends often go to this carnival on the first night and enjoy the exhibits.

Saxon's Lake

Saxon's Lake was once a quarry in Zephyr that filled with water when the mining punctured an underground water source. Saxon's Lake is extremely deep, therefore a car would completely disappear in its depths. The killer who dumped the unknown man and his car here knew this, implying he is a local man.

Bruton

Bruton is a small town next to Zephyr populated mostly by blacks who work in Zephyr, including the Lady.

Zephyr

Zephyr is Cory Mackenson's hometown. Zephyr is a thriving small town in Cory's youth, but becomes a ghost town when the local paper mill closes down.



Themes

Coming of Age

Cory Mackenson is twelve in 1964, the setting of this novel. In this year, Cory watches his father struggle with the death of a stranger, loses his dog, and experiences the death of a good friend. The novel begins with Cory getting up to help his father at his job as a milk man, an experience that is comfortable and familiar. However, it quickly grows unusual when he and his father see a car drive into Saxon's Lake. Cory's father jumps in to save the driver only to discover the man is already dead, badly beaten and handcuffed to the steering wheel of his car to prevent him from floating out of the car once it hits the bottom. This leaves Cory's father bothered by the idea that someone in their quiet little town could do such a horrible thing. Then begin the nightmares.

Cory sees his father struggle with this event for the majority of the year, saddened by the hurt he can clearly see in his father. However, Cory is a child and is more focused on his own concerns. Cory spends the summer with his closest friends, including Davy Ray. They go camping alone for the first time and stumble on a scheme to bomb a local black museum. Cory sees his first naked girl and experiences his first crush. Cory's friend Johnny is beaten badly and becomes versed in boxing techniques in order to better protect himself in another attack from bullies. At the carnival that fall, the boys spend the evening indulging the curiosity of a normal boy, haunted houses, freak shows, and junk food. They also find themselves viewing a trapped animal, something that touches Davy Ray so deeply that he returns to the carnival and frees the poor animal. This same animal will later save Cory's life. Finally, during a hunting trip with his father at the end of the year, Davy Ray is shot. Davy Ray dies, leaving Cory frustrated and afraid, forced to take a leap of faith before he has even come to understand what faith is.

By the end of the year, Cory has gone camping on his own, lost a friend, lost his dog, and finds himself the object of a killer's fear. Cory has figured out before everyone else who killed the man in Saxon's Lake. Out of concern for his father, Cory has investigated on his own and come to the conclusion that the killer is the beloved vet in town. However, Cory cannot imagine what the motive might be, so he keeps his suspicions to himself. Cory could not possibly know that the vet is a German soldier living in hiding. Cory is caught spying on the vet on the same day his father discovers the truth, leaving Cory a pawn in the killer's attempt to escape justice. Cory survives, thanks to his father's heroics, something that helps build a closer relationship between the two.

The events of 1964 each have a huge impact on Cory Mackenson. Learning that his father is human, learning that even best friends can die, learning what it means to be a man all help Cory to mature as a young man and step down the road to maturity. Cory takes each experience and learns from it, becoming a better person in the process. It is this fact that makes coming of age a theme of the novel.



Death

Death touches the plot of this novel in the very first chapter. In the first chapter, Cory and his father see a car fall into Saxon's Lake in which a man, who has been badly beaten, has been handcuffed naked to the steering wheel. This death will overshadow Cory's father for the majority of the novel, leaving him convinced that the dead man wants him to commit suicide and join him in the dark of the lake's depths. Cory's father becomes depressed, refuses to eat, and can no longer sleep. The dreams take over his every waking moment until he finds himself considering death as a good alternative to living this life.

Even as Cory is trying to solve the mystery of the dead man in the lake, he is touched by other deaths. Cory's dog, Rebel, is hit by a car one day while running with a pack of dogs in town. Cory is rushed to the vet where he is told Rebel is dying and should be put out of his misery. Cory falls on the floor and cries, begging for death to leave his dog alone. Surprisingly, Rebel recovers from his injuries, but he is cold and refuses to eat. It appears the dog has died, but he continues to function in the world of the living because of Cory's prayer. Cory spends as much time as he can with his dog, despite the awareness that Rebel is no longer the same. One night, Cory finds Rebel speaking with a boy who died several years ago. Cory realizes he is being selfish by holding on to his dog and he should let him go, to become the pet of this dead boy in whatever world they live in in death.

Before the year is over, Cory will experience one more death. Davy Ray, Cory's always skeptical friend, accidentally shoots himself while hunting in the woods with his father. Davy Ray's injuries are extensive, but he lives long enough for Cory to visit him in the hospital and tell him one last story. When Cory gets the news that Davy Ray is dead, he finds himself filled with questions he cannot find a satisfying answer to. Both his mother and pastor tell Cory to take a leap of faith, to believe Davy Ray is in a better place. Cory is only twelve and does not understand faith. However, this death has a huge impact on his life, making death a theme of the novel.

Racial Inequality

The novel is set in 1964, a time period in which tensions between whites and blacks in the south are still high. This novel is set in Zephyr Alabama, a small town along the Tecumseh River. Next to Zephyr is Bruton, another small town in which reside many of the black people who work in Zephyr. Bruton is closer to the river's edge, therefore it often floods when the dam up river floods. These people are poor, people who work hard and make small wages, leaving them destitute when the flood waters come. During a flood in 1964, several men in Zephyr refuse to help the people of Bruton even though stopping the flood waters there will protect Zephyr, because they did not feel it is their duty to help blacks. However, they change their minds when the son of the local bank owner threatens to tell his father about their lack of generosity.



There is a woman in Bruton called the Lady. The Lady is something of a leader in Bruton. Most of the white people in Zephyr believe the Lady uses voodoo magic to make bad things happen to them; therefore they are deeply afraid of her. As a result, they treat her with distance and a semblance of respect to protect them from her magic. However, any respect this woman gets is buried under the disdain of the whites who feel she attempts to live her life above her social station. The Lady ignores the protests of the white people and often appears at social events and gatherings that are traditionally for whites only.

The Lady spearheads a drive to create a museum of black history in Bruton. The Lady feels as though no one can change their future if they do not remember their past. A few days before the museum is to open, the Lady invites Cory and his mother to a reception in her honor. It is then that Cory sees the pictures of the little girls who die in the Birmingham Church bombing and knows that a couple of KKK members in Zephyr plan to bomb the museum opening. Cory helps them to find the bomb and stop the attempt. This is why racial inequality is a theme of this novel more than anything else because this episode represents the anger and prejudices that define the racial tensions of this time period.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The main character, Cory Mackenson, narrates the story, telling the main events of his twelfth year of life. Cory tells a well rounded story, including both things he was a witness to as well as events that took place out of his knowledge but of which he learned about later. These latter events Cory tells with something of an authorial voice that allows the reader to understand that the narrator is informing the reader of events in the present tense that he learned after the fact.

The point of view in this novel is first person, creating a connection between reader and main character that is unique to this point of view. However, this novel also includes a third person point of view told through the main character's eyes in something of an authorial voice. This is a unique change of viewpoint in this novel that allows the reader to see and understand events that take place out of the knowledge of the main character but are important to the developing plot. This point of view makes the continuity of the novel a little complicated, but it also presents a well rounded point of view that works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in Zephyr, Alabama near the Tecumseh River. Zephyr is a small town that is populated with people who work both at the paper mill up river and for the local dairy. The people all know one another and often are friendly with one another, sharing holidays and birthdays together as well as tragedies. Down river is Bruton, a small town that is populated by many of the black people who work in Zephyr as domestic and blue collar workers. Through the course of the novel, the main character befriends many of the residents of Bruton, overshadowing the border between the two towns that often separates his neighbors from the Bruton residents.

The setting of this novel is important in two ways. The first reason the setting of this novel is important is because it is a small town in 1964. The small town aspect of the setting is important because it creates a tension upon the discovery of a murdered man that might not be present if the setting were a larger city. The second reason the setting is important is because of the racial tension between the few bigoted people of Zephyr and the black people of Bruton. This tension creates a situation in which the notorious group the KKK forms a chapter in Zephyr and makes plans to bomb the opening of the new black history museum. If not for the setting of a small town in 1964, the racial tensions between the people of Zephyr and Bruton would not lead to the bombing that Cory Mackenson is able to prevent.



Language and Meaning

The novel contains language that is both simple and appropriate to the characters within the novel. The novel is set in 1964 in Alabama, therefore the characters tend to speak in a dialect that is common to that region. However, the writer does not attempt to manipulate the dialogue in such a way that causes the grammar to be confusing and difficult to read. There is slang in the novel and reference to many religious and regional words or phrases that may or may not be familiar to the reader, but many of these references are clearly explained in the text and do not pose any confusion for the reader.

The language of the novel is simple and easy for the reader to comprehend. The author remains loyal to his characters, having them speak and act in ways that are common to the area in which the novel is set. The language works with this plot because of its authenticity regarding the characters and the setting, and is simple enough that even the youngest reader can comprehend the action taking place within the plot.

Structure

The novel is separated into five parts that each includes several named and numbered chapters. Each chapter is more than ten pages long and is often separated by spaces that allow the reader to know when a change in scene or setting is about to take place. The novel is told in both exposition and dialogue. In fact, much of the novel is told as though a young man is telling a story about his childhood, telling rather than showing many of the scenes that were important to him in the summer of his twelfth year.

The novel includes multiple story lines, some integral to the main plot and others that appear to have no importance other than their entertainment value until the end of the novel when many of these story lines come together in the final climax of the novel. The main plot follows the investigation of one young boy into the mysterious death of a stranger whom his father saw as his car sank into Saxon's Lake. This investigation often takes a back burner to the other events in the boy's life, including the death of his dog, his best friend, and his own close brush with death. However, in the end the investigation reveals all, both to the boy and his hometown, concluding the novel in a highly satisfaction climax.



Quotes

"But Zephyr was a magic place." Pg. 3.

"Maybe he was crazy. Maybe crazy is what they call anybody who's got magic in them after they're no longer a child." Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 1, Before the Sun, pg. 9.

"On the bottom of my left Ked was a small green feather." Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 1, Before the Sun, pg. 20.

"And I couldn't help but wonder, as well, if some of Granddaddy Jaybird's cowardice might be inside me, too." Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 4, Wasps at Easter, pg. 55.

"He was stark naked. Not a stitch on him." Part 1, The Shades of Spring: Chapter 6, Old Moses Comes to Call, pg. 70.

"I righted the bike, thanking whatever angel had been riding on my shoulder, and as I ran my fingers over the dented fender I saw the eye in the headlamp." Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 3, A Boy and a Ball, pg. 121.

"There is nothing more frightening or exciting than a blank piece of paper." Part 2, Summer of Devils and Angels: Chapter 7, My Camping Trip, pg. 173.

"I had to turn around. Last time I'd resisted, she'd smeared saliva on the back of my neck in the shape of a heart." Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 1, Green-Feathered Hat, pg. 209.

"I had always wondered what Reverend Lovoy meant when he talked about 'grace.' I understood it now. It was being able to give up something that it broke your heart to lose, and be happy about it." Part 3, Burning Autumn: Chapter 4, The Wrath of Five Thunders, pg. 259.

"The solitary traveler has left this world. He will not pass this way again." Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 1, A Solitary Traveler, pg. 343.

"It was time to go see the Lady." Part 4, Winter's Cold Truth: Chapter 5, Sixteen Drops of Blood, pg. 393.

"And magic has a strong, strong heart." Part 5, Zephyr as It Is, pg. 438.



Topics for Discussion

Who is Cory Mackenson? Why does he introduce the book as he does? Why does he explain how he can tell the reader things he could not possibly have known? Why does he wrap up the story by returning to Zephyr as a young man? What has changed in Zephyr? How does this impact the reader's comprehension of the plot? What does Cory find still exists in Zephyr? Why does this surprise him?

What does Tom Mackenson see when the car goes into the water? What does he see in the car? How does he react? Why does the sheriff decide not to pursue the case? Who could have killed the man? Why does this murder upset Tom so much? Why does Tom begin having nightmares? What does he believe he hears the dead man saying? What is he really saying? Why does learning these words are not meant for him make such a difference for Tom?

Who is the Lady? Why does she dump meat into the river every spring? What is she feeding? For what reason? How does this introduction to the Lady affect the reader's impressions of her? Why do Cory and his mother go to see the Lady? Why does the Lady want to see Tom? Why does Tom refuse to go see the Lady? Is he afraid of her? Why or why not? How does the Lady help Tom?

Who is Davy Ray? Why does he always question the details of the stories that Cory tells his friends? Why does he always tease Ben? Why does Davy Ray free the tyrannosaurus? Why does Davy Ray not believe Snowdown exists? How does he finally learn he does? What does he say to Cory about seeing Snowdown? How does Davy Ray get injured? Why does he die? How does this death affect Cory?

Who is Rebel? What does he mean to Cory? How is he injured? What does Cory do when he learns Rebel is injured? Why does Cory believe he made the wrong choice about Rebel? Who does Cory see talking to Rebel? Why does Cory decide to have Rebel put down? Is this the right choice? Explain.

What is Rocket? Where does Cory get Rocket? What does Cory see in Rocket's light? What magic does Cory believe Rocket has? Does he? How does Rocket save Cory's life on at least one occasion? What does this say about Rocket? What does this say about being a child? Is there really a magic that only children are aware of? What does this say about Cory both as a child and as an adult?

Why does Cory have the same dream over and over again? Where does Cory see the faces of the girls who died in a church bombing in Birmingham? Why do the girls keep coming to Cory? Are these dreams a part of Cory's imagination or a premonition? How do these dreams compare to the dreams that Tom Mackenson is having? Why does the Lady know about Tom's dreams? What does this say about the Lady?