

Breakfast of Champions Study Guide

Breakfast of Champions by Kurt Vonnegut

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Plot Summary

Kilgore Trout is a widely published, but unknown writer who is invited to deliver a keynote address at a local arts festival in distant Midland City. Dwayne Hoover is a wealthy businessman who owns much of Midland City. Unfortunately Dwayne is mentally unstable and is undergoing a gradual mental collapse. Kilgore arrives in Midland City and, by happenstance, piques the interest of Dwayne. A confused Dwayne demands a message from Kilgore, who hands over a copy of his novel. Dwayne reads the novel, which purports to be a message from the Creator of the Universe explaining that the reader - in this case Dwayne - is the only individual in the universe with free will. Everyone else is a robot. Dwayne believes the novel to be factual and immediately goes on a violent rampage, severely beating his son, his lover, and nine other people before being taken into custody.

Kilgore has published dozens of novels and scores of short stories, but remains entirely unknown. His fiction has generally been used as filler material to pad the length of pornographic books and magazines. Strangely, Kilgore receives an unlikely invitation to speak at the Midland City arts festival. Kilgore decides to speak at the festival to represent unknown, failed and desperate writers. He intends to deliver a stinging rebuke full of bitter commentary to what he imagines will be a crowd of effete patrons of the arts. Using the funds advanced to him by the festival organizer, Kilgore sets out on a long trek to the Mid-West. Kilgore hitchhikes across the country to save money. He tries to sleep in an adult film theater to avoid renting a hotel room, but he is evicted in the early morning hours when the theater closes. Kilgore is then robbed and beat up and ends up spending the night in police custody. Nearly completely destitute, he continues his westward voyage.

Meanwhile Dwayne Hoover, an affluent citizen of Midland City, suffers the final stages of a mental breakdown. Dwayne's adult son has disappointed him and his wife's suicide has left him a widower. He runs an automobile dealership, owns an interest in most Midland City businesses and carries on a discreet monogamous affair with his secretary. But he also continues to go gradually insane due to a chemical imbalance, even as other Midland City residents approach him for various forms of financial assistance. Dwayne moves through Midland City and observes or recalls many trivial details about his earlier life.

After a long trip full of trivial details, Kilgore eventually reaches Midland City and enters a hotel lounge where he reviews some arts festival registration materials. By strange coincidence, nearly every other character presented in the novel is simultaneously either inside the same hotel lounge or at least nearby. Dwayne sits in the same lounge, mesmerized by Kilgore's shirt, which glows under the lounge's fluorescent lights. Dwayne suddenly lurches to his feet and demands a message from Kilgore. Kilgore furnishes a copy of one of his novels and Dwayne eagerly and quickly reads the book. Dwayne interprets the book to mean that he, Dwayne, is the only thinking, free-willed being in the universe. Everyone else is simply a robot programmed for Dwayne's

amusement. He immediately sets out on a violent rampage, severely beating his son, his lover, and nine other characters.



Preface

Preface Summary

Kilgore Trout is a widely published, but unknown writer who is invited to deliver a keynote address at a local arts festival in distant Midland City. Dwayne Hoover is a wealthy businessman who owns much of Midland City. Unfortunately Dwayne is mentally unstable and is undergoing a gradual mental collapse. Kilgore arrives in Midland City and, by happenstance, piques the interest of Dwayne. A confused Dwayne demands a message from Kilgore, who hands over a copy of his novel. Dwayne reads the novel, which purports to be a message from the Creator of the Universe explaining that the reader - in this case Dwayne - is the only individual in the universe with free will. Everyone else is a robot. Dwayne believes the novel to be factual and immediately goes on a violent rampage, severely beating his son, his lover, and nine other people before being taken into custody.

The narrator's early life and philosophy were heavily influenced by Phoebe Hurty, an older woman with atypical views. As a child the narrator was aware of, and disturbed by, several forms of disease, including the *locomotor ataxia* of syphilitics and pronounced neck goiters. These diseases would shape the narrator's worldview that humans are robotic and amorphous. The narrator feels that the subsequent novel is a poor work and feels like it was written by somebody named Philboyd Studge. Nevertheless, the book is the narrator's fiftieth birthday present to himself and, as such, serves as a sort of dumping ground for various unrelated ideas.

Preface Analysis

The preface, although part of the work of fiction, is presented as if it were an actual non-fictional preface. The narrator signs his name 'Philboyd Studge' but notes that such is not his actual name. The narrator also claims to be the actual author of the text. This somewhat typical meta-fictional reference is often interpreted to indicate that the novel is largely autobiographical in nature, and Kilgore Trout is often viewed as the real author's fictionalized self-representation, apart from the narrator.

The preface purports to inform the reader of various 'real-world' facts that are external to, but explanatory of, the narrative construction. For example, the jerking movements of syphilitics is claimed to be the basis for the narrative contention in Kilgore Trout's novel-within-the-novel *Now It Can Be Told* that all human beings, save one, are in fact machines. The fact that these particular random facts are presented as a 'preface' seems to indicate they should somehow be highly significant to the subsequent narrative development. While this does present several interesting topics for further discussion, the fact remains that the preface is essentially a collection of random facts and statements. They do not contribute to the narrative development in a more meaningful way than do later random facts and statements.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Kilgore Trout is a widely published, but literally unknown science fiction writer who lives in Cohoes, New York, during 1972 and makes his living by installing aluminum window frames. Kilgore has published countless manuscripts and novels, principally as filler material for pornographic magazines and books. He lives in America and learned in school that America was discovered in 1492, established and maintained through superior weaponry, and practiced slavery. Kilgore is dirt poor and thinks that Americans are greedy.

Dwayne Hoover is a car salesman in Midland City. He is fabulously wealthy and is largely a self-made man. Dwayne owns huge portions of Midland City and owns all or parts of most of the city's businesses. Dwayne, however, is chemically imbalanced and is slowly going insane. One day Dwayne will read a novel by Kilgore Trout which will convince Dwayne that he is the only thinking person on the planet who has free will.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the two principle protagonists of the novel - Kilgore Trout, an aging and unsuccessful science fiction writer, and Dwayne Hoover, a wealthy but disturbed businessman. The chapter, replete with amusing amateurish illustrations, sets a sarcastic and playful tone that will continue throughout the remainder of the narrative. The chapter also introduces the novel's unnamed narrator, who is reliable and omniscient.

The focus on Kilgore's ridiculous writing habits - for example sending away his only copy of a manuscript with no return envelope - is amusing and also an interesting meta-fictional element. The additional use of paragraph marks and other unusual typography notifies the reader that this novel is atypical in construction. The chapter starts the principle timeline of the novel during 1972, although the narrator claims to have written the novel sometime after Kilgore's death in 1981 (the novel was originally published in 1973).



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Dwayne is a widower who has an unusually tight bond with his pet dog, a crippled Labrador named Sparky. Dwayne employs an African-American house servant named Lottie Davis.

Kilgore has a pet parakeet named Bill. Kilgore allows himself to believe that mirrors are actually thin spots between alternative realities, and he refers to mirrors as 'leaks'. Kilgore is a fairly curmudgeonly man, aged sixty-five. One of his science fiction novels, *Plague on Wheels*, tells the story of a society of living automobiles who poison their own atmosphere and destroy their own culture before becoming extinct. Like virtually all of Kilgore's early works, the book was published as filler material in a volume that featured explicit pornography entirely unrelated to the text.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Dwayne's character is further established as an affluent, but increasingly deranged man. The mental image of Dwayne rolling around on the floor with his crippled pet dog is simultaneously funny and pathetic. Kilgore's relationship with his pet, the parakeet Bill, is entirely different. Kilgore keeps the bird as an early-warning device to alert him to atmospheric pollutants, and interacts with the bird primarily by complaining to it. Kilgore's publications, apparently all unpaid, are noted as being extensive but completely unknown.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Kilgore is startled to one day receive a fan letter from one Eliot Rosewater. Rosewater praises *Plague on Wheels* as a masterpiece; but his poor handwriting leads Kilgore to mistakenly decide he is just a child. Several days later Kilgore is astounded to receive a letter from Fred T. Barry inviting Kilgore to appear as a keynote speaker at an upcoming arts festival to be held in Midland City at the Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts. The letter states that Eliot Rosewater has recommended Kilgore, and a one-thousand-dollar check is enclosed to help defray travel expenses. Kilgore decides to go so he can represent the dark side and the failure of the arts. He finds his old tuxedo, now covered in mold, and sets off on a trip to Midland City.

Chapter 3 Analysis

At first Kilgore is reluctant to address the festival. However, he notices the logo for the festival - two theatrical masks, one smiling and one crying. Kilgore decides he would be able to adequately represent the crying mask and additionally wants to keep the money. He worries, however, that he does not own a single piece of his own published fiction.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Dwayne's wife committed suicide. His biological parents abandoned him early on and his adoptive parents had twins of their own after his adoption. Dwayne continues to go crazy and manifests this by singing all the time. Dwayne travels to his automobile dealership and talks to several of his employees. Francine Pefko is his secretary of many years. Harry LeSabre has been Dwayne's friend and number-one salesperson for nearly twenty years. Harry is a secret transvestite and lives in fear of being discovered and legally prosecuted. Vernon Garr is a mechanic who has also been a long-term associate of Dwayne. After some pleasant and typical conversations Harry mentions something offhand about adoption and Dwayne flies into a rage. He berates Harry and accuses him of always dressing like a mortician.

Later that evening Dwayne goes home and contemplates suicide. He fondles his .38 caliber revolver, but instead of shooting himself instead shoots up his bathroom. He then goes out for a drive and crashes his car, ending up in a vacant lot which he happens to also own.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Dwayne's history as a businessman is detailed in an amusing manner - the three characters mentioned have all been Dwayne's associates and confidants for around two decades. Harry is nearly always Dwayne's best salesperson and considers himself to be a personal friend of Dwayne. Thus he is personally affronted by Dwayne's vituperative commentary on his proper, but staid wardrobe. Harry initially believes that Dwayne has somehow found out that he Harry is a transvestite and assumes that Dwayne's commentary on his clothing is a veiled reference. In fact, Harry is mistaken. Dwayne is just going slowly crazy.

The novel notes the composition of Dwayne's ammunition's propellant as "charcoal, potassium nitrate and sulphur" (pp. 50-51), which is unusual. That composition would indicate not gunpowder, but rather black powder: a propellant that was not much used for metallic-cased ammunition manufacture since c. 1900. The reference to black powder is either a literary mistake, or Dwayne is using some notably peculiar ammunition.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Kilgore makes his way to New York City where, he travels through numerous adult book stores searching for some of his published work. He finds some books and a magazine with his stories and then goes to a pornographic movie house, where he intends to spend the night because it is cheaper than renting a hotel room.

As he watches pornographic films he amuses himself by thinking about the sassy speech he plans to deliver to the Midland City arts festival attendees. He also thinks up the plot of a science fiction novel set on a planet where the only food is coal-based derivatives. That planet is infested with a plague of pornography, but their pornography features people eating real food, with close-up views of their mouths chewing up and swallowing fruit and carelessly discarding left-over edibles.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Kilgore unknowingly sets himself up for a very disagreeable evening by refusing to part with some of his travel allowance. The image of the unknown writer perusing hard-core pornography in search of something of literary value is indeed ridiculous and compelling.

The stories that Kilgore finds are contained in books and magazines that feature explicit images of sexual encounters that are completely unrelated to the science fiction stories themselves. Kilgore's transformation of sexual pornography into food pornography is a concise, but compelling statement on the nature of illicit desire.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Dwayne recalls that his deceased wife, Celia, had committed suicide by eating Dr?no, a powerful solvent that dissolved her from the inside.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Although Dwayne has been enormously successful in business, it becomes apparent that his personal life has not been all that one could hope for. Whether Dwayne contributed to his personal problems remains to be revealed, of course. Dwayne continues to go crazy due to a chemical imbalance.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Kilgore uses the restroom and sees a question scrawled on the wall, which inquires about the meaning of life. Kilgore decides that the meaning of life is to act as the eyes, ears, and conscious of the creator. Kilgore then starts to imagine he is experiencing important things and tries to 'beam' his thoughts to the creator. He returns from the restroom to discover that the adult theater is closing for the night. The manager insists that Kilgore leave the building.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Kilgore reads a question on a bathroom wall and actually contemplates the question and forms an answer. His answer is insightful, but Kilgore interprets it in a particularly and characteristically bizarre fashion - he assumes his answer is literal and thereafter he spends a few hours trying to communicate with the creator. Instead of seeking deeper meaning or truth, Kilgore tries to tell the creator about the carpet in the theater.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Kilgore exits the theater and walks along 42nd street in the early morning. A giddy prostitute propositions him. He walks along the street amidst the other trash and feels vaguely uneasy. He notices a car is following him. He then wakes up in an alleyway and discovers he has been robbed, raped, and beaten up. The police pick him up assuming he is a vagrant trying to cause a public disturbance. He spends the remainder of the night at the police station; and one of his offhand comments to the police is picked up by the newspaper, eventually causing a panic as the citizens of New York City are led to believe a new crime wave is imminent.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Kilgore's false economy of not renting a hotel room becomes painfully obvious and he loses all of his money, save a hidden ten dollar bill. He doesn't remember anything about his attackers. His offhand remark is picked up and printed in a yellow journal newspaper and causes a scare. Later a gang seizes upon his remarks and makes them real, but this all happens without Kilgore's knowledge.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Cyprian Ukwende, a black Indaro physician from Nigeria, is staying at the Midland City Holiday Inn. He is newly employed by the local hospital and has not yet found a permanent home. Dwayne enters the hotel - he owns part of the Holiday Inn but the clerk doesn't recognize him. Dwayne stands in line behind Cyprian at the clerk's desk and both men check into the hotel. Dwayne has decided to sleep in the hotel for a change.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The clerk of the hotel is newly employed and does not recognize Dwayne, who owns most of the business. Dwayne checks in like a normal customer and apologizes for not knowing his automobile's license plate number.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Kilgore is released from the police station and wanders down some streets until he catches a ride in a commercial truck. The truck driver talks about the need for conservation of natural resources as they drive through the poisoned swamps of New Jersey. Kilgore disagrees and formulates a position that being a conservationist is actually an atheist position because God frequently uses natural disasters to destroy huge amounts of pristine wilderness. Later in the day Kilgore and the driver eat lunch at a diner and Kilgore watches an 'idiot' eat a huge lunch. After lunch Kilgore reads the sides of trucks as they drive by.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Kilgore catches a ride by hitchhiking. He has to stay on the cab floor of the truck until leaving New York State so avoid being fined - picking up hitchhikers is illegal in the State. The driver tells Kilgore his name repeatedly, but Kilgore forgets it immediately. Kilgore and the driver will spend the next several chapters in each other's company driving down the Eastern Seaboard. Comically, this day is Kilgore's birthday.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Dwayne wakes up and eats breakfast in the hotel restaurant. He sits at a table next to Cyprian. Cyprian eats breakfast and thinks about how horny he has become. Dwayne leaves the hotel feeling completely normal but quickly resumes his crazy behavior once outside. He walks to his automobile dealership, where a young black man named Wayne Hoobler accosts him. Wayne has just been released from prison and asks for a job; but Dwayne assumes he is hallucinating the young man, and tells him no. Dwayne then enters the dealership and discovers they are having a 'Hawaiian Days' promotion, which confuses him. Harry presents himself to Dwayne - Harry is wearing a colorful and outlandish Hawaiian Days costume. Dwayne assumes he is hallucinating and completely ignores Harry who is devastated.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Wayne Hoobler has spent the last several years in prison reading the advertisements of Dwayne's automobile dealership. Wayne has convinced himself that his future lies with employment by Dwayne and has marked several years imagining working at Dwayne's automobile dealership. He comments that since their names - Dwayne Hoover and Wayne Hoobler - are so similar, there must be some sort of connection. His over-eager antics catch Dwayne off guard and Dwayne rapidly concludes that Wayne is a hallucination, brushing him aside by claiming that he is not Dwayne. He likewise assumes that Harry's freakish costume is also a hallucination and chooses to completely ignore it.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Kilgore and the driver arrive in Philadelphia on the day after Veterans Day. Kilgore muses that the world is exactly as it should be. Kilgore and the driver chat as they travel, talking about friends, sex, aluminum siding, and other painful minutia. Kilgore tells the driver that he has been married three times and has one adult son, whereabouts currently unknown.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Kilgore's road trip continues to Philadelphia. His intermittent discussion with the truck driver is humorous but also painfully boring. For example, the driver asks him to offer his opinion on aluminum siding versus concrete poured to mimic natural stone siding. Kilgore feigns partial interest as the miles roll by. The driver has the idea that he has no friends because he is always on the move and, therefore, he assures Kilgore that he, Kilgore, must have lots of friends because he lives in one place without traveling often.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Dwayne sees Harry in his funky costume and completely ignores him throughout the day. Harry is devastated and once again mistakenly concludes that Dwayne somehow knows about his transvestite behavior.

Kyle and Lyle Hoover arrive and visit Dwayne. They are Dwayne's younger twin brothers. Although Dwayne was adopted, Kyle and Lyle are the biological children of Dwayne's parents. Kyle, Lyle, and Dwayne are the owners of the Sacred Miracle Cave, a local cave that is a tourist attraction. Kyle and Lyle supervise daily activities at the cave. They note that the cave has been filling up with industrial waste, which bubbles into a froth. The bubbles are roughly the size of ping-pong balls and the bubbles dry out into hard shells which are accumulating in the cave. Kyle and Lyle used their shotguns to attempt to eradicate the hard bubbles, but when the bubbles burst they released a horrific stink that drove everyone out of the cave.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 introduces Kyle and Lyle Hoover, two minor characters in the novel. They are identical twins and fairly short on intelligence. Dwayne's adoptive parents were unable to conceive and therefore adopted Dwayne. Shortly thereafter they did conceive and had twin boys. Dwayne obviously feels some conflict with this occurrence. The significant development of the chapter involves the introduction of the Sacred Miracle Cave, a local tourist trap said to be historically significant in several ways. In fact the cave is recently discovered and has no appreciable significance. The cave will become significant later in the narrative.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Kilgore continues on his journey and travels through West Virginia, where he sees a countryside destroyed by coal mining. Kilgore and the truck driver talk about various weird things including the local practice of snake handling. Kilgore thinks about steam power, coal, and coal mining. The company that performed most of the destructive coal mining in this part of the State was founded by Eliot Rosewater's ancestors, and is responsible for most of Eliot's considerable estate.

The truck driver recalls reading one bad novel and describes the plot. In the novel a roulette wheel randomly determines the value of art. Most art is assigned to the trash heap, while some rare pieces are randomly determined to be great works of art. The great art pieces enjoy huge popularity and sale for incredible sums. Eventually the roulette wheel is discovered to be rigged. Kilgore realizes the truck driver is describing one of his - Kilgore's - novels and is apprehensive about actually meeting a reader. Kilgore remains anonymous.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Kilgore continues his Western journey to a distant and, to him, strange destination. The novel introduces several more obscure coincidences that, although humorous, are fairly irrelevant to the narrative development. For example, the narrator states that Kilgore's single patron, Eliot Rosewater, owes his considerable personal fortune to strip mining performed in West Virginia by his ancestors. Kilgore views the environmental destruction *en route* to meeting Eliot. Kilgore also meets a reader - his first ever - who describes one of Kilgore's novels and states that it was not particularly enjoyable.

The concept of the novel, however, is ironic and entertaining. Art is appraised by a randomizing device and society accepts the practice. When the practice turns out to be rigged, society revolts at the idea that their artistic estimation has been established by something other than randomness. This is allegorical within the narrative of the process that led Kilgore to be selected as a speaker for an arts festival.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Dwayne continues to teeter on the edge of sanity. He develops a mild case of echolalia and wanders through town repeating the last words of whatever he hears. He eats lunch at a hamburger restaurant he owns. His waitress is a seventeen-year-old girl named Patty Keene. Patty has a large amount of medical debt pending collections from her father's recent death by cancer. She recognizes Dwayne and believes that he is the solution to her financial troubles and therefore she flirts with him hoping to start up a relationship. Dwayne is oblivious to her advances.

Dwayne then returns to his office where the echolalia subsides. He thumbs through some pornography and becomes aroused. He calls Francine Pefko on the office telephone and asks her to accompany him to a motel in a neighboring city. Francine arranges to have her work position covered by a fellow employee and accompanies Dwayne to the motel where they have sex. After having sex they discuss the electric chair and executions. Francine then remarks that the area they are in would be a good location for a fried chicken restaurant. Dwayne assumes she is asking him to buy her a franchise and becomes angry and rages at her. He later apologizes and they discuss the destructive testing methodologies used by automobile manufacturers.

Meanwhile Harry is nearing a nervous collapse and has returned home for the day. His wife Grace is fed up with Midland, angry with Dwayne and suggests that Harry liquidate all of his considerable stock holdings. With their money, she suggests they retire and move to Maui. Harry agrees and the couple will subsequently proceed as described. Elsewhere, Kilgore has hitched another ride with a traveling salesman and continues on his westward trek.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Chapter 15 further establishes the central conflict of the novel - Wayne's insane rampage. It heavily foreshadows the coming conflict by noting that Wayne will soon savagely attack Francine because of Kilgore's writings and Wayne's incipient insanity. This event is indeed heavily predicted throughout the opening chapters of the novel, and is therefore hardly surprising when it finally does occur. This chapter does, however, create the intimate relationship between Wayne and Francine, which will make his subsequent behavior all the more incredible. Wayne clearly has an emotional attachment with Francine. A teenage girl first propositions him, but he then turns to Francine for sexual intercourse and emotional support. Francine is portrayed as the consummate helpmate, focusing on Wayne rather than her own needs.

The chapter also introduces the risible and ridiculous habit of stating the penis length and girth of all male characters mentioned, as well as stating the hip-waist-bust



measurements of all female characters mentioned. We therefore know that Francine is physically attractive in the conventional sense and that Wayne has a very large penis. Ironically, Wayne's sexual experience with women is severely limited and Francine's sexual experiences with men are also limited. Thus Wayne enjoys having a large penis without even knowing he is above average, and Francine enjoys Wayne's large penis without even knowing it is bigger than usual.

Although it is irrelevant to the narrative it would be possible to rank nearly all of the male characters' penis lengths by utilizing the litany of physical measurements given in this chapter. It is funny to note that Kilgore's penis is also considerably larger than the norm and that the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, and young Patty Keene has a nearly idealized figure, which should earn her the attention of most men, if not Wayne Hoover.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Only a few hours out of Midland City, Kilgore rides along in silence and skims through *Now It Can Be Told*. The novel is written as a lengthy letter from the creator of the universe to the reader. The novel develops the theme that all of existence is a deterministic machine and that free will does not exist - except for the reader. Even the creator of the universe is a pre-programmed machine. But the reader can do whatever the reader desires, spontaneously, for no reason or any reason. The reader's behaviors even mystify the creator of the universe.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Kilgore's novel is once again summarized and noted as the cause for Dwayne's future rampage. Presumably, Dwayne will assume he is the only intelligent being in the universe once he is exposed to Kilgore's novel plot.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Bunny Hoover, Dwayne's homosexual son, dresses for work. Bunny is pale, thin to the point of gaunt, and horribly alone. He works as a pianist in a hotel lounge and spends his hours playing piano while his mind is in a transcendental trance. Bunny recalls that at the age of ten he told Dwayne that he wanted to be a woman. Dwayne responded by shipping Bunny to a military academy. Bunny performed exceptionally well at the school but now lives on skid row. The narrator notes that both Bunny's mother, Celia, and the narrator's own mother were crazy.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Bunny's background is lightly explained in Chapter 17. Although he excelled at military school, his current life appears fairly meaningless and he is totally alone. While Bunny plays piano his mind wanders through the cosmos. The narrator makes another narrative intrusion - a technique that becomes increasingly prevalent throughout the remainder of the novel. This particular meta-fictional device will develop into one of the prevalent themes of the novel.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Bunny plays piano in the hotel lounge, while Dwayne sits and sips a martini in the same lounge. The two men do not speak to each other. Meanwhile Francine catches up on the work she missed during the day and Wayne loiters around with nowhere to go. Meanwhile the narrator sits in the same lounge as Bunny and Dwayne. The narrator wears mirrored sunglasses and looks around at the scene he has created.

Elsewhere, Kilgore sits as a passenger in rush hour traffic leading into Midland City. Eventually the traffic comes to a complete halt. Kilgore eventually gets out of the car, and walks toward the hotel where he is staying. On the way he sees a fatal automobile accident that has caused traffic to come to a gridlock.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Chapter 18 continues to develop the narrative tension that has been building since virtually the first chapter of the novel. Kilgore is approaching his fateful, or at least predicted, meeting with Dwayne. Meanwhile several other significant characters arrive in close proximity, all under the watchful but hidden eyes of the narrator. Clearly, significant plot developments are about to happen. Yet do not. The playful pace of narrative development continues.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

A cook at the hotel lounge where Bunny, Dwayne, the narrator, and other characters are drinking happens to see Wayne loitering about. The cook, himself an ex-convict, realizes that Wayne has nowhere to go and nothing to do, so he invites him inside the hotel, serves him a steak, and sits him in front of a television. The cook nods to a small peephole drilled in the wall and tells him to look through it. Wayne looks through the peephole into the lounge where Dwayne, the narrator, and others are assembled.

Inside the lounge Rabo Karabekian, Beatrice Keedlser, and Bonnie MacMahon are having a prolonged conversation. Rabo is a minimalist artist who has just sold a vastly over-priced painting to Midland City. Beatrice is a novelist who writes typical novels. Bonnie is a waitress in the lounge. Whenever Bonnie serves a martini she announces her action by saying 'Breakfast of Champions' to the patron. Rabo insists that Midland City must have notable events worthy of novelizing; but Beatrice, a native, argues it does not. To illustrate his point, Rabo indicates Dwayne in an offhand way and asks, "What is the life story of that man?" (p. 215). Bonnie responds by telling Rabo about Dwayne's dog Sparky. Beatrice agrees that Sparky would indeed be a notable character.

Bonnie then takes offense at a deliberately offensive remark Rabo makes and criticizes Rabo's recent painting - a stripe of color on a green background. Rabo stands up and loudly defends his painting, claiming that it represents all of reality; the bright stripe is a single intellect. The narrator bluntly states as a narrative act that Rabo's unanticipated speech is the surprising spiritual climax of the novel. The narrator then delivers a statement of narrative intent, which claims that art should be chaos emerged from real life rather than false order extracted from chaos.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Wayne Hoobler unwittingly becomes the witness of a series of nearly pointless actions within the lounge occupied by many of the novel's principle characters. Unfortunately, Wayne is particularly stupid and does not realize that he is not witnessing anything extraordinary. The reader is also in Wayne's situation; both acting as voyeurs, and, like Wayne, the reader is frequently mystified by some of the passages experienced in the narrative.

The prolonged characterization of Rabo, Beatrice, and Bonnie initially seems out of place, as is the narrative attention to their banal conversation about nothing. In fact, however, the scene rather transparently sets up the narrator's claim that all characters have equal significance in worthy works of art, just as all details possess equal weight. In other words, Bonnie is as important in the narrative as Kilgore, and the length of the

cook's penis is as significant as the names of various trucking companies. The narrator proposes that nothing in the novel, or in any novel, should be construed as more significant than any other detail presented in the novel.

This pretense has been, of course, carefully designed throughout the preceding chapters, which are full of seemingly random statements purported to be factual. Nevertheless the narrator picks on one event - Rabo's speech - and indicates that it forms the central spiritual climax of the novel. This is of course contradictory to the narrator's statement, because if Rabo's speech is no more significant than Grace LeSabre's statements to her husband about Dwayne's intellect, then it is implausible that Rabo's speech alone should be identified as the spiritual climax of the novel. Either the narrator is unreliable or the narrative has essentially no meaning. This meta-fictional device is simultaneously engaging and spurious. After all, the novel is a novel regardless of what the putative narrator claims.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Kilgore wades through a polluted stream, which is incidentally the same flow that is polluting the Sacred Miracle Cave. He then walks a short distance to the hotel, which also houses the lounge occupied by most of the novel's other characters. Incredibly, the desk clerk not only recognizes Kilgore, but has read dozens of his novels and stories. Kilgore is devastated to not be anonymous. The exuberant desk clerk enthuses about Kilgore's work and predicts that Kilgore's presence will change Midland City by shocking it from complacency. When Kilgore claims his message is a negative one, the desk clerk counters by claiming that Kilgore has returned from the negative life.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Kilgore continues to move inexorably toward the fatal moment when he will poison Dwayne's disturbed mind. In yet another seemingly meaningless coincidence, Kilgore wades through the very pollution that emanates from the factory where Francine's deceased husband had once worked. It is the same pollution that is destroying the Sacred Miracle Cave. The pollution is being released because of the criminal activities of the same organization that built Dwayne's house.

The hotel desk clerk that greets Kilgore is the relative of the leaders of the criminal organization. The truck, involved in the automobile accident that forced Dwayne to walk, carried goods produced in the prison that recently discharged Wayne. All of these amazing coincidences are, of course, meaningless to the narrative construction. They seemingly create order from the chaos of unrelated and insignificant events, contrary to the narrator's statements in Chapter 19. Yet the order that is created is entirely meaningless. Finally the most improbable fact of all is the desk clerk's enthusiastic familiarity with Kilgore's work.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Kilgore finally enters the cocktail lounge where the narrator, Dwayne, and others are congregated. Rabo stands at the piano surrounded by a group of adoring sycophants. Now that he has explained his art they find him irresistible. Wayne stops watching through the peephole and goes outside. Dwayne sinks deeper into confusion and Kilgore realizes the narrator is watching him. Kilgore has imagined, from time to time, that he actually is a character in someone else's novel and he seems to instinctively realize the narrator when he sees him. The narrator makes Kilgore nervous.

Chapter 21 Analysis

All of the principle characters are now in close proximity to each other. In fact, the narrator mentions that Kilgore, Dwayne, and the narrator occupy positions such that they form the points of an isosceles triangle. The situation Rabo finds himself in is, of course, sarcastically humorous. Initially he was hated by nearly everyone in the town because they felt his painting, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, was an over-priced and unintelligible outrage. Once he publicly explains its meaning the people in the lounge view it as a triumphant painting and feel that Rabo is an enjoyable and insightful person.

The narrator notes that of all the characters he created in the novel, only Kilgore is perverse and curious enough to have realized that he is merely a character and not a real person. This presents a 'dream-within-a-dream' construction, as Kilgore suspects he is a fictional character of a fictional narrator while he simultaneously presents a novel in which he claims that in fact every fictional character in the fictional world, save one, is a pre-programmed robot.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

The narrator decides to speed up the pace of the novel by eliminating irrelevant details and tedious examinations of unrelated facts. The narrator notes that Kilgore couldn't have made the trip in the narrative timeline allotted, but fixing this error would be too complicated and thus it will be ignored. Suddenly Dwayne lurches to his feet and walks to Kilgore. He digs his chin into Kilgore's shoulder and demands that Kilgore deliver a message to him. Dwayne snatches *Now It Can Be Told* from Kilgore's table. In order to get Dwayne to step off, Kilgore states that the novel is in fact the message. Dwayne, an accomplished speed reader, takes the novel and begins to read.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The meeting between Kilgore and Dwayne, which was foretold on the first page of Chapter 1, finally takes place. In most ways the meeting itself is anti-climactic and insignificant. Dwayne accosts Kilgore because Kilgore's shirt happens to fluoresce brightly under the lounge lights. Kilgore is repulsed by Dwayne's physical contact. Dwayne grabs Kilgore's novel, backs away from Kilgore, and begins to rapidly read the book. Of significance to the narrative construction is the narrator's meta-fictional declaration that the pace of the novel has bogged down due to various insignificant details and events that have been presented *ad nauseum*.

The narrator will henceforth dispense with meaningless trivia and focus on the salient narrative developments. This contrasts completely with the narrator's discussion in Chapter 19. Originally the narrator had claimed that all characters were of equal significance in the novel. This is no longer the case, however. For example in Chapter 24 several newly-introduced characters will simply be referred to by race and gender. The narrator therefore declares the subsequent action of the novel to be significant while discarding the significance of the initial twenty-one chapters. It should be noted, however, that Chapter 24 also introduces several completely insignificant characters for no apparent reason, and develops the characters at some length.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Dwayne, an accomplished speed reader, rapidly completes the book. The book convinces him that he is, indeed, the only freethinking organism in the entire Universe, and believes that everyone else, living or dead, is simply a pre-programmed robot. Dwayne then goes on a psychotic rampage of violence. He first crosses the lounge to his son Bunny and smashes his face repeatedly against the piano. He assaults a few other lounge patrons and then runs outside where he attempts to assault Wayne, who is once again loitering in the parking lot. Wayne is quite good at avoiding Dwayne's punches, however, and eventually Dwayne gives up trying to hit him. Instead, he delivers a brief observation and a fragmented lecture on putatively proper race relations and slavery.

Chapter 23 Analysis

The long-foretold rampage of Dwayne finally comes to pass in Chapter 23. As predicted since Chapter 1, Dwayne's rampage is senseless and is simply the result of a chemical imbalance. Dwayne just goes crazy and becomes violent. His assault on Bunny, his son, is particularly vicious. Even though Bunny could have used his combat training to completely avoid his father, he did not. He instead deliberately slips into a transcendental trance and allows his father to repeatedly smash his face into the piano keyboard until his entire visage is pounded into bloody pulp. Apparently Bunny blames his own homosexuality for his father's insanity. Wayne, however, easily avoids Dwayne's assault and Dwayne quickly becomes physically fatigued trying to attack Wayne. He instead contents himself by vituperating Wayne.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Eliot Rosewater's plane lands at the local airport. The narrator notes that Eliot has also been featured as a character in another of the narrator's novels. Meanwhile Dwayne rushes to his automobile dealership and furiously beats Francine. He then drags her into the street and begins to beat her again while he berates her morality. Kilgore uncharacteristically attempts to intervene and stop the beating and Dwayne bites off part of one of Kilgore's fingers. Dwayne then beats up several other people until the police physically restrains him. A large emergency response vehicle quickly arrives and Cyprian Ukwende, apparently an accomplished emergency doctor, begins to assist the wounded. Dwayne is strapped down and begins to randomly shout out seemingly irrelevant phrases.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The final chapter of the novel completes the difficult narrative development without resolution. In other words, the narrative does not conclude, it simply ends. As predicted from the novel's start, Kilgore meets Dwayne and profoundly influences his life in a very negative and very random way. Also as predicted, Dwayne goes stark raving mad and becomes explosively violent for no particular reason at all beyond 'bad chemicals' in his brain.

Although this may, in fact, be a realistic representation of so-called real-life insanity and its causes, it definitely leaves a peculiar gap in the narrative development of traditional plot and character. The conclusion of the novel's final chapter, then, leaves an inconclusive termination of narrative elements suspended and points the reader toward the Epilogue with the expectation that there, finally, the plot will be resolved. It is an expectation born of convention rather than narrative construction, however, and an expectation that will not be fulfilled.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

The patients are transported to the local hospital. Kilgore wanders around trying to locate the billing office. He is momentarily accosted by another hospital patient who is high on drugs. Kilgore, unaware that the arts festival has been cancelled due to the violence, then leaves the hospital and starts a cross-town trek to deliver his speech. Meanwhile the narrator positions himself to intercept Kilgore. The narrator claims to be unaware of a vicious dog that is stalking him. The dog had originally been a major character in this novel but the narrator had tried to write it out - such a vicious dog, however, is not so easily eliminated for a narrative in which it has once preliminarily appeared. The dog attacks and the narrator avoids the attack.

Kilgore flees from the narrator who chases him down using an automobile. The narrator convinces Kilgore that he is actually a fictional character. The narrator then mentions several wonderful future events to which Kilgore can look forward. Kilgore feels the narrator is crazy, even as the narrator sees in Kilgore the narrator's father. The narrator then celebrates his fiftieth birthday by freeing all of his literary characters, including Kilgore, from the restraint of fiction. The narrator then dissolves himself out of the narrative and the novel concludes with Kilgore's final shouted request of "*Make me young, make me young, make me young!*" (p. 295) going unfulfilled.

Epilogue Analysis

Like the 'preface', the epilogue is presented as a distinct unit of text apart from the novel proper. As such, the events described in the epilogue would appear to have a greater significance than events described in, for example, Chapter 8. This is, however, decidedly not the case. Like the preface, the epilogue is essentially a collection of random events. For example, Kazak the dog tries to attack the narrator but is easily avoided. Kazak thereafter disappears. In fact, the event of note in the epilogue is the face-to-face, as it were, meeting between the narrator and Kilgore. Kilgore seems reticent to speak and is unsure of himself, even as the narrator 'writes him' to be aware that he is simply a character in a work of fiction. The narrator sees, in Kilgore, his father's physicality. This is often interpreted as supportive evidence that Kilgore is the author's fictionalized self-representation. The author sees in himself a form of his father.



Characters

Kilgore Trout

Kilgore, the primary protagonist of the novel, is a widely published science fiction writer who lives in Cohoes, New York. He was born in 1907 in Bermuda and died in 1981. He was recognized by the American Academy of Arts and Science, and received the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1979. At the time of the novel's primary events Kilgore is in his mid sixties. He is described as a curmudgeonly old man who lives alone in a run-down apartment, dresses somewhat shabbily, and, while not entirely filthy, does not pay particular attention to personal hygiene.

During his early life Kilgore assisted his father's study of the fictional Bermudan Ern, a supposedly huge seabird that was severely endangered. During Kilgore's early years the Bermudan Ern became entirely extinct and serves as a minor symbol of the destructiveness of modernization. Later in life Kilgore moved to the continental United States and eventually settled in New York State, though biographical events between his early life and later years are not provided in the text.

Kilgore has been married and divorced three times and has one son, Leo Trout. All of Kilgore's wives are noted as having originally been attractive women with good spirits, but all of them were poisoned by Kilgore's essentially pessimistic outlook and apparently became embittered during the marriage. At the time of the novel's principle events, Kilgore lives alone with a pet bird, apparently has no friends and only a few casual acquaintances. He makes his living installing aluminum window fixtures; and at one point in the narrative forcefully notes that he does not sell the frames, but only installs them. Ironically, his abode does not have the aluminum frames installed.

Kilgore has written scores of novels and hundreds of short stories. He does not retain personal copies of his fiction, however, and submits them to seemingly random publishers without even a self-addressed, stamped envelope for reply. As such, Kilgore does not receive remuneration, even on the infrequent event of acceptance for publication. Apparently the only place his work has been published is as filler material in pornographic books and magazines to pad out their length and help them avoid being classified as socially unredeemable. He appears to be aware that he has been published from time to time, but does not actually know the extent of publication. His material has been actually read only by a few individuals. One of his readers is a childish but influential man who arranges to have Kilgore appear as a speaker at an arts festival. Kilgore decides to accept the invitation, and thus starts the principle plot of the novel.



Dwayne Hoover

Dwayne Hoover, the primary antagonist of the novel, lives in Midland City, an unplaced Mid-West city probably located in Ohio. Although Dwayne's early life is not well-detailed in the novel, several salient points are established. His biological father was a typesetter who seduced his biological mother while setting her poetry in type. He was put up for adoption shortly after his birth and was adopted by the Hoover family. The Hoovers spend a lot of time wandering from place to place in search of work. They were originally named Hoobler but upon arriving in the Mid-West they changed the family name to Hoover because they felt that Hoobler has a certain implication of racial origin. The Hoovers adopted Dwayne after being unable to conceive but, as so often happens, shortly after Dwayne's adoption his parents did conceive. Thus, Dwayne has two younger brothers - monozygotic twins named Kyle and Lyle. Little more is specified about Dwayne's childhood or upbringing except to note that he has a predilection to insanity.

Dwayne is a self-made man, enormously successful in business and fabulously wealthy. He owns huge areas of Midland City and either owns outright or owns a large portion of most Midland City businesses. His influence has also extended to neighboring communities. His original business, established some twenty years before the novel opens, was a Pontiac Automobile dealership established in a racially distinct and less wealthy neighborhood. Dwayne eventually moved the dealership to a more affluent part of town and spends most of his time at or around the dealership. He also owns a large interest in a local hotel and several other types of businesses.

Dwayne married Celia and had George, a son. When George was ten years old he told Dwayne that he wished he had been born a woman. Dwayne responded by shipping George to a military academy. After excelling at the school George returned to Midland City and openly announced his homosexuality. Dwayne thereafter completely disowned his son and refused to even speak to him. At some point Celia committed suicide. George and some others blame Dwayne for Celia's suicide, but the narrator states that Celia was herself, mentally unstable. A few years after Celia's suicide, Dwayne began to have a discreet sexual affair with his automobile dealership secretary, Francine Pefko. Dwayne finds Francine very attractive and is apparently completely monogamous. Although Dwayne has very large genitalia, Dwayne and Francine's very limited sexual escapades prevent either character from realizing Dwayne's natural endowment.

At the time of the novel's principle events Dwayne is probably about fifty years old and is beginning to suffer a rapid mental collapse because of chemical imbalances in his brain. By random chance, Kilgore Trout is adjacent to Dwayne in a hotel lounge when Dwayne suffers his final collapse. Dwayne accosts Kilgore and grabs one of his strange novels, *Now It Can Be Told*. Dwayne, an accomplished speed reader, quickly reads the novel, which convinces him that he is the only free-willed organism in the universe. Dwayne thereafter is transformed into a so-called 'homicidal maniac', even though he does not actually kill anyone. He does, however, rampage through Midland City and severely assaults several people including his son and his lover Francine. Dwayne is



eventually apprehended by the police who forcibly restrain him and deliver him into medical care.

The Narrator

The novel is narrated by an unnamed narrator who also appears as a character in some of the scenes toward the end of the narrative. The narrator claims to be the author of the novel, which establishes an interesting meta-fictional element within the novel's structure. The narrator claims to be a 'real' person who has 'invented' the other characters as an act of creative fiction. The narrator appears reliable, is well-spoken and of at least average intelligence. During the novel the narrator does display some astounding feats that would seem to defy the laws of physics, including one spectacular standing leap which clears an automobile. The narrator is also omniscient within the novel and is able to transport Kilgore Trout to the surface of the sun and other improbable places and times, simply by 'writing' the scene within the novel.

The narrator claims to be fifty years old and, based on a description of the measurements of an improbably-shaped penis, is male. The narrator sees in Kilgore a worthy character highly reminiscent of the narrator's father in physical appearance and in certain behavioral traits. The narrator gives little personal information aside from noting several similarities between events in his own life and that of other characters. For example, the narrator's mother and Celia Hoover were mentally deranged in a similar way. The most interesting aspect of the narrator is the demanding interplay between the narrator as character, narrator, and supposed author. The narrator is often assumed to be the literal author, speaking through the text in an auto-biographical or non-fictional way; but such an interpretation is extremely problematic and does not yield textually meaningful insight.

Francine Pefko

Francine is Dwayne Hoover's long-time secretary and mistress. As a young woman she married Robert Pefko, a soldier. Robert was transferred to Midland City where Francine obtained a job working for Dwayne. Robert was subsequently sent to Viet Nam where he was killed in combat at roughly the same time as Dwayne's wife committed suicide. Francine and Dwayne then became lovers. Francine is very capable and essentially runs Dwayne's automobile dealership by herself. She is quite attractive and in general only wants to please Dwayne, who she considers to be her man. Francine feels that men as a class are overworked and under appreciated, and she feels that Dwayne deserves more pity and respect than he gets because he works so hard.

Although Francine is very intelligent, she practices hiding her intelligence so she will be accepted in society. The novel makes it clear that Francine is physically attractive in conventional ways. Francine makes a rather offhand comment to Dwayne who assumes she is demanding a sizeable amount of wealth from him. This misunderstanding grows through the novel and when Dwayne suffers his final mental collapse he violently



attacks Francine, breaking her jaw and several ribs before dragging her into the street where he verbally assaults her character and further degrades her as he continues to beat her up.

Eliot Rosewater

Eliot Rosewater is a Midland City man of some wealth and therefore influence. He reads Kilgore Trout's *Plague on Wheels* and finds it to be a masterpiece. He sends Kilgore a letter of appreciation; but Eliot's poor handwriting leads Kilgore to mistakenly dismiss Eliot as a child. Eliot uses his influence to have Kilgore invited to the Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts as an arts festival speaker. Eliot's family estate largely resulted from environmentally disastrous coal strip mining carried out in West Virginia. Eliot is a minor character in the novel; though it is worth noting that a character with the same name appears in other novels by the author.

Fred T. Barry

Fred, born 1907, is an eccentric patron of the arts in Midland City. Fred dresses and behaves as if he were from China. He established and operates the Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts. On the advice of Eliot Rosewater, Fred invites Kilgore Trout to be a keynote speaker at a Midland City arts festival. Fred is noted as being very wealthy and is otherwise a minor character in the novel.

Celia Hoover

Celia is Dwayne's deceased wife. She committed suicide by eating Dr?no, a powerful solvent used to clear clogged pipes. Celia is noted as having been mentally disturbed, but is otherwise a minor character in the novel.

George ("Bunny") Hoover

George is the adult son of Dwayne and Celia Hoover. George is commonly known as Bunny and is a notorious homosexual. At the age of ten George confided in Dwayne Hoover, his father, he wished he had been born a woman. Dwayne responded immediately by sending George to Prairie Military Academy. At the academy George demonstrated a marked talent for combat and success, and graduated with many honors. The academy also featured constant homosexual buggery. George eventually returned to Midland City and announced his homosexuality, whereupon Dwayne completely disowned him.

During the novel, George lives alone in a depressing and small apartment and makes a subsistence living by playing piano at a local hotel lounge. During his piano-playing,



George practices transcendental meditation and allows his mind to wander off for prolonged periods of time. George apparently has no friends and few, if any, acquaintances. He lives a very depressing and solitary existence. He apparently blames his father for his mother's suicide. The narrator also states that George will come to view himself as responsible for his father's mental collapse.

George is playing piano in the lounge where Dwayne reads Kilgore Trout's novel and begins his violent rampage. George is, in fact, the first victim of Dwayne's criminal outburst, and George allows Dwayne to repeatedly smash his face against the piano keyboard. George's face is reduced to a bloody pulp while he voluntarily enters a state of meditation. Although a significant character in the novel, George is also a fairly minor factor.

Leo Trout

Leo is the adult son of Kilgore Trout. He left home at the age of fourteen and lied about his age to join the Marines. He wrote Kilgore an insulting and brief letter from boot camp and then vanished for several years. Leo was shipped off to Viet Nam where he deserted his position and went over to join the Viet Cong. Kilgore was notified of his son's treasonous behavior by the F.B.I. Leo is a minor character in the novel, but does form a sort of interesting contrast to George Hoover as the sons of the novel's principle characters.

Kyle and Lyle Hoover

Kyle and Lyle are monozygotic twins and are the younger brothers of Dwayne Hoover. Although Dwayne was adopted, Kyle and Lyle are the biological children of Dwayne's adoptive parents. Kyle and Lyle, along with Dwayne, own a cave on the outskirts of Midland City, which is a tourist attraction. During the novel Kyle and Lyle visit Dwayne to inform him that the cave is being filled up with a durable foamy substance caused by industrial waste that is being dumped into local waterways feeding through the cave system. Kyle and Lyle are memorable, but minor characters in the novel.

Patty Keene

Patty is a seventeen-year old resident of Midland City. Her father is recently deceased from cancer and Patty faces huge medical bills. She works as a waitress in one of Dwayne Hoover's hamburger restaurants. Patty flunked English and, although intelligent, hides behind a facade of unintelligent affability. She lost her virginity through being raped - a crime which she did not report. Coincidentally the man who raped her is, months later, assaulted by Dwayne Hoover during his violent outburst.

Patty serves as Dwayne's waitress once when he eats lunch at the restaurant where she works. She sees in Dwayne a solution to her financial problems and wonders how she can turn her young and attractive body to use in securing some of Dwayne's money.



Unfortunately for Patty, Dwayne is not attracted to young women and therefore her rather blatant flirting goes unnoticed. Patty is a minor character in the novel.

Harry LeSabre

Harry LeSabre, one of the few sympathetic and somewhat likable characters in the entire novel, is a sales manager at Dwayne Hoover's Pontiac automobile dealership. Harry has worked for Dwayne's dealership for over twenty years and is routinely the top-selling staff member. He is generally acknowledged as a cornerstone to the dealership's success. Harry is married to Grace LeSabre and they are fairly racist in outlook. Throughout the years Harry has carefully managed his finances and has made many intelligent and lucky investments. He is therefore very wealthy even though he continues to work for Dwayne.

Harry is also a secret transvestite and enjoys dressing up in front of Grace who keeps his secret. Because of this, Harry is unusually sensitive to comments about his clothing and always appears in public wearing a coat and tie of dark colors. As Dwayne begins his gradual mental deterioration he begins to berate Harry's choice in clothing. For example, Dwayne accuses Harry of looking like a funeral home director. Harry mistakenly assumes Dwayne has discovered his secret practice of cross-dressing. Harry later dresses in an obscenely frilly and colorful costume during a sales promotion and tries to thereby please Dwayne's demands for being more ostentatious. When Dwayne completely ignores him, Harry becomes even more nervous and convinced that his deviancy has been discovered.

Harry nervously discusses his perceived predicament one evening with his wife. Grace is fed up with Dwayne's behavior and suggests that Harry liquidate all of his extensive stock investments. Then, Harry and Grace could move to Maui and retire on the proceeds. Harry likes the suggestion and thus, the narrator claims, they follow Grace's stated plans. In any case, Harry does not thereafter appear in the novel. Harry is completely developed as a character throughout the first portion of the novel; but strangely, although not a minor character, appears to serve no narrative purpose beyond being a sympathetic, intelligent, and interesting character.

Rabo Karabekian

Rabo is a painter who creates and sells an overpriced piece of minimalist art. He also delivers a speech, which the narrator identifies as the spiritual climax of the novel. Early in the novel Rabo is generally disliked because others perceive his art as stupid and ridiculously overpriced. After Rabo's speech he gains some popularity. The speech is, essentially, an explanation of his painting. Rabo is a pivotal and memorable but minor character in the novel.



Objects/Places

Sparky

Sparky is Dwayne Hoover's crippled pet Labrador retriever. Sparky is principally significant in the novel because he is the only object with which Dwayne appears to have complete confidence and share some affection. Dwayne likes to grab Sparky and roll around on the floor with him. Because of an injury, Sparky cannot wag his tail, which apparently provokes other dogs to attack.

Bill

Bill is Kilgore Trout's pet parakeet. At the beginning of the novel Kilgore offers to grant Bill three wishes. Bill first wants to leave his cage and then he wants the apartment window opened. Bill then apparently rethinks his future and flies back to the cage. Kilgore comments that Bill has wisely used his three wishes by making sure he still has something to wish for.

Plague on Wheels

Plague on Wheels is a science fiction novel written by Kilgore Trout that tells the story of a planet that is inhabited by a sentient race of automobile-like creatures. The automobiles eventually poison their own planet, destroy their culture, and go extinct. The book was published as filler material in a volume, which featured explicit pornography entirely unrelated to the text.

Now It Can Be Told

Now It Can Be Told is a science fiction novel written by Kilgore Trout and read by Dwayne Hoover. The novel is written in a form that purports to be a long and detailed letter from the Creator of the Universe to the reader. The letter explains that the reader is the only organism in the universe capable of meaningful action and possessed of free will. All of the other organisms are pre-programmed robots that behave as they do because they are unable to exhibit free will. Several paragraphs of the meta-fictional novel are quoted toward the end of the narrative. Dwayne assumes the novel is actual fact and, after speed-reading through it, goes on a vicious rampage and beats up several people.

Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts

An arts center in Midland City which features a huge luminescent ball on tall poles leading some characters to mistakenly and momentarily believe they are seeing a second moon. Other characters see in the bizarre structure various likenesses. The center was established and operated by Fred T. Barry. The center requests that Kilgore



Trout deliver an address at an upcoming arts festival. The center also purchases a controversial minimalist painting from Rabo Karabekian.

Pyramid Truck, Etc.

Kilgore catches a prolonged ride out of New York City aboard a commercial truck. The truck's side is emblazoned with the word 'Pyramid'. It has a 324-horse-power Cummins Diesel engine, 13-speed transmission, a turbocharger, hydraulic steering and air brakes. It cost \$28,000. Kilgore mentions to the truck's driver that the pyramids are huge and haven't moved an inch in thousands of years and therefore make a particularly unsuitable name for a trucking company. The driver responds by mentioning that pyramid is a good-sounding name. Other trucks' advertising slogans are noticed and commented on by various characters throughout the novel.

Midland City

Midland City is located in Midland County and is apparently situated near Cincinnati. The novel notes that Midland City is in the Mid-West, but does not specifically place it otherwise. In another novel by the same author, Midland City is formally located in Ohio. Midland City appears to be a typical small Mid-Western town in all respects. It has a Holiday Inn, a Pontiac Dealership, several restaurants, and features a tourist-attracting cave system. It features a single transvestite bar called *Ye Old Rathskeller* and is also the home of the Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts.

Sacred Miracle Cave

The Sacred Miracle Cave is a somewhat recently discovered cave owned by Dwayne, Kyle, and Lyle Hoover. Kyle and Lyle Hoover supervise the cave's daily activities. The cave has been turned into a tourist attraction, and various untrue claims about its putative ancient history have been advanced as fact. The cave unfortunately begins to fill up with industrial waste that threatens to destroy most its rock formations (a structural diagram of some of the industrial waste is presented in Chapter 20, p. 227). The cave is notable because it is referenced numerous times throughout the narrative, but plays no significant or symbolic role within the novel. Thus a cave - a hollow nothingness whose existence is, of course, a negative - is a perfect symbol for a constantly referenced narrative object, which holds no textual significance.

The Temptation of Saint Anthony

The Temptation of Saint Anthony is the title of a minimalist painting created by Rabo Karabekian. The painting is twenty feet wide by sixteen feet high and features a field colored 'Hawaiian Avacado' with a single vertical stripe of day-glo orange reflecting tape. The painting was purchased by the Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts for fifty thousand dollars. Rabo explains that the painting signifies a conquering intelligence, symbolized by the orange stripe, amidst the confusion and angst of life, symbolized by



the green field. A black-and-white representation of the painting is rendered in Chapter 19, p. 207.

The Hotel Lounge

The Holiday Inn in Midland City houses a restaurant with an attached lounge, or type of piano bar. The lounge has a large central piano that is encased in orange Formica and occasionally doubles as a restaurant table. Dwayne Hoover owns a large portion of the hotel and George Hoover is the pianist in the hotel lounge. The lounge is the setting for the novel's semi-dramatic climax.

Robo-Magic Company

The Robo-Magic Company, operated by Fred T. Barry, was founded before World War II and originally manufactured appliances designed to perform repetitive household chores. At one time most Midland City residents dreamed of owning a Robo-Magic washing machine. During World War II the Robo-Magic Company converted its washing machine control mechanism design into a type of mechanism that performed the timed-interval release of bombs from American heavy bombers.

Kazak

Kazak is a ferocious dog that stalks and attacks the narrator during the novel's epilogue. The narrator claims that, in earlier drafts of the novel, Kazak had been a more-significant character. The narrator removed Kazak during the editing process; but such a mean-spirited dog is not easily obliterated without trace. Thus when the narrator becomes distracted, Kazak sneaks back into the narrative and launches a surprise attack. The narrator easily eludes the dog and Kazak promptly disappears again.

Social Sensitivity

Breakfast of Champions is set in an America stripped of physical and spiritual beauty. Before setting out on the darkly humorous journey to the heartland that takes him past various scenes of ecological and human destruction, Kilgore Trout cries out, "I have no culture, no humane harmony in my brains. I can't live without a culture anymore." But when he arrives in Midland City, where antipersonnel bombs and body bags are manufactured, he is confronted by a garish array of fastfood restaurants and neon-lit motels divided by a vile stream called Sugar Creek.

The interspersed historical notes, which rewrite American history as a tale of racist sea pirates, place these observations in a larger context, reminding the reader of the dark and paradoxical nature of American capitalism. The contradiction between the ideal of American independence and the actual experience of Vonnegut's Americans is symbolized by Thomas Jefferson's ownership of slaves. In summary, the book reminds its readers of the continuing bloodshed in Vietnam, addresses Americans' increased concern over the ecological destruction of the planet, satirically explores the vacuity of American culture, questions the benefits of capitalism, and suggests that racism is central to the structure of American society.

Techniques

Written after Vonnegut's brief-lived rejection of prose, the novel is a conscious effort to break away from the successful formulas of his earlier writing. Vonnegut openly addresses himself in the role of creator "on a par with the Creator of the Universe," and with a Prospero-like gesture releases the characters from his earlier fiction.

He also talks freely of his own personal experiences, including his mother's suicide and his relationship with his psychiatrist.

The result is a colloquial antinovel, a further break from the confines of realistic fiction. Vonnegut undercuts suspense by revealing his plot in the first few chapters. In one of his numerous authorial intrusions, Vonnegut states that his purpose is to bring "chaos to order," to undercut his readers' comfortable expectations. Vonnegut freely ranges in time from 1492 forward into the future, saying that life is like an endless polymer without beginning or end. He stylistically emphasizes this notion of continuity by beginning many of his sentences with the word "And." In another rebellion against the order of realistic fiction, he makes no effort to dish out moral justice; the good and the evil suffer equally.

Other technical experiments in *Breakfast for Champions* derive from pop art.

Vonnegut's felt-tip-pen illustrations reduce experience to its inexorable essence while parodying Americans' tendency to accept simplistic, commercial versions of reality. Their crudeness mocks a culture that rewards efficiency more than truth, as did the original hardcover edition of the novel, which was packaged to resemble a box of cereal.



Themes

Themes

One important theme explored in *Breakfast of Champions* is the proper role of the artist, a particularly difficult question in a society so adept at transforming art into commodity and so immersed in the consoling fantasies supplied by Washington, Wall Street, and Hollywood. By writing a self-conscious, antinovel Vonnegut hopes to prevent his readers from trying to "live like people invented in story books." It is a reworking of a favorite Vonnegut theme, explicitly stated in the preface that was added to the 1966 reissue of *Mother Night*: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."

In *Breakfast of Champions*, Dwayne Hoover, the man of property, is set against Kilgore Trout, the man of vision, and at the center of their confrontation is the question of free will. Near the end of *Breakfast of Champions* Hoover reads Trout's *Now It Can Be Told*, which tells him that he is the only creature in the universe with free will and that other people are only robots.

This message seems to confirm the alienation Hoover has experienced and encourages a psychotic binge of violence that leaves both of the principal characters physically and spiritually damaged.

Yet in *Breakfast of Champions* there is some hope for melioration. Although experiential evidence indicates that life is mechanistic, intuition suggests, in the words of the minimalist painter Rabo Karbekian, that there is an "unwavering and pure" "immaterial core" in people, the "'I am' to which all messages are sent." In this sense, *Breakfast of Champions* is Vonnegut's attempt to define a new humanism, a world in which "we are healthy only to the extent that our ideas are humane."

The difficulty of true communication is repeatedly emphasized in the novel, as the author portrays trite conversations and failed efforts to express the truth. In one absurd example, Vonnegut records the bodily measurements of all the main characters, but the language used in Midland City is an equally meaningless amalgamation of clichés and ritualistic responses. Before he goes mad, Dwayne Hoover starts repeating the last words spoken to him, but the citizens of Midland City do not notice the change. The book shows that faulty communication can be dangerous, too. After Hoover's rampage "it shook up Trout to realize that even he could bring evil into the world — in the form of bad ideas." Yet, when Trout sees "What is the purpose of life?" scrawled on a man's room wall, he immediately answers, "To be the eyes and ears and conscience of the Creator of the Universe, you fool."



Dehumanization

One of the novel's principle themes is the dehumanization existing in society. The various characters presented are examples of dehumanized people who have been damaged in various ways. The novel presents all of the characters as fictional. While this is manifestly true in any work of fiction, it is rarely acknowledged so bluntly in such clear meta-fictional terms. One character, the narrator, claims outright to have created all other characters through the act of writing; and in the Epilogue one character is confronted with his own fictionalized existence.

This contention is, of course, absurd as the narrator is himself also a fictional character. But the result causes the characters to be viewed as non-human constructions. Thus the typical suspension-of-disbelief enabled by well-crafted fiction is deliberately and consistently thwarted. During the narrator-identified 'spiritual climax of the novel' a bright band of light symbolizes a human being. This is put forward as a positive construction. However, the narrative simultaneously symbolizes a cockroach as a bright band of light, which is indistinguishable from the first light.

Further, the characters are generally reduced to simple objective descriptions, which most prominently include stating penis length and circumference for men and bust-waist-hip measurements for women. This largely has the effect of reducing the characters to an absurdly simple trait of single-dimensional sexuality. For example, Patty Keene "had thirty-four inch hips, a twenty-six inch waist, and a thirty-four-inch bosom" (p. 145) and therefore is clearly nothing more than a very desirable sexual object - a fact not lost on the perversely-named Don Breedlove who rapes her (p. 139) with impunity. Incidentally, Don Breedlove "had a penis five and seven-eighths inches long and seven-eighths inches in diameter" (p. 145) . This matches the national average for length; but five-eighths of an inch lacking in circumference which perhaps, by the narrative's internal logic, adequately explains why he is an occasional rapist.

Furthermore, humans are routinely compared to animals in various respects. For example, humans are noted as being unusually long-lived for a mammal, whereas many mammals have far larger penises. Humans are often referred to as 'meat machines' and evaluated unfavorably when contrasted to mechanical machines. For example a large dirt excavating machine is quantified by the number of "niggers" it replaces. Sexism and virulent racism are overt and pervasive.

and robbed; Celia Hoover eats Dr?no and dies; and the culmination of the novel's plot involves an insane Dwayne Hoover severely beating George, Francine Pefko, and other characters, as well as biting off part of Kilgore's ring finger. Notably, however, the narrator escapes all harm and even manages to elude a surprise attack from the vicious dog.



Nature of Art

The nature of art is a pervasive theme throughout the novel. Kilgore Trout is ostensibly the most-important artist in the novel. He writes scores of novels and hundreds of short stories, many of which have been published. However his art is published, not because of its merit but as filler material to pad the length of pornographic books and magazines. The narrator points out that the selling price of Kilgore's novels is based entirely on the number of "wide open beavers" (p. 22) featured in photographs interspersed with the text. Thus it is entirely probable that Kilgore's art is widely purchased, but completely unread, a fact suggested by his complete anonymity as a writer. Kilgore's art is therefore superfluous.

One of Kilgore's novels, *The Barring-gaffner of Bagnialto, or, This Year's Masterpiece*, is published in a book which was literally used as toilet paper after being read. The novel tells the story of a distant world where everyone creates art and submits it to an organization that grades its artistic merit and monetary worth by spinning a type of roulette wheel. Most art is subsequently deemed entirely worthless and destroyed, while the odd piece of art, regardless of merit, is determined to be highly desirable and very worthwhile. These roulette-wheel-winning works of art are purchased for huge sums and put on public display in museums so that an admiring public can enjoy them.

Thus art's value is entirely random and, even more intriguing, the public is completely satisfied with this arrangement. In fact, when the public discovers that the roulette wheel is rigged and not truly random they are outraged. The operator commits suicide, ostensibly to avoid having to explain that the art had been graded by some non-random, subjective methodology.

Finally the artist, Rabo Karabekian, creates a minimalist painting entitled *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, which is a simple colored stripe against a garish but monochromatic background. The painting is sold for fifty thousand dollars. This initially outrages the public who feel they deliberately are being made fools of by some conspiracy of artists and millionaires. The public evidently feels the painting is inherently meaningless and therefore worthless. During the course of events, however, Rabo gets a chance to 'explain' his painting and claims it is symbolic of consciousness struggling against the angst of life. Even though the narrative makes it clear that none of the characters are actually possessed of consciousness, and Rabo bluntly states that the symbolic consciousness could be that of a cockroach, the public is mollified. Having now advised of the painter's intention, people now view the painting as somehow marvelous. But it still remains a bright stripe on an ugly background.

Organization or Randomness

The novel claims to be, and in fact is, a prolonged series of random observations and insignificant characterizations. The narrator appears to be unable, or at least unwilling, to create a traditional narrative structure. It is therefore left to the reader to sift through mountains of minutia to extract salient facts and construct a plot with creative meaning.



For example, the Sacred Miracle Cave is featured on bumper stickers, calendars, and signs repeatedly throughout the novel. The cave is also discussed at some length by several characters on a few occasions and is physically described in detail by the narrator. Yet the cave is essentially meaningless within the novel and serves no purpose within the narrative construction.

There are dozens - hundreds - of similar objects and even characters throughout the text. The end result is an eclectic and random collection of characters, events, and objects through which the reader must sort, filter, and relate in order to extract meaning. This, of course, is interrelated with the theme regarding the nature of art; but it is also a dominant theme in the novel.

The narrator claims that every character in the novel is just as significant as every other character. This would seemingly preclude the assembly of a plot based primarily on the experiences of just two or three of the characters. Yet the narrator also claims in the introductory pages of the novel that it is indeed a story about two fairly old white men. So, although the narrative introduces Benjamin Davis, the husband of Lottie Davis, who is in turn Dwayne Hoover's black maid, and provides some details about his life, the fact remains that he is actually an insignificant character.

Likewise, Kilgore Trout emerges as a significant character, not because of his personality or achievements, but simply because he appears repeatedly throughout the novel in a variety of settings and materially participates in significant plot developments. Thus, although the narrator may claim to have created a novel devoid of significant elements, the claim is in point of fact not accurate.



Style

Point of View

The novel is told in the first-person point of view by an unnamed narrator who claims to periodically feel as if his name was Philboyd Studge. The narrator is traditionally interpreted to be a fictionalized self-portrayal of the author and in fact the narrator claims to be the author of the meta-fictional construction. The narrator is, or at least claims to be, omniscient and also apparently nearly omnipotent. For example, the narrator causes Kilgore Trout, another character, to travel to the surface of the sun and other unlikely places simply by desiring it to be so. The narrator is also able to reveal the inner thoughts of other characters and, from time to time, actually creates those thoughts. The narrator also functions within the text as a character of sorts.

Needless to say, all of these narrative functions are not particular to this novel. Narrators routinely perform all of these functions in standard fiction. This novel is atypically simple in the tacit admission of the narrator as construct and the repeated meta-fictional device of the narrator, self-identifying as the narrative authority. The point-of-view selected is appropriate and, in fact, necessary to the success of the novel insofar as it assists in the deliberate destruction of traditional meaning which is replaced by an alternative interpretation on the nature of art.

Setting

The novel features several settings between New York State and a fictional town named Midland City, which is not located said to be in some proximity to Cincinnati, Ohio. In another novel by the same author, Midland City specifically is identified as being in Ohio. Although several minor settings are introduced, the principle setting in the novel is unmistakably Midland City, which is presented as a more-or-less typical Mid-Western city of the 1970s.

Midland City's history and development are considered in some detail in the novel. The story notes numerous building projects and explains in painful detail why certain buildings are named for certain people and why some structures are taller than other structures. Although the geographic layout of the town is not particularly defined, many structures are enumerated and described.

Even the relationship between the town and its nearest neighbor is considered from several angles. The town houses a Holiday Inn, a Pontiac automobile dealership, an arts center, a hospital, a police department, a prison, a highway, at least one creek, an industrial plant that manufactures military ordnance, a high school, monuments, parking lots, radio towers, several restaurants, apartments, and many houses among other structures. All of these buildings are described. Many town residents appear as characters and they are often given considerable attention by the narrative. Thus, even



though the plot might be considered as weak or non-existent, the novel's setting is well established and vividly defined.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written using fairly simple language with extremely simple sentence and paragraph construction. Most sentences are very short and direct, and the paragraphing is typical. In fact, the text, devoid of implied meaning, reads somewhat like a child's storybook in its simplicity. Although there are subtleties within some segments of the narrative, in the vast majority of the text the objective meanings are straightforward and obvious. For example, when the narrative describes the process of turning a live chicken into food, the process is detailed as killing, plucking, gutting, apportioning, and frying. The resulting pieces are then placed in a waxed paper bucket. As if this description were not concise enough, an illustration of a live chicken and an illustration of a waxed paper bucket full of fried chicken are also provided to remove any supposed ambiguity.

Although the objective meaning of various sentences and paragraphs - often of nearly entire chapters - is unquestionably simple and obvious, the narrative's subjective meaning is deliberately obfuscated and intentionally largely destroyed. The novel's plot, in a conventional sense, is incredibly pedestrian, and its meaning entirely banal - two men, one teetering on the brink of insanity, meet by chance in a hotel lounge. Kilgore Trout's great voyage is pointless because the arts festival is cancelled. Dwayne Hoover's insane outburst is by very definition meaningless and even within the text is attributed to a chemical imbalance. Thus, the novel's meaning must be constructed from a non-traditional reading methodology since the text does not provide a useful traditional meaning. It is arguable, therefore, that the novel *per se* is devoid of significant meaning and that a more useful interpretation of the text is to consider it a representative form of the so-called anti-realistic novel, deliberately assembled from illogicality and absurdity.

Structure

The 296-page novel is divided into twenty-four chapters, a preface and an epilogue. The chapters are of unequal length. One of the more unusual aspects of the novel's structure is the routine inclusion of somewhat crude line-drawings attributed to the author. These drawings illustrate various banal topics from the book. For example, illustrations include an asshole; the American flag; a beaver; an exposed vagina; women's underwear; a revolver; a light switch; a cow; the mathematical symbols used for zero, infinity, and pi; a bucket of fried chicken; and many others. All drawings are referenced by the text, which facetiously indicates the drawing illustrates a fairly complex idea. For example, a drawing of a simple rectangular street sign is prefaced by the textual note that cities often put up street signs that 'look like this'.



In addition to the illustrations a number of atypical typographical features are used, primarily large downward-pointing arrows and large left-point arrows. These features are used somewhat like an ellipsis and a paragraph mark respectively, and give the novel the feel of processing somewhat like a flowchart. Coupled with the illustrations, the unusual typography gives the book a visual texture akin to a child's picture book. The narrator's assumption that the reader must be 'shown' a line-drawing of an apple, as if the fruit were intrinsically so complex so as to defy description, apparently indicates that the text has been narrated either for a moron or some type of extraterrestrial intelligence. Coupled with the extremely simple sentence and paragraph constructions and the seemingly random comments on vapidly ordinary life, the novel's structure is clearly masterfully plotted to create a particularly alien form of narrative experience.



Quotes

"The expression 'Breakfast of Champions' is a registered trademark of General Mills, Inc., for use on a breakfast cereal product. The use of the identical expression as the title for this book is not intended to indicate an association with or sponsorship by General Mills, nor is it intended to disparage their fine products." (Preface, p. 1 - a nearly identical quote also appears in Chapter 18, p. 195)

"As for the suspicion I express in this book, that human beings are robots, are machines: It should be noted that people, mostly men, suffering from the last stages of syphilis, from *locomoter ataxia*, were common spectacles in downtown Indianapolis and in circus crowds when I was a boy.

"Those people were infected with carnivorous little corkscrews which could be seen only with a microscope. The victims' vertebrae were welded together after the corkscrews got through with the meat between. The syphilitics seemed tremendously dignified - erect, eyes straight ahead.

"I saw one stand on a curb at the corner of Meridian and Washington Streets one time, underneath an overhanging clock which my father designed. The intersection was known locally as '*The Crossroads of America*.'

"This syphilitic man was thinking hard there, at the Crossroads of America, about how to get his legs to step off the curb and carry him across Washington Street. He shuddered gently, as though he had a small motor which was idling inside. Here was his problem: his brains, where the instructions to his legs originated, were being eaten alive by corkscrews. The wires which had to carry the instructions weren't insulated anymore, or were eaten clear through. Switches along the way were welded open or shut.

"This man looked like an old, old man, although he might have been only thirty years old. He thought and thought. And then he kicked two times like a chorus girl.

"He certainly looked like a machine to me when I was a boy." (Preface, p. 3)

"In 1972, Trout lived in a basement apartment in Cohoes, New York. He made his living as an installer of aluminum combination storm windows and screens. He had nothing to do with the sales end of the business - because he had no *charm*. Charm was a scheme for making strangers like and trust a person immediately, no matter what the charmer had in mind.

"Dwayne Hoover had oodles of charm.

"I can have oodles of charm when I want to.

"A lot of people have oodles of charm." (Chapter 2, p. 20)



"Then he thought about what Bill himself might want. It was easy to guess. 'Bill,' he said, 'I like you so much, and I am such a big shot in the Universe, that I will make your three biggest wishes come true.' He opened the door of the cage, something Bill couldn't have done in a thousand years.

"Bill flew over to a windowsill. He put his little shoulder against the glass. There was just one layer of glass between Bill and the great out-of-doors. Although Trout was in the storm window business, he had no storm windows on his own abode.

"Your second wish is about to come true,' said Trout, and he again did something which Bill could never have done. He opened the window. But the opening of the window was such an alarming business to the parakeet that he flew back to his cage and hopped inside.

"Trout closed the door of the cage and latched it. 'That's the most intelligent use of three wishes I ever heard of,' he told the bird. 'You made sure you'd still have something worth wishing for - to get out of the cage.'" (Chapter 3, p. 35)

"Trout was petrified there on Forty-second street. I had given him a life not worth living, but I had also given him an iron will to live. This was a common combination on the planet Earth.

"The theater manager came out and locked the door behind him.

"And two young black prostitutes materialized from nowhere. They asked Trout and the manager if they would like to have some fun. They were cheerful and unafraid - because of a tube of Norwegian hemorrhoid remedy which they had eaten about half an hour before. The manufacturer had never intended the stuff to be eaten. People were supposed to squirt it up their assholes.

"These were country girls. They had grown up in the rural south of the nation, where their ancestors had been used as agricultural machinery. The white farmers down there weren't using machines made out of meat anymore, though, because machines made out of metal were cheaper and more reliable, and required simpler homes.

"So the black machines had to get out of there, or starve to death. They came to cities because everyplace else had signs like this on the fences and trees: no trespassing! this means you!" (Chapter 8, pp. 71-72)

"'You married Kilgore?' the driver asked.

"'Three times,' said Trout. It was true. Not only that, but each of his wives had been extraordinarily patient and loving and beautiful. Each had been shriveled by his pessimism.

"'Any kids?'



"'One,' said Trout. Somewhere in the past, tumbling among all the wives and stories lost in the mails was a son named Leo. 'He's a man now,' said Trout.

"Leo left home forever at the age of fourteen. He lied about his age, and he joined the marines. He sent a note to his father from boot camp. It said this: 'I pity you. You've crawled up your own asshole and died.'

"That was the last Trout heard from Leo, directly or indirectly, until he was visited by two agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Leo had deserted from his division in Viet Nam, they said. He had committed high treason. He had joined the Viet Cong.

"Here was the F.B.I. evaluation of Leo's situation on the planet at that time: 'Your boy's in bad trouble', they said." (Chapter 12, pp. 110-111)

"Kilgore Trout thought about the cries of steam whistles he had known, and about the destruction of West Virginia, which made their songs possible. He supposed that the heart-rending cries had fled into outer space, along with the heat. He was mistaken.

"Like most science-fiction writers, Trout knew almost nothing about science, was bored stiff by technical details. But no cry from a whistle had got very far from Earth for this reason: sound could only travel in an atmosphere, and the atmosphere of Earth relative to the planet wasn't even as thick as the skin of an apple. Beyond that lay an all-but-perfect vacuum." (Chapter 14, p. 123)

"Kilgore Trout once wrote a short novel about the importance of the clitoris in love-making. This was in response to a suggestion by his second wife, Darlene, that he could make a fortune with a dirty book. She told him that the hero should understand women so well that he could seduce anyone he wanted. So Trout wrote *The Son of Jimmy Valentine*.

"Jimmy Valentine was a famous made-up person in another writer's books, just as Kilgore Trout was a famous made-up person in my books. Jimmy Valentine in the other writer's books sandpapered his fingertips, so they were extrasensitive. He was a safe-cracker. His sense of feel was so delicate that he could open any safe in the world by feeling the tumblers fall.

"Kilgore Trout invented a son for Jimmy Valentine named Ralston Valentine. Ralston Valentine also sandpapered his fingertips. But he wasn't a safe-cracker. Ralston was so good at touching women the way they wanted to be touched, that tens of thousands of them became his willing slaves. They abandoned their husbands or lovers for him, in Trout's story, and Ralston Valentine became President of the United States, thanks to the votes of women." (Chapter 15, p. 151)

"I had no respect whatsoever for the creative works of either the painter or the novelist. I thought Karabekian with his meaningless pictures had entered into a conspiracy with millionaires to make poor people feel stupid. I thought Beatrice Keedlser had joined hands with other old-fashioned storytellers to make people believe that life had leading



characters, minor characters, significant details, insignificant details, that it had lessons to be learned, tests to be passed, and a begging, a middle, and an end.

"As I approached my fiftieth birthday, I had become more and more enraged and mystified by the idiot decisions made by my countrymen. And then I had come suddenly to pity them, for I understood how innocent and natural it was for them to behave so abominably, and with such abominable results: They were doing their best to live like people invented in story books. This was the reason Americans shot each other so often: it was a convenient literary device for ending short stories and books.

"Why were so many Americans treated by their government as though their lives were as disposable as paper facial tissue? Because that was the way authors customarily treated bit-part players in their made-up tales.

"And so on.

"Once I understood what was making America such a dangerous, unhappy nation of people who had nothing to do with real life, I resolved to shun storytelling. I would write about life. Every person would be exactly as important as any other. All facts would also be given equal weightiness. Nothing would be left out. Let others bring order to chaos. I would bring chaos to order, instead, which I think I have done.

"If all writers would do that, then perhaps citizens not in the literary trades will understand that there is no order in the world around us, that we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos instead.

"It is hard to adapt to chaos, but it can be done. I am living proof of that: It can be done.

"Adapting to chaos there in the cocktail lounge, I now had Bonnie MacMahon, who was exactly as important as anybody else in the Universe, bring more yeast excrement to Beatrice Keedsler and Karabekian. Karabekian's drink was a Beefeater's dry martini with a twist of lemon peel, so Bonnie said to him, 'Breakfast of Champions.'

"'That's what you said when you brought me my first martini,' said Karabekian."
(Chapter 19, pp. 209-210)

"Fred T. Barry wrote these ads himself, and he predicted at the time that Robo-Magic appliances of various sorts would eventually do what he called 'all the Nigger work of the world,' which was lifting and cleaning and cooking and washing and ironing and tending children and dealing with filth.

"Dwayne Hoover's stepmother wasn't the only white woman who was a terrible sport about doing work like that. My own mother was that way, too, and so was my sister, may she rest in peace. The both flatly refused to do Nigger work.

"The white men wouldn't do it either, of course. They called it *women's work*, and the women called it *Nigger work*.



"I am going to make a wild guess now: I think that the end of the Civil War in my country frustrated the white people in the North, who won it, in a way which has never been acknowledged before. Their descendants inherited that frustration, I think, without ever knowing what it was.

"The victors in that war were cheated out of the most desirable spoils of that war, which were human slaves." (Chapter 21, pp. 245-246)

"Dwayne now began to read hungrily, as though starved for print. And the speed-reading course he had taken at the Young Men's Christian Association allowed him to make a perfect pig of himself with pages and words.

"'Dear Sir, poor sir, brave sir:' he read, 'You are an experiment by the Creator of the Universe. You are the only creature in the entire Universe who has free will. You are the only one who has to figure out what to do next - and *why*. Everybody else is a robot, a machine.

"Some persons seem to like you, and others seem to hate you, and you must wonder why. They are simply liking machines and hating machines.

"'You are pooped and demoralized,' read Dwayne. 'Why wouldn't you be? Of course it is exhausting, having to reason all the time in a universe which wasn't meant to be reasonable.'" (Chapter 22, p. 253)

"I could go on and on with the intimate details about the various lives of people on the super-ambulance, but what good is more information?

"I agree with Kilgore Trout about realistic novels and their accumulations of nit-picking details. In Trout's novel, *The Pan-Galactic Memory Bank*, the hero is on a space ship two hundred miles long and sixty-two miles in diameter. He gets a realistic novel out of the branch library in his neighborhood. He reads about sixty pages of it, and then he takes it back.

"The librarian asks him why he doesn't like it, and he says to her, 'I already know about human beings.'

"And so on." (Chapter 24, p. 278)



Topics for Discussion

Is the novel an essentially racist text? How is race used throughout the narrative to construct meaning?

The narrator observes that many menial jobs (refer to pp. 245-246) are considered to be properly done only by women or African Americans (for example, an earth-moving machine is referred to as "*The Hundred-Nigger Machine*", p. 146). In point of fact, nearly all of the female and African American characters in the novel are employed at performing these types of menial and physically-demanding jobs - is this simply a textual coincidence?

Discuss the relationship between the novel's author and the novel's narrator. Are they the same person? How is the narrator constructed as a character throughout the narrative?

The narrator states that Dwayne Hoover went crazy because of 'bad chemicals'; is this a plausible and satisfactory explanation?

Consider the actual plot of the novel - what really happens?

What is the narrative about? What meaning does the narrative convey? Is the novel simply a random and nearly meaningless collection of facts and observations, or does a cohesive statement seem to emerge? Is the novel properly considered a representative of the so-called 'antirealistic novel'?

Which of the characters, if any, in the novel are sympathetic and likable? What features make a given character likable? What features make a given character despicable?

A character named Kilgore Trout appears in another novel by the same author. Is this novel's Kilgore Trout 'the same' character in the other novel? Or are the two characters separate except for sharing a name by coincidence?

z i What is the function of the Preface in the novel? What is the function of the Epilogue? Why do you think the two sections are not simply listed as e.g. Chapter 1 and Chapter 26?

Is Dwayne Hoover responsible for his wife's suicide? Is George Hoover responsible for his father's mental collapse?

Dwayne Hoover states that Francine Pefko attempts to have him give her a chicken restaurant franchise in exchange for sexual intercourse (refer to Chapter 15). Is Francine's suggestion simply a good idea or does she in fact have an ulterior selfish motive by making the suggestion?



Instead of being happy with his freedom, Wayne Hoobler misses the clash of steel prison doors, misses bugging other men, misses being bugged by other men, and misses having sex with cattle in the prison dairy. Do you think he would still miss these things if he had managed to obtain a job at Dwayne Hoover's automobile dealership?

Literary Precedents

Perhaps the most important literary precedent is *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's symbolic exploration of the role of the artist. Like Shakespeare, Vonnegut explores the ambiguous connection between the real and the invented, questions the authority of the artist, and considers the paradox of freedom.

Like Prospero, he frees his literary thralls at the novel's end although he cannot grant them the happiness and immortality they want.

Related Titles

Although Vonnegut frees his characters in *Breakfast of Champions*, several are recalled in later books: In the Prologue to *Jailbird* (1976), Vonnegut announces that "Kilgore Trout is back again. He could not make it on the outside"; *Deadeye Dick* (1982) is set in Midland City in the years prior to Kilgore Trout's disastrous visit and describes many of the same characters; the ghost of Leon Trotsky Trout, the son of Kilgore Trout, narrates *Galapagos* (1985) from a distant future long after humanity has extinguished itself.



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