

# **Cosmicomics Study Guide**

## **Cosmicomics by Italo Calvino**

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# The Distance of the Moon

## The Distance of the Moon Summary

According to Sir George H. Darwin, the moon was once close to the Earth and gradually was pushed farther away by the tides. Qfwfq narrates his story from this time. Qfwfq, Captain Vhd Vhd, Mrs. Vhd Vhd, young Xlthlx, and Qfwfq's cousin, the Deaf One, among others, go out on the sea to the Zinc Cliffs to climb up to the moon with ladders. Fish and small sea creatures that are light enough are lifted out of the ocean and float in the air. One person holds the ladder in the boat, while someone else climbs up it, and a third person rows underneath the moon. The person on the ladder often thinks he'll hit his head, since the moon is so close. The moon's surface is covered with scales, and to get up, a person grasps onto the scales and tumbles down in a somersault, held by the moon's gravity.

The Deaf One is very agile and in tune with the moon. People go to the moon to collect moon-milk, which is a cheese-like substance of plants and animals that get stuck in crevices. The gatherers throw the moon-milk by spoonfuls down to Earth, where others in the boat collect it. The Deaf One is good at everything related to the moon. While on the moon, he plays and dances. On the trips to the Zinc Cliffs, Captain Vhd Vhd's wife plays the harp, looking and sounding beautiful in the moonlight. Xlthlx catches fish and sea creatures as they float by. Xlthlx floats and plays among the sea creatures in the air. The people in the boat chase after her on the water. She attracts the smaller creatures and seaweed to her. When she is heavy, she falls to the sea again.

After coming to Earth from the moon, people are still influenced by the gravity of the moon. Qfwfq is still being pulled upward, and others on the boat have to pull him down. Sometimes he grasps Mrs. Vhd Vhd's breast to pull himself back into the world. Qfwfq is in love with Captain Vhd Vhd's wife; however, Mrs. Vhd Vhd is in love with the Deaf One, who is in love with the moon. Mrs. Vhd Vhd is jealous of the moon, as Qfwfq is jealous of his cousin. Mrs. Vhd Vhd throws her body against the deaf one, but he is unaware of her. The Deaf One is always the last down from the moon. During the month the moon is away, the Deaf One is isolated and quiet. The next month, Qfwfq and Mrs. Vhd Vhd stay in the boat. As the Deaf One goes up, Mrs. Vhd Vhd says she wants to go, and her husband encourages her. Captain Vhd Vhd holds Qfwfq back.

The captain wants to be away from his wife for a while. None of them know the moon is moving away from Earth, except maybe the Deaf One. The Deaf One leaps off the moon and floats between Earth and moon. The others follow him, leaving the moon-milk behind. They are trapped in the air, and the captain tells them to hold on to each other, so they all fall into the water. Mrs. Vhd Vhd is missing. Mrs. Vhd Vhd is floating near the moon. Qfwfq tries to reach her, but their combined weight pulls them toward the moon. Qfwfq is excited about being alone with Mrs. Vhd Vhd for a month. During the month, Qfwfq is not happy; instead, he feels homesick for Earth. Mrs. Vhd Vhd never looks toward Earth. She is obsessed with becoming part of the moon, the object of the Deaf



One's affection. When the moon comes back to the Zinc Cliffs, everyone has a long pole, but only one pole is long enough to reach the moon. As usual, the Deaf One is in sync with his beloved moon, and the tip of his bamboo pole barely touches the moon's surface.

Mrs. Vhd Vhd stays on the moon, playing her harp. Qfwfq crawls down it to the Earth and the pole breaks. Mrs. Vhd Vhd is lost forever, part of the moon.

## The Distance of the Moon Analysis

The fantastical story of the moon living close to the Earth is a story of attraction. The attraction of the moon serves as a metaphor for the attraction between people. Qfwfq, Mrs. Vhd Vhd, and the Deaf One are caught in a love triangle, each attracted to someone who cannot return their affection. The Deaf One loves the moon, and ultimately, he must let her go away from him on her own course. This is something he does gladly because his love requires no return from the moon.

Qfwfq loves Mrs. Vhd Vhd, but he desires a return of his affection. Like the moon, though, Mrs. Vhd Vhd is lost to Qfwfq. He may be attracted to her, but she (like the moon) is moving away from him. She becomes the eternal symbol of lost love, the woman in the moon with her harp, singing to the Deaf One, who can never hear her.

All of the human relationships in "The Distance of the Moon" show the inability of human beings to truly communicate and be in sync with each other. People are separated by enormous gulfs of understanding. The Deaf One understands his moon, but the human couples are not so lucky. Qfwfq and Mrs. Vhd Vhd can never really understand each other. Neither can Mrs. Vhd Vhd and her husband or Mrs. Vhd Vhd and the Deaf One. The Deaf One's inability to hear is symbolic of the isolation of the human condition, and the irony of Mrs. Vhd Vhd playing the harp accentuates the inability to communicate.

The story is a tragedy because the characters can never overcome their basic separateness and find happiness together. Mrs. Vhd Vhd as the woman on the moon comes to represent this eternal separation. Each person has his or her private world and point of view, and no one truly understands the others. No one can understand the Deaf One's complete synchronicity with the moon, and no one understands or recognizes Qfwfq's attraction to Mrs. Vhd Vhd.

While on the moon with her, Qfwfq thinks that perhaps, if Mrs. Vhd Vhd also longs for the Earth as he does, she will begin to understand him. However, Mrs. Vhd Vhd never longs for the Earth. Mrs. Vhd Vhd becomes a mythical being, a part of the moon, which is a symbol of love. As a part of the moon, perhaps she achieves what she desires, the affection of the Deaf One. However, even if he looks up to the moon with love and sees, not only the moon, but Mrs. Vhd Vhd as part of the moon, the two must necessarily be separated.

Attraction or love catches people and traps them, much as Xlthlx, and later the sailors, can be caught up in between the moon and the Earth. Each character is caught in his or



her personal attraction. Mrs. Vhd Vhd cannot free herself from an attraction to the Deaf One and becomes physically trapped on the moon. The Deaf One is caught in his attraction to the moon and seems to lose vitality when the moon is not around. Qfwfq is caught up in his attraction to Mrs. Vhd Vhd and traps them on the moon, only barely escaping after a month. He still, however, finds himself caught in the attraction of Mrs. Vhd Vhd, now a part of the moon in the sky.



# At Daybreak

## At Daybreak Summary

The solar system's planets first come together in the cold and darkness, until the sun increases in mass and begins to emit light and heat. Qfwfq tells his story of the first light. He is a child, on a proto-planet with Father, Mother, Granny Bb'b, Mr. Hnw, and other relatives. They lie under the surface of the condensing matter, and there is nothing to do. Only Granny Bb'b remembers an earlier time, when matter is spread out and there is heat and light. G'd(w)^n, Qfwfq's sister, is reclusive and has dreams of a darkness. The matter beneath them is condensing. Qfwfq's brother Rwzfs finds something and begins playing with it. It's the first solid thing they have ever had. Qfwfq never sees a sign of the upcoming change. When his father says they're hitting something, he doesn't understand because there has never been anything to hit before. Granny Bb'b asks if he's found her cushion. Qfwfq hates the cushion but did not take it. Father says something important is happening. Matter has closed in on Mr. Hnw, and everyone pulls him out of the newly-forming stuff. Qfwfq looks for the lost twins. Matter has congealed enough that Qfwfq can now walk.

Qfwfq falls over something G'd(w)^n has made of mud. She calls it "an outside with an inside in it." Qfwfq finds Mr. Hnw head-first in the mud. He pulls out Mr. Hnw, and finds the twins, where they're trapped by the solidifying matter. Qfwfq pulls them out, destroying the cushion in the process. The visiting aunt and uncles say they should get going. They can't find their way in the new environment, and the aunt gets stuck on a piece of stuff. Suddenly the world changes and Granny believes the early days of the universe are back. They look inside the newly-formed Earth and see G'd(w)^n, going deep down into the planet. Qfwfq never sees her again until he meets her at Canberra in 1912. The atmospheres are on fire. It is the end of the first day.

## At Daybreak Analysis

"At Daybreak" is a story of a tremendous change in the solar system—the eruption of the sun into light and heat. The story explores the response of the fantastical characters to change. The aunt and uncles ignore the changes going on around them and act with extreme politeness and propriety in a situation which might be life-threatening. They disregard the changes completely, even ignoring potential danger and find themselves stranded on newly-formed planets.

Granny Bb'b is stuck in the past. Her beloved cushion is a piece of the early galaxy, a throwback to an earlier time. Qfwfq's hatred of the cushion, which seems out of place, confirms that it represents the past. Granny, however, wants to reclaim the past, always seeing it as better than the present. When Granny wants change, she can't imagine the world changing into something new. Instead, she only imagines the world reverting to a past existence. The destruction of the cushion seems to emphasize that the past is



dead and that no one can go backwards; instead, the universe moves forward to new things.

Qfwfq's sister G'd(w)^n also does not take change well. She enjoys the world as it is. While the others are unhappy in the darkness and immaterial stuff, G'd(w)^n is pleased to be alone with her imagination. She belongs to her time. When change comes, she flees from it, and because she cannot stay and face the changes, she becomes trapped in the newly-forming planet or else stranded on the opposite side.

Mr. Hnw also has difficulty with the new changes. He is constantly doing the wrong thing because he is stuck in the old ways. There used to be no ground to sink into, and Mr. Hnw can't stop himself from getting stuck head-first in the dirt. He meets the changes with complete awkwardness, unable to adapt. Qfwfq watches the changes and the reactions of his family. He is able to learn to walk and carefully move through the newly-adapting environment. Although he falls, he does not find himself stuck like Mr. Hnw or Qfwfq's brothers, and Qfwfq is able to save others from being stuck in the dirt. Qfwfq seems ready for change, able to adapt and thrive.



# A Sign in Space

## A Sign in Space Summary

The sun's trip around the Milky Way takes about two hundred million years. Qfwfq leaves the first sign ever created to find the same point next time. Qfwfq finds the sign again in hundreds of millions of years. The creation of the sign is more important than what it represents. Qfwfq imagines making other signs, both similar and different from his first sign. He tries to remember his sign and how he made the sign. He believes he will recognize the sign. The sun nears the end of its revolution around the Milky Way. Qfwfq fails to find his sign. The sun does not pass the same point in space, so he will need to wait four hundred million years to see his sign. Qfwfq travels twice more around the Milky Way and arrives where he left the first sign, its not there. Qfwfq sees another sign, poorly copied from his own. Kgwgk destroyed his sign and created his own crude imitation.

Qfwfq creates a new and better sign. As the world moves, more changes take place. Qfwfq's sign is part of a passing fad. He fears Kgwgk will mock his sign, so Qfwfq erases it. Signs open the maker to judgment, so Qfwfq is afraid to make another sign. Qfwfq makes fake signs to fool Kgwgk, who erases them as he passes. Qfwfq might see his original sign again; however, many others are making signs. There are five signs near Qfwfq's original sign and random formations also look like signs. The universe is clogged with signs; perhaps without signs, space could not exist.

## A Sign in Space Analysis

In "A Sign in Space," Calvino ruminates about the nature of signs. Signs are symbols; they do not have any inherent meaning but take on meaning through intention and interpretation. Qfwfq creates the first sign, and his intention is for the sign to signify a specific place in space. However, the sign soon takes on much more meaning. Qfwfq begins to identify himself with the sign. Since Kgwgk erases the sign, Kgwgk becomes Qfwfq's enemy because Kgwgk has erased part of Qfwfq's self.

When Qfwfq makes the second sign, he identifies himself with that sign, too. As times change, and Qfwfq becomes dissatisfied with the sign, he becomes dissatisfied with his former self. He becomes a self-destroyer by erasing the sign, and he removes himself from what he perceives as the critical eye of the world. Qfwfq recognizes that signs are communication. He puts a sign out into the world, attaching some meaning or significance to it. Others see and interpret the sign, but Qfwfq cannot control how others will perceive the sign and also perceive him through the sign. This idea will reappear in "The Light-Years," when Qfwfq will be faced with a similar difficulty.

Everything is inextricably linked to a sign. As Qfwfq points out, he cannot think of anything without a sign through which to think about it. Once signs exist in the universe,





then Qfwfq sees signs even in natural objects. He perceives meaning without any intention of meaning. He concludes that perhaps space does not exist without the myriad of signs that mark every part of it. How can it exist if it cannot be thought about? How can the signified exist without the signifier?

Ultimately, signs create the ability to know, understand and think about things. Perhaps things can exist without signs, but they cannot be processed or understood. However, signs are not static things. Their meaning and the perception of them changes with time. That is why Qfwfq cannot trust a sign to signify himself. The original, lost, sign is the only one that Qfwfq can value, and yet he does not recognize it when he sees it again. The true value, then, is not in the sign itself, but in the perception or meaning in Qfwfq's mind.



# All at One Point

## All at One Point Summary

Edwin P. Hubble's calculations can determine when all matter existed in one single point. Qfwfq tells his story of that time. Everyone is packed into one small point, but there is no concept of space. Everything is on top of each other. No one talks much, since they exist on top of each other. Qfwfq converses with Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0, her friend De XuaeauX, the annoying Mr. Pber^t Pber^d, and the Z'zu family. A cleaning woman is employed to clean the point, but there is nothing to clean. The point contains all the material of the universe. The Z'zu family are called "immigrants," although there's nowhere to come from, and Qfwfq says that the label is mere prejudice. All people are limited in the point. Everyone loves Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0, but no one ever sees her again after the universe expands. May the universe will retract again, and everyone looks forward to meeting Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 again.

Qfwfq runs into Mr. Pber^t Pber^d who lives in Pavia as a plastics salesman, and he's still loud. Mr. Pber^t Pber^d bad-mouths the Z'zu family and Qfwfq mentions Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0. They hope to see her again. Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 does not make anyone jealous. Everyone knows she sleeps with De XuaeauX. Though people bad-talk everyone else, they all feel good about Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0, who fills them and is filled by them. Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 wishes she had room to make noodles for everyone. Everyone imagines her wish coming true. The point instantly expands, with Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 at the center. She becomes the universe, but at the same time, she is lost to everyone.

## All at One Point Analysis

The point at the beginning of the universe is a place of stasis. This enclosed place is representative of the attitudes of the people who occupy it. They are closed-minded, bickering, petty people who bad-mouth each other at every opportunity. They cannot see outside of a narrow perspective, the narrow perspective of their one minuscule point.

Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0, though, contrasts to the other people in the single point. She is an open and loving person, and she neither takes part in the bickering nor is bickered about. No one backbites Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 or becomes jealous of the open love she gives to others. Only through this open-minded expansiveness can the universe expand. She shows to all the other people the possibilities of both the universe and herself transcends, becoming the basis of all the expansion of space. Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 is the Big Bang, the origin of everything and the way to break out of petty mindedness, through love.

Although Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 creates the universe, she does not truly change the others. When Qfwfq meets Mr. Pber^t Pber^d, the loud, suspended fellow is still obnoxious and petty, planning to disallow the Z'zu family from joining them at the end of the

universe. Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 is not what people are, but instead, she is the model of what people could be, the model of goodness.



# Without Colors

## Without Colors Summary

Without atmosphere, ultraviolet light makes Earth a dull gray color. Qfwfq runs about the monotone planet. Not many people are there; no sound without atmosphere, and meteors constantly strike the Earth. The molten core of the Earth warms the surface. The lack of color makes it difficult to distinguish objects. Qfwfq sees something moving, falls in love, and pursues the runner, Ayl. He finds her lying on the ground asleep and sits down to watch her. Ayl sees Qfwfq and can't distinguish him from his surroundings. She is afraid and Qfwfq tries to communicate with gestures that the two of them are alike and different. They run together and he asks Ayl to agree that the shiny rocks are beautiful. She disagrees. Once he moves the rocks, they no longer shine; then Ayl agrees that the rocks are beautiful. Ayl and Qfwfq spend that night together and Qfwfq wants to give Ayl a present but nothing seems worthy. Qfwfq sees beauty in difference, while Ayl loves sameness.

A meteorite causes colors to appear and Qfwfq shouts that it's his gift to Ayl, but she has fled. He finds Ayl in a garden, playing ball with her friends using a piece of quartz. No one sees Qfwfq in the grayness. Qfwfq leads Ayl away and reveals himself. They go off to play together. Ayl and Qfwfq throw the quartz ball back and forth over a fissure. The land is filled with a kind of fog, and Ayl grows frightened. The ball falls into the Earth. The gap is widening, and Qfwfq and Ayl are separated. Qfwfq realizes his voice is traveling through the gas. Qfwfq's senses are overloaded as he covers his eyes, mouth, nose, and ears. The world explodes into color. Qfwfq calls out to Ayl, but she is gone. Plants grow and water flows over the land. Qfwfq is awed by the colors. He sees Ayl's friends, who are now a blonde, brunette, redhead, and the other with brown hair. Qfwfq realizes Ayl is below the surface. He hears her voice and she tells him to be quiet. Ayl doesn't like the new colors. Qfwfq tells her the colors are gone. Qfwfq leads Ayl to the surface. She screams and runs back into the Earth. She has gone into the Earth forever, and Qfwfq realizes that she was never meant for this colorful world; she loved her perfect, gray world.

## Without Colors Analysis

"Without Colors" chronicles a major change in Earth's environment, and like "At Daybreak," it examines the characters' reactions to change. Qfwfq is exhilarated by change. He welcomes it. He looks for beauty, not in things that are familiar or the same, but instead in things that are different. In the gray world, Qfwfq is attracted to things that stand out. Even Ayl's flashing eyes stand out to him the first moment he sees her, and he falls instantly in love.

Ayl contrasts to Qfwfq. She is unable to embrace change. She enjoys stasis and security. She likes things to be the same. When Ayl and Qfwfq first meet, Qfwfq points



out the rocks, that they are different from each other. Then, he points out that Ayl is different from him. Ayl objects; they are not different; they are the same. Ayl is attracted to their likenesses, while Qfwfq is attracted to their differences, even from the beginning of their relationship.

The colorlessness of the environment that Ayl loves is calming and reassuring. She sees the colors as chaos, something uncontrolled and therefore dangerous. She limits her perspective to something that she understands—such as the people living in the point before the Big Bang in "All at One Point." Ayl takes a narrow point of view. Her inability to accept anything outside of the realm of her current vision causes her to run and hide, limiting her world even further. Instead of embracing colors, Ayl chooses to flee into darkness, losing the little light that she had. Her world is gone, and Ayl is unable to adapt to the changes of the universe.

In some ways, Ayl herself represents the lost world of grayness. Ayl disappears along with the time period to which she belongs. Qfwfq is eternal. He lives through all of the changes of the universe. When a time passes away, he cannot recapture it, and throughout his existence, each time period passes and is replaced by something new. In this way, he experiences a constant state of loss. Ayl leaves with the grayness of the Earth, and Qfwfq feels her loss and the loss of an era.



# Games Without End

## Games Without End Summary

An alternative to the Big Bang is that as the universe expands, matter is created to maintain a constant density. Hydrogen atoms are created at the rate of one every 250 million years. Qfwfq and he and his friend, Pfwfp, hydrogen atoms along the curve of space, each trying to throw his farthest. If a player throws too hard, two hydrogen atoms colliding might create deuterium or helium, which puts those atoms out of the game. If one player destroys his opponent's atom, that player must replace it. During the game, some atoms spin off into space, and so the supply slowly runs out. The first player out of atoms loses. Qfwfq is losing. He hasn't any atoms left, and Pfwfp always seems to have another in his pocket. Qfwfq follows Pfwfp when he wanders off to . Pfwfp is secretly collecting new atoms and rubbing them so that they look old. Pfwfp is stockpiling a lot of them. Perhaps Pfwfp is trying to build his own universe.

Qfwfq makes fake hydrogen atoms and replaces Pfwfp's new atoms with the fake. Pfwfp fills his pockets with fake atoms, but Qfwfq begins to win the game with the new atoms, while Pfwfp's fake atoms crumble whenever he throws. Pfwfp says the ruined atoms cancel the game. Qfwfq says he wins if Pfwfp does not throw. Qfwfq suggests throwing galaxies. Qfwfq throws his atoms into space, where they create a spiral galaxy, and Qfwfq hops on it, hurling away into space.

Pfwfp's atoms die as soon as he throws them. He vows revenge on Qfwfq, who avoids the older galaxies and flees in front of newer galaxies. Pfwfp chases Qfwfq into space, until they are beyond the boundaries of space and creating their own space. They chase each other in a circuitous, infinite race through space.

## Games Without End Analysis

Qfwfq's rival Pfwfp has a name that's nearly the same as Qfwfq's, showing how alike the two boys are. The same dynamic occurs in "A Sign in Space," where Qfwfq's unseen rival is named Kgwgk. Both Kgwgk and Pfwfp compete with Qfwfq on similar terms. Kgwgk and Qfwfq both make signs, while Pfwfp and Qfwfq compete for hydrogen atoms. The rivals in both instances are perhaps more similar than different. Pfwfp is a cheater, but Qfwfq does not hesitate to imitate his cheating behavior by setting a trap for his rival.

The rivalry between Pfwfp and Qfwfq leads them into a trap that the two boys cannot escape. By always trying to win over the other, the two boys' actions are dictated by the action of the other. When the two boys become trapped in a loop of space, chasing each other on their galaxies, this trap becomes literal. No one can ever win in this rivalry. Instead, both boys lose, because they are forced into constant competition.



Through the example of the two boys, the author talks about the nature of competition. The competitors may be ahead or behind, winning one battle or losing another, but they cannot escape the competition itself. No one can be a final and definitive winner as long as the rivalry goes on. The boys eventually grow up, and they are still trapped in a race with each other. There is no fun left in this contest, the game without end. The idea of having fun has been lost to the idea of winning.



# The Aquatic Uncle

## The Aquatic Uncle Summary

The first land creatures were fish that could turn their fins to paws. More and more fish move to the land, especially the young. The land-dwellers change and adapt, separating the more fish-like from the reptilian. Qfwfq's family is almost all dwelling on the land. Only Qfwfq's great-uncle, N'ba N'ga, still lives in the water. N'ba N'ga is a fresh-water Coelacanthus. He's rude to his land-dwelling family and accuses them of getting warts from the land. The family bring N'ba N'ga family issues and problems, even though he can't always understand the issues that occur on land. Qfwfq's family won't move back to the water and N'ba N'ga refuses to move to the land. Qfwfq falls in love with Lll, who is more agile than Qfwfq, since she was born on land. Qfwfq feels self-conscious because Lll's family is more established on land, while he still has a backward uncle living in the water. Qfwfq puts off introducing Lll to his uncle, but after they are engaged, he knows she'll have to meet the patriarch. Qfwfq and Lll are near the lagoon, and Lll dares Qfwfq to get as close to the water as he can. Qfwfq, is as agile as Lll in the damp environment. He mentions N'ba N'ga, his uncle, who still lives in the water. Lll says that she'd like to meet him, and N'ba N'ga appears on cue. Qfwfq introduces them, his embarrassment rising. Lll and N'ba N'ga talk about the water. As Qfwfq and Lll leave, Lll comments on how nice N'ba N'ga is. Qfwfq thinks that she must be joking.

Qfwfq and Lll continue to date and Lll asks for Qfwfq to bring her to N'ba N'ga again. N'ba N'ga talks about how breathing water is better than breathing air. He believes the lands are too changeable. Qfwfq sees Lll as the negation of these ideas. The lagoon offers a constant temperature and a stable environment and in this stasis, a person can find himself. Lll asks whether it's too late to go back and live in the water. N'ba N'ga says he can teach Lll to live in the water. Feeling that he's losing Lll, Qfwfq tries to show off, but she's gone all the time, spending time at the lagoon. To Qfwfq, learning to swim and breathe under water is a step backward. One day, Qfwfq waits for Lll and tells her he wants to go with her to a new land. Lll wants to live in the sea. Lll intends to marry N'ba N'ga and live in the water. She says goodbye to Qfwfq and dives into the water. Qfwfq has chosen a life of change and transformation, and Lll has chosen a life of stasis and self-actualization.

## The Aquatic Uncle Analysis

Through the idea of evolution, "The Aquatic Uncle" addresses two distinct points of view. The point of view of youth, in the guise of Qfwfq, embraces change and moving forward toward something new. The point of view of age, in the guise of N'ba N'ga, embraces stasis and security, which allows a person to fulfill who they are instead of becoming something new. N'ba N'ga loves the water and wants to become, truly, a fish. Qfwfq sees possibilities beyond the water and wants to become something new, something that will create a new future.





Qfwfq is embarrassed of his grand-uncle, and N'ba N'ga is condescending and critical toward Qfwfq. These two points of view have no common ground. Neither can hear the other's arguments. Qfwfq does not know how to argue his position; instead, he is constantly referring to his emotions and his joy at the beauty of the new world. In contrast, N'ba N'ga has well-thought-out arguments for his position, but he does not express them to his family; instead, he grumbles at them, accusing them of having warts, a blatant falsity.

LII is in between Qfwfq and N'ba N'ga. She is young, but she does not come from the water. LII was born on land, and for her, the land does not present a new world to conquer. Instead, it is the world she's always grown up with. She is not embarrassed by the ways of the past from which Qfwfq is trying so hard to escape. In some ways, she can see the arguments more clearly than either Qfwfq or N'ba N'ga. LII is not prejudiced against the land, and she is not prejudiced against the water.

When N'ba N'ga gives his arguments for living in the water, LII sees the strength of them. She values the stability that the oceans offer. Although N'ba N'ga is wrong that the lands are just a passing phase and will soon sink back into the ocean, he is right that the climate is much more changeable than the ocean. The Coelacanth species is one of the oldest and most unchanged fishes in the ocean. They represent stasis, finding a place of balance that does not require change. LII throws in her lot with N'ba N'ga to gain that balance and stasis.

In the end of the story, Qfwfq envies the ability of his uncle to survive after his time and maintain a balance with his environment that does not require constant change and transformation. Still, Qfwfq cannot move backward or throw his lot in with those who do not embrace change. Qfwfq wants, not only to change with the rest, but to move forward ahead of others. Qfwfq wants to move to a newly-discovered plain beyond the mountains, even farther away from the water. He is attracted to LII because of her agility and confidence on the land. He sees her as someone who has already moved forward and is ready for the next step. Qfwfq's nature causes him to endlessly push forward beyond the current boundaries.



# How Much Shall We Bet?

## How Much Shall We Bet? Summary

According to cybernetics, all the formations of the universe are inevitable through the natural interactions of matter. Qfwfq bets with Dean (k)yK there will be a universe and also wins a number of bets about what the universe will be like. There's not much on which to base bets. One day, Qfwfq intuits there might be atoms. Suddenly, hydrogen atoms form. There are no symbols, money, or numbers, which makes betting difficult. Qfwfq begins to see patterns and is able to make predictions. Qfwfq takes risks and bets on change while conservative (k)yK bets against new events. When numbers exist, they bet on how much stars will grow. Qfwfq puts all his wealth into technetium, which is unstable and disintegrates. Sometimes Qfwfq's bets are wrong; however, Qfwfq gets better makes detailed bets, such as whether the Assyrians will invade Mesopotamia. Dean (k)yK can't imagine such things in the future, so he always bets against them. Some of the bets are on immediate events, but before Dean (k)yK can even imagine humanity and Earth, Qfwfq is betting on minute details of existence.

Once the human world exists, Qfwfq realizes he's taken too many risks. Dean (k)yK begins to collect. Qfwfq and Dean (k)yK now hold their winnings in a Swiss bank. They work as researchers for the Electronic Predictions Center, where (k)yK has the better salary, since he has finagled the position of dean. The beginning of the universe was orderly and mathematical, and Qfwfq misses its predictability in the face of the messy unpredictability of the current world.

## How Much Shall We Bet? Analysis

The universe's physics give humanity the ability to predict what will happen in the future. Physical actions have predictable results. What are the consequences of this idea? If human beings are formed by the natural progression of the natural world, then aren't they subject to the same predictability as other natural processes? In other words, do human beings have free will, or is free will an illusion? The story "How Much Shall We Bet?" addresses these questions.

Qfwfq is superior in his bets, using his intellect to calculate the future events unfolding in the universe around him. He is competitive against his counterpart, and he is progressive in the face of (k)yK's unimaginative conservatism. He quickly catches on to the fact that the physics of the universe is predictable. He mentally follows the progression of the unfolding galaxies and suns. He can foresee Earth and its occupants long before they exist, while the sun is still cold.

Qfwfq's success leads the reader to suspect that Qfwfq will be able to predict human events with equal accuracy. Why would the laws of physics cease to apply once human beings develop? Human beings are, after all, part of the physical world. Qfwfq never



questions that his mathematical predictions will continue to be accurate, and (k)yK can't even follow Qfwfq's train of predictions and so cannot judge the question of whether those predictions might be derailed by some aspect of the future. However, once human beings appear and begin to interact, Qfwfq sees the folly of his logic. The human world is not solely governed by physics. The author's viewpoint is clearly that human beings have free will, and Qfwfq, for whom the physics of the universe is simple, cannot understand the complexities of human behavior.

9



# The Dinosaurs

## The Dinosaurs Summary

The reasons for the extinction of the dinosaurs are unknown. Qfwfq is a dinosaur, which is empowering, but the dinosaurs begin to die. Qfwfq stays in a deserted place until he cannot stand the loneliness and travels back to the world to find it changed. One of the New Ones calls to him, and Qfwfq runs away. They don't recognize him as a dinosaur. Qfwfq finds a colony of New Ones who ask Qfwfq to haul logs. They call him the Ugly One because he looks so different from them. The New Ones tell horror stories about the dinosaurs though they have not met one. When asked if he has a dinosaur story, Qfwfq hesitates, and Fern-flower tells the others to let Qfwfq be. Fern-flower dreams that a dinosaur carries her off to eat her, but she likes him. Zahn, Fern-flower's brother does not trust the "foreigner" Qfwfq. The conflict leads to a fight, and Qfwfq strikes Zahn. Qfwfq has earned respect and that "dinosaur" is a slang term, urging the fighters on.

The New Ones' start referring to dinosaurs as an example of how things should be. When Qfwfq objects, they won't believe Qfwfq has seen a dinosaur. Qfwfq confesses his feelings of inferiority, which drives Fern-flower away. A messenger says the dinosaurs are returning. Qfwfq is conflicted between his new life and the return of his species. Zahn suggest Qfwfq be in charge of their defense and Qfwfq is forced into the job. Qfwfq realizes the dinosaurs are really rhinoceroses. The others think he's a deserter. Dinosaurs become laughable creatures in the New One's stories. Fern-flower has a dream of a funny dinosaur being teased, which she protects the creature. Qfwfq is offended and shouts that he's a dinosaur, but no one believes him. A dinosaur body has been uncovered in a recently-melted glacier. The New Ones still do not recognize Qfwfq's similarity to the dead creature. Qfwfq buries during the night and they call it just another mystery of the great creatures.

A group of wanderers comes and Qfwfq recognizes dinosaur blood in a young female, though she does not realize it. Zahn courts the newcomer. Fern-flower relates another dream, of a dying dinosaur. Qfwfq is horrified and dances around Fern-flower, trying to replace the negative imagery with happy images. Fern-flower doesn't dance with him, so Qfwfq swims with the newcomer across the river. They spend the night together, and by doing this, Qfwfq breaks off any remaining friendship with Zahn. The people stop talking about dinosaurs. Fern-flower's next dream is of a lone creature in a cave, a survivor of a dead species. Qfwfq realizes that dinosaurs are still exercising power across the generations. Qfwfq decides to leave and encounters the travelers, including the half-dinosaur. She has a child, which is Qfwfq's child. The boy tells Qfwfq that he is a New One. Qfwfq heads off, taking the next train out into the wide world.



## The Dinosaurs Analysis

"The Dinosaurs" is a story of the passing away of an era. Qfwfq has a unique perspective because he is the only one who knows what life inside dinosaur society was like. As a dinosaur, Qfwfq has a narrow perspective, seeing things only as dinosaurs see them, within the dinosaur culture. However, when Qfwfq survives past the death of the rest of the species, his eyes are opened to new perspectives. He begins to see the dinosaurs from the perspective of outsiders.

The dinosaurs become a force in the culture of the New Ones. Dinosaurs themselves are extinct, so the dinosaurs do not develop any thoughts or understandings about anything else. Their era is dead; they are gone. They leave only a sign of themselves, a mark in the world of the New Ones. As time passes, the idea of the dinosaurs becomes changed and degraded by retelling of tales and by the events taking place in the culture.

The New Ones go through a series of cultural ideas about dinosaurs. First, they are afraid of the dinosaurs, and dinosaurs only exist in horror stories told around the campfire at night. Fern-flower's dream of being hauled off by a somehow attractive dinosaur to be eaten shows that these stories reflect a cultural titillation at the idea of the dinosaurs. Then, the society begins to revere the dinosaurs, casting the past, falsely, as a utopia to be imitated. But, the people's feelings change again, and the dinosaurs become mocked and pitied as ridiculous creatures.

After the New Ones find the dinosaur bones, though, their initial fear of the dinosaurs comes back in a new way. They rejoice over the dinosaur bones, glorying in the death of the others. Finally, the New Ones begin to forget dinosaurs completely. The dinosaurs become a part of the peoples' unconscious minds, affecting them but never fully understood or remembered. In this way, the era of the dinosaurs is absorbed into a new era but the dinosaur era influences people throughout time.

The fact that the dinosaurs still exist through the half-dinosaur woman and her new dinosaur child represents the dinosaurs living on, undetected, in society. Qfwfq is able to watch this process of dinosaurs becoming a memory and a subconscious influence. Only Qfwfq recognizes how far removed the idea of "dinosaur" is from the actuality of dinosaurs, and yet the New Ones' perceptions of dinosaurs are part of the totality of what dinosaurs "are."



# The Form of Space

## The Form of Space Summary

An unnamed narrator, presumably Qfwfq, falls through space without any reference. He is on a parallel track with the beautiful Ursula H'x and Lieutenant Fenimore. Ursula ignores the glances of the narrator and Lieutenant Fenimore. Fenimore wants to meet along their parallel paths, but the narrator knows that's impossible. Perhaps the parallel lines will meet in the infinity of space, but the fall continues uninterrupted, and the narrator's fantasies are just his jealous imaginings. Occasionally, the narrator or Fenimore try to catch Ursula's attention with a report of a universe. Perhaps it's the same universe passing over and over or just a figment of their imaginations. The narrator cannot know for certain what is happening, but he mulls over the situation and if there is any hope that he and Ursula will meet.

The narrator begins to think space is affected by the matter within it. Straight lines are distorted, since space has a shape that is modified by matter. The narrator begins to see the complex shapes of space within their parallel lines. He realizes that space is full of nooks and niches, where he and Ursula could join together until their paths again separated. Similarly, the narrator can join Fenimore's path. The narrator carefully observes their courses until he can ambush Fenimore, knocking him down and holding him against the rocks. The two fight until their paths are parallel again. They ignore one another. The narrator compares the parallel lines of his and Fenimore's falls to lines of handwriting, with loops and whorls through which the rivals pursue each other and their object, Ursula. Still, they continue their parallel fall, never meeting.

## The Form of Space Analysis

Although the narrator is unnamed in "The Form of Space," the story takes on the same first-person narrative style and context as the rest of the stories in the book. The unnamed narrator exhibits typical characteristics of Qfwfq, including his rivalry with Lieutenant Fenimore, his attraction to the beautiful Ursula H'x, and his ability to intuitively understand the nature of physical space. Presumably, the narrator is another incarnation of the eternal Qfwfq.

The narrator is caught in an eternal triangle, between attraction to a woman and jealousy of his rival. The parallel lines of their falls show how far apart the three are. Ursula H'x is consistently distant, unattainable both emotionally and physically. Although the narrator and Fenimore are both infatuated with Ursula, she herself has few characteristics. She is beautiful and moves tantalizingly, constantly grooming herself; otherwise, she has no personality. She is more a symbol of unattainable beauty than an actual person.



Fenimore, similarly, has little personality except for the perception of him as a rival and therefore an enemy. He is portrayed as pompous and lecherous, which may be the narrator's biased perception of him. The three characters, on three separate tracks, hardly seem to know or understand each other in any way. The narrator perceives Ursula as desirable and a willing partner and perceives Fenimore as an enemy or threat. These perceptions become realities, as the narrator uses the bends and twists in space to bed Ursula or attack Fenimore. Although the narrator makes contact, he does not have any true communion or understanding with the other characters. They may touch, but they are still separate, traveling on parallel tracks through eternity.



# The Light-Years

## The Light-Years Summary

Galaxies that are farther away are moving farther away at a faster speed. Galaxies ten billion light-years away move away at the speed of light. The narrator is looking through his telescope and sees a sign on a galaxy that says, "I saw you." The narrator realizes the communicator must have seen him exactly two hundred million years ago, when the narrator was caught in an embarrassing situation, which he did not handle very well. The narrator could explain the situation, but he can't communicate the complexities across the distance, so he puts up a sign that says "What of it?" The narrator comforts himself with the thought that they must have been watching him since then and seen his better behavior. He can't stop wondering and worrying, though. He keeps looking to the skies, and more "I saw you" signs crop up in other galaxies. One galaxy shows a different sign: "We can't see a damn thing." Once galaxies reach ten billion light-years away, they will be too far away for communication. One day when he did a particularly good deed he wants to know if the other people in other galaxies observed that deed, too. Since the galaxies are moving away from each other, the wait is longer with each event.

Meanwhile, "I saw you" signs keep appearing, as well as signs from others commenting on the "I saw you" signs. The narrator anticipates positive responses to his good actions. Finally, the time arrives to receive a response to his good day. The narrator turns his telescope to the sky and sees "Tra-la-la-la" on a sign. Whoever is supposed to be watching must not have been paying attention, but instead is singing a song. Other galaxies seem to have similarly missed the event, commenting on such minor elements as his flannel undershirt. When the narrator finally sees a sign praising him, he realizes that the people didn't recognize who he was. The narrator has failed to correct the misrepresentation of himself. The narrator sees signs commenting on all the minor events of his life. The narrator has a large sign with a pointing finger to point at himself when he does something good. When he is doing something bad, he uses another sign with a thumb that points away from him to distract people. These signs don't work out. He uses a variety of signs to communicate; none work. Meanwhile, galaxies begin slipping away past where light will reach. The narrator feels a kind of relief at finally losing communications with these galaxies. Although their judgment will never be corrected, he feels peace that their opinions will finally be out of his hands.

## The Light-Years Analysis

The narrator of "The Light-Years" desperately tries to communicate with the universe. He not only wants to communicate ideas but the essence of his personality. He wants others to understand who he is inside, underneath his actions; however, the means of communications are limited and awkward. The world is rife with miscommunication and misunderstanding, and the narrator cannot break through the barrier that separates him





from others. This narrator is likely Qfwfq, who similarly is concerned with others' opinions and the interpretations of his signs in "A Sign in Space."

Also like Qfwfq, the narrator of "The Light Years" has difficulty with problems of human interaction. The absurd attempts to communicate show the narrator's inability to express himself through signs that the outside world will understand. The distances between the narrator and the people he tries to communicate with are vast, hundreds of millions of light-years. This physical distance represents the enormous distance separating human beings as they try to interact.

While the other people in far-off galaxies misinterpret the narrator's meaning, it is equally possible that the narrator is constantly misinterpreting the meanings of the signs from other galaxies. Perhaps the original "I Saw You" sign means something completely different to the person who exhibited it than it does to the narrator. The narrator's experience exists only within his own mind. Because of this, the entire experience is as unreliable as the narrator's attempts to give others a good impression of him.

The narrator's quest to communicate has a deadline. Galaxies are moving constantly away from the narrator, and soon communication of any sort will be impossible. The narrator desperately wants to correct any negative impression of himself before the galaxies are lost to him entirely. At the same time, he recognizes that once the galaxies move far enough away, they will not exist for him anymore, and he will not exist for them. Once the galaxies are gone, he can finally let go of his need to please others and get their approval.



# The Spiral

## The Spiral Summary

Though mollusks have brightly colored shells, they cannot see each other or their surroundings. Qfwfq is a lump of stuff intent on sucking up food. He is basically formless with little concept of the world around him. Qfwfq is freed from entanglements because mollusks reproduce without sex. All the possibilities of evolution are in front of him. Qfwfq has some awareness of the world. Qfwfq absorbs whatever the waves have to offer. Qfwfq detects the presence of others, both different and similar from Qfwfq. He detects a female, who gives off a special vibration. He is immediately attracted and curious. Qfwfq fertilizes the female's eggs. At first, there is a mass of indistinguishable female vibrations, but then Qfwfq tries to recognize one female's vibrations and communicates. Qfwfq is jealous thinking her unfaithful. Qfwfq's fear motivates his forming his shell. He feels a drive to mark the world with something individual. The shell becomes shelter. Qfwfq's love is creating a shell, as are all the others, since they experience a kind of joint spontaneous creation.

Five hundred million years later, Qfwfq sees a variety of human activities taking place and is not surprised at this disparate world, a natural outcome of the mollusk shell. He sees his love in the females that surround him. His love is everywhere, but he cannot go to her. He could be mistaken, or she might not recognize him. Still, the shell is a shell. The world has changed, in that now there is a shell in it, and the shell has produced images that are worth looking at. The images of the shell in the world demand eyes which can see those images. Qfwfq extrapolates the idea of eyes and the development of eyes from his shell and the images his eyes create in the world. Others in the world will be attracted to the vibrations of images, and eyes will appear to see the images of the shell. Qfwfq, though, thinks that mollusks will develop sight to see the shells. Instead, all the other creatures of the world develop sight. The sight desired by mollusks is given to others, and others' sight is given them by mollusks. Qfwfq says that his image and the image of his love live on in the eyes of others.

## The Spiral Analysis

In "The Spiral," Qfwfq is a mollusk without sight or many ways to observe the world outside himself. Qfwfq is isolated. The focus of the mollusk is only on itself at first because there is little other information the mollusk can understand. The input that Qfwfq does have is in the form of vibrations and random bits of the world that come to him in waves. There is a sharp division between Qfwfq's experience and the world outside himself. He has no way to communicate and no way to express himself to others. Although he realizes that he is not alone, he continues to be isolated.

When Qfwfq creates his shell, it is an expression of himself and a means to communicate with others. In this way, the shell is similar to the sign that Qfwfq makes in



"A Sign in Space," and the signs that the narrator holds up to far away galaxies in "The Light-Years." Qfwfq is trying to express who he is to those around him. He is isolated, not by vast astronomical distances, but by a lack of sensory organs. The creation of the shell is not directed to random strangers, though, but to his love. He desires to cross the distance that separates himself from the female mollusk.

After the shell is created, the story changes. It flashes forward in time to the modern world, where Qfwfq still exists but in a different person and context. Qfwfq observes all the variety and history of the world and traces it back to that initial shell. He sees in all women and images of women the initial woman of his mollusk-love. Each reality in the world produces an image and sometimes many images. The reality of Cleopatra produces an image of Cleopatra, an idea of Cleopatra, a cinematic interpretation of Cleopatra, an actress who plays Cleopatra and a photograph of that actress on a magazine. The reality of Cleopatra produces many images that resonate throughout the culture, much as the images of the mollusk's shell resonate throughout the world.



# Characters

## **Qfwfq appears in The Distance of the Moon, At Daybreak, A Sign in Space, All**

Qfwfq is an eternal and abstract character who lives throughout all the ages of the universe and exists in many different places at many different times. Sometimes he is an animal, sometimes a person or sometimes an abstract entity. Qfwfq is constantly falling in love and pursuing love. He is self-consciously fearful of the judgment of others, and he is competitive against his rivals in both love and play. He is also consistently a harbinger of change in the universe as it evolves.

In "The Distance of the Moon," "All at One Point," "Without Colors," "The Aquatic Uncle," "The Dinosaurs," and "The Spiral," Qfwfq is in love with an unattainable woman. The changes in the universe wrench him from his loves. Mrs. Vhd Vhd is taken from him by the retreating moon. His love in "All at One Point" begins the expansion of the universe, disappearing into its stuff through her generosity as she releases Qfwfq from being contained in a single point. In "Without Colors" and "The Aquatic Uncle," the world is changing, and Qfwfq is anxious for change, while his loves long for a past time and lose themselves in search of it, as does his sister in "At Daybreak." In "The Dinosaurs," too, Qfwfq's love wrestles with her ideas of past and is not able to let go to simply move into the future.

In "The Form of Space," Qfwfq is presumably the unnamed narrator. He is eternally separated from his love by traveling in parallel lines, but he takes advantage of the shape of space to meet her and attack his equally inaccessible rival. Qfwfq is well able to understand the nature of space and time. He is intelligent enough to imagine and make the first sign, to create images out of which sight will develop, and to outsmart his playmate in "Games Without End." He outsmarts another rival by being able to bet on the formation of planets and other astronomical events in "How Much Shall We Bet?" What he can't always understand is the human element, which seems to foil him again and again throughout his adventures.

## **Captain Vhd Vhd appears in The Distance of the Moon**

Captain Vhd Vhd is in charge of the expeditions to get moon-milk from the moon when it comes close enough to the surface of the Earth to climb up. Captain Vhd Vhd wants to be rid of his wife, so he encourages her to climb up to the moon on their last expedition.

## **Mrs. Vhd Vhd appears in The Distance of the Moon**

Mrs. Vhd Vhd is Captain Vhd Vhd's wife. She is in love with the Deaf One and jealous of his love of the moon. She goes up to the moon with the others, when the moon is about



to start moving away from the Earth. Mrs. Vhd Vhd's plan to spend time with the Deaf One goes astray, and she becomes trapped on the moon for a month with Qfwfq. Mrs. Vhd Vhd becomes one with the moon in her quest to compete for the Deaf One's affection, and stays on the moon as it finally drifts away from the Earth.

## **The Deaf One appears in The Distance of the Moon**

Qfwfq's deaf cousin, known as the Deaf One, loves the moon. He goes off into the moon's unexplored spaces on his own, and he is able to intuit the best places to find moon-milk. He is incredibly agile at climbing up to the moon and back down to Earth, and he is the one who is able to get Qfwfq off of the moon's surface before it drifts too far off into space. Mrs. Vhd Vhd is in love with the Deaf One, but the Deaf One only loves the moon.

## **Xlthlx appears in The Distance of the Moon**

Twelve-year-old Xlthlx is light enough to be caught in the air between the gravity of the Earth and the gravity of the moon. The sea creatures who float around her are attracted to her, covering her and making her heavy enough to finally fall to the Earth.

## **G'd(w)^n appears in At Daybreak**

Qfwfq's sister is reclusive and enjoys the darkness. She constantly looks inward to her own mind and imagination. When matter begins to condense, she makes a kind of castle in the mud, calling it "an outside with an inside in it." When the sunlight first breaks in the solar system, G'd(w)^n flees from the change in her world. Among all the family, she has been most comfortable in the darkness and solitude. She swims down into the newly-condensing Earth, finding her way either into its center or out the other side. G'd(w)^n is resistant to changes and flees inward when she is confronted with the strangeness of an emerging sun.

## **Granny Bb'b appears in At Daybreak**

Granny Bb'b remembers the early days of the universe, when a diffuse light filled the universe. She believes that matter will disperse again and that the early light and heat that radiated throughout space will return. She persists in this belief to the point that she throws garbage into space, believing that it will simply break up and go away. Qfwfq finds Granny Bb'b's attitude embarrassing.

Granny Bb'b has a cushion that is made from material from the early galaxy, the only material object anyone seems to possess. However, she has lost it in the darkness and believes Qfwfq has taken it. Qfwfq finds that his twin brothers have the cushion, and when he pulls his brothers out of the newly-formed matter, the cushion is destroyed.



Granny Bb'b persists in believing that the changes to the solar system are a return to the old days, not the dawn of a new period of time. She resists change by refusing to believe change is really happening. Granny's cushion is a remnant of the past that she clings to, and its destruction represents the passage into a new time.

## **Father appears in At Daybreak**

Father is the first one to notice that matter in the solar system is becoming solid.

## **Mother appears in At Daybreak**

When the planetary matter starts to condense, Mother has trouble sleeping because of the lumps and bumps.

## **Rwzfs appears in At Daybreak**

Rwzfs is one of Qfwfq's twin brothers, a toddler. He finds one of the first "things" created by the formation of matter in the solar system and plays with it.

## **Mr. Hnw appears in At Daybreak**

Mr. Hnw is staying with Qfwfq and his family when matter begins to form in the solar system. He keeps sinking into the mud and getting stuff in his mouth. Qfwfq comments that Mr. Hnw will later become a horse.

## **Aunt and Uncles appears in At Daybreak**

Qfwfq's aunt and two uncles are visiting when the matter in the solar system starts to solidify. They leave in the midst of the transformation, and Qfwfq hears them making their way through new and unknown things, getting separated from each other as they go.

## **Kgwgk appears in A Sign in Space**

Kgwgk is the nemesis of Qfwfq. He erases Qfwfq's sign in space and creates his own crude imitations. Qfwfq never meets Kgwgk but deduces his existence.

## **Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 appears in All at One Point**

A bosomy woman wearing an orange dressing gown, Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 is a generous woman loved by everyone in the single point of matter at the beginning of the universe.



She has a lover, De XuaeauX, but since everyone is confined to a single point in space, everyone is part of her affair as well.

Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 avoids all the pettiness that invades her home at the beginning of the universe and inspires love but not jealousy. In a moment of generosity, Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 wishes she had space to make noodles for everyone, and everyone imagines her in a universe, kneading dough to make noodles. Through that image, the point begins to expand, with Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 at the core of the expansion. No one ever sees her again, and she becomes part of the universe.

## **De XuaeauX appears in All at One Point**

De XuaeauX is Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0's lover. Since everyone is condensed into a single point, everyone shares their bed.

## **Mr. Pber^t Pber^d appears in All at One Point**

A loud man with suspenders and a silver tooth, Mr. Pber^t Pber^d is one of the occupants of the point at the beginning of the universe. He is an obnoxious and petty man, and he is prejudiced against the Z'zu family.

## **The Z'zu Family appears in All at One Point**

The Z'zu family is known as an immigrant family in the point at the beginning of the universe, even though there is no time and no where to immigrate from. Petty people gossip about and criticize the Z'zu family.

## **The Cleaning Woman appears in All at One Point**

One cleaning woman, the "maintenance staff," is employed to clean the point at the beginning of the universe, but since it is only one point, there is nothing to clean.

## **Ayl appears in Without Colors**

In "Without Colors," Qfwfq falls in love with Ayl as soon as he sees her on the colorless world. Ayl and Qfwfq are alike, made of similar stuff, but they are also different. Ayl is attracted to their similarity, since she values sameness. Qfwfq, however, is attracted to their differences. While Qfwfq constantly looks for things that are different or unusual, Ayl is comforted by the sameness of the gray world that surrounds her and craves its security.

When an atmosphere and color come to the Earth, Ayl is frightened by the changes instead of being attracted to them. She runs away, into the Earth, leaving behind her all



the sunlight that she's known. Instead of embracing a new kind of light, she chooses to lose all light. Ayl loves the world that she starts out in, with its grayness. She is resistant to and afraid of all change. Her love of the world is part of her resistance. Ayl sees the world as perfect, and she fits with its calming grayness. Any change is a ruination of this perfect world.

Nothing can stop the destruction of Ayl's perfect world and the onset of a colored world, however. Ayl has two choices. She can let go of the world of calming gray that she used to know and try to live in the new world of colors, or she can retreat into total darkness, losing both her perfect world and anything new that the world of colors has to offer. Ayl chooses retreat. If she cannot have her perfect grayness, she will have nothing.

## **Pfwfpappears in Games Without End**

Pfwfp is Qfwfq's friend and rival in a game something like marbles but played with hydrogen atoms that generate in pockets in space. Pfwfp begins to cheat at the game by stealing the new hydrogen atoms before Qfwfq can discover them. Pfwfp is driven by rivalry. He cheats in order to win, and then when he begins to lose, Pfwfp wants to call off the game.

In the next game, creating galaxies, Qfwfq also comes out ahead, since Qfwfq has caught on to Pfwfp's cheating and has outwitted him by substituting fake atoms for the new atoms. Pfwfp is angry at Qfwfq for beating him. Driven by the rivalry, Pfwfp creates his own galaxy, and the two boys shoot off into space, in an eternal circular race. Pfwfp is always chasing Qfwfq, and Qfwfq is always chasing Pfwfp. Their rivalry can never be resolved. They are locked in competition where no one can be the winner.

## **N'ba N'gaappears in The Aquatic Uncle**

N'ba N'ga resists change. He is the last fish in Qfwfq's family, and he refuses to leave the water, even though his family constantly begs him to join them on land. N'ba N'ga sees the land as a changeable place that will require constant adaptation and kill off anyone who does not adapt. Meanwhile, the environment of the water remains stable, providing constancy and security for years to come.

Qfwfq finds N'ba N'ga hopelessly out of date and rude. However, N'ba N'ga remains the patriarch of his family, making decisions that affect all of his relatives on the land while he lives only in the water. N'ba N'ga is not completely out of touch with what life is like on the land, even though he maintains a narrow point of view from his position in the pond. Although Qfwfq dismisses N'ba N'ga, the old fish is intelligent and argues his points well. N'ba N'ga sees no reason to change when the water environment will continue to suit his needs and sustain him.





## **Lllappears in The Aquatic Uncle**

Lll is among the first generation to be born on land. Because her family has been on the land longer than Qfwfq's, Lll is more agile on the land than he is and better adapted to the land environment. When Lll meets Qfwfq's uncle, though, she is entranced by his arguments for how much better the water is than the land. Lll craves the stability that N'ba N'ga talks about. Ultimately, as in Qfwfq's affair with Ayl, Qfwfq loses this love to a regression into the past. Lll goes into the water to live in the world of the past instead of progressing into the more uncertain future.

## **Dean (k)yKappears in How Much Shall We Bet?**

Dean (k)yK bets with Qfwfq throughout the formation of the universe on upcoming events. Qfwfq begins winning more and more bets as he follows, logically, the physics of events to their natural conclusions. Dean (k)yK is conservative, betting against Qfwfq, typically saying that certain events will not happen. As the universe develops, Dean (k)yK, who does not see its patterns, loses more and more bets. He is a bad loser, often trying to deny the events as they occur.

However, Qfwfq's power of prediction only extends to a certain point in the development of the universe. Once humanity appears on Earth, Dean (k)yK and Qfwfq become researchers for the Electronic Predictions Center. They continue their bets on everything that happens around them. Qfwfq, however, finds that his physics-based predictions are defied by human behavior, and Dean (k)yK begins winning more and more bets. Dean (k)yK is as poor a winner as a loser, gloating over his victories.

## **Fern-flowerappears in The Dinosaurs**

Fern-flower is the object of Qfwfq's affection. She is one of the New Ones, part of a generation that does not remember the dinosaurs but mythologizes them. Fern-flower reflects her society's ideas about the dinosaurs. At first, the society uses dinosaurs for cautionary tales and titillating horror, and Fern-flower dreams of being carried off by a dinosaur intent on eating her, to whom she is strangely attracted. Then, the society begins to think of the dinosaurs as an idyllic past society, and Fern-flower dreams of a regal dinosaur who will not even look at her. Fern-flower cannot imagine what dinosaurs are really like, and she does not recognize the dinosaur who is right in front of her.

The society begins to think of the dinosaurs as laughable, comic creatures, and Fern-flower dreams of protecting a dinosaur being teased by all the others. Her feelings have changed to pity, and Qfwfq cannot stand being pitied. Later, the villagers find a dinosaur skeleton in the ice, and Fern-flower has a dream of a dying dinosaur. She is pleased to see him die, reflecting the society's underlying fear of dinosaurs and rejoicing at the scene of one's death. In a wild rebellion at her attitude, Qfwfq sleeps with another woman.



Finally, the society starts to forget what dinosaurs are, and Fern-flower has a dream of an unnamed survivor, the last of a species, hiding in a cave. Although she can't name him, she somehow knows him. The dinosaurs have passed into memory, but they remain a force in the subconscious. Fern-flower reflects all these changes in processing the meaning of dinosaurs to the society. She never recognizes Qfwfq and cannot consciously understand her own drives.

## **Zahn appears in The Dinosaurs**

Zahn is Fern-flower's brother, who disapproves of Qfwfq and challenges him. Zahn only comes to accept Qfwfq after Qfwfq defeats him in a fight.

## **The Half-Breed appears in The Dinosaurs**

One of the travelers that come to visit Fern-flower's village is a half-breed. Qfwfq recognizes that she has dinosaur blood in her, and he has a one-night stand with her, leaving her with a dinosaur child.

## **Narrator appears in The Form of Space**

The narrator of "The Form of Space" is presumably Qfwfq, the named narrator of most of the stories in Calvino's collection. In this story, he is falling eternally through space on a parallel track with other people. As with other incarnations of the eternal being of Qfwfq, the narrator is absorbed by love for an unattainable object. Ursula H'x is eternally separated from the narrator by a parallel fall, and the narrator's mind is filled with fantasies about her. These fantasies eclipse any reality of her personality. The narrator only sees the external beauty of Ursula, and so the physical separation of their parallel falls represents the lack of communication or communion between them as people.

As in other incarnations of Qfwfq, the narrator is stuck in a rivalry with another man, Lieutenant Fenimore, who is also falling along a parallel track with the narrator and Ursula. Fenimore makes signals and gives Ursula looks, so the narrator knows that Fenimore also lusts after Ursula. The rivalry explodes in violence when the narrator finds a way to exploit the twists and turns of the fabric of space in order to cross over to Fenimore's parallel tracks. As with Ursula, the narrator only sees the superficial elements of Lieutenant Fenimore, including his looks at Ursula and his military attire.

The narrator is intuitive about the nature of space, another thing he has in common with Qfwfq's other incarnations. He is constantly theorizing about the nature of their fall, and he intuits the bumps and pockets in the fabric of space through which he is falling. Although the narrator is able to manipulate space, he seems unable to resolve human difficulties and remains locked in an eternal love triangle.



## **Ursula H'xappears in The Form of Space**

Ursula H'x is the beautiful and preening object of the narrator's affection in "The Form of Space." She never speaks, but she moves her body tantalizingly as she falls through space in a parallel line to both the narrator and the lecherous Lieutenant Fenimore.

## **Lieutenant Fenimoreappears in The Form of Space**

Lieutenant Fenimore is the narrator's rival in "The Form of Space." He shows his attraction to Ursula H'x through hand gestures and lecherous looks. The narrator finds his way through the coiling intricacies of space to attack Fenimore, although their parallel trajectories keep them separated. Fenimore and the narrator are engaged in an eternal fight along their parallel lines.

## **Narratorappears in The Light-Years**

The narrator of "The Light-Years" is presumably Qfwfq in yet another incarnation of the eternal being. Although the narrator seems to be a human living on the planet, he also has existed for hundreds of millions of years, long enough to send messages back and forth from distant stars. Much as Qfwfq in "A Sign in Space," the narrator is concerned with how other people might perceive and judge him, and he also engages in using signs to try to influence others' opinions of him.

In "A Sign in Space," the narrator's sign is an abstract symbol left without description, but in "The Light-Years," the narrator uses a literal sign. At first, he writes messages such as, "What of it?" Later, he gets large signs of fingers pointing either toward or away from him that he uses to try to influence opinions. The narrator's signs are constantly misinterpreted. The more the narrator tries to communicate, the more his meaning gets lost in translation from one person to another.

Although the narrator is able to live through millions of years and communicate with other galaxies, mastering both time and space, as with other incarnations of Qfwfq, the narrator is unable to master simple human relationships. He is constantly insecure and concerned with what others may think of him. He tries to send out signals, but he cannot overcome the vast barriers to communication. He perceives his own actions and behaviors in one way, but the people he tries to communicate with perceive them in a completely different and unexpected way. The narrator's quest to truly communicate his nature and character to other people in the universe is doomed to failure.

## **The Female Molluskappears in The Spiral**

Although Qfwfq is a mollusk with no real senses to detect the outside world, he senses others, and among them a female mollusk with whom he immediately falls in love and

whose eggs he fertilizes. The unseen and barely-sensed female mollusk becomes a symbol of love and beauty, found in images of all women.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Zinc Cliffs appears in The Distance of the Moon**

The Zinc Cliffs are the best place to get to the moon when it comes close enough to the Earth.

### **Moon-Milk appears in The Distance of the Moon**

The sea creatures and plant materials that fly up to the moon when it gets close enough to Earth become trapped in the moon's crevices and ferment into a cheese-like substance called moon-milk. The story's characters go up to the moon to harvest this substance.

### **The Moon appears in The Distance of the Moon**

The young moon comes close enough to the Earth during its elliptical orbit for people to climb up to it from boats using ladders.

### **Granny's Cushion appears in At Daybreak**

Granny has a cushion made of material from the early galaxy, which she lost in the darkness. She thinks Qfwfq has stolen her cushion, but really Qfwfq's younger brothers have it. It dissolves when the Earth's matter starts congealing.

### **The First Sign appears in A Sign in Space**

Qfwfq makes a sign on a point in space to mark how long it takes for the Earth's sun to revolve around the Milky Way. However, when Qfwfq returns on his orbit, the sign is destroyed, and he cannot remember what it looked like. Over time, the original sign resurfaces, but Qfwfq cannot distinguish it from other signs that other people have made in the meantime.

### **The Point appears in All at One Point**

The story takes place in a single point before the Big Bang. This one point contains all the characters and all the matter of the universe.



## **The Meteor appears in Without Colors**

A meteor passes over the Earth, temporarily blocking some of the sun's rays and drenching the world in color. This frightens Ayl, while it delights Qfwfq.

## **The Quartz Ball appears in Without Colors**

When Qfwfq finds Ayl after she is frightened away by the meteor, she is playing with her friends with a quartz ball. Qfwfq catches the quartz ball and uses it to lure Ayl away from her friends. Later, the ball falls into a fissure in the Earth.

## **Hydrogen Atoms appears in Games Without End**

Qfwfq and Pfwfp play a game somewhat like marbles using hydrogen atoms. As new atoms appear in pockets in space, the boys are supposed to divide them evenly.

## **Fake Hydrogen Atoms appears in Games Without End**

When Qfwfq realizes that Pfwfp is cheating by stealing all the new hydrogen atoms, he creates fake hydrogen atoms out of radiation and other materials held together with spit. Qfwfq tricks Pfwfp by stealing the new hydrogen atoms himself and replacing them with fake hydrogen atoms.

## **Galaxies appears in Games Without End**

Qfwfq and Pfwfp create galaxies by throwing hydrogen atoms up in the air. They ride their galaxies off into space in an eternal race.

## **The Lagoon appears in The Aquatic Uncle**

N'ba N'ga lives in the lagoon as a fish and refuses to move onto the land with his family. The lagoon is a place of security, which N'ba N'ga sees as unchanging, and therefore safe.

## **Electronic Predictions Center appears in How Much Shall We Bet?**

When human life develops, Qfwfq and Dean (k)yK, two entities from the beginning of the universe, become researchers at the Electronic Predictions Center, where they continue to make bets about what will happen in the unfolding future.



## **The Dinosaur Skeleton appears in The Dinosaurs**

The villagers find a decaying dinosaur body in a melted glacier. They hold a celebration at the site of the dead dinosaur, rejoicing in having conquered the fearsome creatures. Qfwfq steals away the dinosaur skeleton in the night, burying his dead to protect the memory of the dinosaurs from the reactions of the New Ones.

## **The Fabric of Space appears in The Form of Space**

The narrator realizes that the fabric of space has a shape, affected by the matter in space. He is able to use the distortions of the fabric of space to move between parallel lines that separate him from both his love and his rival.

## **The I Saw You Sign appears in The Light-Years**

The narrator sees a sign that says "I Saw You" on another galaxy and assumes that the people on the galaxy are condemning him for something that happened two-hundred million years ago.

## **The Shell appears in The Spiral**

Qfwfq and the other mollusks spontaneously secrete colored spiral shells, which Qfwfq says create images that require eyes to see them, prompting other creatures to develop eyes.



# Themes

## Change

In Calvino's short stories, the characters often have to cope with change. The universe is constantly evolving, whether through the Big Bang, the moon moving away from Earth, the sun bursting into light or the Earth's atmosphere creating colors on its surface. Change is constant. The main character, Qfwfq, usually embraces change. When early fish are beginning to make the transition to walk on land, Qfwfq becomes excited at the prospect of land dwelling. When colors appear on Earth, Qfwfq is stunned by its beauty.

Still, Calvino's characters find change difficult to deal with. Qfwfq's family in "At Daybreak" doesn't know what to make of the changes in the planets and the sun as the solar system forms around them. His aunts and uncles get stuck on planets, and Mr. Hnw gets stuck upside down in the dirt. Ayl, Qfwfq's love in "Without Colors," fears change and runs away from the disruption in her world. Human beings (however alien they seem) don't deal well with change, and even Qfwfq is often awkward in periods of transition.

Qfwfq expresses a comfort with change and a desire to move forward to whatever comes next, discovering new wonders; however, Calvino's other characters sometimes give arguments for stasis and stability. Qfwfq's love, Ayl, is not only afraid of the new colorful world, she also mourns the passing of a gray world, a world of comfortable stability and sameness that is never jarring. Qfwfq's uncle N'ba N'ga expresses a similar sentiment. His beloved waters will not go through the dramatic climate changes that land will. In a constant state of change, a person is constantly adapting, but in a solid, static environment, a person can discover his or her true self.

## Self and Other

Qfwfq is very aware of the deep divide between the self and the other, and in Calvino's stories, divisions of space often represent the great personal divides between one soul and another. In "The Distance of the Moon," characters cannot understand each other or reciprocate each others' feelings, and the moon's flight away from the Earth becomes an objective correlative for the distance between each individual's experiences. In "The Form of Space," parallel tracks separate the characters, who are only able to come together at brief moments for love or hate.

In "All at One Point," the characters are, instead, crammed into a single, insular space. However, within that space the personal distance between them is accentuated. Instead of achieving greater understanding of each other, the characters are drawn into back-biting and quibbling, labeling some as "immigrants," (with a pejorative connotation) and constantly gossiping. The one character who is expansive in this insular atmosphere is





the one who truly joins the others together—Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0, who does not cause jealousy or gossip. Instead, she contains each one in herself and is contained in them, a true human communion. There is no "self" and "other" divide with Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0, and the power of that truth causes the world to expand into a universe.

In "A Sign in Space" and "The Light Years," the author deals with the idea of communication between self and others. As in "All at One Point," in both these stories, the world judges individuals. In this judgmental world, it is important to show the best of one's self; however, the divide between self and other is deep, and in these cases, the divide is represented by astronomical distances. The mechanisms for communication are severely limiting. Qfwfq's abstract signs in "A Sign in Space" makes communication of his true nature nearly impossible, and in "The Light Years," his truncated signs, designed to be readable over astronomical distances, are equally flawed. Somewhere between the intention of the communicator and the perception of one who receives the communication, meaning is lost.

## Perception and Reality

In many of Calvino's stories, perception plays an important role in reality. In "The Dinosaurs," after the dinosaurs themselves disappear off the face of the Earth, their existence is limited to others' perception of them. The New Ones do not know what dinosaurs are really like. Instead, the dinosaurs become abstract concepts in the New Ones' society. The reality of the dinosaurs is replaced by the New Ones' perception of the dinosaurs.

In "The Light-Years," the narrator struggles with the disparity between the reality of his character and others' perception of him. In far-away galaxies, the narrator himself doesn't exist (much as the dinosaurs do not exist after their extinction). All that exists of the narrator is others' perception of him, which he is keenly aware is faulty. A similar dynamic causes Qfwfq to stop making signs in "A Sign in Space."

In "All at One Point," perception takes on a new importance. Through the powerful perception of the possibility of a universe, a universe is formed. Similarly, in "The Form of Space," the narrator is able to manipulate his parallel path through his perception. In "The Spiral," the perception or idea of an image creates the reality of eyesight. Perception creates reality, and yet, perception is often faulty in reflecting that reality.

# Style

## Point of View

The stories in *Cosmicomics* are told from a first-person limited perspective, from the point of view of Qfwfq or an unnamed narrator, who is probably Qfwfq. Most of the stories are told as if they're being narrated by an old man to younger listeners. The narrator has a personal style of talking, sometimes answering unwritten questions from an unseen listener, as when he says "Orbit? Oh, elliptical, of course," in "The Distance of the Moon." Qfwfq exists outside of space and time, and he has different existences in different contexts. He exists as a dinosaur and as a mollusk. He lives at the point at the beginning of the universe and on Earth when the sun bursts into fire. Qfwfq, in his travels throughout space and time, brings an understanding of space, time and the natural processes of physics.

However, Qfwfq is also separated from others. His point of view is always internalized, focused inward on his own experience. Through his narration, the reader only sees what Qfwfq sees. Although this gives the reader a perspective on events that no one can experience, such as the formation of galaxies, the reader only sees these events through Qfwfq's eyes. Qfwfq can understand the physics of things, but he is lost when it comes to human relations.

Qfwfq falls in love easily but seldom truly understands the one that he loves. He falls into contests with rivals that lead only to disaster for both parties. He fails to predict how human beings will react to the changing world around them. He also fears others' opinions of him and fails to communicate his inner self. From Qfwfq's point of view, the physical world holds little mystery and is easily manipulated, but the relationships of thinking beings to each other is an eternal mystery.

## Setting

The settings for Calvino's stories range throughout space and time. The setting is often metaphoric, representing elements of the human condition. In "The Distance to the Moon," the moon represents both love and the inherent separations of human beings from each other. In "All at One Point," the single point at the beginning of the universe represents the insular nature of the people who inhabit it. In "Without Colors," the grayness of the Earth before its atmosphere represents Ayl's love for sameness and stability. In "The Form of Space," the characters' parallel trajectories through space represent the inherent distances between human beings and the impossibility of true human connection.

The settings of Calvino's stories often include major shifts in the universe. They take place in times of significant change. This gives Calvino an opportunity to explore the responses of the characters to change. Even if the changes might have taken place



gradually over a long time in the physical universe, Calvino's changes take place suddenly and momentarily. The moon suddenly shifts away from the Earth; the Earth's atmosphere suddenly erupts from the ground. Sudden change accentuates the human reaction to these shifts.

Because Calvino sets his stories in such disparate places and times across the universe, he emphasizes the universality of the human condition. From "All at One Point," set at the very beginning of the universe, to "Games Without End," set atop galaxies flying off into unformed space, to "The Form of Space," set in a void outside distant universes, human nature is the same. Calvino's characters have the same jealousies and desires, whether they are humans or mollusks or dinosaurs or abstract beings.

## Language and Meaning

Calvino uses long, complex sentences to evoke strings of actions, consequences and associated ideas. When Qfwfq reaches a moment of realization, ideas are strung together in a rush of connections, reflecting, perhaps, the interconnectedness and complexity of physical elements of the world. When the action of the story reaches a height of excitement, a similar rush of connected ideas, often in the form of one lengthy sentence, builds the emotion up to its peak.

Calvino's language is at times filled with scientific terms and references. The stories, while not scientific, are based on scientific concepts, ideas and events. Ideas are discussed in terms of energy, light, heat, atoms, pieces of matter, radiation, particles and points. Characters live abstractly in a realm of science where they do not belong. The characters themselves often use terms that don't apply in their situations at all, such as the characters living in a single point at the beginning of the universe wearing suspenders or having mattresses, or Qfwfq's aunts and uncles saying goodbye and stepping somehow off into the stuff of the early solar system. This creates a humorous contrast between the everyday reality of human existence and the grandeur of the universe.

Calvino also playfully uses language to create names that are tantalizingly suggestive of meaning. Qfwfq is a palindrome, bilaterally symmetrical, as are many natural constructs and organisms. Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0's name evokes physics equations and also is reminiscent of the name Planck, evoking Planck's constant, a number used to describe the sizes of quantum particles. Qfwfq's arch rivals often have names that reflect his own, such as Kgwgk, whose name follows the same pattern (with a symmetrical w in the center) as Qfwfq's, and Pfwfp, who is separated from Qfwfq only as far as a p is separated from a q.

## Structure

Each of Calvino's stories in *Cosmicomics* begins with a fact or idea about science, which sets up the events that the story will tell. This scientific idea is related in the



straightforward tone of an encyclopedia. Then, Qfwfq, or, in the case of two stories, an unnamed narrator, begins telling a fantastical tale relating somehow to that scientific tidbit. In these stories, impossible characters relate to each other as typical human beings, even though they live in fantastical settings. The stories, therefore, move from the solid, factual reality of science into the fantastical and personal reality of human nature.

The structures of Calvino's stories are typically chronological; however, since they are narrated from the future by Qfwfq, the stories sometimes jump forward or backward. The only story that is formally divided, except for the scientific fact at the beginning, is "The Spiral." This story is divided into three parts. The center part of this story, set off in italics, contrasts the blind and nearly senseless world of the mollusk with an impression of the future world with all its interconnected elements, in which the narrator searches for his love in the images of all women.

The consistent character of Qfwfq ties all of the stories in *Cosmicomics* together into a single narrative. Qfwfq persists in all places and times, and he faces similar conflicts in vastly different circumstances. While he may be an abstract being at one moment and a mollusk the next, he always faces problems of love, rivalry and change. This enforces the idea that the human condition is universal, throughout space and time.



## Quotes

"Didn't I realize it? Or had that been my intention from the very beginning? Before I could think properly, a cry was already bursting from my throat. 'I'll be the one to stay with you for a month!' Or rather, 'On you!' I shouted in my excitement: 'On you for a month!' and at that moment our embrace was broken by our fall to the Moon's surface, where we rolled away from each other among those cold scales." —"The Distance of the Moon," page 13

"There was no use trying to understand the phenomena that took place in those days; and there was no use trying to explain it to Granny B'bb." —"At Daybreak," page 24

"Now, there wasn't a single sign of mine in space. I could start drawing another, but I knew that signs also allow others to judge the one who makes them, and that in the course of a galactic year tastes and ideas have time to change, and the way of regarding the earlier ones depends on what comes afterwards; in short, I was afraid a sign that now might seem perfect to me, in two hundred million years would make me look absurd." —"A Sign in Space," page 37

"It was enough for her to say, at a certain moment: 'Oh, if I only had some room, how I'd like to make some noodles for you boys!' And in that moment we all thought of the space that her round arms would occupy, moving backward and forward with the rolling pin over the dough, her bosom leaning over the great mound of flour and eggs which cluttered the wide board while her arms kneaded and kneaded, white and shiny with oil up to the elbows; we thought of the space that the flour would occupy, and the wheat for the flour, and the fields to raise the wheat, and the mountains from which the water would flow to irrigate the fields, and the grazing lands for the herds of calves that would give their meat for the sauce; of the space it would take for the Sun to arrive with its rays, to ripen the wheat; of the space for the Sun to condense from the clouds of stellar gases and burn; of the quantities of stars and galaxies and galactic masses in flight through space which would be needed to hold suspended every galaxy, every nebula, every sun, every planet, and at the same time we thought of it, this space was inevitably being formed, at the same time that Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0 was uttering those words: '. . . ah, what noodles, boys!' the point that contained her and all of us was expanding in a halo of distance in light-years and light-centuries and billions of light-millennia, and we were being hurled to the four corners of the universe (Mr. Pber^t Pber^d all the way to Pavia), and she, dissolved into I don't know what kind of energy-light-heat, she, Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0, she who in the midst of our closed, petty world had been capable of a generous impulse, 'Boys, the noodles I would make for you!,' a true outburst of general love, initiating at the same moment the concept of space and, properly speaking, space itself, and time, and universal gravitation, and the gravitating universe, making possible billions and billions of suns, and of planets, and fields of wheat, and Mrs. Ph(i)NK\_0s, scattered through the continents of the planets, kneading with floury, oil-shiny, generous arms, and she lost at that very moment, and we, mourning her loss." —"All at One Point," pages 46-47



"And I realized, with grief and fear, that I had remained out here, that I would never again be able to escape those gilded and silvered gleams, those little clouds that turned from pale blue to pink, those green leaves that yellowed every autumn, and that Ayl's perfect world was lost forever, so lost I couldn't even imagine it any more, and nothing was left that could remind me of it, even remotely, nothing except perhaps that cold wall of gray stone." —"Without Colors," page 60

"We had lost all pleasure in this game of chase, and we weren't children any more for that matter, but now there was nothing else we could do." —"Games Without End," page 68

"Compared to the uncertainties of earth and air, lagoons and seas and oceans represented a future with security. Down there, changes would be very few, space and provender were unlimited, the temperature would always be steady; in short, life would be maintained as it had gone on till then, in its achieved, perfect forms, without metamorphoses or additions with dubious outcome, and every individual would be able to develop his own nature, to arrive at the essence of himself and of all things." —"The Aquatic Uncle," page 79

"When I saw I was caught in a trap it was too late. I still had the satisfaction—a meager satisfaction, this time—of being the first to be aware of it: (k)yK seemed not to catch on to the fact that luck had now come over to his side, but I counted his bursts of laughter, once rare and now becoming more and more frequent . . ." —"How Much Shall We Bet?" page 91

"Since then, I have learned many things, and above all the way in which Dinosaurs conquer. First I had believed that disappearing had been, for my brothers, the magnanimous acceptance of a defeat; now I knew that the more the Dinosaurs disappear, the more they extend their dominion, and over forests far more vast than those that cover the continents: in the labyrinth of the survivors' thoughts." —"The Dinosaurs," page 111

"The grain of space was porous and broken with crevasses and dunes." —"The Form of Space," page 122

"However, the rational certainty was not enough to afford me relief: until I had the proof of a change of opinion in my favor, I would remain uneasy at having been caught in an embarrassing position and identified with it, nailed fast in that situation." —"The Light-Years," page 129

"And so I learned that there were the others, the element surrounding me was filled with traces of them, others hostile and different from me or else disgustingly similar. No, now I'm giving you a disagreeable idea of my character, which is all wrong. Naturally, each of us went about on his own business, but the presence of the others reassured me, created an inhabited zone around me, freed me from the fear of being an alarming exception, which I would have been if the fact of existing had been my fate alone, a kind of exile." —"The Spiral," page 143



## Topics for Discussion

Calvino makes several arguments for stasis over change in "Without Colors," "At Daybreak," and "The Aquatic Uncle." Describe and respond to these arguments.

Discuss the portrayal of women in Calvino's stories. How are these women individual characters with distinct personalities, and in what ways are they one-dimensional representations of ideas of beauty and love?

Why is Qfwfq often locked in conflicts and rivalries with other male characters?

Why do the New Ones' perceptions of the dinosaurs change over time in "The Dinosaurs"? Are the true dinosaurs lost to time forever?

Discuss the nature of signs and symbols in relation to the things they represent in "A Sign in Space" and "The Light Years." What role do signs and symbols play in communication?

Describe how the settings of Calvino's stories symbolically represent aspects of the human characters, such as the insular nature of the people in "All at One Point" and the distance between the characters' perspectives in "The Distance of the Moon."

Why does Calvino choose to use one main character, Qfwfq, to play so many roles throughout time and space?