

Count Zero Study Guide

Count Zero by William Gibson

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Plot Summary

Count Zero is a cyberpunk novel, taking place in a corporate-ruled future where information is shared in a mass construct called cyberspace. Turner is a mercenary hired to help a scientist escape from his contract with a large corporation and defect to another corporation. Instead, he winds up with the scientist's daughter, who has been implanted with brain biomechanics that allow her to channel artificial intelligences living as gods in cyberspace. Turner helps her escape to a group of voodoo practitioners who deal with the cyberspace gods before he retires from his life as a mercenary.

As the novel begins, Turner is blown up during a job in New Delhi and is reconstructed. In Mexico, he becomes involved with an undercover psychologist sent to check him out for his next mercenary job, extracting a scientist from one corporation to work for another corporation. On this job, things go wrong. The target's plane arrives, with corporate security on its tail, but the target is not the scientist Turner expected. It's the scientist's daughter, Angie Mitchell. Turner takes off in a plane with Angie, and behind them the extraction site explodes in a white light. Unsure who to trust, Turner takes Angie to his brother's rural home, where they discover a strange implant in Angie's brain that causes trances, wherein Angie seems to channel voodoo gods.

Meanwhile, Marly, a Parisian former art gallery owner, is hired by ailing billionaire Josef Virek to find the artist who made several collages. She becomes increasingly concerned about Virek and his web of influence, but she finds the location of the artist, on an abandoned mainframe station in orbit around Earth. It's an artificial intelligence using mechanical manipulators and sensors, and it communicates with smaller AIs that exist as voodoo gods in cyberspace.

In New Jersey, Bobby Newmark, a.k.a. Count Zero, goes on his first cyberspace run, where he is almost killed. He finds that big companies are after the software he's used, and they blow up his house. The software was being tested on him by big-money followers of voodoo, and Bobby was saved by someone they call the Virgin. The voodoo followers bring Bobby to a club called Jammer's to keep him safe, but soon their club is closed in by gang members. Bobby goes into cyberspace and finds that Jaylene Slide, a cyber runner, is looking for whoever killed her lover at the botched Mitchell extraction.

Turner arrives with Angie, brought there under the direction of voodoo gods, who live in cyberspace. They discover that Conroy double-crossed Mitchell, and he's working for Virek. Bobby goes into cyberspace to tell Jaylene that Conroy is the culprit, and he finds himself face-to-face with Virek. Bobby lets one of the voodoo gods take him over, an ability he gained by using the AIs' illicit software, and kills Virek. Then he gives Conroy up to Jaylene, who has him killed. Turner retires from his mercenary life, while Bobby and Angie join the voodoo followers to learn about their role. Several years later, Angie is an up-and-coming media star, with Bobby as her bodyguard.



Chapter 1, Smooth-Running Gun, Chapter 2, Marly, and Chapter 3, Bobby Pulls a Wilson

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Count Zero is a cyberpunk novel, taking place in a corporate-ruled future where information is shared in a mass construct called cyberspace. Turner is a mercenary hired to help a scientist escape from his contract with a large corporation and defect to another corporation. Instead, he winds up with the scientist's daughter, who has been implanted with brain biomechanics that allow her to channel artificial intelligences living as gods in cyberspace. Turner helps her escape to a group of voodoo practitioners who deal with the cyberspace gods before he retires from his life as a mercenary.

As the novel begins, Turner is blown up by a bomb trained on his pheromones and hair color. His agent has him transported to Singapore, where a Dutch surgeon rebuilds him over the course of three months, using cloned skin and purchased body parts. Meanwhile, Turner exists in a "simstim," a type of virtual reality, where Turner lives the life of a boy in New England in the twentieth century and talks to the Dutchman in what seem like dreams. Turner lives a roaming life, and he starts hopping from airport hotel to airport hotel. Then, one day he has a sudden rush of memory that causes him to vomit, and he drops all his plans to travel to Mexico.

In Mexico, Turner uses a "microsoft" plug-in that attaches to a socket behind his ear to speak and understand Spanish. He meets a woman named Allison and stays with her at a hotel for several weeks, spending days at the beach and nights in their hotel room. On their last day together, she seems tense and suggests a walk down the beach to a ruined hotel. When Turner sees a boat in the distance, he sends Allison away and goes to meet Conroy, who wants Turner to extract Christopher Mitchell, Maas Biolabs' leading scientist in biochips, so that he can defect to Hosaka Corporation. Allison is a field psychologist who's been evaluating him, and she says he's ready to work.

In chapter two, Marly Krushkhova, a Paris art dealer whose gallery went out of business because of a scandal over a forged artwork, is going for an interview with wealthy businessman and art connoisseur Josef Virek. At Virek's office, the billionaire meets Marly in a virtual setting, through a "sensory link." They appear to be in Barcelona, but in actuality, Virek is confined to a vat in Stockholm, where his cancer-ridden body is being kept alive. The illness is kept secret, with doubles and holograms impersonating Virek in public. Virek shows Marly a work of art, a box containing a bird bone, three circuit boards, a white clay sphere, a piece of lace, and a human wrist bone. The box is brought to them by "Paco," who appears as a small boy but is actually a computer program. Virek hires Marly to find the artist who created the box.



Chapter three introduces Bobby Newmark, a kid who wants to be a hot-shot cowboy, an operator in cyberspace who can break into secured data and do other programming feats. Bobby's just finished his first run and almost got killed. His self-styled cowboy name is Count Zero, and he was rented an icebreaker, security breaking software, by Two-a-Day, a waresman, or illicit hardware/software dealer, in his impoverished Barrytown, New Jersey neighborhood. Bobby has "pulled a wilson," the street lingo for messing up. He is dying to the security software he's trying to break, when a female form comes to him from out of cyberspace and saves him.

Chapter 1, Smooth-Running Gun, Chapter 2, Marly, and Chapter 3, Bobby Pulls a Wilson Analysis

Turner is recreated from the ground up at the beginning of the novel. He starts the story by basically dying. This reincarnation emphasizes the level of technological accomplishment of the futuristic society, but it also foreshadows Turner's development during the story. He has been reborn physically, but now it is time for Turner to make an emotional jump, an evolution in his development as a person that will allow him to change his life. The memory that makes Turner vomit in the airport and sends him off to Mexico is the beginning of the journey. However, before Turner can begin to change, he's sucked into his old life again, as Conroy comes to bring Turner on another mercenary job.

The novel follows three storylines that are set up in the first three chapters. Each of the three primary characters approaches the story from a different perspective. While Turner approaches the story as a hardened mercenary, Marly approaches it as an art dealer, a woman who is sensitive to emotion and experience. Bobby approaches it from a perspective of ignorance. In contrast to Turner and Marly, he lives in a slum, where he is not exposed to much of the world at all. He wants to be a player, a cyber runner, but he understands almost nothing about the game.



Chapter 4, Clocking In, Chapter 5, The Job, and Chapter 6, Barrytown

Chapter 4, Clocking In, Chapter 5, The Job, and Chapter 6, Barrytown Summary

In chapter four, Turner meets the team that Conroy has lined up for the extraction. Oakey, one of the men, worked with Turner in the past, but Turner doesn't remember him. Conroy shows Turner an advanced Maas-Neotek cyberdeck, used to access cyberspace. The technology is so advanced that Hosaka can't reverse engineer it. Jaylene Slide will be using the cyberdeck, and someone named Ramirez will be using a second deck on site. The men came through Turner's agent, and Conroy has the gun and ammunition Turner's agent specified for him, too. Conroy gives Turner a biography of Mitchell to plug into his head. It's disorienting, because the information is meant for an AI. Then, it's time for Turner to go inspect the troops.

In chapter five, Marly checks into a plush hotel on her new salary. She's gotten rid of her old favorite jacket, a year-old designer piece, and bought new clothes, including a new jacket and purse. She plans to have her hair cut in Paris. Marly tries to call her friend and roommate Andrea, but she realizes the program on their phone to block outside numbers, put in place because of the scandal at Marly's gallery, will block the call. A package is delivered to Marly's hotel, containing holograms of the boxes made by the artist she's looking for and information about each one, although she hasn't told anyone where she's staying.

In chapter six, Bobby regains consciousness eight hours after his run. He takes a shower and goes to his bedroom where he has a holographic porn unit, which now bores him. He turns it off. Bobby gets his credit chip and two hundred ten New Yen hidden in a screwdriver and goes out to Big Playground, an open, neutral area inhabited by rival gang members from the Gothicks and the Kasuals. He looks up at the Projects, large self-contained living areas called arcologies, where Two-a-Day comes from. Two-a-Day picked the base for Bobby to break into on his first run, and Bobby didn't expect any deadly security. He goes to Leon's, a hangout off of Big Playground, to look for Two-a-Day but can't find him.

Bobby thinks about his mother, Marsha, who is addicted to soap operas and drinking. Bobby never knew his father, and the stories Marsha has told him are likely lies. He goes to a protected area behind a dumpster to wait until more people are out. He sees a group of kids salvage a dangerous biohazard canister out of a dumpster to sell. After an hour and a half, he goes back to Leon's where the Gothicks are gathering, but no one can direct him to Two-a-Day. Bobby begins walking around, starting to get hungry. Then he hears on the news that his block has been blown up. He walks off in distress, and two Gothicks follow him.



Chapter 4, Clocking In, Chapter 5, The Job, and Chapter 6, Barrytown Analysis

The new technology coming out of Maas Biolabs is a recurring motif in the novel. The sleek cyberdecks that Hosaka uses for the extraction operations are so advanced that the rival company can't reverse engineer them. Virek's people also use Maas technology. Mitchell is the originating force behind the new technologies, a new evolutionary "jump" for human society. The idea of an evolutionary jump that moves someone or something to the next level is also a recurring theme in the novel. Maas technology is moving computers to the next level. Virek wants to move to the next level of his own evolution, where he can live outside his body. Turner needs to move to a new personal level, where he can live a more healthy life. Bobby, too, is moving to a new level in his life.

For Bobby, the Projects represent a next level up from his life in the slums where he lives. The Projects are a technological advance from the past, but they are also a continuation of old ideas. The housing projects of New York became ghettos, impoverished and isolated black or immigrant communities. The Projects in Bobby's community are isolated black communities, but in isolation, the black community has evolved. They have their own clothing and religion. They are not, however, powerless or impoverished. To Bobby, the Projects represent a movement up in the ladder to success.

Bobby is an innocent bystander to the plot he unwittingly becomes involved in. First, he nearly dies on his first cyberspace run and is rescued by a strange girl-like entity. Then, his home is blown up. Bobby's past is destroyed, and he is completely thrust into a new world that he knows nothing about.



Chapter 7, The Mall, Chapter 8, Paris, and Chapter 9, Up the Projects

Chapter 7, The Mall, Chapter 8, Paris, and Chapter 9, Up the Projects Summary

In chapter seven, Conroy brings Turner to the site for the transfer, a mall project that was stopped before it ever got built and is now decaying in the Arizona desert. There are nine members of the extraction team, plus a team of medics who will check Mitchell out for any potential biological dangers planted by Maas. The medical building is hidden inside an abandoned structure. Turner tells Conroy to get him a jet to get out with Mitchell. Turner will plug into the jet and fly it himself. Turner meets the crew and immediately suspects one of the men, Lynch, of being a plant to spy for Conroy.

In chapter eight, Marly goes to Andrea's apartment in a run-down old Paris building. Marly used to live in a room attached to her gallery, with Alain. When she had to close the gallery, she came here to live with Andrea. Andrea lets Marly in, and Marly makes coffee. Marly shows her friend a hologram of the box, and Andrea agrees that it's Marly's type of art, though it's too serious for Andrea. Marly says that Virek was horrible and not quite human, and they talk about the very rich becoming inhuman. Andrea tells Marly that her former lover, Alain, has called, probably sniffing after her new-found money.

In chapter nine, Bobby wakes up in the Projects, coming out of weird dreams of his mother's soap opera. A man named Pye, who is not a doctor but as a former veterinarian helps out, is sealing large cuts in Bobby's chest with a mechanical claw that looks like a centipede and seams together the flesh. A girl named Jackie, who Bobby saw earlier at Leon's, wheels him into another room in a wheelchair. Bobby's deck has been stolen by the men who cut him up, and his clothes have been burned. Rhea, a second girl, has taken Bobby's money that was hidden in the screwdriver to pay for a new shirt. Her old one was ruined saving him.

Bobby finds himself in a floor of the projects that is planted throughout with trees. Two-a-Day is there with two other men, and his living space is cluttered with garbage, empty food and drink containers, and cigarette butts. Two-a-Day, to Bobby's chagrin, doesn't seem to care about him, but the other two men question him. They want to find the Virgin of Miracles, the presence that saved Bobby. They say he is a chosen one of Legba, the loa, or voodoo god, of roads and communication.



Chapter 7, The Mall, Chapter 8, Paris, and Chapter 9, Up the Projects Analysis

Both Turner and Marly rely on their instincts. Turner immediately believes that he's pegged Lynch as a plant who is on Conroy's payroll to keep an eye on the operation, something Turner thinks could endanger them all. Marly, also relies on her instincts. She approaches the holograms of the boxes from a personal perspective, based on her intuitive responses to the art. She approaches Virek in the same way. She gauges her personal response to her experiences with Virek, and her experience gives her a growing uneasiness about Virek himself, who seems to have lost his humanity in the midst of his wealth. Virek has lost his humanity on one level, at least. He does not live in a human body in the world. His physical form is confined to a vat, kept alive by machines and riddled with cancer. Virek lives in a virtual reality inside cyberspace, in an entirely manufactured world afforded by his wealth.

Like Turner, Bobby experiences a death and rebirth at the beginning of the novel. In fact, he experiences more than one. When he goes into cyberspace, Bobby dies on the black ice that he finds there, and is only pulled out of death by the female apparition he encounters. Later, after his world is destroyed by a bomb, Bobby is cut up and he loses consciousness. This time, he is pulled away from death by the forces of voodoo religion that have grown up in the Projects. In this death and rebirth, he has found his way to the next level of his existence, where he is embroiled with gods.



Chapter 10, Alain, Chapter 11, On Site, and Chapter 12, Cafe Blanc

Chapter 10, Alain, Chapter 11, On Site, and Chapter 12, Cafe Blanc Summary

In chapter ten, Marly meets with Alain. He at first tries to convince her that he only engineered the counterfeit artwork scheme to help her, but Marly sees through him and begins to finally realize that she's emotionally rid of him. Alain offers to sell her information on the artist she's been hired to find. He goes to the restroom, and a waiter approaches her. He says to accept Alain's offer and that the money is no problem. He also says Alain has a gun and is wired for sound.

In chapter eleven, Turner has gone over all the arrangements with the men, and he's getting three hours of sleep. Turner isn't pleased with the arrangements and thinks the extraction will be dangerous. There are standing orders to blow up the medical facility and team if things go bad. Turner believes that the helicopters that will come in to lift out the rest of the team will get shot down. The base with the cyberdeck is also wired to be exploded if there's a problem. The one part of the plan that Turner admires is the hand warmers that Conroy bought to mark off a landing strip for the plane that will be carrying the fugitive.

When Turner wakes from a troubled sleep, he goes to see the medics. The plan is to move the medical unit out and off its wheels when the target is coming in, so the fugitive can be examined for deadly implants and then moved out. The head mercenary doctor hints that something cutting edge and dangerous may be hidden in the defector's head, but that it won't be deadly to the fugitive. When a messenger comes with the software to allow Turner to fly the jet, Turner questions him about Lynch's loyalty and then sends a message to Conroy that he knows Lynch is the snitch. As they prepare for the arrival, Turner chats with Webber and learns that she lives in New Mexico with a female lover and their child, and that she raises dogs and fishes.

In chapter twelve, Marly walks away from her meeting, feeling Virek's web of influence around her. She goes to a restaurant that once held too many memories of Alain for her and feels free of his influence, at least. The waiter who spoke to her about Alain comes to her table, introducing himself as Paco, the real-life grown version of the boy in Virek's virtual reality. Marly talks about her misgivings about Virek, and Paco calls her a poet. Paco says that Alain will double his price, but there is no worry about the money. Paco also reveals that he engineered Alain going to the restroom by cutting the power to Alain's wire.



Chapter 10, Alain, Chapter 11, On Site, and Chapter 12, Cafe Blanc Analysis

Marly also needs to move to the next level in her life. Her meeting with Alain moves forward the plot, since Alain wants to sell her information on where the artist she's seeking is. The meeting also moves forward Marly's emotional growth, though, since she is able to let go of her emotional attachment to Alain. Marley's death and rebirth that occurs at the opening of the story is more subtle than the deaths and rebirths of Bobby and Turner. Marley has gone through a scandal that destroyed her career and her personal life. Like Bobby, her world has been pulled down around her. Her job with Virek is a rebirth.

Turner's world is one where human life is devalued. Corporations as entities hold the power, and they use technology to control that power. Between corporations and technology, there is little room for the value of individual life. The plans to blow up the medics and the cyberspace runners if things go wrong show this lack of value. This devaluation of individual humans in relation to corporation makes Virek an anomaly, an individual with the power of a corporation.

Marly escapes from the influence of Alain, but she becomes embroiled in the influence of Virek at the same time. She needs to escape Virek's influence and find herself before she can move on and achieve the jump to the next level of her existence. Note that the video phone that Paco uses so that Marly can talk to Alain without Alain knowing her location is another example of Maas Biolabs' next-level technology.



Chapter 13, With Both Hands, Chapter 14, Night Flight, and Chapter 15, Box

Chapter 13, With Both Hands, Chapter 14, Night Flight, and Chapter 15, Box Summary

In chapter thirteen, Bobby is talking with Beauvoir, one of the men with Two-a-Day. Beauvoir and Lucas are explaining the voodoo, or vodou, beliefs about gods in cyberspace. He says that Bobby doesn't have to believe in it, and that it's not about salvation like Catholicism or Scientology. Vodou is about getting things done. Beauvoir reveals that he and Lucas, the other man, bought the icebreaker Bobby used but were unsure about its validity. Two-a-Day gave it to Bobby to test it, sending him to a database where the deadly black ice security would kill him if the icebreaker failed. The people who were watching Bobby for Two-a-Day saw what happened, and Bobby tells his story of the presence in cyberspace. Beauvoir tells Bobby that Jackie is a horse, who channels the god Danbala. He also tells Bobby that the hydroponic forest is part of the idea of the project, to make it self-sufficient. There are also shrimp and catfish being grown in the building, though much of the technology is obsolete.

In chapter fourteen, Turner amps up for the extraction, thinking about Maas's work creating hybrid cells for the new biotechnology and wondering how it can make a difference, jumping from research at one company to another. Mitchell's memories from the biochip come back to Turner with a strange feeling of fear. Turner remembers his start as a mercenary. At the beginning of his career, Turner works in security for a simstim show set in Mexico. He first meets Conroy there, who advises him to put in additional security. Turner dislikes Conroy immediately, but gets the extra security. It doesn't stop half the series cast from getting killed.

Turner and the mercenaries move the medical unit into position. Ramirez doesn't help so that he doesn't damage his hands. Turner remembers the rest of the story from his early career: An explosion blows up the set, despite his security measures, and a representative of the network comes and gathers the star's eyes, which are owned by the network. This is the memory that later makes Turner vomit when it comes back to him.

Back in the present, Mitchell is about to arrive. Turner orders Lynch to cover the perimeter, but when Lynch objects and wants to stay, Turner shoots him, convinced he's Conroy's spy. Webber protests that she was Conroy's spy. Then, the plane arrives, and the group is attacked by gunfire. Webber blows the medical unit and the cyber deck station. Webber grabs the target from the plane, but it's not Mitchell. It's a girl. He takes her off in the jet. As they fly away, there's an even bigger explosion, the size of a small nuke, taking out the whole area. Turner cancels the jet's current course, but hesitates about a new direction.



In chapter fifteen, Marly dreams of Alain, and then when she wakes, talks with Andrea about Alain, Paco, and Virek. Andrea mentions an academic book her company is publishing, which talks about the nature of wealth and the oddity of an individual like Virek acquiring so much. After Andrea leaves, Marly looks at the holograms of the boxes, feeling their emotional power. She doesn't look at the extensive information about their origins. At one, she meets Paco at a gallery, which exhibits a collage of old photos called "Read Us the Book of the Names of the Dead." Paco professes not to understand art like it. The gallery manager tells Marly that the box came from the estate of Roberts, the former gallery owner, after he died, and there is no record of the purchase. The gallery manager asks after Virek, and Paco explains later that Virek has many means of seeming to appear in public, despite his illness. Paco has arranged for Marly to take her expected phone call from Alain, creating the illusion that she's at Andrea's apartment. As expected, Alain doubles his price.

Chapter 13, With Both Hands, Chapter 14, Night Flight, and Chapter 15, Box Analysis

In Gibson's novel, one of the "jumps" to a new level, which take place on both a personal and a societal level, has already happened. Technology has expanded through the evolution of artificial intelligence beings that live in cyberspace as gods. They are creations, not necessarily directly of man, but of mankind's technology. They take on the personas of gods that mankind has created through culture years ago, so that they are reflections of mankind in both technology and culture. Instead of gods creating man, man has created gods. These gods, as they existed conceptually in Haitian culture in the past, may not have had any real power, but as AIs take on their identities, voodoo gods become real beings with power.

One of the concepts integral to Gibson's vision of the future is that past technologies hang on, influencing culture, even as new technologies are developed faster and faster. The Projects are legacy technology from the past. Designed to be self-sufficient, efficient, and well-planned urban living spaces, the Projects have out-of-date power sources, unnecessary hydroponics, and degenerating technology. They serve as segregation, keeping the black community separated from the white, even far into the future. The artwork that Marly and Paco discuss at the gallery, "Read Us the Book of the Names of the Dead," also harkens back to the past, as a collage of old photo-booth photos of anonymous people now gone.

Turner's mercenary job goes sour when Maas security seems to be attacking them, and the wrong person is on the plane. Turner takes off in the jet, and with the explosion that destroys the drop point behind him, he is on his own. Turner seems to work best on his own. He can't be a part of a corporation and instead is most comfortable as a freelancer. He is, in many ways, afraid of being something part of himself. He has no family and no home, nothing that he hangs on to. Instead, he's an independent operator, and by being stolidly independent, Turner rejects both the good and the bad things about forming roots and attachments.



Chapter 16, Legba, Chapter 17, The Squirrel Wood, and Chapter 18, Names of the Dead

Chapter 16, Legba, Chapter 17, The Squirrel Wood, and Chapter 18, Names of the Dead Summary

In chapter sixteen, Rhea wakes Bobby and gives him some of her brother's ornate clothes, to which Bobby strenuously objects. When Bobby sees Lucas, the first thing he asks is who killed his mother. It's a question Lucas, too, would like to answer. Lucas takes Bobby into the Sprawl, the metropolis surrounding New York, in his ornate Middle Eastern limo driven by an AI named Ahmed, equipped with advanced countersurveillance to ensure privacy. Bobby asks if he's been held prisoner, and Lucas says he won't let Bobby go but that Bobby's in no danger. Lucas explains a little more about voodoo, and Jackie's role as Danbala's horse, an instrument the god uses to act in the world.

Bobby and Lucas go to the person who sold Lucas the software, known as the Finn. Finn has killed three men who came to kill him and shows Lucas and Bobby the bodies. Bobby tells his story, and the Finn says the matrix, cyberspace, has changed. In the past six or seven years, there have been entities there that people make deals with. Bobby mentions the slang term "wilson," and Finn says he knew the original, Bodine Wilson. Finn also reveals that the software he sold Lucas came from Wigan Ludgate, the Wig, a former cyberspace cowboy who made a fortune off of third-world nations, then went crazy looking for God in empty areas of cyberspace. He left for orbit, but regularly sends people to Finn with technology to sell, as well as the box collages that Virek has ended up with.

In chapter seventeen, Turner regains consciousness to find that the jet has landed and camouflaged itself. The girl is still unconscious. Turner gets out of the jet and lies down in the grass, remembering going squirrel hunting there with his brother. The trick was to lie down and be still, and the squirrels would forget you were there and keep coming back to get shot. Turner realizes that he's just like the squirrels, always coming back for more punishment. Back at the plane, the girl is awake. She is Angie Mitchell, the scientist's daughter. Her father arranged her escape secretly, never planning to go himself. Turner goes to erase the plane's files and discovers that the plane was secretly programmed to go to Bogotá.

Turner and Angie walk to his brother Rudy's farm, which is guarded by dogs with cybernetic implants. Angie has a sprained ankle, and Rudy's girlfriend Sally takes her inside and begins making breakfast. Rudy scans Angie and finds that she's got a strange implant in her head, intertwined with her brain. He has no idea what it is. Turner plans on going to the Sprawl with Angie, where he has friends and resources. They



speculate that a railgun may have blown up the extraction site. Later that night, Turner sits with Sally out on the porch. Angie has been speaking in tongues, she says. Sally also tells Turner that Rudy's been bad, between drinking and drugs. Rudy is upset that Turner didn't come back when their mother died. Sally is lonely, and she and Turner go upstairs together.

In chapter eighteen, Marly makes arrangements to pay Alain the larger amount, and then Andrea comes home. They talk about Virek and the wealthy Tessier-Ashpool clan, whose business empire has declined over the last seven years, after being taken over by one of the daughters. As Marly walks with Andrea after dinner, she realizes that Paco is probably not real but a construct tailored to her tastes. When it's time to meet Alain, Marly tells Paco that she wants to go alone. When Marly gets to Alain's run-down apartment, though, she finds him dead. Quickly she searches for the information he was trying to sell her and finds it written on an empty cigarette packet hidden on a closet shelf, just before Paco appears to find out what's happened.

Chapter 16, Legba, Chapter 17, The Squirrel Wood, and Chapter 18, Names of the Dead Analysis

The slang term "wilson" is an example of how time and culture distort events and how one thing can morph and evolve into another. Wilson was originally a person, Bodine Wilson, a cowboy who Finn says was very smart. Yet, Bodine Wilson messed up in a way that struck a cultural chord. His story must have been told and retold until the name wilson became synonymous with messing up. Bobby, who's never heard of Bodine Wilson or the story behind his mess-up, knows what pulling a wilson is.

The squirrels are an important metaphor for Turner. Turner keeps coming back to his mercenary life, over and over, putting himself in danger. He can't seem to help himself. In some ways, he seems to be punishing himself. After all, he failed to guard the actress whose eyes were reclaimed by her network. Coming home again and remembering the lesson of the squirrels seems to put Turner's life in focus for him. Like the squirrels, he forgets the danger that awaits him and comes back, but he also has the capacity to step back and see what he's doing to himself. Seeing his own life from a more distance perspective is a step on the path of change.

The Tessier-Ashpool clan exists in the background of the story. Though they are not a large part of this book, they are responsible for the AI that lives in one of the Tessier-Ashpool mainframes and is the central focus of the story. The alert reader will note that the Tessier-Ashpool clan began declining seven years ago, at the same time as the beings began appearing in cyberspace.



Chapter 19, Hypermart, Chapter 20, Orly Flight, and Chapter 21, Highway Time

Chapter 19, Hypermart, Chapter 20, Orly Flight, and Chapter 21, Highway Time Summary

In chapter nineteen, Lucas leaves Bobby with Jackie, who brings him to a fourteen-floor mall called a hypermart. They get coffee at a stall, and Jackie tells Bobby that she's bringing him to a club called Jammer's, where Bobby should be safe. Bobby tells Jackie what he learned at the Finn's. Before they head to Jammer's, though, Bobby insists that Jackie get him new clothes. He picks out a cyberspace t-shirt, black jeans, studded belt, and leather astronaut-style boots.

In chapter twenty, Paco drives Marly away from Alain's apartment and questions her about what happened. She doesn't tell him about the information that she found. Paco was eavesdropping on the apartment with a high-tech microphone and heard her talking to herself. Marly makes him stop the car and let her out to walk. She goes to a travel agency and buys passage into space, to the coordinates she's found, paying with cash and using an assumed name.

In chapter twenty-one, Turner surveys his brother Rudy's vehicles. He focuses on an armored surplus hovercraft. It's fast and street legal, and he chooses it for his trip to the Sprawl. Angie is awake and feeling better, and Turner asks her about the implant. She says that her father put it in her brain because she wasn't smart enough. Rudy gives Turner a bag of cash and coffee and food. He and Sally are heading off to Memphis, in case anyone comes to look for Turner and Angie. Rudy also tells Turner that Angie's father has been reported dead. Before Turner leaves, his brother asks him why he didn't come back when his mother was dying. Turner says that it just didn't happen that way.

Turner drives Angie toward the Sprawl. He's afraid to call anyone, even his agent, since he doesn't know who blew up the operation site. Angie tells Turner that her implant makes her dream, like she's in cyberspace, where she interacts with bright ones. They stop to eat, and Turner tells Angie that his brother is troubled. He is stuck. Turner says that sometimes people need to make a change, a jump, to save themselves. They sleep by the side of the road that night, and Turner's dreams are haunted by images from Angie's father's dossier.

Chapter 19, Hypermart, Chapter 20, Orly Flight, and Chapter 21, Highway Time Analysis

The coffee shop at the Hypermart, with its espresso machine, is an example of the persistence of old technology. The Hypermart itself is a post-modern conglomeration of



the accumulation of many things that mankind has made, most of it junk. It continues to accumulate over time, the individual pieces becoming part of a mass that can be understood as a collage, a whole that is something more than its parts. In this way, the Hypermart, or any other artifact of human civilization, is similar to the box collage that Marty is investigating and the collage art of photographs. Human society itself, in the novel, follows this same pattern. The individual loses identity in the collage of the whole.

Rudy is unhappy, and his unhappiness leads him to isolation and alcohol abuse. He is, as Turner puts it, stuck. Rudy is an example of what happens when a person, or by extension a culture, fails to make a jump to the next level of development. Rudy can't seem to move beyond the place he's at in life. Though the reader learns no real information about Rudy and Turner's mother, clearly something in their family history makes Turner reject his family and past and makes Rudy wallow in his family home.



Chapter 22, Jammer's, Chapter 23, Closer, and Chapter 24, Run Straight Down

Chapter 22, Jammer's, Chapter 23, Closer, and Chapter 24, Run Straight Down Summary

In chapter twenty-two, Bobby and Jackie go to Jammer's. Jammer is a retired cowboy. They ask Jammer about Wig, but Jammer thought he was dead. As Bobby tells his story, he can't keep his eyes off Jammer's hot-looking cyber deck. Jammer lets him try it out, taking Jackie along, and in cyberspace Bobby and Jackie meet Legba and Ougou Feray, god of war. Jackie says that these gods appearing to her mean Lucas is dead. Jammer doesn't believe the apparitions are really Haitian gods, speculating that they might be projections made by some powerful force, or perhaps viruses or parts of AIs. Jammer goes to take a nap, leaving Bobby alone in the empty club. He finds a gun under the bar and pretends to be a hot-shot cowboy. Then he peeks out the front window and catches the eye of Leon, who is sitting outside.

In chapter twenty-three, Marly takes off for her destination, but in her simstim film to watch during takeoff, she finds Virek talking to her. He says that he knows where she's going and that she's doing her job for him. He also says Alain was killed by Maas Biolabs and reveals that he's not just looking for an artist, but for a way to escape his vats and find freedom. At the terminal, instead of making her connecting flight, Marly hires a pilot named Rez with cash to take her to her destination immediately.

In chapter twenty-four, Turner pulls over because it's begun raining and the wipers on the hovercraft are worn out. He pulls off the highway to where there's an obsolete gas station and is just about to talk to the man who comes out to tell him he's trespassing, when the man's head is blown up by a laser. A helicopter is after them. Turner shoots it down, seeing that it's manned by Oakey. As Turner drives away, Angie goes into a trance and Legba talks to Turner, telling him to take Angie to the city and that Turner is to ride with the God of Graveyards, Samedi.

Chapter 22, Jammer's, Chapter 23, Closer, and Chapter 24, Run Straight Down Analysis

When Bobby and Jackie go into cyberspace, it becomes clear that the voodoo gods, which have manifested through Angie, are indeed actual beings, living in cyberspace. They take on a form that has at least virtual reality. Even the skeptics, like Jammer and the Finn, must recognize that the entities exist. Bobby realizes that the beings, whatever they are, are powerful.



Marly has done everything that she can to escape Virek's influence. The scene on the shuttle where Virek takes over a simstim film to talk directly to an audience of one, Marly, shows the far-reaching nature of his influence. Virek's body may be confined to a vat, but Virek himself is spread throughout human society, wherever money can buy power. The sheer power of Virek makes Marly distrust him and believe that nothing Virek wants can possibly be good. Though Virek knows where Marly is headed, she does everything she can to outdistance him. Like Marley, Turner is being pursued by a power that extends around and beyond him, so large that he can't see it clearly. Marly knows who is pursuing her, but Turner does not. He knows that Conroy has probably turned on him, but Conroy is a mercenary. The force behind Conroy remains obscure.



Chapter 25, Kasual/Gothick, Chapter 26, The Wig, and Chapter 27, Stations of the Breath

Chapter 25, Kasual/Gothick, Chapter 26, The Wig, and Chapter 27, Stations of the Breath Summary

As chapter twenty-five begins, Finn isn't answering his phone, and he's obsessively addicted to the phone and afraid to leave the house. Lucas and Beauvoir also aren't answering their phones. Then, screws start falling out of Jammer's ceiling. It's Beauvoir, breaking in from outside. He confirms that Lucas was blown up in his limo. Beauvoir also found out that someone's hired the Gothicks and the Kasuals to surround Jammer's and keep them inside, probably until someone arrives. Beauvoir thinks Maas Biolabs is out to kill them. Beauvoir's plan is to wait for the hitmen to arrive, overpower them, and take one alive. Then, they'll escape with heavy firepower and head to the projects. As they're talking over the plan, Jammer goes to open the door and a laser comes through and destroys his hand. Jammer won't be able to run in cyberspace, and now Bobby will have his chance to be a cowboy.

In chapter twenty-six, Rez pilots Marly toward her destination and tells Marly that her destination is one of the abandoned mainframes for the Tessier-Ashpool corporate empire. As they approach the destination, Rez can't get permission to bring in her passenger until Marly mentions Virek. Rez tries to put Marly in a spacesuit, but Marly is claustrophobic and won't put on her helmet. Rez lets her through the airlock. On the other side, Marly meets Wig Ludgate and tries to explain about the boxes. Wig is clearly crazy, though, and tells her the boxes are the hand of God. Jones, who lives on the deserted station, too, tells her he ended up there on the run and takes care of Ludgate. He promises to show Marly the artist. The station has been bought by someone in Pakistan after the collapse of Tessier-Ashpool, but it's too expensive to do anything with it. Jones and Ludgate live there undisturbed.

In chapter twenty-seven, Turner takes back roads into the Sprawl and then abandons the hover craft. Angie goes into another trance, and Samedi talks to Turner, telling him to go north to New York. Turner and Angie take the subway. Turner uses the dossier on Angie's father to find some specific information. He looks at Angie's IQ and Mitchell's grades, and puts it together with other information and feelings from Mitchell's record. Turner surmises what happened: Mitchell made some sort of deal with the gods who spoke through Angie and was being fed technology, in exchange for implanting his daughter.

Samedi leads Turner to the Hypermart and Jammer's. Turner and Angie stop at the coffee stall to get coffee and find that someone's bought out or scared away most of the



stall owners and that Jammer's is surrounded by the Gothicks and Kasuals. Samedi, through Angie, tells Turner to just walk in.

Chapter 25, Kasual/Gothick, Chapter 26, The Wig, and Chapter 27, Stations of the Breath Analysis

As Bobby is trapped at Jammer's, the storylines in the novel begin to come together. Marly is heading toward the conclusion of her journey to uncover the truth about the box collages, and Turner is heading toward Jammer's with Angie. The voodoo gods are working to bring these elements together, since they appear through Angie and give Turner directions on where he should go. In an interesting exchange, Turner misunderstands the name Samedi and calls the god Saturday. Instead of rejecting the name Saturday, Samedi expands on it, saying that he is Baron Saturday. This is the type of event that causes language to change and ends in evolutions like the term "wilson." Years later, perhaps this god will be known everywhere as Baron Saturday, and even related to Saturn, the Roman god that the day is named after.

The destruction of Jammer's hand is an important element leading to the conclusion, since it will force Bobby, who is more powerful than anyone suspects, to be the one who travels into cyberspace. Bobby is underestimated by everyone, including himself. He seems completely weak and harmless, and he considers himself a hot-dogger, a low-level player who doesn't know what's really going on.



Chapter 28, Jaylene Slide, Chapter 29, Boxmaker, and Chapter 30, Hired Man

Chapter 28, Jaylene Slide, Chapter 29, Boxmaker, and Chapter 30, Hired Man Summary

In chapter twenty-eight, Jackie tends to Jammer's hand, while Beauvoir wires the club's door with explosives in case someone tries to get in. Jammer tells Bobby that the Yakuza, the Japanese mafia, owes him a favor. He gives Bobby a backdoor in to call in the favor for some help. Bobby logs in with Jackie, but he is hijacked by Jaylene Slide. She's looking for the person who killed Ramirez so that she can take revenge. Bobby tells her his story and asks for help, but she's not interested in anything but her revenge. She does tell Bobby that the gangs were not hired by Maas, but by some other faction. When Bobby comes out of cyberspace, Turner and Angie are there. Bobby recognizes Angie as the girl who saved him during his first run, the Virgin of Miracles. Bobby tells about meeting Jaylene, and then the phone rings. It's Conroy.

In chapter twenty-nine, Jones leads Marly through the deserted station, and Marly asks his help in getting out of her spacesuit, which she can't stand. Jones tells her it's the only working spacesuit on the station. Jones leads her out to a set of mechanical arms attached to the machinery. Objects float in the chamber, which has no gravity, and the arms pull the objects, choose them and cut them, and assemble the boxes. The artist is an AI. There is a screen attached to one wall of the chamber, and it comes to life. Josef Virek speaks to them, telling Marly she's fulfilled her job and the contract is ended. He's predicted her reactions. He thinks he's found a way to evolve out of his body and jump into other bodies, using the AI. He's bought the cores where Marly is from their owner in Pakistan, and he's sending Paco.

In chapter thirty, Jackie takes Angie and Bobby out of the room so Turner can talk to Conroy on the phone. Turner's guessed that Conroy double-crossed Hosaka and is working for someone else. He tells Conroy about killing Lynch, and Conroy says that Lynch was a plant, as well as Webber. Conroy thought Turner would be suspicious if he didn't have any plants in the group. Conroy admits he's working for Virek, who wanted Mitchell, and says that Mitchell's killed himself. He also sent Oakey to Rudy's farm, and Rudy's dead. Conroy also hired the gangs to lock Bobby in the club. He can't get professionals to work for him anymore, after double-crossing Hosaka. Now he wants the girl. Before Turner can tell him to go to hell, Jammer cuts the line and tells Turner he did it to give them some time.



Chapter 28, Jaylene Slide, Chapter 29, Boxmaker, and Chapter 30, Hired Man Analysis

Jaylene Slide plays a minor but important role in the story. She is everything that Bobby wants to be, a hotshot cowboy who is hired for big bucks to perform mercenary missions in cyberspace when someone needs the best. This is how Jaylene became involved in the Mitchell extraction, where she worked offsite from Turner's crew. Jaylene's lover Ramirez was the onsite cowboy, and he was killed in the massive explosion that Turner witnessed as he took off. Jaylene has the power and position that Bobby craves, but the most important thing to her is her lover, who she wants to revenge.

Marly rejects her spacesuit. She is claustrophobic, and her rejection of the suit plays a part in the plot, making her vulnerable to a disaster on the station. However, the rejection of the spacesuit is also a rejection of the intellectual world of science and technology, in favor of the world of intuition and feeling, an emotional world where Marly exists. Marly is approaching something that is inherently technological, but she is approaching it from a personal, emotional point of view. The boxmaker that Marly encounters is sublime, and the physical, mechanical aspect of it is not important to her. Note that throughout the novel, women are the center of emotion. Marly lives in an emotional, artistic world. Jaylene, though she is a top-notch cowboy, is also emotional, living for her love of Ramirez.



Chapter 31, Voices, Chapter 32, Count Zero, and Chapter 33, Wrack and Whirl

Chapter 31, Voices, Chapter 32, Count Zero, and Chapter 33, Wrack and Whirl Summary

In chapter thirty-one, Jones tells Marly he's going to go find Wig, to make sure he doesn't get hurt. Marly stays and watches the mechanical manipulators making a box. Marly takes her brand new designer jacket off, and it floats into range of the sensors. The machine takes it and clips off neat rectangles. Marly laughs and says she's honored. Then she begins to hear voices. She talks to the AI, who Wig calls God. The AI says there are others, the so-called gods that make deals with men. The AI says that Virek cannot gain what he thinks he can. He could only become like the least of the gods. After the voices are gone, Marly thinks about the original artist, who put the manipulating arms here and the objects they use for creation. Then Paco's voice comes over the communication system. Wig is not letting him in, and Paco threatens to break in, letting out all the air and killing everyone inside.

In chapter thirty-two, Bobby talks to Beauvoir. He let Turner and Angie in because Jackie went into a trance, and Legba told them to let in the Virgin. After getting off the phone with Conroy, Jammer tells Bobby to go into cyberspace and let Jaylene Slide know Conroy's the one who got Ramirez killed. Slide will take revenge much quicker than the Yakuza could help them. When Bobby and Jackie jack in, though, Jackie is killed and Bobby finds himself sidetracked to Virek's virtual reality, an unexpected and accidental guest. Some force in Bobby's brain has saved him and brought him here. Bobby is horrified and screams at Virek for killing Jackie. Paco comes and pulls a gun on Bobby. The force that brought Bobby here begins tugging at his mind again, and Paco realizes there is danger to Virek. Virek doesn't want to leave though, and be confined to his vats and his body. Before Paco can argue, Bobby lets the force take over his mind. Samedi takes him over, to take revenge on Virek. Then Bobby finds Jaylene Slide and tells her Conroy killed Ramirez. She has him killed without hesitation.

In chapter thirty-three, Marly takes no notice of Paco's threats, unconcerned about the possibility of her own death. Jones tries to give her the spacesuit, but she won't take it. Their argument is interrupted by Paco, coming over the communication system. Virek is dead. Marly's employment is terminated. The occupants are warned out of the core, or they will be charged with trespassing. The machine finishes its box, with leather from Marly's jacket, the crumpled cigarette package with the location of the creator, and the chips containing holograms of the seven boxes. As they're leaving, Jones tells Marly about the biosoft chips they would load into the AI and then sell, an indication that the biosoft Bobby used was a message from one of the voodoo gods.



Chapter 31, Voices, Chapter 32, Count Zero, and Chapter 33, Wrack and Whirl Analysis

Marly's encounter with the AI is the heart of the novel, and the closest the reader gets to a true explanation of the events of the story. Virek has been struggling to find the technology that he thinks will save him so that he can become a god, while the true god, or god-like being, is sitting in isolation in a mainframe, placidly weaving artworks. The AI is not just godlike in knowledge and potential power, if allowed free into cyberspace. It is also a creator, a maker of beautiful and perfect things, which Marly admires. She sees the artworks as sad, but the AI describes them merely as evocative of time and distance. Marly sacrifices her expensive brand-new jacket to the boxmaker, and she is happy to do so. She has let go of everything and merely stands in awe of the boxmaker.

The voodoo gods are pieces of the AI that Marly encounters, separated off as free entities that wander cyberspace. They have taken on the identities that mankind has put on them, in the form of Haitian gods. The biosoft that Bobby used was a communication between the AI and the voodoo gods, and after it was downloaded into the computer core, it was resold to Finn. Bobby's use of it was accidental, but it has given Bobby power. Because of that biosoft, which opens Bobby's mind up to the voodoo gods, Bobby can escape the security measures of Virek and has the power to destroy the billionaire despite his wealth and power. Even once Bobby infiltrates Virek's security, he is underestimated. Neither Paco nor Virek sees him as a threat until it's too late.



Chapter 34, A Chain 'Bout Nine Miles Long, Chapter 35, Tally Isham, and Chapter 36, The Squirrel Wood

Chapter 34, A Chain 'Bout Nine Miles Long, Chapter 35, Tally Isham, and Chapter 36, The Squirrel Wood Summary

In chapter thirty-four, the situation at Jammer's winds down. Jackie is dead, but the Gothicks and Kasuals are dispersing. Bobby hasn't told anyone what happened in cyberspace, just that he gave the message to Jaylene Slide. Turner sees on the news the article about a Park Avenue building being fired on, the location where Conroy was. Virek's death has been announced, put down to failure of his life-support system. Angie wakes up, and Beauvoir offers to take her and Bobby back to the Projects, to teach them. Before Turner leaves, he tells Angie that her father died fending off the security people who were trying to kill her. Bobby goes in to see Angie, and on the news, he hears that his mother is alive. She wasn't at the apartment when it blew up. Bobby has no intention of going home, and agrees to go to the Projects with Beauvoir and Angie.

In chapter thirty-five, simstim star Tally Isham, famous for her simstim shows about the rich and famous, is watching the newest rising young star, Angie, and her boyfriend and bodyguard Bobby. The next day, Isham is planning on interviewing Marty, who is running a fashionable art gallery now.

In chapter thirty-six, Turner goes to the Squirrel Wood with his seven-year-old son. The jet is still buried in the woods, and Sally, the boy's mother, showed it to him. The boy goes there and pretends to fly it, though he knows the jet has to remain a secret. When Turner explains to his son about the squirrels always coming back, the boy questions if it's true that they always return to get shot. Turner says it's true, then stops and corrects himself. It's almost always true.

Chapter 34, A Chain 'Bout Nine Miles Long, Chapter 35, Tally Isham, and Chapter 36, The Squirrel Wood Analysis

The last three chapters form a denouement, wrapping up the story. With the death of Virek, everything stops. Virek was the driving force behind the action, and although his corporations live on without him, they do not have the same will that Virek had. His will was driving events. Almost instantaneously, his far-reaching influences cease, and all the danger retreats, both from Jammer's and from the core where the AI resides.



The last two chapters give the reader a glimpse into the future. Angie has matured and becomes a rising simstim star. This position will give her vast influence, and the implant in her brain gives her the potential for great power. Angie has joined together with Bobby, who also has a power beyond what most people imagine. Together, they will be a force that can affect the world. Bobby carries with him his roots in the ghettos of Barrytown, and this will likely influence the way he views the world and the actions he takes in the future.

The final chapter shows Turner's future. He has found the will to escape his own patterns and jumped to the next level. For Turner, this means returning to his home and finding a place there again. He has a son, and he lives with Sally. Turner has found a new beginning, back in the place where he grew up. He has escaped the fate of the squirrels and stopped going back into danger again and again.



Characters

Turner

Turner is a mercenary. He finds himself stuck in a loop. He has no home and no family, having separated himself from his mother and brother long ago. Instead, he lives a transient lifestyle, going from job to job around the globe and living only at hotels. Turner has no permanency in his life and no real peace. He lives a violent life where death is an everyday occurrence, and he has no compunction against killing. However, he does feel guilt for the deaths that he causes, and he feels human sympathy for others. He wants to save Angie Mitchell, although he has no real reason to help her.

Turner compares himself to the squirrels that he used to hunt when he was a boy. The trick to hunting squirrels was to lie still on the ground so that the squirrels would forget there was danger. Then they would come back, ignoring the danger, and be shot. Turner sees himself as going back again and again to a life of danger and pain, with every new mercenary mission.

At the end of the novel, Turner is able to turn his back on his mercenary life. He gains a woman and a son, and he goes back to his family home, now that his mother and brother are dead. Turner has moved on to a new level in his own emotional development. After his life is torn down, it is rebuilt.

Bobby Newmark, or Count Zero

Bobby Newmark is an everyman. He lives in a world that is formed by technology, but he is not conscious of what any of it means or how any of it came to be. Bobby is blinded to truths about the world by living in it. Bobby's greatest desire is to be a cowboy, a powerful computer operator who jacks into cyberspace to carry out missions for high-paying clients. He can't seem to escape his low-class background and lack of knowledge of the world, though.

Bobby's first run, unknown to him, is a set-up. The technology seller that he admires has set him up to test some software of unknown origins. Bobby, duped, goes to his death. He is only saved at the last minute by an unknown being, a girl-like creature, who comes to him and surrounds him with light. Although Bobby doesn't realize it, the software he's using has opened him up to receive the voodoo gods/AIs that live in cyberspace, and apparently also the girl who has been implanted with a special cybernetic mechanism in her brain, who the voodoo practitioners call the Virgin of Miracles.

Bobby's experience with the software makes him a target for Maas Biolabs and for Josef Virek, who are both after the technology. Bobby is on the run through most of the book, and he learns about the voodoo practitioners who deal with the gods/AIs in cyberspace. He doesn't realize his own power, but at the end of the novel, he is able to



find and kill Virek without even realizing that's what he's doing, by channeling the voodoo god Samedi, Lord of Graveyards.

Marly Krushkhova

Marly is a former art gallery owner. She was in a relationship with Alain, a con artist. He used her gallery to sell a fake artwork to a collector. When the fake was discovered, Marly's gallery was ruined. She found herself without a lover or a business, and her whole world was destroyed. At the beginning of the novel, Marly is wearing last year's designer jacket. She feels a mess with no prospects, dependent on the kindness of a friend for a place to live. At this low phase, Marly is hired by a billionaire art collector to find an unknown artist. At first, the job seems like a dream come true, but sensitive Marly begins to realize that there is more to the job than she realizes.

Marly operates on her intuition, feeling her way through problems instead of thinking through them. She takes a dislike to Virek, who is more technology than man and hidden behind a vast web of wealth. Marly frees herself from Alain by seeing him again and recognizing him for what he really is, but she is immediately caught up by another man's manipulations. Marly feels herself constrained by Virek's web of influence, which is always around her. She tries to flee, but even her flight seems anticipated by Virek, who sees her as a small part of a larger pattern.

At the end of the novel, Marly finds the artist she's seeking in an artificial intelligence existing in a mainframe orbiting above Earth. She is hoping to warn the AI against Virek, but instead, she finds that she gains a sublime experience in her encounter with the artist that she's seeking. In the face of the sublime, even immediate danger loses its significance.

Turner's Agent

Turner has an agent who is unseen in the story, but who arranges Turner's jobs and also arranges Turner to be reconstructed after being blown up in an explosion.

The Dutchman

The Dutchman is the surgeon who rebuilds Turner after he is blown up in New Delhi.

Allison

Allison is a psychologist sent to Mexico to evaluate Turner. She poses as a woman from California on vacation, and she spends several weeks in a romantic relationship with Turner before sending him on to an assignment.



Christopher Mitchell

Mitchell is a leading biochip scientist at Maas Biolabs, but he's gotten to his position by being fed information from AIs. In exchange, he's implanted his daughter with technology that will allow AIs to manifest through her. Mitchell reportedly kills himself after arranging his daughter's escape from Maas Biolabs.

Conroy

Conroy is the operative who hires Turner to rescue Mitchell from Maas Biolabs. He double-crosses Hosaka Corporation and makes a deal to deliver Mitchell to Josef Virek instead.

Josef Virek

Josef Virek is an immensely wealthy individual, one of the few individual centers of wealth in a world run by corporations. Virek's body lives in a vast amalgam of vats near Stockholm, kept alive by machines while it dies of cancer. Virek's mind, however, lives in a virtual representation of Barcelona in cyberspace. He is horrified by his body's circumstances and he longs to be free to live in cyberspace and in real bodies. When Virek learns of the artificial intelligences in cyberspace, he believes that he can use them to transform himself into an AI and inhabit other bodies from cyberspace, as the voodoo gods are channeled by horses like Jackie. Virek hires Marly to find the AI, which he knows is the artist who created the boxes. Though Marly leads Virek to the AI's location, Bobby kills Virek before his plan can be implemented.

Alain

Alain is Marly's former lover, a con artist who forged an artwork that resulted in the bankruptcy of Marly's gallery. He gets killed trying to sell Marly information about the artist Virek is looking for.

Paco

Paco is Virek's helper and emissary. However, Paco is likely not a real person at all. Marly first meets Paco in Josef Virek's virtual reality version of Barcelona, where he appears as a small boy. He is a subprogram who helps Virek with whatever he needs. In the real world, Paco appears to Marly as an adult, and at first she thinks that he is a human being. After a while, Marly begins to believe that Paco is a projection, designed to attract her.



Two-a-Day

Two-a-Day is a wareman, a dealer in hardware and software, particularly illicit ware for illegal cyberspace runs. Two-a-Day is a hero of Count Zero's. He is on his way out of the Projects and Barrytown, Bobby believes. However, it turns out that Two-a-Day is just a small fish. Two-a-Day is tasked by Lucas and Beauvoir with testing a piece of software, supposedly an icebreaker, anti-security software. He gives the software to Bobby, knowing that it might be dangerous or deadly.

Oakey

Oakey is one of the men assigned to Turner's mission. He's worked with Turner in the past, but Turner doesn't remember him. Oakey later is flying a helicopter that fires at Turner and Angie with a laser, and Turner shoots it down, killing Oakey.

Jaylene Slide

Jaylene Slide is a hot-shot cowboy who is working offsite during Turner's mission. After the mission is fumbled and an explosion kills her lover Ramirez, Jaylene makes it her business to track down the killer and take her revenge. After Bobby gets to Jaylene in cyberspace and tells her that Conroy arranged the deaths, Jaylene has Conroy killed.

Ramirez

Ramirez is a cowboy, Jaylene Slide's lover and protégé. He is killed during the mission to extract Mitchell.

Andrea

Andrea is Marly's friend and roommate, who takes Marly in after Marly's art gallery goes out of business. She works for a book publisher.

Marsha Newmark

Marsh Newmark is Bobby's mother. She is a single parent, addicted to simstim soap operas and alcohol.

Jackie

Jackie is a voodoo horse, which means she acts as a medium for a voodoo god, or artificial intelligence, to speak through her and act in the real world. Jackie is killed by



Virek's security software, and her death prompts Bobby to channel the Lord of Graveyards, a voodoo god/AI, for revenge.

Rhea

Rhea is the second "angel" who Bobby meets in the Projects.

Pye

Pye is not a doctor, but he sews Bobby up and treats his wounds. He is trained as a veterinarian.

Beauvoir

Beauvoir is Lucas's partner and a practitioner of voodoo. He and Lucas buy the biosoft that Two-a-Day tests out on Bobby, and he explains to Bobby, in part, about voodoo and the gods in cyberspace. Beauvoir breaks into Jammer's when it's surrounded by gangs to bring information and help Bobby get out alive.

Lucas

Lucas is Beauvoir's partner, a lawyer and a practitioner of voodoo. He and Beauvoir buy the biosoft that Two-a-Day tests out on Bobby, and he explains to Bobby a little bit about voodoo and the gods in cyberspace. Lucas has a sophisticated, extravagant limousine. He is killed by Virek's men during the course of the novel.

The Finn

The Finn is a former cowboy who deals in hard and soft technology. He buys technology from Wig through intermediaries. Ugly, agoraphobic Finn can take care of himself and kills three hit men who come to torture and kill him, but he is eventually murdered by the corporations who are looking for Bobby.

Wigan Ludgate, the Wig

Wig is a former cowboy who became obsessed with the idea that God lives in cyberspace. Wig began tuning in to empty parts of cyberspace to find God. He went into orbit to live in space and be closer to God. When Marly meets Wig, he is living on an abandoned Tessier-Ashpool mainframe core, where the central computers of the Tessier-Ashpool corporation once resided. Wig lives alone and becomes absorbed in his insanity, but he has a companion in the artificial intelligence that inhabits the mainframe computer.



Angie Mitchell

Angie Mitchell is the daughter of scientist Christopher Mitchell. Her father put an implant in her brain when Angie was very young, and it has grown with her brain to be an integral part of her. Through this implant, artificial intelligences can use Angie as a tool to act in the real world. As she reaches adulthood, the implant seems to be becoming stronger. Angie is known to voodoo practitioners as the Virgin of Miracles. Her implant allows her to save Bobby when he's in cyberspace, even though she doesn't fully know what she's doing. At the end of the novel, she becomes an up-and-coming star entertainer, giving her potentially ominous power.

Rudy

Rudy is Turner's troubled brother, who lives in their old family home. He discovers the implant in Angie's head.

Sally

Sally is Rudy's woman, a former dancer who has come to live with him in Turner's childhood home. Rudy, though, is troubled, and Sally is on the verge of leaving him. Sally sleeps with Turner and has a child with him. Years later, she is with Turner, and she remembers Rudy with love and sorrow.

Jammer

Jammer is a former cowboy and the owner of the nightclub where Jackie takes Bobby to keep him safe.

Rez

Rez is the pilot who takes Marly to Wig. She has a pink and black rose tattoo on her chest that Marly originally thinks is a pink and black bra.

Jones

Jones is an ex-criminal, a young man who took off into orbit to escape prosecution and wound up living with Wig on an abandoned Tessier-Ashcroft mainframe core. Jones takes care of Wig, who has lost most of his mind. He leads Marly to the artist she seeks.



Objects/Places

Cyberspace

Cyberspace is a shared virtual experience tapped into through a cyberspace deck. Cyberspace is similar to the Internet, but it is experienced virtually as a separate reality, a space populated by virtual representations of places, people, and data.

The Projects

The Projects are a group of high-rise arcologies, built to be self-sufficient living areas. The Projects are populated by a black community and are a step up for Bobby, who has lived in the slum-like condos below.

Barrytown

Barrytown is the New Jersey suburb where Bobby Newmark grew up.

The Icebreaker Biosoft

Bobby jacks into cyberspace for the first time using a type of software called an icebreaker that is supposed to break into secured locations. The software directly interacts with Bobby's brain. However, instead of its expected function, the software seems to make Bobby a portal, allowing him to channel AIs that live in cyberspace and take on the personas of voodoo gods.

Mexico

Mexico is important to Turner because early in his career, a set he is working security on there is blown up, killing the star, and the network takes her eyes. After Turner is blown up, he goes back to Mexico to recover emotionally and psychologically.

The Sprawl

The Sprawl is a megalopolis that has built up across the eastern United States around New York.

Ahmed

Ahmed is Lucas's ornate, sophisticated Middle Eastern limousine. Lucas uses the name Ahmed to refer to the car itself and also the artificial intelligence that runs it.



Angie Mitchell's Implant

Angie Mitchell has a complex cybernetic implant grafted into her brain. The implant allows her to enter cyberspace and channel the artificial intelligence voodoo gods who live there.

The Squirrel Wood

The Squirrel Wood is the place where Turner used to go with his brother to hunt squirrels. Turner sees the squirrels, who forget that danger is there and come back to get shot over and over, as metaphors for himself.

The Box

Marly is hired to find an artist who creates sadly moving collages in shadow boxes. The box that Marly first sees is the one that moves her most, containing a collection of objects including a bone from a bird, one from a human finger, antique circuit boards, and old lace.



Themes

Jumping to a New Level

When Angie asks about Turner's brother Rudy, Turner tells Angie that Rudy is stuck. Sometimes, Turner says, it's necessary for a person to take a jump to the next level, something that Turner did when he left his home behind. Without moving forward, people like Rudy stagnate and become unhappy. During the novel, both people and society make jumps to new levels, evolving in spurts forward.

Turner himself evolves to a new personal level, leaving behind the life of a squirrel who always returns again and again to danger. Bobby evolves to a new level, acquiring the ability to channel voodoo gods to give him power in cyberspace. He becomes something more than just a human being. He also jumps in status, moving out of Barrytown and into a higher social sphere. Angie, too, evolves, growing into the ability to utilize the implant in her brain. Marly has her own evolution, breaking free of Alain and Virek's manipulations.

Societies, too, evolve in short leaps forward. Seven years ago, such a leap took place with hardly anyone being aware of it. At this point, the beings, independent pieces of a highly powerful AI, appeared in cyberspace. These beings have changed the balance of society, and the effects have not yet shown themselves. Another leap forward is spurred by the AIs, in the form of the Maas Biolabs technology developed by Mitchell, which is moving technology forward to yet another level. Each "jump" is a short sprint forward in the evolution of the society.

The Individual versus Mass Man

Marly's friend Andrea works at a book publisher, and she talks to Marly about an academic expert who has written a book about Mass Man. Corporations and entities representing groups of people, Mass Man, are taking over, and individuals such as Virek are remnants of the past, the author proposes. The dichotomy between the individual and cultural groups that this fictitious author outlines is one of the core themes of the novel. As society moves forward and becomes larger, more emphasis is placed on the group, rather than the individual.

Corporations like Maas and Hosaka represent the group, mass humanity. Virek represents individual power, but once Virek is killed, his wealth disperses into corporations. Virek's wealth lives on, but it is owned by no individual. The power is ascribed to a group, not a person. The more individuals who exist, the less important any particular individual seems in the face of the whole. Society becomes a collage, like the box that Marly is investigating or the photo collage she sees at the gallery. The whole is greater than the parts.



In the face of this trend, individuals in the story move it forward and make great advances. Bobby gains great personal power and is singlehandedly responsible for destroying both Conroy and Virek. Turner is a rogue individual, with allegiance to no corporation, and he is responsible for delivering Angie to the voodoo practitioners. Angie is also an individual, but she has been implanted with cybernetics that will likely make her more powerful than any corporation. Even in a world of Mass Man, individuals are the will behind action.

Power

Throughout the novel, different factions gain power in different ways. Virek has great wealth, and great wealth is one of the avenues to power. His wealth allows him to live far beyond his natural lifespan. He is able to create a virtual reality for himself in cyberspace, and he is able to expand his influence to every corner of the globe and into orbit above. He is able to predict with eerie accuracy how Marly will react to future situations and manipulate people, unaware, into helping him with his goals. A second route to power is the power of masses. Corporations gain power because they represent large groups of people. They have different branches that extend throughout society. Corporate power is the power of Mass Man.

Another route to power is represented by the voodoo gods that live in cyberspace. These gods are artificial intelligences, an evolution of technology, so they represent the acquisition of power through technology. A person with a gun has more power than a person with a club. In the same way, a person with the power of an artificial intelligence flowing through him, like Bobby, has more power than all the technology Virek's wealth can buy. Technology, like wealth, brings individual power. Marly, unlike most of the characters, is not interested in acquiring power. The contrast to power games is finding a personal, emotional connection with the sublime, and finding fulfillment of the self. This is what Marly finds in orbit, and it is also what Turner finds in the Squirrel Wood, when he retires from the power struggle in which he has been embroiled.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told in the third person by a semi-omniscient narrator. The focus of the semi-omniscient narrator changes during different parts of the story, though, so that the reader experiences the story from three different perspectives over the course of the novel. The rescue of Angie Mitchell is told from the perspective of Turner. The reader is privy to Turner's memories and experiences, such as the experience of Mitchell's dossier. As Turner begins to realize that Mitchell implanted his daughter as part of a deal with artificial intelligences in exchange for advanced technology, the reader experiences the revelation. However, the reader never understands what it's like to be inside Angie Mitchell's mind, as she channels AI gods from cyberspace.

The second point of view the narrator presents is Marly's. Marly is not an artist herself but sees the world through the eyes of an artist. She appreciates the box and its meanings, and so she can also appreciate the artificial intelligence that created it, and beyond that the person who created the means for the box's creation. Marly also sees Virek with an intuitive eye, and it is through Marly's thoughts and feelings that the reader perceives Virek and understands his nature as something corrupted by great wealth, no longer human, and seeking to expand power.

The third point of view that the narrator presents is Bobby's. Bobby is an everyman. Turner is a mercenary, an insider and even a participant in the competitive, dangerous, corporate-run world. Marly is an insider with a different perspective, dealing with an upper-crust world of art aficionados. Bobby represents the vast majority of people in the society. He is living in a slum and doesn't understand the nature of the world around him. Throughout the novel, Bobby's eyes begin to be opened to the world he takes for granted and what it means.

Setting

The novel is set in a future society with advanced technology, which is largely run by corporations. Governments, in relationship to corporations, have little power, and the same is becoming true of individuals. The technology itself is beginning to gain power, and this is represented by the artificial intelligences that exist in cyberspace. They are the personified power of technology as an independent entity, which has evolved to move beyond the controlling influences of human beings or corporations.

Although the novel travels to many places, the most important setting is cyberspace itself. Unlike the Internet, cyberspace is a shared virtual experience. Data, people, corporations, and places are represented by visual constructs. Together, they make a constructed reality, a world that exists entirely as data but is accessed by human beings as an environment. In many ways, cyberspace is an extension of human society in the



normal world, which is a reality built entirely by human beings and for human beings. In the novel, cyberspace takes on a life of its own in the guise of artificial intelligences that, through interactions with human beings, take on the personas of gods.

The world outside of cyberspace is overcrowded. New York has spilled out over the entire East Coast into a megalopolis called the Sprawl. The smaller town of Barrytown is filled with high-rise Projects that tower over the city. Individuals become less significant in the society that is Mass Man, as the author Andrea talks about puts it. At the same time, technology has made the world smaller. Turner hops from country to country and continent to continent. Marly can exist in a virtual Barcelona with Virek, no matter their distance apart.

Language and Meaning

One of the hallmarks of Gibson's novel is its technological language. Gibson coined the term cyberspace to describe a virtual world of information that would exist in the future. The novel is filled with other terms that denote advances in technology. Biosoft, for example, is the term for software that directly communicates with the brain, turning information into immediate knowledge. These new words indicate a changed society, one where language must evolve to reflect the evolution of technology. Language evolves in other ways, as well. Bobby uses the term "pulled a wilson" to mean doing something stupid or messing up. Finn says that he actually knew the original Wilson. The story of Wilson has become a cultural story, one that has been expanded into a figure of speech.

Another aspect of language in Gibson's writing is naming. The cowboys in the novel name themselves. They take on new identities when they enter a new world, the world of cyberspace. Bobby becomes Count Zero. Jammer, the Finn, Two-a-Day, and Wig are all names taken on to transform into something new, a cowboy, a persona that exists in cyberspace more than in the real world. Naming is a kind of creation, and this extends to the AI gods as well. By naming an AI Samedi, it takes on all the things that name entails and becomes Baron Samedi, Lord of Graveyards. The name gives the AI a function and a personality, as well.

Structure

The novel follows three different storylines that are intertwined and revolve around the presence of voodoo gods in cyberspace and the existence of the Virgin of Miracles. The first storyline is the story of Turner, a mercenary who finds himself protecting the Virgin, Angie, from forces that want to kill or capture her. The second storyline is the story of Marly, who is hired to find a mysterious artist and traces the artworks she's researching back to their origin, an artificial intelligence. Marly's storyline introduces the novel's primary antagonist, Josef Virek. The third storyline is the story of Bobby Newmark, or Count Zero. Bobby becomes embroiled in the story when he accidentally uses software



that originated with AIs, which allows one of the voodoo gods/AIs to work through him. With this power, Bobby becomes the force that destroys Virek.

Count Zero is divided into thirty-six short chapters, which switch back and forth between the three storylines. Turner and Bobby's stories come together at the end, as they join forces at Jammer's. Marly's story ends when she locates the artist she seeks. Through her story, the reader comes to more fully understand parts of the plot that Turner and Bobby do not see. Turner and Bobby see and interact with the voodoo gods, but they don't know where they come from or what the software Bobby used is. Marly's meeting with the AI in a remote abandoned mainframe clarifies that the gods are AIs and that the software came from the AIs' communications with each other.

The novel leaves threads open in the end, hinting at future developments. The software that Bobby used is stolen and disappears into the underground, and based on what Marly learns, there is more similar software that exists. This hints that a new future, based on humans joining with AIs, is dawning.



Quotes

"And something leaned in, vastness unutterable, from beyond the most distant edge of anything he'd ever known or imagined, and touched him." Chap. 3, p. 18

"He was like a kid who'd grown up beside an ocean, taking it as much for granted as he took the sky, but knowing nothing of currents, shipping routes, or the ins and outs of weather." Chap. 6, p. 38

"How could she have imagined that it would be possible to live, to move, in the unnatural field of Virek's wealth without suffering distortion?" Chap. 12, p. 73

"There had been times, during that long day, when Mitchell's coded memories had risen in him, filling him with a strange dread that seemed to have nothing to do with the operation at hand." Chap. 14, p. 88

"Knowledge lit him like an arcade game, and he surged forward with the plane-ness of the jet, feeling the flexible airframe reshape itself for jump-off as the canopy whined smoothly down on its servos." Chap. 14, p. 98

"Five years tends to find a cowboy either rich or brain-dead, or else financing a stable of younger cracksmen and strictly into the managerial side." Chap. 16, p. 120

"'It's all through her head,' Rudy said. 'Like long chains of it. It doesn't look like anything I've ever seen, ever. Nothing.'" Chap. 17, p. 133

"The fact of his having caught her here, pinned her here this way, told her that her intuition had been correct: The machine, the structure, was there, was real." Chap. 23, p. 174

"Someone, something, had found Mitchell in his postgraduate slump and had started feeding him things." Chap. 27, p. 203

"But now the sounds were sounds only, no forest of voices behind them to speak as one voice, and she watched the perfect globes of her tears spin out to join forgotten human memories in the dome of the boxmaker." Chap. 31, p. 227

"'My name,' a voice said, and Bobby wanted to scream when he realized that it came from his own mouth, 'is Samedi, and you have slain my cousin's horse...'" Chap. 32, p. 233

"He stood there a long time, staring after the wake of the Athens boats, neither Tally Isham nor the unit director nor Angie knowing that he was seeing a gray sweep of Barrytown condos cresting up into the dark towers of the Projects." Chap. 35, p. 244



Topics for Discussion

How does the existence of AIs acting as voodoo gods in cyberspace change human society?

What type of an entity is a corporation, and why do corporations have so much power in the novel?

Why does Marly not try to escape death at the end of the novel? What does she gain from her experience of finding the artist she's looking for?

What does the end of the novel, where Angie becomes a rising simstim star, bode for the future?

Does wealth necessarily make Virek evil and inhuman? Why?

Would it be disastrous if Virek found what he's looking for, a way to live forever, as Marly thinks it would?

What allows Turner to stop being a "squirrel" coming back for more punishment and retire to live a life with Sally and his son?