

The Circle Study Guide

The Circle by Dave Eggers

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Due to the structure of this novel, this study guide has been broken up into sections according to page numbers. This guide specifically refers to the First Vintage Books Edition, May 2014, paperback. Accordingly, quotes are referenced by page numbers.

“The Circle” is a cautionary contemporary dystopian novel of technology by Dave Eggers in which an internet-technology company, the Circle, seeks to make accessible all information in the world, in which it would not only control that flow of information, but would make it mandatory for all people in the United States to have an online account with them for the purposes of doing anything from shopping to voting.

When the novel begins, Mae Holland, a girl of 24, has just been given a job at the Circle, one secured through the help of her best friend, Annie Allerton. Mae is thrilled to be working for the biggest, most influential internet-technology company that there is.

Their company has gone beyond mere internet usage, as Mae soon finds out. For example, she meets two women who are developing a submarine that can descend to the lowest levels of the Marianas Trench to bring up sea creatures for study. As a result of the unique job Mae is given, where she wears a camera nearly 24 hours a day, she is given nearly free-run of the Circle campus, and has innumerable viewers, to whom she shows off the campus, developing technologies, sits in on meetings, and so on. She is well-loved the world over, and privacy becomes a thing of the past for millions. However, she has several mysterious run-ins with a man named Kalden, who reveals his true identity to Mae off-camera.

Kalden is actually Ty, the original founder of the Circle. Ty has come to loathe the Circle, for it has become a monster. He originally developed it for fun, to help people, not to control them or hurt them, as is now happening. He believes people have a right to privacy, that some things shouldn't be known, and that people need to respect one another's boundaries. They should especially, he reveals, have the right and the option to opt out. Ty says that the Circle has become dangerous because it controls the flow of information in the world. The Circle was meant to provide access to information, not control all of it.

This, coupled with the move by the Circle into the public sphere – to take over voting and government services – is totalitarianism. Mae is stunned. Ty tells her that he can take apart the Circle from the inside before it is too late, but that he'll need her help and her influence by way of her viewers to help people see the truth of things. Mae is not sold. She has been completely brainwashed by the company and what its goals are. She cannot objectively reason outside of it, and so she turns Ty in to her superiors.

They cannot kill Ty, but merely relegate him, for the mythology surrounding his person make him invaluable to the company. Mae continues to advance in the company, amazed that Ty nearly ended the world. The novel ends with Mae visiting her comatose

friend, Annie, in the hospital, and wondering what her mind is doing. She decides that everyone in the world has a right to know Annie's thoughts.



Book I: Pages 1 – 102

Summary

Twenty-four year-old Mae Holland arrives for her first day of work at the technology company, the Circle, on a sunny Monday in June, in the Customer Experience department. She is amazed by the company's campus, thinking of it like Heaven, from its landscaping to the daycare it runs for the children of employees. The company is one of the most admired and powerful, and hires hundreds of new minds each year. The company's logo is a knitted grid with a "C" in the center of the grid. Mae has secured the job through her former college roommate and good friend, Annie, who is two years older and who has developed a sisterly bond with Mae. Annie, after receiving her MBA from Stanford, was snatched up by the Circle. Annie insists she had nothing to do with Mae being hired, but Mae thinks Annie had more to do with it than she lets on.

In the front offices, Mae meets Renata, who by way of retinal interface, a Circle innovation, informs Mae that Annie will soon be on her way from the Old West. The Circle names its buildings and departments after historical eras, rather than things like Building 3B East. Renata then brings Mae to the Customer Experience building, the Renaissance, and explains that Annie has been held up, but will be there to visit Mae within an hour. Mae rides a glass elevator with Renata, on the walls of which appear the image of Mae's high school yearbook photo, and the words "Welcome Mae Holland". It is a horrible picture, and Mae suspects that Annie is behind its surfacing. Renata explains that everything is run on digital sensors, and can detect Mae's ID card. Renata also reveals Annie is behind the photo, saying the two must be close for Annie to have that kind of picture. The elevator also generates a schedule of activities and events for the day, from a showing of the movie "Koyaanisqatsi" to core strengthening to a town hall meeting that evening with a U.S. Congressman.

Leaving the elevator on the fourth floor, Mae can see through the floors, for they are all made of glass. Renata worries that Mae is concerned about this, and offers to place her on a lower floor, but Mae says she was merely looking, not getting scared. As Mae walks through the building, she sees that all walls are made of glass – even the cabinets and shelves in the kitchen. Mae is thrilled, until she is brought to her cubicle and computer – which look like a generic, boring, gray cubicle and computer – the kind she left at her old job to come to the Circle. Mae pretends to be thrilled, and Renata explains that Denise and Josiah will soon be along to help orient Mae.

Mae reflects on her small hometown of Longfield, California, where she worked at a gas and utility company that was horribly outdated. She had spent \$234,000 on college, and wanted more than being the head of the IT department if she did well for four or five years. Needing to pay college loans off, she kept the job and stayed for eighteen months, always looking for a better opportunity. She felt as if she was wasting her life at the utility company, and did not like having a regular workday of nine to five. The cubicle walls were lined with gray burlap, and at the Circle, her cubicle walls are once again



lined with gray burlap. Mae curses under her breath at the burlap as Annie arrives. Annie bursts out laughing, for it has been an elaborate welcoming joke that Renata was also in on. Annie explains that her ruse is how she got to where she is now, in a senior executive's position – with planning and following through. Mae is relieved but a little annoyed, and Annie then brings Mae on a tour of the company.

Mae remembers how Annie was in college: always friendly, bubbly, optimistic, forgetful, and from serious money. Mae wonders how someone like Annie could become an executive director at a company like the Circle – one of its famous Gang of 40, the forty most important people in the company who knew everything going on and everything being planned, and how Annie would have managed to have enough power in so short a time as to get Mae a job almost as soon as Mae asked her about the possibility of applying. Annie tells Mae that she should not worry, because most senior members of the company all started out in Customer Experience. Annie says that people move up reliably, and that Annie will brag about Mae's successes to everyone. Annie shows Mae everything from restaurants to a shop which loans things like hang-glider for free to company employees, and a daycare-like kennel for dogs, which is Annie's personal brainchild. At the cafeteria, Annie introduces Mae to different employees, who are all working on incredible things, such as a submarine to explore and map the Marianas Trench and low-cost housing for developing countries. The company fuels passions of its community of employees, and while people may be brought into the company for doing one thing, they may end doing something else. The low-cost housing designers were hired on as programmers, originally. The company itself is run by what are referred to as the Three Wise Men, who founded the company years before. A painted picture of them is in the Ochre Library, which Annie brings Mae to, telling her she is not supposed to see the Library yet, but she'll show Mae anyways.

The Three Wise Men include the first Wise Man, Tyler "Ty" Alexander Gospodinov, who founded the company, and is considered a boy-wonder visionary who may have borderline Asperger's, and the picture seems to reinforce the point, as Ty is painted as not paying attention and looking somewhere else. Just before the company's IPO, he worried about being socially awkward, and hired on the two other Wise Men, Eamon Bailey and Tom Stenton. The move worked, and the company tripled in value. As the company grew more public, Ty backed out of the public view, and shied away from the spotlight. Ty is responsible for the Unified Operation System, which combines everything from social media profiles, e-mail accounts, and payment systems, into one simple system, later called TruYou. Instead of needing multiple passwords for multiple accounts for multiple sites for multiple reasons, everything is now combined into one single system, which is now dominant. Real names must be used, for everything is tied together, from bank accounts to credit cards. It means the end of false identities, identity theft, and other issues. Some oppose TruYou for reasons of privacy, but the system simply takes over for ease of use, and for other benefits, such as getting rid of trolls. Ty, upon being asked about TruYou, humbly said its creation was merely accidental, that he was simply tired of having to memorize multiple passwords.

To Ty's lower left in the painting is Tom Stenton, in his mid-fifties, grinning like a wolf. Tom is a brilliant CEO in the vein of 1980s Wall Street traders, and defies everyone from



the European Union to Chinese hackers. Tom is single, and delights in showing off his wealth, unlike Ty and Eamon Bailey. Eamon lives in a modest house ten minutes from the Circle, has gray hair, is kind, friendly, and the public face of the company. He is originally from Omaha, from a normal American family. He loves his wife, and has four children, one of whom has cerebral palsy, which doesn't bother him in the least. He prefers to be called "Uncle Eamon" by employees, wanting them to feel at home. As Mae regards the painting, she finds it strange that it is a high school-quality painting, and that each man in the painting has a hand on the other's shoulder, completing a triangle. Mae doesn't understand why they couldn't get a better painting.

Annie then shows Mae the library itself. It is a massive, beautiful, traditionally-designed atrium surrounded by three levels of some ten thousand books. There are numerous antiques and marble busts as well. Annie explains that the library is Bailey's project, that he often buys up books and antiques being sold by collectors, but buys them at fair market value, and allows the former owners to come in and be among their possessions. Annie brings Mae to the topmost level of the library, where the rarest books are kept, from beautiful Bibles to atlases to ancient histories. Annie then removes a book from a shelf—"The Best Years of Our Lives"—and a bookcase shifts, revealing a hidden chamber. The chamber is round and lined with books, and there is a fireman's pole in the center of the room, which drops down into the darkness. No one knows where it goes. It is Bailey's secret, and few know about the pole at all, including Annie, who was shown by Bailey himself.

Leaving the library, Annie goes off to handle interviews with startups that want to be acquired by the Circle, and leaves Mae with Josiah and Denise, in their mid-twenties, near the Glass Eatery. They both love Annie, and says that everyone does. They continue giving Mae the tour, from the health center to the organic gardens run by two full-time farmers. They also visit the company dorms, now at 180 rooms, for people who work late or need a nap during the day. They are free and always clean. They hope to have a few thousand rooms within the next few years.

Mae is beyond impressed, especially by a party given by the company that night. Mae and Annie get some food and then go and sit in the stone amphitheater. All over, people are enjoying games of kickball, playing Limbo, or just hanging around and laughing. They all drink a variety of Riesling that is produced at the campus, and everyone gets drunk pretty quickly. Mae loses track of Annie, and wants more Riesling, but she is pretty drunk and it is difficult to get around. She meets a developer in security named Francis, called Frank, who has hidden away two bottles of Riesling in a fountain. Frank is a developer. They sit and talk on some steps overlooking the party. He toasts Mae on her first day. Frank hits on Mae, telling her he likes her voice. Mae finds Frank to be strange, and thinks to have met someone like him among thousands of others is evidence of God. As the party winds down, Annie finds Mae. Frank takes off when Annie asks him to, and Annie knows she has interrupted something. She asks where Frank got the alcohol, and Mae reveals he had it hidden in the fountain from the Industrial Revolution.



Mae gets a few hours of sleep that night, and goes to work early the next morning. Renata brings Mae to her real desk, and Mae notes how all rooms and dividers are made of glass. Some people arrive to meet Mae: Rob from payroll; Trish, the notary, who asks for Mae's driver's license and her signature and fingerprints; Jon, who collects Mae's birth certificate to make a copy; and Brandon, a man in his mid-thirties who gives Mae a brand new, not-yet-released tablet. Onto it, he transfers all of the contents from Mae's laptop, and then does the same with her old phone to her new phone. Brandon also arranges it so that everything is backed up on the cloud. The tablet and phone are protected by computer-generated password, according to company rules. Mae's full name is engraved on each: Maebelline Renner Holland. As Brandon leaves, Annie shows up, and Mae hugs her, thanking her.

Dan, Mae's team leader, then approaches. It was Dan who interviewed Mae three times for the job. Annie leaves, telling Dan to watch Mae for great things, and that she'll be watching Dan watching Mae. Dan brings Mae up to the rooftop, from which most of the campus, and the nearby city of San Vincenzo can be seen. Dan explains that, although the Circle is a workplace, it is also a humanplace, because actual human beings do the work, and must be more like a community than anything else. Humanity – from opinions to voices – are heard and respected. Communication is critical. Dan explains that it is critical what Customer Experience does, for without customers, there is no company. The CE Department is the face of the company, and the customers need a humane experience. Dan then introduces Mae to Jared, her unit's leader.

Mae will be answering the questions of customers in writing. Each message to a customer must be personalized, and very much human. Mae will be rated on her service. If it drops below a 95, she will need to step back and reexamine what she is doing. If it gets lower, it means practice with Dan or Jared to get better. Mae should always aim for 100, and if she doesn't get a 100, she can do a follow-up with a customer to find out what she can do better. Mae tries out her first response, and gets a 100. Jared is impressed. He tells her that any stumpers – questions not easily answered – should be bounced over to him. Mae then gets going, and by noon, acquires an average score of 98. Jared messages her that he is impressed. So does Dan. It makes Mae happy and encourages her. By noon, Annie has been made aware of Mae's work, and she blasts out her approval on Zing –to the 10,041 people who work at the Circle. Mae is thrilled. At the end of the day, Mae's score is 98 – the highest ever for a newbie. Congratulatory messages pour in. Mae is thrilled.

By the end of the week, Mae's score is a 97. The work is demanding, but enjoyable. Mae has lunch with Annie on Friday. They are joined by Sabine and Josef. Sabine has an infinity tattoo on her arm, and Josef has bad teeth. Sabine is a biochemist who is working in biometrics – from iris scanning to facial recognition. Josef is in Educational Access, getting tablets to poor schools, and is friends with Frank. Frank is working on preventing child abductions, a kind of security. It is revealed that Frank had four siblings, including two sisters. Their parents were losers – the father always in jail and the mother on drugs. The sisters were raped and murdered, and it led to him heading up the child safety program he currently works on.



Later, Annie and Mae attend a ritual, weekly talk called “Dream Friday” in the Great Hall in the Enlightenment, where Bailey welcomes newbies. He is in his mid-forties, and explains Dream Friday is meant to inform all Circlers what is being worked on. Bailey likes to surf, but hates having to gauge waves. He shows live footage of Stinson Beach, in brand new, crystal-clear streaming footage from a lollipop-sized camera, transmitting the footage without wires by way of satellite. The camera runs on a two-year lithium battery, with a solar-powered model a year away. The camera is waterproof, sand-proof, etc. Bailey switches the footage to other beaches, where he has set cameras up all morning. The cameras are unnoticed by anyone, for they are small and resemble weeds. Everything done at Circle is about knowing the previously unknown, Bailey explains. Installation of the cameras takes five minutes – and each camera will cost approximately \$59, making them affordable for anyone. They can be set up anywhere, and live feeds can be shared between people. Bailey shows footage of his own house, and Tahoe, set up by a friend. With millions of cameras all over the world, peaceful protestors in Cairo, for example, do not need to risk their own lives to film atrocities. They even pick up sound, as Bailey demonstrates for the camera in Cairo. They can be moved and controlled by voice. There are fifty cameras in Cairo. It means that accountability can be increased, and human rights expanded. Bailey says they are at the dawn of the Second Enlightenment, and all that happens must be known. It also means peace of mind. He can check in on his mom by camera as well. Bailey estimates that there will be some two billion cameras worldwide within ten years. All of the video feeds will be hosted at the new site, SeeChange.

Mae’s parents take her out to dinner on Saturday to celebrate her first week of work. They are beaming and incredibly proud of Mae, both for her accomplishment working at The Circle, to her yearly salary of \$62,000. Mae’s parents mention that they ran into Mae’s ex-boyfriend, Mercer, the other day. Mercer makes chandeliers out of antlers, and has his own business now, which is thriving.

Mae’s father, Vinnie, is delighted to hear that things are going so well for Mae, which perks him up. He suffers from multiple sclerosis, which tires him out quickly. His insurance company has also refused to pay for the pain medication he takes. Mae feels powerless to help, and wants to help, desperately. Mae’s parents give her a fancy silver pen, given to Vinnie by a friend. Mae’s father, unable to use it, thinks it would look good on Mae’s desk. Mae warmly accepts the gift, and spends the night with them at the bed and breakfast at which they are staying. The next morning, after breakfast, her parents leave to go home, and Mae goes kayaking – a sport Mercer introduced her to. Mae heads to Maiden’s Voyages, a rental place owned and operated by the aging Marion, a sweet, warm woman who is friendly with Mae. Mae heads out on a kayak. She passes boats, yachts, and houseboats. She sees one with a Confederate flag on it, and another barge with a motorcycle on it. With time to herself, Mae begins to cry, feeling horribly for her father, who was handling so much pain with so much dignity.

Monday mornings at the company are always rough, for weekend requests have piled up. Mae is unhappy to see her score at 91, but Jared messages her, telling her not to worry, that it is normal. She meets Frank for lunch. He confirms his horrible past, and explains the program he is working on is called ChildTrack. Years ago, in Denmark,



children under fourteen were implanted with tracking chips, and at first, the public loved them. Eventually, several children are kidnapped, their chips removed, and their bodies found later on. They believe that the chips led to their children being kidnapped, by enabling the kidnappers to track them, and so the whole idea is done. Frank explains the tracking chips were implanted in too shallow an area, and could be cut out. Frank thinks it would be better to put the chips in bone. Crimes against children could be reduced by 99-percent, Frank asserts.

After the workday finishes, Mae's score has inched up to 93. After using the bathroom and before a meeting Dan sets up between Mae and Gina from CircleSocial, Mae meets a man named Kalden who is interested in her work. She doesn't know whether he is an employee or someone off the street, or even some kind of corporate test. Mae shows him what he does, and he seems amazed. He says he'll see Mae around campus, and then heads out as Gina comes in.

Gina handles the social media application for the company's community, and wants to help Mae get hers going. Online presence at Circle is considered essential to community, and Gina encourages Mae to use hers. Mae has three computer screens at her desk, one of which is dedicated to CircleSocial. The site allows employees to see where other employees are, for example, updated automatically by her ID. The account is also tied into Zing, a Twitter-like service, and Gina explains that the company expects ten Zings a day, minimum. CircleSocial also allows others users to see what kind of music she is listening to as well, for example. While the company expects Mae to maintain a strong online presence, they also want her to focus on her work as well. Important things, like work-related notices will show up in Mae's InnerCircle feed, while everything else appears in her OuterCircle feed. Her activity will be measured by an algorithm known as a Participation Rank, or PartiRank. Some people take it very seriously, but it is primarily a way for an employee to see what their activity level is like.

Analysis

Dave Eggers's novel "The Circle" is a contemporary dystopian account of information, internet, and technology, which raises questions about rights, privacy, transparency, technology, and democracy – all of which become important themes in the novel. Factoring into the center of all of this is Mae Holland, a new hire at the internet-technology giant, the Circle, responsible for its unified operating system, a central platform called "TruYou", which links together all accounts a user has online, from personal to professional. The program is wildly popular for its ease of use, accessibility, and cumulative nature, and has been integral to the six year-meteoric rise of the Circle. The Circle is especially popular among young people, those in their twenties and thirties. Mae herself is twenty-four, and has spent her teenage and college years with the Circle booming above her. When Mae Holland arrives on campus – indeed, the very first line of the novel, itself – she compares it to Heaven. This is crucial for the reader to understand that the commentary is ironic: Mae is not entering a symbolic Heaven, but an actual Hell – one which will become clearly apparent by the novel's end.



Mae's initial job is simple and seemingly innocuous enough: she tends to questions, comments, and inquiries at the Customer Experience department, for which she receives an approval rating visible to all others at the company. Indeed, the Circle has developed its own personal TruYou system, which incorporates the public TruYou system, but also allows Circlers at the campus to be within their own company network. This is called CircleSocial. Interestingly enough, Mae is expected not only to handle work, but to maintain an active social media presence on CircleSocial, for which she will receive a PartiRank. This is in order to help build community among Circlers. Community is what the company is all about, it is explained to Mae. True communities, the Circle maintains, know about what all of its members are doing at all times. This is given physical manifestation by the fact that nearly the entire buildings in which Circles work are composed of glass: glass walls, nearly all-glass furniture, glass cabinets and shelves, glass floors, and so on. To the unthinking eye, the use of glass may be architecturally aesthetic, but to the objective reader, the guise is clear: glass means no privacy. Immediately, the themes of privacy, transparency, and rights come into effect, where everyone in the work place can see what everyone else in the workplace is doing with a simple glance in any direction. What right does the person sitting a floor above someone else have to look down and watch the other as he or she works, is a question the reader might ask. But this is barely the beginning of what the Circle considers to be transparency.

Transparency is key to life at the Circle. Transparency means information and knowledge. Mae comes to learn about the things going on at the company through tours and meeting people working on various projects. Whether it is a submarine being designed to be used in the Marianas Trench, or a child-tracking device being developed by Frank, the goal is ultimately transparency, to know. A parent will want to make sure his or her child is safe, and where that child is supposed to be. This will cut down on kidnappings, Frank explains, as well as other crimes against children. People have a right to know what is at the bottom of the Marianas Trench, and the submarine designed to go down there will help the Circle reveal just what is at the bottom. On the surface, both ideas seem to have equal merit: both are noble endeavors aimed at a better world. Mae cannot help but fall in love with the nobility of the goals of the company. So far, everything appears relatively straightforward. But there are things which are not explained, such as with the child tracking device: will the location of the child be available only to the child's parents and law enforcement agencies, or will it be available to everyone? Does the parent have the right to choose which? Does the parent have the right to opt out? These are not questions that are answered, for the benefits of the program seem to outweigh any objective thoughts Mae may have on the idea.

Mae herself is a wide-eyed dreamer, more gullible than any other character in the novel. She has grown up under the auspices of the Circle, and is idealistically progressive, and is more than young enough to be irreversibly impressionable. This is quite clear as she is awestruck by technology, as well as her unwillingness to question anything because she is simply happy enough – and desperate enough – to have a job at the Circle, to be a part of something big. Nothing is ever truly critically examined by Circlers, as is made evident by the program regarding SeeChange. Mae buys at face value the idea that billions of cameras monitoring the world will cut down on crime and enable people to



experience things the world over that they might not otherwise have been able to experience. She doesn't stop to reflect on the idea that some people may simply not want to be filmed, or may have some private moments they don't want broadcast, live, to the world. As will later be made clear, privacy is something the Circle does not believe in, and indeed, views to be akin to criminality.

There is also one particular scene the reader should keep in mind as well. When Mae is shown what Bailey uses as an office in the library, on the top floor, there is a fire pole that leads down into a dark hole which no one knows where it goes. Note that Bailey's office is on the top floor of the library – the summit of knowledge and power, an all-seeing point of view, like God – and that the Circle is intending to make all knowledge and information public, the building up to something tremendous – but to what end? This is signified by the unknown in the hole below, but the darkness itself also doubles as literal darkness – a descent into Hell, through the rabbit hole, where nothing is quite what it seems to be. Darkness is the opposite of light; darkness is unknowing, light is knowing. With all things known, what comes next? What is on the other side of total power, information, and control? The answer is simple: a fall. A fall into darkness. Whether that descent into Hell, into darkness, will be taken by the Circle, or the people of the world, is as of yet unclear.

Discussion Question 1

Explain the symbolism of the fire pole and hole in the library's top floor. What do you believe this portends? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Mae so thrilled to be working at the Circle? What is she like as a person?

Discussion Question 3

What technologies and programs are being worked on at the Circle? Objectively consider one. What are the positives? What are the negatives? Do you approve or disapprove of the technology or program you have chosen. Why or why not?

Vocabulary

elegant, innovate, indebted, immaculate, stupefied, myriad, elaborately, baffled, voracious, distillation, effervescent, decadently, intermittently, invariably, assuaged, ubiquitous, unaggressive, translucent, obfuscation, nonchalance, pungent

Book I: Pages 102 – 205

Summary

Mae spends hours going through her CircleSocial account, both the InnerCircle account from everyone at work, and her OuterCircle account, everyone she is friends with not at work. These range from wanting more vegan options at work to her friend from college have a stomach flu. At work the next day, Mae manages to strike a balance between handling her work load, and keeping up on her social account. She is amazed by the support, encouragement, and friendship among members of the Circle.

Before lunch on Tuesday, Dan asks Mae to come into his office. There, she meets Alistair, who is upset that Mae did not come to his Portugal brunch. Both men are unhappy with Mae for not coming, but they soften when she gives the excuse that she is so new, she didn't know if she'd be welcome. Dan happily says that he knew it was merely Mae being new, and there being misunderstandings. Everything is resolved, and Dan has the meeting end in hugs. He then fires up a report to Human Resources about the event, which Mae signs, and then goes to meet Annie for lunch.

Annie explains she listened to the entire exchange, and reveals that Mae was probably invited to the brunch because Alistair more than likely ran a search for anyone with an interest in Portugal. Because Mae had pictures on her laptop from Portugal years before, which are now in the cloud, she was probably included in that list. Annie then brings Mae into building for free samples, where companies bring in new or unreleased products and give them away as gift bags to Circle employees. Circle members use their IDs to zap which bags or products they take. They are expected to use them and post about them online. Mae is still worried about Alistair, and Annie explains that he just happens to be overly-sensitive nuts, and some - like Dan - enable them. Annie also tells Mae to fill up her gift bag to the brim before she leaves. When Mae gets back to her desk, Annie has messaged her, panicked, saying she shouldn't have spoken so poorly about Dan, and wants to know if Mae has told anyone about it. Mae says she hasn't, and she won't. Mae tells Annie she is overstressed, and Annie says she's been dealing with Washington government-hassle stuff. Mae invites Annie to dinner, but Annie declines, saying she has more work to do. Mae then asks Frank out, who is thrilled by the invitation. They end up kissing.

Frank and Mae begin dating. Mae thinks she is falling in love. Everything seems amazing in the world now that she has Frank. At that Friday's innovation talk, Mae sits with Frank to listen to speaker Gus Khazeni, who worked on Frank's unit and later spun off onto his own. He asks Mae and Frank to sit near the front. Bailey introduces Gus, who comes onstage. He says he is pathetically single, and knows that 67% of employees are single. Gus is overseeing a program called LuvLuv, which scans the internet for more information about the person being dated. He asks for a volunteer to come on stage, and Frank raises his hand. Mae realizes she is going to be dragged into whatever is going on. Frank explains he is dating Mae Holland. Entering Mae's name in



LuvLuv, Gus explains that LuvLuv scans all her online activity to determine, for example, what her allergies are, to carefully plan dates. She likely has a horse and gluten allergy. It also scans her preferences for restaurants, based on her posts. Essentially, LuvLuv helps set up a perfect date. Gus goes on to describe more to the company audience about Mae, most of which is accurate. Mae is furious with Frank, and will not talk to him afterwards. He doesn't understand why she is so mad. He says Mae is a hit. Mae herself doesn't understand why she is so upset, because all of the information Gus uses she herself posted online at some point or another. She thinks perhaps the surprise of it, or how accurate the program was, was offsetting to her. Mae then receives a message from her mother, telling her to come home.

Mae's father has apparently suffered a seizure or some other kind of attack, has been rushed to the hospital, but has been released to go home. Mercer is there, being the one who took Vinnie to the hospital in the first place. Mae's father cannot thank him enough. Mae is furious, having driven two hours to get to where she is not needed, after all. Mae thanks Mercer for his help, and after dinner, they get to talking.

Mercer explains his business is doing incredibly well. He also tells Mae that he is tired of never just talking to her, but of having to deal with other people by way of social media as well. For example, Mae brings up customer comments about Mercer's business. But Mercer wants to talk to Mae directly, not about each other by way of what they see online. He believes the vast majority of social networking is mere gossip. Business is about buying and selling and directly talking to the business, not complaining about it to everyone else online. It allows for rumors to become truth and simplified conversation to the point of "likes" and "smiley faces". And companies like the Circle, he contends, manufacture social neediness to extreme levels. Mercer can't even e-mail Mae without the company scanning the contents for ways to monetize the information. After Mercer leaves, Mae gets online to handle social media for the night. Mae spends the weekend with her parents, but leaves on Sunday when her mom insists she does, after her father has been unable to get up off the couch in time to use the bathroom.

Mae is enraged as she leaves, for being summoned home and then just cast out. Mae decides to go kayaking. Walt, Marion's son, is running shop today. He wants to check Mae in on her account on their newly digitized system, but can't get the wifi system working, so he allows her to head out without checking in. He asks her to be back at 5:22, so he can go and pick up his daughter. Mae kayaks, and sees some sea lions. Mae comes upon a barge, and is invited on board by a woman and man in their fifties. They drink some white wine and get to talking about the beauty of the bay, and the quietness of it. Mae says she'll come back and visit, for she has to return her kayak rental. The woman says it would be swell to have her back.

Monday morning, Mae is given new tasks. The company is expanding once more, and new hires are coming on. Mae is to take Jared's old task of fielding stumping questions, after Jared trains the newbies. A fourth, small monitor is placed at Mae's desk by Renata to directly handle those questions. Mae's rating shoots up to a 98. Jared brings in twelve new people. The afternoon flies by, with Mae's day-end score being 96, and the new group's average being 94. It is a good start. Mae is then sent to



the medical clinic by Jared, since she did not have a chance to go during her first week at work. There, she is met by Dr. Villalobas, a beautiful woman in her forties. Mae explains she has heard how excellent the medical care is at Circle, and Dr. Villalobas explains that the center focuses on prevention more so than anything else. Mae is entitled to checkups once every two weeks. Mae, thinking of how her father never had preventative care for MS, agrees that it is a good thing to have regular checkups. All medical information on Mae will now be available to her from one place. Medical care, and operations, are all free at the clinic. Dr. Villalobas explains that preventative medicine is cheaper than dealing with issues after the fact. Most Circle employees are young and very healthy, and so they are cheaper to handle. Mae consumes a shake with a sensor in it, which connects to a silver bracelet, which collects information from Mae's body through the sensor – from her heart rate, to her sleep duration, to her body posture. It will also help to trace diseases, as was done in Iceland. The bracelet can also measure things like BMI and caloric intake, among others. All the data is stored in the cloud. Dr. Villalobas asks about Mae's family's medical history, and she begins crying. She tells Mae it is probably possible to add her parents to her health insurance plan, as other Circle employees have done the same.

Mae later talks to Annie about the insurance possibility. Annie does not know that Mae's father was having such a difficult time with insurance companies. Annie explains that the company often does whatever it can to make the lives of its Circlers better. Annie rushes off to a meeting about Russian taxes, and Mae wonders if her family might actually end up being covered. Shortly, Annie texts Mae, saying that she's pulled a few arms, and both her parents will now be covered under the Circle's health insurance plan. Mae is stunned and unendingly grateful. Details will be worked out with HR the following day. Mae calls her parents, who are also unendingly grateful. Mae celebrates the evening by going to an event on campus, the Funky Arse Whole Circus. She sees Alistair there, who invites her to another Portugal event, and Mae agrees to go. She sees Josiah and Denise, who thinks the circus – full of nearly nude performers – has gone too far. She then runs into Kalden, who dismisses the circus as court jesters meant to entertain royalty. Kalden won't talk about himself, but asks about Mae's friends. He picks a lemon for Mae from a lemon tree, but it is not ripe, so he shakes the tree, and several lemons fall, two of which hit Mae in the head. Kalden quotes his parents, saying you always hurt the ones you love, and his parents loved him very much.

The next day, Mae asks Annie about Kalden, and tries to describe him. He is near thirty, but with gray hair. Annie jokes around, saying Mae must be into much older men. Mae runs a search for Kalden on the company CircleSocial, but can find nothing. Annie offers to do a facial rec of Kalden, but Mae has no photos of him. Annie tells Mae to keep her posted on Kalden, since anything is possible – including his being a spy.

Dream Friday's presentation on making currency obsolete by way of CircleMoney is cancelled, and employees are instead asked to watch a press conference in which U.S. Senator Williams announces intentions to break up the Circle. She is well-dressed and very competent, seeking to discover when the Circle presents a monopoly in violation of antitrust laws. She believes the Circle is dangerous to free markets for stifling



competition. Williamson is left-leaning politically, so many believe she won't get much support from liberal Democrats or conservative Republicans. Mae does know the Circle controls 90 percent of the search market, 92 percent of text servicing, and 88 percent of free-mail. In Mae's opinion, this is proof of the Circle offering the best product possible. Annie thinks Williamson is in a world of trouble, and asks Mae to let her know the next time she sees Kalden – which may have something to do with the investigation.

Dan later calls Mae into his office, worried about her Participation Rank of 9,101, and how she rarely stays on campus after five. Dan thinks Mae is avoiding the company. Mae explains that her father has had health issues, and while Dan understands that, he stresses the need for community in the workplace. Josiah and Denise come to talk to Mae. They believe that Mae is an enigma, shrouded in mystery, and that it has been years since they have had an employee like her. They are thrilled with her work, but worried she is not meshing enough with the community. For example, while they totally understand Mae's desire to be with her parents through a trial, they do not understand why Mae has not reached out to any Circlers for comfort or to let them know what is going on – or to serve as an example to help others in the same situation. Mae agrees to post something about what happened, and volunteers to join the MS club. Mae explains what she did over the weekend. They can't understand why Mae didn't post about watching women's basketball on Saturday morning. They also want to know why Mae didn't post anything about kayaking on Sunday, or any of the animals that she saw, or how she could identify the animals she saw. Mae explains that she used an old waterproof brochure an ex-boyfriend gave her, and Joisah says that is the problem: paper is the death of communication, intended for only one person. Documenting things online lets everyone experience it. Everyone, from students to historians to the Coast Guard can benefit from documenting. Josiah says that so much information being lost is selfish of the people who refuse to share it. Mae counters, saying she knows now that it is selfish, but that she didn't think it was all that interesting or worth posting about. Denise questions Mae, wondering if she has low self-esteem. She asks if Mae would consent to participating in a special program conducted by Pete Ramirez. Mae agrees.

Mae later curses herself for doing the bare minimum to get by, knowing how much is at stake – from her father's health to Annie's reputation. Mae then spends hours getting more social on InnerCircle. As a result, her rank rises to 3,887. By 3:19 in the morning, Mae breaks 3,000. She spends the night at the dorms. In the morning, at her desk, she comes back to thousands of congratulatory messages, etc., with everyone telling her they knew she could do it. She feels as if she is repaying Annie with her efforts, and by Thursday night, she is at a rank of 2,217. She continues on in social networking, realizing that her anxiety had to do with not knowing what was going on, not with knowing what was going on. This includes being fully aware of all of her body's functions, including her heart rate. The only thing Mae doesn't know by the end of the week is where Kalden is. Annie is glad he seems to have disappeared.

Mae is saddened by not being able to know about someone, so she seeks out Frank in his dorm. Frank has an old papier-mache mask he made as a child hanging above his bed. They have some sake together, with Frank saying it always takes him a few shots to unwind from the day. Frank compliments Mae's waist, and they listen to some music



by a musician-in-residence, who, if enough Circlers like it, it will be turned into an album and released. Mae looks through an old photo album that Frank has brought from home. They are photos of his family long before the horror of his childhood. Foster kids are discouraged from digging into their past, and even having photos of the past is incredibly rare. Frank intends to try facial recognition software on some of the pictures. Frank is the saddest person Mae has ever known, and she excites him to the point of ejaculating, watching their heart rates on their bracelets increase dramatically. She explains she liked what she just did to him, but then is stunned to discover he filmed the incident with his phone. Mae knows it could be available to everyone, and asks him to delete it. He refuses to do so, saying it won't go anywhere.

Analysis

It is clear, by the next section of Book I, that the Circle has high expectations of its employees, not only in work, but in their social activity. What Mae should be enjoying on her free time becomes essential to work, and indeed, becomes work itself. Dan, and his superiors, emerge as something of soft tyrants. Mae is not fired or verbally abused for her lack of participation and failure to attend Alistair's Portugal party, but is lectured and condescended to as if she were an errant child through use of emotional manipulation. It is an unsettling incident, which Annie dismisses as Alistair being overly-sensitive, and Dan being an enabler. But what is more unsettling is Annie's panic that Mae has mentioned her comments to someone else, though Mae reassures Annie that she has done no such thing. Mae, desperate to keep her job and wanting to do right by Annie, can only agree to work more diligently at having an online social presence. The message, delivered softly, is clear: Mae is surrounded by wolves in sheep's clothing, and she had better do what is expected of her, or else. Strangely enough, Mae never stops to question her own rights in the process, but merely does as she is told, seeking approval from her superiors. As such, she becomes the very child she is being lectured to as if she was.

Yet, there is another reason for Mae's willingness to cooperate with the policies and practices of the Circle. Her parents are now on her health insurance plan, and her father is receiving better treatment and better medications as a result. Mae loves her parents dearly, and does not want to do anything that could jeopardize their coverage. But Mae's work ethic and willingness to believe in the beneficent idealism of the Circle are put to the test when Mae finds herself the involuntary and unwitting victim of LuvLuv, a romance app that lets daters learn all they can about one another prior to the date. Mae feels violated, believes the experience paints an inaccurate portrait of herself, and believes she should have been consulted first rather than merely used. Meanwhile, Mae, who has been private both about her parents' health situation, and her enjoyment of kayaking, finds herself once more being lectured to about the need to post all over the internet about this. Mae refusing to let the world know about kayaking or her parents, means information is being lost, and is a selfish thing to do. Anything not transparent, in consistency with the established theme, is criminal, either by way of selfishness or actual illegality. Mae, ever eager to impress others and keep her job, readily agrees. It is not a mistake she will make again. She has just voluntarily



surrendered her privacy, and has freely given up some of the remaining shreds of her freedom, all to make the Circle community – what is clearly a collective – happy above herself. Here, the theme of individual rights is clear in the question that is posed: is the individual more important than the group, or is the group more important than the individual? It is a question Mae will come to answer by the end of the novel.

The theme of transparency also remains clear as well. In order for Mae to be accepted, to earn validation, and the approval of superiors, and to keep her job, she must continue to be transparent. Yet strangely, for all the Circle's transparency, and insistence on transparency, there are two mysteries that are not parsed, or offered truly satisfying explanations to. In a company that considers anything less than transparency dangerous, the founder of the company, Ty, is rarely ever heard or seen, and does not have any kind of public presence at all. This bothers no one at all, for not only is Ty the founder, but he is also worshipped as if he was a god by the employees and the people of the world. He has achieved a near-mythical status, an aura of greatness, that elevates him to the level of being above and beyond criticism or question. At the same time, Mae meets a young man named Kalden, who is clearly antisocial, who does not do what is socially expected of him, and seems to have few, if any, friends, apart from Mae. Kalden, in many respects, is parallel to Mae. Though he has been at the company for a while, he appears to be no one of any real importance, yet has enough clout to get away with not having a public profile at the company. Mae finds it strange, and she and Annie even consider the fact that Kalden might be a spy. They assume the worst without knowing everything about him – an important perception which will be treated again by Bailey in later chapters. Knowing is important to the Circles, as is made consistently clear. But even with all the warning signs that are in plain view, Mae swallows everything being fed to her, hook, line, and sinker. The misguided nobility and idealism – the superficial aspects of what is being done – are a veneer that is impossible to break through, or even see through. This becomes clear with the developing facial recognition technology that Frank uses to find his family members – a seemingly beautiful idea. This technology will later be adapted into PastPerfect, which will bring Annie to ruin.

There is one more interesting incident the reader should pay attention to. Senator Williamson, a left-leaning politician, seeks to break up the Circle monopoly. The Circle, full of left-leaning individuals who believe that everyone should have access to all information, and that no one should control it, are blind to the fact that they themselves are what they oppose, what they fear. Yet, the Circlers – mostly people in their twenties and thirties – are so vain, so narcissistic, that they cannot see past their own self-importance. This lack of self-reflection, of objectivity, whether willful, ingrained, or natural, is incredibly dangerous – especially because it provides a powerhouse force to be wielded by those at the top.

Discussion Question 1

How does Dan handle Mae's kayaking excursion? How does she respond? Do you think it is any of Dan's, or the community's business, to know that Mae went kayaking? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

What makes Mae so sad about not being able to find Kalden online? Do you think Mae's reaction is normal? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

For what reasons is Mae so willing to cooperate with the dictates and requirements of the Circle? If you were in Mae's position, how would you respond? Why?

Vocabulary

exhilarating, theatrically, imperceptible, corporeal, ebullient, conjecture, paradox, obviate, predicated, enigma, ostensibly, espionage, tentative



Book I: Pages 205 – 306

Summary

Annie tells Mae not to worry about her sexual encounter with Frank, but Mae does worry with the video being in the cloud. Mae has asked Annie to delete the video on her behalf, but Annie won't, because it is heavily frowned upon by the company to delete any information. To Bailey, it is akin to killing babies.

On Dream Friday, the Ideas talk is given by Tom Stenton, one of the Three Wise Men, an uncommon occurrence. Stenton talks about the beauty and importance of democracy, including Sunshine Laws, which give citizens access to meetings and transcripts of meetings. Yet, corruption in the government continues, and public trust of Congress is at 11 percent – including a certain senator (Williamson) who is now under investigation for half-a-dozen ethical violations, including bizarre searches on her computer. Stenton introduces the audience to Olivia Santos, U.S. Congresswoman from District 14. Few know who she is. Stenton announces a step forward in transparency that Santos is there to explain. Government should be utterly transparent. Every move she makes and every word she says will be available by way of a Circle device around her neck – every moment, until she sleeps. The applause and cheering are overwhelming, especially once she activates the device. She calls on all elected leaders to do the same. She then exits not by way of the stage, but the aisle in the audience, to thunderous applause. The Colony hosts a reception for Santos that night. Frank is not at the reception, being in Las Vegas to introduce ChildTrack to a convention of law enforcement agencies. A wallscreen soon projects the image of Ty himself, broadcasting from an unknown location. He apologizes for not being there, but says he is tied up with new projects. He says the Circle has a crucial new step it has taken, and that the party can now truly begin. Mae then sees Kalden sitting in a stairwell, and goes over to talk to him.

Mae questions Kalden on why they haven't talked more, and Kalden says they've both screwed up in the process of keeping in touch. Kalden says he does indeed work at the Circle. Mae's concern is that her supervisors saw her at the event, and Kalden says he has already seen his. He is not always social. Mae asks him how long he's been at the company - perhaps six years, she asks. Kalden explains that would be at the beginning of the company. Kalden says he doesn't want to look that old, and it must be the gray hair.

Hillary and Dayna, the girls working on the submarine for the Marianas Trench, say hello to Mae as she goes to get herself and Kalden some wine. They say the submarine will be taken out to the Trench by Stenton himself, and will be big enough to bring back lifeforms from the Trench. Mae tells Kalden about this when she returns to him, and he rolls his eyes, which she has never seen any other Circlers do. He asks her what she thought of the speech, saying Stenton concerns him sometimes because he is so smart and intimidating. Kalden also worries that Mae thinks he looks so old, perhaps about



thirty. Based on what Santos is doing, Kalden tells Mae to come with him, and he brings her to a basement.

Mae is stunned, because he seems to have access to all doors and all places, and has an anarchic streak. Mae asks Kalden what he does, and he says it is not very important, the he attends meetings, gives input, and not much more. Kalden asks Mae if she has heard of Project 9 – an all-encompassing name given to secret research going on at the Circle, from space technology to DNA work. Kalden shows Mae some Donald Judd-inspired copper-sculpture-like processor units, which store and map all the information from a device worn by Stewart, who precedes Santos in recording every single thing he does. Everything recorded by Santos will be stored and mapped in the same way, in a different room. He then brings Mae down to see a tunnel originally intended to be a part of the subway, which leads to a natural cave toward the bay. There is an underground lake, where Kalden suspects all the future Stewarts will go. Kalden makes Mae promise not to tell anyone what they have done. They kiss, and Kalden carries her to an alcove cave, full of blankets and pillows, where Kalden sometimes sleeps. She and Kalden then have sex.

The next morning, Mae wakes up in the dorms, wondering if the night before was a dream. But she knows it was real. She calls Annie to tell her about sleeping with Kalden. She confirms to Annie that Kalden works at the Circle, but Annie says they need to get the guy nailed down that day, because company security has to be taken very seriously. Mae calls the number Kalden has given her, but there is no answer and no voicemail. Mae remembers Kalden dropping her off at the dorms, kissing her on the head, the chin, and each cheek, like the Sign of the Cross.

Mae then heads to Circle Surveys to meet with Pete Ramirez at the request of Josiah, Denise, and Jared – a reward to answer questions about her tastes, preferences, and so on. Josiah explains it is the next step for her. Wearing a headset, Mae will receive questions to which she will answer “Smile” for approval, or “Frown” for disapproval, and then follow-up questions will be up to her to answer as she wants. The test question is about liking dress shoes. Mae answers with a “Smile”, and the following question asks how often she shops for new shoes. Mae responds, “Once every two months.” Ramirez explains that those under Survey can usually answer five hundred questions in a day. The voice that asks the questions can also now be calibrated to be Mae’s voice. Mae answers 652 questions throughout the work day. Congratulatory messages pour in. Mae does her best to continue to impress, answering 820 the next day, and 991 the following.

The increased busyness help keep Mae distracted from Kalden, though she feels horrible that he has not contacted her in four days. She believes he is not a serious person. Non-communication in a place like the Circle now feels like violence to Mae. She thinks she sees Kalden one day in the office, and tries to catch him, but finds Frank instead. He apologizes again for the video, but she doesn’t want to talk to him. Frank says the video is in the cloud, and he can’t technically delete it anymore. It is now part of the collective record. Mae congratulates him on ChildTrack being tried out in Vegas to get rid of him, and then goes back to work.



In the next few weeks, other important developments happen, such as talk of the Circle taking over the city's services. Rumors fly about Circlers being able to disassemble forming tornadoes, and counting all the grains of sand in the Sahara. More and more politicians, both in the United States and globally, are "going clear", taking on Santos's challenge. Thousands of requests for the device are pouring in globally. Production on cameras goes into overdrive. All of the naysayers are rooted out and exposed as criminals in some way, shape, or form. No honest person, it is contended, could possibly oppose transparency. Fewer and fewer politicians are daring to even run for office without first promising to go clear. As time passes, Mae feels more and more at home at the Circle, and feels needed, even. She finds the community amazing and her work intellectually stimulating. She knows she is making a difference in the world.

Kalden calls one day, his number being blocked. He says he needs to see Mae. They meet in a bathroom and have sex. They both laugh, and as Kalden leaves, Mae takes a picture of him, catching only his right forearm and fingers as he is leaving. She messages Annie about having sex in the bathroom. Gina then comes to talk to Mae about a new level of her job – spurring purchases and enticing people to buy things – while Mae is continuing to message Annie. She lies, and tells Annie she knows everything about Kalden, and says everything connects. Annie is relieved, but tells her to take it easy when she has sex with old men. Meanwhile, Gina tries to explain that companies have long been trying to connect everything from online mentions to reviews to actual purchases, by measuring their impact. Gina explains that everything Mae does to spur a purchase increases her Conversion Rate. Gina, after explaining, nearly leaves in tears, for having to compete for time with Mae, with Annie, who everybody loves.

Mae drives home on Thursday evening to see how her parents are doing. Mae's father also wears a wrist monitor, now, and he is in a good mood. Mae's mother is also in a very good mood. Vinnie's health is slowly but steadily improving. Mae also learns that Mercer has gifted her parents with an antler chandelier that actually looks nice, and then learns unhappily that Mercer will be coming for dinner. When he arrives, she does her best to be civil toward him, and takes a picture of the chandelier, telling him it is beautiful. As the evening goes on, Mae becomes happier and happier, because everything at home seems lighter and brighter now that her father's health is improving.

Mae takes a few moments to herself to share the photo of Mercer's chandelier, his phone number, and his business website, in order to drive sales for him. At dinner, Mae's mother toasts her for all that she has done for the family. At the same time, Mae's phone, and Mercer's phone, begin going off like crazy. Mae explains what she has done, and how much approval Mercer's chandelier has earned. Mae begins reading off the positive comments, and Mercer asks her to stop. When she refuses, Mercer walks out. Mae's mother asks her why she had to do that during a nice dinner, and Mae rushes out after Mercer, getting into his car as he tries to drive away. Mercer explains that all he asked Mae to do was stop, and she didn't. Mae says she is trying to help him, and Mercer says he neither asked for, nor wanted help. He calls her snide, callous, and mean. Mae disagrees, insisting she is trying to help him. Mercer explains that someone tried to sell him on Homie the other day, a system which digitally monitors what food and products there are in the house, and then automatically orders more when those



things are low. Mercer says that everything the Circle does is more progressive, more central, more controlling – and they have amassed a tremendous amount of power that can be used to ruin people. Mercer doesn't think it is a coincidence that every time a politician challenges monopolies that they are destroyed in some sort of ethical scandal, as has happened to Williamson. Mae counters that Mercer sounds ignorant and paranoid, that for hundreds of years, milkmen brought milk to people's houses. Mercer counters that the milkmen never scanned the house. Overreliance and overuse of communication destroys simple skills of human interaction – such as at dinner moments before: three people are waiting on Mae while she is absorbed in her phone. She is doing everything digitally, and leaving no evidence that she ever existed. Commenting on pictures does not substitute doing what is actually going on in the picture, he argues –but all because she worries about her numbers at work. He tells her she has become boring.

Mae drives home. She wonders how she ever dated someone like Mercer for three years in high school, for he is overweight and ugly, as well as paranoid. She nears home around ten that evening, and goes to the beach near Maiden's Voyages. The shop is closed, but someone, presumably a late renter, returned a kayak by leaning it up against a fence. Mae decides to take it out. Mae does not think it can be theft to use the kayak. Mae decides to head to Blue Island, past Angel Island, to prove Mercer wrong. She mocks Mercer in her mind for being near thirty, and for being too fat to get into a kayak. As she paddles out, she sees a sea lion. It is difficult to get around in the dark, but Mae does it successfully. She wonders, as she walks around the island, why the Coast Guard dissuades people from going there, if it is a private island, if it is dangerous, and so on. Mae decides to head up toward the mountain-like rock at the center of the island, happy that there is no path for her to follow. Up at the top, Mae is proud of herself, and is amazed by the view of lights in the darkness. As she sits there, she thinks of all the things going on around her – from the animals on the island to the fish in the water – and knows in that instant that there is some comfort in not knowing at all.

Back on shore, Mae is put under arrest by the police, but when they call Marion to confirm who Mae is, Marion says she is indeed a usual renter, and that she'll be right over. When Marion arrives at her shop, she tells the police that they do indeed have Mae Holland, that she is a usual, and has the run of the place. The police explain they got two tips: one from an unidentified caller, and the other from Marion's own security camera. Marion tells Mae not to worry about coming back, that she'll still be more than welcome, especially given the truth of things. Mae feels very badly. She is called into Dan's office the next morning, and Dan reveals he knows what happened: Gary Katz, an employee at the Circle, had placed a camera at the beach; and Walt, Marion's son, had placed a camera near the shop as well – with both cameras feeding into SeeChange. Dan is incensed not only by the crime itself, but by the fact that even before that, Mae was not present for Thursday night activities. Dan shows her footage of the kayak event, saying it is obvious Mae knew she was doing something wrong. Not only that, Mae's selfish impulsiveness meant she did not wear a life-preserver, which could have led to an accidental death, and the ruining of Marion's business. Dan then



reveals Eamon Bailey himself wishes to speak to Mae about the incident, and she agrees to do so.

By that evening, when Mae goes to meet Bailey, her PartiRank is up to 1,430; she has handled 1,129 surveys, and she had managed a Retail Raw score of \$24,050. Mae then meets Dontae Peterson, a man of about thirty who works with Eamon Bailey, and brings Mae up to Bailey's office in the library. The portrait of the Three Wise Men, Dontae explains, was done by Bailey's niece. Mae then meets Bailey, personally. They have tea. Bailey reveals that Annie always speaks well of Mae, and believes that Mae could become invaluable to the company. He asks Mae how she feels about what happened the night before; Mae says she feels horrible. He asks her how she would have behaved if she knew the SeeChange cameras were present. She says she wouldn't have done what she did, because she would have known she would be caught. Bailey says that the cameras help keep people safe, and fortunately, in Mae's instance, the crime was minor and there were no accidents. Individual acts, Bailey contends, all have reverberations. Mae promises to do anything to make up for what happened, and Bailey gently explains that neither Mae, nor Annie's jobs, are in jeopardy, that the company doesn't want either of them to leave.

Bailey says it is a teachable moment. He talks to her about secrets, and whether any should be kept. Bailey's brother is gay, and he kept it a secret from his family until he was twenty-four. Years ago, people were afraid to come out as gay until everyone did it at once. There should not even be any government secrets, either, Bailey goes on. If all countries knew the plans of other countries, no one could ever risk mutually-assured destruction, because everything would already be out in the open. He believes all people have a right to know everything, and should have the tools to do it. He also knows Mae is upset about the LuvLuv demonstration weeks before, and Mae says much if it has to do with there being an incomplete picture of her. Bailey contends that completeness is the goal at the Circle, that the C in the logo should be a completed circle, and therefore, perfect. Any information inaccessible by the Circle prevents the Circle from being perfect. The Circle is seeking perfection, and doesn't want a distorted view of itself being broadcast to the world. He uses the analogy of a broken mirror: a broken mirror gives an incomplete view, while a perfect mirror gives a perfect view. Even things that go on in the bedroom should be exposed – either to demystify and normalize them, or do build up consensus against them. Bailey says he has never been able to come up with a secret that wouldn't be better being known. With cameras everywhere, people would be forced to be their best selves. Bailey then encourages Mae to confess that she'd been in his office, in the library, before. Mae feels relief at telling Bailey this. Bailey goes on to say that darkness doesn't have to tempt people anymore, that he believes, as a Midwestern churchgoer, in the perfectibility of human beings. By being better, people can increase their potential, and do amazing things, from curing diseases to ending hunger.

On Dream Friday, Mae takes to the stage with Eamon Bailey, as she will be leaving Customer Experience for the Enlightenment Building. The presentation takes the form of an interview. Bailey talks to Mae about her awakening, regarding Blue Island and the kayak trip, and how knowing she is being watched makes her behave better. Secrets,



Mae contends, lead to the possibility of crimes, lack of accountability, and speculation. But it also prevents other people from being able to experience things. For example, Bailey's son, Gunner, with cerebral palsy, cannot experience a kayaking trip, except through video and pictures online. Mae says that keeping secrets is immoral, that it is part of an aberrant behavioral system. Sharing is caring, Mae contends, and Bailey agrees, saying that caring about others is best demonstrated through sharing with them. Mae contends that the natural state of information is to be free, that privacy is theft. On the screen behind Mae appear three phrases, which Bailey gives her credit for: Secrets are Lies; Sharing is Caring; and Privacy is Theft. The audience goes wild for Mae, and Bailey announces that Mae herself will be going clear, will be going transparent.

Analysis

As Book I concludes, there are several more startling developments in the time Mae has been at the Circle – for several months, now. The first has to do with the power and reach of the Circle. It is revealed that Senator Williamson – seeking to target the Circle's monopoly – is now the center of a scandal probe over ethics violations, due to things found on her computer. The timing is eerie, especially given Williamson's desire to break up the Circle's monopoly. Yet, no one at the Circle, or its supporters, even pauses to consider that the Circle had something to do with it, in order to protect itself. Instead, the Circle offers as proof – which the public eats up – of Williamson being representative of government corruption and hypocrisy. It is a stunning reversal. Williamson's career is, for all intents and purposes, finished, as is her investigation into the Circle. This leads to the rise of Congresswoman Santos, who exploits the events for political gain, and in seeking an alliance of some kind with the Circle. Santos says that, apart from sleeping, she will now wear a SeeChange camera around her neck, so that her constituents – and all Americans and people of the world – may see and hear everything she is doing, every moment of the day. This, Tom Stenton explains, will mean the beginning of an era of accountability. The reader understands that this is true – but that it will also mean the end of personal privacy. The reader understands that this is also ironic and hypocritical: there will be accountability for everyone, except the Circle.

Strangely enough, even people at the Circle itself – except for Mae – appear to be unaccountable for everything that they do. Questions of individual rights arise through Mae. For example, Frank's use of Mae in LuvLuv, and Frank's filming of a sexual encounter between the two, are done without Mae's consent or agreement, but only with the expectation that Mae will willingly submit to doing whatever the Circle thinks best for all. Not once is Mae herself taken into account, for she is not as important as the greater collective of the Circle. Rather than Mae being the victim being contemplated, the collective is considered the victim, and Mae the criminal. How dare Mae not allow herself to be part of a social dating experiment for the greater good. How dare Mae deprive Frank of the ability to remember a rare sexual encounter, which can then be accessed by the world from the cloud. Mae has gone through the rabbit hole, and even then – even with everything on its head and upside down – Mae still cannot see the truth, still cannot see the light: because she wants to keep her job; because she wants to be part of something important; because she wants to be validated; because



she is utterly selfish. Indeed, Mae's actions being frequently equated with selfishness lead to her very being selfish by not defending her own rights, or the rights of others. Her job matters more than her rights, which is selfish. By denying other people rights, and by going along with it for her own personal validation, Mae is being selfish as well. She cannot see outside of herself outside of the collective. She is about to be swallowed whole.

Mae's ultimate obeisance and surrender to the Circle comes by way of her taking out one of Marion's canoes after hours, and nearly-disastrous experience, which is then turned against her. Mae becomes the unwitting agent of her own demise, by serving as an example of how better behavior can be compelled provided people know other people are watching. Mae agrees to go clear, to go transparent, by wearing a camera at all hours of the day, excepting during sleep. It is out of this arrangement with Bailey that Mae comes to the conclusion and declaration that all privacy is theft, that it is criminal, and that it therefore has no moral or legal foundation whatsoever. Under the guise of individual rights and the greater good, there are no more individual rights – either in privacy or consent. It is something that Mercer tries to make Mae understand, to make her see, but Mae is unwilling to listen. She has essentially been brainwashed. Mercer, and his way of thinking – valuing human interaction over social media interaction – are things of the past, and have no more relevance. Indeed, Mae's old life, everything in her past, has no more relevance either, now that the Circle has changed everything. Progress must be had, all for the greater good. People like Mercer are outliers and irrelevant themselves, and are obstructions to progress. The thought among Circle members is never to just let them be and live how they wish to live, but to convert them one way or another. Everyone must be inside the Circle. There is no other way. Mae's decision to go transparent brings the world one step closer to that, as will be seen in Book II.

Discussion Question 1

What does Congresswoman Santos's decision to go transparent consist of doing? Is this seen as a good or bad thing by Stenton and the Circle? Why? If you were given the chance to go transparent, would you? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Despite Mercer's warnings about, and arguments against the Circle, Mae refuses to listen to him, believing he is a paranoid loser. Why? Do you agree or disagree with Mercer? How so?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe that privacy is theft? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

enumerate, permutations, luminous, labyrinth, brusqueness, inexorable, proliferation, precipitate, euphoric, unconscionable, metaphorically, aberrant, apropos

Book II: Pages 309 – 402

Summary

Mae, using a necklace like Stewart's, except with a camera lens worn at the level of her heart, now serves as a window into the world of Marianas Trench creatures in a brand new aquarium constructed by Strenton to house the creatures he has brought back from the Trench itself. This is especially important for the new species Stenton has discovered, such as an octopus. Mae also wears a tiny earpiece from Assisted Guidance, which helps to direct Mae's activities throughout the day. For example, they may suggest she move into the Machine Age department, where she can show off new Circle products, such as a solar powered consumer-user drone. She is to show off for viewers every aspect of the Circle, from the mundane things, such as the gym, to the sublime things, such as new products. Mae's work has signaled a new round of motivation at the Circle, with motivational questions appearing throughout the campus, such as, "What would Completion mean?" Meanwhile, 90% of Washington has gone transparent, with the remaining 10% under intense scrutiny. Mae becomes the poster child for all other Circlers, and it is hoped that almost all Circlers will be transparent within one year. People love Mae's voice, and they tell her so, which makes Mae very happy. She has a small watch-like screen which allows her to see what the camera is seeing, or to check viewer comments, her daily score, and so on. She averages 845,029 unique viewers to her footage a day. She is now in the top ten of everything measured at the Circle.

Mae continues her aquarium tour, moving on to interview Georgia, a young woman who will be feeding a shark a Maine lobster. Georgia's hand is nearly taken off by the shark. Georgia then considers feeding a kindly Pacific sea turtle to the shark, but Mae's viewers beg them not to do it, even if it is in the interest of science. Nevertheless, Georgia feeds the turtle to the shark. Meanwhile, Mae catches sight of Kalden, having not seen him in a month, especially after having gone transparent. Mae knows she'll be able to check SeeChange cameras later on, because they are everywhere, now. Mae wants to go after Kalden, and begins heading through the newsroom. The voices in Assisted Guidance ask her where she is going. Though she is free to wander around, AG still checks in. Mae sees Kalden moving across a lawn outside, and she knows it was him that she saw in the aquarium.

Suddenly, Mae gets a call from a blocked number, and answers. She knows it must be Kalden. He explains no one can hear him, that it will be fixed in a few moments, and that the Circle is nearing completion, and that it will be very bad for humanity. Most of what's happening, he contends, must stop. He asks her to meet him in the bathroom. Mae hangs up, explaining to AG it was merely some lunatic babbling about the end of the world. In the interest of transparency, Mae tells her viewers she has no idea what just happened, but that she will tell them as soon as it is figured out. She continues on with her job, but inside, Mae is shaken and nervous. She maintains a calm, happy exterior, but inside, her mind and heart are racing. She doesn't know how to proceed –



for example, if she should report the call, or who she would even report it to. Perhaps, she wonders, it is part of a test that has to do with Completion. Mae wonders where she can have some privacy, but everywhere she knows, there are cameras now, including at her own parents' house, as part of a condition for her father's treatment. Over time, slogans begin appearing all over campus, including "Complete the Circle" and "The Circle Must Be Whole".

Mae decides to clear her mind by going to work in CE, as she is allowed to do. This is appreciated by the viewers on one hand, and allows Mae to remain connected with the ground floor of work operations, and to appear humble. Mae is aware of the awesome power she now commands with what she does, even when she works. Customers are thrilled to see when Mae answers their own questions, or connects with them socially online. All around the country, more and more politicians are going clear, each announcing their decision to do so with great acclaim. These have come to be known as Clarifications. Mae's own life changes, as viewers begin to moderate her behavior - from how much she drinks at parties to what she eats. She is called a role-model by mothers and daughters, and this empowers Mae, making her feel liberated, free, important, and as if she is actually doing better every day.

That afternoon at five, Mae attends the Clarification of the governor of Arizona, and his entire staff, and then joins Renata, Denise, and Josiah at the Glass Eatery for dinner, where food is free and now being prepared by a different noted chef each day. Mae has since permanently moved onto the Circus campus, and is now referred to as a Settler. She is allowed to turn off her necklace camera at ten o'clock each night, which she does, and is allowed to turn off the SeeChange cameras as well, though she rarely does. Before Mae goes to sleep, she checks to see how her parents are doing, but all their cameras are dark. She discovers that Mercer, and his website, are all offline. Annie has been away overseas on business, and out of touch. Mae watches videos of beaches in Sri Lanka and Brazil to relax.

The next morning, she prepares to expose the world to a major meeting of health insurance companies, world health agencies, pharmaceutical companies, and other medical-related groups, at the Circle campus. It is also the day Annie is due to return. Mae begins by visiting Terry Min, at the Protagorean Pavilion, where education is focused on. It is explained they have been working with a \$3-billion grant from the federal Department of Education. One such thing they are working on for kids is a word-counter. Kids, Terry explains, should hear about 30,000 words in a day. A word-counter will measure how much a child hears. As Mae meets Jackie, a beautiful woman, she coaxes Jackie to talk about winning a bronze medal in the 2000 Olympics. Jackie goes on to say they can also monitor how well an individual student is doing against the others, by way of ranking them. Mae is prompted by AG to ask how it overlaps with ChildTrack. Jackie brings in Frank to explain. Wherever ChildTrack has been tested, there has been a 90 percent drop in child crime, and a 100 percent drop in child abductions. Nationwide, only three abductions have occurred, all taken care of within minutes. Like ChildTrack, the new education system will keep track of everything a child learns - from what they highlight even down to what words they look up. This can all be



stored in the same microchip used to track children Frank explains, makes the picture of a child complete.

Mae is jealous of the way that Jackie looks at Frank, and now Mae wants to be alone with Frank, but she cannot do so. She has a doctor's appointment at two, and on the way, she tries to see if she can find Annie, or buy some time to see Annie, by stopping to talk about a sculpture by a Chinese artist who is under fire from the Chinese government. She explains that over 180 million frowns from Americans must surely have an effect on the Chinese regime. The sculpture consists of a hand reaching through a rectangle, and is called "Reaching Through for the Good of Humankind".

Mae then catches up with Annie, who conceals the fact that she isn't happy to be on camera – and Mae notices this but says nothing about it. Annie explains a new system called PastPerfect is being finalized, the idea being not just to map the present, but to map the past as well. For example, Annie explains, someone could find a photo of their great-grandparents at the World Fair in 1912 that they never knew existed. All they need to begin is a person whose family goes back a long way in the United States. Mae and Annie then use the bathroom, during which time Mae is allowed to turn off the audio, though encouraged to keep on the video, provided it does not violate her privacy. Mae asks Annie how she's been, and Annie says she's been good, and compliments Mae on her meteoric rise. Mae tells Annie she is worried about her, but Annie snaps that she is fine. Annie reveals she has been working relentlessly, and the Three Wise Men are close to Completing the Circle, but won't say how. Mae feels jealous that Annie knows things that she doesn't. After Annie leaves, Mae cries, because she thinks Annie can't accept the fact that they are peers, now. Mae knows she will have to make sure that Annie accepts it.

Mae goes to see Dr. Villalobos, who tells her she is not walking enough. She also goes on to tout CHAD to all of Mae's viewers – the Central Health Data program. Real-time data can be seen on anyone in the Circle. The week before, for example, the first person to bring flu onto campus was sent home immediately to recover, and no one else on campus was infected. Dr. Villalobos also cautions Mae to watch eating foods with too many nitrates, because as one observer from Scotland pointed out, it could lead to cancer. She also reveals that Mae's parents have blackened out twelve of their sixteen cameras. Mae apologizes for them, and volunteers to go and check to see what is going on. As Mae drives home, she secretly worries that Mercer's madness has also infected her parents. She is enraged that her parents would do this to her, and also enraged that Annie would act superior to her. Mae theorizes that Annie is obviously jealous of her. Mae considers Annie a self-entitled brat whose family stretches all the way back to the Mayflower. Mae also reflects on when she went home for the first time as transparent, and all the messages of love that poured in for her and her parents. At home, Annie puts on her best face, gently telling her parents that they should keep their cameras on, otherwise they can't expect better medical treatment. They confess that it is very stressful trying to keep up with so many messages when they have their hands full with so many things. As Mae leaves that night, Mae's mother hands Mae a letter from Mercer.



Mercer's letter tells her to read it on camera. He says goodbye to Mae, saying they can no longer be friends if he also has to be a part of her experiment. Mercer admits to helping having covered up the cameras, because the social onslaught was too overwhelming for her parents. He says that there will soon be two societies in the world – one under constant surveillance and doing nothing – and an alternative to it. Mercer says he'll always wish Mae well, but looks forward to the day the system collapses on itself, for the day when a vocal minority speak out and turn back things, and where people have the option to opt out. Mae doesn't read the rest of the letter, but suddenly worries about her parents. She goes back inside to find her parents preparing for sexual activity, then leaves for home. When Mae gets back, her parents have left her messages, asking her to stop, to not contact them unless she does it privately. Mae tells her parents that they are on the wrong side of history, that they will come around in time. Mae then gets online, signing petitions, talking to people, and handling some questions. She tries to get her mind off of what has happened by committing to more online social activity, but it is just not enough. She goes to see Frank. Frank reveals he has been able to use facial recognition to track down members of his family – all within about seven minutes. She decides to spend the night with him. They have sex, and Frank asks for a numerical rating, because words mean too many things. She gives him a 100.

Mae goes to meet with the Gang of 40, including Eamon Bailey, who says hello to her when he arrives. Nearly 2 million people are watching. Bailey begins by talking about openness and the importance of democracy being open to the people. Within the past few months, since Congresswoman Santos, most politicians have gone transparent, and among them, corruption has been very limited. Transparency is now extending to their staffs. But the issue now is the citizens of the country: only 58 percent vote in national elections; 32 percent in state elections; and 17 percent in local elections. 244 million people in the United States, he goes on, are eligible to vote, but only 140 million people voted in the last election. Meanwhile, 241 million Americans are registered with the Circle. This tells him that the Circle has a knack for getting people to vote, and the Circle could automatically register people to vote through TruYou accounts. Simply signing up for a TruYou account would automatically register a person. 181 congressmen, including Santos, and 32 senators are on board to push legislation for this. This means no more fringe-elected candidates, but candidates that would be elected by true majorities. Bailey believes they can ultimately achieve 100 percent participation in democracy.

Mae raises her hand, and asks why it cannot be made mandatory for people to use TruYou - to have it required to have them use TruYou. It is the same as being required by law to have schooling as a child, or a license for driving a car. Tom Stenton points out that other legitimate things are required by law, such as paying taxes and serving on juries. Mae agrees, saying being required by law to vote would be just one more thing, that it is illegal not to vote in some countries, and that technology now makes it possible to require it. Annie asks how people could be required to vote. Bailey says it could be done in many ways, such as a friendly reminder to vote, or that their YouTrue accounts won't work until they vote. Mae realizes that over 7.2 million people are watching the broadcast from her necklace. Bailey and Stenton take things one step further, offering



the idea that it could be required for everyone to pay taxes online as well through YouTrue. Mae goes further as well, saying that every government service, such as drivers licenses, could all be done through the Circle. Annie asks why the government wouldn't just do that themselves. Stenton responds that it would be silly of them to try, would be too costly, and impossible to quickly do what the Circle has already done. The Circle would offer the service for free, and infinite amounts of money would be saved. Stenton even goes on to say that the Circle, through its services, could eliminate the need for much of Washington at all.

Mae is thrilled after the meeting, for having earned so much approval, and possibly solving the problem of participation in democracy. After the meeting there is some concern over a private company taking over a public act like voting, but this is dismissed. Frank goes with her to the bay in celebration. He kisses her, and tells her how wonderfully she did. Mae scrolls through comments, and is dismayed to see one about total control of things leading to totalitarianism, but Frank dismisses the guy as a tinfoil hat-wearing crank. As they travel about in public, Mae is recognized and treated like a celebrity. A man in his fifties, once headed for the priesthood, but turned to computers, instead, talks with Mae and Frank. The man says that Mae and the Circle have pulled it all together, that everyone will soon be like God, able to see everything. Judgment can be extended, and so can forgiveness and wrath. All people will be direct and immediate messengers of God's will.

Mae and Frank burst out laughing, and the man, insulted, goes on his way. Mae spends the night with Frank. The next morning, Mae checks her messages, ignores calls from Kalden's blocked number, and discovers that Circle developers are already working on Mae's ideas. It will be called "Demoxie", for democracy, and Mae's moxie. She is invited to the developer's pod on campus, where a beta version of Demoxie has already been formulated overnight. Sharmie, a developer, gives a talk and speaks to Mae's viewers. Demoxie will pose questions to Circlers on various issues to gauge community needs, such as wanting more veggie options in food areas. The Circle then reacts according to the will of the people. Eventually, Sharma says, it could be worldwide, and the idea is owed to Mae. Mae is speechless. She is roundly and routinely congratulated throughout the day.

Analysis

Mae's decision to go transparent, to go into the clear, has two immediate impacts. First, her popularity at the Circle, and in the world at large, skyrockets. On a constant basis, Mae has the continual approval and love of millions of social media users. She is growing more and more popular, and therefore, more influential. Second, Mae's privacy is virtually gone. While she may turn off her necklace camera, and the SeeChange cameras in her room while she sleeps, she must leave the video portions on while using the restroom, though she can turn the audio element off. It is all done in the name of transparency, for the collecting of information, all for the greater good. It is terrifying to the reader that even the most intimate acts – from showering to using the bathroom – are to be subject to viewership. Given her growing popularity and power, Mae doesn't



even stop to think about what she is doing. She simply does it. Technology has fast become her drug, and her addiction is staggering.

Mae's misguided idealism and narcissism continue unabated as an unavoidable course of events ensues. With real transparency, greater accountability, and better access to information, all overseen by the Circle, now possible, the course of the novel shifts between the public and the private worlds in a very unnerving way. The Circle's efforts have long been described as communal, collective, and pro-democratic. But lately, the Circle has been using political terms to refer to itself. More and more, words like "fairness" and "democracy" are being used in reference to the Circle. At a very publicized meeting with the Gang of 40 and the Three Wise Men (where Ty is present only in video form), the physical move toward closing the circle, from talking about democracy to actually seeking to influence it, is made. Startlingly, Mae goes from being a passive observer and submissive servant of the Circle, to an active member of it, advancing ideas and suggestions which are all seized upon. Mae's ability to put two and two together to offer up the sum is reminiscent of the Platonic idea that all human beings can determine an answer if they are led to it, like a bread crumb trail. Mae, whose mind has been filled with idealistic fantasies weighted with poisonous lead, is given a bread crumb trail to follow, which she ultimately does, offering up what the upper echelons hope that she will say – but giving the impression that she is the one who truly came up with the idea on her own, and thus influencing all of her followers to the same effect. As such, she becomes highly powerful and highly influential – though this has been set up to happen.

A trial of Demoxie – the democracy software – by the Circle reveals the chilling results of what Mae has influenced. At the Gang of 40 meeting, the idea for forced participatory democracy – a requirement by law – is advanced and accepted. Only Annie has anything to say against it, but is quickly shut down through condescending dismissiveness. A trial of Demoxie asks five questions, one regarding the popularity of Mae. 97 percent of the Circle thinks Mae is awesome, but three percent do not. Mae feels horrible, wondering who these three percent of people are, and chillingly, Frank reveals that the identity of the voters can be seen freely online. Mae determines that she will go to them and see what she can do to make them think she is awesome, but she misses the entire, frightening point as to what has just happened.

If the Circle adopts a policy or attitude that needs to be translated into law – or, if the government seeks a policy, legislation, or approval, or if the powers in the nation seek specific candidates or want the public to respond in a specific way to an issue – it can now be done by targeting naysaying voters, with their identities revealed. No voter is safe to vote according to how he or she truly feels, for there will always be the threat of reprisal, either from power or from fellow citizens. The goal is not just total participation, but total agreement. Mae does not realize she has become a miniature dictator by wanting to seek out those who do not like her, and has no clue how dangerous the Circle has now become, by being able even to influence the way people vote, and their attitudes toward any given issue or candidate. The United States, a republic, wherein democratically-elected representatives made decisions on constituents' behalf, has now descended to the level of an abject democracy, often referred to as mob rule or



“mobocracy” by Aristotle. Passions will rule the day, and mob mentality will set in as immediate response to immediate decisions is now possible. This will be seen in the final section of the book in a very heartbreaking way.

Discussion Question 1

What does Mae’s decision to go transparent mean for her? How does she handle it? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What suggestions does Mae make about the Circle with regards to democracy? How does the Gang of 40 – and the public at large – respond to these ideas? Choose one of these ideas. How do you feel about this idea? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe that there is danger in the ideas that Mae suggests for the future of politics and democracy? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

ethereal, omnivorous, endearing, subsume, nattering, meanderings, meditative, acolytes, abundantly, rectified, semiperformative, self-aggrandizing, ignominious, triumphalism



Book II: Page 402 – Book III

Summary

Mae continues ignoring calls from Kalden. By noon, a campus-wide trial of Demoxie will be enacted. The results, the Wise Men say, will be acted upon within one day. Around 12:30, Mae finally answers one of Kalden's calls. He has blocked his audio once again, and says it is a matter of life or death. He explains the mandatory thing and the positive reaction it has received, is the last step in closing the Circle, and it can't be done. A private company controlling all of the information in the country, and its voting services, either has to be broken up or reined in. It is a tyrannical monopoly. Mae accuses Kalden of being a spy for a loony anarchist politician like Senator Williamson. Kalden ignores her, saying it is a pivotal moment in history, the kind which leads to the rise of a Hitler or a Stalin. He says everything is messed up, down to her relationship with her parents. He tells her she should publicly question the importance of closing the Circle at the upcoming plankton event, in which both the young and the old will be watching. Kalden contends that no entity should have the power that the Wise Men have. Mae hangs up on him.

She then heads to the Great Hall for the first test of Demoxie. The five questions include veggie options, for which 88 percent approve; whether Take Your Daughter to Work Day should happen twice a year instead of once, with 55 percent opposing; a favorite Beatle, for which 60 percent choose Ringo; then one serious question arises about politically-related questions. The fourth question is about killing a terrorist in Pakistan with a drone. 71 percent favor the strike. The last question asks whether Mae Holland is awesome or not, and 97% find her awesome. Mae wonders about what 3 percent of people do not find her awesome – meaning some 368 of 12,318 Circlers do not think she is awesome. Mae feels as if she has been stabbed in the back by these people, and wonders who they are.

Mae then sees Annie, and goes to talk to her about PastPerfect. Annie has decided to be the volunteer for the project, since her family stretches back to the Mayflower. Even her parents are excited, she says. She asks about Mae's parents. Mae says they are fine, even though she hasn't had contact with them in weeks since they left their home. Mae continues on her way, angered that Annie still has more power and influence than she does with the Gang of 40 and the Wise Men. This leads her to think about her own parents, and where they truly were, and why the opinion of 3 percent of Circlers should matter so much to her. Her viewers see her concern on her face, and so she decides to go and do some work at Customer Experience. For four hours, she talks to people, likes their photos, offers help, suggestions, encouragement, and assists them out in any way that she can. Before bed that night, Frank shows Mae a program the Circle has just purchased from a three-person startup in Belgium which allows viewers to replace actors with themselves in movies.



Mae wakes up around 4 in the morning, unable to sleep because of the results of the Demoxie survey. She tells this to Frank, who says Mae can look up who didn't think she was awesome. He says one of them is Alistair, and Mae begins backing into the corner, shielding her face, not wanting to hear or see any more. Mae goes and takes a shower. It helps to calm her. She knows that with a purer form of democracy, not only will people be unafraid to cast votes, but to be held accountable for votes. Mae knows she will have to win over 368 people, now. It calms her down.

The plankton event arrives, where plankton-like companies, start-ups, etc., will be pitching ideas to the Gang of 40, and the Three Wise Men, including Ty, who is broadcasting his appearance from an unknown location. It is Ty, more so than anyone else, everyone wants to impress. For example, a student named Faisal suggests that, for those who decide to commit to using CircleMoney, there could be perks, such as discounts, rebates, and so on, for doing so. A black woman of about twenty-two, Belinda, suggests a scanning device for police to simply gaze at a crowd, and see who the trouble-makers are, noted by a color code. This would eliminate racial profiling, Belinda says. It could be done through something like Frank's chip, which would generate a color code for each person. Stenton thinks it could be taken a step further, to include known associates of criminals, and so on. A young man named Gareth offers up a system where people themselves are tracked according to their neighborhood, and that strangers will show up red by a neighborhood's system. All residents will receive a notice of this. It could be tied into Belinda's system. Bailey asks about crimes committed in homes, and a young woman named Finnegan stands up, herself a victim of abuse as a child. Motion detectors in homes could report unusual motion activity. Finnegan demonstrates how an alarm will go off in such an instance, but it is too loud for the demonstration, and it angers Stenton for being too loud. Bailey encourages Finnegan to go on. Stenton allows it as well, seeing how popular Finnegan and her program are, which can be worked into the same system that Frank, Belinda, and Gareth have suggested.

Later, Annie leaves a message for Mae at her desk, urging her to meet her in the restroom. Mae agrees to meet her, and turns off her audio. Annie confesses the results from the PastPerfect thing are disturbing, and may get worse when it goes public. She explains her ancestors in the Middle Ages were white slave traders, rounding up people in Ireland to bring back to England for use as slaves, and also had a part in killing a thousand members of a slave uprising. Mae tries to calm her, telling her it happened more than six hundred years ago. Mae thinks she is overreacting.

The next day, when the results are released, some people say some negative things, but the vast majority do not care. On Friday, the only day the regular mail service still operates, a letter arrives from Mercer. He says things will end up getting very bad for Annie, very fast. He says there are things people are not meant to know, or should not know. The human mind needs to turn off, needs mystery as much as it needs clarity. There is no time to relax, unwind, or cool down, as people are constantly wired into their devices. Mercer explains he has moved to the northern woodlands, and that he will keep moving north as the Circle continues to map out every inch of the earth, especially after Demoxie. He had hoped it would only ever be the Circle to think they could know



everything, that it was a golden calf for so many millions of people, but because there are so many people with so many radical ideas about privacy being criminal. People like Mae don't just want their own data, but they want other peoples' data as well. It is a sickness. Mercer is not alone. There are others like him, who will live away from civilization, underground. Mercer says these will be two distinct societies, living parallel, with the smaller always in fear of the larger. Mercer ends his letter by saying he is scared to death for everyone.

Mae meets Annie in the bathroom again. Annie says she has learned her ancestors were slave owners in the New World, too, that they fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War, and thinks it is a sickness in her family. Annie's family has refused to leave their house for two days because of it. Annie finds out something far worse about her family before it is released, and she sends out a Zing to the world saying that she doesn't think they should know everything. Mae is stunned. Annie tells her she is going to shut down PastPerfect, or anything like it that she can. Annie is already in trouble for the Zing, and has been relieved of some of her duties. Mae asks about what was discovered about her parents. Annie responds that they had an open marriage in the 1990s, in which they are featured in pornographic photos. Even worse is a video of her parents, when she was six years old, getting drunk and watching someone drown without trying to help him or reporting it. It will all be released in less than twelve hours. Annie explains that she has asked Bailey for help, but Bailey says there is nothing he can do. Mae decides to drum up support for Annie on the Circle. She decides that turning off the audio to talk to Annie was wrong, and decides to rectify it, and help Annie, with one brave act. Mae explains what has happened in the mirror of the bathroom. Though she does not reveal what Annie's family's issues were, she presses for love and support of Annie. Most people respond positively. Bailey congratulates Mae before their SoulSearch presentation, backstage in the Great Room.

Mae heads out on stage to talk about SoulSearch, which seeks to root out hiding fugitives. She uses the example of Manchester, England, resident Fiona Highbridge, aged forty-four, who starved her three children by locking them in a closet in 2002. She escaped prison after seducing a guard. Of the 1.1 billion people watching her talk, Mae notes that there are more than 14 million in the United Kingdom, alone. Within minutes, photos are being shared and information is being exchanged. Two photos of the same woman in Carmarthen, Wales, ultimately come to attention. It is Fiona, who has been going by the name of Fatima Hilensky. A woman who works with Fiona, Gretchen Karapcek, begins following her as Fiona realizes what is going on. A dozen people with phone cameras converge upon her, and she gives up. The group threatens to turn ugly, but Mae tells them not to harm Fiona, and to call the police, who arrive in a matter of moments. Mae decides to test the system again, with a regular civilian. She decides to try it with Mercer Medeiros, whom Mae explains is merely a fugitive from friendship. The viewers get to work. The first lead is a false end; the second leads to a man living high up on a mountain. Two people converge on Mercer's house. Mercer tries to flee in his truck, but the people trying to film him continue to follow. A SeeChange camera on Mercer's window captures his anger and rage, and he curses at the camera before rolling down his window to knock it off. Mae calls on drone use to find Mercer's truck. It is found in sixty-seven seconds. Mae tries speaking to Mercer through a drone speaker,



telling him he is surrounded, and then quickly adds, “by friends”. Mercer refuses to answer. Mercer’s intended path over a bridge has now been covered with cameras. Mercer is now looking panicked, and then a sense of peace comes over him. He crashes through the guardrail, and descends to his death in the gorge hundreds of feet below.

A week later, Mae meets with Bailey to check in. Annie has had a collapse, in addition to Mercer’s death. Bailey tells Mae not to blame herself. Bailey tells her that she and everyone else were reaching out, trying to help a disturbed, antisocial man, who rejected it all. Bailey asks about the service for Mercer, and Mae explains she saw her parents there, briefly. Bailey goes on to say that all cars should be automated, not self-operated. Bailey goes on to say that Mercer’s suicide has cost money to repair the bridge, and to clean up his mess below. Bailey thinks Mercer’s suicide was going to happen anyway, for shutting himself off from the world community. Mercer, Bailey continues, was obviously a man who could not survive in a modern age. Mae knows her own sadness was eased by millions of people reaching out to her. Bailey assures Mae that she and Annie will never be without the Circle.

They then go in to see Stenton in the aquarium, where he is overseeing new, larger tanks for sea life. Also present in the room is Ty himself – who, it turns out, is actually Kalden. Ty shakes Mae’s hand, and tells her it is nice to meet her. Mae’s mind is spinning, knowing Ty warned her about Completion. Kalden/Ty asks what is about to happen. Bailey turns things over to Stenton. There are now 40 million people watching, because all three Wise Men are on camera together. Stenton explains that their three stars have been kept in separate tanks while getting acclimatized to the Circle. They will now all be put in the same tank. Mae’s mind continues to race, even contemplating running away with Annie, somewhere. Victor, the caretaker, arrives with a bag full of seahorses. Viewership is now at over 62 million. The seahorses are released, followed by the octopus, and a shark. Viewership now surpasses 75 million. When the shark is released, it seeks out the octopus, and attacks and eats it. This stuns Bailey, who looks away. The shark then roots out seahorses. Stenton looks proudly upon the realistic portrayal of life in the Trench. Ty and Bailey then leave, while Stenton remains behind. Ty shakes Mae’s hand as he leaves, giving her a note.

Mae reads the note in the bathroom without the viewers being able to see it. He says he will shut off her video and audio feed when she announces she is going back, giving her thirty minutes. His note says Mae’s life, and the lives of all she loves, depends upon it. Mae does as instructed, and follows Ty’s directions to the underground levels and caverns. There, Ty confronts Mae, telling her he is not dangerous. Ty explains his movements must be hidden from the world above, thanks to the shark that Circle has become. Ty reveals that Bailey and Stenton know that he passes himself off as Kalden to get around. He is technically not allowed to leave campus, he explains. Mae is only the third person who knows. Ty wants Mae to slow down or stop everything at the Circle, because she is the only one capable of doing it now due to her influence. Ty explains he envisioned the Circle as a place without anonymity, to bring about civility, and a simple unified system – not mandatory participation where government and all of life is forced upon people through one system. Mae doesn’t understand why Ty just



doesn't leave. Ty says that not even Mercer could escape it – and that there will be more. There is no longer the option to opt out. Completion is a totalitarian nightmare. Mae has become the face of Completion, and wields tremendous power because of it. Mae says Ty sounds as crazy as Mercer.

Ty explains that if someone like him, who created most of the Circle itself should be afraid of it, it should mean something. Ty explains that most of what he did was for fun, but that Bailey and Stenton turned it into a business empire, losing the business part along the way. Ty tells Mae that if the flow of information is totally controlled, then everything is controlled. No one can ever challenge, or rise up against the Circle, if the Circle controls all information. Soon, not having a Circle account will be illegal. Ty confirms Senator Williamson's downfall was brought about by Stenton, because Williamson dared to challenge the Circle. She is the hundredth victim, and there will be more. Demoxie – where people can be targeted because of the way they vote – is purely mob mentality. Ty explains that Bailey genuinely believes all people should have access to all information controlled by the Circle – and it makes him an infocommunist. It isn't just criminals that would be targeted, but people like Mercer as well, who just want to opt out. Mae says she understands now, and Ty asks her to read a statement when she has the maximum number of viewers possible, attesting to rights to privacy, to opt out, that not all human activity should or can be measured, and so on – including that everyone has the right to disappear. Ty explains he has a series of steps that will take the Circle apart, and he is the only one who can do it, but needs Mae's help. Ty says they will disappear themselves, and live in the world without being tethered to anything or anyone. Mae asks Ty if he is sure they are not being heard, and Ty says that no one can hear them. Mae says she now knows what must be done.

Book III

Mae visits Annie in the hospital. She is now in a coma. Frank comes in to visit. It is revealed that more than ten million people in the world are now transparent, an irreversible movement. Following Mae's talk with Ty, Mae had gone straight to Bailey and Stenton, who relegated Ty's activities and duties, and gave him a secluded office. Mae has not seen him since. Completion is imminent, and the world before the Circle will seem like a dream. Mae wonders what is going on in Annie's mind in her coma, and wonders if there is a way to make it possible to see what she is thinking. The world, Mae believes, deserves to know, and it cannot wait.

Analysis

The dangers of mob mentality become all too clear in the demonstration of SoulSearch. Mae's ability to lead the rooting out of a criminal by average citizens within twenty minutes is a stunning thing – but when Mae turns the tables by having average citizens seek out Mercer, she crosses a line. Indeed, she becomes quite cruel in her desire to force friendship, and a global lens on, Mercer. All Mercer wants is to be left alone. Yet Mae, and everyone else watching, do not seem to understand this. It is what Mercer (and later, Ty) talks about: there is no option to opt out. You are part of the Circle, and



there is no alternative: You are either with us, or you will be with us. Mercer is fed up, and has had it. As a result, he kills himself in front of millions of people. It is a dramatic and terrifying conclusion to what Mae has attempted to do. She is now a wolf in sheep's clothing, a visceral and virulent villain in the guise of a gorgeous twenty-four year-old girl. The reader should take careful note of what Mae has done to Mercer, extending to it the context of politics, of democracy: Imagine Mercer is not merely an average citizen. Imagine he is someone who opposes the Circle in some way, shape, or form. Imagine that Mercer is declared an enemy of the state, even though he is morally right. Imagine that Mercer is representative of a thousand citizens who vote the wrong way for something or someone. The answer for refusing to submit to the Circle is clear: mob vigilante justice. There are no more individual rights or absolute rights in general. Transparency means there is no privacy, and privacy is considered criminal. All of this has been made possible through technology.

Mae's own relationships fall apart except for Frank and the Circle. Mae's parents have opted out of living on camera anymore, and have moved out of their house, saying that it has just been too much for them. They are estranged from Mae, and one can only wonder how long it will be before Mae sets the mob to finding her parents. What end, the readers wonder, will Mae's poor parents face? Mae's best friend, Annie, the woman who got her the job and took care of Mae through college, is abandoned and betrayed by Mae in the sake of honesty and transparency. Annie's family's unscrupulous past comes to light, and it breaks her heart. But rather than truly be there for Annie as a friend, Mae brings the world into the situation in a misguided and cruel attempt to offer comfort to Annie, causing Annie to have a nervous collapse. Only between Frank and Mae do things continue normally, as normal as it can be, for Frank is just as devoted to the Circle as is Mae.

Yet, the most startling conclusion of all is that Kalden, actually Ty, has come to oppose the Circle. Ty emerges as a Dr. Frankenstein-like character, who out of love, interest, and determination creates what he hopes will be something beautiful, only to realize it is a monster. There is great irony here that should not be missed by the reader, that the one who started it all has come to oppose it all. Ty's vision for the Circle was originally one of civility, openness, ease, and fun, while protecting privacy and rights. But along the way, that original goal was mutated into something cruel and dangerous – the consequential evidence of which is what happened to Annie and Mercer. Again, as mentioned earlier, the irony that the Circle believes that everything should be scrutinized, except for the Circle, should not be missed here – and Ty is determined to bring the Circle down from the inside. He cannot do it without Mae's help, explaining that no person or organization should have the kind of power that the Circle has. The greatest power the Circle has is to control information. They have become a pseudo-government. But Ty's words fall on deaf ears. Mae has been totally and completely brainwashed, her mind made numb by narcissism and disguised, devilish idealism.

Mae actually turns Ty in to Stenton and Bailey. Ty is lucky to escape with his life, being relegated to virtual irrelevance. Only his image, and the myth built up around him, is more powerful than the Circle, but is itself powerless against the Circle. Ty is an August ruler, a figurehead, whose work has been hijacked and is now being run by others. It is



a runaway train that no one can stop anymore. It is headed toward the metaphorical darkened hole in Bailey's office. What happens now that the Circle has all this power is anyone's guess – though given Mae's desire to want to read Annie's thoughts, the next step seems clear. And Annie will be the unwitting test subject. In essence, Mae has become the female version of Bailey.

However, the reader should also carefully note the aquarium scene, for it reveals what the future of the company will be. Bailey, for his gentility and father-like affection, is symbolized by the seahorse. Ty, who originally developed the Circle, bringing all things together, like the spokes on a wheel or the legs on an octopus, is the octopus. Stenton, the businessman, is the shark. Neither Ty nor Bailey can stand up to the shark (aka Stenton) and will be devoured in his wake. Nothing but complete control will satisfy him, and even then, he will ever be reaching further, as symbolized by his exploration of a place as remote and difficult to get to as the Marianas Trench.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mercer commit suicide? Do you believe Mae was justified in trying to root Mercer out? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe that people should generally have the option to opt out of things? Why or why not? Consider several contemporary American issues with respect to your answer, such as being required by law to purchase health insurance, be vaccinated, or having a company like Facebook store and monetize personal information. Explain why. If your answers vary according to each issue, explain why. If your answers do not vary according to each issue, explain why.

Discussion Question 3

In the end, why does Mae turn Ty in to Bailey and Stenton? How is Ty dealt with? Why? If you were Mae, would you have helped Ty or turned him in? Why?

Vocabulary

opprobrium, ideological, excruciating, acclimated, benignly, malleable



Characters

Mae Holland

Maebelline “Mae” Renner Holland is the twenty-four year old main character of Dave Eggers’s novel “The Circle”, who ultimately serves as a wolf in sheep’s clothing rather than an outright villain by the end of the novel. When the novel begins, Mae is only two years removed from college, is bright-eyed, eager to please, and wants to make an impact on the world, like most people in their twenties and thirties. She is very pretty, has a very sweet voice, and looks forward to her future. However, she is incredibly impressionable. She has secured a job in Customer Experience at the internet-technology giant, the Circle, with the help of her best friend from college, Annie.

Mae is thrilled to be working at the Circle, and it is explained to Mae that not only will she be expected to do her regular work, but to maintain an active social media presence. While Mae quickly succeeds at work, she struggles with her social media presence, having never before been so committed to it. She is chided like a disobedient child about this by her superiors, and she redoubles her efforts, aiming to please. It is expected that every aspect of her life, even the most personal, such as the health of her father, be made apparent online, all for the sake of transparency, honesty, and community. Mae readily agrees to this. Her parents are not as thrilled, but happy to go along with things at first, because Mae’s health insurance plan at the Circle covers them. Mae’s ex-boyfriend, Mercer, is highly skeptical of what the Circle is doing by seeking to control the flow of information under the guise of freedom of information. Mae also begins a relationship with Frank at work, while carrying on a series of random sexual encounters with a mysterious Circler known only as Kalden.

Mae’s time at the Circle is filled with bumps along the way, all of which ultimately lead her more deeply into the way the Circle wants her to think. For example, Mae’s dislike of being publicly used without consent to test out the LuvLuv system, ultimately causes her to come around and see her reluctance as selfish, and that it is for the good of the community and openness that she submit to such things. Likewise, following an argument with Mercer, Mae borrows a kayak, which is assumed to be theft, leading to Mae deciding to go clear by wearing a camera which will stream everything she does during the day, from the time she wakes up until the time she goes to sleep. This is done in the interest of openness and fairness, and is a teachable moment for Circlers, allowing them to understand that if everyone is constantly filmed everywhere at every moment of the day, it will force people to be on their best behaviors, and to be held to account for their actions. As a result of being a one-woman television show, Mae’s popularity increases exponentially, and she is thrilled with all the adoring fans she has. Her influence and power grow as a result.

As a result, she becomes less and less objective, surrendering completely to the Circle, and even going so far as to suggest the Circle should replace much of the government, including handling voting, by making it illegal not to vote. By the end of the novel, Mae’s



friendship with Annie has been ruined, and she no longer has a relationship of any real measure with her parents. While cruelly testing out SoulSearch on Mercer, Mercer commits suicide in front of millions of viewers. Mae is told she should not blame herself, for people like Mercer do not belong in the present, and are beyond the Circle's help. Mae comes to accept this wholeheartedly. She has become a wolf in sheep's clothing, and will do anything and everything for the Circle. When she learns that Kalden is actually Ty, and that Ty has come to oppose the Circle, and intends to destroy it from within, she turns Ty in to Stenton and Bailey, who isolate and relegate Ty. As the novel ends, Mae goes to visit Annie in the hospital, and believes that people should even have the right to know what everyone else is thinking.

Mercer

Mercer Medeiros is Mae's ex-boyfriend, having dated her while she was in high school. Mercer is several years older than Mae, is overweight, and owns a deer antler-chandelier business, in which antlers are formed together to create chandeliers and other home furnishings. Mercer remains close with Mae's parents, helping them out in tricky medical situations when Mae is not around. Mercer worries about Mae, and the work being done at the Circle.

While Mercer has always had a healthy respect for the internet and technology, he hates how invasive and all-consuming it has become. He finds it sad that Mae can't have a simple conversation with him in person without consulting her phone. He also believes it is dangerous for the Circle to have accumulated so much power, to want to plant cameras everywhere, and thinks people should have the right to opt out if they don't want to participate.

Mae considers Mercer a fat, paranoid loser, and Mercer, who has had enough with her and the Circle, moves to the Pacific Northwest to live freely in a mountaintop cabin. Mercer is rooted out during a SoulSearch demonstration, orchestrated by Mae, which leads to him committing suicide by driving off a bridge in front of millions of viewers. While Mercer and Mae are of the same generation, the fact that he is several years older allows him a different, more traditional point of view to things, and an objectivity that Mae has not yet developed.

Annie

Annie Allerton is Mae's closest friend and former college roommate. At the age of twenty-six, Annie has been with the Circle for two years, is well-liked and well-respected by everyone, and even manages to have the ears of the Wise Men and the Gang of 40. It is through Annie that Mae gets her job at the Circle. Annie helps orient Mae to the goings-on at the Circle, introduces her to people, and serves as a constant source of help and support. Annie's own responsibilities at the Circle have to do with business and law, taking her around the world to handle talks, such as with the Russians over taxes.



Annie becomes jealous of the power that Mae comes to yield, and becomes worried about the power the Circle itself comes to yield. In order to stay ahead of Mae, Annie volunteers to be the first trial for PastPerfect, in which horrible things come to light about her family: her ancestors in England dealt in white Irish slaves, and her ancestors in America dealt with black slaves. Security camera footage of her parents from years before is found, in which while drunk, they watch a man drown and do nothing to help him. Annie knows this will ruin her, and begs Mae to keep it between them for the time being. Mae betrays Annie out of misguided kindness, wanting her millions of viewers to offer Annie support. Annie has a nervous collapse, and lapses into a coma.

When Mae visits Annie, Mae believes even Annie's thoughts should be accessible to the world, and decides to orient the Circle to finding a way to read thoughts, beginning with Annie.

Frank

Francis "Frank" Garaventa is a programmer who works in security applications at the Circle. He meets Mae during a party at the Circle campus, and the two eventually begin a relationship, though their relationship is bumpy at times. For example, Frank not only volunteers Mae for a LuvLuv demonstration without her consent, but films an awkward sexual encounter between them, puts it in the cloud, and refuses to delete it. In both situations, Frank tells Mae she is being selfish for wanting to keep something private.

If there is anyone who might be forgiven for his indoctrination into, and unflinching loyalty to the Circle, it is Frank. Frank, as a foster child, had to deal with the rape and murder of his little sisters at the hands of others. As such, he develops ChildTrack, which includes the implanting of a small microchip into a child's bone so the child can always be tracked by parents and law enforcement agencies, and so that crimes against children can be stopped. At the end of the novel, Mae and Frank are in a relationship, bound together mainly not by their love for each other, but by their love of the Circle.

Tyler Gospodinov

Tyler Gospodinov is the original of the Three Wise Men, having developed TruYou, and founded the Circle. He is about thirty, rarely seen in public, is brilliant, and many believe he has a slight case of Asperger's Syndrome. When Ty takes the Circle public, he brings on Tom Stenton and Eamon Bailey, the other two Wise Men, to handle both business and public relations for the company.

Ty moves freely around the Circle's campus by pretending to be a worker named Kalden. As Kalden, Ty gets in touch with Mae, having several random sexual encounters with her, and finally attempts to get her to see that the Circle has become dangerous, and is never what he envisioned it to be. He wanted to make life easier and more fun for people, make civility possible while respecting privacy, and to make it easier to access information, but now, the Circle has become a totalitarian business empire now moving into the political realm.



He urges Mae to help him bring down the Circle, but Mae refuses, and turns Ty in to Stenton and Bailey. As a result, Ty is isolated and relegated, protected only by the near-mythic status of his image. His future is uncertain at the end of the novel.

Kalden

Kalden is a mysterious man, perhaps about thirty, with gray hair, who meets Mae one evening on campus after a party. Mae is immediately sexually drawn to Kalden, meeting up with him several times for random sexual encounters. Mae tells Annie about this, and Annie worries that Kalden is a spy for another company or a politician. When Kalden brings Mae down to the lowest levels of the Circle, she realizes he must be very important, and that he is indeed not a spy.

As Mae goes clear, she finds it harder to find Kalden, and Kalden is able to interrupt Mae's video and audio feeds for short amounts of time to talk to her or meet with her. As the novel nears its conclusion, Kalden begins to sound very similar to Mercer, saying that the Circle is too powerful, and people should have the right to opt out. At last, Kalden reveals that he is truly Tyler Gospodinov, and that he intends to bring down the Circle.

Tom Stenton

Tom Stenton is the second of the Three Wise Men, brought onto the Circle by Ty in order to give the company a better business footing and future, and to increase the company's value. Stenton resembles a 1980s-Wall Street tycoon, is not married, and has the business personality of a shark. He is always brief and to the point, and outright cruel when provoked. While it is assumed that Ty, Bailey, and Stenton all run things, it is truly Stenton who is pulling all the strings behind the curtain. He makes the final decision about which new products, programs, ideas, or technologies to buy, and has the final word whenever money is spent. He pretends to respect and work with Bailey and Ty, but his goal is clear: he will one day take over the Circle for himself.

Eamon Bailey

Eamon Bailey is the third of the Three Wise Men, brought onto the Circle by Ty in order to give the company a gentle human face, and to serve as a moral and emotional inspiration. Bailey is a wolf in sheep's clothing, hammering away at people with velvet-gloved fists of steel. He emotionally and mentally manipulates people to his will, and has his best success with Mae, whom he completely brainwashes into unfettered loyalty for the Circle. As such, Bailey is loved by all and respected by all for his fatherly appearance. He is, after all, married and has several children, one of whom has cerebral palsy. Bailey maliciously uses this child as a way to encourage others to surrender their privacy by living their lives on camera, so children like his son with CP have a way of seeing the world that they could not have otherwise seen.



Mae's parents

Mae's parents are sweet, loving, and gentle people, who deeply love Mae and are thrilled when she first gets the job at the Circle. Mae's father suffers from multiple sclerosis, and his insurance does not cover better care or better medication for him. They have had to sell off the family business because Mae's father requires full-time care by his mother. When Mae's parents are included on Mae's Circle health insurance plan, their access to better care increases, and Mae's father's health improves slowly but steadily.

Mae's parents, in exchange for the chance to be on Mae's health insurance plan, allow sixteen SeeChange cameras to be set up in their homes, and commit to using social media to be in touch with fans and supporters. However, the experience proves overwhelming for them, and they eventually turn off all but four cameras to have a little privacy. Eventually, they have a falling out with Mae, for Mae thinks their actions are selfish and embarrassing to her for all she has done for them. As a result, Mae's parents ultimately move out of their home, only seeing Mae at Mercer's funeral for a few moments. Their fate is unknown at the end of the novel, though Mae intends to reestablish contact with them. One can only chillingly imagine she will do to her own parents what she did to Mercer.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Circle

The Circle is the biggest and most powerful internet and technology company in the world, based in the fictional town of San Vincenzo, California, on a sprawling campus and network of buildings that employs over 10,000 people. The Circle is originally made famous by its internet ease program TruYou, and later becomes an innovative company where everything from submarines to child safety to affordable housing is developed. The Circle is the company that everyone wants to work at, for everyone believes the Circle is the future.

The Circle is founded by Ty Gospodinov, who envisions the Circle as a way for people to access information easier, to make the internet civil and fun, and to respect the privacy of people as well. The Circle has been turned on its head by Bailey, Stenton, and the employees of the company, who have come to believe that all information should be accessible by all people at any times, and that the Circle should control its flow. Because the Circle values community and shared knowledge, privacy is considered near criminal. As the Circle prepares to move into the political realm, to ensure that citizens live every aspect of their lives through the Circle, and under full view of everyone else, which according to Bailey means closing the Circle in completion,

Ty revolts against his creation. He believes that no company should have so much power, or control all information in the world. When Ty moves to shut down the Circle, he is stopped and turned in by Mae.

TruYou

TruYou is the name for the unified operating system developed by Ty Gospodinov, leading to the creation of the company, the Circle. TruYou is essentially a macro-account, which combines all online accounts of a user into one single place, from personal to public, from social to shopping, while protecting privacy. It requires one to use his or her real name, and helps to engender civility and rational discussion. By the end of the novel, it is intended for TruYou to become the next step in politics: TruYou will become the platform for Demoxie, will become synonymous with a person's identity and social security card, and will require people to vote in elections.

SeeChange

SeeChange is an online website created by TruYou, and is the brainchild of Eamon Bailey. SeeChange (which can be understood as "seeing change" or a "sea change" – a change in direction) is a website where the live, twenty-four hour video feeds from \$59 SeeChange cameras are directed and may be viewed by anyone at any time. The goal



of constant surveillance of everyone everywhere, Bailey contends, is to force people to be the best that they can, knowing everyone else is watching; and to cut down on crime. As a result, people can “see change” and can cause a “sea change”, by forcing people to be good and do good things in the world.

SeeChange cameras

SeeChange cameras are small, battery and solar-powered high-definition video cameras that cost a mere \$59, and can be placed anywhere at any time in order to deliver a live video feed accessible by everyone in the world at SeeChange. Eamon Bailey hopes that billions of these cameras will one day cover the world, and make scrutiny of every single action possible, thus forcing people to be better, and to make the world better. SeeChange cameras are also available in miniature formats, to be worn by people such as Mae and Santos, twenty-four hours a day, so that everyone can see everything someone is doing no matter what. This is referred to as “going clear” or “going transparent” – all done in the interest of openness and fairness, and of people having a right to know.

CircleSocial

CircleSocial is the social media aspect of TruYou accounts. It is essentially a combination of traditional e-mail and messaging, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, in which individuals communicate with one another. All people who work at the Circle are required to have a CircleSocial account. Their accounts are divided into two areas: the InnerCircle, for Circle employees, and the OuterCircle, for non-Circle employees. Circle employees are given PartiRanks based on their participation in social media, and are expected to participate as much as possible in CircleSocial. No detail of one’s personal life is to be left out.

LuvLuv

LuvLuv is a dating algorithm and program developed by the Circle, in which an individual can enter his date’s name into a search engine, and the program will deliver a list of results to help foster communication and connectivity on the date. For example, potential allergies will be highlighted, as well as favorite places to eat, all based on social media posts, comments, messages, photos, and so on. LuvLuv is tested out on Mae involuntarily, which causes her some discomfort, but later comes around to accepting it since all of the information LuvLuv used she herself had put out there online.

SoulSearch

SoulSearch is one of the more extraordinary, and dangerous programs developed by the Circle, and advocated by Mae. SoulSearch involves the use of everyday people and



their cameras to track down and find a selected individual. Before an audience of millions, the program is tested out for the first time, where in the United Kingdom, Welsh citizens track down a child-murderer in twenty minutes.

Mae then cruelly tests out the system on Mercer, just to find him. When people descend on Mercer's house, Mercer flees, and commits suicide, having just wanted to be left alone. SoulSearch makes hunting down people a near-sport, and encourages mob mentality in the hunt. The program is so open to misuse that it is terrifying to see how many people do not realize its potential.

CircleMoney

CircleMoney is a kind of online currency being developed by the Circle, with the intent of replacing physical currency. The Circle will control value, inflation, the amount of CircleMoney created, and so on. Limited tests are being run on CircleMoney at the end of the novel, with the intention of ultimately moving on to wider testing. This is a very dangerous program for the Circle, for its desires to control access to all information in the world, coupled with making inroads into politics, means that soon the Circle itself will rival an actual government.

Demoxie

Demoxie is a brand new program being tested by the Circle, with the intention of shortly being released nationally and globally. Demoxie is a real-time voting application designed to gauge people's views on the issues and provide immediate response by way of politicians. However, the program reveals the identities of who voted for what, making reprisals and targeting a very real thing. Mae's own experience with Demoxie – that 3 percent of people do not think she is awesome – lead her to want to track down the naysayers, and change their minds. Substitute Mae with a government official, politician, or agency, and that is tyranny. By controlling access to information, money, and by having the ability to manipulate public opinion, the Circle will become invincible.

The Hole

Eamon Bailey's office at the top of the library is notable primarily for a hole in the center of the office, through which descends a fireman's pole. No one knows where the hole goes, and no one has ever tried. In reality, the hole is symbolic, and is reminiscent of the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll's novel "Alice in Wonderland". Bailey's office is on the top floor of the library, which itself represents the ultimate summit of knowledge, power, and knowing, and becomes an all-seeing point of view as if Bailey was God.

The Circle is intending to make all knowledge and information freely accessible to the public through its control, building up to something huge and unseen before in the world – but to what end is as of yet unknown. This is parallel to the unknown darkness in the hole below. What the Circle is doing is not going to keep bringing people up, but will



ultimately bring people down through the darkness of the hole. The darkness itself also represents a literal darkness, like Hell, and the descent into Hell, through the rabbit hole, where nothing is what it appears to be. Darkness is the opposite of light; darkness is unknowing, where light is knowing. With all things known to the Circle, which then exercises total power, information, and control, there can only be a fall, like the Tower of Babel in the Bible. There will be a fall into darkness eventually, though it seems as if it will be years until this happens with the way the novel ends. Whether the fall and descent into Hell and darkness will be taken by the Circle, or the people of the world, is as of yet unknown.

Settings

The Circle campus

The Circle campus is the main setting for the novel “The Circle” by Dave Eggers. It consists of numerous buildings for various purposes, with each building being given a different name rather than a number. For example, Annie works in the Old West, while Mae works in the Renaissance. In addition to work buildings, the campus also features places to eat, a massive auditorium for presentations, shows, and speakers, an outdoor amphitheater, a daycare for children, a daycare for dogs, a health clinic, a rental facility which rents out sports equipment, and dorms for Circlers who work late and don’t wish to drive home, or who wish to live on campus. The Circle campus is full of beautiful, well-manicured lawns and gardens, places for sporting activities and parties, and ample parking. Everything on the Circle campus is given to employees free of charge, from healthcare to food. The campus also features a library, in which Bailey has his office, and deep underground levels connecting caverns, an underground lake, and an old unused subway tunnel, where Ty works and lives. It is on the Circle campus that Mae not only works, but ultimately comes to live, and to discover what Ty is planning.

San Vincenzo

San Vincenzo is a fictional California city which is in very close proximity to the Circle campus. San Vincenzo is located on San Francisco Bay, and is a very popular place to live for Circler commuters, and to stay for Circler visitors. Mae initially takes an apartment in San Vincenzo before moving into the Circle dorms on the Circle campus.

The caverns

The caverns are located deep underground below the Circle campus and lower levels, and are where some of the most secret projects are kept. The caverns are partially man-made, partially natural, and intersect an old, unused subway system. The caverns also feature an underground lake, in which the Circle plans to store processors to keep cool, and are believed to also eventually lead out to the bay. It is in the caverns that Ty spends most of his time, able to work on projects unseen and without interference. He has even set up a small bedroom in one of the caves off the main caverns. By “going underground”, Ty has the only chance he can take to avoid having every aspect of his existence monitored by the Circle. Ty brings Mae down to the caverns to encourage her to trust him, and is where she has sex with him. At the end of the novel, Ty reveals his true intentions in the cavern.



The Great Hall

The Great Hall is an auditorium on the Circle campus where talks, presentations, and speeches are given to members of the Circle community, as well as theatrical performances of various kinds. The Great Hall is always visited on Dream Friday, where normally Bailey reveals new plans, projects and ideas to the Circlers, after which he usually steps aside to let the creators talk about their work. The Great Hall is where Annie first tests out SoulSearch live, and watches – along with millions of other people – as Mercer commits suicide.

Longfield

Longfield is a small, dusty American town in California, two hours from San Vincenzo, and is typical of every small town across the country. There, people get along well, but nothing exciting or important ever happens. It is Mae's hometown, where she works for eighteen months following graduation at a utility company, believing her life will go nowhere. It is from Longfield that Mae moves to San Vincenzo to work at the Circle, and it is later to Longfield that Mae travels to visit her parents.



Themes and Motifs

Individual Rights

Individual rights form an important theme in the novel “The Circle” by Dave Egges. Individual rights, in the Judeo-Christian American tradition, come from God, are declared as such in the Declaration of Independence, and are codified and protected in law by the United States Constitution. Individual rights are those gifted to individuals naturally, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. American citizens have the right to personal freedoms, including privacy, that American political philosophy contends may not be taken away by fellow men, governments, or any institution. The importance of individual rights comes in the protection of the individual to be free and do as he or she wishes, even if it is unpopular, unconventional, or in the minority, so long as it is moral, sound, and ethical, and does not violate the rights of others. Value is placed on the individual, not on the collective whole as a collective whole. While the general good is encouraged, American political philosophy maintains that it cannot come at the expense of individual rights or individual freedom.

In the novel, individual rights are undone in favor of the greater good by the Circle. This is best seen through the breaking down of Mae’s rights, and later, by the rights of Mercer. When Mae first comes to work for the Circle, she is told that the Circle is a community, and all must participate in the community. To do this, an active social media and campus presence is encouraged. To share is to care, it is explained, and the Circle is about community caring and sharing. At first, Mae struggles to keep up with social media, and is childishly reprimanded for it. When Mae fails to disclose her kayaking and her father’s medical condition publicly on social media, she is again condescendingly reprimanded for this. It is explained that she cannot be a part of the community if she is not willing to participate. If she is not willing to participate, no one else can benefit from her sharing. For example, it is explained, perhaps another Circler would like to kayak with Mae, or to kayak where she kayaked. If Mae does not share this information, she cannot help the community. If Mae does not share this information, she is selfish for not letting others experience the same things. Mae’s individual rights to privacy are ultimately trampled, all under misguided and poisonous idealism supporting the greater good. It is no longer about Mae anymore, but all Circlers. The need to know by the greater masses is more important than Mae’s desire not to share. She is not as important as everyone else. Mae’s personal rights are thus violated by the collective.

Mercer, and later Ty, make the point that people should have the option of opting out, that privacy matters, and that everyone doesn’t need to know about everything going on every second of the day about everyone else. There must be boundaries. Mae disagrees vehemently, saying the greater good is more important, that no one has a right to keep anything a secret, or to keep any kind of information for themselves, that it is selfish, and that it is near criminal to do so. Mae so divests herself of individual rights that she decides to wear a SeeChange camera necklace whenever she is awake, so everyone can see everything she is doing at all times, all in the interest of the greater



good. Mae has voluntarily given away her freedom and individual rights, down to viewers telling her what she should and should not eat.

There are at least three million Americans who are attempting to resist or opt out of the Circle's plans, holding fast to the important idea of individual rights, such as privacy. Bailey and Mae both intend to bring all three million people into the Circle, denying them their individual rights in favor of the rights of the greater collective. The individual does not matter against the whole. The individual good does not compare to the greater good. Mae cruelly uses SoulSearch to root out Mercer, who has tried to opt out of the system, leading to a mob of people tracking him down and finding him. As a result, rather than surrender his individual rights, Mercer commits suicide. He will not be a part of the Circle, he will not give up his personal freedoms, and would rather die than do so. But rather than move people, Mercer earns the criticism of them, with people saying that his act was hurtful and selfish against the greater good. By the end of the novel, even the most private of places, the human mind and thought, are determined to be worth probing and exposing.

Rights

Rights form an important theme in the novel "The Circle" by Dave Eggers. Here, the theme of rights in general is dealt with. For a detailed description of the theme of individual rights, please see the theme "Individual Rights". Rights, whether they are general or individual, help determine, order, and form a society and culture. Rights, essentially, are what privileges, freedoms, or entitlements that people enjoy, are meant to have, or may exercise. Just what rights are, exactly, and how they are created or taken away, forms a major component of discussion in the novel.

When Mae arrives to work at the Circle, she assumes, like all Americans, that she has certain rights, including rights to privacy and consent. These rights are quickly stripped away by the Circle, which encourages Mae to post everything she does, and everything about herself, online for others to view and see. It is contended that other people have rights, too: the rights to access information, to know what Mae is up to, and the rights to do things that Mae does, such as going and kayaking where Mae has kayaked. Sharing is caring, sharing informs, and sharing allows others to have the same kinds of experiences, or to learn from them. Here, it is obvious that Mae's rights are inferior to the collective of the Circle. Indeed, Mae's consensual rights are disregarded by Frank on two occasions, including when he forces Mae to participate in a LuvLuv demonstration, and then when he films an awkward sexual encounter between both himself and Mae. In each instance, Mae's rights do not matter, but the rights of the general good matter more. Mae's refusal to voluntarily participate hurts others, and denies them their rights of freedom of information, and freedom to access that information. No individual's rights are more important than the rights of the collective.

The source and enforcement of the twisted view that the Circle has of rights –especially Bailey –has its origins not in God, the Declaration of Independence, or the U.S. Constitution, but in other men, primarily Bailey, and the Circlers as a group of sheep.



Bailey is often the source of the rights he espouses, which are all given in support of the Circle, as company and as collective. He often uses the precursor of self-belief (“I believe”) when he talks about rights, and then backs up his arguments with poisonous and misguided idealism and manipulative emotion. For example, Bailey uses his cerebral palsy-plagued son’s inability to personally experience something as proof that all things should be shared online, so that everyone can experience everything. His desire to see a better world through constant surveillance, and to see people improve themselves through constant watching, come from his self-professed Midwestern church upbringing and the idea that human beings are perfectible –but Bailey fails to see the irony in his position stemming from Christianity, which truly maintains that it is up to the individual, freely, to do right or wrong. Bailey’s view of a better world thus comes not from church itself, but from a warped understanding of it –or the desire to warp it to suit his own use as he does with his son.

As Ty later explains to Mae, the Circle was intended to make life better, the internet easier, and allow greater freedom of sharing things like information. It was never supposed to be mandatory or all-encompassing. It was never supposed to infringe upon individual rights, or replace those rights with its own system of rights to which all others must bend. While Bailey may be a deranged idealist, the true monster in the equation is Stention, the shark in the tank that is the Circle. Indeed, the Circle is no longer just another creature in the sea, but its greatest predator. As the holder of all the power, the Circle can dictate and manipulate rights by way of manipulating the public. Rights, therefore, are not something absolute and universal, eternal and unchanging, solid and unchallengeable as those described by Thomas Jefferson in the American Declaration of Independence, but are rather utilitarian and collective, transient and convenient, malleable and questionable, all as needed by the Circle.

Transparency

Transparency is an important theme in the novel “The Circle” by Dave Eggers. Transparency involves openness, accessibility, and honesty, all in the interest of accountability and public information and knowledge. Transparency takes on two principle forms in the novel, and all of them ultimately have to do with Mae. Being transparent – letting people know what someone is doing, eating, or up to – fosters community and improves the standard of living for others, according to the Circle. It is the collective right of the masses that there be such a thing as transparency.

Mae’s first real brush with utter transparency comes by way of her father’s illness, and her enjoyment of kayaking, neither of which she writes about on social media. This earns the scorn and condescending lecture of Mae’s superiors, who believe the community could benefit from Mae’s experiences, and have a right to know about Mae’s life. She has no right to keep information from them. If she does, she is not being private, but being opaque. She is not being transparent. Later, during the kayak theft incident, Mae is given a “teachable moment” by Bailey: complete transparency eliminates the propensity for, and the commission of, doing bad things. Bailey believes that a world under constant surveillance would improve dramatically, that crime would



be marginalized and perhaps eliminated. For the Circle, transparency means nothing is withheld, all information is public, and crime will be on its way to extinction while people, on their best behavior, will improve the world.

The second form that transparency assumes in the novel is much less than voluntary, though it is voluntary initially. Begun by Senator Santos, the trend of “going clear” or “going transparent” soon rocks and subsumes the political world. Santos, except while sleeping, decides to wear a miniature SeeChange camera, so her audience will always know what she is up to at all hours of the day, eliminating the possibility of scandal or corruption politically. Her decision is greatly-received, and by the end of the novel, 90% of politicians are wearing SeeChange cameras, revealing their every word and movement to the people of the country and the world. Yet also by the end of the novel, due largely to Mae’s influence and example of going clear as an average person, more than ten million people worldwide have done the same thing. It is a trend expected to continue, meaning that not only will people be filmed by others and by stationary cameras, but will be filming themselves as well, leaving no moment or action private or sacred – and thus devaluing everything done. The question that must be answered by the reader is, is there ever such a thing as too much transparency?

Technology

Technology is an important theme in the novel “The Circle” by Dave Eggers. In the novel, the Circle is an internet company that has also plunged headlong into technology in general. All of the technology developed by the Circle has to do with the gaining and disseminating of information in one form or another. In the novel, technology assumes an ambivalent, neutral ground, with the people using it intending it for good, but not stopping to consider how their technology may be abused, misused, or utilized for bad purposes. Intended to make the world better, the Circle’s technological developments may make the world worse.

Consider ChildTrack. Frank’s ChildTrack system is borne out of a traumatizing childhood experience of his own, in which his younger sisters were raped and murdered. Frank intends to eliminate crimes against children, as well as abduction of children, through his ChildTrack system. ChildTrack involves placing a microchip into the bone of a child, through which the child can be tracked by parents or law enforcement agencies. This will do everything from stopping crimes against children to finding runaways. On the face of it, the system is good. But then the question becomes, what happens to the microchip when the child is no longer a child? Is the individual still tracked? If so, by whom? Could governments or groups like the Circle track people against the will of the individual?

Another important technological and internet innovation is the Demoxie system, measuring in real time voter responses, and enabling the delivery of the will of the voters at a much faster rate. On the face of it, it seems good, like democracy in action. But there are serious flaws in the system. For example, Mae is able to find out who did not think she was awesome following the test vote, and endeavors to seek out these



people. Voting is a public, although private act. If people knew their voting records were public information, how could this affect the way they vote – or be used to affect the way that they vote? Will people fear reprisals? Will they fear being targeted? The Demoxie system opens the door to voter intimidation, persuasion, and even manipulation. How will this affect the balance of power between the people and the government, or between the people and the government and an organization like the Circle?

Democracy

Democracy is an important theme in the novel “The Circle” by Dave Eggers, which ultimately becomes a stronger theme later, rather than earlier, in the novel. Democracy – essentially rule by the many – is seen as something incredibly important, and useful, by the Circle. The Circle equates democracy to community: everything is shared, and approved or disapproved of by members. Indeed, sharing is caring, it is contended. Only a true majority of people in a democracy can actually have any claim to legitimacy, meaning that third parties and fringe groups will be unable to affect the outcomes of elections if most, or all, people vote. In the latter half of Book II of the novel, the Circle is pushing itself into the political forum, in order to encourage democratic participation. This is done in two ways.

The first way the Circle intends to make America more of a democracy, rather than a democratic-republic, is through the use of the Demoxie system. Demoxie will measure, in real-time, the votes cast by people on various issues, allowing elected officials to respond quickly and appropriately to the will of the people. But there are two important issues here that are not considered. First, pure democracy rarely leads to considered options, thoughts, or courses of action through tempered reason (Aristotle referred to democracy as “mobocracy”), but to shifting opinions and the passions of the moment. If passions change from one moment to the next, there is no consistency, which is dangerous for stability. Second, just because the people vote for or against something, does not mean they are right. The majority of any population is not always right. Consider the Nazis in Germany, or the Communists in Russia, as examples of wrongful majorities. How are elected officials to respond when the people are wrong?

Democracy, Mae contends later on, will only work if there is 100-percent participation, just as the true, full sharing of information will only work through CircleSocial if everyone fully participates. Mae suggests that, in order to truly gauge the desires of a democracy, that voting should be mandatory, even required by law itself. Such a decision would force people to vote, and would indeed spell out true majorities, but at what cost? Will these people be intimidated or lured into voting one way or another? What right does the Circle have to be the group to ask the questions? What if someone truly has no desire to answer a question, or to vote? Democracy is something intended to be participatory, but voluntary. In a free society, a citizen only gets as much back as he or she puts into things. It is all about work and merit. However, citizens have the right to opt out if they so choose. It is all a part of the freedom of democratic-republics to vote one way or another, or to choose not to vote at all. A compulsory democracy defeats the purpose of democracy in the first place.

Styles

Point of View

Dave Eggers tells his novel “The Circle” from the third-person semi-omniscient perspective, which follows the thoughts and actions of Mae throughout the course of the story. This is done for several reasons, at least. First, it allows the author to impart important information to the reader without interrupting the flow of the story itself. For example, Mae arrives on campus believing it to be Heaven-like, and the narrator goes on to explain not just why Mae finds it to be Heaven-like, but gives background information to the company and its founding. Second, the narrator presents an unbiased point of view, simply describing things as they occur, rather than taking a side. This allows the reader to be objective and to consider things from their own point of view, rather than being forced to only consider things from Mae’s point of view. As Mae turns out to be something of a quasi-villain at the end of the novel, this is important for the reader to come away with a separate point of view. This point of view is espoused by Mercer, Tyler, and the author himself, and appears unfiltered through third-person narration, as opposed to the way that Mae may have made it seem has the novel been told from her point of view in the first person.

Language and Meaning

Dave Eggers tells his novel “The Circle” in language that is simple, straightforward, and which proceeds at a brisk pace. The novel, which clocks in at 497 pages of small print, has a lot of ground to cover and a lot to talk about, from themes of democracy and individual rights, to transparency and technology, let alone the author’s cautionary message about the limits of information and technology. In order to make his message clear and unmistakable, and in order to make sure the reader isn’t bogged down in details, the author relies on simple and straightforward language. This also allows the individual a brisk read, for much of the novel has to do with little actual action – much of it involves Mae sitting at her desk, walking around with a camera necklace, and discussing freedom and democracy with Mercer. However, this brisk pace and the simple language allows the reader to feel that the plot is moving along well, and keeps the reader focused on the cautionary message.

Structure

Dave Eggers divides his novel “The Circle” into three chronological, linear parts, labeled Book I, Book II, and Book III. There are no subdivisions or chapters between these. Book I extends from page 1 to page 306; Book II to page 491, and Book III to page 497, the end of the novel. The novel extends across the course of several months, and each Book deals with a specific evolution in Mae’s character. In Book I, Mae is a sweet, naïve girl who dreams of doing big things, and is seduced by the Circle’s power and Bailey’s

indoctrination. In Book II, Mae is a full-fledged devotee of the Circle, who is totally in the tank for them. Efforts to right her all fail, and the degree to which she has become a cruel person are detailed by what she does to Mercer. Book III reveals that Mae has remained loyal to the Circle, and will remain loyal to the Circle, having turned Tyler in and seeking to find a way to read Annie's thoughts.



Quotes

My God, Mae thought. It's heaven.
-- Narrator (Book 1 paragraph Page 1)

Importance: The opening line of the book is incredibly important to the novel because it is ironic. Paying careful attention to it reveals that Mae equates the Circle with Heaven, and such a rash judgment is never correct. All things fall short of Heaven. Indeed, Mae's arrival at the Circle portends her descent into Hell.

I'll be watching you watch her.
-- Annie (Book I paragraph Page 46)

Importance: In a seemingly lighthearted moment, Annie tells Dan she'll be watching him watching Mae. In reality, this isn't merely friendly first-day banter. The joke is laced with iron, with seriousness: Mae will be watched like a hawk, and those watching Mae will also be watched like a hawk. Everything that Mae does from here on in will be watched, studied, and critiqued, from her actual activities through her online social presence.

All that happens must be known.
-- Eamon Bailey (Book I paragraph Page 68)

Importance: In a seemingly idealistic moment, Eamon Bailey contends that everything in the world that happens should be known, from brutal soldiers in Egypt to the tide levels and wave conditions at beaches. However, Bailey's friendly slogan is not about gaining knowledge, but about human behavior being tracked, monitored, studied, analyzed, and used to the Circle's advantage. Nothing is what it seems at first glance.

The world has dorkified itself.
-- Mercer (Book I paragraph Page 133)

Importance: Mae's ex-boyfriend, Mercer, a few years older and old enough to have escaped the lure of oversaturation with technology, tries to explain to Mae that life can't be lived through a computer screen. In person with her parents, Mae is more interested in her phone than human interaction. Mae would prefer to comment on a photo, rather than doing what is in the photo herself, making herself boring. Rather than actually doing something to combat inhumanity, Mae would rather send frowns or dislikes on statuses about inhumanity instead. It is, Mercer contends, all dorkification, a lack of moral integrity, courage, and commitment to actually doing things, but merely talking about it instead, as if that is enough.

We don't delete at the Circle.
-- Narrator (Book I paragraph Page 205)

Importance: After Frank films an awkward sexual encounter between himself and Mae,



Mae presses him to delete it. Frank refuses to do so, saying it now belongs to the cloud, and it is wrong to keep any kind of information away from other people if they should so choose to see it or peruse it. Mae realizes what this means: nothing is ever deleted at the Circle. Once it is out there, it is out there, end of story.

You don't own the news, even if it happens to you. You don't own history. It's part of the collective record.

-- Frank (Book I paragraph Pages 237-8)

Importance: Here, Mae again asks Frank if he has deleted their sex video. Frank says he has not, and equates the video to news. No one owns the news, especially once it is out there. Now, the sex video is out there, and he no longer has the right to own it or do something with it, such as deleting it and depriving the world of it. He contends he never had that right, that the video, like news, belongs to everyone.

You think it's just a coincidence that every time some congressman or blogger talks about monopoly, they suddenly become ensnared in some terrible sex-porn-witchcraft controversy?

-- Mercer (Book I paragraph Page 261)

Importance: Mercer attempts to make Mae understand how dangerous the Circle is becoming, and how much power they can now wield against someone. They are able to bring down even the most important and popular politicians, who dare to speak out against, challenge, or even question the Circle. As Ty later reveals, it is not coincidental at all, but well-orchestrated by Stenton himself.

There was no path, a fact that gave her great pleasure – no one, or almost no one, had ever been where she was.

-- Narrator (Book I paragraph Page 270)

Importance: As Mae returns home after her argument with Mercer, she decides to prove him wrong by going off the beaten path and doing something unexpected, trying not to be the dork he believes her to have become. She ends up kayaking out to an island in a borrowed vessel, and this proves to be her last real act of total freedom, ever.

I'll do anything to make this up to you. Seriously, I'll take on any extra work, I'll do anything. Just tell me.

-- Mae (Book I paragraph Page 283)

Importance: Mae, after being caught by the police after her kayaking incident, must also explain herself to her superiors, and especially, to Bailey. She is terrified about keeping her job, is still eager to please, and worries about her parents losing insurance coverage, so she offers up everything she has in order to stay in Bailey's good graces. She has just sold her soul to the Devil, in the form of every last shred of her freedom to Bailey.



To eliminate all costly elections, replaced by instantaneous ones, all of them nearly cost-free? This was the promise of the Circle. This was the unique position of the Circle.
-- Narrator (Book II paragraph Page 395)

Importance: For years, politics has been accused of being sold to the highest bidder. In other words, politics has become a business practice. Mae has just encouraged the surrender of politics, completely, to the hands of a business entity, the Circle. But she, and the Circle, do not see it as the privatization of what the Founders intended to be a public system: they merely see it as greater freedom with less cost, something only the Circle has the power to do. The circle is nearly complete, its power near absolute.

With actual democracy, a purer kind of democracy, people would be unafraid to cast their votes, and, more important, unafraid to be held accountable for those votes.
-- Narrator (Book II paragraph Page 419)

Importance: As the Circle moves toward gaining oversight of American democracy, everything Mae believes it will be, will not be, as evidenced by the results of the Mae-being-awesome question in the trial run of Demoxie. The goal is to get people to vote, and be unafraid to vote or be held accountable for those votes. But what happens when a government, its agency, or another institution is unhappy with the results of a vote, even if they win or succeed? Mae provides the answer, intending to seek out all those who do not think she is awesome, and make them see the light.

All this. The f----- shark that eats the world.
-- Ty (Book II paragraph Page 484)

Importance: Ty has gone gray prematurely because of the viciousness and stress wrong by the Circle, and by Stenton in particular. Ty's reference to a shark that eats the world isn't just to the Circle, but specifically, to Stenton, whose shrewd acumen and ruthless nature make him the one who will benefit above all others as the Circle closes, and power is secured.