

The Diamond Age, or, Young Lady's Illustrated Primer Study Guide

**The Diamond Age, or, Young Lady's Illustrated Primer
by Neal Stephenson**

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Plot Summary

The Diamond Age is a science-fiction novel that anticipates the development of nanotechnology and reflects on its social consequences. The action revolves around three main characters: Nell, a little girl who grows up to become an important player in her world with the help of a "magical" storybook; John Percival Hackworth, the author and software engineer behind the book; and finally, Miranda, an actor who provides the interactive voice for the characters in the book and who forms a bond with the reader through the book's networked interface. The novel takes place on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, near the Asian continent. The Diamond Age is set in the later part of the twenty-first century, although no exact time reference is provided. The novel also examines the potential for social divisions in a world where there is no country and where the rules of the free market determine the fate of society.

The story starts on an artificial island located in the South China Sea, named Atlantis/Shanghai. This island hosts an enclave for the most powerful and wealthiest tribe on earth: the Victorians. The aristocratic Victorians own most of the companies that provide the consumer goods and real estate to the rest of the world. They differentiate themselves by speaking a sophisticated yet somewhat outdated form of Victorian English and by using "real" material. John Percival Hackworth, a high-level engineer working for Bespoke, is also a Victorian. He is hired by Lord Alexander Finkle-McGraw to write a book for his four-year-old granddaughter Elizabeth. The book is supposed to be unique, but the author decides to make a copy for his own daughter. This copy gets stolen and falls in the hands of a little girl with no social status named Nell.

With the help of the "magical" book, Nell starts to learn to read, write, and exercise her judgment and her body. However, her family situation deteriorates quickly and she is forced to flee her home along with her brother, who had given her the book in the first place. Nell moves to Dovetail, a community of artisans working to produce goods for the Victorians. She starts to study at an academy attended by the upper class Victorians. She becomes friends with two other girls who also own the magical book, Elizabeth and Fiona.

During this time, Hackworth's trickery gets him in trouble with the law and he is sentenced to ten years. Hackworth's sentence is suspended after he agrees to work for the tribe that put him on trial. After getting the book and giving it to his granddaughter Elizabeth, Lord Finkle-McGraw discovers that the book is no longer unique and that it the code that produced it is in the hands of a counterfeiter working in Shanghai, named Dr. X. The old Lord confronts Hackworth, but the latter avoids getting dishonored after agreeing to work as a double agent for the Victorian authorities. Hackworth is sent to Vancouver to look for "the alchemist." He ends up living with the Drummers tribe for ten years in a dream-like state while participating in continual orgies involving strange rituals.

Miranda wanted to become a "ractor" (an actor specialized in interactive theater and movies). However, after becoming increasingly involved as the voice of Nell's interactive



book, she starts to develop a motherly bond with the girl, even though she never addresses her directly. She does not even know her real identity. She decides to seek the girl and she is eventually led to join the Drummers in the hope that this will help her reach out to the girl.

Hackworth leaves the Drummers' cave and attempts to contact his now grown up daughter. He discovers that he is now divorced. His wife rejects him but his daughter Fiona runs away from her mother and joins her father in his quest to understand the essence of the revolution that is brewing and to save the Victorians' heritage.

Nell finishes her formal training at the Victorian academy and starts working at an Asian brothel, providing scripts for interactive adult games to the girls. Most of the girls are members of the Han tribe and have been raised with the same book, though their copies do not rely on live ractors and they were adapted to the Chinese culture. The girls eventually form a tribe of their own, this time led by Nell. In the hope of reaching her mother, Nell reaches out to the Drummers. She escapes death through defense mechanisms that she designed to fight the drugs used by the Drummers. In the end, she manages to save Miranda before she suffers the explosive fate that awaits the Drummers' ritual victims.



Part the First: A Thete Visits a Mod Parlor

Part the First: A Thete Visits a Mod Parlor Summary

The Diamond Age is a science-fiction novel that anticipates the development of nanotechnology and reflects on its social consequences. The action revolves around three main characters: Nell, a little girl who grows up to become an important player in her world with the help of a "magical" storybook; John Percival Hackworth, the author and software engineer behind the book; and finally, Miranda, an actor who provides the interactive voice for the characters in the book and who forms a bond with the reader through the book's networked interface. The novel takes place on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, near the Asian continent. The Diamond Age is set in the later part of the twenty-first century, although no exact time reference is provided. The novel also examines the potential for social divisions in a world where there is no country and where the rules of the free market determine the fate of society.

Bud is an artificially muscled-up, independent criminal skating down a crowded street and heading towards a mod parlor. He decides to upgrade his skull gun to a state-of-the-art spray gun. After considering his options, he concludes that it would be worth the extra yuks (money) to do the upgrade in a local shop instead of going through the trouble of crossing into Shanghai. After waiting in line while the other clients get their own modifications, Bud sits and the robot arm removes the man's old armament and installs a new spray-gun into his forehead. Bud tests the new equipment, loaded with a hundred rounds of popcorn, against a manikin. Satisfied of the outcome, Bud buys three magazines of ammunition as well as some aspirin.

Part the First: A Thete Visits a Mod Parlor Analysis

This first chapter introduces a criminal character named Bud. As Harv and Nell's father, Bud is the model for the kind of behavior that his son grew up imitating and that his daughter will spend her life trying to avoid. Like his children and girlfriend, he has no family name. This absence of a name is an indication that they have none of the family-tree inheritance that the aristocratic Victorians can rely on. Bud is self-centered and uses technology purely for his immediate personal satisfaction and to improve his earnings through illicit actions.

The chapter introduces the main technology at play in The Diamond Age: nanotechnology. This futuristic technology allows the molecular manipulation of microscopic mechanisms to create objects by assembling them together and by creating specialized, miniature robots the size of microbes. In the novel, nanotechnology is implanted under the flesh of the people in so-called "mod parlors", which act much like tattoo parlors. Bud's upgraded skull gun is an example of the

fantastic (and somewhat unregulated) power that is available to the individuals of the late twenty-first century. It allows the people to use super powers brought about by a costly microscopic technology. In this case, the skull gun serves as an easy-to-grasp introduction to the applications of nanotechnology at large.



Source Victoria

Source Victoria Summary

Source Victoria is a building hosting a molecular disassembly line. The construction filters the dirty sea water and polluted air. The Source then returns clean water and air, as well as a stream of recycled molecules. The water and air are filtered by cascading through a series of walls and tanks. By the end of the process, the Source feeds molecular conveyors—known as the Feed—with perfectly clean molecules of nitrogen and water.

Source Victoria Analysis

This chapter explains that the environment is maintained and sanitized by huge structures located on the artificial islands. The machine's mechanisms transform the molecular structure of the air and water and return both products to a state of purity. It uses the residual molecules to feed its network of raw molecular material. The reader also learns that diamond is cheaper to produce than glass (hence the title of the book). The location of the source, as well as its environment, emphasize the bright side of future science applications based on nanotechnology. In this technological environment, objects and products appear almost magically, at least by today's standards. This description of the gifts of science to humankind stands here in sharp contrast with that of technology usage provided by the previous chapter, where the same nanotechnology is used to generate products aimed at criminal usage.



Financial Complications of Bud's Lifestyle

Financial Complications of Bud's Lifestyle Summary

Bud decides that he needs to change jobs because he needs money. After entering a seedy building, he meets with a Parsi banker who calls himself the Peacock Bank. The banker tells Bud that he should get a line of credit and he hands him a brochure. The white piece of smart paper turns into a multimedia presentation that talks about the advantages of owning a credit card from the bank. The credit card would be mounted on a bone near the surface of his skin and would give him automatic credit. Bud asks the banker about the penalties in case he misses one of the payments. The banker answers by pointing to a group of people slaving in a prison-like environment and assembling jewelry. Bud leaves, but keeps the brochure.

Financial Complications of Bud's Lifestyle Analysis

The futuristic and almost magical world of *The Diamond Age* produces marvels such as free, low quality products for the needy. Indeed, the matter compilers available in public areas provide free food for everyone, leaving no one hungry. However, anything of higher quality becomes a virtual consumer good and can be generated by the matter compilers available at retail places or in the houses that can afford them. Even better, all these quality goods can be obtained through automatic credit.

Using the story of Bud, the chapter introduces the importance of racial delimitations. Most tribes (called "phyles" in the novel) are race-dependent and cannot be joined by "foreigners"—in the racial sense of the word, since geographical borders have all but disappeared from the world of *The Diamond Age*. These phyles are also linked to specific trades. In the example of this chapter, the Parsis are described as having the perfect qualifications for being bank owners (though the novel remains silent as to the reasons why the Parsis would make better bankers). *The Diamond Age* is filled with passages that use exaggerated emphasis as a humor mechanism. An example of this particular style of humor can be found when the banker explains that the penalty for a missed payment can range from "a polite reminder" to "spectacularly fatal".



A Visit from Royalty

A Visit from Royalty Summary

On the day of her birthday, Princess Charlotte invites all the children of the employees of Machine-Phase Systems Limited who are living in Atlantis/Shanghai to a special cruise. The Princess travels aboard a small airship named Atlantis. The children and their parents use two huge cruise airships named AEther and Chinook. Lord John Finkle-McGraw, followed by his three children and their respective spouses, accompanies his granddaughter Elizabeth. They embark on the AEther. John Percival and Gwendolyn Hackworth climb aboard the same ship to accompany their daughter Fiona.

While Hackworth is strolling on the enchanted island generated for the Princess' birthday, he meets with Lord Finkle-McGraw. Both men exchange civilities and discuss their respective backgrounds. The Lord is immediately impressed by the engineer's culture and by his attitude towards life, which he finds quite similar to his own. The Lord thanks him for the work he has done so far on the current project and says that he is the perfect person to complete a new project of his.

A Visit from Royalty Analysis

In this chapter, the author shows the wonders of nanotechnology in an almost pyrotechnical display of virtual marvels. The aristocratic Victorians literally live in a gated community, surrounded by the fantasy that they created for themselves through nanotechnology. The application of nanotechnology ranges from the grandiose (the creation of a temporary phantasmagorical island populated with fairies for the sole amusement of children) to the ridiculously precious—such as the self-cleaning white gloves worn by the Victorians.

This chapter introduces a key element in the novel: the relationship between members of the same phyle is greatly facilitated by their usage of a coded language. Lord Finkle-McGraw has no problem establishing a quick relationship with Hackworth, even though he is one thousand times richer than him and a member of the "Equity," which is the economical equivalent of royalty in the world of the neo-Victorians.



Bud Embarks on a Life of Crime

Bud Embarks on a Life of Crime Summary

Bud starts to steal money by scaring "blacks" into giving him their money. After a few successful runs, he encounters a well-dressed couple with a baby and corners them. The man does not appear to be scared and speaks in a very peculiar fashion. Bud gets closer and threatens him by displaying his skull gun. The victim warns Bud that as an attacker, he will put himself in deep trouble if he does anything harmful. He refuses to give him any money. Bud blows part of his bicep away and the man finally gives him his currency. A few days later, a bunch of Ashanti guards land on the island and start searching the area for Bud. The criminal wonders if he should join a gang of his peers, but realizes that in every case he does not have the required skills or the proper cultural background to do so. The Ashantis finally catch up with him and shrink-wrap him with their special guns before handing him out to the authorities. Bud is picked up by a constable and driven away.

Bud Embarks on a Life of Crime Analysis

In this chapter, Bud uses language to score points against his victim, instantly gaining the upper hand in the psychological confrontation. The following passage illustrates the verbal confrontation between the two men: "'Sir, I am not what you refer to as a Vicky, or I should have gone directly there. I would be obliged if you could be so kind as to moderate your language in the presence of my wife and child.' It took Bud a while to untangle this sentence, and a while longer to believe that the man really cared about a few dirty words spoken within earshot of his family, and longer yet to believe that he had been so insolent to Bud, a heavily muscled guy who was obviously packing a skull gun. 'I'm gonna fucking say whatever I fucking want to your bitch and your flicking brat,' Bud said, very loud. Then he could not keep himself from grinning" (p. 23).

The victim is a member of the powerful Ashantis. He behaves as though asserting his social class is sufficient to scare the attacker away. He uses the order and efficiency of a pure English sentence (the Victorian-style language) as opposition to Bud's random threat of violence. In other words, he uses language as a powerful armor.



Hackworth's Morning Ruminations

Hackworth's Morning Ruminations Summary

Hackworth wakes up at 5 am, while his daughter Fiona and his wife Gwen continue to sleep. He reads through his personalized newspaper and scans the excerpts from the Times concerning him and his trade. While getting dressed, he accidentally awakens his wife. He tells her that he will be coming late from work, but that he will bring a special surprise to their daughter to compensate. Gwen kisses him good day. As Hackworth leaves, he realizes that his four-year-old daughter is now in on the secret and she is now expecting the surprise. The engineer concludes that it is now too late to back out of his project.

Hackworth's Morning Ruminations Analysis

This chapter depicts Hackworth as a man about to commit a crime. Obviously, he does not intend to alert his family and even less to change his relationship with them. This is underlined by his failed attempt to leave for work without waking up his wife. All he wants to do is change the future of his daughter. He cannot help but hint at his secret by announcing that he will bring something special for his daughter when he returns from work. This, in turn, ensures that he cannot change his mind anymore and he has to go through with his plan.



Bud Is Prosecuted

Bud Is Prosecuted Summary

Bud is called into the courtroom, which is presided over by Judge Fang, a young magistrate originally from New York. The judge explains that Bud is accused of mugging and wounding a member of the Ashanti phyle. His victim is in the courtroom and identifies Bud as the criminal. The judge sees that Bud shows no remorse and that there is little mitigating circumstance to weight in his favor. The court reveals that Bud's girlfriend, Tequila, gave birth to a girl a few days earlier. Bud says that he has not seen his girlfriend in months, but that he has a son with her named Harv. The judge orders Bud to leave and walk down to the end section of a pier by the Huang Pu River; he should wait there for further instructions. While he waits, Bud is executed by the explosion of a series of microscopic bombs running through his blood.

Bud Is Prosecuted Analysis

Originally from New York, Judge Fang turns the power of Bud's raw language back against the original aggressor: "'I'm Judge Fang,' the Judge continued, looking straight at Bud. 'You can address me as Your Honor. Now, Bud, Mr. Kwamina here has accused you of certain activities that are illegal in the Coastal Republic. You are also accused of actionable offenses under the Common Economic Protocol, to which we are a subscriber. These offenses are closely related to the crimes I already mentioned, but slightly different. Are you getting all this?'

'Not exactly, Your Honor,' Bud said.

'We think you mugged this guy and blew a hole in his arm,' Judge Fang said, 'which is frowned upon. Capiche?'

'Yes, sir.'" (p. 35).

This chapter shows that a justice system based on traditional wisdom and principles, such as Judge Fang's courtroom, can decide on cases according to loose criteria. In this case, Confucian tradition finds no excuse for Bud's actions and the guilty is executed without warning. The Confucians apparently find it unnecessary to let an individual know about his or her fate when the latter is fatal. It also shows that a remote execution leaves no one in particular responsible for the sentencing. This makes sense, since the decision is based entirely on principles established generations ago and with which no one can argue.



Nell Learns to Work the Matter Compiler

Nell Learns to Work the Matter Compiler Summary

Harv, Nell's bigger brother, decides that it's time for Nell to get a new mattress. Under the watchful eyes of his little sister, he operates one of the matter compilers by poking on the mediaglyphics appearing on the screen. The compiler takes a long time to perform its duty because they live in a poor neighborhood where the Feed is poor and thin. Eventually, the compiler produces a brand new, albeit thin mattress for his sister. Harv departs from the house to go out with his friends, leaving Nell alone. The little girl repeats the keying sequence she observed earlier and she starts the matter compiler on her own. Eventually, she generates enough mattresses to fill up the entire room. When her brother returns, he hurries up and makes the excess mattresses disappear into the recyclers before their mother returns.

Nell Learns to Work the Matter Compiler Analysis

This chapter is a version of the classic Goethe's "Sorcerer's Apprentice". The novel replays the elements of the original storyline almost exactly. Nell plays the role of the apprentice who learns about a new and somewhat magical possibility. Harv is the sorcerer who teaches his apprentice the secret—in this case, the generation of new mattresses; and the compiler plays the part of the magic (nanotechnology) and its power of infinite replication. This situation underlines the magical aspect of the technology. It also points to the possibilities as well as the dangers of uncontrolled replication.

Hackworth Arrives At Work

Hackworth Arrives At Work Summary

John Percival Hackworth arrives at Design Works, the Bespoke department where engineers are working. He meets with Demetrius Cotton, an experienced engineer who is putting the finishing touches to the design of a power supply specifically constructed for the ongoing project. After fiddling around over the virtual interface of the design pad, Cotton says that he is done and gives Hackworth the rights to the design. Hackworth thanks him, tells the plan to fold itself, and places the result in his pocket.

Hackworth Arrives At Work Analysis

This chapter uses an anecdotal event to present more aspects of nanotechnology. It gives the readers a chance to learn a little more about the neo-Victorians' philosophy of life and their relationship with the virtual world that they constructed. For instance: "Neo-Victorians almost never used mediatrons. Hard art demanded commitment from the artist. It could only be done once, and if you screwed it up, you had to live with the consequences" (p. 42).

Particulars of Nell's Domestic Situation

Particulars of Nell's Domestic Situation Summary

Whenever Nell needs a new piece of clothing, her mother Tequila simply orders the matter compiler to synthesize it. However, Nell had never seen a piece of real clothing and does not know the difference between the two. One day, her brother Harv finds a small piece of real cloth by the sea; he hides it and brings it home. Harv and Nell are then able to examine this strange object by dissecting it thread by thread using toothpicks. They both conclude that it must be something constructed by mites, since the fabric is obviously too complicated to be human-made.

Particulars of Nell's Domestic Situation Analysis

The chapter explores the consequences of the "magical" possibilities of the matter compiler. It also underlines the differences between the generated objects and the real ones. Nell belongs to a class of people not associated with any tribe. The "thetes" are the equivalent of the outcasts in the Indian civilization. The thetes are used to a synthesized version of reality that only imitates the real objects, made with real material. In this case, they are unable to differentiate real clothes and fake ones because there is no obvious difference on the surface. However, the children are at awe when they realize that the "real" material of the clothes worn by the upper-ranking members of their society is made of complex woven threads, instead of the flat and uniform plastic that their own clothes are made of.

The chapter also points to an application of nanotechnology that allows women to have an abortion by using "nanobots" ("mites" in the novel) to get rid of the unwanted eggs. This technology is ironically referred to as the "Freedom Machine" in the novel.



Security Measures Adopted by Atlantis/Shanghai

Security Measures Adopted by Atlantis/Shanghai Summary

Atlantis/Shanghai is protected by a grid of interconnected pods that constantly monitor the area surrounding the enclave. These pods are devices that hover over the ground and provide an extra level of physical security by instantly relaying any breach to the proper authorities. The city is also protected by a cloud of microscopic artificial organisms. This cloud acts like an immune system. The population is protected because the little devices constantly scan the air for invaders, then seek and destroy intruders as soon as they find them.

Security Measures Adopted by Atlantis/Shanghai Analysis

This chapter gives an overview of several key features of the society that relies on nanotechnology. It reveals that objects produced by technology are extremely light and will usually float in the air. Because nanotechnology works with building blocks the size of atoms, it is also easy for humans to produce microscopic weapons that can infiltrate the human body. It underlines that security is extremely important, because enemies can design and produce micro-organisms that will attack any human being from the inside.



Nell Sees Something Peculiar

Nell Sees Something Peculiar Summary

One morning, Nell takes a look outdoors and notices that everything is covered with a charcoal, powder-like substance. Harv enters the house covered with the same black powder. Harv is wearing a mask and as soon as he takes it off he starts coughing. He explains to his sister that the black dust is called "toner" and that it is simply bodies of dead mites. These mites are victims of a war between factions of mites designed by different clans. Harv cleans himself with a mite gun and leaves the house again to go scavenging.

Nell Sees Something Peculiar Analysis

This chapter covers another aspect of the implications of technology. As the same technology is used by every tribe ("phyle" in the novel), they are bound to clash at some point. The result in this case is a war waged through minuscule robots sent to destroy each other. Because those robots can be replicated infinitely, each warring party sends them by the millions. The dead mites cover the ground and end up polluting the environment. The word "toner" is a reference to the black powder used in laser printers and photocopiers.



Hackworth Compiles the Young Lady's Illustrated Primer

Hackworth Compiles the Young Lady's Illustrated Primer Summary

Sitting at his desk, Hackworth lays out the completed version of the Runcible program—the code name for the Illustrated Primer project. He activates the matter compiler with his code and then uses a molecular copy machine to destroy the original copy.

Hackworth Compiles the Young Lady's Illustrated Primer Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the possibilities of nanotechnology in compiling and replicating large amounts of data, as well as turning the data into solid objects. The description of Hackworth's hack around the security system of Bespoke is purposely vague.

Nell and Harv 's General Living Situation

Nell and Harv 's General Living Situation Summary

Harv warns his little sister that there are a lot of bad people out there in the Leased Territories. He says that bad people are like the interactive pirates that Harv sometimes plays with on the mediatrons. He warns her never to go out there on her own. Tequila's new boyfriend, Mark, turns out to be a pedophile. One night, Harv and his street gang make him disappear and the children never see him in the house again. Harv tells Nell that Mark will not come back because he turned out to be one of those "pirates" he was talking about. Nell's brother also insists that if she is ever to see him again, she should scream and run to her brother immediately.

Nell and Harv 's General Living Situation Analysis

This chapter introduces another danger lurking in the Leased Territories, which is the name of the area where tribeless people like Nell live. As it turns out, the real danger lurks not in technology but in people. The only protection that the outcasts can rely on to protect themselves from the "bad people" is to turn to more "bad people". In this case, Nell's stepfather turns out to be a pedophile. Upon learning about this situation, Harv uses his street gang to get rid of the man. He protects his sister against the bad guys by being a bad guy himself.



Hackworth Crosses the Causeway Into Shanghai

Hackworth Crosses the Causeway Into Shanghai Summary

Hackworth crosses the Causeway, a bridge arched between the artificial island of Atlantis/Shanghai and the Pudong Economic Zone, on the outskirts of China's Shanghai. The engineer gazes at the clunky city and wonders what's ahead for him. He is looking for a counterfeiter that has the ability to replicate the Primer's code by hooking to an independent source of material without getting caught.

Hackworth Crosses the Causeway Into Shanghai Analysis

This chapter introduces a new geographical area which will become increasingly important as the story progresses. The old city of Shanghai is wholly different from the artificial island where Victorians like Hackworth live. It is threatening and dangerous, smelly, foggy, and clunky. The chapter also introduces another aspect of the novel: the absence of older common technology and the strange, die-hard habits of the architects to design as though the old world still existed. In this case, the bridge between the old Shanghai and Atlantis/Shanghai is arched as to let boats pass under it without disrupting the traffic. However, there is no boat traffic in the area.

Hackworth in the Hong of Dr. X

Hackworth in the Hong of Dr. X Summary

Hackworth enters the Flea Circus, which is another name for the office of Dr. X, a professional counterfeiter whose real name is too complicated to be pronounced by Westerners. The doctor uses a tiny scalpel to tear out a part of the flesh on the engineer's palm. He then starts foraging through the sample and finds mites of different types. Hackworth indicates to Dr. X that the mite he should be looking for looks like a wild cocklebur. He also says that the artificial container holds one terabyte of data, adding that it will self-destruct in six hours.

Hackworth in the Hong of Dr. X Analysis

In this chapter, Hackworth plays the Sorcerer's Apprentice himself, albeit with a twist. However, his situation is more complex than Nell's challenge, as he is trying to generate a copy of the book he wrote for Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw. In the end, the engineer manages to produce such a copy but encounters a number of obstacles. One of these obstacles is the difficulty, inherent to the digital technology, in avoiding having the code replicated ad infinitum, thus voiding the advantage of using the compiled book in the first place.



Hackworth Departs from Dr. X's Laboratory

Hackworth Departs from Dr. X's Laboratory Summary

Hackworth recalls that he graduated from a rather simple job in the San Francisco's office of Bespoke to a higher position in Atlantis/Shanghai. This graduation happened after his invention of the digitally created bamboo chopsticks displaying Chinese ads. Though his position in the company is now fair, he still desires something better for his daughter Fiona. The only way she can do better than him in life is by having a more powerful personality. Lord Finkle-McGraw had told Hackworth that he wanted his granddaughter to be raised with enough subversive culture to stand above the rest of the fray. This subversion, as he sees it, is one of the keys to a better position in the neo Victorian society. The Lord had even sent him a copy of a Coleridge poem, *The Raven*, as an example. After two years of development, the Primer is now ready to be delivered to four-year-old Elizabeth by her grandfather on Christmas day.

Dr. X's equipment produces a copy of the *Young Lady's Illustrated Primer* intended for Hackworth's young daughter Fiona. Hackworth grabs that copy and then rents a velocipede to cross the Causeway back to the island. As he rides toward the island, the wind blows his expensive hat away, but it reappears on the head of a boy who rides away with it. Hackworth goes after the robber and follows him back to the Asian city, where he is ambushed and robbed by a street gang of children.

Hackworth Departs from Dr. X's Laboratory Analysis

The chapter condenses all the problems and the fears that the engineer has about his creation and subsequent attempt to replicate an object originally designed to be unique. Looking back at the development of the *Illustrated Primer*, Hackworth wonders if his hack (the act of replicating the book for his own usage) was worth the trouble. He imagined and feared all kinds of problems, but he never thought that it would be in the shape of a criminal street gang of children.

Miranda

Miranda Summary

Miranda always wanted to become an interactive actor (known as a "ractor" in the novel). She saves all her money until she can finally afford a full "Jodie": a high-end grid of microscopic sensors implanted all over the body. Miranda goes through the sixteen hours of torture required by the full-body, tattoo-like process. A few days later, she quits her job as a maid and goes directly to the theater district of Shanghai. She meets with Fred Epidermis, an interactive movie director who seems impressed with her many physical and acting qualities. He runs a few tests on her by modeling her character through a computer and trying out different ractors scenarios. He gives her a few lines to improvise on. Following that audition, he hires her. He assigns her to a dormitory and tells her that his commission rate is eighty percent.

Miranda Analysis

The chapter traces the history and development of a character who will become increasingly important as the novel progresses. It also emphasizes that the same technology used for implanting a powerful armament under Bud's flesh can also be used for more peaceful purposes. The chapter underlines the level of dedication that Miranda has for her job. She does not care very much for social life. She is even willing to sacrifice her physical integrity for her career.

Harv Brings Nell a Present

Harv Brings Nell a Present Summary

Harv comes home and tells Nell that among his many findings of the day, there is a present for her—something he had to fight for to keep for himself. He then gives her a heavy book with golden letters on it. When she starts browsing through the Primer's pages, the book turns itself back to the first page and begins telling the story of a girl named Elizabeth. Nell immediately closes the book and throws it away on the floor. On the following day, her mother's new boyfriend picks up the book, throws it at her head, but the book avoids her. She goes to her room and opens the book again. The book learns her real name and starts the story again, this time with the animated images of a little girl who looks just like her.

Harv Brings Nell a Present Analysis

Harv and Nell have virtually no parents. Their mother is always gone and her boyfriends change from week to week. Harv becomes Nell's father figure and he acts like a father would, only in a brotherly fashion. He gives her the copy of the Illustrated Primer that he managed to take from the victim during the attack on Hackworth. The book starts working its magic and begins to play the role of a protector. Much like Harv represents Nell's father figure, the Primer will become her mother.

Nell's First Experience with the Primer

Nell's First Experience with the Primer Summary

The Primer tells the story of a character named Princess Nell. Along with her friends, she is a prisoner in a castle located on an island. The book displays images and sounds that animate the whole story, and the latter is narrated by a soft-spoken woman who speaks with an old Victorian English accent. The voice interacts with Nell and gently teaches her how to read by adapting the story to her needs.

Nell's First Experience with the Primer Analysis

This chapter gives an overview of the Illustrated Primer's premises: a collection of stories that will slowly adapt to the girl's environment and eventually merge in as part of her life. As the book becomes an integral part of her lifestyle, Nell's life becomes more and more like the story told by the book.



A Young Hooligan before the Court of Judge Fang

A Young Hooligan before the Court of Judge Fang Summary

In the courtroom of Judge Fang, one of the judge's assistants reviews the security video of the attack on Hackworth. The video shows a few boys riding high-tech bicycles and attacking a yet unidentified victim who ends up covered in blood. The cameras are soon disabled by the boys. Yet some mites managed to track one of them down. The accused boy is sitting in the courtroom. The police recovered all the stolen objects shown in the video, except what looks like a book. The judge asks to take a look at the hat that was recovered and notices that the name of Hackworth is printed inside it. After much deliberations based on several sayings taken from the Confucian philosophy, the judge decides to be lenient towards the boy. Fang also decides to leave the book with the little girl, as books are more important to children than they are to grownups like Hackworth.

A Young Hooligan before the Court of Judge Fang Analysis

In this chapter, the reader can appreciate the Confucian logic behind the (fictive) justice system of Shanghai. Judge Fang, who will eventually become a key player in the novel, is introduced as a lenient magistrate who typically relies on tested principles of wisdom to distribute punishment where and when necessary. The judge decides to leaves the book in Nell's hands because traditional wisdom states that books have a greater value than punishment. Removing the book from her hands would do more harm than good.



Hackworth Presents the Primer to Lord Finkle-McGraw

Hackworth Presents the Primer to Lord Finkle-McGraw Summary

Hackworth gives the Primer to Lord Finkle-McGraw and explains its mechanism. He says that the book reacts to its environment. As such, the book is now looking for a little girl, which is why Finkle-McGraw is unable to make it work. Hackworth also says that he decided to have professional ractors provide the interactive voices instead of implementing it in self-contained artificial intelligence—he says that ractors allow the book to be more flexible, though at a higher cost.

Hackworth Presents the Primer to Lord Finkle-McGraw Analysis

In this chapter, the author discusses the fundamentals of the Illustrated Primer's technology and logic. It is based on Artificial Intelligence and it will follow the embedded rules of interaction to follow its course. The book refuses to work for the old Lord because it does not recognize the conditions under which it should operate.



Nell's Second Experience with the Primer

Nell's Second Experience with the Primer Summary

The Illustrated Primer gives a summary of the story of Princess Nell and her friends. They are prisoners of a dark castle on an island in the middle of the ocean. After visiting them a few times, a raven frees Nell by taking her away, along with her little friends. However, her brother Harv proves too big to be flown away and remains in the castle as a prisoner, locked behind twelve doors. The princess goes on to many adventures across the oceans. After many years, she finally succeeds in collecting the twelve keys needed to free Harv. She comes back to the castle but Harv does not recognize her and tries to kill her with an arrow. She avoids the arrow but Harv is killed in the process. The princess cries and her tears turn the castle from dark to bright. Soon afterward she becomes a great queen, happily married, and has plenty of children.

Nell's Second Experience with the Primer Analysis

The chapter is a brief overview of the story upon which the Illustrated Primer is based. It is a simple and relatively typical childrens story. The only difference between a classical story and the one previewed by the Illustrated Primer is that the heroine of the story is Nell herself. Indeed, the Primer's storyline foreshadows Nell's own adventures. Though the settings and conditions of the adventures will change, the fundamental conditions and logic will remain the same.



Judge Fang Visits his District

Judge Fang Visits his District Summary

Judge Fang visits the Leased Territories along with two of his associates. One of these associates discovers that there are two kinds of mites going around the area, apparently sent to look for a book. They conclude that the little girl's book, which was let go by the judge earlier, is the target of these searches. After examining the two kinds of mites, they find that the little robots have two separate manufacturers. Some mites were sent by Dr. X, the owner of the Flea Circus, while the others are more sophisticated and were probably designed by a high level neo Victorian engineer. Out of concern for the little girl's security, Fang concludes that they should plant some surveillance cameras in the apartment where she lives.

Judge Fang Visits his District Analysis

This chapter provides the logic that drives Judge Fang to protect the girl who owns the stolen book. Obviously, there are people out there who seek to acquire it and Judge Fang suspects that the copy she owns is just . . . a copy. Therefore, her book is not technically stolen property, since the object can be reproduced without affecting its content. Like all the Confucians, Fang values education. This logic will be applied once again when Fang joins Dr. X later in the novel; it also permits him to justify allowing the same book to be distributed to hundreds of thousands of Han refugees for educational purposes.

Description of Old Shanghai

Description of Old Shanghai Summary

Miranda is now living in an apartment located inside the Parnasse Theater in the French quarters of Old Shanghai. She plays several parts in different presentations, including interactive versions of theatrical standards. She plays Scarlet O'Hara in a rendition of "Gone with the Wind", Kate in "Taming of the Shrew", and Rhea in "Silk Road". The latter is a self-made role that earns her several good reviews from the local press. Miranda Redpath receives some advice from a passive viewer, Carl Hollywood, who owns the theater company for which she works. In between these roles, the ractor also fills in for interactive roles in a few primetime adult-related interactive movies and a few educational ractives aimed at children.

Description of Old Shanghai Analysis

This chapter describes the old city of Shanghai as a collection of remnants and artifacts, fake or real, of the older civilizations that passed through the Asian continent. It also points to the changes that the classical arts went through when the technology changed to allow for greater interactivity. For instance, old movies are now called "passives", as opposed to the popular "ractives" in which Miranda participates as an actor (or "ractor"). The novel introduces Carl Hollywood, an actor who represents the American tradition of cinematography.



Nell's Further Experiences with the Primer

Nell's Further Experiences with the Primer Summary

Responding to the many questions emanating from Nell, the Primer recounts the detailed origins of the heroic princess whose tale is at the heart of the story. The book explains that Princess Nell and her brother are in fact of royal descent. They were brought to their adoptive parents by mermaids who found them floating in a basket at sea. One day, while their father was out fishing at sea, a monster came to kidnap the babies. The mother defended her children against the monster and defeated it. Sadly, she died soon afterward from the wounds suffered during that battle. The father then hired a woman as a maid, but once the children grew up the maid delegated all the tasks to them and ended up never lifting a finger. The fisherman was eventually lost at sea and the woman locked the children in the Dark Castle, keeping them secured behind twelve locked doors. The Dark Castle was built and guarded by trolls. After reading this story, Nell gets scared and closes the book. The book then asks Nell if she would like to learn how Nell defeated the trolls.

Nell's Further Experiences with the Primer Analysis

This chapter is essentially a development based on the previous summary delivered by the Illustrated Primer to Nell. While the summary was relatively simple and childish, this expanded version is a little more intriguing. In trying to adapt the storyline to its reader, the interactive book multiplies the angles and opens up possibilities for further development. This chapter within a chapter is open-ended. It allows the story to develop along the lines that are most suited to the context of Nell's real life environment. At this point, the Illustrated Primer asks for Nell's input, which is essential to its continuation of the story and the future involvement of the reader.



Judge Fang Pays a Visit to the Celestial Kingdom

Judge Fang Pays a Visit to the Celestial Kingdom Summary

Dr. X often tried to bribe those who were working for Judge Fang, but without much success. With time, both men developed a mutual respect. Considering the current situation, Fang decides to pay an impromptu visit to the doctor. Accompanied by his two assistants, the judge travels to the old city of Shanghai. He meets with Dr. X in a teahouse located on an island which is separated from land by tortuous bridges. These bridges were designed to keep the demons out. The two men sit and discuss their relationship in various metaphoric terms. The dialogue purposely avoids anything explicitly related to the current problems and the two men part, apparently satisfied.

Judge Fang Pays a Visit to the Celestial Kingdom Analysis

This chapter basically uses Judge Fang as an agent for facilitating the upcoming turn of events. The long and seemingly pointless exchange of politeness between the judge and the potential criminal is a reflection of their motives. These men do not base their action on knee-jerk reflexes. Rather, they discuss and agree on principles and leave it to the individual to make the right decision, which should logically follow the principles they have already agreed upon.



Hackworth Receives an Unexpected Visit from Inspector Chang

Hackworth Receives an Unexpected Visit from Inspector Chang Summary

Lieutenant Chang, one of Judge Fang's assistants, arrives unannounced at the door of Hackworth. He is bringing a mostly destroyed hat which he gives back to its rightful owner. Chang tricks Hackworth in admitting that he was the victim of a crime which he did not care to report to the proper authorities. The lieutenant then shows the video of the crime and asks him about the nature of book that also disappeared. Hackworth replies that it is not worth mentioning and then wonders if he could bribe a higher-ranking officer into forgetting about the book while he faces the charges. Chang leaves the option hanging and departs, now convinced that the book has a great value.

Hackworth Receives an Unexpected Visit from Inspector Chang Analysis

In this chapter, the house of cards build by Hackwork to hide his crime (i.e., replicating the Illustrated Primer) is blown away by Chang's trickery. Chang, an adviser and assistant to Judge Fang, follows the Confucian principle of never confronting his adversaries. He uses words to trick Hackworth into admitting to his crime and confirming the value of the stolen book. The chapter also establishes Fang as a man of principles who will not fall for corruption. Instead, Chang uses the attempt to corrupt a member of the judicial as an admission of guilt on the part of Hackworth.



Miranda Takes an Interest in an Anonymous Client

Miranda Takes an Interest in an Anonymous Client Summary

Browsing through her earnings report, Miranda notices that her biggest source of revenue is coming out of her narrating role in the child ractive about Princess Nell. She decides to give priority to this role by changing the setting in the program to keep the relationship going. Soon she finds herself narrating the story for hours on end. The ractor is surprised that a small child could spend so much time in a ractive. As her experience shows, rich kids usually go to school and attend activities other than reading, leaving little time or interest for ractives of this type.

Miranda Takes an Interest in an Anonymous Client Analysis

This chapter illustrates the limits of scripted interaction. It is the first sign that the relationship between the girl and the book is leaking outside the closed boundaries of traditional reading. The chapter also points to the differences between the hard-working Victorians and the more relaxed lifestyle of outcast people like Nell.

Further Experiences with the Primer

Further Experiences with the Primer Summary

The story of Princess Nell continues. In order to keep the troll away, Harv decides to collect some wood and light a fire that will be left burning through the night. He knows that trolls only come out at night and that they do not come near a fire. Interacting with the story, Nell learns how to light a fire by hitting a metal knife with a rock and sending a spark to dry leaves and grass. The story continues and Princess Nell discovers four dolls in a hole in the ground. They come alive at night and explain that they were imprisoned in a cave by an evil woman. Upon learning that she is a princess, the animals pledge their allegiance and make a promise to defend her and her brother. The dinosaur drives the trolls away and Princess Nell is able to sleep better at night.

Further Experiences with the Primer Analysis

This chapter is the first indication that the book's intent goes beyond simply teaching its reader to read. In fact, the book allows Nell to experience real problems through a virtual reflection of herself as Princess Nell. It forces her to solve technical problems and it will not allow the story to continue unless Nell solves the puzzles she encounters. It is infinitely patient and has infinite resources. Sooner or later, the book's reader will solve the problem. This chapter is also the first test for Nell to try out her problem solving skills on her own. This mechanism of learning will soon become an essential part of the book's structure.



The Torture Chamber of Judge Fang

The Torture Chamber of Judge Fang Summary

Judge Fang and his acolytes are holding a prisoner in the torture room. They hope to get him to sign a confession. The accused is a red-headed man named PhyrePhox. In order to torture him, several microscopic robotic parasites have been inserted at the lower end of his spinal column and are standing ready to relay signals of intense pain directly to his brain. The man, a former member of the Cryptnet gang, is suspected of joining the criminal gang called the "Fists of Righteous Harmony" after his arrival in Shanghai. The prisoner does not deny this fact. According to the accusation, he also organized the crossing of several women and their children aboard a ship to the Leased Territories. He is accused of sequestering them in order to use them in human trading.

Defiant, PhyrePhox says that he will answer the accusation after they torture him and insists that they go ahead. One of Fang's assistant triggers the parasites, but this has no apparent effect on the prisoner. A device installed somewhere in the body of the former Cryptnet member prevents the parasites from working. The prisoner then responds as promised and goes on to deny the accusation. He explains that the shipment was actually a salvaging mission and that he saved the women and their children from the harsh and deadly conditions they were living under as Han peasants in inland China. Judge Fang does not believe his answer and is about to order the continuation of the torture when he is interrupted by a constable who hands the judge a scroll signed by Dr. X. After reading through the document, handwritten by the doctor in the finest calligraphy, the judge tells his associates to send PhyrePhox back to his cell and that the procedures will continue on another day.

The Torture Chamber of Judge Fang Analysis

This chapter shows another side of the Confucians' justice and the overall logic of the traditional Chinese. Torturing here takes a whole new meaning as it is a truly virtual process. No actual physical damage is incurred by the victim. Yet it is still considered torture. The point of this chapter is to show that technology is a tool that can be turned around. The intended victim uses technology to counteract the seeds of pain implanted in his body and to avoid the effects completely. However, Dr. X's timely intervention saves the prisoner from a more sophisticated form of torture. In the end, the novel leaves the reader wondering about the content of the sophisticated message sent by the doctor.



A Domestic Scene

A Domestic Scene Summary

Nell interrupts her mother and her boyfriend Tad while they are embracing on the sofa. Tad gets angry and shoves her outside the apartment, telling her to go play in the building's common playroom. At first, the little girl is lost in the corridors, but with the help of the Primer she finds her way to the playroom. When she gets there, the other children steal her precious book and play keep-away on her. Nell cries but the game stops when all the other children are victims of a mysterious and sudden illness. Nell is able to grab her book back, go to a corner and read it unbothered.

The Primer continues the story of Princess Nell. After getting rid of the trolls, Dinosaur tells his own story about how he came to outlive the other dinosaurs. After roaming the earth for a long period and finding nothing to eat but each other, there were only four dinosaurs left. On the edge of the sea, these last survivors were confronted with herds of mammals. The latter decided to keep only one of the beasts alive and eat the rest of them. The chosen one would have to pass a test: win against the mysterious Dojo. All the prehistoric reptilians failed, except Dinosaur. Dojo turned out to be a mouse, which the Tyrannosaurus Rex convinced to play tic-tac-toe. The T-Rex won and survived for millions of years, spending all his time in Dojo's cave, taking slow lessons from the master.

A Domestic Scene Analysis

In this chapter, Nell has to face yet another instance of violence and rejection. This time, she cannot rely on Harv to defend her and she is thrown out of the apartment. By now she really has a bond with the book and cannot imagine having to live without this virtual refuge and source of knowledge. The book uses some mysterious power (left unexplained in the novel) to save itself from the hands of some annoying neighbors. It finds a way to return to Nell. This incident further solidifies the relationship between the book and its reader. The embedded story told by one of the book's characters is a lesson on self-defense, aimed at showing the girl the necessity of defending herself, no matter what size she is.



Judge Fang Goes for a Dinner Cruise with a Mandarin

Judge Fang Goes for a Dinner Cruise with a Mandarin Summary

Unaccompanied, Judge Fang takes a cruise on a huge ship belonging to his host, Dr. X. The two men discuss the case of the book and Dr. X congratulates the magistrate for his handling of the situation. The men agree that leaving the book in the hands of the little girl was a decision that was perfectly suited to the teachings of Confucius. The doctor then takes the judge along for a tour of the boat. The judge discovers that the ship is filled with women and their little baby girls. All the women belong to the same phyle from inland China, the Hans. Dr. X explains that there are fifty thousand babies on board, along with their mothers. He hints that there's a quarter million more secured in other similar places. Though a multimedia presentation, he shows the judge that they are in fact being saved from the certain death that would otherwise await them on land.

Having driven his boat into the territory under Fang's jurisdiction, Dr. X offers the magistrate his surrender. Judge Fang considers the potential trouble of being suddenly responsible for so many young lives and declines to arrest him. Fang says that he does not really trust the corrupted Coastal Republic and that his true home lies in the Celestial Kingdom—the phyle of Dr. X. Dr. X explains that he needs copies of the book to raise the children. In order to do so, he needs to get his hands on Hackworth and his decryption key. Convinced, Judge Fang replies that he will help him out.

Judge Fang Goes for a Dinner Cruise with a Mandarin Analysis

This chapter marks an important turn of events in the course of the novel. Through multiple hints, the reader learns that there is something really important brewing behind the activities of Dr. X. For the latter to accomplish his goal and to empower the Hans through education, he needs the support of a powerful judicial instrument. As it turns out, Judge Fang is ideally suited for the task. By now, Dr. X knows that Judge Fang relies solely on true Confucian principles to make a decision. This is why he presents him with a situation that is perfectly in line with the teachings of the Master; however, it is considered illegal in the context of the phyle that Fang works for. Fang faces both a professional and a personal dilemma. The doctor is so convinced that he will have the judge on his side that he challenges him to arrest him as he navigates his boat into the magistrate's judicial territory. When Fang refuses to arrest him, the doctor knows that he has won his allegiance.



Hackworth's Dilemma

Hackworth's Dilemma Summary

Hackworth receives information that Dr. X has recovered the stolen copy of the Primer and that he wishes to meet the engineer. Hackworth imagines that he can use this opportunity to negotiate his way out of his problematic situation. His objective is to keep his phyle from learning of his crime. While he waits for the doctor, he watches a propaganda video of the renowned warrior and politician Zhang Han Hua. He sits with Dr. X and the men exchange compliments for a while, but they are interrupted by the appearance of Judge Fang's assistant Chang. Hackworth learns that Dr. X does not have the copy of the Primer and that the engineer is in fact under arrest.

Hackworth is taken to the court of Judge Fang, who now works for the Celestial Kingdom. The magistrate convinces the prisoner to admit to his crime and sentences him to sixteen cane strokes and ten years of imprisonment. The judge then offers to reduce the number of cane strokes to one, but only if Hackworth agrees to provide the Illustrated Primer's decryption key, so that the book can be replicated by Dr. X. He adds that upon this agreement, the prison term will be commuted to a different type of punishment. Hackworth accepts the deal and promises to make the necessary modifications to the Primer so that the Primer can be used by the hundreds of thousands of Chinese children. He receives his painful physical punishment and returns home.

Hackworth's Dilemma Analysis

In this chapter, Hackworth's situation changes completely. His initial expectation in meeting with Dr. X was that he would be offered a way out. However, he ends up with an even greater number of problems and he finds himself facing a judge threatening a physical punishment. His only way out is to give the decrypting key to Dr. X and to see his masterwork replicated to support the education of an entire population of Han refugees—a move that goes against his Victorian philosophy as it threatens the hegemony of his own phyle. However, he is used to everything being essentially computerized and under control. He cannot bear to suffer an intense cane beating. He is trapped by his own hack and sees that his situation is only get worse. Modifying the Illustrated Primer and allowing its replication to support Dr. X's humanitarian enterprise is seen as the only possible route. However, he still hopes to avoid having to reveal his "hack" to the members of his own phyle.



More Tales from the Primer

More Tales from the Primer Summary

Nell is now learning to read quite efficiently. She is resorting a lot less to the voiced interaction. Dinosaur, the animated animal from the Primer, tells Nell that he too learned a lot during the millions of years he spent training with Dojo. He says that Dojo also had other students, including Belle, a young female monkey. The mouse taught Belle how to use her opponent's strength to beat it during a fight. In the end, Belle was able to constantly beat the T-Rex by flipping him over her shoulder. This story makes Nell laugh and the Illustrated Primer starts to train her to do the same kind of physical tricks.

Nell's household changes regularly as her mother switched from one boyfriend to the next. When a violent man moves in, Nell starts to train in the playroom down the hall, along with the other kids. Nell uses the techniques taught by the Primer to beat a big and somewhat violent kid at a ball game, stunning him in the process.

More Tales from the Primer Analysis

Once again, the Illustrated Primer's lessons are put to good and immediate use by Nell. This chapter shows that education can take different shapes and that teaching doesn't have to take a direct route. Where Dinosaur represents brute force, Dojo represents the master and Belle the weak but intelligent student. This time, the lesson is not learned by imitating Dinosaur, but rather by imitating his opponent, Belle. The lesson is a metaphorical example of the power of self-control and the role of fear in a fight. By beating the threatening kid, Nell is able to gain the respect of her peers. The book has shown her that while she is not the strongest individual around, she is both fearless and more intelligent than her opponent.



Hackworth Lunches in Distinguished Company

Hackworth Lunches in Distinguished Company Summary

John Percival Hackworth sits down at a table with Major Napier and Lord Alexander Chung-Sik Finkle-McGraw. Hackworth worries that his crime is now well known. Finkle-McGraw quizzes the engineer about his understanding of the sin of hypocrisy. The Lord also discusses the origins of the Neo-Victorians. He says that the authorities are well aware of Hackworth's escapades to Shanghai and wonders what the engineer's business was in this place. Hackworth acknowledges his crime. Lord Finkle-McGraw replies that the authorities could be interested in the whereabouts of a certain Mandarin of the Celestial Kingdom, Dr. X. He offers Hackworth a way out of his problems if the latter agrees to act as a double agent for the Victorian authorities, leaving him little choice but to accept this informal deal.

Hackworth Lunches in Distinguished Company Analysis

In this chapter, Hackworth sinks deeper in the quicksand of his compounding problems. Upon learning of his travels into neighboring Chinese territory, the authorities of his phyle come to the conclusion that his activities are illegal and related to his dealing with the Illustrated Primer. However, they have a bigger problem at hand; namely, a possible revolution, which would in turn lead to a reversal of fortune for the Victorians. They allow Hackworth to go "free" (relatively speaking) if he agrees to act as a double agent and keep them informed about the activities of Dr. X.



From the Primer, the Arrival of a Sinister Baron

From the Primer, the Arrival of a Sinister Baron Summary

Nell's Illustrated Primer continues to recount the saga of Princess Nell and her brother Harv. It talks about the arrival of a sinister Baron named Jack. The huge man threatens the evil stepmother, unlocks the Dark Castle, and ties up the two children. The fairy animals untie the victims of the Baron and one of them tells Princess Nell that it is now time to devise a plan and fight back.

At Nell's home, their violent new stepfather beats both children badly, gets drunk, and falls asleep. That night, Nell opens the Primer and the story continues. Princess and her brother Harv act as servants to the Baron and serve him a feast, so the Baron does not beat the children. Nell intervenes in the story and changes the name of the Baron to Burt, the real name of their violent stepfather. She also tells the book the details of the physical violence that they had to suffer.

The Primer continues the story as the Baron falls asleep drunk and the Dinosaur tells the children to flee. Miranda stops reading the scripted story and ads that Nell and her brother should immediately flee to a police station or to an orphanage.

Instead, Nell attacks her stepfather with a screwdriver but misses. Both Nell and Harv run away from the house and down the street, followed by an enraged Burt. A strong Chinese man intervenes and knocks Burt out as the children flee. Nell opens the Illustrated Primer and tells it that the children are fleeing to the Land Beyond.

From the Primer, the Arrival of a Sinister Baron Analysis

In this chapter, Nell follows the Primer's instructions almost word for word. She waits for her temporary stepfather to fall asleep from drunkenness and then she attacks him with a screwdriver. However, the little girl is too inexperienced and fails to do him any harm. She only succeeds in getting him very mad. The children have to flee for fear of getting beaten by the drunk and violent man. This turn of event changes the dynamic of the relationship between Nell and her book. Up to this point, the Primer kept providing the girl with lessons that could be applied without much thinking. From this point forward, Nell knows that the lessons require some intelligence and that her world is no longer a distorted mirror image of the one shown by the book.



Hackworth Departs from Shanghai

Hackworth Departs from Shanghai Summary

When the airport announcer finally calls John Percival Hackworth's name, the engineer hugs and kisses his wife and daughter. He takes out a copy of the Primer and gives it to Fiona, promising that while he will be absent, he will talk to her through the book. Her daughter thanks him and Hackworth embarks on a flight to Vancouver aboard a huge aircraft carrying over two thousand passengers. He is sent on a mission by Dr. X and the Celestial Kingdom, but he does not know what the mission is. He is also acting for the Victorian's H.M. Joint Force as a double agent. Before departure, he receives an electronic message notifying him that the Primer had been found, along with a map tracing its whereabouts with a red arrowed line.

Hackworth Departs from Shanghai Analysis

In this chapter, Hackworth abandons a life that he carefully constructed so far, and prepares to step into unknown territory. He finally gives a copy of the Illustrated Primer to his daughter, which he will use to keep contact with her while he is gone. By giving Fiona the Primer, he accomplishes the goal he had set for himself, which is insuring that she will receive the education that he wanted her to have. However, he does this at the cost of his lifestyle.



Nell and Harv at Large in the Leased Territories

Nell and Harv at Large in the Leased Territories Summary

Nell and Harv run across the Territories until they reach its edge. They cross over to the forest that surrounds the territories and hide. After playing a game of hide-and-seek in the woods, Nell anticipates meeting with all of Harv's friends. However, the boy reveals that she cannot meet with them because the stolen book is valuable to Doctor X, the man who ordered his street gang to rob the neo-Victorian man. Since he told the owner of the Flea Circus that the book was lost, she cannot let them see that she has the book because the doctor would then certainly kill him. The two kids decide to camp on the beach and settle for a remote corner of the seaside. For security reasons, Nell holds the vigil while Harv sleeps. She opens her book and starts to read. . .

Nell and Harv at Large in the Leased Territories Analysis

This chapter recounts the first of Nell's ventures outside the closed environment of her apartment building. She discovers that she is even more alone than she previously thought, as she learns that she cannot count on her brother's friends to help them. All she has left is her brother, her book, and the friends from the pages of the Illustrated Primer she carries in her head.



Miranda's Reactions to the Evening's Events

Miranda's Reactions to the Evening's Events Summary

After her last emotional exchange with Nell, Miranda sits in a bar in the Theatre Parnasse. She looks quite concerned and sad. Carl Hollywood inquires about her troubles. He says that though the role is emotionally troubling, it is quite likely that if the girl is still alive, she will still need her. Miranda leaves after thanking her boss for the advice.

The Primer continues the story of the Princess. Now that the Dinosaur has killed the Baron, the children are left to confront the evil Queen. A raven offers to fly them away from the Dark Castle. However, Harv is unable to make it through a small window. Nell promises that she will come back to free him later. She takes her four magic friends away and reaches the shore where she finds a boat left by their late adoptive father. The five friends start to row but a storm soon threatens the boat and the Dinosaur decides to jump off the sinking boat in order to save the rest of his friends. The four remaining friends soon reach the shores of the kingdom of King Magpie. The raven informs the little girl that the twelve keys necessary to free her brother have been dispersed and are now in the hands of the twelve kings and queens. The latter took the keys after winning their battle against the evil Queen. The team finally makes it to the city of King Magpie.

Miranda's Reactions to the Evening's Events Analysis

The chapter reveals that Miranda is taking her interactive role quite seriously. She feels responsible for the girl's security. The line between her levels of responsibility is blurred by her personal emotions. She does not know whether she created the situation that forced Nell to face dangers while fleeing her house, or if she is just a passive instrument narrating a story that she did not write. Her friend Carl tells her that she is neither responsible nor passive; rather, she has the responsibility of continuing to help the girl through her adventures.

The Primer's storyline catches up with the real Nell story and sees the Princess escape from the Dark Castle. This marks the first episode where the real events in Nell's life are driving her ahead of the Primer's fictional account. This situation forces the little girl to use the skills and knowledge that she acquired in her past lessons and put them to practice in a strange and unknown world.



Princess Nell in the City of King Magpie

Princess Nell in the City of King Magpie Summary

By involving Nell in an interactive story where she has to confront a stranger, the fictional story told by the Illustrated Primer warns her that you should never go with a stranger, no matter how convincing they sound. Suddenly, a stranger appears on the beach and tells Nell that he wants to help her. All she has to do is to come with him without waking up her brother. However, Nell has learned her lesson and she attacks the man with her brother's nunchucks. She knocks him out and the children run away to another place on the beach, where they fall asleep under a blanket that they find along the shore.

Princess Nell in the City of King Magpie Analysis

This chapter presents yet another example of the practical lessons taught by the Illustrated Primer. This time, Nell is able to put the principles into practice immediately. This episode further strengthens the relationship between the book and its reader. The author purposely blurs the division between the fictional story of the book and the real life of the reader.

Mysterious Souvenir from Dr. X

Mysterious Souvenir from Dr. X Summary

Before his departure, Hackworth meets with one of Dr. X's couriers. The man hands him a card containing a program to generate a big and unidentified item from a matter compiler as soon as he reaches his destination. Once in Vancouver, Hackworth forwards the map indicating the movements of the original copy of the Illustrated Primer to Finkle-McGraw, along with a letter noting that it took two years to locate the lost copy because the book probably remained inside a building during all that period. Lord Finkle-McGraw answers that he cannot wait to meet the girl and her book. Hackworth uses the card in a matter compiler and the latter produces a mechanical horse that is able to fold into a suitcase. He names his new mount "Kidnapper".

Mysterious Souvenir from Dr. X Analysis

In this episode, Hackworth performs his duties to both masters: the Confucians of the Celestial Kingdom and the Victorians. By relaying the information about the location of Nell's copy of the Illustrated Primer to Finkle-McGraw, Hackworth hopes that the old man will not take the book away from the girl. Even though the book was stolen from him, he knows too well the value of the relationship that the book established with its owner, rightful or not. He christens the mechanical horse "Kidnapper" in reference to the possible reaction of Finkle-McGraw.



A Morning Stroll through the Leased Territories

A Morning Stroll through the Leased Territories Summary

Nell and Harv arrive at the gates of the Dovetail enclave. Talking in a perfect neo-Victorian style just as the Primer taught her, Nell addresses the Constable on guard and asks to talk to a blacksmith named Brad. Brad is an ex-boyfriend of Tequila, one of the very few men she ever dated and that Nell liked. The Constable is impressed by Nell's language skills. Despite the children's beaten look, he says that he will contact Brad. He then invites the two kids in the gatehouse while they wait. He takes the nunchucks away from Harv and locks them in a drawer, explaining that they are against the rules of Dovetail. After consulting a few papers, he leaves the book with Nell but warns her not to let anyone else see it.

A Morning Stroll through the Leased Territories Analysis

This chapter marks the first social steps taken by Nell outside of her own community. She knows from the lessons she followed with the Illustrated Primer that language is the key to social connectivity. She instinctively realizes that she is in Victorian territory and uses their sophisticated syntax and style to convince the guard that even though she is not one of them, she is not different from them. Language allows her to connect and establish an immediate relationship. Since the children know one of the members of Dovetail, they are more likely to be allowed inside the gated community. The Constable is caught off-guard by Nell's language and he ends up letting both children in.

A New Friend

A New Friend Summary

A red-headed woman shows up on a horse at the gatehouse. She tells the children that she is a long-time friend of Brad and that the latter will only be available later, as he is busy at work. She takes the two kids across Dovetail and then to the Millhouse, where they wait for Brad. She explains that the workers of Dovetail produce objects by hand using original material such as wood and metal and real hand-made paper. The goods are then sold to the Victorians. Apparently, they value the real things over fake ones. Brad shows up early and glances over the children. He insists that the residents of Dovetail cannot afford to harbor criminals such as members of street gangs, as this would put the whole community in danger of police reprisals. Harv gets the message and disappears toward the sea, leaving his sister in tears.

A New Friend Analysis

In this chapter, Nell establishes contact with her mother's ex-boyfriend and finds a new friend but loses the only person that she could count on: her brother Harv. She is left to find her own friends, provide her own security, and develop new relationships of her own. Luckily, she is in a somewhat secured environment and should remain safe as long as she stays within the perimeter of the Dovetail enclave.



Orphans of the Han...

Orphans of the Han... Summary

Aboard one of the seven floating orphanages, Judge Fang picks up a copy of the Illustrated Primer that is on a pile being churned out by the autonomous matter compiler. The book has been modified by Hackworth to use only its internal voice and to teach the particulars of the Chinese culture. Fang walks to one of the rooms full of little Han girls and hands out the copy of the book to one of them. He observes her as she gets immersed in the Primer's interactive content. Judge Fang reflects on some teaching by the great Confucius.

Orphans of the Han... Analysis

In this chapter, Judge Fang is able to see for himself the effect of the book on the young Han refugees. The content of the book has been adapted to the needs of the Chinese. The book is still interactive, although the interactive narration is completely driven by the Artificial Intelligence provided by the software. There is no more ractor behind the storytelling. This was necessary, given the drain on live acting resources that hundreds of thousands of new Primers would generate.



Hackworth Receives an Ambiguous Message

Hackworth Receives an Ambiguous Message Summary

Kidnapper carries Hackworth around the city. The engineer finds a few fortune cookies in a compartment of his mechanical mount. He opens one of them and finds a mysterious message enjoining him to seek the Alchemist. The horse brings him to a park located near the beach. Hackworth sees a naked woman covered with shimmering bits of lights. He gets off the mechanical horse and start following the woman. She disappears under the waves and Hackworth is sucked underwater and into a cave. The woman reappears and he follows her through some tunnels which end in a dome-like room partially covered by a huge screen.

Hackworth Receives an Ambiguous Message Analysis

This chapter narrates an almost surreal series of events that takes Hackworth through the city of Vancouver and into the Drummers' hideout, located in underground caves and whose entrance is hidden by the ocean. The tunnels are described as a complex network of interconnected routes with no indication of a clear path. This pattern reflects the architecture of the Drummers' philosophy of sharing information in a distributed fashion. The author purposely leaves the reader wondering what is happening and why. The chapter also folds the first of this two-part novel. Now all the characters are well defined and all the elements are in place for the real development.



Part the Second: Hackworth has a Singular Experience

Part the Second: Hackworth has a Singular Experience Summary

Hackworth witnesses an unusual spectacle as a young woman appears to the sound of heavy drumbeats in a darker corner of the room. She is covered in light tattoos and dances as dozen of excited naked men form a circle around her. After a while, the woman falls on her back and all the men take their turn at her, finishing quickly. Once they are done, the woman catches fire and burns to ashes. The drumbeats stop and the ashes are poured into a steel drum. All the men take their turn at drinking the resulting concoction. Once this strange ritual is over, the men wander off.

Part the Second: Hackworth has a Singular Experience Analysis

In this first chapter of the second and final part, Hackworth is witness to a strange sexual ritual. The Drummers share their personality and intelligence by performing an intense orgy of drugs, sex, and sounds. In the end, they sacrifice one of their members in order for that person to be integrated with the rest of the community by drinking her ashes. This ritual is an allegorical representation of ancient rituals meant to keep the primitive communities together.



Nell's Life at Dovetail

Nell's Life at Dovetail Summary

The story told by the Primer sees Princess Nell and her friends entering the castle of King Magpie and stealing the first golden key, as well as a few magical books. After escaping to a forest in the neighboring kingdom, one of the friends, Peter Rabbit, is left without a goal and disappears, never to return.

Following Constable Moore's advice, Nell leaves her Primer behind while she visits the New Atlantis enclave. She rides along with the red-headed woman, Rita, and her horse Eggshell. Rita explains to Nell that, like all the inhabitants of Dovetail, she works for the neo-Victorians, but she doesn't belong to their cast. They pay a quick visit to a parlor. Rita then brings Nell to a bigger building called "Miss Matheson's Academy of the Three Graces". The woman tells the girl that from now on she will study there, although she will not be allowed to live in the academy like the other students. They go back to Dovetail and Nell learns that she will have to live with Constable Moore. The latter tells her that because the gatehouse is not suited for a little girl, she will occupy the garden house.

Nell's Life at Dovetail Analysis

In this chapter, Nell is integrated with the Dovetail community. By protecting the Primer's student, Lord Finkle-McGraw insures that her education is not lost and that the experience of the Primer that he commissioned leads to something meaningful. Nell's inclusion among the Victorian students of the Academy is a calculated move from Finkle-McGraw to allow the teachings of the Primer to run its course. Through its story, the Primer instructs Nell that she will not need the skills necessary to survive in the wilderness anymore. This is why Peter Rabbit disappears.



Carl Hollywood's Activities at the Parnasse

Carl Hollywood's Activities at the Parnasse Summary

Miranda gets curious about her boss' activities and asks Carl Hollywood to let him in on his technical skills. They meet in a restaurant and discuss technology over a milkshake. Carl goes on to describe the network. He lets her know that the distributed communication network makes it nearly impossible to trace back the origins of a communication. Hence, she would face an incredibly difficult task locating the real person behind Princess Nell. Miranda goes back to her apartment, takes a bath, and imagines that she must find a different way to find Nell.

Carl Hollywood's Activities at the Parnasse Analysis

In this chapter, the author leaves it to Carl Hollywood to explain the intricacies of the technology behind the Illustrated Primer's interactive features. Miranda realizes that it will be impossible for her to reach Nell directly and starts to examine how she will be able to get to her "daughter" without resorting to the networking technology.



General Description of Life with the Constable

General Description of Life with the Constable Summary

During the next several years, Nell expands her knowledge by studying at the Academy. The school teaches her new facts and skills. It also allows her to expand her personality by interacting with real people. She continues to live alongside Corporal Moore. She grows her own garden near her quarters and will usually cook dinner for both of them. One day, she discovers that the guard uses one of the gardenhouse's rooms to relive his past as a warrior through a series of interactive media screens ("mediatrons" in the novel). She tries out the interactive historical reconstruction by herself but gets scared by the characters which do not seem to be responding to her presence in the way she anticipated. Constable Moore takes her away from the playroom and they discuss their respective past. She finds out that his real name is Colonel Arthur Hornsby Moore, a retired ranking officer from a great Chinese army.

Moore tells Nell that she needs to take advantage of her experiences in order to face the world as it is. They are both warriors and scarred, the only difference is that she does not know yet how to use that experience to her profit. The Constable demonstrates his principles by taking on the girl in a fight which he easily wins by grabbing her hair. He also tells her that the lessons from the book are not always what they seem. When the Primer's suggestions fail, the failure itself accomplishes something important for Nell.

General Description of Life with the Constable Analysis

In this chapter, Constable Moore bonds with Nell and they share their experiences. The girl discovers that the Constable has a lot of experience that he cannot put to use as a Dovetail guard. However, he manages to maintain this experience by participating in interactive movies that recreate the situations in which he was once involved. Nell learns that experiences, even the painful ones, are just as valuable as the good ones. Moore also teaches her that techniques and skills are not always sufficient to get through a difficult situation. He demonstrates that experience has to be merged with the skills and knowledge she acquires through her education in order to maximize her chances of getting ahead.



Carl Hollywood Returns from Abroad

Carl Hollywood Returns from Abroad Summary

Carl Hollywood returns from a month-long trip to London, which he undertook partly for business, partly for personal reasons. The rest of the company welcomes him with a party. He sits down with Miranda and discusses the development of her racing career. Miranda tells him that she spends most of her evenings on the Princess Nell ractive. She hints that she is beginning to feel and even act like the girl's mother. Hollywood points out that as long as the job pays the bills, it does not really matter what she does.

Carl Hollywood Returns from Abroad Analysis

Miranda reveals to Carl that she developed motherly feelings toward the Primer's apprentice. Carl insists that there is nothing wrong with this situation and that he does not want her to cut her relationship short, as long as the activity continues to pay the bills.



Three Girls Go Exploring

Three Girls Go Exploring Summary

Nell, Fiona Hackworth, and Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw are playing outside the manor of the latter's grandfather. The three eight-year-old girls are running across the green field. Each one of them is carrying a copy of the Primer. They are being watched from inside the manor by Lord Finkle-McGraw and his guest, Mrs. Gwendolyn Hackworth. The duo examines quite attentively the behavior of the three friends as they play games and discuss. A game played by the girls around a wall shows that Nell can use her knowledge and experience better than her two friends. Mrs. Hackworth inquires about her husband's whereabouts, but Finkle-McGraw replies they have no indication that he is in any danger. The children return to the manor and Mrs. Hackworth retires to her room with Fiona to write a letter to her husband.

Three Girls Go Exploring Analysis

The three owners of the real Primers (the copies that rely on real actors) quickly became close friends. Through the book, they have had similar experiences and have developed similar skills. However, their experiences differ quite significantly and Nell's experience puts her ahead of the other two girls when the time comes to apply her skills to real-life situations.

The familial situation of the Hackworths is starting to deteriorate substantially. Gwendolyn is increasingly worried about her husband and her future. She does not understand why her husband is away and why she should continue maintaining a relationship with him, considering that do not have any contact with each other anymore. Finkle-McGraw cannot do more than reassure her that John Percival is safe. However, that does not prove sufficient for the woman.



Miranda Receives an Unusual Ractive Message

Miranda Receives an Unusual Ractive Message Summary

Miranda's co-workers insist on inviting her out to the Cathay Hotel in another part of town. She is in a hurry and does not have time to dress up for the occasion and joins them in casual clothing. She meets Carl Hollywood at the premises and the latter tells her that she has to meet a man named Beck, a personal friend and businessman of his. Apparently, he has a project planned for her. She sits with Beck and another man. They hint that they might be able to help her establish contact with the real Nell if she helps them. Beck then invites her to the dance floor.

Miranda Receives an Unusual Ractive Message Analysis

This chapter introduces two new and somewhat shady characters in the life of Miranda. Miranda sees this meeting as an opportunity to eventually establish contact with Nell and accepts their request. One of them invites Nell to dance, in effect seducing her with his plan, which will be revealed later as a plan to infiltrate the Drummers' tribe.



From the Primer, Princess Nell Enters into the Lands of King Coyote.

From the Primer, Princess Nell Enters into the Lands of King Coyote. Summary

The Illustrated Primer's continuing story picks up when the Princess reaches the land of the last and most powerful Fairy King: King Coyote. Her remaining magical friends are now gone. One has parted to fly away with another animal of his kind. The other was killed in the last great battle that saw her defeat the evil Djinn King. Princess Nell is now carrying eleven of the twelve keys around her neck. However, a crow steals all the keys from her and flies away.

From the Primer, Princess Nell Enters into the Lands of King Coyote. Analysis

In this chapter, the novel indicates that Nell's activities are more integrated with the Illustrated Primer by blurring the separation between the two stories. From this point on, Nell is involved in solving the practical problems faced by the virtual Princess Nell. This is indicated by the loss of the eleven keys collected by the princess; it also forces Nell to attack the problems from a completely different angle, this time with a lot less help from the Primer (signified by the loss of her friends). From now on, she will have to resort to a lot of technical knowledge and will need to use and develop her own problem-solving skills based on experience.

Nell's Experiences at School

Nell's Experiences at School Summary

The Academy was named after three "Graces" which are represented by Miss Ramanujan, Mrs. Matheson, and Miss Stricken. These women and their assistants teach classes in curriculum that corresponded to boom, brilliance, and joy, respectively. Out of these three teachers, Miss Stricken is the most problematic to the children. Her classes teach discipline and order, which does not seem to be related to joy at all. In fact, Miss Stricken teaches discipline with an excessive zeal. Miss Stricken eventually assigned Fiona, Elizabeth, and Nell to a supplementary curriculum that extends their class hours all through the day on Saturdays, effectively occupying the only day that the girls had for themselves. On Saturdays, the girls are now forced to sit in class side by side and silently copy page after page of old historical archive documents.

After a few months of this military regime, Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw leaves the Academy, not to return. She is a rebel and she will eventually be sighted in different places around the world, alongside some members of the CryptNet phyle. Mrs. Matheson, the Academy's principal, tells the two remaining girls that she is perfectly aware that Mrs. Stricken is by no mean fun to deal with. In fact, her classes' activities have no real purpose except to teach them patience and self-discipline. After Matheson's speech, Nell has less trouble dealing with Miss Stricken and her discipline, but Fiona continues to have some problems with it. A few months later, the Hackworths move out to a new island. Mrs. Hackworth is now divorced from Fiona's father.

Nell's Experiences at School Analysis

This chapter marks another turning point in Nell's life. First, she is forced to perform highly repetitive and seemingly useless tasks for the sole purpose of staying in the Academy. This mirrors the previous chapter of the Illustrated Primer's story and the lost keys. Mrs. Matheson confirms that the classes of Miss Stricken do not have a purpose other than to teach patience and obedience, which is sometimes an important life lesson.



Hackworth Awakes from a Dream

Hackworth Awakes from a Dream Summary

Hackworth is having sex with someone he cannot identify. It all seems to him like a dream, the last of countless more. All those dreams include intense sexual intercourse with different people, always in the same environment. He decides to awake and reject these dreams. He has to get out of this place. He manages to crawl out through the tunnels and back to the park where he first encountered the woman. He finds Kidnapper still waiting for him. The mechanical horse is wearing his bowler on its head. Hackworth does not know how long he's been gone, but he knows that the horse and the hat have both turned partly green from growing moss. Hackworth himself is hairier and greyer than before.

Hackworth Awakes from a Dream Analysis

Though he does not fully realize it yet, Hackworth has spent the length of the prison sentence delivered by Judge Fang having sex with multiple people in a trance partially enhanced with drugs and other substances. He will later learn that his awakening from the trance was triggered by a substance injected in one of the participants (the last person he was having sex with) and designed to fight the drugs that were keeping him prisoner of the trance-like state.



From The Primer, Princess Nell Crosses the Trail of the Enigmatic Mouse Army

From The Primer, Princess Nell Crosses the Trail of the Enigmatic Mouse Army Summary

While Princess Nell wanders in the country of King Coyote, she comes upon a clearing in the forest that appears to be the product of a huge army of mice and cats. Apparently the mice are using the cats as mounts. She remembers having once encountered a strange mouse looking through her papers. She trapped it and the mouse insisted on learning her name, but Nell did not answer and the mouse was later found dead.

Nell goes out to the Leased Territories to visit her brother Harv. He now lives in a shelter, attached almost permanently to a breathing tube linked to a matter compiler. This mechanism allows him to breathe correctly as he lies down on a mattress. Harv tells Nell not to forget her brother, as he is the one who brought her the book that made her the beautiful and powerful woman she is now. Nell leaves with tears in her eyes and goes back to her house.

From The Primer, Princess Nell Crosses the Trail of the Enigmatic Mouse Army Analysis

This chapter describes a story told by the Illustrated Primer that is strangely prescient of Nell's future adventures, including her encounter with the Han women and her rise to the rank of head of their phyle which indeed looks a lot like an army of mice.

Nell has now grown into a full-fledged woman. She visits her brother regularly, but the poor man is now heavily handicapped by a respiratory problem that forces him to stay in bed all day long. He says that he is proud of his sister and reminds her not to forget that he was the one who allowed all this by bringing her the magical book. Instead of making a judgment on Nell's person from the neutral, third-person voice of the text, the novel uses Harv's voice.



Hackworth is Brought Up-To-Date by the Great Napier

Hackworth is Brought Up-To-Date by the Great Napier Summary

John Percival Hackworth communicates with Colonel Napier through a mediatron. The latter explains that Hackworth has spent ten years with the Drummers, which means that he completed his sentence. He was awoken from his dream-like state by drugs introduced in the last victim of the Drummers' ritual. He also reveals that the engineer is now divorced and that his ex-wife is living in a neo Victorian enclave in Seattle.

Hackworth is Brought Up-To-Date by the Great Napier Analysis

After learning that he has completed his sentence, Hackworth feels somewhat relieved. However, he soon learns that the sentence also means the end of his marriage and his family life: "She was remarkably understanding about your long absence," Napier said, "but at some point it became evident that, like all the Drummers, you had become sexually promiscuous in the extreme." "How did she know?" "We warned her." (p. 310).

Hackworth learns nothing new about the Alchemist that he is supposed to seek. Yet he learns that the Drummers are using sex to exchange molecules of data that can only travel from one individual to another through bodily fluids.



From the Primer, a Visit to Castle Turing

From the Primer, a Visit to Castle Turing Summary

Nell surveys the territory entered by her fictional alter ego and she realizes that she will have to visit seven castles before she can recover the stolen keys. By now, Constable Moore disappears frequently into Chinese territory for weeks at a time. When he gets back, he drinks heavily and plays his bagpipe into the night.

The Illustrated Primer continues its story as Princess Nell knocks on the door of the first castle. She is immediately imprisoned by mechanical guards in what is revealed as Castle Turing. The guards are robots who seem to respond to orders given through chains of binary commands. She manages to communicate with someone who calls himself Duke of Turing, using the chains she finds everywhere. By communicating a poem to the Duke, she discovers that the so-called Duke is not a human being, but rather a robot like everyone else in the building. She unlocks the secret of the Turing machine and concludes that everything can be programmed by a serial sequence of binary commands.

Nell is called to Mrs. Matheson's deathbed. The latter tells her that she is destined to becoming great and that she protected by someone she does not know. She asks Nell never to forget her or what she learned at the Academy. Nell leaves the premises in tears.

Later she meets with Constable Moore, who says he has returned one last time from the land of China where he was acting as a consultant with a great General. The latter has now perished. He tells Nell that she must remember what he taught her and to be on the lookout for the Fist of Righteous Harmony.

From the Primer, a Visit to Castle Turing Analysis

This chapter marks the end of Nell's formal education at the Victorian academy. Mrs. Matheson is about to die and Constable Moore has run out of will to live. Both these characters instruct the young woman that she should remember what they taught her. They tell her that she has to use her lessons and experience and make the best of it. Just as she previously felt that the Primer's lessons were coming to an end, she now sees that everyone involved in her education is also near the end of their life.



The Hackworths Have a Family Reunion

The Hackworths Have a Family Reunion Summary

John Percival Hackworth goes to Seattle to visit his now ex-wife. The two of them speak in very respectful terms. However, when the engineer requests to talk to his daughter who has just stepped in the house, his ex-wife gets angry and hands him the divorce contracts. The latter prohibits any relationship between the father and daughter. She asks him to read it and abide to its terms. As he leaves, his daughter follows him, then jumps on his mechanical horse and leaves with him.

The Hackworths Have a Family Reunion Analysis

In this chapter, the engineer makes an attempt to reconcile with his ex-wife. However, they can only interact in a very formal, Victorian way. Seeing that he will be unable to reconstruct his life with Gwendolyn, he proceeds to talk to his daughter. Gwendolyn suspects that he is now part of the highly immoral Drummers phyle and has already made the necessary legal arrangements to prevent him from continuing his relationship with their only child. Hackworth's daughter Fiona is now a teenager and she has been raised, if only partially, by her father through the Primer (which he authored). When she runs away with Hackworth, she asserts that this relationship, though mainly virtual, is more important to her than the motherly love that she outgrown.



Carl Hollywood Takes the Oath

Carl Hollywood Takes the Oath Summary

Carl Hollywood joins the Atlantis phyle and meets Lord Finkle-McGraw. The Lord congratulates the actor. Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw has since changed her alliance and has left the Victorians in order to join the CryptNet phyle. The Lord asks Carl about the ractor who plays the narrator in Nell's Illustrated Primer. Carl responds that Miranda has left the theater a few years ago to join the Drummers. She is getting paid by two financiers but she continues to work on the Primer and cannot be reached.

Carl Hollywood Takes the Oath Analysis

Carl Hollywood is an American who was raised in the American West. As an artist, he feels more at home with the anglophile Victorians than with any of the other phyles on the eastern coast of the Asian continent. To the old Lord Finkle-McGraw, this makes up for the loss of his granddaughter to the revolutionaries of CryptNet. His interest in the ractor that managed the relationship between Nell and her copy of the Illustrated Primer is partly dictated by the fact that he considers Nell's experience to be the only successful use of the book he commissioned. He knows that even though he should not intervene in that relationship, he doesn't stop being curious about the whereabouts of the woman who managed that success.



Nell's Passage through Pudong

Nell's Passage through Pudong Summary

Nell crosses the arched Causeway over to Shanghai and ventures with caution into the Pudong Economic Zone. She enters a sophisticated and much advertised brothel owned by Madame Ping, where she requests a job. She says that she does not want to work as a prostitute, but rather as a scriptwriter. She meets with the owner and they both discuss the newcomer's qualifications over a cup of tea. Nell asserts that she knows the New Atlantis phyle and its inner workings better than anyone. Since the members of this phyle are the wealthiest class in the area, she argues that she will be perfectly fitted to script fantasies suited to their desires. The Madame explains that the clientele of the brothel seeks these sophisticated fantasies even though they are usually not neo Victorians. However, they aspire to attain their level of sophistication . . . as a fantasy.

Nell's Passage through Pudong Analysis

In this chapter, the passage of Nell through the Pudong suburb marks another important step in her life. She is now acting on her own and she has to face the world without the help of anyone. Just like Princess Nell's character in the Illustrated Primer, all her friends are now gone and she can only rely on her knowledge, skills, and experience to get by. She succeeds in traversing the murky city without any trouble and she heads for the brothel where she thinks she can find work. Nell uses her profound knowledge of the customs and character of the Victorians, as well as the reading and writing lessons she learned from the teachings of the Illustrated Primer, to convince Madame Ping that she is better suited to write erotic scripts for her girls than any external writer they might otherwise employ.



Peculiar Practices in the Woods

Peculiar Practices in the Woods Summary

Following the indications provided by a message that was left in a different fortune cookie by Dr. X., Fiona Hackworth and her father travel outside Seattle and into the surrounding forest. They discover a group of people belonging to the "Reformed Distributed Republic". The engineer explains to his daughter the working of this particular phyle. They sit down to interview a woman named Maggie. John Percival feels as though he met her in his previous, dream-like state while he was staying with the Drummers, but cannot recall the exact circumstances. She says that while she was living in London (as a man), she had a relationship with Mr. Beck, a member of the CryptNet phyle. The interview concludes and Hackworth explains to his daughter that CryptNet is intent on providing an alternative Feed, which they call the Seed. Akin to their own ways of exchanging data physically and their strong interdependencies, the Seed would provide an independent and democratic source of molecular feed to the compilers. As most Victorians, Hackworth is strongly opposed to this democratization of the molecular feed, as it could lead to the creation of anything by anyone, without any sort of centralized control. Hackworth and his daughter ride back to Seattle and hop on an airship leaving for London.

Peculiar Practices in the Woods Analysis

This chapter follows Hackworth and his daughter in a quest for the essence of the revolution that is brewing everywhere. Following Dr. X's indication, they find a member of such a rebellious phyle in the woods near Seattle. Hackworth gives a short explanation of the technical foundation of the revolt. He points out that their idea is potentially very dangerous to their society: "CryptNet's true desire is the Seed—a technology that, in their diabolical scheme, will one day supplant the Feed, upon which our society and many others are founded. Protocol, to us, has brought prosperity and peace—to CryptNet, however, it is a contemptible system of oppression. They believe that information has an almost mystical power of free flow and selfreplication, as water seeks its own level or sparks fly upward—and lacking any moral code, they confuse inevitability with Right." (p. 353).



From The Primer, Princess Nell's Activities as Duchess of Turing

From The Primer, Princess Nell's Activities as Duchess of Turing Summary

While Nell is working at the brothel, she befriends many of the other Chinese girls and starts to bond with them and their culture. At night, she spends her time with her book and works through the enigmas and technical problems. In the Illustrated Primer, Princess Nell slowly but surely solves the mysteries of the castles around Castle Turing. Her programming skills allowed her to control the army of robotic soldiers and replace the Duke as the Duchess of Turing. She soon finds that each of the remaining castles is plagued by a problem caused by a mysterious Black Knight, and that each solution is an application of the programming techniques she learned in solving the problems encountered in the previous castles. In the third castle, she had to master the art of ciphering. Through this technique, she manages to conquer the three remaining castles and to recover the eleven keys that she had previously lost at the beak of the nefarious raven. Equipped with everything she needs, she heads for the seventh and final castle.

From The Primer, Princess Nell's Activities as Duchess of Turing Analysis

Using the story of Princess Nell as a basis, this chapter gives a few lessons in the fundamentals of programming as it recounts the steps taken by Nell to solve the mysteries of the Black Knight. The two characters named "Nell" are now one and the princess is more like a character in a role-playing game.



Nell Goes to Madame Ping's Theatre

Nell Goes to Madame Ping's Theatre Summary

By now, the Pudong suburb is the victim of sporadic but sustained attacks by the rebels. The latter commit acts of terrorism and burn the Feed lines that crisscross the city. Their limited means and their antiquated beliefs make most of their assaults on the Feed relatively useless. However, the Fists are relentless and manage to raise the level of insecurity within the city to a very high level. One day, Nell observes one of her scripted fantasy scenarios as it is played out by some girls and their client, Colonel Napier. This is the same colonel of Her Majesty's Joint Forces that had previously rescued John Percival Hackworth. Seeing that the script was going nowhere and that the client was falling asleep, she orders the main actor to change the scenario in order to extract information from Napier. The latter is excited in this new turn of event.

The scenario is interrupted by a surprise attack of the Fist of Righteous Harmony. Shots are fired and the security guards are overwhelmed. However, Napier quickly recovers his clothes and, as a man of honor and an experienced military, he fights back, killing a few rebels with his saber in the process. Nell manages to take out a few rebels herself on her own and they regain control of the building. Nell starts to wonder if her connection to the Primer is similar to Napier's relationship with the stories that he is being led into by the scripted scenarios during his visits to the brothel.

Nell Goes to Madame Ping's Theatre Analysis

In this chapter, the revolution becomes something concrete and the characters have to start dealing with its consequence. Through these furious developments, the novel also indicates that the wall between reality and meaningful fiction is fragile. As the Primer is nearing its end, Nell sees this wall as crumbling and wonders who she will find behind it, wondering, "Could it be that the Primer was just a conduit, a technological system that mediated between Nell and some human being who really loved her?" (p. 371).

Carl Hollywood Returns to Shanghai

Carl Hollywood Returns to Shanghai Summary

Dressed as a cowboy, Carl Hollywood walks the streets of Shanghai for the first time in years. He barely recognizes the city, which is now on the verge of chaos. He recounts his youth as a coder on his grandfather's ranch in the Western United States, then his flight to the big city and his ensuing career as an actor and a company director. He enters a teahouse that he used to visit on a regular basis while he was working at the Theatre Parnasse, which is located nearby. He sits down and orders tea, then starts writing a paper. He is trying desperately to connect Miranda to the information that he has gathered so far.

Carl Hollywood Returns to Shanghai Analysis

This chapter re-introduces Carl Hollywood, this time as an actor who is coming back to where he first established his success. The section serves several purposes; namely, to give a summary of the situation in Shanghai, to establish a relationship between Hollywood's current affiliation with the Victorians and his past as an aristocratic American, and finally to indicate that the Victorians know the importance of Miranda and are now trying to contact her.



The Hackworths in Transit, and in London

The Hackworths in Transit, and in London Summary

On their way to London, Fiona inquires of her father about his real goal and wonders who the Alchemist is and why he should keep seeking him. John Hackworth is unable to give her a clear answer. Once they reach London, Fiona and her father ride their horses to a pier and embark on a barge that looks like a flat floating tub. Traveling along with a few other clients, they are involved into a complex theatrical show managed by a theater company called *Dramatis Personae*. The highly interactive show is an allegorical ride through John Percival Hackworth's own life. In the end, the spectators reveal that Hackworth was in fact the main character of the show. Once the virtual adventure is over, Hackworth announces that he found what he was looking for and that they are returning to Shanghai. Fiona replies that he will be returning alone because she found her true calling in theater and is joining the company.

The Hackworths in Transit, and in London Analysis

This chapter uses a virtual setting, full of incongruous situations and almost surreal dialogues, to turn a dynamically constructed fictional story into Hackworth's revelation: he is the Alchemist that he was ordered to seek. The virtual situations allowed him to bring all his thoughts together and to see himself as he is.



Carl Hollywood's Hack

Carl Hollywood's Hack Summary

Carl Hollywood, still sitting in the teahouse after twenty-four hours, manages to get what he is looking for. He now knows that the Drummers are in fact a tribe that uses the rituals and the distributed power of their minds to discover the large prime numbers that are keys to deciphering the codes used by encrypted data. For example, these numbers would enable the revolutionaries to break the code used by the banks to secure financial transactions.

Hollywood is able to follow the whole show through floating cameras from his seat at the teahouse. In fact, his friends at Dramatis Personae allow him to control the interactive show involving Hackworth. By manipulating the events and characters from the confines of the teahouse, Hollywood is able to retrieve an important key to Hackworth, Dr. X, Nell, and even Miranda's characters.

Carl Hollywood's Hack Analysis

The novel finally reveals the true nature of Carl Hollywood. His passage to the Victorian phyle was previously shown to derive from his aristocratic upbringing. Carl Hollywood is a master in the fine art of theater and he possesses the necessary knowledge of the typical reactions of the actors who are involved in a interactive play. As this chapter shows, the combination of the latter knowledge with his advanced technical skills allowed him to manipulate the sequence of virtual events and to trick Hackworth into revealing an important clue to the whereabouts of the important players in the ongoing revolution.



From the Primer, Princess Nell's Ride to the Castle of King Coyote

From the Primer, Princess Nell's Ride to the Castle of King Coyote Summary

In the story told by the Illustrated Primer, Princess Nell rides a horse across mountains and finally arrives in the city of King Coyote. The King's castle is not defended by armed guards and the heroine is able to slip unnoticed in the back of a lineup of messengers, bringing the King the ciphered messages from the city. All the messages are interpreted by a noisy mechanical machine called Wizard 0.2. She carries a coded message containing a programming error. When the Wizard starts reading Nell's message, the machine comes to a halt and the whole city and all its inhabitants disappear in a flash. The princess now faces King Coyote alone. He is a middle-aged man wearing the twelfth key around his neck. He hands her the key and tells her that his real name is John. He says that since he does not have a kingdom anymore, his task is done and he will continue his own quest. Addressing Nell directly, John Hackworth confirms that there is another person involved in this story, but in order to meet her, Nell will need to follow the book's instructions and to make room for her. Then the ruler of the Land Beyond disappears in a flash.

Princess Nell finds herself in the library surrounded by an army of mice covering the floor and hailing their new queen, Princess Nell. After Nell spells out the magic words from the book, the hundreds of thousands of mice are transformed into as many girls, proclaiming their fealty to their queen.

From the Primer, Princess Nell's Ride to the Castle of King Coyote Analysis

The Primer makes it clear from the start of this episode of the story that the princess will have to rely not on her strength or skills, but on her intelligence to vanquish her last hurdle: "King Coyote did not preserve his power by armed might but by cleverness, and sentinels were the only army he needed, information his only weapon." (p. 402).

Nell's mastery of the coding techniques, which she developed by solving the problems of the first six castles, allowed her to quickly outwit King Coyote, the ruler of the Land Beyond. She introduced a hidden programming error in the message. The error stalled the whole decoding process and brought the machine to a halt. Hackworth then spoke directly to Nell after she inquires about Miranda, the ractor that guided her through over a decade of Primer lessons. The prescient book then tells her that she will soon lead an army of women who are about her age.



Hackworth in China

Hackworth in China Summary

Back in Chinese territory, Hackwork rides his mount across different provinces. During his ride, he can observe the effects of the ongoing revolution on the landscape. He reaches Suzhou, where he stops in front of what used to be a MacDonal restaurant. He is led inside the building and meets with Dr. X. The doctor confirms that Hackworth is indeed the Alchemist he was seeking. He reveals to the engineer that his years spent with the Drummers served only one purpose: to integrate his technical knowledge with the rest of the Drummers so that it could be used to complete the doctor's project. The process was short-circuited by the Victorians' intervention, but the amount of information gathered was still significant enough to allow the revolution to go through and build the Seed. The doctor explains that the Seed is closer to the way the Chinese culture works: "As the Master said, 'Let the producers be many and the consumers few.' When the Feed came in from Atlantis, From Nippon, we no longer had to plant, because the rice now came from the matter compiler. It was the destruction of our society. When our society was based upon planting, it could truly be said, as the Master did, 'Virtue is the root; wealth is the result.'" (p. 423).

Hackworth leaves the doctor, not yet totally convinced that he did the right thing. While on his way to Shanghai, he crosses paths with a great number of battalions composed of young Chinese women fighting against the members of the Fist of Righteous Destiny. He is not riding alone, as thousands of girls are also heading toward Shanghai. Hackworth reflects on his role as the author of the Primer and the latter's role in History.

Hackworth in China Analysis

In this chapter, the true nature of this mysterious adventure is finally revealed. This new revolutionary episode in the history of China closely mimics the Boxer Rebellion of the late nineteenth century. Hackworth is able to put together the pieces of the puzzle in his head, a puzzle which he helped creating in the first place. The Seed, which would supersede the Feed for the Chinese people, is defined as the true, distributed source of good that would profit everyone equally.



From the Primer, Princess Nell's Return to the Dark Castle

From the Primer, Princess Nell's Return to the Dark Castle Summary

Nell lies in her bed, wrapped in her nightgown, and reads the Primer. In the story, Princess Nell returns to the Dark Castle and digs a grave for her dead brother. She then starts to browse King Coyote's library to find her origins. One of the books reveals that Princess Nell is not really of royal descent. She only made herself that way; now she is alone by her own making.

Nell is kidnapped and then tortured by girls friendly to the Fists. Members of the latter group join in and lock her up in a closet. She manages to escape, killing a few Fists along the way. With the help of a sympathizer, she makes it to the roof and nearly gets killed in an attack. However, she is saved by battalions of her soldiers and they hail her as their Queen.

From the Primer, Princess Nell's Return to the Dark Castle Analysis

In this chapter, the Illustrated Primer points to its own end and to the real Nell behind the princess. The action unfolds quickly and Nell faces a lot of threats to her life. However, using all the skills she learned from her book, she manages to save herself and is rejoined by her army of women in the end.



Carl Hollywood Takes a Stroll to the Waterfront.

Carl Hollywood Takes a Stroll to the Waterfront. Summary

Carl Hollywood is rescued from his hotel room by Colonel Spence, a retired member of the Joint Forces. The men fight their way through the crowd of enemies with the help of members of a few friendly tribes. However, Spence gets shot in the leg by a sniper and has to be dragged to the pier. They hop on a ship and cross the river. Carl Hollywood makes it safely to the Pudong Economic Zone. Colonel Spence bleeds to death during the crossing of the river. Hollywood continues his quest to find Miranda.

Carl Hollywood Takes a Stroll to the Waterfront. Analysis

This chapter tells the epic adventures of Carl Hollywood as he escapes with his life from the threat of the revolutionary Fist of Righteous Harmony. His heroic actions mirror Nell's dramatic escape from the hands of the Fist in the previous chapter.



Final Onslaught of the Fists

Final Onslaught of the Fists Summary

Carl Hollywood receives a message from the government congratulating him for his brave escape. The message promotes him and assigns him the task of contacting Queen Nell, the leader of the Mouse Army. Hollywood crosses the countryside and enters the Mouse Army encampment. He locates Nell, who is calling on her mother, the Queen of the Drummers, with the book held high between her hands. Carl formally greets the Queen and reveals that her mother's name is Miranda. A few days later, Nell follows a Drummer and disappears under the waves, with Carl on her tail. Everyone else follows and the whole population of the encampment vanishes under the surf. John Percival Hackworth follows them.

Half a mile from the shore, they enter the tunnels of the Drummers. Carl discovers that the Drummers have implanted artificial organisms (called "nanosites") in everyone's blood in order to make them part of their wet network of distributed intelligence. Nell quickly designs a counter-organism to protect herself. Carl and Nell suddenly find themselves in the middle of a huge orgy that uses the bodies of the participants to exchange data. Carl recognizes Miranda in the middle, ready to be sacrificed to the ritual. Before she catches fire, Nell kisses her, biting her lips in such a way that their bloods mix. The parasites designed by Nell immediately attack the Drummer's artificial organisms. Carl, Miranda, and Nell escape through the tunnel and swim back to shore with the help of some members of Nell's army.

Final Onslaught of the Fists Analysis

In this final chapter, the novel liberates the three real heroes but leaves without closing the story completely. Nell has found her real mother in the virtual world. Carl is finally successful and he found Miranda. Finally, Miranda is saved in extremis by her own virtual daughter.

Characters

Nell

Nell is one of the three main characters in *The Diamond Age*. She is the daughter of Tequila and Bud, and she has an older brother named Harv. She has almost no relationship with her mother and barely ever sees her father. She lives in a poor suburb in the neighborhood of Atlantis/Shanghai, one of the wealthiest cities in the world. When the novel starts, Nell is around four years old; through the course of the book, she gets most of her early education through the *Illustrated Primer* and eventually grows up to be the leader of an important group of revolutionaries. As the novel ends, the reader is led to believe that she is promised to an even greater destiny.

Through her brother Harv, Nell receives a copy of the *Illustrated Primer*, a fully interactive book about a Princess growing up and conquering her own world. The book was originally written and programmed for a different girl, but it adapts to Nell's environment and personality. Beside substituting for school, the book compensates for most of the early education that she should have received from her parents. Nell later moves out of her family house and is allowed to study along with the Victorians, including two other girls who own a copy of the same book. Eventually, both Victorian girls abandon their study and leave their books behind. Nell completes her formal education, which she supplements with the teaching of the *Primer*. She starts to work as a scriptwriter for interactive adult games and ends up bonding with other women working in the same area. She becomes the leader of a phyle of her own. She rescues her virtual mother, the ractor who provided the voice of the *Illustrated Primer* during most of her interaction with latter.

Nell represents the opposite of Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw, who is the original intended reader of the *Illustrated Primer*. The book was meant to be a unique tool of learning, capable of differentiating its owner and elevating her above the fray. Short of being "unique", the book managed to accomplish its original goals. Nell comes from the bottom of the fray in that she does not have a family worthy of this name, she has no aristocratic affiliations, and she does not even belong to a tribe. Still, through her constant interaction with the book and its almost magical power to adapt to Nell's educational needs, the *Primer* is able to train the girl with the skills necessary to elevate herself above everyone.

Harv

Harv is the name of Nell's brother in the context of the novel, as well as the name of the Princess' brother in the context of the sub-story told by the *Primer*. When the novel begins, Harv is about nine years old. He takes great care of his sister and constantly protects her. He brings her gifts and shows her how to use technology.



Harv is the son of Bud and Tequila. Bud is never around and Tequila's constant switching of boyfriends makes it difficult for Harv to identify with a father figure. Harv never learned to read letters, but he can decipher "mediaglyphs", which are graphic representations of words aimed at the illiterates. Harv is part of a street gang from the early age; he brings the Primer home after stealing it from Hackworth and gives it to his sister. He is not interested in learning and concentrates on surviving the harsh conditions in which he lives.

Nell's brother originally flees with his sister when they decide to leave the family home for security reasons. However, while Nell is welcomed in Dovetail, he is rejected because of his past experience as a criminal gang member. He is forced to flee back to the Leased Territories. Harv later suffers from a debilitating respiratory condition that forces him to lie in bed most of the time. Nell loves her brother, but no matter how hard she tries, she is unable to save him from his condition.

Jonh Percival Hackworth

John Percival Hackworth is a thirty-something software engineer working for Bespoke. He is married to Gwendolyn and has a daughter named Fiona. When the novel begins, his daughter Fiona is four years old. The Hackworths attend a party in honor of a local royalty's youth. During the festivities, he meets with Lord Finkle-McGraw, a powerful investor in the company that employs him. The Lord is impressed by his skills and culture. Hackworth is commissioned by Lord Finkle-McGraw to write and engineer a unique interactive book capable of helping to raise his granddaughter, Elizabeth.

Hackworth manages to produce a copy of the Illustrated Primer through an illicit channel. His intent is to give it to his daughter. However, the copy is stolen during an attack by a criminal gang of children and the precious book ends up in Nell's hands. Hackworth is put on trial for having failed to report the attack and is sentenced to ten years, which he will spend at a yet undetermined location. The engineer gives the original book to its rightful owner, but consequent to his arrest, his plot to copy the book is discovered by Lord Finkle-McGraw. He avoids punishment by agreeing to play the role of a double agent and to remain in contact with the authorities of his own tribe.

Hackworth purges his ten-year sentence inside the cave with a tribe called the Drummers. He was told to look for "the Alchemist". After completing the sentence, he awakens from his trance-like state and goes out to rescue his daughter from his now estranged wife. He and his daughter fly to London together and Hackworth discovers that he, himself, is the Alchemist he was supposed to seek.

Hackworth's name is very significant, as the whole character asks the question: is hacking worth it? Hackworth is a high level engineer, a genius by all common standards (considering the mind-boggling complexity of the Primer which he wrote); so how and why did he put himself into this much trouble? He wanted to give his daughter a chance to attain a higher rank in the society they both belonged to (the Victorians). In the end, Fiona did indeed profit from the book, although she ended up putting it aside and not



following through with its teachings. Hackworth himself had to take over and complete her education.

Lord Alexander Chung-Sik Finkle-McGraw

Lord Finkle-McGraw is an "Equity Lord"—which means that he is a major investor in the company that produces consumable goods. He commissions the initial Illustrated Primer, which he wanted to give as a present to his granddaughter Elizabeth. He follows Nell's progress and protects her and Carl Hollywood throughout their ordeal. Upon finding that Hackworth has breached their contract, he uses the engineer as a double-agent to spy on the revolutionary activities of Dr. X.

Gwendolyn Hackworth

Gwendolyn is John Percival Hackworth's wife and the mother of Fiona. She lives with her husband and acts like a loving wife, abiding by the Victorian rules of marriage. However, when her husband is sent away to Vancouver and she loses contact with him for an extended period, she divorces him. She takes her daughter and moves to Seattle—a city which is, ironically enough, located not very far from Vancouver, Canada. Gwendolyn Hackworth plays but a minor role in the story. However, she has a good understanding of her daughter's strengths and weaknesses. When she decides to divorce her husband, she embeds specific rules to prevent her estranged husband from seeking a relationship with their daughter.

Fiona Hackworth

Fiona is John Percival Hackworth's daughter. She is four years old when the novel begins. She receives a copy of the Illustrated Primer, an interactive book authored by her father but commissioned for another child. When her father is dispatched to Vancouver to serve his ten-year sentence with the Drummers, she keeps in contact with him through the book's interactive and global communication features. When she grows up, she studies at the same academy as Nell and Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw. However, she is forced to move to an Atlantisclave in Seattle when her mother divorces her father a few years after his departure for Vancouver. She rejoins with her father when the latter comes back from Vancouver. Both the father and the daughter run away and follow the trace of the rebellion to London.

Elizabeth Finkle-McGraw

Elizabeth is Lord Finkle-McGraw's granddaughter. She meets with Fiona Hackworth and Nell at the Academy. She eventually rebels and leaves the Academy to join CryptNet.



Judge Fang

Judge Fang is a judge in his early thirties, originally from New York. He is a magistrate in the Confucian clave of the Coastal Republic, located in Shanghai. Working closely with his two assistants, he sentences Bud to death after he attacked a member of the Ashanti tribe. He later serves as judge in the trial of one of the members of the street gang that committed the unreported attack and robbery on Hackworth. He allows Nell to keep the Primer and imagines that there is something bigger at stake behind the case. He meets with Dr. X. The latter convinces him to move to a different jurisdiction, namely, the one where he operates. Fang is now working for the Celestial Kingdom. He puts Hackworth on trial and sentences him to serve a ten-year sentence. He participates in securing copies of the Primer for the Han refugees and continues to support Dr. X. and his activities. One of the most notable features of Judge Fang is his highly suggestive name.

Chang

Chang is Judge Fang's assistants. Chang visits Hackworth seemingly to bring him back his torn hat rescued from the attack. He is also Fang's executioner, being responsible for executing the torture portion of the judge's court.

Dr. X

Dr. X is a Chinese technology hacker. He runs the Flea Circus as a cover-up for his illicit enterprises. He replicates the Illustrated Primer for Hackworth and orders his mugging. He is at the head of a huge organization that rescues a quarter of a million Han girls from their harsh living conditions. He plans to educate the refugees with copies of the Primer. His real name is too complicated to be pronounced by Westerners, so he goes by the name of Dr. X.

Miranda Redpath

Miranda Redpath is a quite attractive young woman who evolves from being a simple actor to being one of the most active characters in *The Diamond Age*. Early on, she moves to Shanghai to become a "ractor" (i.e., actor in interactive games and movies). She quickly gains a good reputation in her profession, but her involvement with Nell and her Primer eventually becomes her main interest. Miranda does not know who Nell is or even where she is located. However, she bonds with her through the characters that she narrates for the girl and soon adopts a motherly attitude toward the girl. She feels responsible for raising her and keeping her out of trouble. Her desire to meet Nell leads her to accept a contract with investors who are apparently interested in her talent. She joins the Drummers and stays with them for a number of years. She is saved at the last moment from her ultimate fate by Nell.



Miranda represents the limits of interactivity as mediated through humans. Her role as the Illustrated Primer's voice forces her to become the virtual (literally) mother of Nell. She is overwhelmed by her emotions and ultimately sacrifices her career in order to meet with the girl she tutored through the book. When Nell saves her from certain death, she raises her status to that of a real mother, having raised an exceptional child.

Carl Hollywood

Though Carl Hollywood's character plays a minimal role in the novel, he is an exceptional being. He is an actor and a ractor, as well as a performance artist, a theater director, and the manager of a company. He owns the company that employs Miranda and he allows her to concentrate on her role in narrating the Primer for Nell. He becomes Miranda's friend with her and acts as an intermediary between her and Lord Finkle-McGraw. Through his contacts, Miranda is able to continue working on the Primer and join the Drummers tribe. He participates in Miranda's final rescue from the hands of the Drummers.

Constable Moore

Constable Moore is the man who guards the gate of the Dovetail enclave. The Constable's real name is Arthur Hornsby Moore; he is a semi-famous and now retired General from the Chinese military. He was scarred by the terrible wars that he was involved in; he shares with Nell a history of difficult experiences, both emotionally and physically.

After Harv's departure and Nell's acceptance at the Academy, Constable Moore shares his living space with her by letting her use the gardenhouse as lodging. The Constable spends a lot of time re-living his wartime experiences through several ractive interfaces installed in the playroom adjacent to the house. The Constable usually stays at the gatehouse but about once a year he hops on his horse and rides to town where he spends the night drinking. Moore teaches Nell how to fight and how to use her experience in every situation.

Tequila

Tequila is the mostly absent mother of Nell and Harv. She is technically Bud's girlfriend, but upon the latter's death, she begins to switch from one boyfriend to another without much concern for her kids. She runs away when her boyfriends become violent and abusive, leaving her children at his mercy. Tequila disappears from the novel as soon as the children flee the house, not to return.



Bud

Bud is the boyfriend of a woman named Tequila and presumably the father of Nell and Harv. He is a "thete", an individual not associated with any tribe, as well as a criminal. He is unable to join or work for any other group; therefore, he feels like he has to act alone. He is obsessed with his artificially muscular body and decides to become a hard criminal to survive. After buying a powerful gun, he starts robbing the wealthy people. Because of his inexperience and lack of external protection, he makes a huge mistake in attacking, harming, and robbing a member of the powerful and wealthy Ashantis. He is judged quickly under the Confucius laws and executed in the early part of the novel.

Princess Nell

Princess Nell is Nell's fictional alter ego in the Illustrated Primer. She is originally the main character in an interactive story that adapts to its reader's environment and requirements. Technically, the storyline followed by Princess Nell goes as follows: She was found floating at sea along with her brother Harv. She was raised by a fisherman and an evil stepmother. The former got lost at sea and the latter locked both children in a dark castle. The princess managed to escape the castle with a few magical friends, but had to leave her brother behind until she can find the twelve keys that would unlock the doors of the castle. After she completed her mission, she came back but was unable to rescue her brother from himself. The latter died and the Nell became a true princess, ruling over a magnificent kingdom.

Princess Nell's adventures are truly interactive and every challenge she faces involves some kind of technical problem ultimately based on programming concepts. Princess Nell's physical and psychological characteristics closely mimic those of the Illustrated Primer's reader. She looks like Nell and grows up and evolves in parallel with Nell. She is Nell's reflection in a magical, fictional world.

Dinosaur

Dinosaur is one of Princess Nell's magical friends. These friends correspond to stuffed animals belonging to the real Nell. Dinosaur is a T-Rex that survived the extinction of his species by studying with a mouse called Dojo for over sixty-five million years. He is extremely strong, but he is also extremely heavy, and leaves Nell when his weight overburdens the party.

Purple

Purple is one of Princess Nell's magical friends. These friends correspond to stuffed animals belonging to the real Nell. Purple dies after defeating a monster in a single fight.



Duck

Duck is one of Princess Nell's magical friends. These friends correspond to stuffed animals belonging to the real Nell. Duck leaves Nell when he flies away with another duck.

Peter Rabbit

Peter Rabbit is one of Princess Nell's magical friends. These friends correspond to stuffed animals belonging to the real Nell. Peter has great physical abilities, mainly an extraordinary senses of hearing and sight, but these eventually become useless and he leaves the party.



Objects/Places

Matter Compilers (M.C.)

Matter Compilers are machines that assemble goods from molecule widgets provided by the Feed. They are usually boxes of different size, shape, and power that produce consumable goods through rearranging molecule widgets. These widgets are carried to the M.C. by a physical line called the Feed. Matter compilers are everywhere; there are public compilers, providing free low quality food and consumables in public places.

Thete

The Greek word "thete" is used to refer to a tribeless individual. Thetes populate the Leased Territories.

Atlantis/Shanghai

Atlantis/Shanghai is the name of the main artificial island located in the South China Sea, near Shanghai. It is the Victorians' enclave where Lord Finkle-McGraw and the Hackworth family reside.

Imperial Tectonics Limited

Imperial Tectonics Limited is the company that oversees most of the real estate in and around the artificial island of Atlantis/Shanghai.

Machine-Phase Systems Limited

Machine-Phase Systems Limited is the company that manufactures most of the consumer goods available around Shanghai. John Percival Hackworth is an employee of Machine-Phase Systems Limited through Bespoke, one of its departments.

Æther

Æther is the name of the airship that transports Lord Finkle-McGraw and his granddaughter Elizabeth, as well as Hackworth and his family, to the artificial Island constructed for Princess Charlotte's birthday.



Atlantis

The airship that transports Princess Charlotte to the artificial island constructed for her birthday. It is also the name appended to a city name when the Victorians build an enclave in or around a main city (such as Atlantis/Shanghai, Atlantis/Seattle).

Apthorp

Apthorp is the name of a "strategic alliance between several immense companies, including Machine-Phase Systems Limited and Imperial Tectonics Limited".

Geotects

Geotects are Geographical Architects. The geotects design and build public structures and artificial environments.

Bespoke

Bespoke is the company where Hackworth works. Bespoke is a department of Machine-Phase Systems Limited.

Ractive (ractors)

A ractive is a generic name for an interactive game set in a virtual environment of the futuristic world of the Diamond Age. Interactive actors (ractors), such as Miranda, are used to physically and vocally model the characters that the user is interacting with. Ractors read from scripts generated in real time by sophisticated artificial intelligence software.

Skull Gun

A skull gun is a gun implanted under the skin of the forehead. A skull gun is otherwise known as a "voice-activated nanoprojectile launcher". Bud, Nell's father, wore one.

Aerostat

An aerostat is anything that hangs in the air.



Mites

Mites are artificial microorganisms designed and programmed by humans to perform different tasks. They can be produced cheaply and in enormous quantities. They are generally used to enhance biological defense mechanisms in humans, but can also be used for other, more task-specific purposes such as spying, torturing, seeking and destroying other mites, and more.

Victorians

The Victorians, also known as Vickys or Atlanteans, are a cast of people intent on reviving the customs and habits of the people of Britain during the Victorian era (1839-1901). They live in protected enclaves named Atlantis (such as Atlantis/Shanghai), speak their own fanciful version of English, and are generally wealthy. John Percival Hackworth and Lord Finkle-McGraw are Victorians.

Feed

The Feed is the network of physical connections between the Sources and the matter compilers. The Feed is privately owned.

Seed

The Seed is a free and democratic alternative to the Feed supported by rebellious tribes such as CryptNet.

Illustrated Primer

The Illustrated Primer is the title of the book authored by Hackworth, commissioned by Lord Finkle-McGraw, and read by the interactive actor Miranda. The book helps to raise and educate Nell, but is eventually distributed to thousands of female Chinese refugees.

Dovetail

Dovetail is the name of an enclave located next to Atlantis/Shanghai where the artisans working for the Victorians reside. It is also where Nell will reside during most of her youth, living in a gardenhouse alongside Constable Moore.

Themes

The Binary and the Unique

The Diamond Age is centered on one artifact: the Illustrated Primer. The Primer is a typical storybook aimed at children, but extended through interactive technology. It was written and engineered by John Percival Hackworth and commissioned by Lord Finkle-McGraw for his own granddaughter. Finkle-McGraw is an aristocrat; like all his peers, he values things that are real and unique. His aim in commissioning the book was to produce something that was both unique and digital. However, his exercise was bound to fail as everything digital is essentially bound to be copied and reproduced infinitely. Indeed, in the end, thousands of similar books are produced and distributed to the Han refugees. The book itself is a symbol that foreshadows the democratization of the Feed, which is the privately owned source what literally "feeds" the controlled society described in the novel.

Reproducibility is at the heart of this society; it runs opposite of uniqueness, which is a characteristic that the aristocratic Victorians use to define themselves. Indeed, the Victorians rely on artisans living and working in the Dovetail enclave to produce unique hand-made objects that cannot be reproduced exactly. The only usage of these "unique" objects is to define their territory by surrounding themselves with signs of their own perceived uniqueness. Just like their usage of language, the Victorians sacrifice effectiveness in order to maintain their uniqueness. Lord Finkle-McGraw's attempt to create an object that is both digital and unique (therefore "real", in the aristocratic sense of the word) was bound to fail from the start because reproducibility is the essence of everything digital.

The Diamond Age is an ode to the rebellious aspect of computer-generated goods through nanotechnology. The battle between revolutionary proponents of the Seed (a distributed source of raw material accessible without restriction by everyone) and the Victorian's defense of the Feed (a proprietary and controlled source of raw material) mimics the current confrontation between the proponents of open-source software and the companies that are trying to safeguard their assets in proprietary software (for example, Linux versus Microsoft).

Language

Language plays an important role in The Diamond Age. In the fictional world described by the novel, spoken language is used to differentiate the different classes of people. The Victorians, which are an aristocratic and wealthy tribe, impose their own image of superiority to their contemporaries by speaking in a fancy and coded variation of English. Since clothes and other goods can be manufactured at will by anyone having access to the matter compilers, language becomes the only reference point that both unites and divides the society. Written language is virtually absent in the lower,



uneducated classes, such as those that inhabit the Leased Territories. Harv, Nell's brother, cannot read letters but he understands their importance, though he finds them superfluous and somewhat useless. In an attempt to explain to his baby sister what letters are, he says that they are "[k]inda like mediaglyphics except they're all black, and they're tiny, they don't move, they're old and boring and really hard to read. But you can use 'em to make short words for long words." (p. 41). Mediaglyphics are simple animated icons that represent words and ideas on the omnipresent screens.

Race and Philosophy

The world described by *The Diamond Age* knows no geographical borders. There are no countries as one knows them, no governments for separate geographical entities, and of course no territorial taxes. Everything is ruled by absolute free market and the free flow of goods, at least in theory. Civilization seems to have reorganized itself around this absence of barriers by structuring itself into entities delimited by race, religion, and philosophy. Countries have been replaced by vaguely defined territories (enclaves), which are now as numerous as there are tribes in a given geographical area. Tribes (known as "phyles" in the novel) are established on the basis of common race, religion, or beliefs, economic or otherwise. For instance, the Victorians are basically a cast of people held together by their beliefs in the reformed British values of the late nineteenth century, as well as by a common economic contract (they are the most powerful and wealthiest phyle on earth). Opposite the Victorians, which are few, the Hans form an immense tribe of Chinese peasants with a common cultural and racial identity.

Even in the absence of clear territorial borders, race remains at the basis of people's associations. Race is the uniting factor that brings together the greatest number of people "naturally", without requiring them to take an oath to some fanciful scheme of words. Racial divide is omnipresent in the novel, from the Jews and the Arabs to the Parsis and the Nippons. Race is not, however, the only factor in the composition of a tribe. For instance, the members of the Drummers and the Reformed Distributed Republic are only held together by a common belief and a shared intelligence of the world around them. These tribes provide their members with a mechanism to share everything between them instantly. These bonds form a group that is almost impossible to break.

In *The Diamond Age*, two important roots of civilization come to clash against each other: the Victorians and the Confucians. The former represent the western civilization (American and European), and the latter the eastern civilization of Asia. The former tends to be aristocratic and self-centered, while the latter is communal and based on the abolishment of individual privileges and ultimately individual wants and will. The ultimate Victorian representative is Lord Finkle-McGraw. On the other end, the Court of Judge Fang and the activities of Dr. X. are purely Confucian. Both groups use entirely different ways to come to the same conclusions. It comes as no surprise, then, that the book commissioned by Finkle-McGraw in the hope of raising his granddaughter to a higher rank is ultimately used to elevate an entire population to a higher standard. If education

can serve one, it can serve a million just the same. By the time Finkle-McGraw realizes this fact, his granddaughter has long abandoned the book as the main instrument of her education and has herself joined the rebels.

Style

Point of View

The Diamond Age uses the third person throughout the novel, with each chapter alternating in putting the focus on a single character. This continual change of focus gives the novel a unique multi-faceted point of view. The author develops the storyline over a relatively linear timeline, as the chapters overlap each other in constructing the events over a linear timeline.

Most situations depicted in The Diamond Age are metaphorical transpositions of past or current conflicts and divisions in the world of computers and software. For instance, the rebels of CryptNet are set to implement what they call the "Seed", a free and public source of molecules, which serves as an alternative to the Feed that can be used by compilers to generate goods for everyone. The wealthier tribes, such as the Ashantis and the Victorians, are opposed to this democratization, in part because they own the private sources of molecules and profit from it. This situation, as well as the arguments behind each position, mirrors the debate between the proponents of open source software and those that profit from proprietary software. Software and copyright ownership is also at the heart of the developing

Many of the situations encountered by Princess Nell, Nell's fictional alter ego, are anchored in computer science. This is a logical extension of one of the premises of the story, where the John Percival Hackworth is a high level computer scientist as well as the author of the Primer. The Castle Turing episode, as well as most of the adventures that follow, are metaphorical discussions of fundamental computer science principles. When Princess Nell loses the eleven keys to a crow, she has to solve increasingly difficult computer science problems in order to recover them.

Setting

The Diamond Age is a fictional story that takes place roughly eighty years in the future. The action happens mostly in and around Shanghai. The novel uses the existing configuration of the city as its geographical reference points. In this fictional environment, the reader has to assume that the area will not change fundamentally in the next eighty years or so. However, a great number of activities are set on a fictional artificial island located along the coastline of China, a bridge away from Shanghai. Atlantis/Shanghai and its suburbs, the Leased Territories, are located on such an artificial island. Part of the story happens in the western coast of America, between Vancouver and Seattle. A single chapter of the novel happens in London.

Although there is no mention of a definite calendar date anywhere in the novel, the reader is led to assume through different hints and backward references that the characters are evolving late in the second half of the twenty-first century. The story is



divided in three points of views, corresponding to each of the main characters in the plot: Nell, John Percival Hackworth, and Miranda Redpath. Nell originally lives in the Leased Territories but moves to Dovetail and later to mainland China. Hackworth lives in Atlantis/Shanghai but will reside in Vancouver during his ten-year "jail" term. Miranda works in Shanghai and moves further along the coast of China when she decides to join the Drummers. Additional characters, such as Bud, Lord Finkle-McGraw, and Judge Fang occupy a few chapters each. Bud spends his (short) life in the Leased Territories; Finkle-McGraw never leaves Atlantis/Shanghai, and Judge Fang resides in Shanghai.

A large portion of the text is set in a fictional interactive book (the Illustrated Primer) and is closely associated with the character of Nell. This additional layer of literature provides a number of essential reference points and adds a third dimension to the plot. A thorough reading of *The Diamond Age* requires at least a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of computer science as well as an understanding of the promises of an under-developed technology called "nanotechnology".

Language and Meaning

Stephenson's vocabulary expands almost dynamically as the *Diamond Age* unfolds. Besides using a flurry of words taken right out of the Victorian-era dictionary, the author builds words as the story develops in order to describe the fictional environment where the characters are evolving. In the world of *The Diamond Age*, materials, objects, and situations are all direct descendants of the materials, objects, and situations that can be found in the current time. However, the latter have "evolved" with the technology and exist alongside their ancestors (namely, in the neo-Victoria enclaves); hence, most of the new things require new words to differentiate them from their older counterparts. Many of these words are composites, readily recognizable in context (i.e., "geotects" or "pedomotive"). Oftentimes, the author will leave it to the reader to build the semantic of the new word by inserting it in a fairly developed technological context. Since Stephenson only uses widely recognizable technological development in order to anticipate his "future", the reader should have an easy time imagining the purpose of the objects that are often described by a single, made-up word.

The author also use the general "Victorian age" context of the story to rejuvenate words that were commonly used over a century ago in certain circles of the higher society, but have since virtually disappeared from the dictionaries; words such as "adangle" and "alamodality", for instance, are difficult to find in common dictionaries. Typically, the author uses a richer vocabulary and a more complex syntax whenever the story is set in one of the neo-Victorian settings. As the novel progress, the vocabulary becomes richer and the syntax more elegant; by the end of the novel, the reader will have learned quite a few words and will have a better grasp of the English language. In a way, mirroring the purpose of the fictional Illustrated Primer it describes, *The Diamond Age* has an educational purpose and leaves its readers more sophisticated and with a better intelligence of the technological world that surrounds him or her. This explains why the end of the novel comes not when the characters have accomplished their purposes (as

this is left open ended), but when both the fictional and the real books are done "teaching" their respective readers.

Structure

The book is divided in two nearly even parts; these parts are respectively named "Part the First" and "Part the Second", mimicking the elaborate and somewhat superfluous language structure of Victorian-era language. The first part serves as an introduction to the geography of The Diamond Age, the presentation of the important characters, as well as a layout of the technology that is at play in this strange and futuristic universe. The second part develops the central themes of the novel: Nell's quest to find her own way through a maze of characters and situations, paralleled by Hackworth's quest to serve two masters at once, all the while saving his own daughter, life, and reputation.

Each part of The Diamond Age is further divided in relatively small chapters that alternate in recounting the situation from the point of view of the different characters involved. There are four general and predominant points of view in The Diamond Age, all of which are linked to a specific character: Nell, John Percival Hackworth, Judge Fang, and Miranda Redpath. Each chapter is titled with a summary description of the content ahead. The titles are self-descriptive and usually combine several essential ideas that will be developed in context in each chapter. For example, the chapter entitled "Carl Hollywood's activities at the Parnasse; conversation over a milk shake; explanation of the media system; Miranda perceives the futility of her quest" is centered on Miranda, her situation and her environment. In keeping with the characteristics of Victorian-era literature, these titles not only hint at the content of the chapter that follows, but they also give precious indications to the reader as to the real meaning of the ongoing events.

Finally, the storyline is linear and scarcely resorts to flashbacks or explicit foreshadowing. The long chapter titles are reminiscent of the way novels were written in Victorian literature (see Dickens, for instance), when novels were originally published in little chunks (chapters) in newspapers and magazines.



Quotes

"The curt maneuver forced hearty laughter from all of the fathers in the ballroom, who were delighted by the illusion of danger and the impotence of Nature." A visit from royalty, p. 12

"My life was not without periods of excessive, unreasoning discipline, usually imposed capriciously by those responsible for laxity in the first place. That combined with my historical studies led me, as many others, to the conclusion that there was little in the previous century worthy of emulation, and that we must look to the nineteenth century instead for stable social models." A visit from royalty, p. 20

"'How 'bout it,' Bud quacked through the hole in the shrink-wrap, 'he said I might have other rights. Do I have any other rights?' The constable looked back over his shoulder, turning his head carefully so he wouldn't lose his balance on that pedomotive. 'Don't be a jerk,' he said in pretty decent English, 'this is China.'" Bud embarks on a life of crime, p. 29

"As she laid out plates and silver, Hackworth picked up a large sheet of blank paper. 'The usual,' he said, and then the paper was no longer blank; now it was the front page of the Times." Hackworth's morning ruminations, p. 31

"That the highest levels of the society received news written with ink on paper said much about the steps New Atlantis had taken to distinguish itself from other phyles." Hackworth's morning ruminations, p. 32

"'You see, Princess Nell, you have conquered this world today, and now that you have conquered it, you'll find it a rather boring place. Now it's your responsibility to make new worlds for other people to explore and conquer.'" From the Primer, Princess Nell's ride to the Castle of King Coyote, p. 411

"One of the insights of the Victorian Revival was that it was not necessarily a good thing for everyone to read a completely different newspaper in the morning; so the higher one rose in the society, the more similar one's Times became to one's peers'." Hackworth's morning ruminations, p. 32

"'What are letters?' 'Kinda like mediaglyphics except they're all black, and they're tiny, they don't move, they're old and boring and really hard to read. But you can use 'em to make short words for long words.'" Nell learns to work the matter compiler, p. 41

"Judge Fang invited him to take a seat, and after several minutes of sensitive negotiations over whether this would or would not be an unforgivable intrusion on the magistrate's privacy, Dr. X finally, gratefully, reluctantly, respectfully took a seat." Judge Fang pays a visit to the Celestial Kingdom, p. 116



"[...] As many first-time fathers had realized in the delivery room, there was something about the sight of an actual baby that focused the mind. In a world of abstractions, nothing was more concrete than a baby." Judge Fang goes for a dinner cruise with a Mandarin, p. 152

"'I see. Would that be something like being a double agent, then?' Hackworth said. Napier winced, as if he were being caned himself. 'It is a crashingly unsubtle phrase. But I can forgive your using it in this context.'" Hackworth lunches in distinguished company, p. 179

"To make a long story short, the three girls have turned out very differently. Elizabeth is rebellious and high-spirited and lost interest in the Primer several years ago. Fiona is bright but depressed, a classic manic-depressive artist. Nell, on the other hand, is a most promising young lady." Carl Hollywood takes the Oath, p. 337



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the implications of replacing geographical frontiers with a division of the world based on racial, cultural, and/or ideological factors. Do you think it is possible to establish a common identity without a geographical anchor? If the world was so divided, which tribe (of those described in the novel) would you belong to?

Can education be performed by a single book? Discuss the implications of raising a child with a unique book. Why did Fiona and Elizabeth ultimately abandon the use of the book as an educational tool?

In current computer games and applications, interactivity is usually quite limited. Do you think that expanding interactivity with the use of real "actors" is a good idea? Name a few instances where real people are already participating in enhancing the interactive experience of computer applications.

Several usual objects and situations are conspicuously absent from the world of *The Diamond Age*. Make a list of objects that have disappeared from the world described by the novel, as well as their replacement (if any).

The author of the *Primer* initially saw it necessary to include real humans to complement the static and AI-driven portions of the book. However, he changes his mind and embeds every interaction in pure Artificial Intelligence when he re-designs the *Primer* for the Hans. Do you think there are the limits to pure Artificial Intelligence? Why would anyone use a human to complement a perfectly logical computer program?

Uniqueness is a set of properties belonging to an object that are impossible to reproduce, thus making the said object more valuable. Make a list of such properties. Make a list of unique objects. Give a few examples of common objects that are more valuable because they are perceived as "unique" (for instance, a Guess purse) and discuss.

The author of *The Diamond Age* imagined a world where technology is all-powerful. Would you be satisfied if you could "compile" any object you want just by pushing a button (as opposed to going to the store and buying it)? How close are we, as a society, to realizing this goal? Discuss the social implications of such a technology.