

# **Earth Abides Study Guide**

**Earth Abides by George R. Stewart**

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## Plot Summary

Isherwood Williams, a college student working on his thesis, is in the Black Creek Area when he finds an old miner's hammer and is bitten by a rattlesnake. He's not aware of the fact that the "acting president" of the United State has suspended governmental operations and that burials at sea in California have now been abandoned. Ish survives the snakebite coupled with something that he calls an infection then heads back toward his parent's home. On the way, he encounters no one other than a single dead body on the side of the road then finds a newspaper reporting of the crisis. Ish finds his parents gone and stays at his house on San Lupo Drive for a short time. He finds a few survivors but they seem to represent the dregs of society or have gone insane from the shock. He loads up a station wagon with supplies for a trip east, is joined by a dog he later names Princess and heads for New York City, hoping to find surviving communities along the way. His search is largely futile, and he finds only a scattered few survivors, none that he wants to settle with. He returns to San Francisco where he encounters a woman some ten years his senior named Em. They settle in together and are soon joined by a man named Ezra, the two women he's taken as wives, Molly and Jean, a simple-minded girl named Evie, and a carpenter named George with his wife Maurine. None was married before the Great Catastrophe, as Ish calls it, but all have in their way managed to adapt.

The women have children and over the years, the Tribe grows. From the stores, they have everything they need and scavenge for canned goods and supplies. Through it all, Ish clings desperately to the idea of rebuilding civilization as he knows it though he seems always to pin his hopes on someone else's actual work. Ish's youngest son, Joey, is remarkably intelligent and Ish hopes that he will be able to bring the people back to civilization. Two of the young men go on a trip and discover that the Tribes across the United States are very different with some relying heavily on religion. A visitor named Charlie brings an epidemic of typhoid and five - including Joey - die.

Ish and Em early on began numbering the years and giving them names. Ish always chiseled those names with a miner's hammer he'd found on the day the rattlesnake bit him. The Tribe comes to attach an importance on that hammer, almost of religious levels. Ish once wants to counteract that but later decides that the hammer is a harmless attachment that his people need for comfort. Ish also eventually comes to abandon the idea that he and his people will rebuild civilization and turns instead to searching for things he might teach them that will actually make a difference in the lives they live. He teaches the younger ones to make bows and arrows and to make fire without matches. By the fourth generation, the young men are skilled at both and have begun to drop their dependence on items scavenged from the area stores. Ish is pleased and when his time comes to die, he's asked to hand off the hammer. He does so, choosing his great-grandson, Jack, as the recipient.



# Part 1: Chapters 1 and 2

## Part 1: Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Isherwood Williams, a college student working on his thesis, is in the Black Creek Area when he finds an old miner's hammer and is bitten by a rattlesnake. He's not aware of the fact that the "acting president" of the United State has suspended governmental operations and that burials at sea in California have now been abandoned. He's not overly concerned about the snakebite, treats himself with a snakebite kit to remove as much of the poison as possible, and spends the following days suffering through fever and becomes sick enough to worry that he might die. He later isn't certain how much of his illness is the snakebite and how much is some strange infection. One night, two men step into the door and he cries out that he's sick. They immediately leave though he doesn't yet know that they're afraid of the plague that has wiped out the majority of people.

He soon begins to recover and takes his car down to an area store called Johnson's. There's no one there but the gas pumps work and the door is open. Ish pumps some gas, writes a check for the correct amount and heads on to his home city of San Francisco. On the way, he notes that there's little traffic and he sees a dead body on the side of the road. He rushes to the next town to report the death but finds no one there either. However, he does see a newspaper headline, "Crisis Acute." He uses the hammer he'd found to break open a door and take the newspaper. It's a single sheet and offers estimates that 25 to 35 percent of the population has died due to the virus. He stops at a fine home and breaks in, turning the dial of a radio and finding no stations. He drives on toward home and notes that there should be traffic, but there isn't. At one town, there's a strong smell of decaying corpses. He arrives home to find his parents gone but the house in good order. The electricity and water works and he considers that he might become of all the things man has built.

The dogs that are penned up are the first to die, often of thirst. Those that are outdoors or are able to break out learn to hunt or die. The cats had "known little more than five thousand years of man's domination and had always accepted it with reservations." Those not penned indoors quickly take to the streets where they revert to their hunting ways without much difficulty. Those that venture outside the city are often killed by their larger cousins.

As Ish begins his exploration of the surrounding city, he discovers that there were some looters and disarray at the end of the crisis. He finds one man hanging from a telephone pole with a placard that reads, "looter." He notes that the stores that were vandalized were often liquor stores, followed closely by jewelry stores and banks as if people were either seeking the comfort of the liquor or placing trust in the valuables of the old days. Ish locates a drunkard and notes that his eyes had "seen too much." The man died a short time later having told Ish only that his name was Barlowe. He meets an obviously promiscuous young girl with a man who Ish quickly decides is dangerous. It seems this



is the first time he's considered that not all survivors are going to be honorable, trustworthy people. He sees another young girl who runs and hides and an older man who is hoarding useless items and seems on the verge of madness.

As Ish leaves the city, he finds a green coupe on the Bay Bride with the registration to John S. Robertson taped to the steering wheel. The owner is gone and the sight of the car somehow haunts Ish until his dying day. Ish guesses that the man might have jumped to his death and the idea of the Second Kill emerges. He believes that there will be people who commit suicide, die of causes that would easily have been cured in the earlier days or die at the hands of those who are insane or just mean. He wonders if mankind will survive and says finding the answer to that question gives him the will to go on. Ish has always preferred solitary pursuits and now believes that he's better prepared for the future because of it. With the idea that the survivors aren't what he'd hoped for, he plans to go in search of a surviving community.

## Part 1: Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Just before being bitten by the snake, Ish finds a "single jack," a type of hammer used by miners in years past. That hammer would become an important piece of Ish's life and the life of his family for generations to come.

It's interesting that Ish is almost immediately concerned with what will become of civilization. He's almost too accepting, turning away from himself and his own role in this situation to observer. He seems to want only to look at what's going on around him and to analyze. That continues to be his attitude for the years to come. It's also interesting to note that many of the utilities are so automated that they continue to operate even without man's help. The electricity continues for months and the water for years. Ish will even pick up the phone, discover a dial tone but find there's simply no one to call.

In his lonely despair, Ish tries signaling with a light: the universally recognized SOS. After a particularly lonely frightening night, he decides that he has to find other survivors - any survivors. He will soon change his mind and decide that he's not interesting in a single survivor but wants to find a group. He's also soon to be discouraged at the type of people he finds. He seems to be intent on searching for intellectuals and skilled people who will be ready to return civilization to its state before the virus.

There's an interesting parallel between the animals and people. The purebred dogs and horses that were pampered and cared for by their humans were the least able to survive. Only those that were able to find ways to fend for themselves or that were lucky enough to have people remaining were to survive. Ish at one time notes that his oldest daughter, Mary, is stolid. While he has admired intellect over that type of person, he admits that his daughter may very well be the type of person who does best in the new culture.



# Part 1: Chapters 3 through 5

## Part 1: Chapters 3 through 5 Summary

Ish is suddenly aware that a simple injury that would have been easily treatable by doctors before the virus could now be fatal. He worries continually as he prepares for his trip. He finds a serviceable station wagon and is loading it with supplies when he encounters a dog. This one doesn't seem on the verge of reverting to the pack mentality but rubs against his legs and seems to beg to be petted. He tells her to "go away," but she puts her head on her paws and he laughs, earning him a display of tail wagging. He decides that he has a dog whether he'd wanted one or not, then changes his mind to say that the dog has him. He begins a cross-country trip, traveling carefully and continuing to worry about an accident. When he reaches the desert, he plans carefully for the crossing though he's beginning to berate himself for the overly cautious attitude. He starts the crossing in the evening to avoid the heat and is well into the desert when the dog begins to whine to be allowed out. He stops and she immediately takes off after a rabbit. He's angry with her for putting him in what he perceives to be additional danger by being stopped in the middle of the desert, and then suddenly decides that he has to stop with the caution. He resolves that he will "live without fear." As the dog returns, he calls her a "princess" for expecting him to bow to her whims and decides that will be her name. He camps that night rather than pushing on and then drives the abandoned roads fast, thrilling in the speed.

He stops along the way at motels and usually has amenities such as running water, electricity and gas. He can find all the food he wants and continues into Arkansas. He finds a well-tended garden and stops to discover three Negroes, living in the house one of them had before the virus attack and continuing to grow their own crops, even cotton, and are raising animals. He notes that they are reticent with him in the typical way of Negroes and that they seem relieved when he leaves. He ambles along and often forages from the crops that are planted along the way. As he makes his way east, he realizes that he's almost to New York.

In New York City, Ish wanders about searching for survivors. He notes that he'd always unconsciously thought this would be the place to find a community of people if any survived. He travels throughout the city, finding no one and noting the sheer magnitude of quiet. He wanders through Central Park with the same results and notes that the park will soon give way to brush and undergrowth. He does find a man named Milt Abrams, a former jewelry storeowner. There is a woman with him named Ann who is obviously not his wife and that fact seems to embarrass Milt. Ann has worked only as a "lark" at a perfume counter in a large department store. The two of them seem happy, spending their days at cards and drinking somewhat more than would have likely been proper in society before the virus. Neither knows how to drive and they have no inclination to leave New York. They have everything they need within walking distance and encourage Ish to stay. He remains for a few days, playing cards, before heading back



toward California. He worries what will happen to the older couple when the harsh winter arrives.

As Ish heads home, he's going at a leisurely pace and stops frequently to forage fruit and vegetables. He notes that the chickens and ducks seem to have disappeared, likely the victims of the predators no longer held at bay by the hunters. He fishes sometimes, as well. Headed back into California, he encounters wildfires with no one to combat them and is forced to detour. He arrives home at San Lupo Drive to find the note he'd left his parents untouched.

He settles into a routine of scavenging for food from area groceries and notes that bread and flour are already inedible because of mice and weevils. He finds himself occasionally in a state of apathy and forces activity at those times. On one of his walks, he encounters a pack of dogs and begins to carry a firearm at all times. Then ants invade in droves and though he sprays continually, he's unable to abate the flood. One day, they simply disappear. He reasons that they'd overpopulated because of the abundant food supply but died out when the food became short.

## Part 1: Chapters 3 through 5 Analysis

In Memphis, he stays a few days and feels an intense dissatisfaction that he eventually identifies as boredom. He has brought along guns and later kills a calf and then its mother, butchering the calf for its liver and eating that. He seems to be longing for the kind of life the Negroes in Arkansas have - of taking care of themselves rather than scavenging on the leavings of civilization. This is a desire that never leaves Ish.

While the animals are being forced to adapt, the land is also quickly adapting. The weeds are taking over where crops once grew and exotic plants that depended on people to keep the weeds at bay lose their battles. Larger animals, such as cows, begin to take down fences to gain access to the better grazing of the cultivated fields that are now giving way to weeds. Another victim of the virus attack is parasites that had depended on human hosts. The writer notes that though some may not be saddened at the death of man, the parasites will truly mourn.

It's interesting to note that Ann and Milt have moved themselves into a nice apartment on Riverside Drive, and Ish says it's likely better than either of them had lived in before. By contrast, the Negroes in Arkansas still live in a shack that was the home of the woman before the catastrophe. They have little furniture and are raising what they need to survive whereas Milt and Ann are scavenging on the items stored up in the city around them. Later, Ish seems to respect the Negroes way of life more than that of Milt and Ann but it's much later that he says that the Negroes are simply doing what they've done for many years.

He visits the library and reads Swiss Family Robinson and Robinson Crusoe, though he finds the stories trite and meaningless in his current situation. He seems to still be waiting for something and living as a mere observer but he is at least living. It's

interesting to note that Ish believes he has all he needs as there are so many local places to scavenge food and supplies. It's not until he's looking forward to the next generations that he begins to worry that the lifestyle isn't a good choice.





# Part 1: Chapters 6 through 8

## Part 1: Chapters 6 through 8 Summary

When the power fails Ish is suddenly again fighting panic. He soon finds that it's a nuisance because of the lack of refrigeration but that he can survive comfortably. He notes changes in his world - that a drain is plugged and water flow rerouted and that there's a billy goat in an area where there were previously none. The next day, as the weather cools, he notes smoke that seems to be coming from a fireplace. He refuses to go that direction and heads away from the column of smoke. He cites the less-than-successful attempts at human contact as his reason. Then he critically asks if Robinson Crusoe really wanted to be rescued, seeming to make a parallel to himself and the question of whether he really wanted human companionship. After a day's roaming in the car, he returns to find no sign of the smoke. He's relieved but disappointed until later that evening he sees light coming from a house in the same direction. He heads that way and has almost changed his mind about an encounter when Princess runs to the door, barking. The door opens and a light shines in Ish's face. He realizes that he's possibly made a fatal mistake but then a female voice says, "That's a beautiful dog." Princess invites herself in, and Ish meets Em.

They share a meal and talk for some time, Em encouraging Ish to share his story. He considers the way he would once have courted a girl but knows those days are gone. When he realizes that she's read his thoughts, he's embarrassed but then she goes into another room, apparently leaving him to follow.

In the morning light, Ish evaluates the situation. He says that Em is older than he is and no raving beauty and worries that he's mixing some vague "mother image" into his thoughts. He decides that he has to focus on the positive, dresses and goes down for breakfast. He continues to worry until he looks into her eyes and then he instantly feels security and courage and knows that the two of them will endure. They move to Ish's house only because it seems easier to move to his house where all his books are than to move his books to her house.

After a time, she broaches the subject of children. She's told Ish that she had two children before and he assumes that her marriage had been happy though she never offers details. Now she tells him that he can read books about childbirth and that she won't need much help as she's been through it before. Ish's first reaction is that it's dangerous and that there's no point. She tells him that she wants a child. Then she strikes a match, watches it burn for a moment, then blows it out. He says that he understands her message - that the human race won't go on without a next generation.

They are next invaded by rats and Ish takes a great interest in trying to mathematically work out how many rats could possibly have populated the city at that point. He says that after a few generations of rats, his mathematics breaks down. They discover that there are no rat populations outside the city and almost flee but resist the temptation.



They find a dog's skeleton that seemed to have been chewed by rats and keep Princess inside. Then the rats begin to fight and to eat each other. Ish notes that they aren't destroying individual rats but are actually preserving the species.

As soon as he knows Em is pregnant, he drives to the university campus library to find a book on obstetrics. He can't get in so he carefully breaks a window and patches the opening afterward to keep rats and rain out. He and Em soon consider that they need to know the date or at least to be able to mark the passing of the years. He sets up a surveyor's transit and at the date when the sun reached its southernmost point, they marked the end of a year. They decide they will celebrate that as their New Year. When that time comes, they agree to mark the year by chiseling it onto a large rock near their house. Em suggests that it should be Year One. Ish admits that the thought of the coming child makes a huge difference in his own outlook.

## Part 1: Chapters 6 through 8 Analysis

Ish notes among the changes around him that a drainage ditch becomes plugged and water runs into a neighbor's home. While he admits that he could unplug the drain, he says there's no use because he's one person and there are ditches all over the world that have become clogged. He continues throughout most of his life to have the idea that he and only he can save civilization but that he is not capable of doing it alone. It seems that he continues to search for someone equal to himself. When he finds Em and it's apparently that he's going to bed with her, he says that he has only one fear - that of pregnancy in a world with no doctors.

One day, the car won't start and Ish is on the verge of panic and dreading the thought of working on it when she says simply that it's not a big deal. She points out that they have no where to be at an appointed time and they make a game of finding a different car, locating a battery and figuring out how to fill it with acid and make it work.

Then Em tells him that she's pregnant and immediately begins to cry. Thinking that she's afraid, he says that there are ways to eliminate the pregnancy but she says that's not the reason for her tears. She says that he's told her she has nice hands, but has never noticed "the blue in the half moons." He says that he is shocked and that she feels his shock. She says that her "mother's people never had much luck in the world." She says that she has come to think that maybe she shouldn't be among those to repopulate. Then she says that she mainly just couldn't stand to think that she might have deceived him. He begins to laugh and says that the "Jew-baiters and the Negro-baiters" are gone just as the government is gone, and that some day people might have the luxury of worrying about such things. He says that for the time being, they have to worry about things such as ants and rats. He says this is the one time he saw things more clearly and was stronger than Em.

When Ish enters the library, his goal is to find books to help Em with her coming childbirth. Instead, he finds himself caught up in the number of books covering the array of subjects. He's suddenly assured that as long as these books exist, civilization will be



rebuilt. It's a problem Ish will combat all his life but it's not uncommon for the older generation to hate change and to hope that the next generation will move to the "old ways." In this case, the old ways seem infinitely better to Ish than the current situation where there is no electricity, no creativity and he's left to scavenge for the things he needs.



# The Quick Years

## The Quick Years Summary

There follows a section called "Quick Years." The section covers twenty-one years offering brief information on each. Em wants to begin numbering from Year One and establish the tradition of remembering the years by name rather than by number. She calls the first year the Year of the Baby because their first son, John, is born. The second child is born in the second year and they name her Mary. There were occasionally visitors though it was a relief when they moved on. The exception is Ezra, a kindly man who Ish and Em both like and miss when he was gone. Year Two becomes the Year of Ezra. Year Three is the Year of the Fires though the area of San Lupo was saved by the bay.

In Year Four, Ezra returns. He has two wives, Molly and Jean. Molly has a son named Ralph and there's a young simple-minded girl named Evie who Ezra says must have been five or six years old at the time of the virus outbreak. She apparently knew enough to open cans of food to survive and Ezra took her from that squalor. After much consideration, Ezra and Ish travel to find a couple Ezra had located during his earlier travels. George and Maurine are solid people and Ish and Ezra decide that the addition of the couple would be more of a strength than a weakness. Ish notes that it's rather like voting someone into a fraternity. In light of these additions, they name Year Four the Year of the Coming.

Year Five saw a dramatic increase in bulls, similar to the overpopulation of rats and ants. The people frequently encounter bulls and become adept at getting out of the way. They create a sport of it called "bull dodging," and Ish will later note that it's become their "national pastime." Year Five becomes the Year of the Bulls.

In Year Six, all four of the grown women in the community have children - Maurine, Em, Molly and Jean. There was a drought and the cattle population died off leaving a horrible stench behind. The adults were horrified but the children seemed to take it in stride. There were also grasshoppers in abundance that year, hurrying the demise of what grass remained. As they sought a name for this year, they considered the babies, dying cattle and grasshoppers. It seemed that the bad outweighed the good in the minds of the people and they eventually called it The Bad Year.

Year Seven became the Year of the Lions with the cats suddenly having a population boom such as other species had had over the years.

Year Eight became known as the Year We Went to Church. Ish notes that it sounds as if they went once and that it was something more than that, though not much. Ish says that some of the adults want to have church and that he sees no harm in it but that there's no leader and the idea falls soon by the wayside.



In Year Nine, a visitor stopped in for an overnight stay. When he left, everyone began feeling ill - incredible because none had been sick during the intervening years with anything other than measles or a sore throat that reacted to sulfa drugs. Ish believes it's because the chain of infection has been broken. That particular illness ran its course quickly though almost everyone caught the disease that seemed to be a common cold. Later, three of the children became mysteriously ill and it was deduced that they'd eaten rat poison. They all fell ill with diarrhea and died. One of them was the son of Ish and Em. The other two were children of Molly and Jean, both fathered by Ezra. Year Nine became known as the Year of the Deaths.

In Year Ten, the children suddenly discovered the art and fun of fishing so it became the Year of Fishing. In Year Eleven, Molly has a child that dies a birth - the first case of that happening. It's also the year Princess dies, and the older ones are deeply impacted by the dog's passing. Despite these two events, the children want to name the year the Year of the Woodcarving and Ish supports it.

Year Twelve is the Year of the Twins named for the birth of Joey and Josey to Em and Ish. In Year Thirteen, the vote is to call it the Good Year and in Year Fourteen they call it the Second Good Year. There were no children born in Year Fifteen and it is called the Year We Sang in honor of their explorations into music accompanied by Ish on the accordion.

In Year Sixteen, Mary and Ralph, children of Em and Molly, marry and have a child. It becomes the Year of the Grandchild. In Year Seventeen, a nearby house gives way to termite damage and the children name it the Year the House Busted. Year Eighteen becomes the Year of Schoolteaching as Ish tries to implement some formal educational practices. The children aren't eager to learn and the adults aren't overly supportive, but Ish perseveres.

In Year Nineteen, the children see their first elk prompting the Year of the Elk. In Year Twenty, an earthquake shakes the area though none of Ish's community is hurt. Year Twenty-One was to have been the Year of the Coming of Age as there are seven members of the third generation. However, it's discovered that Joey can read - and not haltingly like the others - and it's named the Year When Joey Read.

## The Quick Years Analysis

It's during the second year that Ish plants a garden though he says that he has neither talent for it nor any desire. He wants the fresh vegetables but it seems that he has also associated the raising of food with creativity and that he desires that now. He battles cows, crows, and insects for the right to a few scraggly heads of lettuce and some small tomatoes. It's interesting that in Year Three Ish begins reading a lot again though he saves the university library for "when the time is ripe." It seems that he continues to hold to the idea that someday, the people will need those books to help rebuild civilization.



The idea of church was interesting. The adults have varying ideas ranging from Catholicism to skepticism. Ish notes that Maurine, not understanding the idea of being a skeptic, tells him that he can introduce the theories of the Skeptic Church into the services. There are Catholics and a Methodist in the mix but it's left to Ish to lead the services. He's uncomfortable because he himself doesn't believe in religion though he never fully denies that there's a God. Ish notes that he finally ended the organized service times saying that he'll allow each to pray individually as his heart leads, and that there's no hard feelings about the decision.

In Year Eleven, the children pick up woodcarving and are all working at the craft. Though other things happen - the death of Princess heavy on Ish's mind - he supports the name the Year of the Woodcarving. It seems likely that he's happy that the children are showing signs of creativity.

It's interesting to note that some of the children born are never named in the book. The child of Ish and Em who ate the rat poison and died is only identified as their son, never by name. Twenty-one children born to the four older women over these years survive to the twenty-second year. The adults note the importance of these births - even Ish who at one time worried about the dangers and wondered about the need. In the years when children are born, the adults note that it's as if the circle of light in their own community pushes the darkness back at least a little more. With each death - and with each year that no births occur - the darkness creeps back inward.



## Part 2: Chapters 1 and 2

### Part 2: Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

In the ending of Year Twenty-One, Ish, as usual, is thinking about the future of his "tribe," as they've been calling themselves for years. The children scatter to scavenge boards and to find a can of gasoline to start a fire for the celebration. Later, some of the children will throw bullets into the fire to hear them combust. Ish considers that the stock of these supplies is not being replenished and that there'll come a time when there are no more bullets, no more gasoline and no more canned food. There are constant conversations in which George wants to move a gas refrigerator to their neighborhood and the children, having never had ice, see no need in it. Then Ish typically points out that they must become proactive rather than sitting around doing nothing. At one point, Ezra seems to agree with him but Ezra says that it would be wonderful to have an opportunity to see a movie in a theater. He wonders if there might be a way to get a projector rigged to show movies, saying that the kids would get a kick out of it. Each conversation ends with nothing changing though Ish continues to say that something will happen soon.

Other things concern Ish as well. He's suddenly aware of the intellectual ability of his youngest son, Joey. He also thinks of Evie, at the opposite end of that spectrum. He wonders whether their keeping Evie alive had been cruel or kind. In the end, he notes that there's no one in their group who is qualified to make that decision.

Ish says that Em is worried that he'll give himself ulcers worrying over the future but he notes that it's these observations that keep him interested in life. He continues to say something will happen until the day the water stops flowing into their homes. Even Ish then admits that they were forever talking of doing some particular thing but never seemed to get around to it. He says that through all the years, he's never once said that this is the day he should do something about the water supply. They make the trip to the reservoir in wagons pulled by dogs and Ish says that he's never ceased feeling a little ridiculous though it's the best mode of transportation readily available. They find the reservoir dry and quickly adapt to life without running water though Ish uses the opportunity to say again that they should be doing something. He suggests an "expedition" across the United State and it's quickly decided that Richard and Robert, sons of Em and Molly, will go. Ish is rather surprised that this is the course of action the group picks up but is pleased that there's to be any action. The next step is in planning the trip and Ish takes over. Em objects, saying that it's easier to just go on opening cans and living as they are but Ish continues to argue that this way of life will eventually end and that they must do something to be prepared. He hopes the boys will bring back information that will help when that day comes.

The people still depend on goods canned from years ago though they depend heavily on meat. Ish notes that the younger ones know nothing else. They have coffee though



it's no longer fresh, with canned milk and corn syrup for sweetening. He wonders about vitamins but they don't supplement their diets.

## Part 2: Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

It really seems that Ish is looking forward toward the days of the civilization he grew up in and wanting only a return to that time. It seems that he should be spending his time in pursuits that will benefit them now rather than harping on the need to get civilization - as it existed more than two decades ago - up and running.

It's interesting to note that he wonders if Evie's life has been worth living. He says that it's impossible to tell that she's happy or that she's not. He does say that there's no one qualified to remove her from the group though there will come a time when the members of the group do make that decision in the case of another person.

It's also interesting to note that until it was pointed out that Joey could read and that he'd had no more teaching than the other children who could barely read, Ish had had nothing more than a passing notice of the boy. Suddenly, he feels that Joey is his soul mate and Ish will soon put all his hopes of a bright future on this one little boy.

As it happens, something changes simply because of the breakdown of manmade objects over a period of time. A pipe, which supplies water to the houses on San Lupo Drive, has leaked for many years though it's just been a trickle. Over the course of time, the puddle has become a watering place for animals and the ground under the concrete supports has eroded. Then comes the day when the concrete collapses leaving the leaky section of water pipe unsupported. That day, the families no longer have the convenience of running water. They first think there's a simple problem but finally go to the reservoir which has been emptied by recent droughts and no longer being fed by the broken pipe. It's noteworthy that the initial response was worry but the younger children all knew where nearby streams and springs would yield water. They carried enough for that first day and began digging outhouses. It was a matter of days before these became routine and no one really cared to even try to fix the water supply.





## Part 2: Chapters 3 through 5

### Part 2: Chapters 3 through 5 Summary

Work on the well and the outhouses progresses slowly but the plans for the trip go quickly. It's decided that they need a vehicle and Ish looks for a jeep. He finds a new one but then finds some used one he believes to be better equipped for the roads they're likely to cover. He and the boys change the oil, add water and he brings a new battery to the vehicle, eventually coaxing it to start. The next problem is tires. All the tires on all the vehicles are flat and many of those standing in racks are flat. Ish, Richard and Robert work for hours changing the first tire and then Joey tells Ish that he wants to show him something. Ish says he's tired but acquiesces to the boy's insistence. Joey points out a spare tire mounted on the back of another jeep and suggests that be used instead. Ish is proud of his son's thinking ability and leaves Robert and Richard to finish the task while he takes Joey to the university library.

There, Joey is in awe of all the books. He immediately grasps the idea Ish has held all these years - that all the knowledge of man is inside those books. He asks Ish if he could read them and Ish tells him to help himself, but to always put them back. Joey then asks if he might fix the electricity with the knowledge of those books and Ish realizes that his son is rushing into the trap he's been in all those years and urges him to go slowly.

Ish drives home the jeep though he has a blowout just before reaching home. He toots the horn but no one comes outside except his daughter, Mary. She says that everyone is on the hillside, "bull dodging."

Ish spends time with Richard and Robert, teaching them some basic mechanical skills with the idea that they could patch up the jeep or make some other vehicle work if they were to have trouble. He also talks to them about maps though they have no concept of state lines and question the meaning of "Arizona." They leave with instructions and equipment. At home, the well is completed and the families adapt to a manual pump for water. At night, Ish finds himself in the deepest worries but during the day is typically optimistic of the boys' good sense and their safe return.

Ish continues to try to teach the children the basics of reading and writing with some arithmetic. He says it's to hold to the basics of civilization. He tries everything to make them want to learn but the desire is simply not there. One day, some of the older boys return from a walk with walnuts, which they'd never seen before. Ish is quick to seize the opportunity to teach on any topic and he tries to break the nuts with bricks but finds it impossible. He asks one of the children to hand him the hammer. The child is frozen in what seems to be fear. Ish asks another and suddenly realizes that the children are totally quiet. Finally, Joey rises and gets the hammer. It's only then that Ish realizes that the children have attached some sort of supernatural power to the hammer. Because



Ish takes it along on the special occasion of the annual carving of the year in the stone, they believe it's something special.

Ish, carefully analyzing the situation, admits that he and the other adults have confirmed and even institutionalized some of the superstitions and taboos. He'd beaten two of the boys for destroying books. He and the others had made it clear that Evie was not to be touched sexually by any of the boys. They'd also enforced the idea of fidelity, fearing an occasion of fighting over that situation.

While Ish puzzles over how to address this issue, he continues to watch Joey and to be amazed at the child's intellect. Ish is careful to calculate whether he does want the children to view him as some sort of god and to view Joey as something special. One day, he asks the children who made the world. They answer that the Americans made it and that Americans are the "old people." Ish says that he is an American and immediately knows that, though he was trying to say that there's nothing supernatural about being an American, he'd implied that he himself was something more than a mere man. He was American!

## Part 2: Chapters 3 through 5 Analysis

To Ish, the fact that the "national pastime" has become "bull dodging" is almost as unpleasant as his concept of the loss of civilization. He notes that two of the boys are playing as "halfbacks," doubtless as a part of an overheard conversation about football. It's interesting that none of the sports from the previous generation have come back. It seems that the families would have, at some point, been playing backyard baseball or football, but there's no mention of any sport or playtime of this type. Ish notes that there are few differences between work time and playtime and that it's difficult for even the adults to stay committed to a necessary task, such as digging the well.

Ish begins to worry the idea of the superstitions. He says that children before the plague would also have specific fears and superstitions but that they were eventually exposed to older children who put those into context. These children have no one who will do that except for the adults. Joey, who has always been set somewhat apart among the children, is now even more so because of his willingness and his ability to carry the hammer to his father. It seems that Ish has become something of a god in the eyes of the children and that Joey has become the chosen one. Ish will even admit that Joey himself may have had a role in making this true in the minds of the other children in order to exalt himself.



## Part 2: Chapters 6 and 7

### Part 2: Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

Richard and Robert return with a man named Charlie. Ish takes an instant dislike to the man though he thinks it might be simply because Charlie seems dirty. He later learns that Ezra is also suspicious though most of the group, including the children, likes Charlie. They also soon discover that Charlie is carrying a gun in a vest pocket.

Richard and Robert located some small groups of people, including some who lived in an old Indian pueblo village and a group of religious fanatics. They made it as far as Chicago but found no people there - a fact that Ish put down to the inhospitable climate. They encountered rougher roads and were suddenly afraid of the possibility of snow - which Ish had warned them about. Rather than finding a more southern route on the way home to explore more territory, the boys were fearful of being cut off from their families and returned by the same roads. Ish wished he'd been far-sighted enough to consider that and to have sent the boys farther south where a better climate might have been home to more survivors.

Charlie's presence prompts Ish to lock his doors that night, something he hasn't done in many years. Em seems to defend the man, including his right to carry a gun, though Ish says Charlie shouldn't have a concealed weapon when he came to their community. Ish spends time before he falls asleep considering whether he really has a reason to dislike Charlie or if he fears competition for the leadership role Ish has assumed all these years. The next morning, Ish finds Charlie and many of the community on a nearby hill. Evie is at his feet and stares at him. Evie is typically at the outskirts of any gathering and Ish immediately knows what's happened. Ish asks everyone to leave so that he can talk to Charlie alone. He tells him that the situation with Evie must stop. Charlie doesn't deny it but says that Ish should be happy that he hadn't taken a liking to any of the women who already had a man. Ish says that they don't want Evie to have children and Charlie says that the young men have likely already had her, meaning she probably couldn't have children. Ish then says that they've made Evie taboo among the young men and that none have, though he detests the fact that he's arguing with the man. Charlie doesn't budge and Ish leaves knowing that he's lost the battle of wills.

Back home, Ish calls a meeting. He, Em, Ezra and George are joined by Ish's sons Jack and Roger and Molly's son Ralph. Ish explains the situation and Ezra says that they've had to lock Evie in a room to keep her inside. Though Ish feels that Ezra is wanting to tell him something in private, Ezra doesn't ask and they continue their discussion with everyone present. Then Ezra reveals that Ezra had talked freely the night before and that he'd said he has "Cupid's diseases." The younger boys, having known nothing of sexually transmitted diseases are released from the meeting. They like Charlie and can't see past that. The others discuss what's to be done and realize that Charlie could break down the entire society they'd built up. Ish calls for a vote for either banishment or death. All four vote for death.



## Part 2: Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

The boys talk of finding a group of people who called themselves the People of God and threw stones at the boys, saying they weren't welcome there. Ish notes that his own tribe might have become religious except that there were no religious people to lead.

It's Ezra who urges Charlie to take the best seat in Ish's home, a chair near the fireplace, and Ish berates himself for his lack of thought to the guest - even though he doesn't like Charlie. Before long, Ezra complains of being cold and some of the children build a fire in the fireplace. Ezra continues to complain and Ish is worried that he's coming down sick. The fire is made bigger and the room grows warmer but Charlie refuses to take off his vest. Later, Ezra says that he wasn't cold but had thought to see if Charlie would take off that vest because he was certain the man carried a pistol in his pocket. Ezra is of the opinion that there's something "dirty and ugly and mean" about Charlie. They'll soon discover what that is.

There's no indication of where Charlie sleeps that night but it's obvious that he finds his way to Evie. Charlie's attitude is that he could have taken any of the women and that Ish and the others should be grateful that he selected an unattached one. It's interesting to note that as the four adults discuss Charlie's fate, there are several points made toward helping the man. Ish suggests that sulfa drugs might work on the sexually transmitted diseases. George says that children of Evie's might be normal, that she might have gone insane because of the horrors she likely witnessed before Ezra found her. George also says that the law says a person should not be punished unless he's already done something wrong. Em points out that there is no law and that it's up to the adults to keep their children safe. They all know that banishing Charlie is impossible as he'll simply return and shoot any of them who wanders within his shooting range and that it's impossible for them to imprison someone for the long term. Though the young men don't vote, they later concur with the decision.



## Part 2: Chapters 8 through 11

### Part 2: Chapters 8 through 11 Summary

They hanged and buried Charlie and move on with life, though each of them apparently carries the burden of having made the decision. Later, Ish and Joey look over the box of corn kernels brought back by Robert and Richard. Ish explains that they didn't try to raise anything for many years and that there were now no usable seeds. He says that they'll now find a spot and raise corn. They parch two dozen kernels and even Ish admits that it's not very good. Corn and wheat, like other cultivated plants, are being pushed out of the places they were once raised by the more hardy weeds.

About a week later, Robert takes to his bed, ill with fever. Ish doctors with sulfa drugs but Robert gets worse. Soon Joey and Josey are also ill, and there's a general epidemic among the group. It's soon decided that it must be typhoid, spread by the flies that congregate in the outhouses, and that Charlie was obviously the carrier. Some fear that they've prompted the wrath of God for killing Charlie and Em continues to dispute that theory. Five of the community members die during the weeks of the epidemic, including Joey. Ish is heartbroken and says that it's unfair that the "chosen one," "child of promise," should die.

Those who had been ill continue to recover and Ish wonders at the strength of Em. At one point she does tell him that she's tired of pouring out her own strength to shore up others. When he suggests that perhaps they are being punished, she says that there's no way God would set up rules of which they knew nothing and then punish them for not following those rules. When they're all up and around, they plan a funeral service of sorts for the dead. Ezra leads it and talks not of hope for an afterlife but of each of those who died. He stretches out the service until the moment the sun slides over the mountain, bathing their community in light. Ish says that it was just a trick, but that it was effective.

Ish, needing to be alone with his grief, takes a walk and finds himself at the university library. He looks through the books with his typical sense that everything needed to restore civilization is in the building. Then he picks up a book about climatology and notes that the last person to check out that book was Isherwood Williams. It takes him a second to realize that's his name and then he notes that the book simply no longer applies to their world. He then realizes that Joey, so much like his father, would never have been happy and would have - as Ish had done - struggled and still failed in what he wanted to accomplish. As Ish is sitting on the library steps, he takes his hammer and pounds off a chip of granite. He notes that it's pure vandalism but he doesn't stop. He also doesn't replace the board that he's carefully used to ensure that rats and rain don't gain entrance to the building over all the years. He suddenly decides that he's been trying to accomplish the wrong things.



The next morning, the children assemble in the living room waiting for school. Ish notes that he'd made a decision and that he felt no pain in it. He tells them that there won't be school anymore. They're quiet at first but become noisy, happy children the moment they're out the door. Later, he cuts a hardy sprout from a lemon tree and sets to work carving a bow using nothing but his pocketknife. The children are interested and check on his progress often. He braids a cord from calf hide and then fashions a blunt-ended arrow. When he shoots the first time, the arrow sails through the air and sticks in the ground. The children are hooked and soon pick up the craft, all making their own bows and arrows. One day, his daughter comes to him with the news that her own arrows never go as far as her brother's. Ish suggests she use pinion feathers and the arrow-making goes to another level. Soon, Ish's son Walt returns home with a rabbit he killed with his own bow and arrow. Ish later teaches them to start a fire without matches.

The children soon lose interest in the bows and arrows but Ish knows that they'll occasionally return to play games with them and that he's done what he set out to do. As they prepare to carve the next date into the stone, they discuss what to call it. Thinking back on Charlie, the boys' trip, the death of five of their own people and the bows and arrows, there are several options. It's Ezra who says no name is sufficient and for the first time, the name is simply Year Twenty-Two.

## Part 2: Chapters 8 through 11 Analysis

There's little description of Charlie's death except that he had "cursed obscenely" when confronted by Ish and the boys' rifles, and that George had created the noose and set up the ladder. It's interesting to note that they did not spare the young men of the second generation from the task. Some of the older generation had been vaccinated against typhoid but not all were spared a bout with the disease even then. This, like other rare diseases that had come along to the members of Ish's tribe, was brought from the outside. Those in the community suffered nothing except measles and an occasional sore throat. This encounter will make the people more wary and they'll eliminate contact with the outside world because of it. Of note, there will come a time when they allow a small group to merge with their tribe and those will contract the measles.

Ish, though he'd been concerned about the superstitions attached to the hammer, finds that he's often carrying it. As Ezra talks of Joey, the children glance at Ish as if to see whether he'll wave the hammer and bring the little boy back to life. He later goes for a walk and takes the hammer along. He considers that he might throw it in the bay to put an end to the nonsense, but doesn't.

Ish notes a changing attitude when he encounters a rattlesnake near the university. He says that man once had complete dominion and would have killed the rattlesnake simply because of that. Now, there's no need because man can make little impact on the number of rattlesnakes. Though they continue to kill those snakes that come close to their homes, they live with nature rather than in dominion over it. Though Ish sees

this now in this case, he'll later wonder about his great-grandsons taking a detour to avoid a large cat.

It's interesting to note that an observation from the italicized text notes that man created civilization but that he then sought ways to flee from it. In addition, all the legends "look back toward some golden day of simplicity." As civilization grew, men gave up their days of berry-picking and fishing, turning instead to the drudgery of work, but they always sought to escape.

In these two feats, Ish hopes that he's saved his children and grandchildren the need to revert to the cavemen days. It seems he's suddenly given up the idea of raising engineers and doctors who'll return civilization to its former state and has moved on to practical matters. He's succeeded and he'll later talk to his great-grandson who says that he only hunts with a bow and arrow because rifles are too inconsistent.





# The Quick Years

## The Quick Years Summary

Over the coming years, the children routinely return to the bows and arrows though mostly in play. The adults occasionally come together and though there may be dissention, they agree that anything decided there applies to them all. Ish sees these as two things he's accomplished. When arguments erupt during the meetings, Ish pounds the hammer and so the power of the hammer remains fixed in the minds of the younger generations. Year Twenty-Three is the Year of the Mad Wolf, Year Twenty-Four is the Year of the Blackberries and Year Twenty-Five is the Year of the Long Rain. In Year Twenty-Six, George dies though it's not clear whether he fell from a ladder and killed himself or had a heart attack. No one follows his tradition of keeping the houses repaired after that. Maurine died that same year prompting the name, the Year George and Maurine Died. Over the next five years, the names run together - the Good Corn Year, the Red Sunset Year and the Year Evie Died.

In Year Thirty-Four, a messenger from a group on the opposite side of the Bay requests that they be allowed to merge. The memory of Charlie's disease lingers but there are young men who need wives and a lack of new blood lines resulting in cousins intermarrying and the new people were admitted. Many of them soon had the measles. Then Em takes ill and Ish first believes it to be appendicitis. He wonders if he can read the medical books and do surgery on her but is afraid. He does use medicines from the drug stores to help keep the pain at bay and soon knows that it's not appendicitis. It is fatal and she soon dies with the warning to him that he need not care so much for the loss of civilization because their children and grandchildren will go on. Molly and Jean soon die as well, leaving Ezra and Ish of the original seven adults. At Ezra's request, Ish takes another wife who has no husband and has children though he says he scarcely thinks of them as his own as they are not Em's as well. There comes a day when she comes to him with a younger man, and he gives her his blessing to leave.

At the end of Year Forty-Three, the practice of carving the year in the rock falls by the wayside. Ezra and Ish spend hours sitting in the sun, talking of days gone by. Ish considers that even if the virus attack hadn't happened, he'd now be growing old. He might have become a professor and would now be puttering around the campus planning new research and getting in the way of the younger professors, but he'd still be old and approaching the end of his life. His days are often hazy though he is sometimes clear-headed. One day he realizes that Ezra is gone. As Ish considers his life, it occurs to him that of the original seven people who formed this community that is called a tribe, he is the last to call himself an American.





## The Quick Years Analysis

It's interesting to note that at least for the next few generations after the merger with the new people, there are two distinct clans among Ish's tribe. There are the First Ones and The Others. In the coming years, wives will move into the tribes of their husbands. It seems to be something of a social order and is almost reminiscent of historical references to those of "old money" versus those of "new money." There does, however, seem to be no class distinction in this case and there's no indication whether the First Ones have any additional status or privileges over The Others.

Ish's role in the tribe becomes very hazy around this point. He says that he's well cared for by the members of the tribe and that someone brings him food and sees to his needs. However, there are also those who come to him for advice of varying kinds. He can still use the barometer to make fairly accurate weather predictions but sometimes the requests are for information he doesn't have. For example, young men may ask him which way they should go for the best hunting. If he doesn't answer, they pinch him. It's interesting that they show him such respect in some ways but disrespect him with the pinching.



## Part 3: Chapters 1 through 3

### Part 3: Chapters 1 through 3 Summary

One day a young man stands before Ish. When Ish asks the young man's name, he says, "Jack." Ish has a son named John who was called Jack but knows this man is not his son and says so. Jack says John is his grandfather, meaning that Ish is this young man's great-grandfather. Jack shows Ish an arrow and explains that he uses only the bow and arrow for hunting because the rifle is unreliable. He also proudly notes that anyone can point a gun but the bow takes skill. Ish notes that the arrows have a sharp point and he soon discovers that the arrowheads are made from pennies, dimes and quarters, though nickels are too thick and require a lot of work for shaping. Ish notes that he helped create the culture that encouraged the making of bows and arrows and that his own offspring had skipped a step in the process, fashioning metal for the arrowheads.

Ish wakes very early one morning to the smell of smoke but drifts back to sleep. He's jerked awake later by Jack with the news that there's a fire almost to the house. They rush outside where two other young men were waiting and Ish suddenly realizes he doesn't have the hammer. He says so and Jack rushes away though Ish screams for him to leave the hammer. He gets it with only minor injuries to himself and the four of them rush away toward the rocks where Ish feels they'll be safe from the raging fire. They are and it's soon clear enough for one of the young men to make his way for some water. Later still, they all go to a place alongside a stream that was untouched by the fire and plan to spend the night. Ish realizes that he's on the university campus very near the library. He wonders if he'll have nightmares about the books that he's abandoned.

The next morning, the young men bring back meat they've killed with their arrows for breakfast. Another member of the tribe catches up to them and tells them that they were to go to a particular place where the tribe had decided to settle. The men were "inclined to argue" because they had no say in the decision but grant that what the tribe decides is binding. They begin that direction, now carrying Ish and teasing him that he weighs so little. He is glad that he's not a burden and occasionally rouses himself to take note of his surroundings. The young men travel by direction though Ish would have known the street names instead. When they encounter a road sign, Ish has trouble forming the words in his mind. They soon see a lion and the boys back away from it without making any attack. They agree that the lion is also not going to attack and simply detour. Ish wonders that they don't feel the need to dominate, seeming to forget his own encounter with the rattlesnake outside the university library those many years before.

Ish soon realizes they're approaching the Bay Bridge. He recalls the green coupe he'd seen there right after the Great Catastrophe and that he'd wondered about the owner. The bridge still stands though there are rusty spots and some sections of concrete have given way. Suddenly, Ish finds himself leaning against something hard and two of the



boys are chaffing his hands. He realizes that he must have had a seizure, perhaps a heart attack or a stroke. He knows without a doubt that the end of his life is upon him and that the boys know it as well. They are frightened and though they seem to be talking, Ish can't hear them. They seem insistent on some point and Ish suddenly realizes that they want him to choose one of them to carry the hammer. He points to his great-grandson, Jack. Ish notes a pang of sorrow for Jack as he lifts the hammer, seemingly heavier than a single-jack should have been. The boys, with the matter of the inheritance settled, seem relieved.

He thinks back over his life - his mother, Em, Ezra, Joey and all the others who had gone before him. He fixes his eyes upon the hills as the thing above all others that remains unchanging. He knows that the young men will soon bury him and notes that, "Men go and come, but earth abides."

### **Part 3: Chapters 1 through 3 Analysis**

Ish notes that Jack says the red arrowheads are best for shooting cattle and lions and the white are for deer and game. Ish wants to argue that there's no difference in the arrowheads themselves and that it's superstition to think so. After considering it, he concludes that if that thought gives the hunter more confidence, it's an acceptable belief. Ish asks Jack if he's happy and Jack seems to consider. He then says that he is happy because "things are as they are and I am part of them." Ish ponders that and when he next rouses himself, Jack is gone.

Ish's relationship with his great-grandson, Jack, is not that different from what often happens in cultures everywhere - one child, of his volition, bonds more strongly with an older relative than all the others. In this case, Ish notes that Jack seems intelligent and he almost tries to argue him into seeing reason regarding the arrow points but says that reason is likely a luxury for civilization. He realizes that making this young man aware of that reason would only set him uncomfortably apart from his peers. Ish notes that he'd known it was only a matter of time before there was a major fire because the grasses, weeds and brush had grown unchecked all over the region. Again, this was a case of knowing what could happen but taking no action.

Ish sees a crimson flower and reaches out for it. He notes that the world has taken back the shades of the earth - browns and blues and greens. He says that there was once lots of red in the world and that he hadn't really noticed how much of it was gone until that moment.

At one point, Ish sees that the young men are talking to him but he can't hear. He tries to talk to them but realizes that he has no control over his speech. He momentarily panics, thinking that he can't live a life without being able to communicate with others. Even then, with his life ending, Ish thinks that there's no one who could even read his writing and that without the ability to talk life would be unbearable.



# Characters

## Isherwood Williams

Ish is a young man who is working toward his college degree when the virus strikes. Ish, as he's known, is bitten by a rattlesnake just as the virus outbreak apparently hits its peak. He later believes that there's some connection between the rattlesnake bite and his own survival of the deadly disease. Ish has never fit in well with others, preferring to slip off by himself to read a book rather than go to a dance. He first feels that this trait is a benefit to him in the world after the virus kills so many, but later sees it as a "vice." He spends the first months wandering around and observing the changes that happen to his world without encountering more than a few people. When he meets Em, his life changes and the two of them are immediately drawn to each other, effectively ending Ish's singular lifestyle. He does continue to live somewhat "outside" the others that join their little community. He is constantly observing and fears that they are not making the progress back toward their previous civilized culture as much as they should.

Ish is somewhat proud of himself. He believes that his intellect is superior to those around him and because of that he carries an incredible burden. He spends most of his life after the virus believing that it's up to him to resurrect civilization. He carries on the idea for many years thinking that he must teach the children to read and write and to do mathematics. He worries that the next generations will be forced to revert to the ways of the cavemen once there are no more bullets or matches and he wants to teach them to read so that they can cash in on the vast stores of knowledge in the books of the public and university libraries. He eventually comes to terms with the knowledge that the world has changed and what the next generation needs is the ability to adapt to that world. He stops holding school and teaches them to create a bow and arrow and to start a fire without matches.

After the virus, Ish and Em are joined by a small group, and Ish is the last of them to die. In his old age, he's revered by the younger ones, almost as a god. He is consulted almost as one would consult a psychic for directions on specific matters. His children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren live without running water or electricity or motorized transportation, but he realizes that they've survived and continue to live. Even without the knowledge of reading, they survive. In his final moments of life, Ish comes to peace with the life he has lived.

## Emma

Ish meets Em in California after the months of traveling. From his own home one day, he sees smoke that was likely from a chimney. He resists the temptation to go to it but later feels that was probably a mistake. That night, he sees a light from her house, muted because there is no electricity and she's using a gas lantern. He drives to her house but having already met some mean and devious people, isn't certain whether to



approach the house. He's just decided to leave when his dog, Princess, runs to the door. Em opens it and shines a light into Ish's eyes. She then turns her attention to Princess and invites Ish inside where Princess is already running laps around the house. Em had been married, had two children and apparently lost them all to the virus. She was some ten years older than Ish but the two of them connected immediately. He spent the night and they moved to his house the following day.

Em is a strong character. She believes in the good of others and seems always anxious to lend her own strength to anyone in need. When some fear that an outbreak of typhoid is because they've provoked the wrath of God, Em is quick to point out that God would not punish them for doing what they believe to be right. Even Ish, who is a solitary person by nature, tends to draw strength from Em whenever he begins to doubt himself. Em can see past the immediate present to realize that there is a purpose to having children. When Ish is afraid of the dangers and feels there is no reason for it, Em reminds him that his view means mankind would simply die out.

## Joey

Joey is the youngest child of Ish and Em and has a twin sister, Josey. Ish admits that he's not particularly bonded with any of the children though he talks of wrestling with them on the floor when they are children. Ish has half-heartedly taught the children to read and write and do simple math but suddenly realizes that Joey can read fluently and is above average with regard to book learning. Ish pins all his hopes for a return to civilization on Joey, believing that if any child can carry on the old ways to take the people back to the days of civilization, it will be Joey. However, even Ish realizes that it is a huge task and worries that it would be too easy for the little boy to push too quickly. Once, at the university library, Joey asks his father about the light bulbs that hang unused in their homes. When Ish explains about electricity, Joey then asks if he might someday restore the electricity.

Joey is a frail child and unable to keep up physically with the other children. However, he is something of a brat, according to Ish, when it comes to lording his intellect over the others. He sometimes seems not to want learning for learning's sake, but to show the other children what he can do. Joey is among the five who succumb to typhoid when a man named Charlie comes into their midst and spreads the disease.

## Ezra

Ezra meets Ish and Em soon after the two of them set up house together. Ish notes that there had been travelers who stopped by briefly and that he and Em never wanted any to stay until Ezra. Ezra does leave but soon returns with two women, a young girl and the son of one of the women. He introduces each of the two women as "wife," and sets up the practice of bigamy in the little community. Ezra has the ability to help others work well together, to smooth over tense situations and to make friends. Ish says that it's a testament of that ability that he has two wives and that the two often work together,



never seeming to argue or become jealous. When Charlie arrives on the scene, Ezra backs up Ish's concern that the man is trouble and Ish, saying that Ezra seems to like everybody, is relieved to have the man on his side. As Ish nears the end of his life, only Ezra who remains at his side. He and Ish often sit in the sun, as two old men in any time period are apt to do, talking of the old days and wondering about the next generations.

## Jack, the Great-Grandson

Ish becomes aware of Jack one day as the young man shows him an arrow. Ish, it seems, had been greatly unaware of his surroundings for some time but is suddenly interested in this young man who is so eager to talk about any number of topics. It's from Jack that Ish learns that the young people all carry bows and arrows for two reasons - that the guns are too unreliable and that anyone can shoot a gun whereas it takes skill to hunt with a bow and arrow. As Jack shows Ish an arrow he made himself, Ish notes a pointed arrowhead of some type of metal. He learns that the younger generations have learned to shape coins into arrowheads. Jack says that the thicker ones - nickels - are harder to shape and less often used than pennies, dimes and quarters. Jack carries Ish away from his home once the fires threaten their living area. When Ish realizes that he's dying, he is pushed to decide who will get his hammer - a symbol of leadership and power in the community. He chooses Jack.

## George

George is a carpenter who survived. Ish describes George as a plodding person and notes that you can hear a pause in his thinking even before he says anything. It's George who keeps the houses in good repair and can fix almost anything. George was originally an acquaintance of Ezra's. It's not until Ezra returns to Ish and Em that George and the woman he's taken as a wife, Muriel, join them.

## Charlie

Charlie is in the company of Richard and Robert who travel out from Ish's tribe in order to report on the condition of the world outside their own community. Charlie charms several of the older people and some of the younger and apparently has sex with Evie, a young, simple-minded woman. Charlie tells Ezra that he has sexually-transmitted diseases, and it's known that he carries a gun. Charlie is hanged by a unanimous vote of the makeshift council of rulers as they fear what he will do to their community and their young people. Soon after Charlie's death, typhoid breaks out in the community, and five die. Some believe it's the wrath of God for killing Charlie but Ish is certain that Charlie brought the disease with him. After that, they are careful about allowing outsiders access.



## Maurine

Maurine is the woman who lives with George. She has been nothing but a housewife, and Ish is always amazed that her home looks like a decorator's showplace. She has surrounded herself with lamps, a phonograph and fancy clock, though none of them work without electricity. She carefully crumples scarves on the tables to achieve a specific look. While Ish can't understand, Em says that it's simply her way of consoling herself - by surrounding herself with the pretty things she would have wanted in a normal lifetime.

## Evie

Ezra brought Evie along when he arrived back on San Lupo Drive. She was apparently about five or six-years-old when the virus attacked and had survived by eating whatever she could find, mostly from cans. Evie grows into a beautiful young woman and is not many years older than two of the boys of the tribe, including Ish's own son. However, the older ones teach the younger men that Evie is not to be touched, fearing that she'll have half-witted children who would become a severe drain on the small self-contained society. When Charlie takes her sexually, the others are forced for a time to restrain her physically inside the house. She seems to want to find Charlie. Her condition is not mentioned again until her death some years later.

## Milt Abrams

Milt is a former jewelry store owner who has survived in New York City. He is living with a woman named Ann who is clearly not his wife, and Milt seems somewhat embarrassed by the fact. Milt and Ann are living in a nice apartment having had the opportunity to take their pick of places. They play cards together and intend to remain in the city. Their fate is unknown.

## Mary

Mary is Ish and Em's oldest daughter and the first to marry. She weds Ralph, the son of Molly who is one of Ezra's wives. Ish notes that Mary and Ralph would have previously been considered too young, but in the new culture it's accepted and encouraged to marry early. Ish says that Mary becomes stolid with age and with each child she produces. While he continues to value intellect, he says that could actually be a very good thing and that people like Mary would likely do well in this new culture.





# Objects/Places

## Princess

Princess is a dog, likely a type of beagle, who takes up with Ish as he's preparing to make his way east in search of additional survivors. The dog is named for her tendency to do what she wants and to expect her people to treat her as subjects would treat a princess.

## The Hammer

The hammer is called a single jack and was used by miners in the Black Creek Area. Ish finds it just before he is bitten by the rattlesnake and he holds on to the hammer in the coming days as he faces the reality of having lost everyone he knew to the virus. When Ish and Em decide that they should begin making a record of the passing years, Ish uses the hammer to chisel the words into a stone. As the years pass and the tribe grows, the hammer gains a significance that was never intended. The children consider it a symbol of power and refuse to touch it. When Ish's home is on fire, his great-grandson risks his life to return into the burning house for the hammer. As Ish lays dying, it's noteworthy that the young men around him want to know who should receive the hammer.

## San Lupo Drive

San Lupo Drive is the neighborhood where Ish lived with his family before the virus and where he returns once he's traveled across the country.

## Black Creek

Black Creek is where Ish is working on his thesis when bitten by a rattlesnake. He is there when the virus strikes and suffers through the snakebite and likely a lesser version of the virus alone in a cabin in the mountains.

## Arkansas

Arkansas is where Ish finds a family of three Negroes who are living on the land. He notes later that these people seem to have more creativity than his own community who are happy to scavenge on what civilization left behind.





## **The Bay Bridge**

The Bay Bridge is where Ish finds an abandoned car that he remembers until his dying day. Ish wonders about that driver and whether the owner had simply jumped from the bridge after the disaster of the virus attack. Ish considers the bridges a sign of civilization and notes that those signs hang on past the time much of civilization fades away. Ish dies just off that bridge, having been carried across it one last time by his great-grandson, Jack.

## **Los Angeles**

Los Angeles is the town south of San Francisco where Charlie connects with two of the boys from Ish's tribe.

## **The Others**

The Others are group of people from outside Ish's tribe who ask to merge. Though the adults are hesitant, they admit that there are young men who need wives and that continual intermarriage is not good. For the first few generations at least, the difference between the original group and "The Others" continues to be noted, much as a social distinction.

## **Riverside Drive**

Riverside Drive is the New York Street where Ish meets Milt Abrams and Ann, and where he spends a few days before continuing his travels.

## **The University Library**

Ish himself believes in the power of books and education and holds up the library as a sort of a mystical place to the children of his tribe. It's not until the end of his lifetime that he admits that the usefulness of the library was confined to the age of civilization as it existed before the virus.

## **The Great Disaster**

The Great Disaster is the name Ish gives to the attack of the virus.

## **The Second Kill**

The Second Kill is the secondary reaction to the virus deaths. These are the people who are unable to go on in the face of what they've seen and either commit suicide or fall

into a state of madness. They are also those who fall victim to the dangerous animals and people.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

Ish is a man who believes highly in intellect and places a great deal of trust in traditional knowledge and learning. In some ways, that makes him highly ill-equipped to deal with his current situation. However, he is able to look at things rationally and is a trained observer - both traits in his favor. It simply takes him a while to come to the point that he's able to live in his new world.

Ish wants to teach the young people of his Tribe to form a community. He believes that the basics of knowledge including reading will help his Tribe survive the coming years. Through it all, Ish learns that not all worthwhile people are highly educated or even intellectual. He comes to understand that those who have certain skills and certain personalities are much more able to move comfortably into the new age. Through all this, Ish continues to hold to the belief that the only true advancement is the return of civilization as he knew it before the virus attack. In this way, Ish - as a very young man in his twenties and thirties - resembles the old timers of seventy or eighty who talk of the "good old days." Ish wants that back more than he wants to make the best of the life he's living. It seems that his own coming of age is linked closely with the death of his youngest son, Joey. On Joey, Ish had pinned all his hopes for a return to civilization. Joey was intellectual, read well and understood concepts. Ish believes that in this child, a rebirth of civilization will occur. He loves Joey more than his other children because of the intellectual connection. Upon Joey's death, Ish sinks into despair but soon realizes that Joey would have spent his life as unhappily as he, Ish, had done. Ish makes the decision to move ahead in whatever way he could help his people rather than holding to the desire to move backward, to a time when he was happy. Though he continues to occasionally long for those days of civilization, he does find himself coming of age as a grown man with children and grandchildren of his own.

## The Ability to Adapt

Isherwood Williams was a young man when he was confronted with the reality that everyone he knew was gone. He seems to quickly accept the fact that the greater portion of the population is gone and sets himself up to observe what will happen next. As he realizes that there are no doctors and no hospitals left, he is suddenly overwhelmed by the idea that even a simple injury could result in death. He walks and drives carefully until he realizes what he's doing. He promises to stop the over-cautious actions and soon finds himself reveling in the feel of driving eighty miles per hour on abandoned roads with no traffic.

Ish is a person who would have obeyed laws prior to the Great Catastrophe. He finds it difficult to smash in a window to get a newspaper or to even run a traffic light. It takes time before these become second nature to him. It's much later that Ish, Em, George



and Ezra are faced with a real threat in the form of a man named Charlie. As they try to decide what to do about it, Em says that laws no longer exist and that it's their responsibility to keep their children safe. The four all vote that the threat should be put to death and the sentence is carried out by hanging the man.

As the children begin to age, the decision is made to allow marriages younger than would previously have been accepted. The adults realize that there's the need to have the Tribe grow in number and that teaching fidelity from the beginning is in the best interests of the community as a whole. The issue of what knowledge is important is another area in which Ish adapted his own thinking, though slowly. He wanted to teach the children to read, thinking that they would always have the vast store of knowledge from the books of the library to help them through any crisis. Then he realizes that many of the books are simply not applicable in the current situation and that other kinds of knowledge are more important. He permanently dismisses school and sets out to teach the children how to make and use a bow and arrow. That lesson carries over and by the fourth generation, the young men use bow and arrows exclusively.

Some adaptations seem easy. For example, the Tribe had always had running water. The water plants were automated to the point that the water continues to flow for decades. On the day it stops, the Tribe simply begins to bring water from nearby springs, digs a well and constructs outhouses.

## The Need for Companionship

When Ish is certain of at least the basic details of the Great Catastrophe, he goes home hoping to find his parents. They aren't there and never return. Ish drives around town, honking his horn in hopes of finding others. What he finds are a drunk who soon dies of alcohol poisoning, a mean-looking man and a woman who seems to be a prostitute, and a girl who runs away at the first sight of him. Ish considers that he could continue to search for survivors but that he doesn't really want to settle in with any of those that he's found so far. He sets out for a trip to the east and along the way encounters a dog. He first tells her to go away but then accepts her companionship and it's Princess - as she's come to be known - who teaches Ish to stop being so afraid and start living again.

Ish finds several people along his travels but dismisses all of them. When he's back home in San Francisco, he sees that there's a light from a house some distance away. He goes there and meets Em. The two of them settle in together. Em is some ten years his senior, and Ish admits that she's not the intellectual person he'd have expected to place his faith in. However, with the need for companionship, Ish does make a connection with Em and even agrees that they should have children.

Over the years, visitors stop in, and Em and Ish are never sad to see them leave. The exception is Ezra and when he returns with two wives, he's welcomed into the community. When two of the boys, Robert and Richard, go on a trip they return with a man named Charlie who brings typhoid to the community leaving five dead. It's this that makes the community wary, and no others are allowed near for some time. Eventually,

it's the need for new blood and the fact that some of the young men have no wives that prompts the Tribe to allow the merge of another small band.

# Style

## Point of View

The book is written in third-person and the majority is from the limited perspective of only Isherwood Williams. The mechanism works for this story because it means that the reader has a view of his thoughts, ideas and actions. There are times when the limited point of view could be a distraction. For example, when two young men of the tribe go on an expedition, the reader is left to wonder about the fate of the two - just as their families were left to worry about their return. While this does make a distraction on an impatient reader, it's also effective in keeping the reader turning pages in the desire to find out what is to happen next.

There are exceptions to this limited point of view are excerpts set apart by italicized text that offer a wider explanation for things. For example, while Ish remains in the mountains battling the disease and the effects of the rattlesnake bite, he is unaware of what's happening to the world outside. The reader is informed though, through these set-apart texts. There are other places where this occurs - when Ish is overrun by ants and then by rats, when the water suddenly stops flowing to the houses, and why other communities are evolving differently than the tribe of Ish.

## Setting

The book is set in the United States with the majority of the events occurring in and around San Francisco's San Lupo Drive. The places described are, at least for the most part, real places. There are descriptions of San Francisco itself, the Bay Bridge and streets and highways in that area. During Ish's trip to the east and back, he encounters well-known cities such as Needles, Mojave, Chicago, Little Rock and New York City. He describes the streets of New York and the bridge across the river into Memphis, Tennessee. The fact that all these places exist add a touch of realism to the story and most readers will be familiar with at least some of the places.

However, some descriptions seem less realistic though that too may be for the readers' benefit. For example, he sees only a few dead bodies even in the huge metropolitan area where disposal methods would likely have broken down well before there were only the final few hundred survivors to carry on the process. It seems likely that Ish would have encountered more corpses during his travels but the reader hears about only a few and that Ish can occasionally smell the odor of decaying bodies.

## Language and Meaning

The book is easy to read and the plot easy to follow. Few words or phrases won't be understood by any reader. Though there are a few dated passages, mainly in the description of places, the writing is somewhat timeless. The book was copyrighted in



1949 and that was renewed in 1976, but the language and meaning remains functional to a modern-day reader. There are disturbing passages, including descriptions of how some died. Of note are the way dogs and other animals that were penned up typically died of thirst.

It's noteworthy that Ish almost immediately accepts the fact that most of humanity - if not all - has been wiped out by this virus of which he had no knowledge until he emerged from the mountains. He seems almost too complacent, as one would not really expect from a person who finds that his parents and all his acquaintances are suddenly gone. This could be a defense mechanism and it's at least reasonable that it could be the reaction of a highly intelligent scholarly person such as Ish. However, the speed with which he accepts the circumstances and his subsequent actions seem almost contrived to move the story along quickly. In that capacity, it works, making the story move from the time of his discover to the time of his newly established "tribe" quickly enough to hold the reader's interest.

## Structure

The book is divided into three sections, World Without End, The Year 22 and The Last American. Each is subdivided into chapters of widely varying lengths. There are also two additional sections called "The Quick Years" and each of these covers a range of several years over just a few pages, giving only a few brief highlights of those years.

The interesting thing about this book is that there are sections set apart merely by way of italicized text that contain an overview of what's happening outside Ish's own personal range of vision or is explaining some event in Ish's life. These read almost like Biblical excerpts and give insight into an array of topics. For example, when Ish is overrun by ants, he's baffled. One of the sections of italicized text indicates that there was plentiful food for the ants and that created a population boom that is now becoming a problem because the food supplies are drying up.



## Quotes

"The heat of the afternoon lay heavy on the street, and he saw no one. 'Bad as a Mexican town,' he thought, 'everyone taking a siesta.' Then suddenly he realized that he said it as a man whistles to keep up his courage. He came to the business center, stopped the car by the curb, and got out. There was nobody."

Part 1, Chapter 1, Page 11

"It might have emerged from some animal reservoir of disease; it might be caused by some new microorganism, most likely a virus, produced by mutation; it might be an escape, possibly even a vindictive release, from some laboratory of biological warfare. The last was apparently the popular idea. The disease was assumed to be airborne, possibly upon particles of dust. A curious feature was that the isolation of the individual seemed to be of no avail."

Part 1, Chapter 1, Page 14

"I supposed,' he thought again, 'I ought to be considering suicide. No, too soon. I am alive, and so others probably are alive. We are just like gas molecules in a near vacuum, circulating around, one unable to make contact with the other.'"

Part 1, Chapter 1, Page 25

"Even if he found a shotgun and bushwhacked her boyfriend, she could offer only the grossest physical companionship, and at the thought of her he felt revulsion. As for the other girl - the young one - the only way to make her acquaintance would be by means of a lasso or a bear trap. And like the old man she would probably turn out to be crazy."

Part 1, Chapter 2, Page 37

"The surviving people, he found, were generally in singles, occasionally couples. They were anchored firmly in their own places. Sometimes they seemed to wish that he would stay there with them, but they never wished to accompany him. He still did not find any of them with whom he wished to share the future. If necessary, he thought, he could return."

Part 1, Chapter 3, Page 65

"They urged him to stay longer; they urged him even to stay permanently. He could certainly find himself a girl somewhere in New York, they said; she would make a fourth for bridge. They were the pleasantest people he had found since the catastrophe. Yet he had no desire to stay there with them, even if he could locate a girl for a fourth at bridge - and other things."

Part 1, Chapter 4, Page 75





"Other men had done differently. Even those who had drunk themselves to death had, in a sense, been partaking of life. But he himself, in observing what happened, had merely been rejecting life."

Part 1, Chapter 6, Page 97

"Though so much had happened, and even though he might be deeply moved by that great experience, yet still he was the observer - the man who sat by the side, watching what happened, never quite losing himself in the experience. The strangeness! In the old world it might well never have happened. Out of destruction had come, for him, love."

Part 1, Chapter 7, Page 105

"'Isn't that rather silly, too?' she said. 'I mean, starting out with a date in four figures. As far as I'm concerned,' she paused for a moment and looked around with that quiet air which sometimes was so impressive, 'as far as I'm concerned, this past year might as well be the Year One.'"

Part 1, Chapter 8, Page 125

"To be sure, you easily got all the steak you wanted, though it was tough. But you had continual trouble running into a cross bull when you were merely wanting to walk here or there. You could always shoot a bull, but shooting one near the houses either meant that you had to go to all the trouble of burying the carcass, or of dragging it away, or else you suffered from the smell. They all had to become adept at stepping quickly out of the way when a bull charged, and they came to make something of a sport of this, and to call it 'bull dodging.'"

Quick Years, Page 134

"'Why,' he thought, feeling the words flow through his mind, as if he were arguing aloud, 'why should I be the one who in times like this always has to start thinking ahead? Why am I the one that has to think, or try to think, five years or ten years, or twenty years into the future? I may not even be alive then! The people who come after me - they will have to solve their own problems.'"

Part 2, Chapter 1, Page 149

"Only Maurine accepted the situation philosophically. 'I grewed up my first eighteen years on the old farm in South Dakota,' she said. 'I run out to the outhouse, all kinds of weather, and I never seen a flusher except maybe when I was in town on Saturdays. That was one of the things I liked best when pappy piled us into the old Chevy and we went to California. But I always felt it wouldn't last, and I'd end up a-runnin' out in all weathers, the way I began. Flushers was nice. But it's all over now, and I say, Thank the



good Lord the weather ain't so cold here as in South Dakota."  
Part 2, Chapter 2, Page 176

"Its repetitions were not those of a stolid child going over and over the multiplication table. History was an artist, maintaining the idea but changing the details, like a composer keeping the same theme but dulling it to a minor or lifting by an octave, now crooning it with violins, now blaring it on trumpets."  
Part 2, Chapter 3, Page 189

"Everyone seemed to be turning serious work into a kind of play, as if unable to distinguish between work and play. That might sound fine, but you could not accomplish much, he thought, without settling down to labor."  
Part 2, Chapter 3, Page 192

"The boys enjoyed drawing maps of the nearby country. But neither boys nor girls were interested in the geography of the world as a whole. Who would blame them? Perhaps when Dick and Bob came back in the Jeep, there might be more interest. But just now, the children's horizon was limited to the few miles roundabout. What to them was the shape of Europe with all its peninsulas?"  
Part 2, Chapter 4, Page 218

"Again and again Ish thought of that little incident in which the other children had been afraid to pick up the hammer, but had acquiesced in Joey's doing something that they themselves did not dare to do. Obviously, in their minds, there was some kind of power inherent in Joey. Ish thought far back to the times of his studies and he remembered the widespread belief that certain member of a tribe had a special power within them. Mana, the anthropologists had called it. Perhaps the children believed that Joey had mana; possibly Joey himself believed it."  
Part 2, Chapter 5, Page 226

"After they had gone, Ish thought of something that he had not done during all those years. In fact, after he had decided to do it, he was not sure whether he still could. Yet when he went into the kitchen, he found that there was still a bolt on the back door."  
Part 2, Chapter 7, Page 248

"'It is strange,' thought Ish. 'She has none of those things on which I used to count so much - not education, not even high intelligence. She supplies no ideas. Yet she has a greatness within her and the final affirmation. Without her, in these last few weeks, we would have despaired and lost hold of life and gone under.' And he felt himself humble beside her."  
Part 2, Chapter 8, Page 277



"If the Tribe needed a symbol of strength and unity, if they were happier with the hammer as a rallying point - who was he to enforce rationalism? Perhaps rationalism - like so much else - had only been one of the luxuries which men could afford under civilization."

Part 2, Chapter 8, Page 284

"Within a week the air around the houses seemed to be fully of badly shot arrows. Mothers began to worry about lost eyesight, and two children came in crying after having received arrows in various parts of their anatomies. But since the arrows were headless and shot from weak bows, no real harm resulted."

Part 2, Chapter 9, Page 300

"As he went into the bathroom, he stretched out his right hand, and flipped the electric lightswitch. It made the familiar click and suddenly the room was brilliant to his eyes. Then after a moment he found himself in the half-darkness of dawn again, and realized the electric light had not flashed on. I had not so flashed for years, and would never again - and the familiar click had merely fooled his old brain, so that for a moment the room had seemed light. And this did not bother him because it had thus happened before."

Part 3, Chapter 2, Page 324

"One of them, apparently out of mere habit, began to make a fire with a bow-drill. But the others laughed at him, and soon gathered together some still glowing and smoldering sticks from where the fire has swept through."

Part 3, Chapter 3, Page 335

"But Ish at least was glad that he was no great burden upon them; in fact, one of them said that to carry the hammer was as heavy a load as to carry Ish himself."

Part 3, Chapter 3, Page 339

"Jack picked up the hammer, and stood with it dangling from his right hand. The other three then drew off a little, and Ish felt within himself a strange pang of sorrow for the young man to whom the hammer had descended."

Part 3, Chapter 4, Page 343

## Topics for Discussion

How does Ish discover that there's been a plague while he was in the mountains? What is his reaction? Does it seem reasonable? What does he do in the following weeks?

How does the small community of Em, Ish, Ezra, Molly, Jean, George and Muriel come into existence? What happens when others arrive? What are the dangers to those in Ish's "tribe?" When do those dangers become reality, and how do they deal with it?

How do Ish, Em and the others track the passing of years? What are the names of five of the year, and how are they selected?

What's the significance of the library for Ish? Who is it that shares that feeling? What does Ish see in that person? What is his reaction?

Describe the significance of the hammer? What does Ish realize about that hammer?

What is Ish's chief goal through the years? What events occur that make him think he and the others are moving farther away from that goal? What does Ish himself do about attaining that goal?

Describe how Ish's children adapt to their surroundings? His grandchildren and great-grandchildren? What is the significance of the bow and arrow?