

# **The Ear, the Eye and the Arm Study Guide**

**The Ear, the Eye and the Arm by Nancy Farmer**

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## Plot Summary

The plot moves in a direction familiar to readers of fantasy fiction: the hero(s), in this case three children who range in age from very young to pre-adolescent, face trials and tribulations that include weird monsters and strange places. They overcome their challenges through a combination of courage, cunning and the help of at least a few benevolent characters. The children—Rita, Kendai and Kuda—are the coddled offspring of Zimbabwe strongman General Amadeus Matsika and his wife. They endure kidnapping, exploitation, demonic possession and terrors galore as they fall into the clutches of the netherworld inhabited by genetic freaks and ancient tribal spirits. As they search for freedom from this dark underground, the runaways are tracked by three detectives known as the Ear, the Eye and the Arm designating their physical abnormalities caused by exposure to toxic wastes. Their journey toward freedom is also assisted by Trashman, another example of genetic mutation, who uses his powerful physical strength to protect them although he has the mind of a four-year-old child. Trashman is strong, protective and loyal although he is also at times reckless and without refinement.

In this post-apocalyptic world, it is difficult to distinguish friend from foe, and the children's struggle is made even more difficult because of their lack of exposure to the real world and its inhabitants beyond the reach of their innocent lives and the protection of a powerful, benevolent father. The plot is based on an ancient narrative archetype of a fall from grace (or, biblically, Eden), struggle through the wilderness (or, biblically, knowledge which is sin), and final redemption through their own struggles and reliance on a divine presence (or, in this case, ancestor spirits that arise to help them). The author is very skillful at weaving ancient African tribal beliefs and customs into a story set in the futuristic 2194 where people travel by airborne taxis and are served by a variety of robots, some of them exhibiting quite human characteristics. The children eventually make it back to their safe, nurturing home, battered but wiser about the world and themselves. This is basically a convoluted scary story with a happy ending. While some of the protagonists' adventures might give younger readers nightmares, the eventual positive resolution and salvation of the children may also prove satisfying and reassuring about the strength of families to endure hardships.



# Chapters 1-20

## Chapters 1-20 Summary

Tendai, Kuda and Rita, the pampered children of General Matsika, begin another day of private instruction in their Harare, Zimbabwe mansion as their mother goes off to work in an aerial limousine. The general is head of security and their mother a chemistry professor at the university. Rita carps about how bored she is as their martial arts instructor arrives to lead them in different exercises. Most days they are taught over the holoscreen such subjects as biology, math, physics, African history and a foreign language. Tendai watches as his father, the martial arts instructor and chauffeur zoom off, then goes into the garden and releases a quarrelsome mynah bird from its cage with a wistful thought about freedom. The Mellow asks the general during a praise session for permission to allow Tendai, Rita and Kuda to go exploring for a day in the town beyond their gates. Tendai needs to explore in order to get his explorer badge in scouting. Somewhat dazed, the general nods his approval. The children, eager for adventure, slip outside before General Matsika realizes, in his limousine on the way to work, that he has been duped and orders the gates to his home to be sealed.

They disembark their bus and are thrown into the roiling masses of Mbare Musika where they consume too many chili bites and encounter a blue monkey that bites Tendai on the hand just before he is chloroformed. The children are kidnapped by two thugs (tsotsis) called Knife and Fist and carried in sacks to an unfamiliar, dark place they suspect is Dead Man's Vlei; General Matsika goes to the police and demands that they find his children. The Mellow suggests that the Matsikas hire a detective, and Mrs. Matsika hires the three-man team of the Ear, the Eye and the Arm. Brought to the She-Elephant by their abductors, the children—with the exception of Rita—cower. Rita hurls insults at the She-Elephant, calling her a mound of "blubber." Tendai tries to coax his sister to eat but she refuses. The She-Elephant puts them to work digging ("mining") plastic from the deep ancient garbage dump under which she lives, while they are chained to concrete blocks. Eye, Ear and Arm disembark a bus in Mbare Musik to search for the children, but when Ear tries to pet a blue monkey he is bitten on the ear. A paramedic treats him and tells him he will be OK. The children are introduced to Granny, who joins Rita in insulting the She-Elephant when she is drunk, and to Trashman, a strong, good-natured hulk whose babbling only Kuda can translate.

The detectives stop at a bar where they encounter Granny and the tsotsis on an outing to celebrate her 80-something birthday. Granny has a fit when she discovers her soup has a fly in it, and one of the detectives calls General Matsika on the holophone to tell him they're in Cow's Guts neighborhood, on the trail of the She-Elephant. Arm and Knife shuttle Granny off just before the general arrives at the bar demanding to know who the tsotsis are. They discover Tendai's bloody pocketknife on the floor and the general orders the police to go over every surface of the bar looking for fingerprints. The detectives learn from the bartender that the She-Elephant lives in Dead Man's Vlei, but are afraid to go there. When the She-Elephant learns that the general has found



Tendai's bloody knife she roars that she should sell them to the Masks gang. Meanwhile, in a deep dark tunnel with only one rare sunbeam from a hole overhead, Tendai discovers an ndoro, or ceremonial amulet, that he puts in his pocket. Energized by the ndoro, Tendai slowly climbs up the shaft toward the sun and out of the mine. He encounters his brother and sister sitting and talking with Granny in a vegetable patch. She confirms that the She-Elephant and her minions planned to sell them to the Masks. Tendai calls on them all to flee. He and Rita lead the escape; Trashman follows carrying the bawling Kuda. As they run away, they hear the She-Elephant yelling at Knife and Fist to catch them. All four jump on a bus and speed away.

They get off the bus in Resthaven, a charming neighborhood. The gatekeeper informs them Resthaven is completely different from the rest of Africa, and a place where reverence for one's ancestors counts for much. In the distance they can hear a drum beating. Exhausted, Tendai falls asleep.

Ear, Arm and Eye take an air taxi to Dead Man's Vlei after dark and run across the She-Elephant who races toward them in full attack mode, to prevent them from finding the children. She surprises them in the dark night with her dark skin and black dress. The detectives fire their nirvana guns at her repeatedly but they do not faze her. The three run and Arm is bitten on the foot by a vlei person he unintentionally steps on. They drag Arm and catch an air bus just as the doors close, then tear off into the night. The bus deposits them at Pairinyatwa Hospital so Arm can be treated for his wound. Tendai is taken before a council of men and elders who tell each other fables, some traditional and some improvised. When called upon, Tendai strokes his ndoro and tells the story of how he and his siblings were kidnapped. Garikayi, the chief elder, tells Tendai he is accepted into the circle of men which means he will remain there forever. Tendai protests that he needs to call his parents on the holophone.

Tendai awakens among a group of boys, descendants of Garikayi, who work submissively on the She-Elephant's farm tending cattle and sheep. He is amazed at their passivity and lack of curiosity. Then he is swept up into a gang fight between the Garikayi boys and the Kambas. One of the Kambas, Head Buster, lunges at Tendai and he scurries to a hilltop where he deflects the boy's charge using martial arts and sends him crashing down the other side of the hill into rocks, causing him massive injuries and bleeding. When he realizes that Rita is growing sick and tired working in the She Elephant's kitchen—and has burn scars on her chest—he determines to get them out of servitude so Rita can get adequate medical treatment. General Matsika and his wife entertain Ear, Eye and Arm in the restaurant atop the Mile High McIlwaine tower, then return with them for a visit to the Matsika estate where he tells the detectives he knows where his children are.

## Chapters 1-20 Analysis

At the very outset, the conflicting forces of ancestor spirits, ultra-modern life made more comfortable through such technological advances as robotic guard dogs, and the reality of ageless poverty in Zimbabwe are set in motion. The three children of General



Matsika and his wife are pampered, coddled and isolated from the larger world. With the natural curiosity and rebelliousness of youth, they escape their safe womb of wealth and go venturing in the world outside. This is a time-honored plot device of innocents abroad. In this version there is much for the children to learn about the evil and self-serving motives of some adults, as well as their rich tribal and spiritual heritage that goes back centuries. Hansel and Gretel-like, the children encounter a kind of heartless witch in the person of the She-Elephant, who makes them work like slaves but who also feeds them very well. Their first encounter with the existence of evil in another is tempered with at least one good character trait, as in real life where even criminals and outcasts can exhibit positive motives.

Demonstrating a thoroughly modern form of feminism, the 13-year-old Rita is self-possessed and feels good about herself. She doesn't hesitate to verbalize about anything that seems unfair or that threatens her, without apparent fear of consequences. Although she is a captive of another woman whose poor self-esteem is evidenced in drunkenness and the need to control others, Rita makes it clear she has no time for the She-Elephant and her twisted web of codependency. Once the children escape the She-Elephant, they have more lessons to learn about gangs as well as still-living vestiges of witchcraft and ancestor worship. Tendai, for example, is inducted—or perhaps abducted—into a circle of tribal men who represent and commune with their spirit ancestors. Thoroughly modern Tendai responds by telling the group he needs to call home on a holophone.

This dichotomy between the high-tech present, which is really a futuristic 2194, and the very ancient past with its superstitions thus becomes a plot device to move the narrative forward. In order to deal with the challenges of their present the children must touch bases with the past and learn from it. Until that time, the Matsika children are bored and irritated with their private tutoring and unable to relate it to their lives. In a trial by fire, they learn the value of learning and get a sense of just how sheltered they have been from the realities that the other 99.9 percent of humanity must face.

The juxtaposition of the high-tech world of the children with the backward ways of tribal people is captured well in a scene in Chapter 18, p. 129-30 where Tendai learns about the beliefs of village boys pressed into service tending to the cattle that belong to the She-Elephant. Tendai attempts to explain to them what a holophone is, and asks what they do if they must summon the police. "What are police?" one of the boys asks him. He explains that whenever there is a problem, it is resolved by elders in the village council. If they can't resolve the problem, the boy tells Tendai, they ask the Spirit Medium who is in contact with the ancestors. "Great, thought Tendai. Dial-an-ancestor A service provided by your friendly holophone service."



# Chapters 21-40

## Chapters 21-40 Summary

General Matsika, with an air of helplessness, tells the detectives his children are in Resthaven where he has no authority as a law enforcement official since it is a separate state. He tells Ear, Eye and Arm that he goes to the gates of Resthaven every day and pleads with someone, anyone, to release his children but is just ignored. At home after the Matsika party, the detectives relive the pleasant time they had at the Matsika dinner and try to imagine what life inside the walls of Resthaven is like. Tendai and Rita get word that 14-year-old Chipu, one of the villagers, has delivered twins—one daughter and one son. The boy is praised and celebrated but the little girl is called cursed by the villagers who won't feed her. Rita blasts them for their prejudice and calls the men "vicious, rotten, ignorant pigs." During the night Rita, Kuda and Tendai are dragged from their small hut to a ceremony for the newborns where a spirit medium says the tribe has been infected by a "dirty spirit" that they need to expel. During a lull in the ceremony when the guards are sleepy, they run for the huge gates and, with Trashman's help, open them and get outside. They breathe a sigh of relief when the enormous doors slam shut behind them.

With Trashman running ahead, pulling Kuda behind, the other children follow into a subway station. As menacing members of the Mask gang try to break into the train, the doors shut just in time and the subway speeds toward a dark tunnel. Because they have no money, the conductor lets them off at a stop marked Borrowdale. The detectives approach the gates of Resthaven and hear a heated argument going on between Garikayi and the spirit medium about removing a haunting from Sekai, the young woman with a newborn. Trashman carries Kuda on one shoulder and Rita on the other as the group follows a newspaper robot to a residence where a kindly lady lets them inside, tells them to bathe and puts them up for the night on stiff cots.

They learn that the woman is Beryl Horsepool-Worthingham, the mother of Anthony Horsepool-Worthingham, otherwise known as the Mellow. Meanwhile, the detectives storm the gates of Resthaven and are promptly arrested by the police. At the home of the Mellow, Rita begins to recover from her chickenpox as Tendai gets the same ailment. Kuda also sickens, and Trashman comes down from the mango trees to carry him inside the house. The entrance is too small, so he rips out a portion of the house—enraging Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham. After an apology from Rita, she agrees to let them stay another night because they are so ill. She puts them "in quarantine" but expects them nevertheless to work as her servants, sweeping, polishing, weeding and cooking. As Terndai and Rita recover from their fever, they actually start to enjoy working at their hostess' house. Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham tells the children their parents left for a tour of China just after they ran away and won't be home for at least a month.



Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham overhears Rita complaining about the food and has another fit, but Rita reassures her that her food is OK. The children watch in curiosity as a gaggle of English ladies calling themselves the Animal Fanciers' Society come to tea. Kuda, sickest of the three children, is banished to the "invalid's room" in the center of the house, where all of Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham's relatives, including her husband, have died. Tendai visits his brother there surreptitiously, placing the ndoro on Kuda and asking for the intercession of the ancestors. When Kuda turns over on his side Tendai senses that he is starting to improve and slips out before the hostess arrives. Ear, Eye and Arm attempt to gain entry into Resthaven, but guards have packed huge rocks on the inside that prevent the doors from opening. Frustrated, they jump on a subway headed to Borrowtown. But on the platform, they catch sight of the She-Elephant before she disappears into the crowd. Pleased to be home, the detectives look forward to seeing Sekai and her baby. The Mellow holds the baby as Arm, who has grown very attached to the child, bawls like a baby and accuses him of alienating the child's affections. Eye lifts the child from the Mellow and hands it to Arm.

Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham flies into a rage when she discovers that Trashman has eaten all her strawberries that she planned to use in cream tarts, calling him a "vandal" and "greedy guts." Tendai follows Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham into the study and hides as she calls her son, the Mellow, at the Matsika residence and asks whether he has suggested the idea of a reward for the return of their children to the general and his wife. The Mellow tells his mother that he doesn't want to be part of her dishonest scheme and abruptly turns off the holophone. Eavesdropping Tendai is locked inside the study when the Mellow's mother leaves, but this helps concentrate his mind on an escape plan. He slips out of the study and heads for the Invalid Room where Kuda is resting. On the way, he encounters Rita and they devise an escape plan with a real payback to Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham for her cruelty.

Arm tells Mrs. Matsika not to listen to the Mellow any more because he suspects the Praise Singer is part of a blackmail plot. Shocked, she agrees. Rita and Tendai creep up outside to a window and peer inside at the gathering of the women's humane society. They talk incessantly, sip tea and indulge in stories about their pets; then Rita and Tendai go to the Invalid Room and push Kuda toward the front door, intending to crash the party and tell the women Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham is holding them hostage for a ransom. As they prepare for their big scene, Tendai notices a thin piece of cutting wire working its way through the hinges of the patio door. Suddenly the door crashes in, revealing the "big black shape" of the drunken She-Elephant. Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham grabs a pitchfork and brandishes it at the She-Elephant, who grabs it from her hands and thrusts it into a tree. Tendai unleashes two flesh-and-blood Dobermans who grab the She-Elephant's ankles. But she kicks them away, grabs Rita with one arm and Tendai with the other: Trashman lifts Kuda and follows the group to a taxi, where they all pile in and head for Mufakose where, she tells the children, she plans to sell them. Once they arrive, the She-Elephant knocks the driver out with bottled fumes, then thrusts the bottle under Tendai's nose.

At Mufakose the She-Elephant drags the children, Trashman following, into a dark tunnel where they encounter strange hooded shapes in the killing grounds of the Masks.





They throw off their hoods to reveal "swollen faces with slitted eyes and bulging foreheads...mouths with the teeth of crocodiles." The detectives arrive at Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham's house, searching for clues. They find a bit of torn black cloth from the She-Elephant's dress and call General Matsika so he can get a search warrant. The police arrive almost immediately with the general and arrest Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham. Arm has a nightmare in which he encounters Monomatapa, founder of the Shona tribe, who tells him his people are in danger from invading "alien spirits." He also tells him to go to a high place where more will be revealed. Arm hurries to the Mile-High McIlwane after calling the general to tell him he has sensed a "strange presence" in the Gondwanna embassy. Menaced by the Masks, the children are terrified. The Masks drag Tendai to a chair and tell him he's destined to be a spirit messenger, which means he must die. One of them called Warthog approaches Rita and she recognizes him as the Gondwanna ambassador. He leads the children into an airborne limousine that takes them to the embassy, high up in the Mile-High McIlwane.

The entourage of detectives and Matsika children arrives in a fierce windstorm at the landing dock near the embassy. As Tendai struggles away from a Mask who threatens to throw him off the building, Mrs. Matsika arrives with a nirvana gun. She blasts her way into the Starlight Room and shoots several of the masks during the fracas. Ear gets his ears bloodied in the high winds. One of the Masks has a Soul Stealer weapon, and fires it at Ear but the blast misses him and hits the wall. Mrs. Matsika shoots a Gondwanna guard who pops out from behind a planter urn; the chef and his assistants bash other Masks on the head until all are subdued. Mrs. Matsika and Arm head for the embassy only to discover that its door is as solid as the steel entrance of a bank vault.

Tendai remains strapped to the chair but is encouraged when a tall, thin spirit presence enters and fires a nirvana gun at three Masks, meanwhile giving him fighting encouragement. One by one, the animal spirits abandon their Masks, leaving them exposed and helpless. The Gondwanna ambassador shoots the She-Elephant but she shrugs it off and begins to charge. Just then, the doors burst open and an army of cooking staff armed with knives, long forks and other cooking utensils charges in and dispatches the Masks. Mrs. Matsika, backed by her own squadron, breaks into the room where her children are held and shoots several Masks. The rest of the Masks and the She-Elephant flee. The children, overjoyed to be reunited with their parents, happily run to hug them.

## Chapters 21-40 Analysis

As the children struggle to free themselves from their captors and the Keystone Kops detectives struggle to keep up with them, it is finally the determination of General and Mrs. Matsika—combined with the pluck of Tendai and Rita—that wins the day. One important message seems to be that courage, determination and faith in family will overcome adversity. At every turn, the Matsika children are betrayed, abused and treated like chattel. Through the pain of this initiation to the world, they learn the difference between good and evil and become more skeptical of the real motives that can underlie the words and behavior of other people. For example, they find that the



She-Elephant is basically a helpless, dependent bully and that Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham is a cunning, deceitful criminal who hides an overpowering greed behind her British social mannerisms.

They also learn that even the simple-minded Trashman has much good in him although he is ridiculed and mistreated by so-called "normal" people such as the two females mentioned above. Rita, Tendai and Kuda find that their father's rigid disciplinarian character is a real asset in unraveling their dilemma and freeing them; they thus learn a different aspect of love and experience a measure of gratitude. The children—especially Rita—see a toughness and determination in their professorial mother they never knew existed; this serves as a positive reinforcement for Rita in her early struggles toward womanhood. In their encounters with "ignorant" tribal peoples, the children find a nobility of spirit and innocence that they can admire. The children find the importance of respecting others' beliefs, no matter how bizarre or backward they may seem. They also learn lessons about bullying from the cowardly She-Elephant and from the phony Mask gang. The high-tech environment in which they live is exposed as the cold, mechanistic world of human invention and they learn that human warmth and connection can never come from robots or computers.

Ultimately, for the Matsika children as well as for all people, struggle and suffering serve as crucibles for the soul refining their self-centered and limited consciousness into broader awareness of the human condition and a measure of compassion—an experience they could only have had by leaving their comfortable nest and immersing themselves in the world.



# Characters

## Trashman

Trashman is a powerfully built servant to She-Elephant whom the runaway Matsika children discover after they are abducted into her strange underground world. With a small mind and strong body, Trashman is devoted to those he serves whenever he comes to visit the She-Elephant. His speech is a combination of gibberish and baby talk that only Kuda can understand and translate. Trashman eats like an animal and is completely lacking in any social graces. Trashman soon becomes attached to the three children and accompanies them for protection when they escape from the She-Elephant.

## The She-Elephant

The She-Elephant is a grotesque woman—not an elephant—who has grown enormous over the years as she's built an underground network of tunnels beneath the toxic waste dump, which is below the municipal garbage dump. She is a ruthless overseer who forces the children to work tirelessly while she drinks to the point of stupor. But she is a good cook and always has something good to eat for the children. In one of these dark tunnels, Tendai discovers a magical amulet known as an ndoro that has spirit energy from his ancient tribal ancestors. She-Elephant may be a cruel task master, but she is not fast on her feet and the children outmaneuver her once they are determined to escape.

## Tendai

Tendai is the middle child, between Rita and the younger Kuda. Tendai is quite intellectual and thinks things through before acting, usually. His curiosity and restlessness, combined with Rita's boredom, provide the psychic energy for the three children to deliberately get lost in the world outside the family compound. His curiosity overrules his sense of caution, however, when he tries to pursue the ancient spiritual life of his African ancestors. He has the brash confidence of red-blooded boys who figure they can always get themselves out of whatever situation in which they find themselves.

## Rita

At 13, Rita is the eldest of the children of General Matsika. She is the classic pre-teenager: prickly around boys, self-obsessed and melodramatic. Although older than Kendai, Rita is more emotional and guided by her feelings instead of her intellect. She is quick to condemn and disapprove, and has trouble finding anything positive to balance her fears that she projects to other people and the world.



## **Kuda**

As the youngest of the Matsika children, Kuda is the most easily frightened and usually obeys the commands of his elder siblings. Kuda becomes extremely useful to them as they make their escape from She-Elephant because he can translate the babbling of Trashman.

## **General Amadeus Matsika**

General Matsika is the chief of security for Zimbabwe, an outstanding soldier and devoted father who bears some resemblance to Major von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* because of his military style of raising his children. He is a stiff, but fundamentally good, man and father.

## **The Mellow/Praise Singer**

The Mellow is another name for a praise singer who, according to African tradition, is hired to constantly sing the praises of his employer—in this case the Matsika family. The contemporary equivalent might be something like a personal trainer, or coach. Praise singing is described as "medicine for the soul."

## **The Masks**

The Masks are a criminal gang who terrorize the people of Zimbabwe, the last criminal element yet to be eradicated by General Matsika. The Matsika children are held in their thrall near the end of their journey to the outside world.

## **Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham**

This estimable British woman has a large estate in Zimbabwe where the three children are put to work around the clock in exchange for hiding them from the She-Elephant and other denizens from the neighborhood in Zimbabwe where they were held captive. She seems to have a craving for live-in servants as a holdover from colonial days.

## **The Ear, the Eye and the Arm**

These are nicknames for the three detectives who Mrs. Matsika hires to search for her missing children. The Eye has oversize eyes that he can focus intensely and see great distances; the Ear has oversize ears that he can open to pick up the faintest sounds or close at will; the Arm is so called because of his extremely lanky build, with extra long limbs that enable him to run fast and to reach into places out of reach for normal people.



# Objects/Places

## Zimbabwe

The origins of Zimbabwe trace to the 11th through 14th centuries and it is believed to have been built originally by the Shona peoples. The original settlement was built on a hilltop nearly invisible to those below, thus affording a measure of security. The original inhabitants of Zimbabwe mined gold which they traded for silk, porcelain and glass beads from China.

## Nirvana Gun

Perhaps as a symbol of the humanitarian Africa of the future, the Nirvana Gun is a device that simply puts people to sleep for 15 minutes instead of killing them.

## Vlei

A vlei, in Afrikaans, is a marshy wasteland. Afrikaans is a variation of Dutch, brought to Africa by early European settlers. Afrikaans and English are usually identified as the languages of the whites, while the native Africans speak a huge number of indigenous different languages and dialects.

## Soul Stealer

A soul-stealer is a weapon that uses a laser beam to create a plasma burst, similar to the effect of being struck by lightning. The soul-stealer had been outlawed by the time of the novel, 2194.

## Antigrav Pad

An antigrav pad is an electronic antigravity device used for docking a flying taxi, bus or limosine. General Mistaka has one at his residence, and they are located throughout the urban hub of Zimbabwe.

## Triple-hardened Titanium-Molybdenum Razor Wire

This advanced technology thin wire is used by burglars to defeat locks for house breaking. Some, like General Matsika, use quadruple-hardened alloys for their locks because they are impervious to triple-hardened razor wire.



## **Holophone/Holoscreen/Holovision**

These are all communications devices that produce a three-dimensional image of users with holograms.

## **Dead Man's Vlei**

This is a toxic waste dump in the middle of Harare used in the 20th Century to store chemicals, which causes harm to nearby residents including genetic damage.

## **Blue Monkey**

A blue monkey refers to a genetically engineered monkey that combines the worst traits of monkey, human and pit bull. A blue monkey can speak, and often hurls insults at its owner.

## **Mile-High MacIlwane**

This is a huge towering structure near Lake MacIlwane built in 2150. It rises a mile high and is essentially a self-contained city. This may be symbolic of the divide between contemporary European-influenced Africa and the indigenous tribal Africa.

## **Lake Kariba**

Damming of the Zambezi River created this artificial lake between Zimbabwe and Zambia.

## **Ndoro**

A ndoro is an ancient worn amulet that symbolizes rank or power in Zimbabwean society. Earliest examples are the shells of mollusks, but ceramic ndoros were mass produced by the Portuguese. Ancestral spirits sometimes demand an ndoro if they agree to possess a descendant of the tribe.

## **Spirit World of the Shona**

The spirit world of the primary tribe in Zimbabwe, the Shona, reflects a polytheistic belief in animism. The highest power in this spiritual realm is called Mwari and is a symbol for the natural order of the universe. Disturbances in the natural order cause evil that must be redressed by consultation with Mwari. Mhondoro is the lion spirit who stands as guardian over the earth and its peoples. The mhondoro brings fair weather or foul, feast or famine. The family god is mudzimu, who cures diseases and heals arguments.



Sometimes mudzima takes an interest in a particular descendant and teaches that person a special skill. The angry, vengeful spirit who can cause madness is known as ngori. Unresolved issues from life must be settled before ngori will leave. A shave is the restless spirit of someone who dies far from home and thus didn't receive a proper burial ceremony.

## **Resthaven**

After being kidnapped, the children are held in an area known as Resthaven, which is a distinct entity from Harare and a place where General Matsika has no authority. Resthaven is, to African traditionalists, a holy city like Mecca. It is where traditionalists, seeking to shrug off European presence and influence, fled to recapture and nurture the ancient roots of their culture. Resthaven is the place where Monomatapa—ancient spiritual leader of indigenous tribes—is believed to have been born and lived.



# Themes

## Fall from grace and redemption

Just as in *The Wizard of Oz*, *Peter Pan* or even the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible, this is a story in which innocents—the Matsika children—yearn for knowledge of the world in their protected, serene world. Although they are not symbolically cast out of the Garden of Eden, they sneak away to go adventuring and discover evil as well as good. Thus the story derives from a literary archetype, only reinforced as the children use their knowledge plus a reliance on their father and a benevolent ancient spirit for their rescue and redemption. The children must endure one painful lesson twice in trying to extricate themselves from the She-Elephant.

Redemption comes about through their own determination and will to live free, given an assist by their powerful parents. Largely because of Tendai's tenacity, the three children never give up or give in to their adversaries and thus live to outwit them. If there is a lesson here, it is that one's personal redemption and salvation largely come about through one's own struggles and discipline. The reader is shown how the children use their pride and intelligence to save themselves and use their new-found knowledge of the world for their own deliverance.

## Strength of families

The Matsika family appears, from the outset, to be a strong unit. General Matsika, head security official for Zimbabwe, has risen from poverty to wealth and power in the world and has been successful in dispatching all but one gang from his turf—the Masks, who become the source of their own undoing. The general tries to impart his tribal values of focus, determination, hard work and belief in a higher power to his children but his militaristic style creates a barrier; they can thus only learn these values within themselves by the experiences they have outside the family. But it is these same values that enable the children to survive their adventure.

The reader senses the strength of the family when the mild-mannered Mrs. Matsika takes a nirvana gun in hand and leads a one-woman assault on the Mask gang, which is holding her children captive in the Mile-High McIlwane tower. The bond between Tendai and Rita is evident when Tendai fusses over her welfare and tries to act in loco parentis. The reader also sees evidence of Tendai's care for his baby brother, Kuda, as he tries to minister to the tyke when he is ill with a bad case of chickenpox. Once the children have been exposed to the world and learned a few things, they are able to appreciate their parents and the bonds of family much more.





## Coexistence of different subcultures

A huge part of the drama in this novel comes from the clash between the technologically advanced contemporary Zimbabwean society, represented by the Matsika children, and the ancient tribal culture still alive in the villages outside the city. At first the children are dismissive of their unlettered fellow citizens, but they discover the power of belief (or faith) to heal and provide direction for the future when they encounter the spirit of Monomatapa, ancient founder of the Shona tribe. They see how indigenous belief in this and other spirits is universal and unquestioned, just as their faith in such gadgets as holophones, aerial limousines and robotic guard dogs is real.

There is also a subculture in the underground world of the She-Elephant, whose belief in financial redemption through recycling of toxic wastes and even kidnapping, is unshakable. However her values are not supported by spirituality but by spirits, in the form of kachasu, or moonshine alcohol. In addition there is the hermetic world of English manners personified by Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham, but that also is not supported by any foundational belief system which is evidenced by her schemes to get ransom money from the Matsikas for the return of their three children. The third subculture is that of the wealthy elites, from which the children emerge. The tribal values that General Matsika holds dear are threatened by the life of ease and comfort he affords his children; they are awakened to the importance of those values by their runaway adventures.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view is that of the omniscient narrator who knows her characters and divulges to the reader how their lives are changed in the process of confronting reality and struggling for survival. The author relates her story in a fairly straightforward manner and allows the characters and settings to set the tone rather than imposing her own thoughts and feelings directly onto the narrative. The author is ever alert to opportunities for revealing what is false in human nature, as well as what is noble. The point of view occasionally shifts to Tendai, the 10-year-old who serves as the central character although all three children experience their encounter with the real world together. In most scenes of high drama, it is Tendai's point of view, actions and reactions that become the focal point of the narrative.

Throughout, the children come across to the reader as flesh-and-blood people whose fates are at stake. Antagonists such as the She-Elephant and Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham do not have the human depth the author attributes to the children, nor do such minor characters as the happy-go-lucky Trashman or the lackadaisical Mellow. Another secondary point of view is that of the tribal people who live in villages outside Zimbabwe and depend upon regular communication with ancient spirits as much as the Matsika family relies on high-tech devices. Until the children appear, neither world has any real knowledge of the other, or any awareness of their divergent point of view.

## Setting

The setting for the story is the futuristic, high-tech world of Zimbabwe, Africa in 2194. This world of the educated elite contrasts with the ancient, tribal cultures of the villagers and have-nots who must live by cunning and exploitation of any resources at hand. Some of these resources include the wisdom of village elders as well as the knowledge of ancestors who can be contacted through spirit mediums. Although the temporal and geographic settings of the novel are known, the interior change and growth of the children becomes the real setting as the narrative progresses. The reader sees how Tendai overcomes his innate laziness, Rita her fiery temper and Kuda his childlike passivity as the Matsika children overcome one obstacle after another and develop fuller characters. By midpoint the reader accepts the juxtaposition of past, present and future and naturally becomes focused on the children.

## Language and Meaning

The language is basically standard English, with numerous African words and phrases interwoven. The author uses somewhat artificially heated rhetoric as the story advances to convey a sense of urgency and climax. When in the midst of a crisis, the characters hiss instead of speak, a familiar trope in fantasy fiction. Hyperbole is another device the



author employs to further convey a sense of crisis. There is throughout a narrative dance between danger and deliverance, with deliverance finally coming at the end. One example that describes the scene when the children are captured by villagers who practice witchcraft is illustrative:

"The Spirit Medium raised his walking stick but Tendai wrenched it away before he could strike his sister [and] flung the stick into the heart of the fire. The villagers gasped in horror. They pounced on the children and stretched them out on the ground. Someone handed Garikayi a club. 'Take these little hyenas to the punishment hut,' hissed the Spirit Medium. It was as if the whole village had risen against them with one thought and one purpose."

Frequent use of Afrikaans words such as doek (scarf), dwaal (trance), vlei (marsh), Shona words such as dare (men's meeting place), kachasu (moonshine), mai (mother) and mhondoro (spirit of the dead) is interlaced throughout the English text, adding color and depth.

## Structure

The novel follows the conventional problem-struggle-crisis-resolution structure of most novels, with a minor variation in which the runaway children struggle to free themselves from the clutches of the She-Elephant, are recaptured and must flee again. In each of their flights, the children land in a new situation that presents equally daunting challenges. The final resolution comes when General Matsika and his men finally free them and they are overcome with love and gratitude.



## Quotes

"It was Terndai's turn to stare into the distance and think. What would it be like to go outside the way everyone else did and fly—all alone without bodyguards or the police or Father—to a magical place none of them had seen before? As he thought, the warm excited feeling he had had this morning returned. His ancestors waited in the shadows of the walled garden. One of them raised the hollowed horn of a kudu bull to his lips and blew, to give courage to the hunters." (Chapter 1, p. 24)

"It was blue. Its fur stood out in a handsome ruff around its face and its tail hung down almost to the ground. It wore a leather collar attached to a chain. Its owner, who had a surprising number of bandages on various parts of its body, sat glumly in a chair and smoked a cigarette. 'That's a genetically engineered monkey,' said Tendai in wonder. The blue monkey reached out a long arm and snatched the cigarette from its owner's mouth. The monkey began to puff on the cigarette itself. 'What are you staring at, roach face?', it snarled." (Chapter 4, p. 33)

"They stood on the limo landing pad and looked out at the Cow's Guts. The streets rioted in all directions, twisting around in a confusing way. Newcomers always got lost, to the delight of the muggers. Stolen goods were sold openly here. Drugs were bought as easily as bananas. Beer halls blasted music that made everyone's ribs rattle, but here and there among the pickpockets and dealers, a family struggled to survive." (Chapter 6, p. 48)

"All three children knelt to wash their faces and hands. The water was cold and almost black with vegetable material. It looked like tea. Tandai tasted it: the cold liquid seemed to sink into his tongue. 'It's okay to drink,' said the She Elephant. 'It's better where it comes out.' So Tendai sat where the dark stream spilled from the rock, filled his hands and drank deeply. 'You'll get a disease,' said Rita with a shudder." (Chapter 8, p. 61)

"'Trashman's strong as an ox, but he has the mind of a four-year-old,' the She Elephant said. 'He can't remember anything for more than a minute.' She ladled out a bowl of stew Tendai knew she had planned for her mid-morning snack and gave it to Trashman. He ate it noisily and patted his stomach. Knife gave him one of the chocolates he was saving for Granny. Granny smiled benevolently, an expression almost as repellent as her usual scowl. 'Good boy,' she purred." (Chapter 10, p. 73)

"Tendai held the ancient ndoro and prayed. And gradually he became aware that the light was strengthening. The hair stood up on his neck, but still he held the ndoro and prayed. The light crept down the well shaft until it flooded straight into the dark water. It was the sun! Perhaps once a year the sun passed over the well in exactly the right way and shone into this deep chamber. The brilliant light fell into the water and under the water was a flat stone. Tendai gasped in wonder. He would never have guessed it was there!" (Chapter 12, p. 90)



"The change that came over the Mellower was astonishing. The hangdog look left his eyes and the hunch went out of his shoulders. Even his skin seemed to firm up. He jumped out of his chair and paced around the room. 'I'd be delighted to do it. Let me wash my face and comb my hair. I'll change into fresh clothes. Let me see, the new brown shoes should do. No, no. Too formal. The beige sandals. And the pink shirt—pink is so cheerful—just the thing. Oh, my. The first praise in weeks. I can hardly wait!' He strode off as enthusiastically as Amadeus did when he was going to review troops." (Chapter 17, p. 123)

"He [Ear] saw into his [General Matsika's] mind. This time he did not flinch away as he had with Mr. Thirsty and the Mellower. He felt the cold bleakness of the general's childhood underlying the man's personality. He felt the hot hate of the years spent battling gangs. He saw, through the general's eyes, the vast, sprawling city of Harare, which no one could completely control. It was like walking into a dark house with many rooms." (Chapter 21, p. 148)

"Tendai sighed with contentment. Of course he would rather be home, but they had been gone so long home had grown somewhat hazy in his mind. In the meantime, it was extremely pleasant to laze in Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham's kitchen after a vigorous day's work. The tea kettle purred on the stove. The squash bubbled. Pasha's Favorite burped as his stomach worked on the sardines he had had for lunch... 'Ring the bell when dinner is served,' Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham announced." (Chapter 28, p. 211)

"It was a good plan. It would inflict maximum humiliation without involving the police. The plan was to wheel Kunda straight into the middle of the gathering and announce that Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham was holding them for ransom. Tendai and Rita had observed the English long enough to know they would close ranks. They wouldn't tell Father anything, and so neither the Mellower or his mother would go to prison. At the same time, their code of honor would insist that Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham be forced to call Father herself." (Chapter 31, p. 234)

"Someone lit a match. Tendai watched it move down a row of black candles. The light dipped and bobbed and sent confusing shadows across the floor but he was able to see. Tacked to the walls were dried bats, owls and shriveled lizards. Bunches of gray herbs hung like diseased fruit from the ceiling. Over an altar crouched the body of stuffed hyena. 'It's a witch's den!' screamed Rita." (Chapter 33, p. 247)

"Tendai looked down on the beautiful crisscross of streets that made up his city. A year ago he would merely have admired the view. Now he saw how fragile it all was, laid open to its enemies at its heart. He understood, as Rita and Kuda could not, what was involved in becoming a messenger to the Gondwannan spirit world... Becoming a messenger meant death." (Chapter 36, p. 267)



"Above the wind tumbled the voices of animals: yips and barks, growls, bleats, caterwauls and roars. With them were the voices of men, women and children. They weren't angry. Rather they rejoiced as though released from long slavery. 'It's the people and animals who were sacrificed to feed the Masks,' said Tendai." (Chapter 40, p. 295)



## Topics for Discussion

When the Matsika children disappear, how do their parents, individually, react? Which one seems more disturbed about the disappearance?

What is the motivation for the children escaping into the larger world beyond their home?

What are the values prized most by Zimbabwe residents—including General Matsika—and taught to the Matsika children in scouting?

What is the attitude of General Matsika and his wife toward the Mellower? The attitude of their children?

What is the one virtue that the children discover about the She-Elephant?

Who is Garikayi and how does he figure into the kidnapping and escape of the children?

How effective are Ear, Eye and Arm as detectives? Why?

What is the connection between Mrs. Horsepool-Worthingham and the Mellower? How are their attitudes toward the Matsika family different?

What is the sickness that bedevils the runaway children during their adventures?

What is the truth about the Mask gang that hides behind their facades?