

F Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The story opens with a man driving his two twin sons to pick up his other son, by a previous marriage. Arthur, the father, is an unhappy man because he has not been able to become the world famous author that he feels he should have been. He blames many things for his lack of success, but in the end, the reader can tell that he is a very insecure and unfocused individual who does not care much for being married with children. In fact, Martin, the oldest child by his first marriage, never even met Arthur until he was seven years old. Martin recalls being very disappointed with the initial meeting.

The other two boys, the twins, are named Ivan and Eric. When they reach the theater, the boys discover that their father is taking them to see The Great Lindemann, a world famous hypnotist. During the course of the show the hypnotist brings the boys each up on the stage and has them doing all sorts of things. Finally, he encourages Arthur to come on stage. He does so begrudgingly. The hypnotist can tell from a quick discussion with Arthur, while under hypnosis, that he is a very unfulfilled individual. He makes the hypnotic suggestion that Arthur should give up living a mundane life and pursue his dreams. Arthur wakes up, takes the boys to Martin's mom's house, and then drives away...never to be seen again. A few years later, Arthur's first novel, My Name is No One becomes a runaway bestseller. Martin fixates on the rubix cube and decides that he's going to be a world champion. He never is.

Many years pass and the boys are grown. Martin still plays with the rubix cube, and has some marginal success. Eric has become a stock broker and financial investor in a prominent company in the city. Ivan is an art curator and has told everyone that he is gay. All three men are living lies in their lives because none of them are telling the truth and in many instances are cheating those around them. Eric is cheating on many levels. He's cheating on his wife, Laura, and he's defrauded millions of dollars from his clients over the years. Ivan, after running into the Great Lindemann in Europe decides that he doesn't have what it takes to be a true artist, and instead becomes an apprentice to someone he calls a 'true artist', Heinrich Eulenboek. Heinrich painted for a while, but then seemed to have gone into a slump. When Ivan visits him, he knows why. Heinrich's hands have a type of palsy. Ivan begins to paint for him, and together the two of them continue the farce, making both of them very wealthy. Martin is lying because he is a priest, but has no faith. He doesn't believe that God cares at all about the people who attend the church each week. He just goes through the process and cashes his check.

Eric begins to lose touch with reality when he learns that many of his clients have begun to figure out that he's been mishandling their funds. Eric thinks of all the possible scenarios in which he gets away and can think of nothing. He has resorted to taking lots of medications and almost ends up overdosing on them. In a psychotic break he rambles and almost has a heart attack in his office building. He asks his secretary to make an appointment with his brother for lunch. In error she calls Martin, who comes right away. Eric really wanted to see Ivan, his twin. Later, he calls Ivan, but changes his mind about telling his twin about the trouble that he's in. He goes for a walk in the park



and two children tell him to stay away from the three teen boys by the food vendor's truck.

Ivan is experiencing his own crisis in that people have begun to suspect that there is something particularly wrong with some of the Eulenbroek paintings that have been authenticated. Heinrich, who had ended up being Ivan's lover, has long since died, leaving Ivan as the executor for all things Eulenbroek. Ivan is afraid that he's going to be discovered. He goes out for a walk to clear his mind and sees three teens beating up a fourth teen on the ground near a food vendor's truck. He tries to intervene, but is stabbed by one of the teens. The boys all run away except for the one on the ground. The one on the ground, whose name is Ron, slowly gets up, takes Ivan's wallet, pockets the cash, then leaves Ivan bleeding on the street. No one comes to help. Ivan barely makes it to his apartment where he bleeds to death.

Eric decides to hide out in the church basement where Martin works. He stays there for nearly four years. During this time his daughter, Marie, visits him. They often go to the zoo or to see a movie. Marie, the reader learns, is bright, and isn't given to flights of fancy like the adults in her family. She has the ability to view things from a logical standpoint, to accept things as they truly appear, and sees below the surface to see the truth nature of something. Arthur, meanwhile, has surfaced. He has become a world famous author, but has realized that without family to share it with, it is meaningless. He reaches out to his only grandchild, Marie. They talk via email for a while, and then he visits, taking her to a local carnival.

Once at the carnival they go to a fortune teller, who is none other than the great Lindemann. He attempts to read the cards for them, but he is so old, and partially deaf and blind, that Arthur tells Marie that she shouldn't put much stock in what the man might have to say to her. Finally, frustrated with the tarot cards, Arthur tells Lindemann that he's a fraud and takes Marie. They leave and Arthur tells Marie that she's to never let anyone tell her what her fate will be, that she is to choose for herself.

Meanwhile, though no one has found Ivan's body for four years, has been declared officially dead. This makes Eric the sole executor of the large art collection. It is enough to get him out of debt. That there has been an economic depression has also covered his earlier fraudulent activities and he feels as if he can now emerge from the church's basement. Martin is still as bitter and resigned as ever. The story ends with Arthur attempting to undo the damage he did to his children, realizing that he really can't, and focusing his attention on making things better for his granddaughter.



Chapter 1: The Great Lindemann

Summary

In Chapter 1 the reader is introduced to the main characters, Arthur, Ivan, Eric and Martin. Most of this chapter is told from 14-year old Martin's point of view, but other points of view are offered, too. Martin is the child from Arthur's previous marriage and Martin is waiting for Arthur to come pick him up from his mother's house. Arthur also has two twin boys who are from his new marriage. Martin thinks back to when he first met his father when he was seven, and how he had always thought about his dad as this dark imposing figure, not a middle aged man who looked worn down from the rigors of life.

Once Arthur comes to pick up Martin they head to out to an activity his father has predetermined they'd do that afternoon. They are to attend the hypnotism show with The Great Lindemann. Lindemann goes through all the motions associated with hypnotism acts. He finally gets to Arthur's boys and does his bit with them. Then, he selects Ivan to go first. Once the boys have both had a turn at being ridiculed it is Arthur's turn, which takes some coaxing as he really didn't want to, nor believed, he could be hypnotized. Arthur was hypnotized into making more of an effort with everything in his life. Lindemann offered this suggestion while Arthur was hypnotized when Lindemann found out how washed up Arthur really was. When they all return home and Martin is returned to his mother, Arthur promptly packs and bag and leaves both families for good.

Analysis

In Chapter 1 the reader sees Martin as a kid who likes being fatherless, as this allows for him to not have to live up to anything, nor have a father figure barring down on him. Martin is not impressed by his father as he quickly determines that his father has pretty much sponged off of every woman he's married, and has no aspirations.

Arthur also has children in his other marriage. The twins, Ivan and Eric, loved to be identical to each other until they grew up and realized they hadn't had their own separate identity their whole childhood, so they start to dress differently. The reader can assume the plans to go to the fateful hypnotism show had been in works for a while based on how long Martin was waiting and how excited he was.

Arthur doesn't believe in God, therefore he feels he cannot be hypnotized since he has had no faith concerning things unseen. This, however is brought short at the show when he is hypnotized into being more of a person than he was, which led to him ditching his kids and writing his books. He finally was published and became famous. Since it was said the boys hadn't seen or heard from their dad since that day, and in the present they are 18, it is likely that Martin got his wish and grew up without a father figure. When Arthur left his kids alone at Martin's house they all bonded over shooting a tree with an



air gun. This was the start of the brothers' bonding, since their dad left they thought that they would need each other more.

The symbolism of Miss Miller, the doll that Martin carried around when he was younger will come into play later on in the story. At this point in the novel, the fact that he feels the need to carry around a doll which he has named, Miss Miller indicates that Martin is different from other little boys and that normal conventional actions and thoughts will most likely not be a part of his life. The theme of Identity is introduced in a couple of ways. First, there is the need for the twins to build an identity as a complete unit of two, then later to find their own separate identities. Later, Martin struggles with who he is; whether he is a fatherless boy, a son of a shiftless, ambitionless man, or if he is someone different entirely. And, lastly, Arthur doesn't fully know who he is as he so easily jumps from one persona to the next after going to the hypnotist.

In this chapter, then, the letter 'F' may as well stand for Fatherless, Faithless, and Fate, as Martin, Ivan, Eric will encounter all of these things. As for Arthur, 'F' is for 'fraud' as he is not anything he ever pretends to be.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the potential symbolism for the doll, Miss Miller.

Discussion Question 2

How was Martin disappointed with his father when he first met him?

Discussion Question 3

Why do the brothers decide to become closer at the end of Chapter 1?

Vocabulary

enormously, captivity, restricted, attributed, mediocrity, optical illusion, diminishing, thrall, snigger



Chapter 2: The Lives of the Saints

Summary

Chapter 2 takes place several years after the main character's father leaves them. Martin, Arthur's son from his previous marriage has become a priest and he is dealing with coming to terms with his own faith. He leads mass and confessionals but truly doesn't believe in a God or any higher calling. He muses about his first sexual encounter with an overweight girl he'd known in high school. It had ended badly when her parents and his mother walked in on them just as they were disrobing. He talks about meeting with a demon once. Martin is all into his Rubiks cube and even competed in the championships, but didn't win, coming in second.

Eric, Martin's stepbrother, calls him up one day to go talk. Eric is a business man who seems perpetually angry. Martin and Eric go out to eat but Martin never gets to the bottom of what Eric had wanted to say to Martin. Martin finally hears from his father and they go out to eat. They invite Ivan and Eric. Ivan shows up, but Eric hates his dad for leaving, and refuses the invitation. Ivan reveals that he is gay but has kept it a secret from Eric due to the fact that they are twins and he doesn't want to alarm Eric with doubts about his own sexuality. After dinner, Arthur tells Martin he will be in town for a little bit and then leaves for his hotel. Arthur leaves out the next morning and is gone again. Martin hears a confession from a young boy named Rob who was involved in a murder.

Analysis

The letter 'F' seems to stand for 'fake'. This entire chapter lends itself to one of the predominant themes in this novel, which is hypocrisy. Martin is a priest but doesn't find joy or job satisfaction in his chosen profession. In fact, it is clear that he is primarily going through the motions while he's holding mass for the few parishioners who have attended morning services. It is clear from many of his internal dialogues that he doesn't care for the people in his congregation and when he is asked a spiritual question by two of his members he gives them rote answers claiming that God's will is a 'mystery'. This mindset is different from how he was as a younger man. He used to ask questions and loved the deeper philosophical questions of life. Now, as an overweight priest, he avoids thinking about anything too deeply.

Ivan is also a part of the theme of hypocrisy in that he has been acting as if he were straight, when in reality he is gay. His reasoning is that he didn't want Eric to feel as if he might have to change his sexual orientation, but as far as rationalization goes it is thin. As Martin listens to his brother talk to him about his life choices, Martin is not giving him his full attention, and finds that he has a hard time caring about Ivan's sexual crisis.



F could also stand for Family, in that all three brothers, even though they've grown up and started individual lives, are still in contact with one another. With Arthur showing up out of the blue all of the brothers are once again forced to relive and experience the abandonment that they had when they were younger. Interestingly, Arthur has written a book titled, My Name is No One, in which the main character is named only by the letter 'F'. The symbolism inherent in the title of the book indicates that on some level Arthur is still the same man of low self esteem that he was in the beginning of the novel. Additionally, that he names his main character, 'F' is telling in that the character and his fate in the book leads to a rash of readers committing suicide. The book rockets Arthur to best selling status, and so, F, in Arthur's case, stands for 'famous'.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of hypocrisy in Chapter 2.

Discussion Question 2

What does Martin's actions in his church tell the reader about his frame of mind at this point in his life?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss what the 'F' stands for potentially in Chapter 2.

Vocabulary

novella, constructed, narrative, persistent, melancholic, conventional, exhaustively, suspicion



Chapter 3: Family

Summary

In this chapter the reader sees Martin still bitter about his father's early exit from his life. He opens up the chapter stating that he knows very little about his father and that he has virtually no memory of anything regarding him. F, in this chapter, stands for 'failure' and 'father' as these two terms seem to underscore all of the events.

The first event is Martin recalling his own family history as he recounts exactly what he does know about his father, and his father's father, who fought in World War I. Martin's grandfather had been an actor and had been frustrated trying to regain his earlier acclaim when he returned from the war. Martin's great-grandfather had been a doctor, having gone into medicine solely because his father had been a doctor and he inherited the family business.

Martin goes on to muse about the information he'd found and shares that when he went far enough back, there were some odd people in his ancestry. His Great-Great-Grandmother had been interested in the human body and had taken to sneaking out and dissecting corpses. She volunteered during the war effort and was a nurse, which afforded her the ability to see the inner workings of the body, first hand. Then, her father, Martin's Great-Great-Great-Grandfather had been a 'highwayman' having been abandoned by his father and brought up by a farming couple that used him as cheap labor. There were also priests in his ancestry, which gave him some comfort.

Analysis

This entire chapter gives a broader context to Martin, as he states that knowing who you are is often knowing whom you've come from. As he goes back into a rather detailed account of who his ancestors were, what they ate, where they lived, who they served, and how they died, it becomes clear that in the telling and retelling of his lineage he is beginning to see in some of his ancestors bits and pieces of himself. It serves to root him and give him some sort of semblance of belonging. The theme of Identity is evident in this chapter as it all surrounds the discussion and questions about former ancestors.

Additionally, there is the repetition of the phrase 'never came back'. His own father never came back, and continues to never come back, so in essence, Martin is finding that 'never coming back' is a serious trait in his family. Most of his ancestors, however, never came back because they had been killed or suffered a death. What he concludes is that life can be hard, but often, fate is kind.

After he's examined the genetic makeup of his family, some of Martin's questions are answered. The overall conclusion he comes to, however, is that despite it all, a person does choose to indulge or walk away from moral choices. He decides that his father



was no more compelled by the hypnotist than a mouse in the field is compelled to dig a burrow. His father simply gave in to his own nature and rationalized his actions.

Discussion Question 1

What becomes evident in the long litany about Martin's distant ancestors as opposed to his own father?

Discussion Question 2

What does Martin conclude about his father's decision to abandon everyone?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Identity in Chapter 3.

Vocabulary

highwayman, plagued, landholding, dowries, cathedral, scruples, gallows, asserted



Chapter 4: Duties

Summary

This chapter is told from Eric's point of view. He is wakened in the morning by his wife, Laura, sobbing in her sleep. Eric gets up and goes to the bathroom to get his day started. His usual morning routine consists of taking a number of medications so he can just get through the day. He's had a particularly bad night's sleep since he had a nightmare about his grandmother standing over him trying to tell him something important. He mentions a Paul Klee painting that he absolutely hates but had Ivan purchase for him at an art auction because he wanted a fine art work to impress those in his tax bracket.

The reader also learns that Eric is worried that he might be going to prison. It is evident that Eric is wealthy, to the point that he counts up the costs of the various ordinary things in his home as he moves through it, but it is clear that he is unaware that he is even doing it. He is also having an affair with a woman named Sibylle, from his office, who is upset with him because of last Sunday when he was spotted by someone who knew him and his wife and in fear, Eric had left the theater, stranding Sibylle. She texts him and tells him that she is over it.

Eric shares that for years he has been raiding his company's capital to replace money that he'd lost on bad investments. But now, this spiral has caught up with him and after crunching the numbers he knows that it is only a matter of time before the company's accountants and auditors nail him. He wonders if his brother, Ivan, could forge a good passport. He asks his secretary to call Ivan. Eric desperately feels that he needs to speak with his twin. He meets with a client who has figured out what he's been up to and asks that his accounts be reassigned. Eric panics. Instead of Ivan coming to see him, his brother Martin comes. Frustrated by the conversation with his brother over lunch, Eric takes a walk in the park and sits on a bench. Two children sit next to him and tell him to walk away from the three. Eric doesn't know what they are talking about, but they leave soon and so does he. Eric thinks that maybe he didn't really eat enough for lunch so he goes to a fast food vendor. There are three teenagers standing there.

The vendor runs the kids off and Eric orders a hot dog. Ivan calls on the phone saying that he got the feeling that something was wrong. Eric tells him everything is fine. Ivan tells him that their mother had tried to call Eric three times the other day. Eric hangs up on Ivan and eats his hot dog. He's still upset and angry that Ivan is a homosexual. He goes to Sibylle's flat and they make love.

Eric goes back to the office but it is clear that the stress and the medications are causing him to start to have a psychotic break. He imagines that people are having conversations with him, accusing him of fraud. He goes home early and hears something in the cellar. Then in a dynamic and shifting collage of half remembered



encounters, conversations, frightening near death instances, it is clear to the reader that Eric is taking so many pills that he's lost touch with what is real and what isn't.

Analysis

This chapter is adequately titled as all three of the characters that are introduced, with the exception of Sibylle, feel as if they are required to fulfill certain roles or duties. Eric believes that he's supposed to present this image of material success for his clients and for their neighbors. His wife feels as if she's supposed to be the perfect supportive spouse, and yet readers know that she's not happy in that role because she is crying in her sleep. Even Eric's daughter, Marie, pretends to be Daddy's happy little girl, when in reality she's chaffing for more in her life.

The reader learns that 'F' stands for fraud in this chapter as not only are all of the characters not who they present to the world, but Eric, in particular is defrauding and cheating his clients...and has been doing so for years. The theme of deceit is demonstrated in this chapter as the reader learns just how embroiled and trapped Eric's deceit has made him. His lack of morality and ethics have caused him to have physical and mental issues, to the point that he's having to take medication. He, in error, takes more than he should and ends up having a psychotic break while at work. He asks his assistant to call his brother, meaning that he would like to have his brother Ivan, as Ivan always had a calming effect on him. However, the assistant calls Eric's other brother, Martin, who is a priest.

Eric ends up having lunch with Martin but they talk about next to nothing leaving Martin wondering why the panicked call from the assistant. The symbolism of the number three happens in a couple of places in this chapter. First, it shows up when Ivan tells him on the phone that he needs to return calls to their mother, that she has called three times that day, alone trying to get him. Then, later, Martin is told by the strange children in the park that he needs to stay away from the three teens near the street vendor's truck.

The Paul Klee painting shows up in this chapter, and represents the distorted life that Eric is living. Ivan chose the picture for him because Eric's only requirements for obtaining a painting was that it be expensive and rare. That it is ugly and garish is secondary to Eric, though later, when he is heavily medicated, he sees the truth of the purchase. All of this will come back in the later chapters when he comes to some awareness of his own role in his misery and the misery that he's caused others.

Discussion Question 1

What statements or attitude leads the reader to conclude that Eric isn't sorry for what he has done?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss Eric's character in comparison to his brother, Martin.

Discussion Question 3

How are each of the characters mentioned in this chapter a slave to a certain type of duty?

Vocabulary

sobbing, unconsciousness, symmetrical, groping, tousled, indifference, matchstick, criticized



Chapter 5: Beauty

Summary

This chapter features Ivan, Eric's twin. He is an art dealer and this chapter walks the reader through a typical transaction and his thought processes. After he's met with a few clients for the morning he gets the most terrible feeling that he should call Eric. He does and Eric tells him that he's fine, which in twin speak means that Eric is anything but fine. Eric tells Ivan that he'd actually asked his secretary to call his brother, and she'd called Martin, instead of Ivan. Ivan finds this hilarious. Eric dodges all of the pointed questions that Ivan asks. After they hang up Ivan muses that he keeps his distance from Eric, most likely because as a twin he can't hide anything from his brother. He wonders if it is the same for Eric. He assumes so.

He decides to call his mother, who has left three messages. She picks up and tells Ivan what she told Eric in the previous chapter; that someone has put the land up for sale that is next to their house. She is worried that someone will buy it and build something that will block her view. It is clear from her discussion with Ivan that she does not approve of his homosexuality.

Ivan goes to the subway where he runs into an art critic from the Evening News newspaper. They end up sitting together, though Ivan didn't really want to. His name is Willem. They used to be roommates when Ivan was in Oxford going to school. Ivan recounts for the reader the tempestuous nature of their relationship. Ivan also muses that he had a chance encounter with the Great Lindemann when he was in Brussels. He approached him on the pretext of getting an interview for the Oxford student newspaper. Ivan says that the hypnotist looked insecure and lesser, somehow. However, Lindemann does tell Ivan that science had proven that hypnosis was a cluster effect, which included a person's willingness to submit to authority, some sort of vulnerability, and an openness to suggestion. All of this, he told Ivan, only means that a person can lose control of their own will for a very short period of time. He says that no one can do anything they don't want to do, even when in a trance. Only rarely, he says, does anything spiritually profound happen for a person.

Ivan thinks back to when Eulenboeck paintings first broke onto the scene. He knows exactly when they broke because he and a lover of his, Heinrich Eulenboeck, concocted an entire plot to fake the paintings and inflate their worth. Ivan is the one doing the paintings, but Heinrich signs his name to them. They agreed they'd do it as a lark and then break the news and have a big laugh at the corrupt art community. However, decades later, Ivan is an exclusive dealer of the Eulenboecks, and seems almost frenetic to make sure that they are all accounted for and placed in just the right homes. One time, Ivan recalls, his famous father (Arthur) visited them, but he saw through the little ruse. Heinrich threw him out of the house.



Later, the reader sees Ivan encounter the same teenagers at the fast food vendor's stand that Eric has frequented earlier in the day. The teens are beating another teen senseless and against his better judgment, Ivan intervenes. He is punched, and when he gets back up he notices that one of them has a knife. The boys all call each other Ron, and the reader realizes that this is the same event that the altarboy in Martin's church recounted in an earlier chapter. Ivan is stabbed and falls to the ground, while the other boys run off. The boy he'd been trying to defend comes to and takes his wallet, and he runs off. Ivan manages to make it back to his apartment where he bleeds to death on his floor. This is the man that little Ron, who confessed to Martin the next day, had seen murdered.

Analysis

What is interesting in this chapter is the fact that both Ivan and Eric have little qualms about engaging in fraudulent activities. Eric has defrauded his clients in the investment firm where he works and it is catching up with him. Ivan, also, has engaged in fraudulent activity by faking a whole line of paintings, and artificially inflating their worth. Both Eric and Ivan are scrambling to cover their tracks and falling short. Both are in panic mode. Ironically, since they are both twins, they have found themselves in much the same position. So, in this chapter, as well as the last, 'F' stands for fraud.

The fact that Arthur comes to visit Ivan is interesting and is most likely a nudge from the author to notice that Arthur's legacy to his children has been his tendency to detach from reality, to walk away leaving other people to clean up the mess. Ivan's chance meeting with the Great Lindemann, and realizing that there really wasn't that much 'greatness' left in the man, is telling. The theme of hypocrisy is demonstrated in this chapter by this meeting with the hypnotist who tells Ivan that people can't be made to do anything they don't want to do. Ivan has to face the truth that he'd most likely always known his entire life, and that is that his father simply wanted to be free of all responsibilities so he could be married to his work. To some extent, Ivan understands this as he, too, has been married to his work.

The theme of Family is also demonstrated in this family in that at one point or another, all of them make an appearance in this chapter. Arthur visits Ivan, reminding Ivan that he is as much a fake and fraud as his father. In fact, his father shames him because at least his father had the courage to strike out and walk away to pursue his art. Ivan has had to hide behind the ruse this whole time. Then, there is Ivan and Eric's mother who is beside herself because someone might buy the property next door and ruin her view. Image is everything to her, and when that is threatened, she comes unglued. She is, in other words, committed to the fantasy of her life, and not the reality of it....much like her former husband and two sons. Martin makes an appearance as well, as Eric tells Ivan that Martin came to visit him and that they'd had lunch. This family's typical avoidance issues seems to be genetic. All of them avoid seeing things as they are and instead, can't see the beauty that surrounds them.



This chapter is titled beauty "Because" is asks the characters, as well as the reader, to consider the definition of beauty and whether mankind can ever truly understand the 'language' of the deeper truths that beautiful things try to impart to human beings. Ivan states that mankind sees a thing of beauty and on a deeper level knows that there is some message from the universe trying to get through, and that is where most people stop...too terrified to get to the heart of the message, to simply listen.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of hypocrisy exemplified by all of the Friedmann men.

Discussion Question 2

What motivated Ivan to decide to step in to create Eulenboeck paintings when the real Heinrich couldn't paint any longer?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Eric's situation to Ivan's. Which is worse? What is the most likely outcome of each situation?

Vocabulary

incompetent, erratic, obvious, raptly, monochrome, crumpled, alterpiece, archangels, technicians, grips, clarity



Chapter 6: Seasons 1

Summary

This chapter opens up and it is springtime. Marie, Eric's daughter, is on the roof of the house with her friends, Georg and Lena. The reader learns that she visits her father, secretly, in a small room in the presbytery at her uncle's church. No one knows that her father lives there. She hates going to visit him, but she does. It has been a year since the reader learned of Eric's impending arrest. He was not arrested but has been hiding out in the church's basement. He is happy because just when the noose was starting to tighten an economic bust happened and all of a sudden no one thought to question problems in the books. Her father shows up on the roof and gives them a bow and arrows, then leaves. Marie promises Georg that the arrows aren't pointed.

No one knows where Ivan has disappeared to and apparently no one knows that he's died. Marie muses with her friends about where her odd Uncle could have gone. Marie has a dreaded feeling that her Uncle Ivan is dead. A bird flutters by her and she thinks that Ivan must be up there in the clouds with the birds.

The reader learns that Marie has become a kleptomaniac and has been taking money and jewelry from various family members over the past few months. Laura, who was formerly married to Eric, is now in the movies and is having Marie help her run her lines for a show. While they work it is obvious that neither are connecting to one another. Marie is asking deep existential questions about where God came from, and Laura is talking about the movie and who all would be in it with her. Marie gets tired and before falling asleep wonders how the days could be so long.

Analysis

This chapter features Marie, Eric and Laura's daughter, who is now 11 (a year later than when she was introduced). The reader sees that Marie has been affected by her father's family's legacy of fraud and risk taking. Not only does she routinely crawl out onto the roof, but she takes money from her grandfather's wallet, and steals jewelry from her mother's drawers. She sneaks off to her Uncle's church to visit her father, where he's been hiding out for a year after he thought he'd be arrested.

Her father gives her a bow and arrow, which she allows her friends to shoot. She continues to tell them that the arrows aren't dangerous or pointed. However, when her friend Georg shoots one it lodges across the street and Marie has to go and get it. The author suggests that Marie has a deeper and more pure connection to universal wisdom as evidenced by her conversations with her mother about the nature of God, or her talks with her friends about the universe and how limitless it must be. The symbolism of the arrows is introduced in this chapter and represent ideas and beliefs. That her father has given them to her is telling, and the fact that she manipulates others into shooting the



very pointed arrows across the street indicates that her mindset is much like Ivan, Martin, and Eric's. The symbolism of the bird surfaces in this chapter, too, when Marie sees the bird and immediately thinks of her Uncle Ivan and that he must be dead.

The theme of Family is demonstrated in this chapter, not only in the interaction between Marie and her father, but in her interactions with her mother, grandfather, and in a flashback, with her Uncle Ivan. She is the only one in the entire family who has a feeling that Ivan might be dead. The others simply don't care enough to be worried about his sudden absence.

Discussion Question 1

What makes the reader believe that Marie is much like Eric and Ivan?

Discussion Question 2

Since this chapter is titled Seasons, what makes it appropriate to feature Marie?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism of the arrows and the bird in this chapter.

Vocabulary

drumming, arithmetic, hunched, recapture, embroidered, contradiction, explanation



Chapter 7: Seasons 2

Summary

It is Fall and Marie is still featured in this vignette, but she is now 13. Marie has received a letter from her grandfather, Arthur, saying that he is going to come and visit. They strike up a conversation via email and Arthur genuinely wants to know all about her, what her interests are and who she is. Two months later, he shows up to take her to the carnival. While there Arthur spies s fortune teller's tent and wants to go and have it done. Marie doesn't much want to go, but she humors him. When they go in Arthur believes he recognizes the old soothsayer as Lindemann the hypnotist. However, the soothsayer will not acknowledge the name.

The soothsayer has Marie pick out some cards and hand them back to him. She does so and then the reading starts. Arthur, who apparently reads Tarot as well, sees the cards that have turned up and he's nervous at what they mean. He tries to convince the soothsayer that he's not seeing what he's seeing, and the soothsayer confesses that he's not much good with the cards. Arthur seems relieved and tells Marie that she should make her own fate, choose her own future, not allow someone else to tell her what it should be.

They stop by an art museum and Marie is disinterested and impatient as she has a birthday party to go to. Arthur stops her by a painting of a ship at sea, by Euelenbroek. She's still disinterested but Arthur insists that she look closer. She does and then begins to see the intricate nuances of the painting, the skill that it had obviously taken. She stands so close that the picture disappears and all she can see is a blur of colors and whirls, joy on a canvas. Then, she steps back and it all comes back into focus again. Arthur is satisfied that she's taken a good look at the painting. He tells her that her Uncle Ivan painted it. She tells him that this is not what it says on the placard. Arthur smiles and they leave.

Analysis

Arthur's desire to know his granddaughter is a turning point for his character as before, with his own children, he never bothered to get to know them, and seemed to have cared less about them. The symbolism of the painting comes back into play in this chapter as Marie is encouraged by Arthur to see the beauty in the painting, to know the Uncle that she never really got to know. It is also Arthur's way to get to know the son that he walked out on so many years before.

The soothsayer, who represents freewill and choice, recurs in this chapter to offer what he offered in the opening chapter....a choice and a chance, permission to be whomever you wish to be. In this instance, Arthur realizes that to have the soothsayer actually 'tell' Marie her fortune would be disastrous, as disastrous as it was for him so many years



ago. He has realized that freewill and choice are best administered and activated by the very person to whom it belongs. Giving up the freedom of the choices to someone's suggestion is a type of bondage that Arthur does not want for his granddaughter.

The painting also makes a statement about perspective. Marie has the capacity to really 'see' the painting, in the same way that she really 'sees' people and reality. Most of the adults in her life would only have seen a pretty boat on an ocean, or a pricey painting in an art museum. Marie does not see the painting in that way, but really sees it on all its many levels. She has the depth of the human spirit required to fully understand the message that a thing of beauty has to offer.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Marie agree to strike up a conversation and a relationship with her grandfather after all these years?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of the painting that Marie views in the art museum.

Discussion Question 3

Why does the author bring back the soothsayer at the end of the story?

Vocabulary

fraction, fortress, contortions, relieved, consists, blotches, transitional space, impasto



Chapter 8: Seasons 3

Summary

The season in this chapter is winter, and it opens at the presbytery, told from Eric's point of view. Martin and Eric are arguing because Eric continues to say that God has sent the economic collapse to save him, as well as making Ivan disappear, which ended up making Eric the executor of all of the paintings. Martin sees this type of thinking as immoral and won't consider Eric's thoughts on the matter.

Marie arrives to visit and catches the men fighting. Martin is getting ready to say mass and is getting dressed. His altarboy is assisting him. Marie remembers that when she first met the altarboy that he was pretty shy. Then, later, he had asked her out but she'd turned him down. His name was Ron. This is the same Ron who witnessed Ivan's murder. Marie learns that her father had to go to another church to be baptized as Martin refused to do it.

Eric can't figure out why the altarboy giggles nervously whenever he's around him. It sort of creeps Eric out. Ivan has been gone for four years and was declared officially dead just that past week. The mass that Martin was getting ready to give is in Ivan's memory. It is a mass for the dead. Martin hadn't wanted to do it because Ivan hadn't been baptized officially and besides that, argued Martin, God doesn't change his mind just because a few people sang songs. Martin has given so many eulogies that he does this one on autopilot. In between the various components of the mass, Martin is thinking about what he's going to eat for dinner.

Analysis

This chapter ends the novel, but it seems almost anticlimactic. Ivan is dead, Eric has been absolved of his wrongdoings and won't be going to jail. Martin still hates his job and fakes his way through things consistently. Marie sees everyone for who they are and accepts them, warts and all, as her family. However, it is clear that though she is one of them, she will make better choices.

In a type of closure, the reader sees that Ron, the boy that originally went to confessional and told Martin that he'd seen a murder, has become an altar boy for Martin. He was the boy that had been beaten up by the other three boys and left on the ground, the one that ended up stealing Ivan's wallet. Ironically, the very boy that allowed his brother to die, now serves the dead man's brother...who happens to be a priest. This entire historical loop reiterates and demonstrates the theme of connectedness.

Hypocrisy as a theme still reigns supreme in this chapter as the reader sees that Martin really hasn't changed much from the beginning of the book. Both Eric, Ivan, Marie, Laura, and Arthur undergo character development, but in essence, Martin does not. F, in



this case, stands for failure, and faithless, as Martin is, perhaps, the saddest character of them all.

Discussion Question 1

How does Ron's storyline cross through all of the brothers' storylines?

Discussion Question 2

What is the irony in Ron serving as Martin's acolyte?

Discussion Question 3

Compare Arthur at the end of the book, to the Arthur at the beginning of the book.

Vocabulary

Bhagavad Gita, meditate, administering, essential, asset, chauffeur, accusations



Characters

Arthur Friedland

Arthur Friedland is the father of an older son, Martin and a couple of twin boys, Eric and Ivan, from his current marriage. Arthur's new wife is an eye doctor, which he is grateful for since he is a writer who has enjoyed very limited success in his career. He is an atheist, embittered, and snide toward his family and those around him. The initiating conflict of the story revolves around a pivotal moment when Arthur and his sons attend a hypnotism show by the Great Lindemann. While under the influence of hypnosis, Arthur is told that he will never again accept second rate anything and that he will become more successful than he's ever been; that he will no longer allow things to get in the way of his success. As a result, Arthur packs and bag and the next day he exits his family's life.

Arthur didn't believe that he could be hypnotized but was proven very wrong when he was hypnotized to be better than he was. This hypnotizing lead him to abandon his wife and children and set off to write and publish books which made him famous... but at what cost? Arthur spends a good deal of the book being absent, however, his influence is as tangible as if he were there in the room at all times. His abandonment of his family and, in particular, his sons, have changed them profoundly. In addition, all of them are cynical and view others as potential marks. They are not able to make or form lasting or deep relationships with anyone...all as a direct result of his actions. He realizes this at the end of the book and tries to undo the damage, but realizes that it is too late. He determines to not make the same mistake with his granddaughter.

Martin

When the book starts out, Martin is depicted as being age 14, but there are flashbacks throughout the novel with Martin at varying ages. In each age the reader sees that Martin was greatly confused by his father's disappearance from his life and is equally as confused by his father's decision to reenter his life sporadically. Martin ends up becoming a priest, though what he really wanted to be was a rubics cube national champion. He continues to try to achieve this goal throughout the entire book, and never succeeds. He is the priest of a very large congregation in the city, but has no faith, himself. Many times, as he's going through the various services his mind and heart are elsewhere. He gives his brother, Eric, sanctuary when Eric fears incarceration.

Ivan

Ivan is Eric's twin. He has also been affected by their father's disappearance. He vaguely remembers his father as a dark silhouette in his bedroom while his mother tucked him in at night. Other than a few memories, he really knew nothing of his father. He studies art and wants to become a painter. He is a good student and is offered a



scholarship to attend Oxford. He does and while there takes the summer to travel with his friend and lover. Ivan is homosexual and has only recently 'come out' to his family, who are not happy about it. He ends up breaking up with his lover, but decides to visit a painter he'd heard about a long time ago, a Heinrich Eulenbroek. He goes to the artist's residence and quickly ascertains that the painter isn't painting any more because his hands have become palsied. Quickly Ivan decides to paint for Heinrich, and then they can both capitalize on the wealth from it. They become lovers and Ivan stays with him until Heinrich's death. Afterward he becomes the sole executor of some of the most highly sought after artwork in the world.

Eric

Eric Friedland is Ivan's twin brother and Martin's half brother. He has become a financial investor, and has been embezzling money from his company for many years. He is married to Laura, and they have one child named, Marie. Eric realizes that his clients have begun to suspect what he's been doing and Eric begins to panic. He has been taking many mail order medications and doesn't pay attention to the dosage. He begins his day with an assortment of pills and it continues through his day. He is having an affair with Sibylle, who has a flat that they go to on a weekly basis. Later, he takes refuge at his brother's church until he's sure the police are no longer looking for him.

He still meets on a weekly basis with his daughter, but his wife, Laura, has decided to become a movie star. Eric breaks things off with Sibylle. Things begin to look better for him at the end of the novel because no one suspects his earlier fraudulent activities, and since Ivan has been declared officially dead, he inherits all of the expensive Eulenboek paintings.

Sabine

This is the high school girl that Martin had his first sexual encounter with. Slightly overweight, she invites Martin to come to her house to study, but afterwards they make out on the couch.

Ron

Ron is one of three people named Ron in this novel. The Ron that has a prominent part in the novel plays several roles for all of the Friedland boys, though none of them know the connection. Ron first appears in Martin's confessional, terrified because he's just witnessed a murder. Then, later, the reader finds out that Ron was the boy that was being beat up, whom Ivan went to help, and ended up robbing Ivan and leaving him to bleed to death on the street. Eric knows Ron because he was warned by two children in the park to stay away from the bad teenagers. In one way or another, Ron has touched all of their lives, but they are all unaware of it.



Laura

Laura is Eric's wife. She is very beautiful and must have started out as Eric's trophy wife. However, after she suspects he is cheating on her, and then later, when he tells her that he has to go into hiding, she divorces him.

Nietzsche

Nietzsche is an ancient philosopher whose sayings and theories surface throughout the book.

Georg and Lena

These are two of Marie's friends who like to come over and sit on her roof. One day Marie shows them her bow and arrows and they shoot them off of the rooftop at the other houses.



Symbols and Symbolism

Miss Miller

When Martin was younger he had a doll named Miss Miller that he carried around with him. He hadn't met his father and was seven years old when he first met him. He had carried Ms. Miller with him to that first meeting and his father had been embarrassed that his son carried a doll.

Rubiks Cube

The Rubiks Cube is Martin's connection to his true self. It is who he truly wanted to be, but never was able to be. As a result, he's lost his faith and decided to become an embittered priest.

Book: My Name is No One

Arthur's first book, My Name is No One, is quite indicative of Arthur's mindset when he abruptly left his family. He literally hit the reset button and didn't look back until it was too late.

Paul Klee Painting

This is a painting that hangs in Eric's house. He looks at it each morning and it reminds him that he is a wealthy man. It is also not a painting that he particularly likes, but keeps it around to show off his money and make a statement. It represents the falsity of the image and life that he leads.

The Number Three

The number three is emphasized by the author on several occasions. First, there is the mention of the number three when Martin states that after he first met his father (when he was seven) it was three months later when he saw him again. There is mention of the number three when Eric beats up the bully in the schoolyard, the Great Lindemann counted to three to bring them out of hypnosis, there were three stops that Eric and Ivan had to take to return home from Martin's house, three emails from upset parishioners to the Bishop when they were angry at Martin, three people taking the Eucharist in Martin's church, Eric asks to stay in the basement three weeks, and there were three monks that walked past Ivan when he was having a crisis of conscience, three attempts for Eric to get himself up off of the office floor when he has his psychotic break, a kid beat Martin's Rubiks time by three seconds, and the number THREE is mentioned nearly 83 times throughout the text. The author would seem to using the number three to represent Fate



and the number three as the literally fingerprint, showing the reader that something ordained is about to occur.

Birds

A bird represents Ivan. It is the last thing that he sees before he dies, and the fluttering of the wings corresponded to the fluttering of his heart before it stopped. Later on, Marie will see a bird and think immediately of her Uncle and why he has disappeared. It is at that point she believes that he has died.

Arrows

Marie is given a boy and arrows by Arthur. She shares them with her friends Georg and Lena. Marie makes a point of telling her friends that the arrows aren't dangerous. They most likely represent the truth because Marie is a straight shooter and sees the reality in most situations. Thus, it is not a difficult stretch to see the arrows as the unvarnished truth. The fact that Arthur has given them to her is also a signal that he's beginning to make a positive turn.

Eulenbroek Painting

There are numerous paintings by Eulenbroek that Ivan 'discovers' throughout the years in order to make money. However, the one particular painting is that of a boat at sea. This is the picture that Arthur has Marie observe in the museum one day. He is amazed at her ability to really 'see' the true nature of the piece.

Tarot Cards

The tarot cards are used by the soothsayer (who happens to be none other than the Great Lindemann) at the carnival.

Red Checked Shirt

When Eric goes to live in the presbytery he wears only tee shirts and a red checked shirt over them. Martin hates the shirt, and Marie wonders why he only wears one type of shirt. To Eric it signals a return to humbler times, and he keeps it on even when it seems that he has been absolved of any suspicion.



Settings

The Theater

The theater is the place where Arthur Friedland takes his sons (Martin, Ivan, and Eric) to see the Great Lindemann.

The Church

The church is a Catholic church where Martin is the priest. It is also where he hears Ron's confession, and hides his brother, Eric, in order to avoid jail.

The Art Studio

The art studio belongs to Ivan and it is where he both creates and 'authenticates' works by Eulenbroek.

Eric's Office

Eric's office is located in a tall highrise complex in the downtown area. His office, itself, is one of several investment firms that occupy the space. This is where Eric has his psychotic break.

The City Street Corner

This city street corner is where Ron is beaten nearly to death by the other three teens. It is also where Ivan is stabbed to death, and across in the park is where Eric was warned to stay away from the street corner.

Ivan's Apartment

Ivan has an apartment that he purchases when he moves back to his hometown after having been in Brussels for many years. He lives alone. This is where he manages to drag himself and where he ends up bleeding to death after he's stabbed.

Attic in Eric's Home

Eric's home has an attic where many of the memorabilia from the Friedland family resides. He doesn't like looking through the things there because he doesn't want to think about family and his connection to it. Marie, his daughter, however, loves the attic. It is her favorite place in the entire house.



Themes and Motifs

Hypocrisy

This novel is rife with hypocrisy. One of the first instances is Arthur pretending to be a great father, but ends up leaving all of them again just after their nice father/sons outing. Later, there is the fact that Martin, a grown man, is a priest, and yet he has no faith. In fact, he figures that God just doesn't care, much like an absentee parent. Then, there's Eric, who is an investment broker and continually tells his clients that he treats them like family, getting them to give him money to invest without question. The truth is, though, that he's been anything but responsible with their money. Ivan, is no better than the rest. He is also engaged in pretending to be something he's not. He's masquerading as an art broker, when in reality he WAS the famous artist that he has been claiming to represent.

One of the more hypocritical scenes occurs when Arthur tells a young 14-year old Martin why he is leaving everyone. He tells him that he did the family a favor by leaving because subjecting them to his dissatisfaction with life would have been hard on them. He says that he's also providing an example of how to get out into the world and make your dreams happen, no matter the cost. Unfortunately, his sons internalized that message only too well. He has a son who is a priest and can't believe, another son who uses people for his own ends, and another son so upset about his life's choices that he's sold his own chance at being famous.

Eric is also hypocritical towards his wife, Laura. He tells her that he loves her, finds her more attractive than his mistress, and yet he still continues to have the affair anyway. He tries to silence Laura's questions and desire to have a more meaningful relationship with him by throwing more money, trips, jewels, and material goods at her. In the end, it wasn't what Laura wanted and she files for divorce.

It is also hypocritical when Martin refuses to baptize his brother, Eric, who says that he's had a conversion experience. Eric has spent the better part of four years reflecting. He mistakenly believes that God caused a major economic crisis and the death of his brother, Ivan, so that he, Eric, could prosper and be okay. Because of this Eric feels that he owes God for the assist, and tries to begin living a more pious life. However, when it seems that he can come out of hiding, Eric doesn't waste any time using his forced exile to his advantage, making himself look like a man who had been on a quest to 'find himself' rather than a man that was on a quest to hide himself.

Family

The theme of family runs throughout the novel and is one of the stronger themes that surfaces. There is not one family depicted, with the exception of Ivan's long term relationship with Heinrich, that was loving or nurturing. Martin's childhood was ruined



almost from the beginning by his father's disappearance and it set many things into motion for Martin that would continue to haunt him. It is most likely the reason that he became a priest because then he wouldn't be expected to have a family. He, at least, recognizes that he would not have the ability to know how to be a good father or husband because he never had that as an example.

Ivan and Eric's mother was an eye doctor and as such made enough money to support Arthur's writing habit, even if it wasn't going anywhere at the time. However, this didn't suit Arthur and he resented the fact that his wife seemed to have her life in order but he was constantly denied his. With this second family he is simply going through the motions much like he did with his first family...and with the same results. To Arthur, family is a restriction, a trap, a limiting proposition and he is glad to be rid of it after seeing the Great Lindemann.

Eric sees family as the ultimate accessory. He has the beautiful trophy wife and the brilliant and talented daughter. He drives the best vehicles and purchases the 'right' artwork to hang on his wall so it will impress everyone. He craves people's esteem since he didn't have that growing up. He becomes a user just like his father, and thus the reader sees that the one great legacy that Arthur has passed on is that of using people toward their own ends, and to think only of himself. This Eric does to perfection because when he decides that he's about to be investigated, he just walks away from it all, much like his own father did.

Ivan finds happiness when he leaves his home country to live with Heinrich for many years. It is with Heinrich that he finds a companion that accepts him for who he was and he is able to paint, something that he'd thought he didn't have the talent for. However, his connection to his twin does not allow him to completely escape the family's pull and so when Heinrich dies, he comes home.

Marie and Arthur's relationship at the end of the novel signal a return to a more healing form of family. In this relationship the reader sees Arthur trying to do as he should have done in the beginning and realizing that it had been possible all along to have both the fame and family. Eric stays with Martin, even though they fight most of the time, and it shows that a sense of belonging and family does exist between them on some level.

Deceit

Nearly every character in F is a fake and a fraud. None of them are what they seem.

Martin is a priest, but he doesn't even believe in God. He really wants to be a rubik's cube champion. In that he is fanatical to the point of excluding others from his life and becoming very volatile towards those who don't see it as something more than a hobby. Martin also pretends to have a true love for his brothers, but he doesn't. In fact, most of his interactions with his brothers he undertakes because it is what would be expected of a priest. Martin does what is expected of him, and follows the rules, but he hates it, and as a result hates himself and God.



Marie is also deceitful in that she has been doing many things that her parents don't know about. She is not supposed to be going up into the attic or onto the roof, but she does. One could overlook that as a childish or rebellious teenaged action. However, she has also been stealing money from her grandfather and mother, as well as taking some of her mother's jewels. She's been stashing them in a secret place in her room. She has been doing this over a long period of time and has amassed quite the cache. In many ways, she's exhibiting some of the same characteristics of her father (Eric).

Ivan is deceitful in that he's lying to the world about who really painted the Eulenboek paintings. He also artificially inflates the value of certain paintings and then deftly denounces some of the paintings that are purchased just to make him look like a 'real' art critic. This is why when he runs into Willem in the subway (Willem is an art critic) he's very keen to get away from him. He doesn't want to be found out.

This desire to keep his actions hidden isn't only the purview of Ivan. Eric also doesn't communicate much with his twin. He says that this is because he could never keep a secret from him. So, both Ivan and Eric don't communicate or have much to do with one another as adults, mainly because neither wants their twin to see what they're up to and talk them out of it, or turn them in.

Abandonment

The theme of abandonment comes back from time to time in the novel. Abandonment is one of the first themes that is demonstrated as evidenced by Arthur's actions with Martin and his mother. Martin did not even know his father until he was almost seven years old, and then when he did finally meet him, it was another few years before he saw him again.

Later, after seeing the Great Lindemann, the cycle continues and he abandons yet another family, setting both Ivan and Eric on the road to self deception and abandonment tendencies of their own. Eric abandons his family when he believes he's about to be arrested. He has abandoned them, though, earlier than that by having an affair with someone and by working so much that he has no real meaningful relationship with his wife or child.

Martin abandons God, which is a pretty serious action to take. Perhaps he is getting back at his own father on some subconscious level, but with each sacrament he performs his internal dialogue shows that he is sarcastic and snide about the faith of those who come to him each Sunday for spiritual guidance. He's abandoned his faith, and any hope he offers the members of his church are perfunctory at best. This is evidenced by his exchange with the altar boy that wants to know about God and his existence, and again, later with someone who'd been doing some study and wanted to ask the pastor about his thoughts.

Ivan is abandoned in the street when he steps in to assist Ron who was beaten up. Ivan manages to make it back to his apartment where he dies alone.



Connectedness

That Eric and Ivan are connected is evident since they are twins. However, there is another circular connectedness that happens in this story. Ron, the altar boy, is one such example of this. The first that the reader hears of Ron is when he is frantically telling Martin what he just saw and Martin doesn't report the incident at all. Martin didn't even know that the murder that Ron saw was that of his brother, Ivan. Though all of their lives are intertwined Martin is clueless. Had he managed to make the report to the police, perhaps they would have been able to find Ivan before he bled out in his apartment.

Secondly, Ron connects with Eric because he was one of the boys that the children in the park warned Eric not to talk to. Since he listened to the children, he was not at the vendor's window at the time that the boys began beating Ron, or knifing his own twin. Had he been there then things might have taken a different turn.

Then, there is the connection of Ron directly to Ivan. Ivan did the right thing in trying to get the boys to leave Ron alone. However, when he was lying there bleeding on Ron's behalf, Ron abandons him to his fate.

The Great Lindemann is also a connection that comes full circle at the end. First, there is the encounter at the theater that sets everything into motion. Then, later, in Brussels he runs into Ivan and he's the one that tells Ivan that he's not really a serious artist. This sets up a self doubt in Ivan that he's never able to overcome. Then, later, the reader understands that it is a very old Lindemann who is the soothsayer at the fair that Arthur takes Marie to in order to have the Tarot cards read.

Identity

None of the characters know who they are and if they do suspect who they might be, they run in the opposite direction. This is true of Martin, Eric, and Ivan. Arthur, to some extent, is also guilty of this. Martin does not pursue the rubiks cube championship because at some point his mother or others told him that grown men don't do such things for a living. And, as he saw that being a priest was easy enough, he opted to pursue it. His identity was that of a priest, and yet, he does not act very priestly or spiritual in the least. He is not truly acting according to his own nature and is extremely unhappy.

Ivan struggles for many years with his sexual orientation. He was worried for many years that Eric would feel somehow that it meant that he must be gay as well. However, later on he realizes that Eric is most definitely not gay and he is able to express himself in that way. However, he also faces a deeper identity crisis when he takes to heart what Lindemann tells him when he runs into him all of those years later. He believes that he is a serious artist, but Lindemann has set up doubts in his mind and so he opts to become an art executor instead of pursuing and building a name for himself. Instead, he must assume the creative identity of Heinrich Eulenboek and even though he is



painting, he is not painting the works that he might otherwise have created. He must create his work in the style of another.

Eric also has an identity crisis. He believes and has bought into the notion that investment brokers must look and act a certain way, even if that way doesn't bring him a lot of happiness. This is evident in the art work that hangs in his house. He hates it, but likes that it cost a lot of money. He feels that way toward most of the things in his life and it is only when they are all taken from him that he is able to determine what it is he wants. However, when the chance comes to return to his former way of life, he jumps at it.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view in this novel shifts perspectives and offers multiple points of view. Initially, the book starts out from Martin's point of view, but then, many of the later chapters give at least one or more chapters over to the other characters. Marie, Eric's daughter receives the last three chapters.

These points of view serve to show differing perspectives on an event that causes Ivan to lose his life. The reader finds himself asking whether or not Ivan would have died if each of the characters who were involved had chosen different courses of action, had done the right thing, had opted to become involved in life.

Language and Meaning

The novel drips with figurative language and imagery. One such example is Ivan's death and how the character is in a state of shock, not realizing that he's been stabbed and is bleeding. He calls the blood sweat, a red worm, and other such euphemisms, but the reader knows with stark clarity what is happening. The prose that Kehlmann utilizes is dense, literary, and rich with philosophical questions posed to the reader on a host of topics, including religion, art, sexual orientation, acceptance, abandonment. None of the characters are particularly likable, each of them too flagrantly flawed to be someone that a reader could cheer for.

This novel has been translated, but it has been done well. Where the younger and more immature reader will run into trouble with this work is in the rich saturation of adjectives and long run on prose phrases that can lose the reader in the wild abandon of words, which may completely obliterate what it was the character was meaning to accomplish in the first place. The jarring jump from one unfinished thought to another may also cause concern in a less sophisticated reader. The writing style is not necessarily stream of consciousness, but does tend toward that at times. The reader will find, especially in Eric's case, that having invested almost an entire chapter, that he was hallucinating a good deal of the action, but the reader can't be certain for sure since Eric was also strung out on medications. The disjointed and distorted timeline is masterfully done and aptly simulates the thinking of someone whose mind is not functioning at fullest capacity so as to grasp reality.

Structure

The book is roughly constructed of six sections, with the last section being broken into three separate 'seasons' all of them revolving around Marie. Each chapter focuses primarily on one character or another, but not exclusively. There are several chapters

where in mid chapter, another character's thoughts and motivations will be presented. There is no warning and the shift is jarring.



Quotes

For it all came down to determination, he knew that already. Whether it was the teachers, or other pupils, or even his parents, they were all divided within themselves, all torn, all halfhearted. None of them could stand up against someone who had a goal and really went after it.

-- Martin (The Great Lindemann paragraph page 10)

Importance: This quote is important because it establishes a mindset for Martin at an early age, which contrasts with the Martin that the reader will see at the end of the novel.

No one to help you. No book, no teacher. You had to figure out everything important for yourself, and if you didn't, you had failed your life's purpose.

-- Ivan (The Great Lindemann paragraph page 12)

Importance: Ivan is the only one of the three brothers with many redeeming aspects. In this quote the reader sees into Ivan's interior landscape and an understanding of his internal motivation is shown.

Martin understood for the very first time that people could be mean-spirited and spiteful, taking malicious pleasure in things for no reason at all. They could also be spontaneously good, friendly, and supportive, and both these qualities could exist simultaneously in the same person. But above all, people were dangerous.

-- Martin (The Great Lindemann paragraph page 29)

Importance: Martin has internalized this 'truth' after experiencing his father and his father's new family.

Obligations," he said after a while. "We invent them when required. Nobody has them unless they decide they have them. But I love you a lot. All three of you.

-- Arthur (The Lives of the Saints paragraph page 81)

Importance: This quote typifies Arthur and his character's personality. He does what he does because it suits him at the time, not because he feels any responsibility.

Beauty has no need of art, it has no need of us, either, it has no need of witnesses, quite the opposite.

-- Ivan (Beauty paragraph page 185)

Importance: Ivan realizes that mankind is not the center of the universe upon which everything revolves. Furthermore, he is stating that many things exist whether a person stops to acknowledge them or not.

What if you could read the universe? Perhaps that's what is behind the terrifying beauty of things: we are aware that something is speaking to us. We know the language. And



yet we understand not one word.

-- Ivan (Beauty paragraph page 198)

Importance: As an artist, Ivan feels that beauty, whether in art or in some other form, presents an incredible truth, but many don't pause long enough to figure it out. He thinks that perhaps it isn't that mankind doesn't have the capability, but more that mankind doesn't want to understand it.

Fate," said Arthur. "The capital letter F . But chance is a powerful force, and suddenly you acquire a Fate that was never assigned to you. Some kind of accidental fate. It happens in a flash. But the man could certainly paint. Think about that, and don't ever forget it. The man could paint.

-- Arthur (Seasons, Part 2 paragraph page 246)

Importance: Arthur is speaking about Ivan and his untimely demise. He's also speaking, in part, about himself, being caught up in a destiny that he believes wasn't his to control.

Anyone can make someone change their life.

-- The Great Lindemann (Chapter 5: Beauty paragraph page 178)

Importance: This quote happens when Ivan runs into the Great Lindemann when he is in Brussels. He asks him about hypnotism and if it really could cause a person to do what Ivan's father had done to them. Lindemann says that people are capable of just about anything if they feel justified or that they've been given permission to do it.

What does it mean to be average— suddenly the question became a constant one. How do you live with that, why do you keep on going? What kind of people bet everything on a single card, dedicate their lives to the creative act, undertake the risk of the one big bet, and then fail year after year to produce anything of significance?

-- Ivan (Chapter 5: Beauty paragraph page 184)

Importance: Ivan says this as he's having a crisis of conscience. He has taken something someone said about his being a serious painter to heart and has decided that he's never going to be a serious artist. It is then that he decides to become the real artist's agent and executor.

She pulled the covers over her head so that now all she heard was the rustle of the material, but if you lay still, really really still, and didn't breathe, then you stopped hearing anything at all, there was no more world and there was almost no more Marie. This must be sort of what it was like to be a stone and lie there while time passed.

-- Marie (Chapter 6: Seasons 1 paragraph page 230)

Importance: Marie's interior landscape is exposed in this moment, and the reader realizes that while she possesses a great deal of Erik's personality, she tends more toward Erik's twin, Ivan. The ability to think deeply, and to be intelligent enough to look beyond the surface into the metaphysical is most definitely a trait that Ivan possesses.



Seek it out yourself. Seek out the one you want.
-- Arthur (Chapter 6: Seasons 2 paragraph page 243)

Importance: Arthur has learned his lesson by this point in the novel. He despondently and desperately realizes that he chose a path that, at first, he believed he'd been ordered to follow, against his will. Later, he realizes that he uses the Great Lindeman as an excuse and he was doing what he wanted to do all along. He is telling Marie, in this quote, not to waste time and to seek out her own personal truth and to never waver from it.