

# **Galapagos Study Guide**

## **Galapagos by Kurt Vonnegut**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Galapagos Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 1-Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 3.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 5-Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 7-Chapter 8.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 9-Chapter 10.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 11-Chapter 12.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 13-Chapter 14.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 15-Chapter 16.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 17-Chapter 18.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 19-Chapter 20.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 21-Chapter 22.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 23-Chapter 24.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 25-Chapter 26.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 27-Chapter 28.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 29-Chapter 30.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 31-Chapter 32.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 33-Chapter 34.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 35-Chapter 36.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 37-Chapter 38.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 1-Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 3-Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>



[Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 5-Chapter 6.....42](#)

[Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 7-Chapter 8.....44](#)

[Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 9-Chapter 10.....46](#)

[Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 11-Chapter 12.....48](#)

[Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 13.....50](#)

[Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 14.....51](#)

[Characters.....53](#)

[Objects/Places.....59](#)

[Themes.....62](#)

[Style.....64](#)

[Quotes.....67](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....69](#)



# Plot Summary

Leon Trout has been a ghost for a million years. His unique position allows him to chronicle the survival and evolution of the human race. In 1986, a pandemic causes all female humans to become infertile, and the species only survives because ten people become stranded on one of the Galapagos Islands away from the disease. Mary Hepburn, a widowed biology teacher, artificially inseminates the fertile females with the sperm of her lover, Captain Adolf von Kleist. For a million years, the offspring of the colonists are the only human survivors on the planet, and they evolve to fit their environment, with fur, flippers, and small brains for swimming and catching fish. Humanity has finally found paradise.

As the novel begins, passengers are waiting at the Hotel El Dorado for "the Nature Cruise of the Century", a round trip to the Galapagos Islands from Ecuador on the new cruise ship Bahía de Darwin. The prospective passengers are James Wait, a con artist traveling under the name Willard Flemming, Mary Hepburn, a recently widowed former biology teacher, wealthy financier Andrew MacIntosh and his blind daughter Selena, computer genius Zenji Hiroguchi, and his pregnant wife Hisako. The other passengers never make it to Ecuador. The cruise is canceled due to a worldwide economic collapse.

Zenji and MacIntosh are both shot by a mentally imbalanced soldier, who accidentally lets six orphan native Kanka-bono girls into the guarded hotel. Starving people storm the Hotel El Dorado and the cruise ship to loot whatever food and goods they have. The passengers and Kanka-bono girls are led out in a bus, driven by the hotel manager Siegfried von Kleist. During the escape, James Wait, a.k.a. Willard Flemming, has a heart attack. Siegfried tries to drive to the hospital, but a bomb hits the city. Peru is attacking Ecuador. The bus makes its way to the port, where the Bahía de Darwin is docked. The passengers get aboard the ship, joining its captain, Adolf von Kleist, Siegfried's brother. Another bomb hits the bay, and the resulting tidal wave drowns Siegfried, who is already showing signs of a congenital mental illness.

Adolf starts the ship, hoping to head for safer shores, but they are lost at sea. James Wait/Willard Flemming convinces Mary to marry him, with the captain presiding, and then he dies. Mary never knows that he was a con man. Finally, the ship runs aground at Santa Rosalia, the northernmost Galapagos Island. At first, the passengers await rescue, but a disease has devastated the population of Earth by causing all women to be infertile. The people pair off into couples. Selena and Hisako become a couple and raise Hisako's baby girl, Akiko, who is born covered in fur. Adolf and Mary live together for ten years, until Adolf learns that Mary has, without his permission, used his sperm to impregnate the six Kanka-bono girls. The resulting colony on Santa Rosalia is populated with the only surviving humans on the planet.

A million years in the future, human beings have evolved into swimming mammals, covered in fur, with small brains and flippers instead of hands. The narrator, Leon Trout, is the ghost of a welder who was killed during the construction of the Bahía de Darwin. Instead of entering the afterlife, he's been stranded on Earth as a ghost because of his



curiosity about the human condition. He portrays the evolved humans, who don't use tools, build buildings, or have big dreams, as a kind of paradise. All human violence and pollution is gone. Leon is waiting for the blue tunnel to appear again and lead him to the afterlife. There's nothing left about the human condition for him to explore, and he's ready to go.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 1-Chapter 2

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 1-Chapter 2 Summary

Leon Trout has been a ghost for a million years. His unique position allows him to chronicle the survival and evolution of the human race. In 1986, a pandemic causes all female humans to become infertile, and the species only survives because ten people become stranded on one of the Galapagos Islands away from the disease. Mary Hepburn, a widowed biology teacher, artificially inseminates the fertile females with the sperm of her lover, Captain Adolf von Kleist. For a million years, the offspring of the colonists are the only human survivors on the planet, and they evolve to fit their environment, with fur, flippers, and small brains for swimming and catching fish. Humanity has finally found paradise.

The novel begins a million years ago in 1986 A.D., in the seaport of Guayaquil, Ecuador. Human beings of the time have big brains and wonder over how animals ever came to the Galapagos Islands. There is no evidence that land animals could float there on natural rafts or that there ever was a land bridge. The islands themselves are foreboding and harsh, but one million years later, they are tropical paradises. Perhaps animals were put there by God or deposited from Noah's Ark. This is the story of another Noah's Ark.

James Wait, age thirty-five, is an American on his way to the Galapagos Islands by way of "the Nature Cruise of the Century" aboard the Bahía de Darwin. Wait is staying at the Hotel El Dorado in Guayaquil, waiting to board the ship. The hotel bartender, Jesús Ortiz, feels sorry for the seemingly awkward middle-aged man. Actually, Wait is a conman who marries women, steals their money, and leaves them. So far, he has had seventeen wives, under different names and in different places. Now, he's a millionaire. Such evil as is embodied by James Wait, and found around the world, would not be possible except for the overly large brains of human beings.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 1-Chapter 2 Analysis

Instead of beginning the novel by showing characters involved in a scene, Vonnegut chooses to begin with a discussion of the Galapagos Islands in 1986, from the point of view of a narrator a million years into the future. The reader is left with more unanswered questions than merely how land animals ended up on Galapagos. Why don't human beings have "big brains" anymore? Who is the narrator? What is the world like in a million years? How are the Galapagos Islands important?



After the writer builds anticipation, the second chapter begins the story. James Wait is a criminal preying on gullible older women, and he introduces one of the writer's main problems. With all the harm that human beings do because of their complex mentalities (their big brains), wouldn't the world be better off without them?



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 3

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 3 Summary

The brand new Hotel El Dorado awaits tourists in Ecuador's seaport of Guayaquil, but there are hardly any tourists in the once busy port. There are only two ships. James Wait doesn't know how busy the port usually is. Guayaquil is just another city to him, picked at random after he fleeced his last wife.

Wait has a ticket for the "the Nature Cruise of the Century", beginning noon the next day on the Bahía de Darwin, so he's not staying at the Hotel El Dorado long. Wait hasn't even looked at the brochure for the cruise. He doesn't realize that the Galapagos Islands aren't pleasant tropical beaches like Hawaii, but instead harsh lava rocks.

Darwin Bay, for which the Bahía de Darwin is named, is itself named for Charles Darwin, who came to Galapagos in 1835 on the Beagle. His portrait is behind the Hotel El Dorado bar and on T-shirts in the store. Wait also never read Darwin's Origin of the Species and knew nothing about Darwin. He thinks of claiming to be a widowed mechanical engineer.

Wait is the son of a man and his own daughter who fled town after Wait's birth. After moving through five foster homes, where he was abused because of his taboo birth, Wait himself ran away as a teenager and went to Manhattan, where he became a male prostitute. Following that he became a dance instructor, having inherited dancing ability from his parents. As a dance instructor, he began his career as a con man, marrying and fleecing women. The narrator comments that he, too, was a teen runaway.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 3 Analysis

Wait's story is an example of how human perception creates and perpetuates suffering. Wait was the child of a father and daughter who broke the ultimate human taboo by having a child together. The wrongness of incest is a human perception, an opinion. Much as Darwin's opinion that the Galapagos Islands are valuable, the perception that incest is horrific changes people's actions and lives. Wait is doomed to constant abuse in foster homes, becoming an outcast, runaway, and criminal. The opinions of other people made Wait who he is.

As a character, also, Wait plays on human opinion to make his living. He changes his appearance and attitudes to create perceptions in other people. In other words, he is a con man, and he takes advantage of the artificial social reality that governs all human behavior. At the end of this chapter, the narrator compares himself to Wait, another teenage runaway, building the reader's curiosity about the unnamed omniscient narrator.





# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 4

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 4 Summary

Darwin is a hero in Guayaquil because he made the Galapagos Islands famous and created a booming tourist trade. This shows how someone's opinion, like Darwin's opinion of the Galapagos Islands, changes human behavior. A million years later, people don't have big brains, so they don't worry about opinions.

A Spanish ship carrying the Bishop of Panama to Peru discovered the Galapagos Islands in 1535 after being blown off course. They found the Galapagos Islands a horror and towed their ship away as quickly as possible. No one wanted the islands until Ecuador claimed them in 1832. Only after Darwin persuaded people that the islands were important did they become valued, so that Guayaquil contained three cruise ships dedicated to Galapagos Islands cruises.

However, in 1986, a new opinion is ruining the tourist trade: the opinion that Ecuadorian currency (and most countries' money) is worthless. Only the Hotel El Dorado is open, for people taking "the Nature Cruise of the Century". So far, only six guests have arrived: James Wait, computer genius Zenji Hiroguchi, his pregnant wife Hisako, American millionaire Andrew MacIntosh, his blind daughter Selena, and an American widow named Mary Hepburn. Zenji Hiroguchi and Andrew MacIntosh have stars by their name, indicating that they will die before the end of the day. The narrator will continue putting stars by the names of people who are about to die. The narrator is also in the hotel, invisible to the others.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 4 Analysis

The narrator is telling the story from a million years in the future, when human beings do not have "big brains", the cause of so much havoc and turmoil. Darwin's big brain brings human beings a new understanding of the Galapagos Islands, and so human perception of those islands changes forever. Before Darwin, no one cares about the harsh, unwelcoming islands. After Darwin writes about them, they become prized and valuable. The Galapagos Islands, then, are a prime example of the constructed reality that governs human behavior. Human beings, as a group, agree on certain ideas: that incest is wrong, that money has value, and that the Galapagos Islands are a scientific marvel. Instead of being governed by nature or reality, humans are governed by abstractions and perception.

The narrator's convention of putting stars by the names of characters about to die creates dramatic irony, since the reader knows something that's going to happen before the characters do. It also creates suspense and curiosity about the upcoming deaths, and it focuses the reader on the grim (evolutionary) reality of life and death, which contrasts to the constructed reality of human society.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 5-Chapter 6

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 5-Chapter 6 Summary

The Bahía de Darwin's engines will die in five days, and in ten years, she will sink. She's the newest, fastest Ecuadorian cruise ships, designed to travel to the Galapagos Islands and back. The narrator worked on her in Sweden, where she was built. She has all possible luxuries and technological advantages, unlike the Beagle, on which Darwin sailed. The other Galapagos Island cruise ships are out of commission because the tourist trade is gone.

People in Ecuador, which has poor soil, are starving because their money no longer can buy food. Peru and Colombia are also bankrupt. Besides the Bahía de Darwin, the only other ship in Guayaquil is the San Mateo, a Colombian freighter that's sitting unused, collecting seaweed. The economic collapse has spread to most of South America, Mexico, Pakistan, India, Thailand, Italy, Ireland, Belgium, and Turkey. Although there's enough food for everyone, people are starving, all because of people's opinions about money.

Human brains are responsible for violence to human beings and the environment, but at least people are beginning to distrust their own brains. In the Hotel El Dorado, Mary Hepburn curses her brain, which is telling her to suffocate herself with a dry-cleaning bag, although throughout her career she's taught that the brain is key to human survival. She is a former high school biology teacher from Ilium, New York, and she allowed a thief at the airport to take her suitcase, containing clothes for the hotel. All she has left is evening, scuba, hiking, and swimming gear. Her pants suit disappeared when she sent it to be cleaned.

Mary has remained in her hotel room, afraid to go down to the lobby. She came on the trip even though the cruise will most certainly be canceled. She's lost her husband and her job, and she has nothing to live for. At the beginning of the year, her husband Roy was a millwright in Ilium, and they were both happy and healthy people with money saved. Wait has already picked Mary out as possible prey. The narrator stops the story to note that his own brain often gave him bad advice, such as joining the US Marines to go to Vietnam.



## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 5-Chapter 6 Analysis

The Bahía de Darwin as a modern ship full of technology and luxury is an example of the height of human advancement and accomplishment (because of humanity's "big brains.") The ship, however, will die before many days pass, showing the fragility and falseness of what that human accomplishment means. The fleeting glory of technological advancements is contrasted with the violence and suffering caused by human society.

Mary Hepburn's story, a middle-aged widow sitting in a hotel room and contemplating suicide, humanizes the suffering going on all over the world. She shows how even middle-class, ordinary people suffer as part of the human condition, and how fragile the world of even the healthiest and happiest human beings is.

More of the narrator's story is slowly revealed, and Mary's story is also left unfinished. The writer leaves unanswered questions about both characters, leading the reader forward. How did Mary's perfect life fall apart? How did her husband die? How did she lose her job? How did the narrator end up in Sweden, working on the ship? What happened in Vietnam? Who and what is the narrator now?



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 7-Chapter 8

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 7-Chapter 8 Summary

American and Japanese money still has worth, but Canadian, French, Swiss, British, and Germany money is unstable. Still, the worth is imaginary. Meanwhile, Mary wonders if she has a brain tumor, the same malady that killed her husband Roy. Perhaps the tumor inspired him to buy the tickets to this trip. Roy, who loved his work, had left work at noon, "playing hookey", and walked all around Ilium. He bought the tickets then, the first tickets that were sold. At the time, the ship was not yet built, and the narrator was yet to work on it. The next spring, he would be beheaded during its construction.

The poster showed a flightless cormorant, which only exist on the Galapagos Island. The funny looking bird has evolved to loose its flight but gain superior swimming and fish-catching skills. Those with smaller wings got more fish and survived and reproduced, if Darwin is right. Now, people have made a similar trade-off, losing their big brains and hands but becoming superior fishermen, swimming after their prey.

For Mary and Roy, the nature cruise is impractical at the start. Mary would have to take time off in the middle of a semester, and she has become bored with the Galapagos Islands, which she lectures on each year. Still, she pretends to be happy about it for Roy's sake. Then, Roy loses his job when the factory is mechanized, and the school shuts down because most young people leave town after losing their jobs. Then, Roy is diagnosed with a brain tumor, and the cruise is the only thing he has to look forward to.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 7-Chapter 8 Analysis

Vonnegut contrasts the evolution of animals on the Galapagos Islands and the mechanisms of Darwinian evolution with human society. Evolution deals with life and death, and survival is only meaningful through reproduction. Mary and Roy have happy individual lives, but they are built around concepts and abstractions instead of reality. Their jobs only exist because of demands of society, and without these artificial means of support, they have no way to subsist. Their savings have only imaginary value. They have no children to survive them. Roy's brain tumor and the collapse of the Ilium economy destroys Mary and Roy's lives in one fell swoop, showing how fragile health and happiness are. How are humans really fitted to survive in the world? The humans of the future are fitted for survival, relying on their efficient fishing capabilities and balanced by the forces of nature.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 9-Chapter 10

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 9-Chapter 10 Summary

Roy's brain gives him the delusion that government atomic testing during his service caused his brain cancer. He recalls tying animals to stakes to expose them to deadly radiation as tests, something that couldn't have happened since he was about fourteen at the time. However, Roy loves animals, and the delusion causes him real suffering. He even remembers killing his dog Donald, who is still alive. Despite his delusions, Roy is easy to handle and can stay at home while Mary works. During her last day before the school shuts down, Mary suddenly wonders if maybe she is deluded and has wandered in off the streets to lecture about nonsense.

The number and size of the Galapagos Islands has changed in the last million years, but Santa Rosalia is still the most northern and isolated one. On his deathbed, in 1986, Roy Hepburn is upset about having no children and jokes of becoming extinct. He has two last wishes he asks from Mary. He makes her swear on the bible to marry again as soon as possible and to go on "the Nature Cruise of the Century". In the hotel in Guayaquil, she takes the plastic bag off her evening dress to kill herself, but she's not going to die yet. Mary will live for thirty more years and become essential in the future of the human race.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 9-Chapter 10 Analysis

Vonnegut completes the story of Mary's history in this section. Throughout, the writer has moved back and forth in time, giving hints of both the past and the future as the story develops. In the end of the chapter, the reader is given another glimpse of the future and a vague hint that Mary will have an important role. This storytelling style builds the reader's curiosity and creates a sense of timelessness.

Roy's delusions are an illustration of how the human brain is misleading. He creates an imaginary reality which becomes real to him and causes him suffering. This is analogous to the constructed reality of society, where human beings create imaginary value of money and other things, which then become real to them and cause them suffering.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 11-Chapter 12

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 11-Chapter 12 Summary

Computer genius Zenji Hiroguchi and his wife Hisako, who teaches Japanese flower arranging, have the room on one side of Mary's. On the other side are wealthy financier Andrew MacIntosh's blind teenage daughter Selena and her seeing-eye dog Kazakh. MacIntosh is in the next room. He and Mary will never meet, because he and Zenji will die soon of gunshot wounds.

The hotel manager, Siegfried von Kleist, is a member of the wealthy family that owns both the hotel and the Bahía de Darwin. Siegfried will also die, drowned in a tidal wave three hours after sunset. Siegfried's brother Adolf von Kleist is the captain of the Bahía de Darwin, and he will be the common ancestor of all future humans, with the help of Mary Hepburn.

Zenji and Hisako are upset about their predicament. Zenji has invented a handheld translator called Gokubi and the next generation version called Mandarax. MacIntosh wants to back him and has brought Zenji to "the Nature Cruise of the Century" to seal the deal. Now, Zenji and Hisako find themselves stranded in the economically collapsing Ecuador at the will of MacIntosh, and no one knows where they are.

Mandarax diagnoses diseases, and the Hiroguchis have used it to diagnose MacIntosh as a pathological personality, which they take as more serious than it actually is. MacIntosh is not insane. He is in Ecuador to capitalize on the collapse and buy up property cheap. Not knowing this, the Hiroguchis believe they're dependent on a madman.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 11-Chapter 12 Analysis

The Hiroguchis and MacIntosh have two completely different perceptions of the same situation, showing again how deceptive the human mind can be. The Hiroguchis believe that they are trapped by a madman, while MacIntosh believes he's about to give the Hiroguchis a pleasant and prosperous surprise through wise investment. These disparate viewpoints control their perception and actions.

Vonnegut continues to hint at the future of the human race, noting that Mary Hepburn and Captain Adolf von Kleist will be responsible for the survival of the species. The reader knows that three characters will soon die from gunshots and a tidal wave. Through this device, Vonnegut continues building dramatic irony and suspense. The

narrator notes that he describes humans, throughout time, as fishermen. However, while the humans of a million years in the future fish for actual fish, the "fish" of James Wait and Andrew MacIntosh is money, an illusion without real substance.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 13-Chapter 14

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 13-Chapter 14 Summary

Hisako is pregnant with Zenji's child, and she has genetic testing done to check for abnormalities resulting from radiation her mother was exposed to at Hiroshima. The tests are normal, and the baby is a girl. The tests do not show that the girl will be covered with a fine fur. She will be born on Santa Rosalia and named Akiko.

Akiko will look different than her mother but will be very similar, while Mandarax looks the same as Gokubi but is very different inside. Both operate as translators with a microphone and display screen to translate spoken language, but Mandarax translates a thousand languages and performs other functions, including providing relevant quotations, diagnosing diseases, and providing trivia. People a million years in the future do not have the brains or hands to operate either one. Mandarax will be stranded on Santa Rosalia with Hisako, Mary Hepburn, Selena MacIntosh, Captain Adolf von Kleist, and six other females, and it will be of little use, spewing impossible medical advice and useless quotations. On the day of his death, the captain will throw it into the ocean.

A million years in the future, all humanity is descended from the Santa Rosalia colony. In the first years, the people pair off, but there are no marriages and many births. Hisako and Selena become a couple, as do Mary and Captain von Kleist. After ten years, though, the later couple splits forever because Mary has used his sperm without permission. The first marriage occurs in 2027. The last human marriage on Earth is in 23,011 on Galapagos. Marriage is another product of big brains, and big brains make it impossible for two people to get along most of the time.

As an example, the Hiroguchis fight over their predicament. Zenji realizes that there's something bothering his wife aside from the situation. Hisako admits that she's discovered that Mandarax teaches ikebana, Japanese flower arranging. Zenji's computer replaces and devalues Hisako. Zenji programmed ikebana into Mandarax to please Jackie Onassis, who is supposed to be on the cruise. Hisako does not believe him, and they fight.

The narrator's father was a science fiction writer who wrote a story about a man who invented sports robots who could perform perfectly and whose wife left him, much like the narrator's mother left his father. Finally, the man in the story made a fortune by providing robot endorsements for advertisers.





## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 13-Chapter 14 Analysis

Vonnegut gives the reader a clearer picture of the upcoming future on Santa Rosalia, but many questions still remain. What will happen to the rest of the human race? What will cause humanity to change? How will Mary use the captain's sperm? What experiments will Mary perform?

Mandarax is an important element in the novel. Throughout, the narrator cites quotations that Mandarax might give for any idea or event. The translating machine, like the ship, is symbolic of mankind's accomplishments, but essentially, all of the knowledge and thoughts of humankind are useless. Stranded on an island away from the constructed reality of society, all of Mandarax's knowledge is pointless.

Mandarax also highlights the failure of communication in human interaction. Its main function is as a translator, but even Hisako and Zenji, speaking the same language, can't understand each other. Mandarax, meanwhile, accidentally and unnoticed, translates their argument into Navajo. They might as well be hearing Navajo, since they cannot understand or believe each other.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 15-Chapter 16

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 15-Chapter 16 Summary

Andrew MacIntosh is in Selena's room, waiting for the phone call that will close his deal to buy up cheap Ecuadorian property. The narrator sees blind Selena as an experiment by Nature. When she is twenty-eight, she will refuse to participate in Mary's experiment. If she had born a child, she might have passed on blindness. In the future, she will couple with Hisako to raise Hisako's baby. At the moment, she is protected by her father's wealth and power.

While MacIntosh waits for his call, he orders two rare steaks. The hotel and ship are filled with good food for the celebrity passengers of the cruise, and they are protected from the starving people by soldiers and barbed wire. Jesús Ortiz, the hotel bartender, brings the food to MacIntosh, since the waiters have deserted the hotel. He admires the famous guests and believes that if he tries hard, he will get ahead. However, MacIntosh, unthinking of the starving people outside, commands Ortiz to put the steaks on the floor for the dog and get out.

The narrator pauses to talk about teeth. Teeth are human beings' only tools a million years in the future. They have always been unreliable, and fall out after thirty years or so. When Hisako and Selena commit suicide, Selena is young enough to have most of her teeth, but Hisako's are all gone. Teeth are the most useless human body part, next to the brain. Evolution has solved the problem by reducing human life spans to about thirty years.

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, Ortiz is horrified and offended at MacIntosh's behavior. To him, Jacqueline Onassis and all the minor celebrities on the cruise were heroes. Now, his perception is changed. He walks out on the hotel forever, before Siegfried von Kleist has a chance to call him back. Siegfried has no children because he could be a carrier of Huntington's chorea, as could his brother Adolf. The disease does not appear until late in life and results in uncontrollable dancing, hallucinations, and mental imbalance. The von Kleists' father killed their mother because of the disease. By sheer chance, Huntington's chorea doesn't exist a million years later. Siegfried is a carrier, but Adolf is not. Siegfried will start to lose his mind shortly before his death. Siegfried is sitting at the bar watching his best employee walk out and casually conversing with James Wait (who is calling himself Flemming) when his mind begins to malfunction. Before Ortiz leaves, he disconnects all the phones.



## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 15-Chapter 16 Analysis

MacIntosh's behavior, ordering expensive steaks to feed to his dog while people are starving outside, shows the narrowness of his vision. MacIntosh sees the problems in Ecuador as a financial opportunity, and he cannot see other people's perspectives, including the perspectives of the Hiroguchis, whose goodwill he is trying to cultivate. MacIntosh, in fact, is a prisoner of his own mind, the sets of opinions and culture that control his behavior.

Ortiz is also controlled by his opinions and perspective. His admiration of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and all the minor celebrities who are supposed to accompany her on the cruise keeps him working at the hotel, even though the country is in turmoil. Ortiz's perspective changes in a single moment, much as the world's perspective of the Galapagos Islands changed with Darwin's description of them. Ortiz's experience of MacIntosh's selfish behavior changes his opinion, and his opinion controls his actions. Suddenly, what was important is now unimportant. All human values fall into a similar category, rising and falling in value because of human opinion that has no reference outside of the human condition.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 17-Chapter 18

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 17-Chapter 18 Summary

In Manhattan, publicity man Bobby King realizes that "the Nature Cruise of the Century" is defunct. Due south, in the same time zone, Andrew MacIntosh is shouting into a dead telephone; Bobby King has a stuffed Galapagos iguana that he often shouts into the same way, as if it were a telephone, as a joke. King has made the marine iguana a symbol of the cruise. It eats seaweed and then sits in the sun to let the seaweed cook in its stomach.

King is startled that six people have already gone to Ecuador, anticipating the cruise. King wonders why Roy is not there with his wife, not knowing that Roy is dead. When the Hepburns signed up as the first passengers, King spoke with Mary but found nothing interesting to help with his publicity. Mary is tangentially related to Boone, and coincidentally her maiden name is Boone because her paternal grandfather adopted the name when immigrating to the US from Hungary. The only other award she thinks to mention is the yearbook's title for her: "Mother Nature Personified". The narrator thinks it's a fitting epigraph for the woman who continued to propagate life, even in the dire Galapagos Islands.

King suspects that Roy's name has been accidentally left off the list, since the two seemed such a close couple. He knows about the narrator, or at least that a workman died during the building of the ship. It's information he wants to keep quiet, like the von Kleists keep their Huntington's chorea secret. Adolf never tells Mary about being a potential carrier until after he realizes that she's been using his sperm.

King knows the MacIntoshes, the second people to sign up for the cruise. He knows the Hiroguchis as the Kenzaburos, since they are traveling under assumed names to hide their talks with MacIntosh from Zenji's employers. Half the guests, then, are traveling with false identities, and Mary Hepburn's old army fatigues have the name "Kaplan" sewn into them, so Wait will think her name is Kaplan when they meet. When they are married by the captain, Mary will think she's marrying Willard Flemming, and Wait will think he's marrying Mary Kaplan.

When MacIntosh signs up for the cruise, Bobby King wonders why. MacIntosh has his own cruise ship. King corners him in a restaurant, where he finds MacIntosh dining with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Actually, MacIntosh is trying to set the Hiroguchis at ease so they don't feel isolated with him, but MacIntosh rehashes what he's read in National Geographic, that private visits to the Galapagos cause ecological harm.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 17-Chapter 18 Analysis

King is another example of how perception changes human reality. King's job is publicity, and he began publicizing the trip as "the Nature Cruise of the Century" even before the ship was built. King is responsible for making the Galapagos Islands popular by promoting a certain opinion. The islands themselves, as in the time of Darwin, aren't changed. Only human perception is changed.

The very idea of publicity means manipulating behavior based on perception. The marine iguana is just an animal with unusual eating habits, but it has become a symbol, much like the image of Darwin on tourists' T-shirts has become a symbol instead of a person.

King himself operates under false assumptions based on his perception. He does not know that Roy Hepburn is dead, and he does not realize that three of the passengers who have made it to the hotel are traveling under false names. False information is disseminated both accidentally and purposefully, because so many of the characters are trying to manipulate behavior, including King as a publicist and Wait as a con man.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 19-Chapter 20

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 19-Chapter 20 Summary

Andrew MacIntosh is persuasive because he doesn't care about the truth. His speech, with the coincidental airing of a documentary about blue-footed boobies, inspires Jacqueline Onassis to book a cabin for the trip. The birds later become the colonists' food on Santa Rosalia. The highlight of the documentary and of Mary's classroom lectures is the courtship dance of the blue-footed boobies. In it, the two birds approach each other in a stylized walk and stand, pressing their necks together, with their beaks pointed to the sky. This is called Sky-Pointing.

Mary Hepburn would give extra credit to students for writing poems or essays about the birds. Most students claimed that the birds were praying to God. Mary's favorite poem is a repeating cycle, parents having a child who becomes the same parent having a child, and on and on.

Some students prefer to write about the great frigate birds, which attract females through a bright red balloon-like feature on the throat. Students always ask Mary whether the females choose the largest balloons, and she says it's likely they choose the balloons at the best nesting sites. The mating dance of the boobies, however, has no connection with survival. From a million years in the future, the narrator notes that the boobies have not changed. The dance, he says, is part of the boobies' nature.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 19-Chapter 20 Analysis

The blue-footed boobies will become the main means of survival for the people who are shipwrecked on Santa Maria. Their mating dance, culminating in their necks pointing upward at the sky, seems to serve no function or purpose. It is simply something that they do. Much of human culture falls into this same category, except that human culture is much more complicated. Human beings create art and literature, but what is the real nature of it? The boobies' dance seems to have no objective meaning outside of booby perception, and human art has no meaning or function outside human perception. Culture and society is just something that human beings do because it's programmed into the big human brain.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 21-Chapter 22

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 21-Chapter 22 Summary

After Jacqueline Onassis books passage on "the Nature Cruise of the Century", it becomes an event for the rich and famous. Mary and Roy Hepburn's names are left off the officially released passenger list because they aren't celebrities. That's why they aren't included in the special luxury flight from New York for the passengers. Mary also does not receive the telegram sent on November 1, declaring that the cruise should go on as planned despite international economic problems. By that time, half the passengers have canceled, and almost all remaining passengers will be on the New York flight.

King has made "the Nature Cruise of the Century" out of a simple tourist expedition, and he has made the ship's cook and the captain celebrities. The captain has been on Carson, joking about the Ecuadorian submarines which go down and never come up and the Kanka-bono cannibals that live isolated in interior Ecuador. Now, King must call the remaining passengers and cancel the trip due to the economic breakdown in Ecuador. No one is surprised. When King calls the Ecuadorian ambassador, he hears the Ballet Folklórico practicing the Kanka-bono fire dance. They intend to perform it in the US instead of returning to Ecuador. The ambassador says there are probably no actual Kanka-bonos left in the world, but he is wrong. All humanity will soon be descended from Kanka-bonos, thanks to Mary Hepburn.

The cruise had become important to Ecuador, the one thing to look forward to in a downward spiraling economy. Peru and Colombia have already been taken over by military dictators, and Peru is on the verge of declaring war on Ecuador. Jacqueline Onassis has become a symbol of hope and rescue. People a million years in the future don't look for hope or rescue. The narrator was protected until he was ten, when his mother left his father. Mary was under her parents' wings for twenty-two years. Adolf von Kleist was protected until he was twenty-six.

Mary Hepburn also taught about human sexuality and birth control. She and her husband were never able to conceive, but the high school girls all seem fertile, with at least one pregnancy a semester. On Santa Rosalía, Mary Hepburn will see how easy it is for teenage girls to get pregnant.



## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 21-Chapter 22 Analysis

"The Nature Cruise of the Century" is, from King's point of view, a failure, but in actuality the cruise will become truly important to the history of mankind. This is one of the many ironies and conflicts of individual points of view which are rife throughout Vonnegut's story. King never knows how important his cruise becomes, and the whole world will think the ship has been destroyed in battle. The most insignificant passenger, Mary Hepburn, who is not important enough to put on the list of passengers, will become one of the most important figures in the survival of the species.

Vonnegut hints at the future of mankind throughout the novel, and these chapters contain references to the events that will affect the survival of the human race. The Kanka-bonos are a minor, almost unheard-of tribe, but they will become the dominant culture in the world. The ambassador from Ecuador believes that all of the Kanka-bonos are dead, and they are nothing but a rarity to most of the world. This shows how one small aspect of the current world, which no one thinks of as having any consequence, can become extremely important in the future, much as mammals' first appearance on the earth most likely was ignored as minor by the dominant species at the time.

Mary Hepburn will also become exceptionally important, and her experience with teenage pregnancies in the high school where she teaches may be one factor that causes her to begin thinking about inseminating the Kanka-bonos. She knows how fertile teenage girls can be, and she is very familiar with the mechanics of sexuality and reproduction.





# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 23-Chapter 24

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 23-Chapter 24 Summary

The narrator randomly chooses to inhabit Adolf von Kleist's brain, not realizing he is about to become the father of all humankind. Adolf is thinking of meteorites. As a cadet, he was a poor student and nearly got kicked out of the US Naval Academy, but he was impressed by a lecture on meteorites hitting Earth. He believes meteorites will ultimately destroy humanity.

Adolf has been left feeling meaningless and futile, after his father murdered his mother under the influence of Huntington's chorea. The narrator suffers similar feelings, since shooting a grandmother in Vietnam who had killed his best friend and worst enemy with a grenade.

Adolf goes straight to the Bahía de Darwin from the airport. Clearly, he is only ceremonially the captain, knowing nothing about the ship or the Galapagos Islands. His job is to socialize, and the crew goes about its business without him. One of the problems with people, the narrator notes, is that well-fed people don't respond to trouble, and a million years ago, all the people with power to respond to trouble, like Andrew MacIntosh, were well fed. The captain's belly is well fed, and he is not alarmed that the guides have not shown up and the crew is deserting.

Mary Hepburn has seen Adolf on TV appearances, and she assumes he loves nature and machinery. Mary, however, knows more about machinery, and much more about the Galapagos Islands, than the captain. Mary recognizes Santa Rosalia by its native finches, *Geospiza difficillis*, bloodsuckers that peck boobies and feed on the blood. Mary would joke with her students that they were great pets for vampires, except that they sleep at night. The finches on the Galapagos Islands were especially interesting to Darwin, since different species of finches had adapted so many different behaviors. When Mary first arrives on the island, she falls and cuts her hand. A finch lands on her and begins to drink the blood, so she knows they are on Santa Rosalia.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 23-Chapter 24 Analysis

Both Adolf and the narrator, through experiencing violence and suffering, see life as meaningless. What is the meaning of life? Leon Trout, after seeing a million years of life on Earth, puts everything into the long-term context of evolution. Having babies is meaningful and contributing to the species is meaningful.



Mary's perception of the captain when she sees him on television is completely false, showing how deceptive and misleading most types of human communication are. The captain, as a leader, is defunct, because he has no skills, only external polish aimed at promoting a positive perception. MacIntosh is another leader of society, and while he is capable (unlike the captain), MacIntosh is blind to much that goes on around him. He can focus only narrowly on the idea of acquiring wealth.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 25-Chapter 26

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 25-Chapter 26 Summary

On Manhattan Island, Bobby King goes home from his office. His role in the story is done, and he will die many years later, having no further effect on humanity. In Guayaquil, Zenji leaves his hotel room after fighting with his wife. He is waiting for the elevator when MacIntosh comes out to tell him the phones aren't working. Zenji, using Mandarax to translate, tries to tell MacIntosh to leave him alone. MacIntosh, though, follows Zenji into the elevator. They walk out of the hotel before Siegfried can stop them, and Siegfried runs after them to call them back.

Meanwhile, Siegfried's brother Adolf is taking a shower on the ship. His first mate, Hernando Cruz, is the one who knows everything about how the ship works. Cruz is worried about his family, and although deserting a ship is the last thing he'd ever do, Cruz walks off, leaving Adolf alone with no real knowledge of the ship. If Adolf hadn't been incompetent, humanity would never have survived. The narrator notes that most leaders are incompetent and are saved by an efficient second in command, and the worst mistakes ever made were made by leaders without a competent underling.

Adolf, still in his shower, thinks that Cruz might threaten to charge deserting crewmen with punishment by the Navy, since the ship is officially in the Ecuadorian Navy. Most of the ideas, though, come from Cruz, such as planning to anchor the ship in the marsh away from looters, or possibly taking her to the naval base on the Galapagos Islands. If celebrities come, the ship can transport them to safety, perhaps Panama or even San Diego. The captain never considers taking charge of the ship and running it aground on Santa Rosalia. Meanwhile, Hernando Cruz drives away with stolen food for his family.

Peru will play a part in the story, attacking Ecuador this night. Although Peru's infantry is deserting, the air force has new fighters and bombers and good morale. Peru plans to claim the Galapagos Islands for itself. During the narrator's lifetime, war is going on in some part of the world all the time. A million years in the future, without hands or big brains, no one makes or uses weapons.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 25-Chapter 26 Analysis

Through the story of the captain, Vonnegut comments on the dysfunctionality of human society. Perception is the key to human behavior, so human beings demand leaders, like the captain, who create a positive perception instead of human beings who can



actually do a job. Only the captain's second in command knows anything about running the boat. This backwards leadership is found, the narrator tells us, throughout the world.

The narrator again perceives the only meaning of life in its long-term, evolutionary consequences. Bobby King's life is dismissed once his relationship with "the Nature Cruise of the Century" has ended. Perhaps King never writes Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, but even if he had, would it have any worth? A million years in the future, there is no one to play a symphony or hear and appreciate one.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 27-Chapter 28

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 27-Chapter 28 Summary

Selena MacIntosh never knows during her lifetime that her father is dead. Her blindness is due to retinitis pigmentosa, an inherited condition from her mother. If Selena had had a child, it would have had a fifty percent chance of inheriting the disease, and a female would have a fifty percent chance of passing the disease on. By chance, neither retinitis pigmentosa nor Huntington's chorea were passed down to future humanity.

While MacIntosh and Zenji are walking outside, Private Geraldo Delgado, a paranoid schizophrenic soldier who has deserted his post, breaks into a souvenir shop, getting into the blocked-off zone around the Hotel El Dorado. He believes that people are destroying his brain with radios, and when he sees Mandarax, he thinks it is a radio. He shoots MacIntosh and Zenji and wanders off, leaving the souvenir shop open. A million years in the future, there are crazy people, but they can't have weapons or hurt anyone. They're easy to avoid.

Six little girls begging for food are at the back of the shop. The soldier pushes past them. The next day, he will rape a woman and father one of the last few million children in South America. The six girls go through the shop looking for food. Their parents were killed by crop dusters spraying insecticides. They are Kanka-bonos and will become the mothers of modern humans, thanks to the soldier giving them a gateway to the Hotel El Dorado.

Eduardo Ximénez is a pilot who lands his plane when he sees an SOS on the ground. A priest who has been living with the Kanka-bonos asks him to find someone to care for the six girls, whose parents have died. He drops the girls at an orphanage in Guayaquil. Another pilot who affects humanity is Paul W. Tibbets, an American who drops an atomic bomb during World War II. Without his help, people probably would not have readily become so furry.

The orphanage finds an old man named Domingo Quezada who knows Kanka-bono because he lived with the tribe for three years. He is the grandfather of one of the girls, so today's humans are descended from noble Spanish intellectuals. The narrator notes that as a child, his mother told him they were descended from French nobles and also related to Carter Braxton, who signed the Declaration of Independence. He asked his father about his side of the family, and his father said he came from "determined, resourceful, microscopic tadpoles".

Quezada tells the girls to trust only him. He teaches them to be beggars and thieves, and he steals them from the orphanage. He begins preparing them to be prostitutes.



They run away from him and live on the streets. The tourists dry up, though, and they are starving when they find the Hotel El Dorado, with James Wait in the bar.

## **Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 27-Chapter 28 Analysis**

Vonnegut carefully details the genetic diseases that affect the people so closely involved with the colony that ends up on Santa Rosalia. Is it pure luck that Selena does not reproduce and pass on congenital blindness? Is it pure luck that the captain does not have Huntington's chorea to pass down to his offspring? Is there some higher power at work, or is there something about having an inherited condition that makes people less likely to reproduce?

The reader begins to see a pattern of luck and happenstance that leads to the ultimate survival of the species, and Vonnegut leaves this pattern ambiguous. Through an unlikely series of events, the six little Kanka-bono girls find their way to Santa Rosalia to start a colony. Can it be chance? The existence of a ghost and a blue tunnel to the afterlife imply the existence of some sort of god, but at the same time, Leon Trout detects nothing but natural occurrences. Does the supernatural exist in the elements of luck and chance?



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 29-Chapter 30

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 29-Chapter 30 Summary

Mary Hepburn is suffocating herself with a garment bag and hallucinates that she is a tortoise trapped on its back in a sailing ship, kept that way, helpless, as fresh meat. When Mary told students about this common practice among sailors, they were horrified at this treatment of animals. Nature, though, is harsh, and it is no worse than the rodents that wiped out most tortoises by eating their eggs. A similar fate is awaiting humans, whose eggs will be destroyed by a disease that will spread to all human females, except on Galapagos.

Mary nearly dies, even seeing the blue tunnel to the afterlife, but she takes the bag off her head and goes down to the bar. James Wait is feeding the orphan children cocktail snacks from the bar, and she believes that he is loving and unselfish. Actually, the con man is a murderer. While Wait was a prostitute, a rich and powerful man hired Wait to asphyxiate him for sexual pleasure. With no motive, Wait killed the man instead.

Wait will die next after Siegfried von Kleist, but not until he marries Mary Hepburn. Wait is amazed at how easy it is to be charitable to the Kanka-bono girls, and it gives him the perfect setup to begin conning Mary Hepburn, who thinks he's brought the girls in from outside. The girls don't understand English and will never learn it. In a few decades, Kanka-bono will be the only language of humankind. While the children eat, Mary and Wait talk. He says that he's Willard Flemming of Saskatchewan, Canada, a widowed windmill engineer. He finds out about Mary's history and wheedles information about her financial position.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 29-Chapter 30 Analysis

The story of the tortoises, tortured by sailors for food, is both a story of man's inhumanity and a story of the cruelty inherent in nature, where animals must kill to eat. The actions of the sailors are only cruel in that human beings have the ability to realize that they are inflicting torture on another creature. In other words, human beings have big brains. The rodents who devoured turtle eggs until the turtles became extinct were not being cruel. They were merely eating to survive, much as the sailors are eating to survive. Death and extinction are natural events, and the near extinction of mankind is simply part of nature.



James Wait serves as an example of the duplicity of human beings. He is a murderer, a prostitute, and a con man, but from Mary Hepburn's point of view, in her unique reality, he is Willard Flemming, a kind-hearted man feeding orphan children. Much like Roy Hepburn's delusions, Mary is taken in by her own perception, and her reality is very different from objective reality.





# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 31-Chapter 32

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 31-Chapter 32 Summary

The narrator comments on how much people talk in the twentieth century. His father talked in his sleep, and the narrator himself did the same in the Marines. People's brains went on and on. They also lied constantly, like James Wait or Siegfried von Kleist. Siegfried comes back to the bar. He does not tell Wait and Mary that he's beginning to lose his mind because of Huntington's chorea or that MacIntosh and Zenji have been shot. Instead, he tells Wait to get Selena MacIntosh and Hisako Hiroguchi and that he'll take them all to the airport. He gives Wait Mandarax, which he took from Zenji's body.

Siegfried, the four guests, Kazakh, and the six Kanka-bono girls pile into a bus meant for musicians and dancers. The girls will soon kill and eat Kazakh, the seeing-eye dog. Siegfried tells the guests that Zenji and MacIntosh have gone ahead to the airport.

News comes in that the cruise has been canceled, and the crowd surges over the bus and into the hotel, looting all the food and goods. The passengers cower on the bus's floor. Wait, while sheltering the Kanka-bono girls, has a heart attack. His heart condition is inherited. Meanwhile, another mob is looting the Bahía de Darwin, taking everything not nailed down. Captain von Kleist has retreated to the crow's nest, wearing nothing but his underwear, while Siegfried von Kleist begins to drive the bus away from the hotel. At the same time, Peru declares war on Ecuador.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 31-Chapter 32 Analysis

The cancellation of the cruise is the dissolution of hope for the people of Ecuador. No celebrities are coming to shine goodness and prosperity on their country. The pretense of constructed, societal reality has completely collapsed, and the only reality that remains is the natural reality. People are starving; people need food. Those who can gather the food, at any expense, will be the survivors. The breakdown of constructed reality causes rioting and looting, a return to a natural order.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 33-Chapter 34

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 33-Chapter 34 Summary

What might have happened to humanity if the rich and famous celebrities of "the Nature Cruise of the Century" had ended up on Galapagos? Likely, they would have died off because the women would not be young enough. If the five fertile women were impregnated, probably humanity would be about the same a million years in the future.

Two hundred live lobsters were also on the Bahía de Darwin, and years later, Adolf will make up a story about how they survive and evolve to have civilization, just like humans, all the time wishing they were just lobsters again. The narrator thinks lobsters an unlikely animal to become dominant and perhaps octopi would be a better choice. In a million years, though, no animal has become discontent with being just an animal. Human beings no longer use tools, having just beaks and flippers. Fingers are now useless nubs, attractive during mating. Humans can now swim to the mainland, but the bacteria that wiped out humanity is still active.

Lieutenant Colonel Guillermo Reyes is a pilot in Peru's air force. As he drops a bomb on Guayaquil's airport, he feels that it's better than sex. The sensation is powerful and heady. The bomb itself is a collective effort of human achievement.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 33-Chapter 34 Analysis

The narrator comes to the conclusion that it doesn't make much difference whether young Kanka-bono girls or the world's elite are trapped and isolated on the Galapagos Islands. In the grand scheme of natural selection, individuality does not count for much, although human society puts a great emphasis on individual personality. In natural selection, as the narrator looks at a million-year time period, the environment matters much more than the individual. Again, the things that humans value mean little in the context of nature.

The story of the lobsters exactly parallels the story of man. What is the point of creating a civilization, in the long run? Adolf's evolved lobsters are just as unhappy as human beings trapped in complex existences.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 35-Chapter 36

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 35-Chapter 36 Summary

Just before the bomb drops, Captain Adolf von Kleist comes down from the crow's nest to survey the damage. The ship has been gutted. There are no light bulbs in the lights. Thanks to the darkness, the engines have not been destroyed, which will ultimately result in humanity's survival. The captain, however, has no clothes left, and all he finds is a bottle of cognac.

The crew of the other ship in the port, the San Mateo, steals the Bahía de Darwin's lifeboats, leaving the cruise ship tethered to the dock by one line. The captain proceeds to get drunk. He also discovers that the engines work. In the distance, the captain thinks he sees a meteorite. Then, the explosion hits the airport, as the missile hits the radar dish.

Siegfried has driven the hotel bus to the hospital to get help for James Wait, a change in course which saves all the passengers' lives. The airport explodes, and the windows of the bus break. The hospital is put out of commission. Siegfried and the passengers, deaf from the explosion, flee in the bus, going the only direction they can: toward the harbor. They will never know the cause of the explosion, accepting with reservation the captain's idea that it's a meteorite. When Siegfried reaches the ship, he is surprised to find his brother Adolf is there and alive. At first, he thinks it's the fabled ghost of the ship: Leon Trout, the narrator.

Adolf jumps down from the boat. Siegfried is deaf, and Adolf is drunk. He finds everything funny. He thinks that Siegfried's convulsive movements are a mocking imitation of their father. Adolf gets the hiccups, something that still happens to people a million years later, perhaps more so, since they eat so much raw fish so fast. People still laugh, too.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 35-Chapter 36 Analysis

As the first book nears its end, the guests from the hotel and the Kanka-bonos are finally brought together with the Bahía de Darwin. None of the castaways will ever know what really happened in Ecuador, much as they will never learn what happens to the human race after they leave the mainland. Again, this is an example of how people's understanding of the world is governed by their limited knowledge and perception. The captain is certain that the explosions are caused by meteorites because his background

and experiences and thought processes predispose him to think so, much as Mary will go through life certain that "Willard Flemming" was a kind, talented, and generous man.

Luck is an important element in much of the story, which depends on a large number of factors bringing a small group of people to the Bahía de Darwin. Wait's heart attack brings them to the hospital, both saving them from the bomb that drops on the airport and forcing them on a course toward the ship.



# Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 37-Chapter 38

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 37-Chapter 38 Summary

Adolf says that the explosion was surely a meteor, though Siegfried thinks the hospital blew up. Siegfried tells his brother about the people on the bus and that he's starting to show signs of Huntington's chorea. Mary, Hisako, and Siegfried maneuver the boat nearer the dock and use the bus to climb aboard. The hardest to get up is the captain, who is too drunk to make the climb in the first few tries. They haul Wait up in a harness. Siegfried sends Mary up last, and then he starts the bus, planning to kill himself by crashing it, as his symptoms are worsening. However, he doesn't get the chance. Another bomb, meant for the Bahía de Darwin, hits the other boat in the harbor. The resulting tidal wave drowns Siegfried.

The San Mateo is on its way home when it's bombed by a Peruvian missile. The shipmen are eating a dairy cow, which they hauled up by her neck onto the ship practically killing her, but keeping her alive enough to last a week or so to be fresh meat. They're eating the meat when the bomb hits them. The Peruvian pilot radios back that he's destroyed the Bahía de Darwin, not realizing that the wrong ship is destroyed. He, too, thinks dropping such a bomb is better than sex. The bomb causes much destruction, but it is a boon, if anything, to the microorganisms in the marsh. It drowns Siegfried and breaks the Bahía de Darwin's tether to the dock. The captain starts the engine and heads to the ocean, a new Noah's ark.

## Book One: The Thing Was, Chapter 37-Chapter 38 Analysis

The story of the dairy cow shows that man's behavior toward animals has not changed since early sailors treated land tortoises in a similar manner. Although Mary Hepburn's class may have objected passionately to the idea that human beings could be so cruel, people the world over still treat animals in much the same way. The sailors' needs are practical. They must eat or die, and their own survival is put ahead of kindness or respect for another species. However, in the context of the natural world, the sailors themselves are subject to the same cruelty, whether from a bomb or a bacterium.



# Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 1-Chapter 2

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 1-Chapter 2 Summary

The Bahía de Darwin is now a ghost ship, and the narrator is its ghost. Leon Trout, the narrator, is the son of science fiction writer Kilgore Trout. Leon is a deserter from the US Marines, given political asylum in Sweden. Working there as a welder, he was beheaded while working on the Bahía de Darwin. He refused to go into the blue tunnel to the afterlife.

As a ghost, Leon can materialize, but he has only shown himself one time, during the storm the Bahía de Darwin went through on its way from Sweden to Ecuador. Leon stands next to Adolf as the ship sails into the ocean. Mary has been up all night, caring for James Wait. Everyone else is asleep below. Mandarax is in a partially closed drawer, pointlessly translating everything into Kirghiz. The captain plans to sail to Baltra in the Galapagos Islands, where there is a hospital and radio station. However, he has already made navigational errors that are throwing them off course.

Mary remembers the past, being in a sleeping bag on a camping trip. She hears a whippoorwill call and investigates, but what she thinks is a bird is actually a sailor, her future husband Roy. He has been discharged from the Navy and is hitchhiking around the country. He's heard that woodpeckers thought to be extinct have been spotted in this park, but it's a hoax. Mary falls in love during this brief meeting. Memories like this don't happen a million years later.

Meanwhile, James Wait begs Mary to marry him. She tries to comfort him. A million years later, people still make comforting noises to the sick, even without words, like Mary uses. People, however, have much simpler love lives. They mate when in heat about twice a year. While James Wait lies dying, he thinks he's in love with Mary, and she thinks that she's in love with him, or rather, Willard Flemming, the kind-hearted widower and environmentally conscious windmill engineer. She calls him "Mr. Flemming", and he can't remember what his first name's supposed to be so that he can tell her to call him by it.

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 1-Chapter 2 Analysis

At the beginning of the second book, as the castaways begin their journey to Santa Rosalia, the reader finally learns information about the narrator, Leon Trout. Trout's position as a ghost who can see people's backgrounds and the causes and



consequences of events gives him the unique position of being a first-person narrator with a personality and specific point of view who is also omniscient. Because much of the story has to do with faulty perception and deceit, Leon Trout's position allows the reader to realize when and how characters are being deceived.

The second book also gives more information about the human beings of a million years in the future. They do not know "love". They mate when they are in heat. Is this too much to give up? They do not have memories, like Mary's memories of meeting Roy, but they also do not have memories like Roy's memories of killing animals while in the military or Mary's memories of Roy dying of brain cancer.



## **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 3-Chapter 4**

### **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 3-Chapter 4 Summary**

While in Midland City, Ohio, as a sixteen-year-old boy, Wait is mowing the lawn of a wealthy local man whose wife is addicted to prescription drugs and alcohol. Wait is not looking for any trouble, since he wants to leave for Manhattan. The police are always watching him, although he's never committed a crime. Still, the wife comes out in a bathing suit and asks him inside. Soon, they're having sex, and nine months later she has Wait's son. Her husband thinks the child is his. Later, Wait learns about the child, but he never thinks of the boy as a relative. A million years later, males reach sexual prime at six.

On board the Bahía de Darwin, no one is truly hungry yet, and everyone can sleep except the captain and Mary, who are running the ship. Mary steers during the day by the sun, and the captain steers at night. Unknown to them, Baltra has already been destroyed by bombs. During this time, such explosions cause the species no real biological harm. There are too many people to thin the population this way. Soon, however, mankind will lose the ability to heal through repopulating.

If mankind hadn't been on the verge of extinction, the castaways would have been rescued after a while, and the captain would have been chagrined at causing the shipwreck. However, after one night, the captain still believes all is well, even though the sun doesn't come up in quite the right direction, according to his calculations. He corrects course and imagines that they can't be far off track.

The captain goes to find Mary and Wait. Mary has just agreed to marry Wait in order to calm him. To her surprise, the captain offers to marry them immediately, and she goes through with the ceremony. Both Wait and the captain believe Mary's last name is Kaplan, the name on her fatigues, so both parties are married under false names.

### **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 3-Chapter 4 Analysis**

The narrator focuses on who procreates and who does not because biologically, the making of babies determines what genetic material survives. James Wait, criminal, has procreated, so his genes survive. Meanwhile, Mary and Roy's genes are an evolutionary dead-end.

The captain wants to be on the right course, and so he assumes that he is on the right course. He could have recognized he was making an error and turned back toward the



coast, but he has false confidence in his own abilities. His faulty perception makes him a danger to the others, but by sheer chance also saves the human race.



# Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 5-Chapter 6

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 5-Chapter 6 Summary

On Santa Rosalia, Mary Hepburn will memorize many quotations from Mandarax. She will remember Willard Flemming with love and affection, taking their marriage seriously but disparaging her lover, the captain. Akiko, Hisako's daughter, will listen eagerly to Mary's stories about the mainland and about love.

Mary tells Akiko about Robert Wojciehowitz, head of the Ilium High English department. After Roy's death, Robert tries to date Mary, and she refuses. However, he persists and even shows up at her house, asking her to marry him. Mary retreats into the house, leaving Robert outside with her dog Donald. Robert is afraid of dogs, and Donald drives him into a tree. Mary finally rescues him, and Robert is overcome with self-loathing, similar to the captain's self-loathing after finding no land for five days. The ship is off-course to the north. James Wait is dead. Everyone else, save the ghost, is starving. The Kanka-bono girls secretly kill and eat Selena's dog Kazakh.

The narrator comments that neither Kazakh nor Wait were going to write Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a comment he learned from a coworker at a funeral in Sweden. Later, as a ghost, Leon hears the same coworker say the same thing about Leon himself.

When Wait dies, the captain tries to get Mary to stop grieving a stranger, but Mary defends Wait and insists on calling him her husband. She repeats Wait's lies about being a windmill designer and composing two symphonies. As the boat clearly is off course, Mary throws "Willard's" accomplishments in the captain's face. The captain has begun navigating wildly, and meanwhile Selena is searching for her missing dog. Mary gets the captain to try to use Mandarax as a radio, but as he says "mayday" into it, all it responds with is a quotation about May.

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 5-Chapter 6 Analysis

The Kanka-bono girls' killing and eating Kazakh shows that they are in tune with nature. They understand that to survive they need food, and they will take what food they can get. Living in a tribe in the interior of Ecuador has prepared them to live in the wilderness of Santa Rosalia in a way that living in "civilized" society could not. Kazakh's death is one of natural selection.

Throughout the novel, the narrator will comment on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and in this section the reader learns the background and meaning of the comment.



Beethoven's Ninth is symbolic of all the greatness to come out of human culture. Are such moments of genius worth all the pain, suffering, and dysfunction of human society? For every Beethoven, how many millions of ordinary people are there who cause more harm than good in their lives?



# Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 7-Chapter 8

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 7-Chapter 8 Summary

For a second, Mary and the captain believe they've contacted someone, but Mandarax continues responding to "mayday" with quotations about May. The captain tries saying "June" and gets a quotation about June and the same with "October". Mary goes up to the crow's nest, condescendingly asking the captain what island she can expect to see. He says she'll see Mount Ararat.

In the crow's nest, the ghost of Leon Trout sees the blue tunnel leading to the afterlife coming for him again. He's seen it three times: at his death, at his funeral, and during the storm when the Bahía de Darwin sailed from Sweden to Ecuador. The narrator will only go through the tunnel when his curiosity about life is expended.

Kilgore Trout, Leon's father, appears in the end of the blue tunnel and asks his son if he's ready to come into the afterlife. Otherwise, the blue tunnel won't come again for a million years. Leon steps toward the tunnel, still hesitating. Leon asks for more time, but his father says Leon is always asking for a little more time. Leon says he's learned a lot about the meaning of life, but Kilgore says he's learned nothing but facts. He repeats that he won't return for a million years and rants about the inhumanity of the humankind that Leon is so fascinated with.

Leon doesn't like his father, one of the reasons he hasn't yet entered the afterlife. Leon ran away from home at sixteen. In contrast, Wait ran away because he was physically abused, while Leon just hated his bitter, cynical father. Leon ran away to find his mother but never did. Kilgore Trout had published many books and stories, but only one person Leon ever met knew of him. After leaving, Leon never contacted his father. He became a Marine like his father, though, and now he's a writer without any readers, like his father.

Leon's father accuses him of being like his mother and believing that people are essentially good. He wants to see his mother, who is also in the afterlife. For a minute, he thinks she's behind his father, but it's their neighbor, Naomi Tharp. Leon steps toward the tunnel again, but then Mary gives a shout from the crow's nest. Leon steps back to find out that she's seen land.

The land is Santa Rosalia, and the boat will of course head toward the island. Leon hesitates whether to stay or go, but when he turns back, the blue tunnel is already gone. Now, the million years have past, and Leon waits for the blue tunnel's return. Nothing new is going to ever happen on Earth again, so he's ready to go.



On December 1, 1986, Adolf von Kleist runs the ship aground on the island, hoping to gather supplies and then sail for the mainland. However, the engines never start again. He and Mary go ashore and kill boobies and iguanas for food. Mary cuts herself and identifies the island by its blood-sucking finches. They don't eat any marine iguanas then, but later find that the seaweed in their stomach gives needed vitamins and minerals. As time goes on, people evolve to digest seaweed on their own. People also eat fish, and boobies if food is short. That night, on the Bahía de Darwin, the passengers feast. The next day, they go ashore and kill as much food as they can to stock the ship. They'll sail east and cannot possibly miss the mainland. However, the engines don't start.

## **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 7-Chapter 8 Analysis**

Mandarax's uselessness as a radio, providing quotations instead of communication, highlights the essential uselessness of the mass of human knowledge. Most of the castaways will find Mandarax obnoxious because of how useless this font of human knowledge and ability is. From the art of Japanese flower arranging to the sum total of human literature, most of the things that human society values are meaningless in the struggle for survival.

Leon Trout must face the decision whether to go into the afterlife or stay for a million years to watch humanity evolve. He cannot let go of the unfolding story of humankind, at least not for another million years. The things that make humanity so interesting are the same things that make it dysfunctional: passions, lies, and faulty perceptions.

Chapter eight ends with the castaways' arrival on Santa Rosalia. The land seems like their savior, and in a way, it will be. When they learn that they are stranded there, the castaway's hopes are dashed, but again, this disappointment is a result of faulty perception. They will never realize that their disaster is the only reason human beings survive for even one more generation.



## **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 9-Chapter 10**

### **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 9-Chapter 10 Summary**

Ten years later, the Bahía de Darwin sinks, and by that time, the castaways call her the Walloping Window Blind, after a poem by Charles Carryl that is disparaging of the captain and his reliance on the ship's technology. Hisako's daughter Akiko and the Kanka-bonos all use the nickname, although the Kanka-bonos don't understand it and Akiko cannot translate it.

Soon after the ship sinks, when Mary is sixty-one, she begins the artificial inseminations. The captain does not want to reproduce and pass on Huntington's chorea. He also is a racist and so stays away from the other women on the island. No one on the island knows that humanity is going extinct, and they still expect rescue. Mary, however, begins to wonder about impregnating the other women. The idea gains such strength that she can't resist trying it. She goes to the Kanka-bonos, with Akiko to translate, and uses her finger to put the captain's sperm in the Kanka-bono women, making them pregnant.

James Wait's body sinks to the ocean floor with the ship. The captain is the only man on the island, until his son Kamikaze is born a year later. When the ship sinks, the captain is a boring person, spending most of his time by the spring that supplies water to the castaways. From a reservoir of rainwater, a steady drip fills a natural basin. The captain lives a desperate existence watching over the spring, which doesn't need him, but so have many others. A million years in the future, no one is desperate. The island has no tools available. If it had, the captain certainly would have destroyed the spring trying to improve it. Food, luckily, is plentiful on the island. Meanwhile, people around the world are dying from droughts.

The captain doesn't know that the Kanka-bonos are pregnant until about a month before Kamikaze is born. The castaways never become united, but after a generation or so, the colony is one family with Kanka-bono culture, ruled by Akiko and Kamikaze.

### **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 9-Chapter 10 Analysis**

Although the ship has been useless for ten years, its existence seems to maintain hope of rescue, at least for Mary Hepburn. When it finally sinks into the ocean, hope finally disappears. Some primal desire to maintain the species seems to rise up in Mary Hepburn's unconscious mind, even though she does not know that mankind elsewhere



is doomed. The Kanka-bonos, too, have a drive to keep the species going. They all want babies, a natural and primal desire for their genes (and their culture) to live on. The ease of impregnating the Kanka-bonos indicates how natural it is for them to reproduce.

The captain would have, with tools, tried to improve the spring and therefore destroyed the castaways' only water. This is a microcosm of human society, fiddling with the natural environment to try to "improve" it, only to wreck it.



# Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 11-Chapter 12

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 11-Chapter 12 Summary

The captain does not find out the Kanka-bonos are pregnant because they avoid him, since they are also racist. He sees one of the women one night and thinks that she has an infection or parasite that is making her stomach swell. Mary does not disillusion him. After Kamikaze's birth, when the captain learns the truth, she openly mocks him and his uselessness except as a sperm donor.

Mary's comments end her relationship with the captain. Mary could have lied to him and told him sea lions or seals impregnated the women. He would have believed it because the idea of artificial insemination seemed impossible, even though Kamikaze, like one in twelve humans a million years later, has the captain's blue eyes and blond hair. Mary and the captain, however, were only together by default, after the Kanka-bonos moved off on their own and Selena and Hisako became a couple.

The Kanka-bonos do not reveal their names to outsiders, but Leon Trout knows them. Kamikaze's mother is Sinka. The second to give birth is Lor, followed by Lira, Dirno, Nanno, and Keel.

After Mary and the captain separate, she complains about him to Akiko, telling her that Adolf never worked on their relationship. Mary fondly remembers her first husband and believes her second marriage to "Willard" would have been happy. The captain, however, would talk about what he would do when he got off the island, but his ideas never included Mary. He also made fun of Willard Flemming, doubting his claimed accomplishments, and complained about Mandarax. Finally, he never said he loved Mary. Mary and the captain go on living alone, visited by Akiko and later her children.

The Kanka-bono women fear Mary and the captain instead of honoring them. Another twenty years pass. Akiko and Kamikaze have seven children together, and the children speak Kanka-bono but call Mary and the captain Grandma and Grandpa. On May 9, 2016, Akiko comes to tell Mary that Adolf is dying. According to Mandarax, the captain, now eighty-six, has Alzheimer's disease. Mary goes to visit him in their old home, build with a view to the ocean, where the Bahía de Darwin has long ago sunk from water in the stern.





## **Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 11-Chapter 12 Analysis**

The truth about the Kanka-bonos' pregnancies is easily kept from the captain. When he doesn't know the real reason for the woman's swelling stomach, his "big brain" makes up its own explanation, which satisfies him. This is another example of people's individual realities being deceptive and far removed from the truth. The fact that the captain would have believed that the Kanka-bonos mated with sea lions or seals highlights even more how easily deceived human beings are, just as Mary continues to be deceived about "Willard's" true character.

The captain's Alzheimer's disease is another example of how deceptive the human brain can be. Much as Roy's brain rebels against him, filling his mind with delusion because of a brain tumor, the captain's brain is rebelling against him, deleting his memories and causing confusion.



# Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 13

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 13 Summary

On the same shore where the Bahía de Darwin sunk, Hisako Hiroguchi and Selena MacIntosh walk into the ocean to commit suicide. The view upsets Akiko, who feels responsible. At twenty-two, Akiko moved out on her own, and shortly after, her overprotective caregivers kill themselves.

At eighty, Mary takes pride that she can still care for herself, but the captain needs Akiko to survive. His body is healthy, but his mind is decayed, like millions of people on the mainland. A million years in the future, sharks and killer whales make sure there are no helpless old people to care for.

The captain doesn't recognize Mary, and Mary says he's no worse than ever. Akiko and Mary hear the sound of Kamikaze catching a female for sex. Although Kamikaze is Akiko's mate, he has sex with anyone he can get his hands on. Akiko had to persuade him not to have sex with the sea lions and seals.

One of the Kanka-bonos tells Akiko that her son has broken his arm, so Akiko leaves Mary to watch the captain. Mary takes out Mandarax to give a diagnosis, but the captain snatches the hated machine and throws it in the ocean. Mary goes in the water after it, and she and Mandarax are both eaten by a great white shark. The captain's memory is haywire, and he can't recall what happened or why the water is bloody. He is terrified by the harmless blood-sucking finches that come to feed on his bedsores. He jumps in the water to get away from them and is eaten by a hammerhead shark.

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 13 Analysis

Hisako and Selena's suicides show that the one thing they live for and value while stranded on Santa Rosalia is Akiko, Hisako's daughter. Children are the way a species continues, and Akiko becomes the matriarch of the colony on Santa Rosalia, a key figure in continuing human existence. Aside from procreation, Hisako and Selena see no meaning in their lives, without the constructed reality of human culture.

The deaths of Mary and the captain indicate the passing of the old order. They are the last people who have any memory of western civilization. The Kanka-bonos have their own culture, and Akiko is the beginning of a new world, the colonists who know only life on the island. With the passing of the older generation, western civilization, if not humanity, dies.



# Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 14

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 14 Summary

The ghost of Leon Trout has written all this in the air with his invisible finger. These invisible words will be as lasting as anyone's. Today's humans have no left-handed people (nor hands, really), no redheads, and no albinos. Perhaps their fur would have been prized for fur coats once upon a time. Nature has balanced itself, and human beings can go on indefinitely. Trout cannot detect anything supernatural or alien in the changes to humanity, only Darwinian natural selection at work. The best fishers survived. Humans are no longer aware of their own mortality, for which Leon Trout is thankful.

Leon tells more about himself in the final moments before the blue tunnel will appear again. He once got a teenage girl pregnant, but she had an abortion. After that, he always used birth control. He has not, in a million years, seen natural rafts or any indication of how land creatures might have reached the Galapagos Islands in the past.

In Vietnam, after killing an old woman, Leon is hospitalized for psychological reasons. The army presses him to keep what happened a secret. Fifty-nine villagers were killed by his platoon. Leon contracts syphilis, and not wanting the army to know about the disease, he visits a private Swedish doctor in Bangkok. Leon tells the doctor about the war and his experiences. Then, the doctor asks if Leon is related to the science fiction writer Kilgore Trout, and Leon bursts into tears. This doctor is the only person Leon ever meets who knows of his father or his father's writing. After Leon recovers, the doctor offers him a "strong medicine", political asylum in Sweden.

## Book Two: And the Thing Became, Chapter 14 Analysis

Leon Trout is ready to pass into the next world. Humankind has reached a stasis, but stasis is not interesting the way that the intricacies of the human drama a million years ago were. Perhaps this is simply because Leon himself is human, and the constructed reality of human society is only relevant (and interesting) to human beings.

The ultimate question that the book asks is whether human accomplishment is worthwhile. Leon Trout's accomplishment, his invisible book with no readers, is clearly not written for any audience. Is it worthwhile? His father wrote for years with no seeming effect on the world. Was his writing worthwhile? The fact that Leon degrades into tears when he meets a man who's heard of his father indicates that he is constantly searching

for his father's work, for human accomplishment, to have meaning or an effect on the world.



# Characters

## Leon Trout

Leon Trout is the narrator of the novel. He is the son of science fiction writer Kilgore Trout, and he runs away from home when he is sixteen. Leon joins the US Marines and goes to fight in Vietnam. During Vietnam, Leon shoots an old woman who has just blown up his best friend and worst enemy in the platoon with a grenade. After this, he is hospitalized for psychological reasons and wants to sleep all the time. Meanwhile, the army officials want him to hush up the incident.

Leon contracts syphilis and goes to a private doctor to keep his condition from the military. The doctor is the only person Leon ever meets who has heard of his father's writing. After Leon breaks down in the doctor's office, the doctor offers to arrange political asylum for Leon in Sweden. Leon deserts the Marines and goes to Sweden, where he becomes a welder.

Leon works as a welder on the Bahía de Darwin during its construction and is accidentally beheaded by a falling sheet of metal. He refuses to go into the blue tunnel to the afterlife, mainly because his father is there, and Leon remains on Earth as a ghost to find out about life. He can see into the minds of other people and understand full stories. Leon stays on Earth a million years and sees people evolve into the colony of fisherfolk on the Galapagos Islands.

## Mary Hepburn

Mary Hepburn is a biology teacher from Ilium, New York. She lectures each year on the Galapagos Islands. When her husband Roy signs them up for "the Nature Cruise of the Century", Mary is secretly annoyed because she is sick of the Galapagos Islands and would rather travel to Africa. Mary loses her job when the Ilium factory shuts down, putting most of the town out of work and causing a mass exodus. The high school is shut down.

On Roy's deathbed, he tells Mary to go on the cruise without him, and so Mary heads to Ecuador. She is so depressed that she tries to kill herself, but stops herself at the last minute. Mary meets James Wait and believes his lies. She marries him more to soothe him in his illness than for any other reason, but after he dies she remembers this "second husband" fondly, comparing him favorably to the captain.

When stranded on Santa Rosalia, Mary has a troubled relationship with the captain, who is her only option for a companion. After ten years, when the Bahía de Darwin sinks, Mary begins to think about impregnating the Kanka-bono girls on the island. The idea consumes her until she must try it. Through her experiments transferring the captain's sperm to these fertile girls, Mary causes human life to continue on the planet.



## Roy Hepburn

Roy Hepburn is Mary Hepburn's husband. He works as a millwright and loves his job, but he is laid off when the plant is automated. Roy signs himself and Mary up for "the Nature Cruise of the Century", possibly an early sign of the brain tumor that eventually kills him. Before his death, Roy is plagued by delusions that, during his stint in the armed forces, he was forced to tie animals up to posts in order to expose them to radiation for experiments. Roy is an animal lover with a natural affinity for and ability to communicate with animals, and these false memories torture him. On his deathbed, Roy makes Mary promise to get married as soon as possible and to go on the cruise without him.

## Captain Adolf von Kleist

Captain Adolf von Kleist is the independently wealthy captain of the Bahía de Darwin (owned by his uncles) and the brother of Siegfried von Kleist. Adolf has never had children because there is a fifty percent chance that he has Huntington's chorea, a neurological disorder. His father had the disease, which caused him to move convulsively in a kind of uncontrollable dance. Under the influence of the disease, which affected his mind, Adolf's father killed his wife.

Adolf is humorous and good at socializing with important passengers, but he knows nothing about navigation or about the ship. When he tries to take the ship to the Galapagos Island, he gets hopelessly lost, running aground on Santa Rosalia. The ship will not start again, and Adolf has marooned himself and his passengers on this uninhabited island.

Adolf pairs up with Mary Hepburn on the island but they part forever after he finds out she's used his sperm to impregnate the Kanka-bono women. Adolf does not want to pass on Huntington's chorea, but by sheer luck, he does not have the disease. He is the male ancestor of all humans a million years in the future. Adolf suffers from Alzheimer's disease in his old age. His final action is throwing the hated Mandarax into the ocean, which causes Mary's death when she goes after it. Adolf himself suffers a memory lapse, is frightened by birds, and runs into the ocean where he is eaten by a shark.

## Siegfried von Kleist

Siegfried von Kleist is the independently wealthy manager of the Hotel El Dorado (owned by his uncles) and the brother of Adolf von Kleist. Siegfried has never had children because there is a fifty percent chance that he has Huntington's chorea, a neurological disorder. His father had the disease, which caused him to move convulsively in a kind of uncontrollable dance. Under the influence of the disease, which affected his mind, Siegfried's father killed his wife.



Siegfried begins showing symptoms of Huntington's chorea at about the time when Ecuadorians are beginning to riot. He manages to get the hotel guests to the Bahía de Darwin, but he decides to kill himself before his disease gets worse. However, a tidal wave drowns him before he can kill himself.

## **James Wait/Willard Flemming**

James Wait is a con man who marries vulnerable women and fleeces them of their savings and possessions. Wait is the product of the illicit incestuous relationship between a man and his daughter, who left their baby boy and ran off together. As a child, Wait was shuffled from one foster home to another, always suffering abuse at the hands of foster parents appalled at his taboo birth.

Wait runs off to Manhattan at the age of sixteen after siring a child in a sexual encounter with a neighbor. In Manhattan, he becomes a male prostitute, and he is propositioned by a powerful man who wants, not sex, but help asphyxiating himself for sexual release. Without a clear motive, Wait kills his customer. He doesn't even take any money or property from the house.

When Wait loses his good looks, he begins working as a dance instructor. He meets and marries his first wife there. Under different names and in different locations, Wait meets, marries, and robs seventeen wives. He books passage on "the Nature Cruise of the Century" to find an eighteenth wife, and Mary Hepburn looks like his prey. Wait calls himself Willard Flemming, a widowed Canadian windmill engineer who is concerned with the environment and has composed two symphonies. Mary is completely taken in by this false personality. Wait has a heart attack while fleeing the Hotel El Dorado and dies on the Bahía de Darwin, but not until he has convinced Mary to marry him. Mary always fondly remembers her second husband, Willard Flemming.

## **Jesús Ortiz**

The bartender at the Hotel El Dorado, Ortiz walks out on his job after one of the millionaire guests, unconcerned that millions of Ecuadorians are starving, orders two expensive steaks from room service to feed to his dog.

## **Zenji Hiroguchi**

Zenji Hiroguchi is a computer genius who invents two translation devices. The second, improved, translation device is called Mandarax, and one of the few existing prototypes is stranded on Santa Rosalia with the castaways. Zenji is in Ecuador to make a business arrangement with MacIntosh, and he begins to think MacIntosh is insane. After a fight with his wife, Zenji goes outside the Hotel El Dorado and walks around, and he is shot by a paranoid soldier.



## Hisako Hiroguchi

Hisako Hiroguchi is Zenji Hiroguchi's wife. She is a teacher of Japanese flower arranging, and she is carrying Zenji's child. Hisako is stranded on Santa Rosalia with nine other people. She lives with Selena MacIntosh, who helps her raise her child, Akiko, when she is born. After Akiko grows up and moves out to a home of her own, Hisako and Selena commit suicide by walking into the ocean together.

## Andrew MacIntosh

Andrew MacIntosh is a wealthy and sociopathic financier. He does not have an appreciation of the perspectives or realities of the people around him. He takes the Hiroguchis to Ecuador, knowing that the economy is collapsing and that the conditions will be unfriendly. His goal, which he does not tell the Hiroguchis, is to buy up as much cheap property in Ecuador as possible while Ecuadorian money is worthless.

MacIntosh is instrumental in promoting "the Nature Cruise of the Century" by regurgitating a National Geographic article in the presence of Jacqueline Onassis. He has little concept of truth or reality, and he does not realize his own hypocrisy. MacIntosh's companies are constantly harming the environment, and yet he claims to take the guided nature cruise so as not to harm the delicate Galapagos environment.

MacIntosh is shot by a paranoid soldier outside the Hotel El Dorado while he is trying to befriend himself to Zenji Hiroguchi, who he wants to recruit to start a new business. MacIntosh plans to use Hiroguchi's computer genius to bait investors.

## Selena MacIntosh

Selena MacIntosh is the blind teenage daughter of Andrew MacIntosh. During her young years, she lives in the protective shadow of her powerful father and has little personality of her own. When she is shipwrecked on Santa Rosalia, Selena pairs off with the pregnant Hisako and helps her raise her child, Akiko. Thanks to the grueling conditions on Santa Rosalia, Selena develops a personality uniquely her own instead of becoming like her sociopathic father. Selena refuses to be impregnated by Mary Hepburn, although she is fertile, because she does not want to pass on her blindness. Selena and Hisako commit suicide together by walking into the ocean after Akiko grows up and moves out to a home of her own.

## Kanka-bonos

Six Kanka-bono girls are stranded on Santa Rosalia with the other passengers of the Bahía de Darwin. These girls are orphans from an elusive tribe living in the Ecuadorian interior, and they bring their own language and culture. They live separately from the others. Mary impregnates the Kanka-bonos with the captain's sperm, giving them the





prized gift of children. The Kanka-bonos pass down the Kanka-bono language and culture to all future human civilization.

## **Bobby King**

Bobby King is the public relations man in charge of publicity for the first cruise of the Bahía de Darwin. He is responsible for naming the ship and coining the journey "the Nature Cruise of the Century". Bobby King makes the journey a celebrity event, signing up Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis as one of the first passengers. Unfortunately, the cruise must be cancelled at the last minute due to economic problems in Ecuador.

## **Kilgore Trout**

Leon Trout's father, Kilgore Trout is a cynical, unsuccessful science fiction novelist.

## **Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis**

Former first lady Jacqueline Onassis is convinced by Andrew MacIntosh and by an educational nature special to book passage on "the Nature Cruise of the Century". Because of her international fame, other celebrities follow suit. Jacqueline Onassis is held in high esteem by the people of Ecuador, who anxiously await her arrival.

## **Charles Darwin**

Charles Darwin, by the force of opinion alone, transforms the Galapagos Islands from an inhospitable, uncomfortable group of rocks to a valued resource and tourist attraction. Darwin is honored in Ecuador as father of the Galapagos Islands tourist trade.

## **Hernando Cruz**

The first mate of the Bahía de Darwin, Hernando Cruz is the one with the real knowledge of the ship's workings. Cruz deserts the ship and its captain shortly before the ship is ransacked by looters.

## **Private Geraldo Delgado**

Delgado is a paranoid schizophrenic soldier who abandons his post. He believes that Zenji and MacIntosh are his enemies who are destroying his brain with a radio, and so he shoots them, leaving an open door for the six orphan girls to get to the Hotel El Dorado.



## **Eduardo Ximénez**

Ximénez is a pilot who, responding to an SOS on the ground, takes charge of the Kanka-bono orphans and delivers them to an orphanage.

## **Domingo Quezeda**

A white man who lived with the Kanka-bono for three years, Domingo knows Kanka-bono. He translates for the Kanka-bono girls while they are at the orphanage, and then he runs away with them, teaching them to be thieves and prostitutes, before they run away from him.



## Objects/Places

### Hotel El Dorado

The brand new Hotel El Dorado is built for Galapagos Islands tourists, but the Ecuadorian economy collapses. The tourist trade dries up. The hotel is looted by starving rioters after "the Nature Cruise of the Century" is called off.

### Bahía de Darwin

The Bahía de Darwin is a modern technological marvel built as a cruise ship to run back and forth to the Galapagos Islands. The ship is equipped with every possible luxury and practically runs itself. Ecuadorians, however, loot all the ship's luxuries and food, and the captain gets it hopelessly lost. The ship will not start after running aground on Santa Rosalia and ten years later sinks into the ocean.

### The Nature Cruise of the Century

The Nature Cruise of the Century is the result of a public relations campaign by Bobby King. The first trip of the Bahía de Darwin to the Galapagos Islands is intended to be a celebrity event, but it is canceled because of economic conditions in Ecuador.

### Galapagos Islands

The Galapagos Islands are an isolated archipelago off the west coast of South America, made famous by Charles Darwin, who observed the evolution of the species living there in isolation. It is a mystery how land animals came to live in these isolated volcanic islands. The Galapagos Islands become the only habitat of human beings a million years in the future, after humanity elsewhere has been wiped out by a bacterial disease that makes women sterile.

### Humans a Million Years in the Future

A million years in the future, human beings have lost their superior intellect and agile hands in favor of qualities more suited to survival on the isolated Galapagos Islands. They have fur-covered bodies and flippers suited to swimming and beak-like mouths suited to catching fish. Their heads are streamlined to swim quickly through the water. Humans grow to adulthood rapidly, leaving their mothers before a year has passed and reaching puberty at six years. The human lifespan has decreased to around thirty years. Human beings still laugh when someone farts, get the hiccups when they gulp down too many fish, and make soothing noises to those who are sick. They are the natural prey of



sharks and killer whales and cannot survive on the mainland because the disease that makes all human females infertile is still active.

## Price Tags

James Wait leaves the price tags on his shirts as a way for strangers to approach him.

## Blue-Footed Boobies

Blue-footed boobies inhabit the Galapagos Islands and perform an unusual mating ritual that culminates in the birds, chest to chest and neck to neck, with their beaks pointed upward to heaven. Mary's students often interpret this as religion. The blue-footed boobies never develop a fear of humans, and the castaways eat them to survive.

## Kazakh

Kazakh is Selena's seeing-eye dog. All of her dog-like traits and individuality have been bred out of her by humans, and she's even been neutered. Kazakh is killed and eaten by the starving Kanka-bono girls on board the Bahía de Darwin.

## Donald

Donald is Roy and Mary Hepburn's dog. Roy enjoys playing with Donald as his brain tumor worsens, but he also has a delusion that he killed Donald under orders by the government to perform nuclear radiation tests on animals.

## Santa Rosalia

The most isolated, northernmost of the Galapagos Islands, Santa Rosalia is where the Bahía de Darwin lands, stranding the castaways. It becomes the location of the only colony of human beings on the planet, and the humans evolve into seal-like creatures.

## The Blue Tunnel

When a person dies, a blue tunnel appears, leading to the afterlife. Leon Trout refuses to go into the blue tunnel and stays on Earth for a million years as a ghost.

## Mandarax

Mandarax, invented by computer genius Zenji Hiroguchi, is a hand-held translator that knows a thousand languages. It's also programmed to diagnose diseases and provide quotations on any topic.



## Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is emblematic of all the artistic accomplishments of mankind. A coworker of the narrator said at another worker's funeral that he wouldn't have written Beethoven's Ninth Symphony anyway. Leon Trout applies these words to many people throughout the story at their deaths.

## Huntington's Chorea

Huntington's chorea is a deadly inherited neurological disease that causes madness and loss of motor function, and one of the symptoms is uncontrollable dancing. Both Siegfried and Adolf von Kleist have a fifty-fifty chance of having Huntington's chorea and passing it on to their children. Siegfried begins showing symptoms shortly before he dies.

## Geospiza difficillis

Geospiza difficillis is the scientific name of the blood-sucking finches that live on Santa Rosalia. Mary Hepburn is able to identify which island the castaways are stranded on by the native blood-sucking finches.

# Themes

## The Value of Humanity

Do the things that make us human have value? Vonnegut asks this fundamental question. All the art, literature, philosophy, and science of human civilization is appreciable only by human beings and has meaning only in the context of human life. Mandarax and the Bahía de Darwin both embody the uselessness of human knowledge and accomplishments outside of human society. Even within human society, despite all human accomplishments, human beings live in misery, inflict misery on each other, and destroy their environment. Is human culture really valuable, considering all the horrors of humanity?

In Vonnegut's future, the human race has been wiped out by a disease that will prevent reproduction among any humans who ever return to the mainland. In Galapagos, human beings evolve to fit their environment as fisher-people who are more animal than human. Vonnegut compares these events to biblical stories. The virus is compared to the Great Flood, and the Bahía de Darwin is a new Noah's Ark. The human experiment has failed. On Galapagos, mankind gives up free will and sentience, returning to a natural, animal state, controlled only by nature. Mankind once again lives in the environment.

The narrator portrays Galapagos as a paradise, a Garden of Eden, where man has never eaten the fruits of knowledge. However, while the narrator seems to see this reality as preferable to the past, he has become bored with the new, placid humankind. He is anxious to enter the blue tunnel when it appears. Before, humankind held his fascination, with all its turmoil. Now, there is nothing to be curious about. The narrator himself is human and so appreciates all the intricacies of humanity, something that modern "humans" no longer have.

## Constructed Reality

Throughout Vonnegut's novel, the reader is reminded of the artificiality of human society. Money is only little pieces of paper. There is a disconnect between the reality of life, death, and survival of the species and the artificiality of societal wealth, prestige, and technology. None of the things that are important to human beings are truly important in nature's game of long-term survival. For survival, two elements are essential: food and children.

When the castaways are shipwrecked on Santa Rosalia, they are stripped of all elements of human society. Everything in the ship has been looted, so they have almost nothing. Only Mandarax remains, and it is a futile device in the new environment. Constructed social reality has no function. With no tools, human beings revert back to



the essentials. They need food, and they need children. Otherwise, humanity will die. The constructed reality of money, power, and society is worse than useless.

By reminding the reader that human reality is a construct, and that most things in human culture are important only to humans, Vonnegut reminds the reader how fragile these things can be and how unimportant they might be in the big picture. What is the ultimate point of human society, if it is merely a construct for human consumption?

## Survival

In the natural world, survival of the species is the main goal. What do human beings need to survive? Although the human animal has thrived and created societies all over the world, these societies are unstable. Vonnegut points out that human culture is prone to self-destruction and destruction of the environment, so that it cannot last. Ultimately it is destroyed by a tiny enemy: bacteria.

The necessity for survival refocuses humanity on two essentials: food and babies. Because the environment on Galapagos is so harsh, human beings must evolve in order to survive. They change to become better fishers and gather more food. They also change to have more babies, since humans go into heat twice a year and babies mature in less than a year. The reduced age of puberty, which comes at around six years old, also contributes to producing more babies. Food and babies control the development of the species, since they are essential to survival.

Humanity's evolution raises the question of whether anything except survival is important. Humanity has lost the ability to create art or think about philosophy. Mankind has no words or abstract concepts. The only concepts are concrete: food and babies. There is no more war, violence, or cruelty beyond nature's cruelty. Is the trade-off a good one? Does art and religion have value beyond survival? What is that value? Vonnegut raises questions but provides no clear-cut answers. Although Leon Trout sees the new humanity as a new Eden, he also finds it dull and uninteresting, since he's more than ready to jump into the tunnel to the afterlife after a million years.

# Style

## Point of View

Vonnegut's novel is told in the first person from the point of view of Leon Trout. However, Leon Trout is a ghost, and as a ghost he has the talent of omniscience. Trout can look into other characters' minds and tell their stories. In this way, Vonnegut has created a highly unusual narrative style: a first-person omniscient narrator who can provide the thoughts and feelings of all of the characters.

The first-person narrator is not a part of the main story. Instead, he is an onlooker. However, he brings an individual opinion to the story because he has seen humans evolve over a million years. He believes that all the problems of humanity are caused by their maladaptive big brains, which separate humans from animals.

The omniscience of the narrator, who has been around for a million years, also allows him to jump back and forth in time and place. The reader gains information about the characters' histories and about the future, seeing the big picture instead of what is happening in one particular place at one particular time.

## Setting

The story is split between two major time periods. Most of the story occurs in 1986, when a small group of people is stranded on Santa Rosalia in a shipwreck. This story is enhanced by looks into the past of each of the characters and glances into stories that affect the characters, such as the story of the publicity man Bobby King. Interspersed with this story, the narrator also gives information about Santa Rosalia and its colony of humans a million years in the future, when humans have evolved to become seal-like, hunting fish in the sea.

The Galapagos Island of Santa Rosalia is an important setting because it isolates the colony of humans who settle there. With few natural resources, the humans do not have tools and must evolve. These same harsh conditions caused the animals already living on Galapagos to evolve and made the islands so interesting to Charles Darwin. If the islands were not so harsh and isolated, the colonists might easily have contracted the bacterial disease which wipes out the rest of humanity, and they most certainly would not have evolved in the same way to survive.

Vonnegut also describes in detail the traits of the birds and animals living on the Galapagos Islands, highlighting their evolution to adapt to their environment, and also highlighting the importance of survival of the species and natural balance. The human beings who find themselves on Santa Rosalia are brought back into nature and become part of that balance. As a price, they lose much of what makes them human.





## Language and Meaning

Throughout the novel, Vonnegut makes connections across time and space using language. He compares both James Wait and Andrew MacIntosh to fishermen, using bait to capture women or property, and then he transitions across a million years to point out that the people of the future are also fishers, but literally instead of metaphorically. This contrasts the constructed reality of money to the harsh reality of food.

Vonnegut also repeats certain words and phrases, giving names that convey meaning. He uses the term "great big brains" to describe the human mind in the twentieth century. This term is derisive, belittling human accomplishment and the things that humans value. He also calls the cruise to Galapagos "the Nature Cruise of the Century", in quotation marks, using the public relations name made up by Bobby King. This is an entirely constructed identity, and its intended meaning contrasts with the real significance of the Bahía de Darwin's actual journey to Galapagos, which results in a shipwreck and a new colony of humans that survives through time.

The narrator uses the convention of putting stars by the names of characters who are about to die throughout the novel. This creates dramatic irony, giving the reader foreknowledge of events, but it also contrasts starkly the petty problems of human reality with the hard fact of death. It puts the events in a new context, the context of survival.

Throughout the novel, Vonnegut also inserts quotations from famous writers, ones that would be found in Mandarax. Vonnegut uses this convention to comment on the action and also to remind the reader of all the literary accomplishments of humanity that are lost with the passage of time and the evolution of man.

## Structure

The novel is divided into two books. The first and longest part chronicles the events that lead up to eleven characters leaving Ecuador in the Bahía de Darwin. The second, briefer, section chronicles the beginnings of a human colony on Santa Rosalia and the million years of evolution that follow. The disparate size of the two sections shows that the narrator places more emphasis on the human entanglements that lead to the eventual shipwreck and finds the evolution of man into a peaceful, stable species less intriguing, belying to some extent Leon Trout's perspective that Santa Rosalia becomes a new Eden.

Vonnegut jumps around in time and space to tell the story of the end (or survival) of humankind. The novel is divided into fifty-two short chapters which are further divided into unnamed subsections and broken up by quotations from Mandarax. Instead of following a single storyline, the novel tells the stories of many characters, moving alternately into the past and future to show the causes and significance of events. This style of storytelling gives the reader a sense of a bigger picture, with all of the different



human perspectives intertwining to lead to an ultimate result. It also piques the reader's curiosity, as future elements are hinted at long before they are revealed. The narrator's own story, for example, is begun in the first chapter and not finished until the last, driving the reader on to find out his background.

Vonnegut's story is one of coincidence and concurrence. The characters make decisions that have long-term effects on the fate of the human species. By giving both a volume of detail and a vision of the future in a million years, Vonnegut creates an intricate web of events that codify into dramatic results: the evolution of mankind.



## Quotes

"Only one English word adequately describes his transformation of the islands from worthless to priceless: magical." Book One, Chap. 4, p. 18

"About that mystifying enthusiasm a million years ago for turning over as many human activities as possible to machinery: What could that have been but yet another acknowledgment by people that their brains were no damn good?" Book One, Chap. 8, p. 39

"The tests were incapable of detecting minor defects in the fetus, such as that it might be as tone deaf as Mary Hepburn, which it wasn't—or that it might be covered with a fine, silky pelt like a fur seal's, which would actually turn out to be the case." Book One, Chap. 13, p. 60

"Yes, and I pause to marvel now at how little interested this man was in reproduction, in being a huge success biologically—despite his exhibitionistic sexuality and his mania for claiming as his own property as many of the planet's life-support systems as possible. The most famous amassers of survival schemes back then typically had very few children." Book One, Chap. 15, p. 80

"But if there were a tombstone for Mary Hepburn, no other inscription would do but this one: 'Mother Nature Personified.'" Book One, Chap. 17, p. 100

"This was a particularly tragic flaw a million years ago, since the people who were best informed about the state of the planet, like Andrew MacIntosh, for example, and rich and powerful enough to slow down all the waste and destruction going on, were by definition well fed." —Book One, Chap. 23, p. 136

"There are still plenty of hallucinators today, people who respond passionately to all sorts of things which aren't really going on. This could be a legacy from the Kanka-bonos. But people like that can't get hold of weapons now, and they're easy to swim away from. Even if they found a grenade or a machine gun or a knife or whatever left over from olden times, how could they ever make use of it with just their flippers and their mouths?" Book One, Chap. 27, p. 161

"And there was something prophetic, too, in those millions of royal tadpoles on a satin sheet, with no place meaningful to go. The whole world, as far as human sperm was concerned, with the exception of the Galapagos Islands, was about to become like that satin sheet.

"Dare I add this: 'In the nick of time?'" Book One, Chap. 29, p. 181

"In the long run, the survivors would still have been not the most ferocious strugglers but the most efficient fisherfolk. That's how things work in the islands here." Book One, Chap. 33, p. 199



"They don't make memories like that anymore." Book Two, Chap. 1, p. 245

"'As captain of this ship in international waters, I am legally entitled to marry you. Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God—' he began, and, two minutes later, he had made 'Mary Kaplan' and 'Willard Flemming' man and wife." Book Two, Chap. 4, p. 259

"So he laughed, and she laughed. Everything was going to be all right after all. But then the engines wouldn't start." Book Two, Chap. 8, p. 287

"One of the exasperating things about the Captain's disease was that his body was still perfectly capable of taking care of itself. It was a lot stronger than Mary's. It was his deteriorating big brain which was having him spend so much time in bed, and allowing him to soil himself and refuse to eat and so on." Book Two, Chap. 13, p. 313



## Topics for Discussion

Are the human beings Leon Trout describes a million years in the future truly human?

Why does Leon Trout choose to remain on Earth instead of going into the blue tunnel, and why is he prepared to leave at the end of the book?

Trout's experience spans a million years, but he chooses to tell a story concentrated around 1986. Why is the story of the first castaways the center of Trout's tale?

What role do luck and chance play in the story?

Why does Vonnegut jump around in time and space as he tells the story?

What drives Mary Hepburn to artificially inseminate the Kanka-bono women?

Compare the society of 1986 to the society of a million years in the future. Is the future "Eden" better than human civilization?