

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World Study Guide

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World by Haruki Murakami

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Plot Summary

Tokyo is a hub of information technology companies in a future world, where biotechnology is significantly advanced. Access to data encryption is critical in order to protect valuable corporate and financial data from organized crime. A quasi-governmental organization, known as the System, controls access to legal encryption technologies and methods. System operatives known as Calcutecs serve as living encryption devices, using bio-algorithms hidden in their subconscious neural circuitry to securely encrypt data. An organized crime network known as the Factory opposes the System at every stage. One man has developed the next step in encryption technology and made some advances within the System's developmental laboratories, but only at a high cost. Most operatives mentally modified to perform the new process die within a few months; only one has survived. Embroiled in moral quandary, the scientist leaves the System but pursues his research goals independently. He surreptitiously involves the sole surviving Calcutec in his scientific investigations and through a miscalculation in his ability to control his experiments realizes he has consigned the man to death.

The narrative structure of the novel is atypical as it presents two distinct narrative threads which alternate between odd-numbered and even-numbered chapters. In fact, the novel can be read as two independent novels. First, there is the Hard-Boiled Wonderland, encompassing the odd-numbered chapters. Then, there is The End of the World, encompassing the even-numbered chapters. Hard-Boiled Wonderland, set in a gritty urban environment, tells the story of an unnamed Narrator as he slowly realizes his unwitting involvement in biotechnology experiments on his own mind and consciousness. He meets several characters through the course of the novel and learns he has been the subject of secret experimentation which will, ultimately, result in the death of his consciousness and his physical body. He is unusually muted in his response. Rather than trying to avoid his impending demise, he seeks to enjoy a final day of satisfying activities.

The End of the World is contrarily set in a dreamy other world where inhabitants perform menial tasks without ambition and execute the routine of their nearly medieval lives with exactness lacking in emotion. The narrative focuses on the experiences of a man, a Dreamreader, confused and out of place, as he enters an enclosed town called End of the World. Upon entering the town, the Dreamreader's shadow physically is cut away from him and thereafter leads a separate existence as an independent character. The Dreamreader explores the town in great detail, meets its inhabitants and tries to develop relationships with them. He eventually learns, however, that they are basically mindless automatons, who are unable to feel emotion or develop deep bonds of friendship. Meanwhile, his shadow has devised an escape plan. At the conclusion of the second narrative thread, the Dreamreader helps his shadow to escape but chooses to remain behind and continue his strange existence within the town.

In reality, the second narrative is a gradually-developing altered state of consciousness of the first narrative's protagonist. The town is the edited and programmed alternative mental reality created by the System's scientist and implanted into the narrator's mind.

The gradual fusion of his consciousness with this altered consciousness results in the mental deterioration of the narrator and, ultimately, his death.



Chapter 1, Elevator, Silence, Overweight

Chapter 1, Elevator, Silence, Overweight Summary

Tokyo is a hub of information technology companies in a future world where biotechnology is significantly advanced. Access to data encryption is critical in order to protect valuable corporate and financial data from organized crime. A quasi-governmental organization known as the System controls access to legal encryption technologies and methods. System operatives known as Calcutecs serve as living encryption devices, using algorithms hidden in their neural circuitry to securely encrypt data. An organized crime network known as the Factory opposes the System at every stage. One man has developed the next step in encryption technology and made some advances within the System's developmental laboratories but only at a high cost—most operatives modified to perform the new process die within a few months; only one has survived. Embroiled in a moral quandary, the scientist leaves the System but pursues his research goals independently. He surreptitiously involves the sole surviving Calcutec in his scientific investigations and through a miscalculation in his ability to control his experiments realizes he has consigned the man to death.

The Narrator arrives ten minutes early for an appointment but then spends a full twenty minutes being processed through building admittance clearance. The building is located in downtown Tokyo. He rides a soundless high-tech elevator, noting it has no buttons, indicators, or other common elevator features. He is unable to determine if the elevator is moving up or down—in fact, if it is moving at all. While waiting in the elevator he counts the change in both of his pants pockets simultaneously, using the right-half of his brain to count the contents of the right pocket and the left-half of his brain to count the contents of the left pocket.

After a long ride, the elevator doors open and a young, pretty, chubby girl dressed in pink is waiting for him. The Chubby Girl leads him along an impossibly complex maze of featureless hallways that penetrate into a fancy but repetitively-monotonous building. He notes that the doors are all closed, the building appears vacant, and the room numbers are seemingly random. She speaks to him occasionally but she makes little or no sound; he tries to understand her by lip reading but determines she is probably speaking a foreign language. He finds her sexually attractive and enjoys following her along the incredibly long trek; when she stops at room 728 he bumps into her and then enters the room.

Chapter 1, Elevator, Silence, Overweight Analysis

The novel opens with an unnamed Narrator (hereafter referred to as Narrator) entering a strange building which features very high security. The elevator ride is very disorienting to the man who wonders whether he is going up, down, or moving at all. While riding the elevator, he engages in what appears to be a singularly difficult process



of counting the change in both of his pants pocket simultaneously; he mentions that it was once difficult but with practice has become a regular pastime.

When he arrives at his destination, he is led along an extensive and complex path of hallways which run by huge numbers of room which are seemingly unoccupied and apparently numbered at random. He wonders if he is above or below ground and becomes completely disoriented. Although the building is austere and repetitive, it is nicely appointed and constructed of top-notch materials. He watches the Chubby Girl, a young attractive girl, who guides him through the maze; although overweight he finds her sexual and attractive. Strangely, she speaks without making noise and the narrator attempts to understand her by reading her lips; also strangely, she speaks in what appears to be a foreign language although her meaning is clear given the social circumstances—that is, follow me, enter here, etc.

The chapter sets a particular and distinct tone for the remainder of the odd-numbered chapters of the novel. This is a world with many social conventions which are intelligible—arriving early for an appointment, being greeted by an apparent secretary—but with many things which are bizarre—elevators which are entirely silent and devoid of semaphores, mazelike hallways that run for impossibly long distances and wind around randomly-numbered rooms. Things are decidedly not altogether as they appear, and traditional character names are not supplied. The next chapter introduces a distinct second narrator, and the stories of the two narrators alternate thereafter between odd-numbered and even-numbered chapters of the novel.



Chapter 2, Golden Beasts

Chapter 2, Golden Beasts Summary

The second narrator, the Dreamreader, watches the fur color change to gold on a herd of perhaps a thousand animals—unicorns—as autumn approaches. Every day, an audible horn signals the animals to migrate into or out of a Town. The Dreamreader speaks to the Gatekeeper, a man who sounds the horn and opens a huge gate to allow the unicorns to pass. He asks why the Gatekeeper keeps the unicorns corralled during the day but frees them into the countryside at night. The Gatekeeper responds that's how it has always been. When the Gatekeeper isn't manipulating the gate he sharpens various keen-edged instruments—knives or hatches—or sleeps. The Town is surrounded by fields and, further away, apple trees.

Chapter 2, Golden Beasts Analysis

A second narrator, the Dreamreader, is introduced in this chapter; the interleaved structure of alternating chapters describing alternating settings and events will continue throughout the remainder of the novel (although he is not noted as the Dreamreader until chapter 4, this summary refers to the second narrator as such for internal consistency). This alternation dominates the structure and themes of the novel and becomes particularly significant in the novel's subtle resolution. Odd-numbered chapters—1, 3, 5, etc.—are titled in standard font face and feature events focused on the Narrator; they are also page-entitled 'HARD-BOILED WONDERLAND'. Even-numbered chapters—2, 4, 6, etc.—are titled in italicized font face and feature events focused on the second narrator; they are page-entitled 'THE END OF THE WORLD.'

The chapter sets a particular and distinct tone for the remainder of the even-numbered chapters of the novel. This is a dream world with mystical creatures such as unicorns and bizarre inhabitants such as the Gatekeeper—physically imposing but apparently without much overt purpose beyond opening a gate for the unicorns' daily migrations and sharpening a variety of edged instruments to a razor hone. The Gatekeeper's attitude appears to be that things are as they are because they have always been that way. The Dreamreader is obviously a newcomer to the area and has little or no idea of the local conventions and atypical social mores. The 'golden beasts' of the title are the unicorns; their fur changes to from brown to gold apparently over a few days' period every autumn. The next chapter returns focus to the Narrator, as the stories of the two narrators continue to alternate between the odd-numbered and even-numbered chapters.



Chapter 3, Rain Gear, INKlings, Laundry

Chapter 3, Rain Gear, INKlings, Laundry Summary

The Narrator enters the room, accompanied by the Chubby Girl dressed in pink. She instructs him to don heavy rain gear and goggles and then hands him a flashlight. Weighed down by the raingear he enters a dark area; the Chubby Girl closes the door behind him, and he is enveloped in pitch black. He turns on the flashlight and discovers he is on a metal platform. He descends a metal ladder and ends up in a giant cavern through which roars a massive river. He follows the wet, rocky floor for some distance until he meets an older gentleman—the Professor. They try to hold a conversation but cannot be heard over the roar of the river, whereupon the Professor uses a remote control device to 'turn down' the river's volume. The narrator expresses surprise that the sound was artificially produced. The Professor says that, in fact, the sound was real—he has used a technology of 'sound removal' to remove the natural sound of the river. They walk along the cavern to a waterfall, and then pass through the waterfall and a steel door set into the cave wall.

Inside they enter a business-like office room. The Professor explains that all of these precautions are unfortunately necessary—INKlings are prowling about, and he is fairly sure that the INKlings are working with Semitechnicians. The Professor, the customer, tells the Narrator that he has been released to work directly with the customer and produced paperwork which so establishes the highly unusual fact. Normally, the Narrator would be forced to work through proper channels and the relief of this burden is unusual and surprising. The Narrator is a Calcutec; a sort of biological encryption device. He takes unencrypted data into one side of his brain and then passes it into the other side of his brain and then records the encrypted data. The transfer process performs a 'single-conversion trap' encryption using the Calcutec's brain structure which is irreproducible and thus highly secure.

The Professor explains that his research is completely secret but highly valuable and politically volatile. He is researching methods of sound removal and methods to extract sound and thoughts from bone material. The Professor needs the Narrator to encrypt his research results so that they cannot be stolen. The Narrator begins to encrypt several pages of numbers. During a pause in the work, he inquires about the Chubby Girl and learns that she is the Professor's granddaughter. When the Narrator asks if she has been mute from birth, the Professor exclaims that he had forgotten she is mute from a sound removal experiment. He then rushes off to replace her voice's sound.

Chapter 3, Rain Gear, INKlings, Laundry Analysis

A host of plot and setting information is delivered in Chapter 3; this information forms the foundational elements of plot that will run throughout the novel. The Narrator is a Calcutec, or Calcutec, a sort of biological encryption device. Calcutecs all work



for a company called The System. The System, an extensive quasi-governmental organization, licenses Calcutecs and serves as the single location for legal Calcutec work. Becoming a Calcutec involves some obscure procedures and results in a speculative lifespan of from ten to twenty years. During the process, the Calcutec's brain is somehow separated into two connected halves. Unencrypted information can be fed into one half of the brain and then transferred to the other half whereupon it can be written down in an encrypted form. Since the unique structure of the Calcutec's brain acts as the encryption key, the encryption is incredibly resistant to cryptographic attack. Although the Professor clearly worries about INKlings, the Narrator has no idea who or even what an INKling might be. In point of fact, INKlings never actually appear throughout the entire narrative.

The System is somewhat opposed by a shady organization known as The Factory or, informally, as the Data Mafia. The Factory employs people known as Semiotec technicians, or Semiotecs, who can process encrypted data and often derive nearly unencrypted materials by making educated guesses about the encrypting Calcutec's brain structure. Semiotecs otherwise keep occupied as hackers and information thieves. The Factory is not a legal entity, but is widely known and has broad connections. Often, Semiotecs are ex-Calcutecs who have been blacklisted by The System.



Chapter 4, The Library

Chapter 4, The Library Summary

The Dreamreader reviews the layout of the Town. A river divides the Town into two halves, each one semi-circular and called a plaza. The two halves are joined by an old bridge. The south plaza is fairly vacant. The north plaza houses a library, an old structure that looks nondescript. The north plaza also has an ancient square clock tower which rises to considerable height. The clocks are non-functional.

The Gatekeeper tells the Dreamreader that everyone in Town has a job. The Dreamreader's job is to go to the library and read old dreams. The Dreamreader is thus appointed as the Town's single Dreamreader. The Gatekeeper uses a sterilized blunt knife to slice into the Dreamreader's eyes and scar them. The Dreamreader feels no pain or fear and can, apparently, still see after the procedure even though he is warned to not go into daylight or bright light.

After a few days, the Dreamreader makes his way to the library where he encounters the Librarian. After he establishes his identity by revealing his scarred eyes, she tells him to return after a few days, and she will instruct him in the processes of reading old dreams.

Chapter 4, The Library Analysis

The Dreamreader continues his dream-like experiences in the Town; note that within the novel the Town is generally capitalized. The Town's layout is somewhat similar to a Calcutec's brain anatomy—two semi-circular halves joined by an old bridge reminiscent of the corpus callosum, each half distinct but similar. In a scene reminiscent of a Busuel movie the Gatekeeper uses a knife to slice open the Dreamreader's eyeballs, officially converting him into the Dreamreader. The Dreamreader's task is to make a daily sojourn to the library and read old dreams, which are selected by the Librarian. The Dreamreader and the Librarian hold a rather cryptic discussion, where the Dreamreader claims to recognize the woman. She insists this is not possible, and the two characters have a cryptic but pleasant conversation.



Chapter 5, Tabulations, Evolution, Sex Drive

Chapter 5, Tabulations, Evolution, Sex Drive Summary

The Narrator works for several hours encrypting the source data. The Professor fetches sandwiches and coffee, made by his granddaughter. The two men alternate work and light conversation, until the encryption is completed. The Professor speculates on the nature of evolution and postulates that in the future humanity will be completely silent. The Professor then briefly speculates on diverse topics such as eating and sexuality among the young, and obliquely infers that his granddaughter, the Chubby Girl, should be engaging in sexual activity with someone suitable—someone, perhaps, like the Narrator. The Narrator takes the encrypted data and places it into a special secure compartment behind his knee. He is to take the encrypted data home, where he will shuffle it, and return in two days. The Professor warns of vague but dire consequences, which might result from losing the data or delivering it late.

The Narrator then travels back to the office and is met by the Chubby Girl. They talk, as she escorts him to the elevator. She gives him a wrapped gift from her grandfather, a check for payment, and then bluntly inquires about his sexual preferences. She proposes they engage in sexual activity, but the Narrator declines on the grounds that he does not become sexually involved with his employers. She then offers to purchase sex from him but he declines, noting that she is seventeen, and he is thirty-five. She completes the conversation by inquiring about his penis size. It's a question which he avoids, as he steps into the elevator.

Chapter 5, Tabulations, Evolution, Sex Drive Analysis

The data are apparently far too valuable to be released before they are encrypted and thus the Narrator performs several hours' work inside the building office. He then secretes the encrypted document away and leaves—the data shuffling is a considerably more involved process and will take many more hours. The conversation between the Professor and the Narrator is significant and foreshadows numerous plot and theme developments, which occur later in the novel. The Professor's thinly-disguised speculation about his granddaughter's sexual proclivities precedes her blunt propositions by only a few minutes. She soon asks the narrator to have sex with her. When he declines, she offers to purchase sex from him. The Narrator infers he prefers completely anonymous sex and suggests that he will either 'pick up' a complete stranger or purchase sex from a prostitute rather than engage in sex with a much-younger business associate.



Chapter 6, Shadow

Chapter 6, Shadow Summary

The Dreamreader travels to the library and speaks with the Librarian. She brings him the old first dream he is to read. Whatever he was expecting, he is surprised, when she places before him the desiccated and fragile skull of a unicorn. He takes it in his hands and considers it; the Librarian instructs him on the way to read the old dream he holds between his hands. He reads some old dreams and then walks the Librarian home. She lives in a largely vacant area of Town, where the buildings appear to be in disrepair.

The Dreamreader then recalls how, upon entering the Town, the Gatekeeper had forced him to surrender his shadow. The Gatekeeper had wedged a knife between the shadow and the ground, and then peeled the shadow up off the ground and sliced it away from him. The Gatekeeper explained that no shadows were allowed in the town. The shadow would remain under the care of the Gatekeeper.

Chapter 6, Shadow Analysis

The skulls, which are old dreams, are symbolically reminiscent of the various skulls which line the walls of the older man's laboratory office. The Librarian instructs the Dreamreader on the method of reading old dreams. It is somewhat uncomfortable and strange but, apparently, easily learned. The most interesting segment of the chapter concerns the loss of shadow experienced by everyone, when they enter the Town. They are separated through a physical process. The Dreamreader's shadow complained about being abandoned, but the Gatekeeper promised good care.



Chapter 7, Skull, Lauren Bacall, Library

Chapter 7, Skull, Lauren Bacall, Library Summary

The Narrator takes a taxi home, sleeps, gets up, and opens the box from the Professor. It contains a small horse-like skull. He then watches television, telephones in to check his work schedule, and goes shopping. He eats lunch and then stops by the library, where he checks out a few books on animal skeletons and has a prolonged and friendly discussion with the librarian. He then returns home and watches more television. Someone arrives at the door claiming to be a safety inspector from the gas company. He lets the inspector in but is suspicious and catches the inspector attempting to steal the skull. The inspector explains that he is a real safety inspector but was threatened with harm and offered a huge reward if he would steal the skull. The narrator ejects the inspector and then examines the skull more closely. He sees an indentation on the forehead and begins to suspect that it may be the skull of a unicorn. He thinks about the theft attempt and realizes he cannot safely leave his apartment. The Semiotecs are surely aware of his whereabouts and desirous of the skull. He telephones the library and speaks to the librarian, convincing her to deliver a few books about unicorns.

Chapter 7, Skull, Lauren Bacall, Library Analysis

Lauren Bacall in the chapter title is derived from one of the television programs being aired. The chapter otherwise presents a boringly typical catalogue of activities in the life of an average person, excepting of course the skull of a unicorn. The Narrator feels he must remain locked in his apartment for his own safety and to prevent the theft of the skull. His telephone conversation with the just-acquainted librarian is humorously ridiculous but after enough cajoling she finally agrees to drop by after work.



Chapter 8, The Colonel

Chapter 8, The Colonel Summary

The Dreamreader lives with six other men, all from military backgrounds. They include a Colonel, four other subordinate officers, and a sergeant. They live in a large building that is in a state of some disrepair. The Colonel and the Dreamreader play a form of chess, though the pieces and rules differ from conventional chess. The Colonel is an apparent master of the game. They discuss the loss of shadow required for entrance to the Town; the Colonel mentions that it is against the rules to have a shadow, just as it is against the rules to leave. The Dreamreader says that he misses his shadow. The Colonel explains that the yearning will fade, just as the pain of a broken bone fades over time as the bone heals. The Colonel explains that the severed shadows are treated well, but rarely live very long.

Chapter 8, The Colonel Analysis

The dream-like quality of the Town is perpetuated; the numerous buildings are described as generally clean but in a state of disrepair. Vacancy rates are high and the occupants all have jobs—though few of the jobs seem productive. The severing of the shadows of the occupants is symbolic for the splitting of self. The yearning for the shadow is intense at first, but gradually fades, until the shadow is hardly remembered.



Chapter 9, Appetite, Disappointment, Leningrad

Chapter 9, Appetite, Disappointment, Leningrad Summary

The Narrator makes a sumptuous and ample meal and waits for the librarian to arrive. She brings several books and stays for dinner. Her appetite is enormous, and she eats all of the food and then asks for more. As quickly as he cooks, the librarian consumes, until the cupboards are devoid of food. He remarks that her razor-thin body belies such an enormous appetite. She vaguely explains a medical condition and notes that her principle expenditure is for food. After the meal the drink alcohol and then end up naked and intertwined in bed, though the Narrator cannot achieve an erection. Instead, he admires her lean body and small breasts, while they chat about impotence. She explains that she is twenty-nine years old. Instead of having sexual intercourse, she reads salient paragraphs about unicorns from the library books. There is very little agreement about unicorns, though most authors treat them as simply fantastic beasts of the imagination. The librarian then relates a rather detailed anecdote about the claimed discovery of a unicorn skull during the Great War in Russia. The skull was subsequently lost during World War II, although photographs still exist. The Narrator looks carefully at a photograph in a book.

Chapter 9, Appetite, Disappointment, Leningrad Analysis

The meal is described in considerable detail and foreshadows the Narrator's last meal, described in Chapter 35. That meal, also, consists of enormous amounts of food shared with the librarian. The meal described in this chapter is in fact the last substantive food the Narrator will eat for many hours. Their attempt at sexual intercourse is frustrated by the narrator's impotence—a problem he will not suffer after their next meal together. The Narrator's conclusion that the Professor's unicorn skull is perhaps the self-same unicorn skull presented in the photographs is erroneous. The Narrator will eventually learn that his unicorn skull is a facsimile.



Chapter 10, The Wall

Chapter 10, The Wall Summary

The Dreamreader visits the Gatekeeper and discovers his shadow is helping the Gatekeeper plane wood and drive nails. During a private moment, the shadow begs the Dreamreader to create a detailed map of the Town. Later, the Dreamreader asks to be allowed to have a conversation with the shadow and is denied by the Gatekeeper who explains that it would be dangerous. The Gatekeeper then takes the Dreamreader to the Town wall and demonstrates its impenetrability and notes that it cannot be climbed. The Gatekeeper reiterates that nobody can leave the Town and refers to the Town as The End of the World. The Dreamreader then leaves and wanders through the central area of Town.

Chapter 10, The Wall Analysis

The visit between the Dreamreader and his shadow is needless to say strange. The shadow is apparently in fear and desirous of somehow escaping the Town. The shadow apparently feels that a detailed map, derived in utmost secrecy, is the key to a successful escape. The Gatekeeper appears intent upon keeping the Dreamreader separated from his shadow.



Chapter 11, Dressing, Watermelon, Chaos

Chapter 11, Dressing, Watermelon, Chaos Summary

The librarian eventually dresses and leaves, giving the Narrator her number in case he wants to call her for food, conversation, or sex. After she is gone, he retrieves the hidden skull and inspects it, comparing it to the mental image of the photograph of the purported unicorn skull. He finds the two nearly identical and feels strangely confident that the skull he possesses is in fact the skull from the photograph.

The Narrator then plans to perform the shuffle of the laundered data. Whereas laundering is a conscious effort, shuffling is entirely unconscious. The Narrator will reproduce a certain series of tones which will cause him to enter an altered state. While in the altered state his subconscious, coupled with an implanted program, will shuffle the data according to an implanted drama. He is unaware of the nature of the drama—it is perhaps unknowable to him—but he can access its functionality through his personal password which is "End of the World" (p. 112). Once the data are shuffled, the altered state will terminate. The Narrator plays the tones and moves to an altered mental state.

Chapter 11, Dressing, Watermelon, Chaos Analysis

The chapter derives its name from three disparate events; the Narrator watches intently as the librarian dresses herself. He finds her actions to be subtly erotic. He later remembers how the implanted drama had been described as a watermelon—the pulpy core surrounded by a tough skin just as the implanted drama is surrounded by a conscious mind. Finally, the shuffling process is a descent into the chaos of unconsciousness. The description of the process of becoming a Calcutec is intriguing.



Chapter 12, A Map of the End of the World

Chapter 12, A Map of the End of the World Summary

The Dreamreader begins to make a map of the Town. In broad outline, the town is surrounded by a wall which divides it from wilderness and bisected by an elbow-shaped river course which runs from the east to the south and is spanned by three bridges. The river passes through the east wall but pools at the south wall where the water exits via a huge whirlpool. The Town used to have an east gate which has been permanently bricked shut leaving the west gate—guarded by the Gatekeeper—as the only exit.

The Dreamreader begins to read old dreams, three or four at a time. The Librarian explains that she is the only Librarian which will be paired with him, and he the only Dreamreader paired with her. He does not understand the process of reading dreams but performs it well. There are a few thousand old dreams that need reading. One day the Dreamreader convinces the Librarian to accompany him to the southern whirlpool. Although she is afraid, she agrees, and they travel there and observe the waters and have lunch.

Chapter 12, A Map of the End of the World Analysis

At the request of his shadow the Dreamreader begins the process of mapping the Town—the map thus produced is presented in the front matter of the book, entitled 'The End of the World'—presumably the map will be used by the shadow to escape the Town. The Librarian and the Dreamreader are paired such that neither will ever serve with another. Thus, the Dreamreader is somewhat anxious to please the Librarian. The Librarian has been to the pool before, years ago with her mother, but seems to find it frightening and foreign. She wonders if the Dreamreader is trying to escape the town and notes that he cannot—it is in fact the end of the world from whence none escape.



Chapter 13, Frankfurt, Door, Independent Operants

Chapter 13, Frankfurt, Door, Independent Operants Summary

The Narrator completes shuffling the data and comes-to from a trance. He compares his shuffled data to the laundered data to ensure the job is complete and then destroys the laundered data and locks the shuffled data in a small safe. He then goes to sleep for several hours until he is awakened by a telephone call from the Chubby Girl.

She tells him that INKlings must have penetrated her grandfather's lab and that the situation has become dire. She feels that she is in danger and feels that he is probably in danger, too. They arrange to meet at a snack bar in a store. The Narrator places the shuffled data and the unicorn skull in a bag and then goes to meet the Chubby Girl who never shows up. While he waits for her he sees a poster advertising Frankfurt as a vacation destination; the spires in the poster make him vaguely uneasy. He then places the sports bag at a counter check and mails the check ticket to himself and returns home where he wonders what he should do next.

He then hears pounding on the unlocked door and briefly thinks about trying to escape. Instead, he waits until the door is pounded in and two men—one massive and one small—enter the apartment; the Narrator respectively refers to them as Big Boy and Junior. They are menacing and impolite and engage him in a rather lengthy conversation. Their combination of ineptness and criminality is amusing; they state they are aligned neither with the System nor the Factory but are independent operators who plan to steal the Professor's research work and make a fortune from it. They explain that the Professor was once an employee of the System—he had, in fact, engineered many of the processes used for laundering and shuffling. They claim that the Narrator is somehow integral to the Professor's plans and that the data which was laundered and shuffled was not actual data but a mechanism for starting some type of program. They finally single out several valuable items in the apartment and begin to destroy them, claiming their actions will confuse any Factory operatives who may happen to be spying on them.

Chapter 13, Frankfurt, Door, Independent Operants Analysis

This chapter continues the basic plot development of the initial narrative structure. The thugs suggest that the Narrator is not simply hired as a data encryption expert but is somehow integral to the Professor's plans—that the data he has just shuffled are a series of instructions that will control him in some way. Their peculiar fusion of gangster attitude and comic ineptness is both humorous and repulsive and makes each of them

more caricature than character. They do deliver a fair amount of information to the Narrator who reciprocates without much hesitation.

The nature of the telephone call from the Chubby Girl indicates that either she is experiencing difficulties or is at the very least going to some lengths to convince the Narrator that she is experiencing difficulties. Her non-appearance at their determined rendezvous further suggests she is involved in dire proceedings.



Chapter 14, Woods

Chapter 14, Woods Summary

The Dreamreader continues to explore the Town and develop his map. The Dreamreader begins to explore a vast area of forest within the walled Town. The Colonel warns him of approaching winter and notes that being in the woods during winter is particularly dangerous. The Dreamreader continues to explore the woods as the season changes and the unicorns' fur coats change from gold to white. One day he finds a clearing in the woods near the wall. The clearing contains an old abandoned cottage and the Dreamreader enters the structure and falls asleep. When he wakes up it is snowing. He runs through the forest for what seems an eternity until finally exiting the woods and proceeding to the Library where he collapses with fever.

Chapter 14, Woods Analysis

Knowing that winter spells the likely demise of his shadow the Dreamreader makes a concerted effort to complete the map of the Town. Other Town inhabitants such as the Librarian and the Colonel try to gently dissuade the Dreamreader from making the map but he defends it as a simple outgrowth of curiosity about the Town. The eastern portion of the Town is dominated by thick woods within the wall. The Dreamreader scouts through these woods for several days without finding anything of particular note before stumbling upon the cottage located in close proximity to the wall. As he sleeps in the cottage he feels that someone or something is atop the wall, watching him. After he wakes up he looks at the wall in admiration and admits that it is in fact a beautiful and perfect structure.



Chapter 15, Whiskey, Torture, Turgenev

Chapter 15, Whiskey, Torture, Turgenev Summary

Junior and the Narrator watch as Big Boy moves mechanically throughout the apartment demolishing literally everything with routine movements devoid of emotion. Junior explains that the devastation will convince the System that the encounter had been with Semiotecs. Then Big Boy pins the Narrator and Junior takes out a knife, sterilizes the blade, and slashes the Narrator's stomach. Junior postulates that the Narrator will of course cooperate with them because it is his only real alternative; Junior appears to know all about the skull, the shuffling, and the older gentleman's scientific work. Finally, the two hooligans leave. Within a few minutes three inspectors from the System arrive and survey the damage. While two operative peruse the apartment the third interviews the Narrator who decides his only option is, in fact, with the two hooligans. He therefore denies any knowledge of any skull, complains about his ill usage, and refrains from mentioning anything about the Professor.

After the operatives leave the Narrator surveys his wrecked apartment and then seeks medical attention for his slashed stomach. After getting stitched up he returns home and goes to bed, drinking the remains out of shattered whiskey bottles and discarded beer cans, and reading Russian literature. He despondently begins to imagine a world surrounded by a huge wall and a single gate through which no exit is allowed. He then falls to sleep and is later awakened by the Chubby Girl who anxiously tells him that it is no time to be sleeping because the world is about to end.

Chapter 15, Whiskey, Torture, Turgenev Analysis

While Big Boy wrecks the Narrator's apartment, Junior expounds on playing chess in terms highly reminiscent of a lecture the Colonel delivered to the Dreamreader in chapter 8, just as the Narrator's mental anguish leads him to imagine the very Town called the End of the World. The interplay of the two narratives is again enforced by the Chubby Girl's insistence that, in fact, the world is about to end.



Chapter 16, The Coming of Winter

Chapter 16, The Coming of Winter Summary

The Dreamreader is feverish for several days but is nursed back to health by the Colonel. While he is convalescing he holds several conversations with the Colonel and learns that when one's shadow dies one's mind also dies—the shadow, apparently, holds nearly the entirety of the mind. He manages to have the Colonel unknowingly smuggle the completed map to his old Shadow. Once he has recouped his strength, he returns to the library.

Chapter 16, The Coming of Winter Analysis

The metaphysics of the End of the World are further examined—when one is separated from one's shadow, one also loses most or all of one's mind and memories. The Colonel explains that all of the inhabitants of the Town have lost their shadows which have subsequently died; thus, they are all more or less automatons unable to consciously act other than their programming dictates. Eventually, the Dreamreader's shadow will die and with it his mind and memories and consciousness. He will then become at ease living in the town and perform his duties as does nearly everyone else. The only exceptions to this rule appear to be the Gatekeeper and, formally introduced in chapter 28, the Caretaker. Later hints suggest that some individuals who live in the woods perhaps retain their shadows.



Chapter 17, End of the World, Charlie Parker, Time Bomb

Chapter 17, End of the World, Charlie Parker, Time Bomb Summary

The Chubby Girl gets in bed with the Narrator to stay warm. They talk about the Professor's history of working with the System. The Professor had eventually separated from the System and when he did he stole the Narrator's data files. The Professor had come to realize that shuffling entailed much more beyond simple data encryption. At that time the Chubby Girl remembers the Professor underwent a profound mood alteration. In the discussion the Narrator postulates that the data he had shuffled was in actuality a subtle code that has somehow altered his consciousness; he comes to find that he agrees with Junior's suggestions and decides that he must quickly find the Professor.

Chapter 17, End of the World, Charlie Parker, Time Bomb Analysis

Like much of the rationalization which takes place in the novel the Narrator's deductive process is fairly simplistic and seemingly based on little more than suggestions from relative strangers. The reasons for this rather innocuous decision-making process will be found later in the novel; in fact, the Narrator's consciousness and cognitive processes are already beginning to suffer the effects of the Professor's experimentation. The Professor's experimental processes and the history of their development are further explained in chapter 25.



Chapter 18, Dreamreading

Chapter 18, Dreamreading Summary

The Dreamreader fully recovers his strength and continues to read old dreams. He wonders what the old dreams are all about and cannot seem to derive any meaningful information from the procedure of reading them. He holds conversations with the Librarian about his inability to make sense of what he is doing and wonders aloud why the dreams are meaningless. He finally concludes that perhaps an imperfection in his mind disallows the processing of the dreams to meaningful data.

Chapter 18, Dreamreading Analysis

The chapter investigates the process of reading old dreams; the Dreamreader wonders why he has been appointed to work at the procedure and wonders what it means. Although he appears to be successfully reading old dreams they are nonsensical to him—mere random images without apparent meaning. The Librarian does not seem particularly troubled by this. The Dreamreader concludes that perhaps his mind has an imperfection which prevents him from making sense of the dreams he reads.



Chapter 19, Hamburgers, Skyline, Deadline

Chapter 19, Hamburgers, Skyline, Deadline Summary

The Narrator and the Chubby Girl eat a fast-food lunch while he contemplates leaving his old satisfactory but routine life for a new unknown life—he accurately realizes he will never return to his previous life. He purchases some whiskey and drinks and then they return to the Chubby Girl's office and residence. They discover that it, too, has been completely searched and methodically wrecked. She finds a cryptic notebook and explains that it is kept in a cipher that only she and her grandfather—the Professor—can understand. After studying the notebook she informs the Narrator that he has only thirty-six hours remaining before something bad, noted by a simple 'X', will happen to him; they must find the Professor quickly.

The Narrator wonders why he, personally, is involved at all. The Chubby Girl explains that the Professor performed an experiment on twenty-six Calcutecs; twenty-five died within about a year and a half—only the Narrator survived. Thus, he is indeed unique or nearly so. She muses that he possesses an unusually rigid 'emotional shell' within his consciousness that allowed him to survive; the shell is probably partially inborn and partially learned.

Chapter 19, Hamburgers, Skyline, Deadline Analysis

The Professor's research continues to take on darker overtones as the Chubby Girl confesses that it led directly, if unintentionally, to the deaths of twenty-five individuals. The Narrator's survival has made him unique; however, instead of walking away from such a costly experiment the fairly obviously amoral Professor has continued to investigate the mind of the Narrator through further experimentation.



Chapter 20, The Death of the Beasts

Chapter 20, The Death of the Beasts Summary

The Dreamreader awakens to snow. He walks through the town and talks to the Gatekeeper who shows him the bodies of several frozen unicorns who have died overnight. Later in the day the Dreamreader returns home and talks to the Colonel who explains that the dead unicorns are burned except for their skulls which are extracted and processed into old dreams; only the Dreamreader can discover their meanings.

Chapter 20, The Death of the Beasts Analysis

The several thousand unicorn skulls housed in the library make it obvious that the unicorns' lifespan is not guaranteed and that many must die from exposure every year. The Colonel disinterestedly notes that the unicorns die because that's just the way things work.



Chapter 21, Bracelets, Ben Johnson, Devil

Chapter 21, Bracelets, Ben Johnson, Devil Summary

The Chubby Girl leads the Narrator through a series of obscure passages until they enter the underground cavern where they pass underneath the waterfall and enter the laboratory which was introduced in chapter 3. The laboratory has been thoroughly searched and is in shambles although several pieces of equipment appear untouched. The Chubby Girl deduces immediately that the damage has not been caused by INKlings who are apparently fairly mindless in their destruction—instead it is obvious that Semiotecs have searched the lab. She states the Professor will have escaped via a secret egress to a secure location. They enter a secret passage and travel through a maze to a vast cavern that contains an underground mountain. They discover the Professor has left a trail of paperclips. They follow the paperclip trail for about two hours and the Narrator picks up and pockets all of the paperclips as they pass them. After a few hours the Narrator slips into a sort of trance and has a strange vision, much like a dream in sleep. The Chubby Girl wakes him up, cautions him that sleeping is extremely dangerous, and urges him to continue. They eventually reach the top of the mountain to discover it is expansive and flat like a plateau. Then they hear an ominous distant rumbling.

Chapter 21, Bracelets, Ben Johnson, Devil Analysis

The paperclip trail echoes many earlier scenes in which the Narrator sees paperclips and feels a strange *dyja vu* about their arrangement. This minor theme will continue in later chapters. While they travel through the maze and various corridors the Narrator reminisces about the bracelets on a woman he had randomly seen earlier in the day; he has sexual fantasies about the woman retaining her bracelets when having sex. Later he retains his composure by trying to act like Ben Johnson. The Devil in the chapter title refers to one of the daydreams the Narrator has in an altered state of consciousness.



Chapter 22, Gray Smoke

Chapter 22, Gray Smoke Summary

The Dreamreader and the Colonel discuss the deaths of so many unicorns. The Colonel explains that the beasts' salvation comes through suffering; the beasts reincarnate. Later the Dreamreader reads old dreams in the library even though his eyes are painful. The Librarian offers to have sexual intercourse with the Dreamreader but he declines. They discuss singing but she does not know what music is; he can't remember any songs. They go to a large room full of old discarded luggage and fruitlessly search for a musical instrument. The Narrator finds the suitcases and their contents decidedly anonymous.

Chapter 22, Gray Smoke Analysis

The gray smoke of the chapter title refers to the Gatekeeper's practice of burning the corpses of the unicorns; their bodies rise in columns of grey smoke throughout the winter. The room full of old suitcases appears to house the abandoned and forgotten possessions of many of the Town's inhabitants. They contain diverse items but all of them are without distinctiveness and personal touches.



Chapter 23, Holes, Leeches, Tower

Chapter 23, Holes, Leeches, Tower Summary

The Narrator and the Chubby Girl continue making their way through a vast hazardous maze of sinkholes, whirlpools, and mounds of leeches. He thinks of old movies and goes into a sort of waking trance. He realizes that the operations performed to enable shuffling have stolen his memories from his conscious mind and the realization makes him furious. Finally they come to a giant stalagmite and climb to the top where they discover a knotted rope hanging from above. They climb the rope as the distant rumbling comes ever closer—it is rising water which is flooding the entire cavern system below them.

Chapter 23, Holes, Leeches, Tower Analysis

The pair continues their journey through the vast underground cavern system which is presumably the normal home of many INKlings. The water apparently floods the entire system every three days. The Narrator's stomach wound troubles him, and he suffers other bumps and scrapes in the trip. His trance-like state and intuitive realizations will be further explained in chapter 25.



Chapter 24, Shadow Grounds

Chapter 24, Shadow Grounds Summary

The Dreamreader once again visits the Gatekeeper who tells him he can obtain a musical instrument from someone called the Caretaker who works at the Power Station. The Gatekeeper explains that the Power Station is some distance into the woods and gives explicit travel instructions. The Gatekeeper also notes that the Caretaker is not a normal person. He then finally allows the Narrator to speak with his shadow; they meet in an intermediate location between the Town and the outside called the Shadow Grounds. The shadow is losing strength due to the winter but still possesses nearly all of the joint memories of the Narrator and the shadow. The shadow received the map but was unable to make use of it due to the lateness of the season. The shadow argues convincingly that the Town cannot truly be inescapable; there must be a way in and a way out and no Town can be fully self-sufficient. The shadow argues that the Town is too perfect and very sinister. The shadow concludes by stating he will discover a way to escape and then seek out the Narrator.

Chapter 24, Shadow Grounds Analysis

The Gatekeeper allows the Narrator to speak with his shadow apparently on the mistaken belief that the Narrator has more-or-less completely integrated into Town life. Going along with this theme of newfound trust, the Gatekeeper urges the Narrator to venture a small ways into the Town's woods to meet the Caretaker to obtain a musical instrument. The Caretaker, as will be discussed in a later chapter, is not entirely separated from his shadow and is thus not an entirely normal inhabitant of the Town.



Chapter 25, Meal, Elephant Factory, Trap

Chapter 25, Meal, Elephant Factory, Trap Summary

The Narrator and the Chubby Girl finally reach the top of the rope where they meet the Professor. He is healthy but hungry and spends a long time talking about the nature and history of his experimentation. The Professor deduced that all deterministic ciphers were subject to successful attack because they are based on logical assumptions. Thus, he sought to develop an encryption methodology which did not rely on any knowable assumptions. His solution was to use the subconscious mind of encryption specialists as a sort of 'black box' through which data could pass and emerge encrypted. A subsequent pass would decrypt the data. Since the assumptions of the consciousness, if any, are unknowable, the cipher should be impossible to crack.

However, one's consciousness continues to evolve and change due to new experiences and new physical sensations. Thus, a given subconscious would not decrypt a message in a process precisely parallel to that which was used to encrypt it. The Professor's solution was to mirror, or copy, a person's consciousness at a particular point in time and then strip away the ability for that copy of the consciousness to change. The engineered consciousness was then implanted into the subject's mind and a tiny micro-circuit switch was implanted to allow the individual to flip between their normal, waking consciousness and their programmed artificial and static consciousness. The switch was activated by a specific code word or series of tones. The time-frozen consciousness, devoid of all input, is used only to encrypt and decrypt. The Professor delivered this technology to the System which used it to create Calcutecs capable of shuffling data.

The Professor continued to work on his own, however. He used powerful computers to map and image the time-frozen consciousnesses of the shuffling Calcutecs. He then edited these mapped consciousnesses into what he non-technically refers to as a sort of visualized movie. The Professor tried to edit the movie into a rational series of images so far as was possible. He then, unknown to the System, implanted the twenty-six edited rationalized consciousnesses back into the originating twenty-six Calcutecs and outfitted them with a three-way switch in place of the standard two-way switch. He wanted, he explains, to see how they would deal with their own subconscious mind once it had been rationalized by an external intelligence. Surprisingly, twenty-five of the twenty-six Calcutecs died within about a year and a half—only the Narrator has survived for three years.

The Professor does not know why the Narrator survived and the others died—no scientific explanation was ever discovered. The Professor muses that, perhaps, the Narrator naturally is used to having multiple consciousnesses in his mind. After the deaths, the Professor insisted the entire program be abandoned but the System refused and planned to move forward with 2nd-generation shuffling technology. The Professor then severed his professional ties with the System.



In an attempt to learn how the third consciousness might work, the Professor recently switched it on by using the complex activation code which was supplied through the data that the Professor putatively wanted shuffled. Thus, the Narrator inadvertently and unknowingly has caused the third, edited, static consciousness to become activated. The Professor had planned to switch the third consciousness off before any permanent mind changes occurred, but interference from the Factory prevented this. Thus, explains the Professor, the Narrator now has two choices. Either he can kill himself to avoid alteration of perceptions, or else he can resign himself to slipping into the third, edited consciousness which is an irreversible process.

All of this work was done, of course, without the subjects' informed consent. The Professor, supported by the Cubby Girl, attempts to justify his amoral conduct in the name of science and progress. He cites Aristotle and develops his rationalization. The Narrator is not as upset as might be imagined but is nonplussed by his options. He belatedly realizes that Junior and Big Boy were, in fact, Semiotecs working for the Factory.

Chapter 25, Meal, Elephant Factory, Trap Analysis

The lengthy chapter 25 elucidates the central conflict of the first narrative; like others, the Narrator has been subjected to experimental manipulations of his consciousness without his knowledge or approval. Unlike the others, the Narrator has survived for unknown reasons. The Professor, seemingly so likable, is in fact little different from the Nazi medical experimenters from which he attempts to distance himself. At one point in their discussions the Narrator compares his old memories to an elephant graveyard; the Professor corrects him and expands the metaphor, explaining that consciousness is more like an elephant factory. The trap for the Narrator lies in his apparently unpalatable range of choices, namely two. He can die, or lose his extant consciousness. If he continues to live, the Professor explains that he will perceive life within an edited reality devoid of input which is called the End of the World; his body might continue to function but his consciousness will undergo severe changes. The Professor also explains that many of the trance-like states and bizarre memories the Narrator has recently experienced are in actuality the Narrator's mind beginning to bridge the gaps between its various consciousnesses—the Professor assures the Narrator that the strange recovered memories are not real but artifacts of the process.



Chapter 26, Power Station

Chapter 26, Power Station Summary

The Narrator and the Librarian walk out of town and make their way to the Power Station. They find it seemingly deserted but eventually discover the Caretaker inside a huge brick building which vibrates with the hum of power. The Narrator sums up the Caretaker's persona by noting he is antithetical (p. 279) to the Gatekeeper in every way. He is small of stature, quiet in voice, personable and unassuming. The Caretaker notes that he is unable to talk loudly, and they proceed to his humble abode.

Chapter 26, Power Station Analysis

The Librarian explains that the Caretaker was not properly separated from his shadow and is thus not like most other people in the Town. Earlier, the Gatekeeper noted that the Town people called the Caretaker 'nobody'. Additionally he has aesthetic sense—he retains the musical instruments because he finds them pleasing to look at—and seems to have other strange qualities. The power is generated by a large wind turbine and the Caretaker notes that once every third day a strong wind blows up through a vertical tunnel and spins the turbine. The rising wind's action and schedule matches the action and schedule of the rising water in the underground catacombs traversed by the Chubby Girl and the Narrator in chapters 21, 23, and 25.



Chapter 27, Encyclopedia Wand, Immortality, Paperclips

Chapter 27, Encyclopedia Wand, Immortality, Paperclips Summary

The Professor then explains that the Narrator's altered state will be perceived as lasting literally forever because there are no inputs to the system; it is thus a form of illusion of immortality but nevertheless an immortality which will be experienced perceptually. A brief but abortive discussion about the nature of eternity is held, but the Professor dismisses it as delving into the unknowable. He again notes that the perception of immortality could be eluded if the Narrator died before the transition was completed. The Narrator desires to leave; he thinks about a change of clothes and a haircut as appropriate activities for his remaining twenty-four hours of consciousness. The Professor instructs him on how to leave the underground caverns and sends the Chubby Girl along as a guide. The Professor mentions that paperclips, often objects of fascination for the Narrator, serve to stymie the INKlings for about twenty minutes or so. The Narrator hands a pocketful of paperclips to the Professor, and they part company.

Chapter 27, Encyclopedia Wand, Immortality, Paperclips Analysis

The Professor continues to try to justify his actions and digresses into technical and non-technical discussion of his experimental processes. In short, he discusses the unknowable nature of eternal experience and concludes that the Narrator will eventually die, but his altered consciousness will perceive an immortal life because it is devoid of any input from the outside world. It is interesting to note that the Narrator is not particularly upset and instead decides a good way to spend some of his approximately twenty-four remaining hours would be to get a haircut.



Chapter 28, Musical Instruments

Chapter 28, Musical Instruments Summary

The Dreamreader and the Librarian have lunch with the Caretaker. After, the Caretaker and the Dreamreader look over the Caretaker's collection of instruments. He selects a concertina and trades some trinkets from the Town for the instrument. After a few more pleasantries, the Dreamreader and the Librarian leave for Town.

Chapter 28, Musical Instruments Analysis

In chapter 28 the Dreamreader finally obtains his long-desired instrument. Although he does not remember how to play anything he does at least remember how to make chords. The Caretaker is apparently unable to distinguish between single notes and well-formed chords.



Chapter 29, Lake, Masatomi Kondo, Panty Hose

Chapter 29, Lake, Masatomi Kondo, Panty Hose Summary

The Narrator and the Chubby Girl leave the Professor and travel a long distance, often swimming, through subterranean caverns and tunnels. They pass through sewer systems where they are closely shadowed by INKlings. The Narrator finally begins to hear their strange chattering. The Narrator and the Chubby Girl discuss the morality of science and the Chubby Girl attempts to defend the Professor's activities. The Narrator spends time thinking about various movies and actors and then spends an inordinate amount of time trying to remember when he last urinated. He concludes that it must have been many, many hours ago. Finally, they make it to a subway station and perceived safety.

Chapter 29, Lake, Masatomi Kondo, Panty Hose Analysis

Chapter 29 describes the Narrator's escape from the underground cavern system. The Chubby Girl continues to apologize her grandfather's amoral experimentation while the Narrator—the subject of the experimentation—thinks of actors and wonders about his toilet functions while his physical injuries begin to bother him less and less. For the first time he actually perceives the strange noises made by the INKlings, though he still has not seen one of the strangely ominous monsters. They do come across a lone shoe which the Chubby Girl insinuates is all that remains from a hapless subway traveler who became an INKling feast. While scaling one ladder the Narrator looks up the Chubby Girl's skirt and observes her panty-hose clad legs which he finds mildly erotic. For someone aware that their very consciousness will cease to exist within one day, the Narrator is perplexingly detached and calm.



Chapter 30, Hole

Chapter 30, Hole Summary

The Dreamreader wakes up and studies the accordion on his table. He fumbles with it and unsuccessfully tries to recall a melody. Outside is freezing cold and snowing but several old men persist in digging a disturbingly large hold in the frozen ground. In the afternoon the Colonel returns and informs the Dreamreader that his shadow is very sick and will surely die within a short time—he encourages the Dreamreader to visit his shadow one final time. The Dreamreader plans to visit his shadow as soon as he can.

Chapter 30, Hole Analysis

The hole being dug is clearly reminiscent of a grave though the Dreamreader does not make the connection. The Colonel, strangely absent in the morning, returns for lunch and informs the Dreamreader that his shadow is near death. The Colonel assumes the shadow will die soon and encourages the Dreamreader to go and make his final peace. He explains that eventually the strange ways of the Town will come to make good sense.



Chapter 31, Fares, Police, Detergent

Chapter 31, Fares, Police, Detergent Summary

The Narrator and the Chubby Girl make their way to the subway platform and then saunter along, covered in mud and with soaking clothes, as if all were normal. They haggle over the price of a lost subway ticket then eat lunch in a supermarket and discuss tabloid stories. Then they catch a taxi and return to his apartment. He is surprised to discover it has been cleaned up. While the Chubby Girl bathes the Narrator tries to decide what to do with his last day of life. He calls the librarian and asks her for a date; she accepts and confesses to having cleaned the apartment. After he bathes he finds the Chubby Girl naked on his bed reading. He sits and fights off sleep, waiting for her to leave. Finally he bluntly suggests she leave; she declines because her only clothes are wet. In order to shoo her off before he must leave for his tryst with the librarian, he takes her wet clothes to a Laundromat and spends a few of his last minutes sitting on a chair watching a clothes dryer spin a load of pink clothing.

Chapter 31, Fares, Police, Detergent Analysis

The minutiae of travel, the idiotic contents of yellow tabloids, and the tedium of bathing, grooming, and dressing are all covered in chapter 31. Similar to the remainder of the first narrative, the nearly pointless details which make up the Narrator's life stand in stark contrast to his recognition that he has only a few hours of consciousness left. Instead of doing something with them, however, he sits and thinks about what he should be doing with them as they slip away. It is interesting to note the Narrator apparently finds the naked Chubby Girl singularly non-sexual. Throughout the novel he has been fascinated with her clothed body and given it considerable attention. Now she lies naked on his bed idling flipping through a novel, and he fights off sleep and wishes she would dress and leave. The conversation regarding subway fares between the Narrator and the subway attendant is particularly humorous and absurd.



Chapter 32, Shadow in the Throes of Death

Chapter 32, Shadow in the Throes of Death Summary

The Dreamreader goes to visit his shadow presumably for the last time. The Gatekeeper escorts him into a sort of donjon in the shadow grounds and then leaves them alone. The shadow explains he has been faking portions of his illness to buy some time, and he challenges the Dreamreader to escape with him. The Dreamreader refuses, noting that he loves the Librarian girl. The shadow reminds him that she is incapable of love because she is not possessed of mind. The Dreamreader then suggests that the shadow escape alone, without him. The shadow then explains that the folk who live in the woods are those whose shadows did not properly die—thus, they all retain a fragment of mind which harrows them up until the townspeople force them from the Town into fruitless wanderings in the woods. The shadow says the choice is the Dreamreader's to make—if he wants to remain in this so-called perfect place, then the shadow will die to enable it. He then notes that the death of shadows yields up mind energy which is slowly absorbed by the wandering unicorns. When the unicorns die their skulls are impregnated with traces of mind essence. They are harvested by the Gatekeeper and sent to the library because they are possessed of these 'old dreams'. The Dreamreader, always a newcomer to the town, then reads the dreams and dissipates the lingering fragments of mind. The next spring a number of unicorns are born which equals the number who died. The shadow concludes by noting two things. First, the Town's seeming perfection arises through unjustly forcing all imperfection onto the weak and defenseless. Second, without fighting, hatred, and desire there is also no joy, communion, or love. The Dreamreader ponders the shadow's statements and agrees to meet him to attempt an escape.

Chapter 32, Shadow in the Throes of Death Analysis

The shadow is obviously sick but has taken pains to appear sicklier than he actually is. His intent is thus to catch the Gatekeeper off guard and somehow escape along with the Dreamreader. The shadow has gained knowledge from his exercise of mind and also through numerous long conversations with the Gatekeeper who seems to have a singular insight into the metaphysics of the Town's operations. The shadow explains these metaphysics to the Dreamreader. The Dreamreader emphasizes the positive side of the town; it's lack of fighting, hatred, and desire. The shadow points out that these things don't exist but their opposites also do not exist; thus there is no joy, communion, or love. The sick shadow urges the Dreamreader to join him in an attempt to escape and the Dreamreader seemingly agrees to chance escape.



Chapter 33, Rainy-Day Laundry, Car Rental, Bob Dylan

Chapter 33, Rainy-Day Laundry, Car Rental, Bob Dylan Summary

The Narrator dries the Chubby Girl's clothes and then returns to the apartment where he finds her still naked but asleep in bed. He places her clothes by her and then wanders the apartment thinking about his past life there. He had moved in just over eight years ago, still married then. He considers that he has only twenty-two hours left to live and begins to assess his life in minor ways. He finally leaves, then purchases new clothes and kills time in a bar. He goes to the restroom and urinates for two full minutes. He then goes shopping and retrieves his bag from the claim, thinking all along that there is no practical reason for doing so. He then rents a car, tosses the bag into the backseat, and drives home.

Chapter 33, Rainy-Day Laundry, Car Rental, Bob Dylan Analysis

With only twenty-two hours of life remaining, the Narrator spends several hours killing time waiting for his date with the librarian. He buys new clothes, new tapes, and then spends time in a bar listening to music, drinking beer, and watching the clock go 'round. The tedium of life continues to pursue his thoughts as he contemplates his life's experiences and realizes that they are not bad or good but just simple facts.



Chapter 34, Skulls

Chapter 34, Skulls Summary

The Dreamreader travels to the librarian and meets the Librarian. He informs her that he intends to attempt an escape with his shadow. He briefly discourses on the nature of mind; how belief inevitably leads to disappointment and despair. The Librarian remembers her mother; she had been driven into the woods because she still possessed some mind. The Librarian startles the Dreamreader by stating that she thinks she could possibly believe in something. The Dreamreader notes that he has only twenty-one hours left before his escape attempt; in that time he will attempt to read old dreams and discover in them fragments of the Librarian's mind which could be restored to her.

Chapter 34, Skulls Analysis

The mind evaporates on the death of one's shadow and is thereafter absorbed slowly by the living unicorns. When the unicorns die the fragments of mind they have picked up are concentrated in their skulls. The Dreamreader therefore reasons that the Librarian's mind—at least portions or fragments of it—must still reside in some of the thousands of unicorn skulls stored in the library, and he is determined to find at least some of these fragments and return them to the Librarian.

It is interesting to note that the Dreamreader's escape attempt—in twenty-one hours—corresponds exactly with the Narrator's presumable time of future death; also both characters meet a librarian with whom one is in love and the other is possessed of a sexual yearning. Thus, the parallel developments between the two narratives continue.



Chapter 35, Nail Clippers, Butter Sauce, Iron Vase

Chapter 35, Nail Clippers, Butter Sauce, Iron Vase Summary

The Narrator arrives at the library early so he kills some more time and finally picks up the librarian. She looks very nice to him, and they go to an Italian restaurant where they order a veritable orgy of food. They make small talk while they eat, then they travel to her apartment and have a frozen pizza. He shows her the unicorn skull and tells her it is a replica. They continue to make small talk for a little while and then spend the evening having repetitive sexual intercourse.

Chapter 35, Nail Clippers, Butter Sauce, Iron Vase Analysis

The salient portions of the conversation between the Narrator and the librarian deal with the nature of their budding relationship; that is, the Narrator informs the librarian that he will shortly be leaving on a prolonged trip from which return is doubtful. She pursues the line of conversation with gentle questions but when he proves evasive she drops the subject. The catalogue of foods they consume at the restaurant is astounding and very funny; it is made all the more ridiculous by their consumption of an oven-baked frozen pizza a few minutes later. The chapter title is derived from a gift of complex nail clippers the Narrator gives to the librarian, their dinner discussion of the complexities of making a good butter sauce, and the librarian's disclosure that her father had been killed by being struck on the head by an iron vase. The title well-encapsulates the random litany of events presented in the chapter which consume several of the Narrator's last hours of consciousness.



Chapter 36, Accordion

Chapter 36, Accordion Summary

The Dreamreader sits with the Librarian and uses his tiny accordion to play notes, then chords, and finally fragments of melodies. He then struggles to produce a complete song and as he does all of the skulls in the library stacks begin to glow with a soft light. The Dreamreader decides that he will read as many skulls as he possibly can on this, his last night in the Town; he intends to find as many fragments of the Librarian's mind as he can.

Chapter 36, Accordion Analysis

Both narrators spend their supposed last night with their respective librarians. Whereas the Narrator enjoys the physical aspects of existence—drinking, eating, sex, idle chatter—the Dreamreader engages in more metaphysical pursuits of music and thinking about the nature of the mind. The Dreamreader becomes determined to sift through as many 'old dreams' as possible in an attempt to locate numerous fragments of the Librarian's mind. He postulates that by locating them he will somehow be able to return to her some portion of her lost consciousness. The effects this will have, if successful, on the Librarian are completely unknown.



Chapter 37, Lights, Introspection, Cleanliness

Chapter 37, Lights, Introspection, Cleanliness Summary

The librarian wakes up the Narrator and points at the unicorn skull on the table. It is aglow with a soft radiance. They are both surprised at the event and wonder at what it could possibly mean. The Narrator spends an inordinate amount of time focusing on small details of reality which appear to be without significance. They make small talk of their earlier lives; he had been married for several years but has been divorced for several years. In the early morning the Narrator makes the librarian a gift of the unicorn skull and tells her he will shortly be departing, probably permanently.

Chapter 37, Lights, Introspection, Cleanliness Analysis

The Narrator's introspection is peculiar and largely banal. He has no deep insights into the metaphysics of life or the meanings of existence; he simply observes small things and notes them in a catalogue of tiny facts. He enjoys the physical beauty of the librarian, for example, but apparently does not feel any strong emotional attachment for her. Indeed, the Narrator seems to constantly be ever more disengaged from the world as, presumably, his consciousness continues to slip away from him. For her part, the librarian appears satisfied to enjoy the moment and accept the situation as temporary.



Chapter 38, Escape

Chapter 38, Escape Summary

The Dreamreader completes his self-appointed task, having found several fragments of the Librarian's mind. He sleeps for several hours in the morning, and then travels to the shadow grounds. He enters the grounds, then sneaks into the donjon and retrieves his shadow. The shadow is too weak to walk and asks to be left behind. The Dreamreader insists the shadow accompany him and literally carries the shadow up and out of the donjon and across the miles of snowy fields and roads.

The shadow reasons that there must be an exit from the Town. The Town is perfect—too perfect—and offers a solution to every desire; thus, the shadow's desire for egress must somehow be met. The shadow had deduced that the southern whirlpool must in fact be the Town's exit. While the shadow talks out loud the snow continues to fall, obscuring the Dreamreader's footprints as he carries the shadow the entire way to the southern whirlpool.

Chapter 38, Escape Analysis

The shadow has obviously spent a large amount of time pondering the nature of the Town. The shadow has come to realize that the Town is perfect in its limited conception; it offers a solution to every imaginable 'problem' of the inhabitants. Ergo, as the shadow desires greatly to escape, the Town must therefore offer viable, if difficult, egress. A thorough examination of the map provided by the Dreamreader has convinced the shadow that the exit must in fact be the huge southern whirlpool formed by the river as it leaves the walled enclosure of the Town. Whether the shadow has correctly reasoned is not resolved within the novel.



Chapter 39, Popcorn, Lord Jim, Extinction

Chapter 39, Popcorn, Lord Jim, Extinction Summary

In the morning, the Narrator and the librarian go to a local park and drink beer and make small talk about books and literature. They purchase a huge amount of popcorn and feed the pigeons. After a few hours, she leaves him alone, knowing that he will soon be gone and probably never return. He looks around the park and focuses on some of the people, casually wondering what their lives might be like.

On a whim, the Narrator goes to a payphone and calls his old apartment, perversely noting that as one of his last acts it is completely ridiculous. He is surprised when the Chubby Girl answers the telephone. She tells him that the Professor has moved to Finland to escape the prying eyes of the System. The Chubby Girl intends to move into the Narrator's apartment and fix it up for herself. The Narrator informs the Chubby Girl that he intends to drive to a certain location to finish out his consciousness. She plans to retrieve his body—alive or otherwise—and cryogenically preserve it on the off chance that the Professor's continuing work will enable a reversal of the brain processes about to occur. The Narrator seems nonplussed but is not necessarily against the procedure, and hangs up. He drives to the waterfront and listens to music, sitting in the front seat of a rented car. Gradually, sleep comes over him, and he slips into sleep or, rather, non-consciousness.

Chapter 39, Popcorn, Lord Jim, Extinction Analysis

The Narrator's focus on Western literature is again noted in this chapter as he discusses Lord Jim, among others, with the librarian. She appears to be fully conversant in an extremely wide variety of topics including classical music, western literature, foods and wines, etc. This bizarre Western cultural bias of the narrators is not fully explored in the novel; it hints that, perhaps, the Narrator is an expatriate American living in Tokyo but such a claim is not actually supported by any narrative details. All things considered, the Narrator's final day of consciousness is not bad although rather banal. He spends most of his last twenty-four hours either sleeping or just killing time waiting for the librarian to get off work. His last enjoyable hours are spent in her company having dinner, having sex, and making small talk.

The Narrator performs some amount of introspection and life-review but overall spends much more time noting what other people are wearing or doing; he apparently does not have much past history worthy of serious contemplation. The narrative structure of the odd-numbered chapters (that is, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*) concludes with the Narrator apparently falling asleep into a non-conscious state which will presumably be followed

by physical death but an eternity of perceptual existence in another level of consciousness (that is, End of the World).



Chapter 40, Birds

Chapter 40, Birds Summary

The Dreamreader and his shadow reach the southern whirlpool in an exhausted state. They sit panting in the snowy woods and watch the strangely calm surface of the water. The Dreamreader announces that he has in fact decided to stay. He will not escape the Town via the whirlpool although he will send the shadow out. The shadow argues that the Dreamreader is abandoning any chance of a meaningful life by remaining in a perfect but static Town devoid of contention and conflict and therefore meaning. The Dreamreader explains that the Town is his own creation; he feels responsible for the Town and the people and desires to remain and see what will eventually happen. The shadow, sadly, accepts his decision and enters the whirlpool alone. The Dreamreader watches as the shadow is pulled under by the current and vanishes forever. He then walks back to town, thinking of the Librarian.

Chapter 40, Birds Analysis

Just as the Narrator's final hours were spent in a wooded park surrounded by pigeons, the Dreamreader's final minutes with his shadow are spent in the woods listening to the sounds of birds. The Dreamreader's decision to remain behind is not surprising as it has been subtly foreshadowed for several chapters. Even his shadow appears resigned to the fact. The Dreamreader appears to believe that his shadow—his mind and consciousness—will somehow have a separate existence outside of the Town. This is probably incorrect and the shadow's descent into the whirlpool is in any event akin to ultimate death. The shadow will not return to the Town and, as noted by the Gatekeeper, the Colonel, the Librarian, and the shadow itself, the shadow cannot survive indefinitely separated from the Narrator.

In their final conversation, the Narrator and the shadow disagree about the Narrator's future in the town. The shadow believes the future holds no joy or sorrow or meaningful existence whereas the Narrator holds out hope that he will, somehow, be able to regain fragments of his former consciousness. Which viewpoint is correct is not resolved within the narrative.



Characters

The Narrator

The Narrator is the unnamed narrator and is also the protagonist and central figure in all of the action presented in the odd-numbered chapters of the novel. Like all characters in the novel, the Narrator is not named and is physically described in only the vaguest terms. He is thirty-five years old and apparently fairly average in most physical details, though he does seem to be in fairly athletic condition. He suffers from vertigo and appears to enjoy orderly and clean surroundings. He has basic interpersonal skills and rarely voices his own opinion, instead preferring to agree with the opinions of those he is with. He was once married but has been divorced for several years by the opening sequences of the novel. He enjoys drinking whiskey and beer and apparently has fairly frequent sexual trysts with strangers or prostitutes. He does not particularly seek to develop long-term relationships. He is noted as being right-handed.

The Narrator is a Calcutec—an employee of a quasi-governmental organization known as the System, who has been surgically altered to enable rapid encryption of data. Calcutecs can perform several data encryption operations, some are conscious efforts but the most secure methods are entirely subconscious. As a Calcutec, the Narrator enjoys a high salary and looks forward to an early retirement. He is widely read and focuses extensively on Western literature and films. His complete devotion to all things Western is strange for a citizen of Tokyo and might suggest that he is an expatriate American, though the text presents no concrete evidence for this.

Through the course of the novel, the Narrator learns that his mind has been subjected to medical experimentation without his own authorization. A scientist known as the Professor has implanted an altered state of consciousness within the Narrator's mind. The Professor then activates the altered consciousness and intends to observe the Narrator over the next few days before deactivating the altered consciousness. Unfortunately for the Narrator, the Professor is unable to deactivate the altered consciousness due to interference by the Factory, an organized crime syndicate. The Narrator's consciousness gradually fuses with the implanted altered consciousness. The Narrator spends several days having confusing memories surface which are not real and experiencing other strange mental artifacts. He eventually learns that the Professor's experimentation has led to irreversible damage to his consciousness which will, ultimately, lead to his death.

Over the last few days of his life, the Narrator spends time pursuing the minutia of daily living by shopping, drinking in bars, and renting an automobile. He spends his final hours with a new acquaintance—a promising and beautiful librarian—making small talk, eating huge meals, and having sexual intercourse. At the end of the narrative, the Narrator drives to a serene location and slips into sleep and dies. The Narrator is intimately tied to two other characters presented in the novel, namely the Dreamreader



and the shadow. In fact, the three characters can be viewed as essentially the same character).

The Dreamreader (The Second Narrator)

The Dreamreader is the unnamed narrator and is also the protagonist and central figure in all of the action presented in the even-numbered chapters of the novel. Like all characters in the novel, the Dreamreader is not named and is physically described in only the vaguest terms. He is probably in his mid thirties and apparently fairly average in most physical details, though in the dreamy reality in which the Dreamreader lives such concepts are highly subjective. In the opening sequences of the novel the Dreamreader enters a town called End of the World and makes the acquaintance of a man named the Gatekeeper. The Gatekeeper uses a knife to slice the Dreamreader's shadow from his feet, and takes the shadow away to a special location for keeping. The Gatekeeper then uses a knife to slice open the eyes of the Dreamreader. This damage, quickly healed, allows the Dreamreader to read 'old dreams' but also makes him highly sensitive to bright lights—exposure to a sunny day causes the Dreamreader to suffer in pain for several days thereafter, for example.

The Dreamreader finds an abode with several other inhabitants of the town and begins his daily chore of reading old dreams. Old dreams are stored in desiccated unicorn skulls and emerge as random and fragmentary visions when the Dreamreader concentrates on the skull. The old dreams are housed at the town's library and cared for by the Librarian. Over the course of the novel the Dreamreader falls in love with the Librarian. Unfortunately, she has no consciousness of her own and functions as a mere automaton and is thus unable to return his love. Although she offers him the comfort of sexual intercourse, he declines, hoping instead to somehow recover fragments of her consciousness from the vast stores of old dreams.

When the Dreamreader's shadow devises a plan to escape the bizarre town the Dreamreader helps the shadow make good an escape but remains behind in the town. He has come to realize that the town is his own subconscious creation—in fact, it is an edited alter reality implanted in the Narrator's mind and the Dreamreader can be thought of as a portion of the Narrator's personality or consciousness. The Dreamreader thus is tied to two other characters presented in the novel, namely the Narrator and the shadow (in fact, the three characters can be viewed as different aspects of essentially the same character).

The Shadow

The shadow is the unnamed shadow and also secondary protagonist in the even-numbered chapters of the novel. Like all characters in the novel, the shadow is not named and is physically described in only the vaguest terms. The shadow is originally the literal shadow of the Dreamreader. When the Dreamreader enters the town named End of the World the town's Gatekeeper informs him that shadows are not allowed in



the town. The Gatekeeper then uses a sharp knife to pry the shadow from the ground and slice it away from the Dreamreader. Thereafter the shadow leads a separate existence from the Dreamreader although the two characters recognize each other as parts of a complete whole.

Contrary to first impressions, the shadow is not merely a shadow in the conventional sense. He is a fully realized character with physicality. The Dreamreader describes him at one point as looking haggard and unshaved. The shadow apparently cannot survive indefinitely without the Dreamreader, and even as the Dreamreader becomes more and more engaged in the town's daily life so the shadow gradually weakens and grows ill. The shadow is not permitted in the town and instead spends his nights in small enclosure known as the shadow grounds and spends his days on the borders of the town performing physical work alongside the Gatekeeper. When the shadow grows too ill to work effectively, the Gatekeeper locks him into a tiny underground cell and waits for his inevitable demise.

The shadow retains his own independent mind and consciousness, unlike the Dreamreader. The shadow therefore remembers their prior life and contrasts the present in very unfavorable terms. The shadow spends a large amount of time pondering the metaphysics of self and consciousness and determines that existence in the town, though not tinged by sorrow, is also void of happiness and meaning. The shadow slowly develops an escape plan and enlists the Dreamreader to assist in its execution. At the conclusion of the novel the Dreamreader helps the shadow escape but declines to accompany him on the final leg of the voyage. It is highly probable that the shadow does not escape without the Dreamreader but simply ceases to exist.

The Professor (Or "Grandfather" and "The Older Man")

The Professor is an unnamed scientist and the primary antagonist in the novel. Like all characters in the novel, the Professor is not named and is physically described in only the vaguest terms. He is probably in his late sixties and apparently physically average in most respects aside from retaining an unusual spryness despite his age. He talks in a strange 'country' manner, using many contractions and idioms and frequently bursting into loud laughter at seemingly inappropriate times. From his manner of speech, one would assume he is either uneducated or foreign or both. He is clearly a genius, however, and has the ability to rapidly develop complex technologies and quickly analyze situations. The Professor pursues a wide range of experimental research, including sound cancellation, bone structure analyses, consciousness mapping and editing, and encryption technologies.

The Professor is iconoclastic and resists authority. Even so, he worked for several years as the chief researcher for the System where he developed advanced encryption techniques. Some of the Professor's experiments involved mapping and editing the consciousnesses of several System operatives known as Calcutecs. The edited consciousnesses were then implanted into the operatives' subconscious minds. This



experiment proved to be a costly failure because twenty-five of the twenty-six experimental subjects died within about eighteen months. None of the subjects were aware they were receiving experimental surgeries.

After this fiasco and moral failure, the Professor left the System to pursue private research. These events are described in the novel but take place before the beginning of the novel's primary timeline. Unable to resist further experimentation, however, he uses a ruse to gain the unwilling cooperation of the sole survivor from his prior experiment—the Narrator of the novel. Demonstrating a profound lack of morality, the Professor surreptitiously involves the Narrator in yet another experiment which ultimately leads to the death of the narrator. Faced with ever-increasing problems due to his involvement with the System the Professor responds by gamely apologizing to the Narrator for causing his impending and unavoidable death, and then flees the country.

The Professor spends an inordinate amount of time trying to justify his horrific actions but ultimately can only claim to have been carried away by the visions offered by science. He unfortunately has so little regard for human life that he sees his subjects as objects to be investigated and controlled rather than as individuals. He even subjects his own granddaughter to experimental manipulation though not on the pervasive scale he has used on others.

The Chubby Girl (Or "The Girl in Pink")

The Chubby Girl is the unnamed granddaughter of the Professor and is a secondary antagonist in the novel. Like all characters in the novel, the Chubby Girl is not named and is physically described in only vague terms—though of all the characters she perhaps enjoys the most complete description. She is seventeen years old and overweight. She always dresses entirely in pink, from her underwear to her boots and clothing, and she usually wears full-length nylons. Though overweight, the Chubby Girl seems to possess a superior athleticism and is clearly highly intelligent. The Narrator finds her chubbiness to be sexually alluring and in several scenes in the novel sneakily peers up her skirt or openly ogles her nude body.

In addition, the Chubby Girl, a self-professed inexperienced virgin, seems unusually frank about sexual desire and practices, and openly propositions the Narrator on numerous occasions. For example, she wanders his apartment nude after bathing, even refusing to dress when he requests it, and on one occasion she engages him in a discussion about oral sex, openly questioning him on whether he finds semen-swallowing to be erotic. Nevertheless, the Narrator does not engage in any sexual activity with the Chubby Girl, noting their disparate ages and the fact that he likes to keep business (she is his employer) and pleasure separate.

The Chubby Girl works as the administrative assistant for her grandfather the Professor. She claims to be fabulously wealthy and was orphaned at an early age. She did not attend school but is highly educated through self-study directed by her grandfather. She views her grandfather with awe and reverence and is his principle apologist despite his



extensive amoral experimentation upon uninformed humans. Although she does not understand all of the particulars of her grandfather's experiments, she is fully cognizant of the fact that they frequently result in the death of the subjects and nevertheless continues to assist him. When the Professor flees the country, the Chubby Girl elects to remain behind. Strangely, she decides to move into the Narrator's abandoned and wrecked apartment after fixing it up. In this way, she physically displaces the Narrator after his death.

The Gatekeeper

The Gatekeeper is the unnamed attendant of the only functional gate in the impenetrable wall surrounding the town known as End of the World. Like all of the characters in the novel, the Gatekeeper is referred to only by his title and is physically described only in vague terms. He is noted as being physically dominating—by far the strongest individual in the entire town. The Gatekeeper always stays near the town's gate and appears to have nearly demigod-like powers in that he knows everything that happens within the town, enforces town rules at will, and is the only resident able to leave the town—though he rarely does and only then does not go much beyond the town's wall.

The Gatekeeper has numerous responsibilities. Aside from tending the gate, he manages the town's herd of unicorns, sending them on their daily migrations in and out of town. He also severs shadows from people entering the town, and guards the shadows as they weaken until they die. As the gaoler of the shadows, he determines whether they can speak to their former owners and, if so, for how long. He also slices open the eyes of the Dreamreader—effectively converting him into the Dreamreader—and presumably also determines the roles other town inhabitants are to assume. He owns an impressive array of tools, including many edged knives and axes, and spends much time sharpening and cataloguing them. In addition, he is responsible for securing the corpses of dead unicorns, extracting their skulls, and burning their remains.

The Gatekeeper can perhaps best be viewed as a force of nature. He is cruel and a tyrant but is primarily focused on performing his role. He tirelessly works and provides an apparently invaluable range of services to the town.

The Caretaker

The Caretaker is the unnamed attendant of the power center of the town known as End of the World. Like all of the characters in the novel, the Caretaker is referred to only by his title and is only vaguely described. He is not a large man and is nearly entirely self-sufficient. He is noted as being very soft-spoken and the Narrator describes him as the complete anti-thesis of the Gatekeeper. His function in the town is to maintain and operate the large wind-turbine plant which is driven by a wind which erupts vertically through the ground apparently on a routine schedule of once every three days, much like a geyser of air.



The Librarian notes that the Caretaker was improperly or incompletely detached from his shadow and thus retains a fragmentary portion of his own mind or consciousness. As such, the Caretaker is vastly different from other town folk who regard him with suspicion. He is thus ostracized and spends his life far from town in the seclusion of the power center which is surrounded by the woods. The Caretaker has an apparent aesthetic affinity for the shapes of musical instruments. Although he does not know how to play them, or even what they are for, he maintains an extensive collection of instruments.

The Librarian ("the Librarian")

The Librarian (capital L) is the librarian of the town known as End of the World. Like all of the characters in the novel, the Librarian is referred to only by her title and is only vaguely described physically. The Dreamreader finds her young and beautiful and notes she has long hair and lissome arms and fingers. The Librarian entered the town as a child of four, along with her mother. The Librarian's shadow was separated by the Gatekeeper and died, but her mother's shadow was not well-separated. Eventually, her mother was ostracized by the town folk, and she began to wander the woods where, presumably, she remains.

The Librarian serves as a guide to the Dreamreader and instructs him on the methodology used to read old dreams. She cares for the unicorn skulls that store the old dreams in her library—which does not contain any books. She lives by herself in a quiet section of town. The Dreamreader slowly falls in love with the Librarian although she is unable to reciprocate his feelings. She has lost her shadow and with it her mind and consciousness and is little more than an automaton—a fact of which she is aware but not particularly troubled. She offers to engage the Dreamreader in physical sex in an attempt to assuage his desire, but he declines. The Librarian is the principle confidant of the Dreamreader and proves worthy of his trust throughout the novel. Although sympathetic the Librarian is not particularly developed as a character. The Librarian is closely tied to the other librarian. In fact, the two characters can be viewed as different aspects of essentially the same character).

The Other Librarian ("the librarian")

The librarian (lower-case l) is the librarian of a local Tokyo library and is a secondary protagonist in the novel. Like all of the characters in the novel the librarian is not named and is described only in vague physical terms. The Narrator finds her physically and emotionally attractive and notes that she is very thin and lithe. He often comments on the lovely shape of her small breasts and approvingly notices her legs and thighs. She is thus the most sexualized character in the novel.

The librarian claims to suffer from a physical condition known as 'gastric dilation,' which causes her to be perpetually hungry. Apparently, the condition prevents her from gaining weight, however. She admits to spending nearly all of her income on food and yet is



skinny. Throughout the narrative she eats two meals with the Narrator and both of them are orgies of ingestion. She attempts to have sexual intercourse with the Narrator on two occasions; the first time he is impotent but on the second occasion they practice sexual intercourse several times over the course of an evening.

The librarian is a widow. Her husband was murdered in a bizarre scene on a subway; after complaining about the behavior of a ruffian, he was struck on the head by the ruffian who wielded an iron vase as a weapon. Aside from her apparent physical beauty, the librarian is highly educated, dresses in flattering clothes, and knows—as would be expected—an inordinately large amount of trivia regarding wines, foods, and restaurants. Although she obviously enjoys the Narrator's company she does not overly object, when he informs her that he is 'going away' and will probably not return.

The librarian is very kind to the Narrator on several occasions. For example, she assists him find texts in the library and event delivers them to his apartment. When she finds his apartment wrecked on one occasion she spends a considerable amount of time and effort cleaning it up, salvaging what she can and discarding the remainder. In general, the librarian is the most sympathetic and likable character in the novel and receives a fair amount of textual development. Her conceptualization within the Narrator's consciousness is realized as the Librarian character described above. Additionally, the librarian is easily contrasted with the Chubby Girl whose coarse and obvious sexuality defines her while the librarian's subtle sexuality and kindness define her as a mature and capable woman. The librarian is closely tied to the Librarian (in fact, the two characters can be viewed as different aspects of essentially the same character).

The Colonel

The Colonel is the *de facto* leader of a group of retired military men with whom the Dreamreader lives in the town known as End of the World. The Colonel has seen much military action and finds the memory of such interesting if not exhilarating. The Colonel is described only as an older, very proper gentleman with a very European manner and polite bearing. He is the self-appointed mentor and steward of the Dreamreader and attempts to guide him into successful integration with the town. The Colonel appears well-informed though completely subjected to the moods and values of the town. He is a master of a local variety of a game similar to chess and enjoys teaching the game to the Dreamreader. The Colonel frequently cautions the Dreamreader about his activities and exhorts him to be physically careful and morally responsible in his journeys about the town. In essence, the Colonel watches out for the physical needs of the Dreamreader, while the Librarian engages his emotional needs.

Junior and Big Boy

The Narrator refers to two thugs, one small and intelligent, the other large and violent, as Junior and Big Boy, respectively. They operate as a team and always appear together within the narrative. Junior does all of the thinking and most of the talking,



while Big Boy carries out orders and acts as a type of enforcer. The pair is a comic duo highly reminiscent of stereotyped so-called Mafia men. They claim to be operating independently, walking the fine line between the System and the Factory. At first the Narrator assumes they must be independents but later he determines they are probably Semiotecs working for the Factory. Their actual allegiance is never determined within the narrative. Junior speaks with a bizarre patois of proper dialect and street creole and makes vague threats and suggestions which seemingly contradict each other from time to time. Big Boy generally threatens people and physically wrecks things. Although they are an interesting pair of characters they are not well-developed and serve primarily as a plot device within the novel.



Objects/Places

Calcutechnician ("Calcutec")

A Calcutechnician, or Calcutec, is a person who operates as a sort of biological encryption device. Becoming a Calcutec involves some classified surgical procedures and results in a speculative lifespan of from ten to twenty future years. During the process, the Calcutec's brain is somehow separated into two connected halves. Unencrypted information can be fed into one half of the brain and then transferred to the other half whereupon it can be written down in an encrypted form. Since the unique structure of the Calcutec's brain acts as the encryption key, the encryption is incredibly resistant to cryptographic attack. All Calcutecs are licensed by The System, which rigorously controls their work processes and contacts. The Narrator is a Calcutec.

Laundering, Single-Conversion Trap, Double-Conversion Trap, and Shuffling

Laundering, Single-Conversion Trap, Double-Conversion Trap, and Shuffling are mechanisms used by Calcutecs to encrypt sensitive data. Laundering involves passing unencrypted data through a Calcutec's mind. Shuffling is an unconscious process, usually applied to data already encrypted by a laundering process. Shuffling has been officially forbidden by The System; however, it results in a very secure encryption. Nevertheless, when the price is right The System apparently is willing to authorize Shuffling. Each Calcutec has an implanted 'drama' with a title; the title allows indirect access to the drama, and the drama performs the shuffling beyond the conscious control of the Calcutec. Single-Conversion Traps and Double-Conversion Traps are discussed within the text but are not described.

Semiotechnician ("Semiotec")

A Semiotechnician, or Semiotec, is a person who works for The Factory. They are usually hackers and information thieves and peddlers; in addition some of them are able to process data encrypted by a Calcutec in a reverse fashion and reconstruct partially unencrypted text. Semiotecs are often former Calcutecs who have been rejected by The System for some infraction of the rules.

The System

The System, an extensive quasi-governmental organization, licenses Calcutecs and serves as the single location for legal Calcutec work. The System operates as an informally organized but highly regulated umbrella association of Calcutecs. Although



they operate essentially as independent contractors, they are expressly forbidden from obtaining work on their own—The System officially handles all encryption jobs.

The Factory ("Data Mafia")

The Factory, or informally the Data Mafia, is a shady organization that employs people known as Semitechnicians, or Semiotecs. The Factory engages in wholesale hacking and information theft and peddling. Their activities are nearly always illegal in some way, and they operate in a shadowy borderland between outright criminal activity and legitimate business.

INKlings

INKlings, apparently a shortened form of Infra-Nocturnal *kappas*, are claimed to be non-human intelligent humanoids that live in subterranean caverns and dominate the sewers and subways of Tokyo. The Chubby Girl suggests that INKlings are always about, threatening violence and disorder and that they love to kidnap and eat humans. INKlings never appear in the text, though the Narrator appears to hear noises made by INKlings in one scene—however, the Narrator also experiences some hallucinations as his consciousness degrades and it is thus not certain whether INKlings are real or simply imaginary beings invoked by various characters to instill fear and, therefore, compliance. It is worth noting that in Japanese folklore a *kappa* is a river imp or water deity, often portrayed as a monkey-like or frog-like humanoid roughly the size of a small child.

Paperclips

The Narrator has a strange and inexplicable fascination with paperclips; numerous scenes contain references to paperclips and the Narrator usually carries one or several in his pocket. The Professor uses paperclips in chapter 20 to mark his trail and, in chapter 25 the Professor explains that paperclips are apparently repulsive to INKlings who will not approach them. Although paperclips appear throughout the narrative their particular significance is not resolved. Thus, like many other objects which catch the Narrator's attention, paperclips can be viewed as symbolic of his deteriorating mental state.

Chess (But Not Chess)

The Dreamreader is introduced to a game called chess by the Colonel, and the two characters often play as opponents. The Colonel is an apparent master of the game. The game is described as similar to normal chess but with substantive differences. The enumerated pieces include High Priest, King, Horns, Ape, Wall, and Knights. The significance of the various pieces or their board configuration is not described.



The Narrator's Apartment

More than any other physical location in the novel, the Narrator's apartment serves as the setting for the odd-numbered chapters. The apartment is described as a multi-room suite on an upper floor of an apparently typical Tokyo tenement building. It is fairly cluttered with expensive items, including a large video system, many bottles of imported whiskey, many Western novels, and Western music scores. The Narrator usually has a well-stocked fridge and has a closet full of expensive and tasteful clothing. During the course of the novel, all of these belongings are meticulously destroyed by Big Boy while Junior engages the Narrator in banal banter. The wrecked apartment is cleaned up by the librarian. At the conclusion of the novel the Chubby Girl takes possession of the apartment and plans to have it repaired and refurbished so that it may act as her new abode.

End of the World

End of the World is the name of a town, usually given in the novel as Town (capital T). The town is well-described and is even visually depicted in a map offered as the novel's frontispiece. This map is, presumably, the map created by the Dreamreader and delivered to his shadow under the sole of a boot carried by the Colonel. The town houses numerous inhabitants and is surrounded by an insurmountable wall made of bricks which are finely fit together without mortar. The town derives its power from a power station which uses a huge wind turbine. The town has only a single gate which is managed by the Gatekeeper. The town is bisected by a river which pools up at the southern wall and is drained via a giant whirlpool. The inhabitants of the town openly admit that nobody can leave and refer to the town with a strange mix of pride and derision as the End of the World. The town is the principle—indeed the only—setting for the even-numbered chapters of the novel.

Themes

The Nature of Consciousness

The dominant theme of the novel deals with an investigation into the nature of consciousness. Indeed, the novel's two narrative threads are constructed entirely around the theme. The odd-numbered chapters detail the experiences of the Narrator as he lives out the last several days of his life. The even-numbered chapters detail the experiences through the altered perception of the Dreamreader. It is interesting to note how many elements in the two narrative threads occur more-or-less simultaneously. For example, as the Narrator sings a particular song in Tokyo, the Dreamreader is suddenly able to recall the note sequence of a song—the two songs are of course the same melody. While the Narrator feeds birds in a Tokyo part, the Dreamreader watches birds in the woods. Additionally, as the Narrator sits in a rented car on the Tokyo waterfront and slips into the sleep of death, the Dreamreader accompanies his shadow—the symbol of his mind and consciousness—to the edge of a whirlpool and watches the shadow be whisked away to parts unknown. Even characters are shared between the two states of consciousness—the Narrator is represented by the Dreamreader and the Tokyo librarian is represented by the Librarian. Finally, one physical event actually transcribes consciousnesses. As the Dreamreader plays music to the library of unicorn skulls which emit a faint light, the crafted unicorn skull in the Librarian's Tokyo apartment also glows.

Beyond the narrative threads which examine the nature of consciousness, the Professor and the Narrator hold an extensive discussion on the metaphysics of consciousness. Throughout the novel the Professor, and to a lesser extent the Chubby Girl, scientifically study consciousness. The Professor has even developed methodologies to map consciousness and present it visually as a sort of movie which can be edited inside of a computer. He has further developed methods to seat multiple consciousnesses inside of a single mind, and control which consciousness is expressed by using coded stimuli. All of this additional narrative development focuses on the novel's dominant theme of exploring the nature of consciousness.

The Morality of Science

The fundamental plot of the novel involves scientific experimentation on the mind—the very consciousness—of uninformed and involuntary human subjects. The Professor admits to having experimented upon twenty-six individuals and hints at experimentation on others. All twenty-six persons died as a result of the experimentation—twenty-five within about eighteen months and the twenty-sixth several years after the experiments. The Profession appears to be somewhat remorseful of the results, but denies ultimate personal culpability. He contrasts himself to Nazi medical experimenters, claiming that he is not like them; in fact, he is indistinguishable from them except in political viewpoint. Supported by the complicit quasi-governmental System the Professor



performed extensive experiments for the purposes of commercial gain. He simultaneously performed surreptitious experimentation on at least some subjects for the purposes of his own scientific curiosity.

Although the Professor is obviously highly skilled in the sciences and presents himself as a likable person, he is completely amoral and his tactics are entirely unethical. The Professor's own dependent granddaughter, The Chubby Girl, is his chief apologist and constantly attempts to explain and justify his investigations, all the time knowing that they have proven lethal on many occasions. She is, in fact, herself a subject of some of his less-dangerous experiments. The morality of science is thus a pervasive theme throughout the novel. It is supported by additional minor themes such as the extensive recounting of the history of the investigation of a putative unicorn skull that is related by the librarian. Strangely, the Narrator who is the character most influenced by the Professor's amoral experimentations does not appear to be overtly angered by them. He accepts the Professor's 'sincere apology' for causing his impending death at face value and thereafter simply turns to the minutia of life and seeks to have good experiences with his few remaining hours.

Sexual Desire

Nearly every character in the novel expresses sexual desire in various ways. The theme of sexual desire is pervasive throughout the novel and is subtly woven into the discourse of the nature of consciousness. The most overtly sexual character in the narrative is the Chubby Girl. She blatantly and repeatedly propositions the Narrator, claiming her own sexual innocence and virginity, but expressing an endless fascination with all things sexual. She asks him what manners of dress he finds sexy, what motions of body he finds sexy, and what types of behaviors he finds sexually stimulating. When she visits his apartment she showers and then walks around nude, refusing to dress even when he requests it; she later sleeps nude on his bed. On another occasion she climbs into bed with him and makes suggestive statements. She asks him about his penis size and sexual prowess. Finally, she engages him on the topic of semen-swallowing and inquires whether he finds it sexually exciting and further probes for details. Strangely, the Professor, the Chubby Girl's grandfather, bluntly suggests at one point that she would make a suitable sexual partner for the Narrator. Although he finds her sexually interesting, the narrator refrains from pursuing the Chubby Girl sexually largely because of their disparate ages. Instead, he usually hires prostitutes or engages in anonymous sexual encounters. During the narrative, he meets a librarian and pursues her sexually. His activities are prevented on one occasion by impotence but on another and final engagement they successfully have repeated sexual intercourse.

The Narrator's descriptions of other characters are nearly universally sexual, though subtly so—when describing males he notes only the vaguest of physical details but when describing the few female characters he lingers on their sexual attributes, describing thighs, breasts, and facial beauty in more detail. Further, the two principle female characters are both presented in the narrative nude and ogled by the Narrator. Even the physical violence perpetrated on the Narrator has a sexual overtone. While



Big Boy, itself a comically sexual name, pinions the Narrator's arms and legs in a submissive posture Junior strips off his clothes and firmly holds the Narrator's penis while using a knife—a symbolic phallus itself—to ceremonially castrate the Narrator, leaving him with a six-centimeter pink gash across his abdomen—yet another sexual symbol.

Within the secondary narrative structure sexuality is at once more subdued but equally present. The End of the World is a town created from the Narrator's subconscious mind and edited by the Professor. Most of the town's sexual desire is therefore focused on the nature of the relationship between the Dreamreader and the Librarian. The Dreamreader focuses on her physicality in much the same way that the Narrator focuses on his own librarian's body; he finds her immediately and intimately attractive and desires her. She, however, is an automaton and therefore 'realizes' that she is unable to reciprocate feelings of love or even express desire. Instead, she offers sexual union as a coarse substitute. In the end his desire for the Librarian leads the Dreamreader to abandon possible escape from the town in favor of an infinity attempting to pursue self-realization for the Librarian in order that she may reciprocate his desire. It's an interesting, though probably futile, attempt.



Style

Point of View

The novel is related from the first-person, limited, point-of-view by two distinct narrators who each develop a related but distinct narrative subtext. The principle timelines of the two narrative subtexts are roughly equivalent and span a period of several days. Events in the two narrative structures occur generally contemporaneously with each other and the two principle narrators—the Narrator and the Dreamreader—are in fact two aspects of a single individual's consciousness. This has a curious effect on the narrative structure in that the second narrative development, presented in the even-numbered chapters, details the experiences of a narrator who is in fact omniscient because he is the actual creator of the entire setting; however, the act of creation was subconscious and the narrator therefore erroneously perceives himself as possessed of limited vision.

The point of view utilized is highly appropriate to the novel and is required for narrative success. The narrators are presented in favorable and sympathetic terms and their internal confusion and doubt allow the narrative to retain an aura of mystery and uncertainty which continues through the conclusion. This off-base feeling is vital to the tone of the novel and assists notably in retaining tension throughout the novel's fairly slow-paced plot resolution. For example, the Narrator's focus on the minutia of daily life and the boring process of killing time before a date would be impossibly tedious and completely unbelievable if related from a third-person perspective.

Setting

The novel features two principle settings of a future Tokyo and a dreamy town surrounded by a wall which cannot be climbed. The Tokyo presented is extremely generic and, aside from a few details of food or shopping layouts could equally represent any modern, urban center where population densities are high and individuals are routinely anonymous throughout their day. Tokyo is dominated by two rival organizations. One is the System, a legitimate and quasi-governmental company specializing in information security. The other is the Factory, a highly organized crime syndicate specializing in stealing from the System. Most common individuals don't participate in either system, but the Narrator is an operative of the System and other characters presented have various types of relationships with one or the other of the organizations. The setting is generic enough that it is largely unimportant; the fact that the Narrator lives in Tokyo contributes only minimally to the texture of the novel.

The second principle setting is a bizarre town called End of the World. It is surrounded by a high wall which cannot be climbed or penetrated. The walled enclosure includes not only the town proper, but also an extensive wooded area. It is also divided by a river which winds through the town and is spanned by bridges. Town inhabitants are emotionless automatons who have sacrificed their minds and consciousnesses to live



an immortal life devoid of pain and suffering. The town is dominated by unusual customs and social mores which are tacitly enforced by all of the inhabitants. Individuals who refuse to ultimately comply are ostracized and driven into the woods. In fact, the town is an altered state of consciousness of the Narrator which has been recorded and re-crafted by the Professor and, as such, bears only minimal scrutiny from a physics point-of-view. Instead, the town is best understood as a conceptualization of a place simply as it exists in the mind of the beholder which, in fact, it is.

Language and Meaning

The novel has been translated from the original Japanese into the English-language edition considered in this summary. The novel was translated by Alfred Birnbaum who has translated other works by the author. The language of the novel is simple but rich and is simultaneously engaging and enjoyable. Sentences are usually short, though often choppy, and most words used are simple and commonly encountered. There are notable exceptions dealing with food. The dialogue presented is believable and aids enormously in characterization—many characters speak in distinct dialects and all of the principle characters have a unique voice and manner of speech.

It is worth noting that the language used is infrequently offensive and may be deemed inappropriate for some audiences. One discussion, in particular, focuses on a newspaper article detailing the supposed benefits to one's complexion which can be achieved by swallowing the semen of sexual partners.

Meaning within the novel is derived from a complex interplay between two narrative threads. As the narrative provides no objective yardstick by which to measure meaning, the reader is left to subjectively extract meaning from subtle narrative construction and interplay. This can be frustrating at times but is the source of the novel's singularly compelling texture and forms one of the most memorable and enjoyable aspects of an attentive reading and detailed consideration of the novel.

Structure

The 400-page novel is divided into forty enumerated and named chapters. The novel presents two narratives which develop more-or-less simultaneously and are presented in alternating chapters. Thus, the twenty odd-numbered chapters form an independent and cohesive narrative and, likewise, the twenty even-numbered chapters form a second independent and cohesive narrative. The novel's complex structure requires the two narratives be interleaved and developed simultaneously to construct a framework from which meaning can be derived. Read singly, either narrative might be interesting or lyrical but neither would be particularly complete or even intelligible. The odd-numbered chapters are all page-entitled 'HARD-BOILED WONDERLAND' while the even-numbered chapters are all page-entitled 'END OF THE WORLD'; thus the novel's entire title of 'HARD-BOILED WONDERLAND AND THE END OF THE WORLD' is accurate and provides a risible play on words about the novel's unique structure.



Chapters are developed in largely conventional ways, and the novels' chronology is straightforward and easily accessible. Paragraphing and sentence construction are all typical and offer no particular obstructions to understanding the novel. Characterization is light and often frustratingly vague. For example, no characters are named—instead they are referred to by various physical or behavioral traits such as 'the chubby girl' or 'the librarian'. Similarly, the setting and sense of place are often frustratingly vague and incomplete. This does, however, allow the novel to easily transcend cultures and in essence the novel can be successfully read as a Western novel because of this structural component.



Quotes

"It was a long, hard job. The numerics themselves were the proverbial piece of cake, but with so many case-determinant step-functions, the tabulations took much more doing than they first appeared to require. I input the data-as-given into my right brain, then after converting it via a totally unrelated sign-pattern, I transfer it to my left brain, which I then output as completely recoded numbers and type up on paper. This is what is called laundering. Grossly simplified, of course. The conversion code varies with the Calcutec. This code differs entirely from a random number table in its being diagrammatic. In other words, the way in which right brain and left brain are split (which, needless to say, is a convenient fiction; left and right are never actually divided) holds the key." (Chapter 3, p. 32)

"Have I met you somewhere before?"

"She stares at me and searches her memory, but in the end shakes her head. 'As you may know, in this Town, memory is unreliable and uncertain. There are things we can remember and things we cannot remember. You seem to be among the things I cannot. Please forgive me.'

"Of course,' I say. 'It was not important.'

"Perhaps we have met before. This is a small town.'

"I arrived only a few days ago.'

"How many days ago?' she asks, surprised. 'Then you must be thinking of someone else. I have never been out of this Town. Might it have been someone who looks like me?'

"I suppose,' I say. 'Still, I have the impression that elsewhere we may all have lived totally other lives, and that somehow we have forgotten that time. Have you ever felt that way?'

"No,' she says. 'Perhaps it is because you are a Dreamreader. The Dreamreader thinks very differently from ordinary people.'

"I cannot believe her.

"Or do you now where this was?'

"I wish I could remember,' I say. 'There was a place, and you were there.'" (Chapter 4, p. 42)

"I didn't like option no. 1. There'd be pointless debriefings and investigations. Huge organizations and me don't get along. They're too inflexible, waste too much time, have too many stupid people.



"Option no. 2, however, was impossible. I didn't know how to go about contacting the Chubby Girl. I didn't have her phone number. Of course, I could have gone to the building, but leaving my own apartment now was dangerous. And how was I going to talk my way into that top-security building?"

"I made up my mind: I would do nothing." (Chapter 7, p. 79)

"The scientists at the System had induced this drama. I had undergone a full year of Calcutec training. After I passed the final exam, they put me on ice for two weeks to conduct comprehensive tests on my brainwaves, from which was extracted the epicenter of my encephalographic activity, the 'core' of my consciousness. The patterns were transcoded into my shuffling password, then re-input into my brain—this time in reverse. I was informed that End of the World was the title, which was to be my shuffling password. Thus was my conscious mind completely restructured. First there was the overall chaos of my conscious mind, then inside that, a distinct plum pit of condensed chaos as the center.

"They refused to reveal any more than this." (Chapter 11, p. 113)

"She sits me in front of the stove and places her hand on my forehead. Her hand is as ice. My reflex is to push it away, but I cannot raise my hand. For when I do, I feel a sudden nausea.

"'You are fevered,' she says. 'Where on earth have you gone?'

"I find it impossible to answer. I am without words. I cannot even comprehend what it is she asks.

"She brings several blankets and wraps me in them. I lie by the stove. Her hair touches my cheek. I do not want her to go away. I cannot tell if the thought is mine or if it has floated loose from some fragment of memory. I have lost so many things. I am so tired. I feel myself drifting, away, a little by little. I am overcome by the sensation that I am crumbling, parts of my being drifting away. Which part of me is thinking this?"

"She holds my hand.

"'Sleep well,' I hear her say, from beyond a dark distance." (Chapter 14, pp. 150-151)

"I'd read *Rudin* before, but that was fifteen years ago in university. Rereading it now, lying all bandaged up, sipping my whiskey in bed in the afternoon, I felt new sympathy for the protagonist Rudin. I almost never identify with anybody in Dostoyevsky, but the characters in Turgenev's old-fashioned novels are such victims of circumstance, I jump right in. I have a thing about losers. Flaws in oneself open you up to others with flaws. Not that Dostoyevsky's characters don't generate pathos, but they're flawed in ways that don't come across as faults. And while I'm on the subject, Tolstoy's characters' faults are so epic and out of scale, they're as static as backdrops." (Chapter 15, p. 163)



"The aged Devil sat on a rock by the side of a Finnish country road. The Devil was ten thousand, maybe twenty thousand years old, and very tired. He was covered in dust. His whiskers were wilting. *Whither be ye gang in sich 'aste?* the Devil called out to a Farmer. *Done broke me ploughshare and must to fixe it,* the Farmer replied. *Not to hurrie,* said the Devil, *the sunne still playes o'erhead on highe, wherefore be ye scurrying? Sit ye down and 'eare m' tale.* The Farmer knew no good could come of passing time with the Devil, but seeming his so utterly haggard, the Farmer—" (Chapter 21, p. 217)

"Until this moment the memory, it seemed, had been sealed off from the sludge of my consciousness by an intervening force.

"An intervening force?

"Or an operation, like the one done on my brain to give me shuffling faculty. They had shoved memories out of my conscious awareness. They had stolen my memories from me!

"Nobody had that right. Nobody! My memories *belonged* to me. Stealing memories was stealing time. I got so mad, I lost all fear. I didn't care what happened. *I want to live!* I told myself. I *will* live. I will get out of this insane netherworld and get my stolen memories back and live. Forget the end of the world, I was ready to reclaim my whole self." (Chapter 23, p. 239)

"'But there is no escape from here,' I say. 'You looked over the map, didn't you? There is no exit. This is the End of the World.'

"'It may be the End of the World, but it has to have a way out. I know that for certain. Look at the sky. Where do those birds go when they fly over the Wall? To another world. If there was nothing out there, why surround the place with a Wall? It has to let out somewhere.'

"'Or maybe—'

"'Leave it to me, I'll find it,' he cuts me short. 'We'll get out of here. I don't want to die in this miserable hold.'

"He digs his heel into the ground again. 'I repeat what I said at the very beginning: this place is wrong. I know it. More than ever. The problem is, the Town is *perfectly* wrong. Every last thing is skewed, so that the total distortion is seamless. It's a whole. Like this —'

"My shadow draws a circle on the ground with his boot.

"'The Town is sealed,' he states, 'like this. That's why the longer you stay in here, the more you get to thinking that things are normal. You begin to doubt your judgement. You get what I'm saying?'



"Yes, I've felt that myself. I get so confused. Sometimes it seems I'm the cause of a lot of trouble."

"It's not that way at all," says my shadow, scratching a meandering pattern next to the circle. "We're the ones who are right. They're the ones who are wrong, absolutely. You have to believe that, while you still have the strength to believe. Or else the Town will swallow you, mind and all."

"But how can we be absolutely right? What could their being absolutely wrong mean? And without memory to measure things against, how could I ever know?"

"My shadow shakes his head. 'Look at it this way. The Town seems to contain everything it needs to sustain itself in perpetual peace and security. The order of things remains perfectly constant, no matter what happens. But a world of perpetual motion is theoretically impossible. There has to be a trick. The system must take in and let out somewhere.'" (Chapter 24, pp. 247-248)

"It's your core consciousness. The vision displayed in your consciousness is the End of the World. Why you have the likes of that tucked away in there, I can't say. But for whatever reason, it's there. Meanwhile, this world in your mind here is coming to an end. Or t'put it another way, your mind will be living there, in the place called the End of the World."

"Everythin' that's in this world here and now is missin' from that world. There's no time, no life, no death. No values in any strict sense. No self. In that world of ours, people's selves are externalized into beasts."

"Beasts?"

"Unicorns," said the Professor. "You've got unicorns, herded in a town, surrounded by a wall."

"Does this have something to do with the unicorn skull you gave me?"

"That was a replica. I made it. Pretty realistic, eh? Modelled it after a visualized image of yours. It took quite some doin'. No particular significance to it. Just thought I'd make it up on a phrenological whim, ho ho. My little gift to you." (Chapter 25, p. 270)

"The girl claimed the back pages. Some seedy article which addressed the question "Is Swallowing Semen Good for the Complexion?"

"Do you like having your semen swallowed?" the girl wanted to know.

"It's okay," I answered.

"Listen to what it says here: "The typical man enjoys it when a woman swallows his semen. This is a sign of total obeisance toward the man on the part of the woman. It is at once a ceremony and an affirmation."



"I don't get it,' I said.

"Anyone ever swallow yours?"

"Uh, I can't remember."

"Hmph,' she pouted and dove back into her article. I read the batting averages for the Central and Pacific Leagues." (Chapter 31, p. 323)

"Was that so depressing?"

"Who knows? Maybe that was "despair." What Turgenev called "disillusionment." Or Dostoyevsky, "hell." Or Somerset Maugham, "reality." Whatever the label, I figured it was me." (Chapter 33, p. 342)

"Shall we have some wine' she said.

"Why don't you choose,' I said. While she discussed the selection with the waiter, I gazed out at the plum tree. A plum tree growing in an Italian restaurant seemed somehow incongruous. But perhaps not. Maybe they had plum trees in Italy. Hell, they had otters in France.

"Having settled on an *aperitivo*, we opened our menus. We took our time making our selections. First, for *antipasti*, we chose *insalata di gamberetti alle fragole*, *ostriche al vivo*, *mortadella di fegato*, *sepie al nero*, *melanzane alla parmigiana*, and *wakasagi marinata*. For *primi*, she decided on a *spaghetti al pesto genovese*, and I decided on a *tagliatelle alla casa*.

"How about splitting an extra *maccheroni al sugo di pesce*?' she suggested.

"Sounds good to me,' I said.

"What is the fish of the day?' she turned to ask the waiter.

"Today we have fresh *branzino*—that's *suzuki*,' pronounced the waiter, 'which we steam in *cartoccio* and sprinkle with almonds.'

"I'll have that,' she said.

"Me, too,' I said. 'And for *contorni*, *spinaci and risotto al funghi*.'

"*Verdure cotte and risotto al pomodoro* for me.'

"I think you will find our *risotto* quite filling,' the waiter spoke up, a bit uneasily.

"Maybe so, but I've barely eaten in days, and she's got gastric dilation,' I explained.

"It's a regular black hole,' she confirmed.



"Very well,' said the waiter.

"For dessert, I'll have *granite di uva, crema fredda, suffly al limone*, and *espresso*,' she added before he could get away.

"Why not—me too,' I said.

"After the waiter had at last finished writing down our order, she smiled at me.

"You didn't have to order so much just to keep pace with me, you know.'

"No, I really am famished,' I said. 'It's been ages since I've been this hungry.'

"Great,' she said. 'I never trust people with no appetite. It's like they're always holding something back on you, don't you think?'" (Chapter 35, pp. 356-357)

"I have responsibilities,' I say. 'I cannot forsake the people and places and things I have created. I know I do you a terrible wrong. And yes, perhaps I wrong myself, too. But I must see out the consequences of my own doings. This is *my* world. The Wall is here to hold *me* in, the River flows through *me*, the smoke is *me* burning. I must know why.'

"My shadow rises and stares at the calm surface of the Pool. He stands motionless amid the falling snow. Neither of us says a word. White puffs of breath issue from our mouths.

"I cannot stop you,' admits my shadow. 'Maybe you can't die here, but you will not be living. You will merely exist. There is no "why" in a world that would be perfect in itself. Nor is surviving in the Woods anything like you imagine. You'll be trapped for all eternity.'

"I am not so sure,' I say. 'Nor can you be. A little by little, I will recall things. People and places from our former world, different qualities of light, different songs. And as I remember, I may find the key to my own creation, and to its undoing.'

"No, I doubt it. Not as long as you are sealed inside yourself. Search as you might, you will never know the clarity of distance without me. Still, you can't say I didn't try,' my shadow says, then pauses, 'I loved you.'

"I will not forget you,' I reply." (Chapter 40, p. 399)



Topics for Discussion

Why do you think the author chose to forego naming any of the characters? Does this make the novel difficult to read?

What aspects of the Chubby Girl are viewed as sexually interesting by the Narrator? Given that she bluntly propositions him several times, why do you think he doesn't have sexual intercourse with her? Do you find her provocative behavior offensive or attractive?

Do you think that 'gastric dilation' is a real medical condition?

Imagine that you are the narrator. Would you rather commit suicide or spend a perceptual eternity inside of the walls of the Town?

The Narrator eventually concludes that Junior and Big Boy work for the Factory. Do you agree with the Narrator's deductive reasoning? Or, could the two thugs actually be working independently?

The Professor apologizes to the Narrator for effectively ending his life. The Narrator seems to accept the Professor's apology as sufficient. How would you react if you were informed that your life was about to end because of medical experimentation performed on you without your informed consent?

Why do you think the Narrator was so attracted by Western novels, Western music, Western whiskey, and Western culture? Did this add or detract from the texture of the novel? How do you think this element would function within the narrative if you were reading the original Japanese-language version of the novel?

Would you consider becoming a Calcutec? How about a Semiotec?

The chapters of the novel exhibit two primary naming conventions—describe how the various chapters are named and discuss how the chapter names influence the interpretation of the text. Do you think that otherwise trivial events are given more importance by being noted in the chapter titles?

Do you think the INKlings really existed? Or were they just a fabricated story used to scare the Narrator?

One of the more bizarre narrative developments in the novel occurs when the Chubby Girl takes possession of the Narrator's wrecked apartment and determines that she will refurbish the place and live there herself. Why do you think the affluent Chubby Girl would want to live in a normal Tokyo flat when she could live anywhere in the world? What does this say about her psychological makeup?