

The House of God Study Guide

The House of God by Samuel Shem

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Plot Summary

Roy G. Basch is a new intern in internal medicine at a hospital called the House of God. He begins his internship under the tutelage of the Fat Man, a second year resident who has some crazy ideas as to how to take care of patients. According to the Fat Man, there are two types of patients: the dying young and gomers. Gomers are elderly, demented patients from outside nursing homes who barely qualify as being human and who, the Fat Man says, never die. Only the young are sick enough to die at the House of God.

Roy starts his internship fairly scared. He meets his fellow interns, Potts, Hyper Hooper, Chuck, Eat My Dust Eddy and the Runt—all scared and new to internship and patient care. Roy gets assigned duty with Chuck and Potts under the Fat Man on an internal medicine ward. Each takes turns being on call, and he is third in line the first week. Before being on call, he learns of several of the Fat Man's rules like "Gomers never die" and "Gomers go to ground". He learns about the hierarchy of the House of God—from private doctors down to the lowly intern. He learns about "buffing" charts so they make the patient and the doctor look good and about "turfig" patients—sending them to other places based on trumped up reasons why they should be turfed to another facility or ward. The first three weeks are hard but he learns a lot from the Fat Man and begins to cope.

Three weeks into his internship, the chain of command changes. Roy begins to work under the overzealous Jo, a second year resident who believes in doing as much as possible to everyone. Roy tries to do this and realizes that, just like the Fat Man said, it made many of the gomers worse. This is when he decides to fake everything, do nothing to the gomers and to simply buff the chart saying he did a lot of things he never did. The gomers actually get better, and Roy is given praise by the higher ups. Unfortunately, he's also given the distinction of being able to handle the "toughies" which makes his load a lot greater. His shift changes slightly, and he works with the Runt and Chuck. He admits Saul, the leukemic patient, and brings him into remission. He and his friends develop sexual relationships with the female staff with Roy sleeping not only with his girlfriend but with Molly, the nurse. Potts sleeps with a nurse, and both Roy and the Runt sleep with Social Services staff in order to get better placement for their gomers.

Eventually, he gets transferred to the Emergency Ward, where he learns to Buff and Turf patients and spends his time talking with Gilheeny and Quick, two policemen who hang out there. He works with two surgical residents and meets Abe, the guy who lives in the waiting room of the hospital. He takes care of overdoses, cardiac cases and some surgical cases on an every other night rotation. Abe disappears for awhile and then returns, getting paranoid and out of sorts. Abe eventually ends up in the state hospital. Gilheeny gets shot but survives. Roy survives this rotation.

Roy then ends up with the Fat Man on ward 4 North, considered the worst ward of them all. He deals with death and more gomers that are more difficult to get rid of. Everyone



starts to lose it, and several patients die due to malpractice. Eat My Dust Eddie becomes mentally unbalanced and is taken off the ward. Potts is faced with the death of the Yellow Man, whose sickness he was responsible for. He commits suicide by jumping from an eighth story window of the hospital. Berry is worried about Roy who is seeming increasingly imbalanced. Roy does the unthinkable and purposely kills a patient so he won't suffer.

By April, Roy is transferred to the MICU where most of the patients are on ventilators. He's afraid of dealing with these patients, at first. He meets Pinkus, a cardiologist whose answer to death is to run and have a hobby. Roy is afraid he's going to die when he runs into a patient on the Unit that was one of the Best Medical Students at the hospital. The BMS got a cold and now is in multiple organ failure. The BMS dies, and Roy takes up running as a way to cope with his own possible death.

After dealing with multiple deaths in the Unit, Jo cracks, and Roy is nonplussed. He continues running and watches Pinkus in a marathon. He's transferred out of the unit but doesn't want to go. He's finally manhandled by other interns and his policeman friends and forced to go to a mime show. He finally breaks down and tells Berry everything—including the fact that he killed Saul. With Berry's help, he begins the healing process.

Next, it is time to decide whether or not to go on in medicine and do two years of the residency. Roy doesn't want to and wants to take the year off. The Fats has a colloquium to discuss the various options the interns have, and they all decide on psychiatry. This inflames the higher ups who talk to each intern about their decision. The interns are angry at the higher ups and blame them for Potts death and for not being role models for the interns to look up to.

Potts finally reaches the end of his residency and is much wiser. He says goodbye to the people he cares about and makes the decision to go into psychiatry after taking a year off. He and Berry go on a long vacation to the South of France.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The book starts actually at the end of the book with the main character having finished his internship at the House of God. He's lying with his girlfriend, Berry, reflecting back on his year of internship. The two are vacationing in the South of France. They are enjoying a lunch of artichokes in a garden, reflecting back on the year and on the "gomers"—the elderly, demented patients he had to take care of in the House of God. Everything is reminding him of the gomers. He even sees them at a hospice and feels anxious about it.

He flashes back to a fantasy of a cardiac arrest he'd like to be involved with, involving an erotic scene with a nurse. His fantasy ends with the patient dead and all the staff enjoying sex on the blood-slippery floor.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The main character, Roy Basch, is letting the reader know that he survived but that his mind still isn't right. He can't really enjoy his vacation in the South of France. His memories go back to gomers, cardiac arrests and the people he came into contact with at the House of God—the name of the hospital in which he did his internship. There are a lot of sexual themes as Roy uses sex to cope throughout the book. This chapter also opens the reader up to the way Roy is now thinking, which is in terms of medicalizing everything.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

We now flash back to the beginning of his internship, where he starts at the House of God. He explains how the intern was at the bottom of the medical hierarchy, and how everyone from the private doctors to the housekeeping staff can abuse the intern. He describes the "slurpers" or those who licked the asses of the one above them to try to get ahead. He admits to being scared out of his mind to be an intern at the House of God.

He's in bed with Berry, his girlfriend and talks about how scared he is. She tells him to practice denial.

He's introduced to the House of God, complete with the gradually building "Wing of Zock". He meets Fishberg, also known as the Fish, a Chief Resident, who he describes as a slurper. He also meets the Chief of Medicine, Dr. Leggo. He gets a lecture on the sanctity of life by Leggo and another lecture on hobbies by Pinkus, a staff cardiologist. He meets Dr. Frank, the House Psychiatrist who lectures them on what a strain it is in the internship. Finally, he meets Dr. Pearlstein, "The Pearl", a rich private doctor who gives them another lecture about how tough the internship will be.

He and his fellow interns, Chuck and Eat My Dust Eddy go down and visit their wards, staring at the gomers and wondering how bad it's going to be. He enjoys a drink with Chuck and talks about why they got into medicine in the first place. He finds out he's sharing a rotation with Chuck the next day. In the end, Roy gets a letter from his dad that talks about all there is to learn in medicine. The letter is much more serious than Roy feels at the moment.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Roy is getting acclimated to the shock of what medicine at the House of God is all about. He's starting to get sarcastic and thinks some things are funny that definitely aren't funny at all. He's meeting many of the characters that will be a part of the book throughout its length. Roy is scared but gradually, through meeting the others, he's steeling himself to the reality that all of this will be difficult. His dad's letter is so out of place when compared to how he feels and what he's expecting the House of God to be. Portions of the letter show up throughout the rest of the book as a contrast to what is really going on.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The reader is introduced to the Fat Man, a second year resident with a bawdy view of medicine. He introduces Roy to gomers. Roy enters his first rotation on Ward 6-South. He meets the Fat Man, an intern named Wayne Potts, Chuck and three BMS students, which stands for Best Medical School students, who are also on this rotation with him. The Fat Man is talking about his new invention. He explains that gomer stands for "Get out of My Emergency Room".

There are three interns, including Roy and they use flip cards to round on the patients. During this, they meet Dr. Otto Kreinberg, "Little Otto", another one of the private doctors who isn't supposed to write on patients' orders but does so anyway because he hates interns. He meets his patients and begins to panic at the zoo-like atmosphere he's faced with. Roy meets Sophie, one of his patients and asks Fats what to do for her. He meets Mr. Rotanski, a stroke victim and a gomer. He learns Law Number One: "Gomers don't die". He learns that it's the young people who die, not the gomers.

Finally, he meets Ina Goober, another gomer with green, scumlike material under her breast. He learns from Fats that Law Number 2 is that "Gomers go to ground," meaning that they fall out of bed. He learns about the "Double O Privates"—expensive private doctors who are bad but have good bedside manner so they never get sued. Roy writes his first orders and gets nervous about killing the patient; he puts in his first IV.

They do a cardiac arrest on a patient named Leo and Roy learns Law Number Three: "At a cardiac arrest, the first procedure is to take your own pulse." He meets Molly—a nurse on the ward that he lusts after. Finally, he meets the Yellow Man, a man with liver disease who his fellow intern Potts is afraid to give steroids to make him better. He realizes that this isn't medicine—certainly not the type he signed up for.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Dr. Roy Basch is getting a taste of what medicine is all about at the House of God, all in one day. He learns about the real world of the gomers and about the stress of everyday living in the House of God. He makes it through the first day but he's nervous and he is afraid to write even the simplest of prescriptions. He's overwhelmed and a bit shell-shocked, as are his fellow interns. He leans on the Fat Man and his "Laws" in order to survive. In one day, he's already learned a lot. He's beginning to make his way around his ward and to understand his duties. There is some sexual tension between Roy and the nurse named Molly.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Roy starts his second day at the House of God. He sees Potts, who just got off call looking very disheveled. Fats is there and teases Potts about giving Thorazine to a patient, whose blood pressure suddenly dropped. During card flip rounds, he learns about the TURF or the transfer of a patient, due to whatever reason that can be made up, to another ward. Several of the new admissions get turfed. Potts gets yelled at by Fats about the Yellow Man and not giving him steroids, as now he is much worse.

The interns learn about the electric gomer bed, or how to raise the bed high enough so that the patient falls to the ground and ends up either in orthopedics with a hip fracture or to neurosurgery with an intracranial bleed. Fats also teaches them about BUFFING a chart so it looks good when they are turfed, regardless of what was actually done to the patient. They go to lunch and meet up with Eat My Dust Eddie, Hyper Hooper and the Runt—interns on the other medicine ward.

The Runt is so nervous that he's been taking Valium to calm down. The Runt is also known as Harold Runtsky. Roy goes to his outpatient clinic and meets a bunch of his patients. He realizes that they are not in need of much except someone to listen to them. The Fat Man tells him that one of his patients, Sophie, needs to leave and the only way to get her to go is to do a painful procedure on her. He does a lumbar puncture on her until she says, "I want to go home!"

Later he learns the fourth law of the house: "The patient is the one with the disease." He talks to Chuck, who's admitted several patients who don't believe he's their doctor because he's black. Roy finishes up and goes home to read his father's latest letter, which is again so very serious, compared to what Roy is going through. He talks with Berry about what he's gone through, and she thinks it's twisted and sick.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Roy is continuing to understand the upside-down rules the Fat Man is teaching him and he sees how a night of call is breaking down his colleagues. He finds some joy in doing his outpatient clinic and is commiserating with his colleagues about the various complications and idiosyncrasies of their patients. He's yet to be on call so this is still a day of discovery for Roy who is trying to understand "the rules" of this crazy place he's now working in. There is still sexual tension between Roy and Molly, and he's gradually getting to know the players of the game.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

This is the third day of internship, and the day Roy is finally on call. He meets up with Chuck, who was on call the night before and Chuck tells him he's going to sleep with someone in housekeeping in order to get better housekeeping service. They do card flip rounds and "Chuck announces six new admissions. He has lunch with the Runt and some others and found that the Runt got stuck by one of the Yellow Man's contaminated needles. He's terrified that he's going to die.

It's Roy's turn to get an admission and he is on call with the Fat Man. In the emergency room, waiting his first admission, he learns the fifth law of the house: "Placement comes first," meaning that you have to think first about how you're going to get rid of the person first. He meets two policemen who frequent the ER, Sergeant Gilheeny and Officer Quick. He admits Anna O.—a gomer with congestive heart failure. She has no pulse and isn't breathing but, when the Fat Man uses the reverse stethoscope technique on her, she springs to life. He learns from the Fat Man that gomers are good for teaching medicine to interns and he learns rule number six: "There is no body cavity that cannot be reached with a number fourteen needle and a good strong arm."

Roy learns several techniques by practicing on gomers. Then he learns law number 7: "Age + BUN = Lasix dose" and how to buff Anna O's chart. He finds he can't sleep because he's worried about a cardiac arrest happening. While he lies awake, he's met by Molly who needs his help putting a patient back into restraints.

He meets Dr. Sanders, a patient who is suffering from multiple problems and admits him to the ward. He likes Sanders and enjoys treating him, even though it is 4 am. By the next day, it's all a blur to him and he learns the eighth law of the house: "They can always hurt you more." He learns that gomers are out to hurt interns and that it is just a fact of life. He goes home to Berry. It's his birthday but he can't really enjoy himself.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Roy's first night on call turns out as badly as it did for his colleagues. He becomes more proficient in doing procedures and is feeling more confident, despite the fact that the gomers keep getting to him. The rest of his colleagues are no better off and are struggling to get by in the House of God. Even now, he has a natural cynicism that only keeps growing as time goes on. Roy continues to learn the "rules" and the reality of life as a first-year intern.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The Fat Man is sent off to Mt. St Elsewheres. His new resident is a crass female named Jo, who was absent as her father committed suicide by jumping off a bridge. Roy doesn't know how he's going to survive without the Fat Man. Jo is asking for complete work ups on these gomers, and it goes against everything he's been taught so far. He argues with Jo over what to do with the patients as they disagree on everything.

At first, he goes along with Jo and works everything up, only to find that the patients are getting worse. He figures out a way to falsify everything they do to the gomers and do nothing to them in reality, just to keep Jo happy. He feels sorry for Jo, who needs the House just to feel good about herself.

He finds out what Fat Man's invention is—an anal mirror in which patients can look at their own anuses. He finds out that his colleagues, especially Potts, are having a harder time with Jo, who keeps torturing Potts with wanting to do everything on everyone. The Yellow Man is still alive and still tortures Potts, because Potts didn't give him steroids at the beginning.

Chapter 6 Analysis

This is beginning to be a battle between the survivors and the non-survivors among the interns. Roy is doing everything, even that which is unethical, in order to survive and in order to help the gomers. Potts is floundering, taking on too much and is much too sensitive to all the chaos going on around them. Roy is taking a rough situation and is making the best of it, while Potts is just barely treading water. Roy has set himself against Jo in favor of the Fat Man and his seemingly crazy ideas.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Roy realizes he's "hanging himself" by making he charts and the patients look so good, because they now start to get the tough cases as a "reward" for their hard work. This means he has to work harder.

Roy and Chuck start to play basketball together, and sometimes they'd play touch football. Potts moves on to another assignment, and the Runt takes his place. Someone keeps putting MVI after Roy's name everywhere, which stands for "Most Valuable Intern". It's a joke but he can't figure out who's doing it.

Chuck starts sleeping with housekeeping, and their sheets and bedding get changed frequently. Roy continues to have sexual fantasies about Molly. The Runt is nervous about working with Roy, and Chuck and he are introduced around to the medical students and staff.

The Runt wants to ask out Angel, one of the nursing staff but he's nervous about that. Roy and the others end up doing a lot of the Runt's work as the Runt was too nervous to do anything himself.

Roy meets Saul, a leukemia patient he really likes. He has to give him chemotherapy to save him. The Runt finally asks Angel out and has sex with her. Roy, through dealings with patients, is learning to feel competent at what he does.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Things are settling down for Roy. He is beginning to feel like he can handle anything and, even though he still hates what he's doing. He does it with a certain finesse that is getting him noticed. He is dealing with patients he has come to like and care about but he's steeling himself against feeling too much. The team is joking around with one another but several are still unsure of what they are doing. Roy is helping his buddies the best they can, and there is a certain camaraderie among the interns. He still hates Jo but spends as little time with her as possible. Roy has clearly learned much in just a few weeks.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

It is now mid-September, and Roy is becoming a master of "saving himself". The Runt has been having a lot of sex with Angel, and it is helping his self-esteem as an intern. Roy learns the ninth rule of the house: "The only good admission is a dead admission," meaning that it is a good thing when the patient dies soon after being admitted. The Runt talks about his sexual escapades with Angel. It apparently took all of his nervousness away.

Roy and Chick flip coins to lighten the Runt's load, and Chuck saves a gomer who can't breathe by digging broccoli out of her throat. They call her the "Broccoli Lady". All of the interns on the floor become extremely competent. Roy makes up another rule of the house: "You can't find a fever if you don't take a temperature".

The group is introduced to a contest called the "Black Crow Award" which will be awarded to the intern who gets the highest percentage of postmortem examinations by the end of the year. Hooper and Eddie are both interested in getting the award.

Potts continues to be haunted by the comatose "Yellow Man" who has yet to die. They have a luncheon to discuss getting postmortems on as many patients as possible, encouraged by the Fish and Dr. Leggo.

Roy finally goes out with Molly and has sex with her. He is still seeing Berry, his girlfriend. He feels like his relationship with Berry is on the rocks, a phrase he calls ROR, similar to MOR, which means "Marriage on Rocks".

Chapter 8 Analysis

Roy is learning to cope through humor and sex. He finally gets past his fantasies about Molly and turns that into reality. He and the others are coping with intense stress through humor, most of it being black humor. There is still a great deal of camaraderie among the interns, in spite of the contest called the Black Crow Award. Roy worries that some of his colleagues, namely Howard Hooper is taking the Black Crow too seriously. Roy continues to gain in competency on the ward with his fellow interns.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Roy hears a rumor that Fats had his anal mirror on the "Today Show". While it's a rumor, it intrigues him. He talks with Fats about it and about Fats' dreams and fantasies. The Runt continues to talk about his sexual exploits with Angel. They all divulge their sexual exploits with the Fats. He tells them they need to sleep with one of the social workers to get better placement for their gomers. Roy and the Runt sleep with the social workers, and their patients start to get placed faster.

Saul, the leukemia patient, gets saved by chemotherapy. He tells Saul he's not going to die. Roy talks to Jo about how she can improve her standing with the interns, as she is not very popular. He admits a patient with "microdeckia" meaning that he isn't playing with a full deck. Roy has sex with Molly in the call room. In the middle of it, there is a crash. The medical student had let a gomer go to ground from a high height, resulting in a hip fracture.

Dr. Sanders, who had been dying for a long time, finally dies, and it is an awful death. Roy gets chewed out for not getting a postmortem examination on him. He said he loved him too much to just let him be chopped up at the postmortem. Roy finally tells Jo the truth about why their ward has been going so well and that everyone hates her. He has a talk with the Leggo about what the Fat Man's rules, are and how they've worked to do as little as possible on their patients. He tells the Leggo that no one likes him either.

Several of the interns have a sexual encounter with some nurses as they wind up their clerkship on Ward 6-South.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Roy is distressed by the death of Dr. Sanders and he's come to realize that he hasn't ever really saved anyone so far. He's disillusioned enough to tell Jo, his resident, and Leggo, the Chief of Medicine, that no one likes them as if he's using this opportunity to get back at them for all they've done to him. He's finishing up his first rotation in the House of God, and he and the other interns use humor and sex as a way of saying goodbye. He's still using many defense mechanisms to cope with all of the horrible things he's experienced on this rotation and has done his best to take care of himself.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Roy eats oysters with Berry and discusses how he is coping. Roy is a bit confused about everything, especially now that he's got a girl (Molly) on the side.

His next rotation is the Emergency Ward or EW. He's nervous about it and wonders if he can handle it. In the EW, he meets up again with Gilheeny and Quick, the two policemen that hang out in the emergency ward. He also meets two surgeons, Gath and Elihu, as well as Sylvia and Dini, the nurses. It's the middle of the autumn, just past the Jewish Holy days.

He gets a tour of the EW and learns about Abe, the guy who lives in the waiting room. He learns that the rules of the EW are to Buff and Turf like crazy—something he's used to from the medicine ward. He learns to separate disease from hypochondria, thus making it easier on everyone. He learns about being a sieve, or sending all patients into the hospital or being a wall and keeping patients away from being admitted. He learns the phrase "meet 'em and street 'em" and handles everything from cardiac arrests to simple cases. He learns how to work with the surgical residents on the ward.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Roy is learning how to function in a whole new part of the hospital and finds that the rules are much the same. He doesn't struggle much with his work on the emergency ward and finds it comfortable there. As he deals with patient after patient, he becomes more competent at buffing and turfing the patients as he did on the medicine ward.



Chspter 11

Chspter 11 Summary

Roy and Berry go visit his parents for Thanksgiving. It's fairly uneventful except for an interesting Watergate tidbit that comes out that afternoon. He talks with his family, especially his grandfather about medicine and nursing homes. His grandfather is in a nursing home and doesn't want to be there.

Then, he goes back to be on call in the EW. He talks with the policemen and the staff there about how things are going. They talk about Cohen, the staff psychiatry resident. He admits one of his standard gomers. They talk about Duber, an intern of renown from previous years who dropped a dummy grenade into a room full of gomers at one time.

Chspter 11 Analysis

Roy learns to cope through the camaraderie of the policemen, nurses and other staff of the EW. The conversation with his grandfather is significant as he sees someone he knows as one of the nursing home patients he's come to hate. He continues to be very competent at what he does and is still using humor to cope with the stress of working at the House of God.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Roy is working around Christmas in the clinic and in the EW. He learns that he's not supposed to actually treat the patients in the clinic, because the cure is worse than the disease. He just needs to talk to him. Roy likes the clinic and enjoys talking to his patients. He feels good about his work in the EW, too, and finally is feeling human. He learns that the psychiatric resident doesn't have to touch patients until they're medically cleared. He looks up to the psychiatric resident.

He takes care of a patient with extremely high blood pressure who later signs himself out. He takes care of a patient who took an "overdose" of dog food. He has sexual feelings for a patient he sees with neck pain. He takes care of a patient who overdosed on deodorant. He goes with Molly to an Ice Capades show and gets a Christmas present from Molly—a tiepin that says MVI on it.

Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter gives us a look at the humorous side of working in the EW. The patients are all unique and a bit crazy. Roy is doing well and enjoying his time in the EW, even though this is the busy season. His relationship with Molly is blossoming, and he is taking her out. We don't hear much about Berry in this section but we are led to believe she is still in the picture, and he is taking two women out. Roy is less cynical and is just coping as best he can, enjoying the company of his colleagues and others at the EW.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Roy is back in the EW during its busiest season. He's verbally abused by Abe who is upset that Roy is Jewish. He's abused by patients who keep coming in and bothering him with complaints that are years old. He sees so many patients, he can barely function. He is woozy from stress when he goes with Berry to see Handel's Messiah. Berry tells him he's dissociative and that he must be depressed. The policemen are saying he's become paranoid.

Roy decides the EW is just one abusive patient after another. He talks with Berry about all that he's going through. She's determined to keep their relationship going at all costs. He toys with the idea of becoming a psychiatrist. He goes to a party at the Leggo's house. He doesn't have a good time but she gets drunk anyway.

Potts' father dies, and he has to go to arrange for the funeral. Potts just plods along after that, emasculated by his wife, who is doing a surgical internship at MBH. Potts loses his nametag and never bothers to replace it, a bad sign according to Roy.

In the EW, this is really the biggest season. The EW is always full, stressing Roy out. The policeman, Gilheeny, gets shot, and they all have to take care of him—a very stressful time. He lives through the trauma. Abe goes completely crazy and gets sent to the State Hospital. Roy takes care of a rape victim. Roy then goes on a trip to Washington DC and meets with his friends who have become lawyers, along with Berry.

Chapter 13 Analysis

We are continually exposed to Potts, who continues to flounder in the House of God. Roy deals with his toughest time yet in the EW and barely survives. We are introduced to the possibility that Roy may not choose to go on in medicine but will choose psychiatry. There is a never-ending litany of patients with a variety of problems that Roy must cope with. The reader goes along with Roy during this tough time and laughs about the funny patients while crying about the sad, difficult patients Roy must cope with.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The Fat Man returns from Mount St. Elsewheres and the VA. Roy hopes the Fat Man will save him. The Fat Man is planning on joining a GI fellowship after the year is over with. Roy ends up on the worst ward, 4-North with the Fat Man, Hyper Hooper and Eat My Dust Eddie. The Fat Man is hoping to get a good letter of recommendation from the Fish, and it all rides on how well he runs this rotation.

They meet their BMSs. They go and meet their patients, some of which are in the "Rose Room", a room so named as every patient in the room is named Rose. Hyper Hooper is especially into getting as many postmortem examinations as possible. Fats is into total bowel control, something he learned at the VA. There are only gomers on 4 North and it depresses Roy. Fats uses an extract to try and bind up a woman with diarrhea—something he invented. It works. Even so, Roy is starting to doubt the Fat Man's ways and thinks some of them are not practical or legal.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Roy is hit with the hardest ward yet, one with only gomers. He has the Fat Man to deal with, and he's questioning the Fat Man's ways. He is just starting at the rotation but he's already depressed by what he sees. Roy is still coping and still finding some of this humorous but it's getting harder to cope with all of the work he has to do.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Roy is still on 4-North. Roy deals with a lady with lice that no one wants to deal with. They argue about who should delouse the woman. They are having difficulty turfing patients, because they are so difficult. Hooper, going for the Black Crow Award, gets his gomers to sign for their own postmortem examinations on admission.

They have chief rounds with the Fish and discuss a patient named Moe whose big toe has turned white from cryoglobulinemia. The Fish thinks it's a great case. They discuss Harry, a patient who they can't get rid of, because he can willingly change his heart rhythm if he's told he has to leave. Fats has to tell a woman that she has inoperable cancer because the attending physician won't do it. He winds up playing cards with her.

Roy admits Saul, who was the leukemia patient in remission that is now not in remission. Saul asks Roy to finish him off so he won't suffer. Roy declines, at first.

One of the HELP staff has pubic lice and has Eddie look at them in the call room. They all storm in on them as Eddie is examining the pubic lice and embarrass, Lionel, the HELP staff member. Roy goes home and talks to Berry about Fats and the fact that he was able to tell the woman with cancer that she was dying.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Roy is faced with several moral dilemmas. The first is that he doesn't know if he should go into the call room and embarrass the HELP staff. The second is whether or not he should tell the woman with cancer that she is dying but in the end, Fats does it. The third is Saul, who is now dying. Roy is asked to kill Saul for his own comfort. He declines doing it. This chapter is about the moral dilemmas faced by doctors and interns every day and how they are handled. We don't know the end result with regard to Saul—only that he has initially refused to kill his patient outright. Moral dilemmas, as the book shows, are a daily part of life in being a doctor.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

A patient named Rose Budz is killed by Hooper who does a bad chest tap and gets into her spleen and liver. He doesn't mind, because it's a great postmortem examination. A patient named Tina is killed too by dialysis the team gives her. The dialysis team made a mistake during the dialysis. No one wants to take care of the lice lady.

The team goes on a field trip with the Fish to the office of Dr. Pearlman a.k.a. the Pearl—a rich private doctor who has Musak playing in his office. Next, Roy goes to visit Molly, who is angry that Roy didn't remember Valentine's Day. Roy feels guilty. She asks him to check on a dying patient of the Runt's. Another resident goes in there and brings the man back from the brink of death so he can't die peacefully. After calling a code and working on him, the guy ends up on a respirator. Roy talks to Chuck about the case and realizes they are drifting apart. He talks to the Runt, who is chastised by another resident about having given the man morphine to hasten his death. The Runt talks about his sexual exploits.

Roy plots to get rid of the patient named Harry by sneaking him out before he can have an arrhythmia but is foiled by Putzel, a private doctor. Harry finally has a heart attack anyway. Saul is in a coma. Roy is angry at Putzel and starts a rumor that an intern is intending to assassinate Putzel.

Berry comes in to visit Roy when he is on call. She's worried about him. She finds the intern's humor sick. She is nauseous when faced with the smell of the gomers. Berry expresses her concerns to the Fat Man. She thinks Roy is getting too cynical. Roy tells Putzel he's going to do him in and gets restrained by hospital guards.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Roy is beginning to snap, starting with dealing with the man who was about to die and ending with his threat to kill Dr. Putzel. Berry is worried about him and even the Fats is beginning to worry about him. He's faced with death and malpractice suits on a daily basis. He just can't cope with what's going on around him. He's upset that he can't let patients die peacefully, and he can't get rid of or turf his patients. He's drifting apart from everyone, including his love interests, his friends and other interns. He feels like he's stepped out on his own and doesn't know how he feels about that.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

All the interns are breaking. Eat My Dust Eddie's wife has a baby and would only talk about gomers in terms of how he can hurt them on any given day. Eddy finally mentally goes psychotic and is sent to "have a rest" making it harder for the other interns around him.

Roy breaks up with Molly, who is seeing someone else. Roy admits to becoming too cynical. Hooper gets real thin, running around and not eating, trying to get the Black Crow Award. Things are getting rough for the remaining two interns on the ward and they are getting in trouble for the things they've been doing. The Fats tells them not to do anything else or it will reflect badly on him.

Potts meets up with Roy at two a.m. and tells him that the Yellow Man has finally died. Potts seems depressed about that and before Roy figures out Pott's intentions. Shortly afterward, Potts jumps from the eighth floor window of the hospital to his death. Everyone mourns his loss. No one wants to park in the area of the parking lot where Potts fell. Roy and the other interns are angry at the higher ups for teasing Potts so much. The Fat Man cries over his death.

Saul, the leukemic, is suffering but is dying. Roy can't stand it anymore. He gets a vial of KCl and injects it into Saul, killing him.

He works on St. Patrick's Day and sees what he believed are the worst patients in the world. He talks to Gilheeny and Quick, who are hanging out in the EW. Roy realizes that the gomers have won and would outlast him and would survive in Gomer City after he's long gone.

Chapter 17 Analysis

There is a great deal of death in this chapter. Two interns crack and one of them commits suicide. Roy himself is broken but he continues on, realizing that the gomers have won. Each in his own way, the interns are coping or falling apart. Potts suicide affects them all, and it causes the interns to blame the higher ups. Roy copes through anger and cynicism. He realizes he can't "be with" his patients and still survive. Roy crosses over a line when he finally gives in and kills Saul, wanting him to avoid a painful death. All of this is a new low for Roy and the others who have reached their breaking point.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

On April Fool's Day, Roy gets transferred to the MICU, the intensive care unit. He learns about "Ollie" the machine that spits out the EKG readings on the ward. He also meets up with Angel, the nurse who had slept with the Runt. He finds himself working with Jo, who has a special interest in cardiology.

The consultant to the unit is a staff cardiologist named Pinkus who is into health and fitness. Pinkus runs marathons and tries to ask every patient if they have a hobby. Pinkus is a fanatic about health and running.

Roy meets his various patients, including one who has a fatal arrhythmia and who just wants to go home because no medication has worked on her. He meets a patient on a ventilator who came in for a pimple on his knee and now, due to the treatment of his physician, was in total body sepsis. Roy is horrified by the severity of his patients' illnesses.

The last patient he sees is a BMS who caught a cold and then developed pneumonia, and was now on a respirator with dialysis and a pacemaker. He was dying. Fearing he would catch what the BMS has, Roy feels like he is dying, too. He's convinced to start a new program of running and eating better by Pinkus. He feels like he's part of a manned space program working in the MICU and likes the machines there.

Berry is still worried about him and worried that he hasn't grieved properly over Pott's death.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Roy is relatively snatched from the jaws of cynicism and remorse by the MICU, where there are just machines to be dealt with and by Pinkus, who convinces him that running and hobbies are good things. He still is surrounded by death but the gomers are gone. The death is more sterilized now, so he comes to begin to cope a little better. He's dealing with the fear of his own death and is dabbling in whatever he can to keep from dying himself. He's come to be used to people being in the hospital due to the errors of their physicians, and he's still a bit cynical about that.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Roy is still at the MICU with Jo and Pinkus. Roy is still convinced he's going to die of whatever the BMS has. He returns to the Unit to find that the BMS has coded, and they go all out trying to save him. Despite their efforts, the BMS dies. Pinkus asks if the BMS had a hobby.

It's Roy's first night on call, and he runs into the night nurse who teaches him about all that he needs to know to run the ward. At eleven o'clock, he watches the nurses change into their street clothes, called the "eleven o'clock striptease".

He admits an old woman by the name of Zock, the rich family who is building the Wing of Zock next to the hospital. She is a gomer but gets special treatment. The next morning, while visiting with Pinkus, he gets his first pair of running shoes from Pinkus. After his shift is over, he puts on some running shorts, new shoes and goes jogging.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Roy is dealing with death again—his own and the death of the BMS on the Unit. He's completely convinced that Pinkus is onto something. When he gets his new shoes, he vows to change his life, eat better, get a hobby and start running. He starts running right away, perhaps as a way of fighting off the deaths of himself and others. He's starting to feel more competent in this new setting and is learning to deal with Jo. Pinkus is becoming a good mentor for him and things are looking up for Roy.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Roy is still at the MICU and up to four miles per day jogging. He jogs to work every day. He still faces the horror of human misery and helplessness but feels competent that he's running the machines to the best of his ability. He's still titillated by the nurses changing in the hallway every day. He sees patients that seem like they're going to make it and then have a cardiac arrest and die.

He faces a series of patients who die in a row, and this really upsets Jo. Even his patient who is the matriarch of the Zock family falls out of bed and dies. As this happens over Passover, Roy suggests that it's happening because they aren't following the laws of Passover. Roy gets a rabbi to bless the place and to paint all the doors according to Passover custom. It seems to work for a while and then a patient, a doctor, dies of a cardiac arrest. Jo cracks under the pressure but Roy is fine, because he's jogging and taking care of himself. Roy loves working on the Unit and tells Berry that. Berry is worried about Roy, because he's so nonplussed by all the deaths.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Roy has done a 180 degree turn and is coping very well on the Unit. He is taking care of himself and jogging more. Now it is Jo that is cracking because of all the deaths on the unit, and she can't handle it. Death continues to be a major theme in this chapter and how people handle it. It's interesting that Roy brings in a Rabbi to pray and paint the doors of the Unit even though he's not that religious. Perhaps it's a joke but the reader is not given that information. Berry continues to stay with Roy even though Roy believes the relationship is on the rocks and continues to worry about Roy.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Roy denies Berry's comment that he is a machine and continues to jog every day. He deals with a woman with end stage liver disease and puts in several IV lines in her. At about four a.m., she dies. Her husband is there and crying.

The next day is the marathon, and he watches the marathoners run, including Pinkus. He goes to outpatient clinic and finds out that Chuck has been making appointments for dead people to his clinic so he has no one showing up. However, he's found out. He buys his first rod and reel, like Pinkus, so he'll have a hobby.

Chapter 21 Analysis

In this short chapter, we find that Chuck has done something wrong in order to cope with the heavy clinic load. We deal with the death of a young woman from liver failure—one who has a family as Roy finds out. He deals with the effect of these deaths on family members. He continues his idolizing of Pinkus by jogging and taking up the same hobby Pinkus has.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Roy says goodbye to the Unit and wishes he could stay on. Even so, he admits his goodbyes were unemotional. Roy wonders how he can change his personality from type A to type B to reduce his risk of heart disease.

He has pangs of withdrawal leaving the Unit and doesn't want to go see Marcel Marceau with Berry. He talks to Gilheeny and Quick who convince him to go to the show by manhandling him and putting him in the squad car. He goes to the show with Berry and the policemen. The policemen feel like they have saved Roy by making him go to the show.

Roy finally confesses to Berry that he killed Saul and talks about the families of the patient in the intensive care unit. Roy realizes that all of the interns, including him, have gone around like zombies, too afraid to cry. He begins to repair himself as a human being, according to him.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Death is still a major theme as Roy struggles to free himself from his own death. He misses the intensive care unit so much that he goes back instead of going to the show. His friends save him from that mistake and he finally realizes how he has run from death and how much of a machine he has become. He confesses what he did with Saul to Berry, which is the beginning of his redemption. He now sincerely wants to begin the healing process.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Roy finishes his rotation where he started, on ward 4-South under a resident named Leon. Leon keeps a low profile so they hardly ever see him. It's May 1, and they begin talking about where they are going to next. The higher ups expect the interns to stay around for another year but several want to go into psychiatry, including Roy.

He takes care of a patient named Olive O. who had been turfed into the House by her family because of an MI. Olive has strange humps that no one can figure out. The humps are disgusting to Roy and his BMS.

Roy goes out to the suburbs and discovers that the Fat Man has a lucrative practice in his home. He apologizes to the Fats for making things so difficult for him in the last rotation they had together. Fats is okay with it and tells Roy that only his special extract is curing the diarrhea from the VA so he's making a lot of money. The Fats is going to a Fellowship in GI in LA. Things are now okay with Roy and Fats.

Roy spends some time with Berry and suggests taking a vacation to France and taking the year off the following year. She suggests he go into psychiatry. That way he can "be with" his patients and not be as distant from them as he is now.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Roy is making amends with the Fats and is deciding what he's going to do next. He has been so traumatized by being on the medicine internship that he doesn't think he can do that again so he thinks instead about taking a year off or becoming a psychiatrist. He continues to heal by making amends and by realizing that he can get out of this. The end is near and he knows it, giving him a sense of relief. He's not as overcome by death anymore and has come of age, feeling completely competent in what he's doing.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

The Fat Man runs a crowded colloquium on how to choose a specialty. He tells them there are patient care specialties and non-patient care specialties. They talk about the advantages and disadvantages of each type of specialty. They construct a table of all of the non-patient care specialties, including the advantages and disadvantages. Roy attends the colloquium and decides completely on going with psychiatry.

Roy goes on a canoe trip with several other interns and Berry. She says the internship was inhuman and now they are stuck with being in medicine and she suggests they talk to the House psychiatrist. After the canoe trip, he takes care of one of the Zock family and is rude to the family. He is still dealing with Olive O. and spews out another House Law: If the radiology resident and the BMS both see a lesion on the chest X-Ray, there can be no lesion there.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The interns are completely disillusioned by medicine and all are deciding to get out and go into psychiatry. Roy is motoring along in 6 South and is not above being rude to the Zock family. He's beginning to see his way out now and nothing can stop him. At the colloquium, all of the interns seem unable to deal with the idea of going into patient care and they are fully focused on anything that doesn't include actual patient contact. He's now making up his own laws of the House of God.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

By the next day, nearly all of the interns decide to go into psychiatry. This enrages the Leggo. The Zock family member, Nate, says he's never been treated so well under Roy and wants to set him up in private practice. Olive O. still hasn't had her humps fixed because Roy is refusing to do anything about them. The Leggo gives out the Black Crow Award to Hooper who was so strongly vying for it. A couple of other interns are angry that Hooper got the award as the Runt and Eat My Dust Eddy were vying for it, too.

The reader finds out that Duber, the resident that dropped a fake grenade into a room in the EW went into psychiatry. Each intern explains to the Leggo his reason for wanting to go into psychiatry.

The Runt yells at the Leggo and the Pearl that they killed Potts by giving him such a hassle around the patient he failed to aggressively treat. They tell the higher ups that they had no one to look up to.

Chapter 25 Analysis

All of the interns are seeking their revenge now for all they have suffered through this year. They tell the higher ups that they've had no one to look up to except the Fats, and they blame the higher ups for the death of Potts. Death is still in the theme as they now give out the Black Crow award to the intern who got the most postmortem examinations. Roy is comfortably dealing with his internship now that it is nearly over with.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

The Leggo makes some concessions so it looks as though all but two or three interns will stay on in medicine. The Runt and Roy were leaving and Chuck hadn't decided. Eat My Dust Eddie is allowed to become a full second-year resident. It was the last week of internship, and Roy says goodbye to all his clinic patients. His father is upset but eventually settles down about Roy's decision to take the year off.

Roy keeps Olive O. alive for the next new batch of interns. Finally it is the last day and Roy seeks out the Fat Man. Roy realizes that Fats comes up with inventions in part to help his interns cope. He talks with Fats and thanks him for everything he did for them.

Roy sees Chuck, who says he's going back to Memphis and be a "regular old black doc". He says goodbye to the Leggo and tells him he's going into psychiatry after taking a year off. He finds out the policemen are leaving, too. Roy realizes that the Leggo is in pain around his interns not liking him. He is later given a police escort to the airport where he leaves for France with Berry. He says goodbye to Gilheeny and Quick. He goes to France and begins finally to relax.

Chapter 26 Analysis

The book is winding down now, and Roy says his goodbyes to everyone who means something to him at the House of God. He comes to some conclusions about the Fats and about the Leggo that he hadn't thought of before. He's arrived at a crucial life decision and is happy to leave the hospital. Berry has stuck by him throughout, and their relationship is as strong as ever. He finally gets the relaxation he's been hoping for while going on a prolonged vacation with Berry. We find out what everyone is doing the next year.



Characters

Roy G. Basch

Roy is the main character and an intern at the House of God, a Jewish hospital. Roy is Jewish himself and a bit cynical at the outset of the book. He gets more cynical as time goes on and invents ways to make life more palatable for him inside the House of God. Even though Roy is authentic in his cynicism, he still cares about medicine and his patients. There are some patients he gets attached to. Roy does a great deal in order to cope with what he sees as a hopeless situation. He's very intelligent and resourceful, especially when it comes to dealing with the higher-ups in the organization. His true love is Berry, his girlfriend, but he's not afraid to have sex with whoever he has to, particularly the nursing staff, in order to get over some of the loneliness and death he is dealing with. Roy is irreverent. He has put the Fat Man on a pedestal, trying to emulate him.

The Fat Man

The Fat Man is a second year resident and works over Roy on the medicine ward. The Fat Man is a heavy man and legendary, according to Roy. Described as "Brooklyn-born, New York City-trained, expansive, impervious, brilliant, efficient" and having sleek black hair, sharp black eyes and a bulging chin. He has some of his own ideas on the taking care of medical patients and has invented several irreverent rules that he shares with the new interns. The Fat Man's goal is not to touch another patient and to let the interns do it. The interns love him but think he's crazy. He tells them he's invented a type of anal mirror that patients can use to look at their own anus, and he's always looking for a way to make more money. He really is fat and has a healthy appetite. He's the guy everyone looks up to as one who knows the inside scoop on what it takes to survive in the House of God. Seemingly unflappable, the Fat Man helps the interns cope throughout the trials of their internship year with as much irreverence as possible.

Wayne Potts

Potts is one of the interns at the House of God. A guy from the old South, Potts is really insecure, especially after he fails to give steroids to a guy who got a lot sicker after that. Potts is one of the worst interns in the House, partly due to his ongoing insecurity. Potts is depressed and teased by the higher ups, particularly around the issue of the Yellow Man.

Chuck

Chuck is perhaps Roy's best friend and an intern at the House of God. A black man from Chicago, he states he only got this far because of affirmative -action. Chuck is carefree



and fun to be around. He's sarcastic like Roy and plays basketball really well, according to Roy. He was apparently semi-pro at basketball at one time and plays basketball with Roy. Chuck is seemingly unflappable and doesn't have many problems in the House of God.

Harry

Harry is another intern at the House of God. He's fixated with death and is trying to get the most postmortem examinations of any intern. He's otherwise unflappable and has a minor role in the House of God.

Eat My Dust Eddie

Eddie is another intern at the House of God. He's from California and always refers to California when making comparisons to how things are done in the House of God. He's also into getting postmortem examinations and is in the running for the Black Crow Award at the hospital.

Dr. Runtsky-The Runt

The Runt is another intern at the House of God. He's nervous and takes Valium for his nerves. He's insecure and unable to make decisions at first but then he has sex with one of the nurses, and it brings him out of his shell. Eventually, he becomes more competent at the House of God.

Dr. Leggo

Leggo is the chief of medicine that no one likes. He believes in doing everything possible for every patient—something the others disagree with. He wears a long doctor's robe and meets with the residents at BM Deli Rounds every so often. Otherwise, Roy rarely sees him.

Dr. Fishburn—The Fish

Fishburn is the Chief Medicine Resident and is one of what Roy calls "the slurpers" because he licks the ass of the one above him in the hierarchy. He's into standard medical care and disagrees with the Fat Man, and with the way the others do medicine at the House of God.



Jo

Jo is the only female resident at the House of God. A cardiology buff and a stickler for details, she eventually realizes that the interns don't like her. She basically lives for medicine and want to go all-out for every patient.

Sargeant Gilheeny

Gilheeny is one of the two officers that hang out in the emergency ward with the residents and interns of the House of God.

Officer Quick

Quick is one of the two officers that spend their time hanging out in the emergency ward at the House of God.

Berry

Berry is the patient, long-suffering girlfriend of Roy, who sticks with him through thick and thin. She's always worried about Roy and, even when he is cheating on her, she stays by him.

Molly

Molly is the playful blond nurse from Ward 6 South who has a short affair with Roy while he's a resident of the ward.

Pinkus

Pinkus is a tall, emaciated-looking staff cardiologist who used to be of ill health but has done a turnaround. He eats healthy food, runs all the time and actually runs marathons. He tries to get Roy to follow him along. Pinkus is into hobbies and asks everyone if they have a hobby. He believes hobbies keep you from dying of cardiovascular disease.



Objects/Places

The House of God

House of God is the name of the grand old hospital, founded in 1913 that Roy Basch and his colleagues come to be residents of. It has no real other name in the book other than the House of God. It is built upon traditional medical hierarchy and solid medical rules. It appears to be a Jewish Hospital.

BMS

BMS is a term used to describe the "Best Medical School" or a student of the school, often referred to as a BMS, as well.

MBH

MBH is the term used to describe "Man's Best Hospital"—the rival hospital of the House of God.

Ward 6 South

Ward 6 is the ward where Roy first begins his rotation as an intern in the House of God.

Dr. Jung's Anal Mirror

The Anal Mirror is the Fat Man's supposed invention—a mirror system that allows patients to see their own anuses.

The Electric Gomer Bed

The Electric Gomer Bed is the name given to the hospital bed that can be raised up to "orthopedic height" so the patient gets a hip fracture or to "neurosurgery height", where the patient falls and gets an intracranial bleed, needing neurosurgery. It can also be manipulated to give patients any blood pressure desired using the Trendelenberg position.

EW

The House of God's term for the emergency room or emergency ward is EW.

MICU

MICU is the medical intensive care unit where Roy spends a fair amount of his time after working in the EW. These are where the sickest patients are.

Ollie

Ollie is the machine that spits out abnormal EKGs whenever a patient has an arrhythmia. Ollie is in the MICU.

The Wing of Zock

This is the wing of the hospital being built throughout his internship which was being paid for by the Zock family.



Themes

Coming of Age

While Roy is an adult, he is coming of age in the world of medicine. He starts out anxious and afraid of what he's facing and he doesn't know much about the world of medicine, despite his earlier training. He comes to learn a lot of unorthodox ways of dealing with patients and learns the rules of the House of God. He learns through dealing with patients and through the Fat Man, who gives him pearls of wisdom along the way. The story teaches us the coming of age theme through examples of how Roy begins to learn and be more competent with each and every patient he comes across. At times, he feels beaten but he perseveres throughout the reading of the book. Throughout, he becomes more cynical yet increases his competency as he works his way through the hellish nightmare that is his internship. Others cope, too, but a couple do not, especially Potts, who doesn't survive at all. Roy learns about the hierarchy of the House of God and how he fits in with the others who work and live there. Roy definitely comes of age by the time the book is over but he is left disillusioned with medicine and doesn't want to continue in Internal Medicine. It's as though he came of age but didn't like how he turned out and he just wants to get away.

Love Relationships

Berry is his girlfriend through out the book and he asks her to marry him at the end. She sticks by him even when he's never around, when he's acting crazy or cheats on her with Molly. Berry worries about Roy through much of the internship but can't seem to get through to him. Still, theirs is a relationship that survives when no one else's relationship survives. They had acronyms, MOR and ROR, standing for "Marriage on Rocks" and "Relationship on Rocks", respectively. It seemed as though every other intern there has their relationships destroyed by the trauma of being interns at the House of God. Berry, on the other hand, is different. She's willing to put up with Roy's craziness and even his infidelity in order to stick by him and stay in a relationship with Roy. Berry is different. She accepts Roy for who he is and for what's going on with him, no matter what.

Death and Dying

Roy faces death and dying on many levels in this book. He deals with the deaths of his patients, some of whom are dying as their doctors have made mistakes with their care. He deals with the death of his colleague who commits suicide. He becomes, at one point, afraid of his own mortality and takes up a healthy lifestyle. Roy, overall, doesn't deal with death head-on and refuses to think about it. The one time he thinks clearly about it is when he overtly kills one of his own patients in an act of mercy. All of the residents and interns deal with death differently. Some, like Hyper Hooper, see death as a means of getting a postmortem evaluation. Others, upon the death of patients who



they attributed themselves to killing (like Potts), cannot cope and commit suicide. It is said early on in the book that "Gomers don't die" but, in fact, they do throughout the book, albeit very rarely. Roy learns early that it's the young people who die the most, and it goes against what he's been taught in life. By the end of the book, Roy is indifferent to death and feels blunted to the idea of death.

Coping

Everyone in the House of God is in a position of having to cope. They use drugs, alcohol, repression, guilt and self-sacrifice to cope with all of the death and horror they see there. Roy copes differently at different times. He uses cynicism and humor at times. He gets drunk at times in order to cope, and he sometimes just loses it and gets angry. One of the interns goes psychotic and needs to leave for a while. Potts seems never to be able to cope and eventually commits suicide. All of them use sex to cope in one way or another. In fact, much of what goes on in this book is coping in some form or another. Even Jo and the other higher ups hide themselves in their medicine and in meticulous ways of doing things in order not to see the horrors of the totality of what is going on. It's as though Jo and the higher ups don't see the whole picture but instead see the patient as the sum of its parts. That way they don't have to mourn when they die or something goes wrong with a patient. Berry helps Roy cope just by being there for him to talk to. Roy might not have done as well as he did without the help of Berry, who was always worried and stood by him. The Fat Man copes through his use of humor, the Laws of the House of God and his own quest for fame and money.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person by Roy, one of the new interns at the House of God. There are areas of description and of Roy's thoughts as he goes through this internship year. Oddly, he talks very little about his feelings, and much of the exposition is just his observations. Everything the reader knows about comes directly through Roy's experiences of them. Roy is cynical, and this is reflected in his point of view about how things happen in the House of God. All the dialogue comes directly through that which Roy himself experiences. The book is fairly straightforward with regard to point of view.

Setting

Ninety-five percent of the book is set on the ward, in the MICU or in the EW of the House of God, a hospital in a big city. The book doesn't say which city the hospital is in. A small portion of it is set in his apartment with Berry. There is a call room where some things happen, and there is a cafeteria and some conference rooms. The author doesn't paint a very unique picture of the hospital, and one is left to assume that it is an ordinary hospital like any other hospital. There is practically no description of anyplace in the hospital except after Pott's died, there is description of the bloodstain that perpetuated in that place in the parking lot and a little bit of the MICU and the EW. Nothing stands out. The descriptor "The House of God" implies it is a prestigious hospital and as the author graduated from Harvard Medical School, it is likely the hospital was affiliated with that institution.

Language and Meaning

This novel takes you deeply into the world of medicine and includes a lot of medical terminology and dark medical humor. The language is very casual, and the author uses a lot of abbreviations for things. The dialogue is realistic and, at times, poignant. Roy, for all his cynicism, does feel deeply about what he's going through and says some highly symbolic things about death and dying during this book. This is a book written especially for medical students or residents who can understand what's happening on the deepest level.

Structure

There are three books in this novel, and the entire work is divided over 27 chapters. Many chapters outline what happens in a single day in the House of God. The book is spread out over a year of an internship, although more of the book covers the first few days of the internship when things are most hectic and less and less time is taken up as

the year goes on. The book is also structured with one plot line, and the plot can be defined by the various rotations Roy goes through. Roy himself goes through stages in the book, where he is afraid at first, then gains competence and a respect for death and finally is competent and wiser than he was before.



Quotes

"Life's like a penis; When it's soft you can't beat it; when it's hard you get screwed." — The Fat Man Chapter 2, Page 11.

"Sure he can. Listen, Basch, there are a number of LAWS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD. LAW NUMBER ONE: GOMERS DON'T DIE." —The Fat Man Chapter 3, Page 34.

"Money," I said, "there's a lot of money in shit."—Roy Chapter 3, Page 35.

"LAW NUMBER TWO: GOMERS GO TO GROUND."—The Fat Man Chapter 3, Page 36.

"All right all right so you panicked and you feel like shit. I know. It's awful and it's not the last time neither. Just don't forget what you saw. LAW NUMBER THREE: AT A CARDIAC ARREST, THE FIRST PROCEDURE IS TO TAKE YOUR OWN PULSE." — The Fat Man Chapter 3 Page 40.

"Enough of that," said the Fat Man. "Potts, you listen to me. There's a LAW you gotta learn. LAW NUMBER FOUR: THE PATIENT IS THE ONE WITH THE DISEASE."—The Fat Man Chapter 4, Page 60.

She couldn't have known that all I wanted then was to be taken care of. Things had moved fast. Two days, and already, like swimming in a strong current, I'd looked up and found my life an eternity farther downstream, the near bank far gone. —Roy Chapter 4, Page 64.

"Nope. That's BMS textbook. Forget textbook. I am your textbook. Nothing you learned at the BMS will help you tonight. Listen—key concept—LAW NUMBER FIVE: PLACEMENT COMES FIRST."—the Fat Man Chapter 5, Page 71.

"...you know what to do, you do good, and you save hem. That part of it's exciting. Wait'll you feel the thrill of sticking a needle blindly into a chest to make a diagnosis, to save someone young. I'm telling you, it's fantastic. Let's go."—the Fat Man Chapter 5, Page 76.

I had an urge to shove Levy into the Leggo so that both would tumble into bed with the gomer who was being saved at all costs, and I fantasized that "Leggo" was somehow cryptographic for "Let my gomers go," and I pictured the Leggo leading the gomers out of the peaceful land of death into the bondage of prolonged, pitiful suffering life, legging it through the Sinai wolfing down the unleavened bread and singing "Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer troooo." Chapter 5, Page 81.

The Fat Man pointed out a valuable House Law, NUMBER EIGHT: THEY CAN ALWAYS HURT YOU MORE. Chapter 5, Page 82.



While it cheered me to think that the Runt was not dying, except at the rate we were all dying, I thought of Potts and what a terrible time he was having. The Yellow Man was still in coma, neither alive nor dead. —Roy Chapter 16, Page 263

"The postmortem is the flower—no, the red rose—of medicine." —Hyper Hooper Chapter 14, Page 231

From the window I saw the splattered mess on the parking lot below, and in between my panting for breath and shivering in the chill draft I heard the first siren squeal, and I leaned my forehead on the sill, and I sobbed.—Chapter 17, Page 281.

And all I could do then, tears streaming down my cheeks, realizing that these gomers had won, that they had outlasted me and would survive in Gomer City after I'd gone in two weeks and left all of them to try to break my replacement, Howie, and all I could do, then, was lie in the shit on the floor and laugh. Chapter 17. Page 286.

"My hobbies are running and fishing," said Pinkus. "Running for fitness and fishing for calm." Chapter 18, Page 295

"This internship—this whole training—it destroys people." —Roy Chapter 22. Page 328.

To repair, to re-create the human took some time. And it wasn't for many months—no, years—that I was free from a recurrent nightmare: strapped down upon an icy metal slab, writhing back and forth to break free, running and running away, in a marathon race, from death. Chapter 22, Page 329.

Somehow he'd pulled things back up around him and could go on, impenetrable, cold, he tough little pisher he'd always been before. I felt sorry for him; I was going free; he was in a cage. As had happened so often before in my life, the tiger had turned out to be a paper tiger, a dream tiger; worn, bored, timid, envious, sad. Chapter 26, Page 375.



Topics for Discussion

How does each intern come to face the issue of death? Does Hyper Hooper face death any healthier than Potts or Roy?

During which situations does Roy come of age in the world of medicine? Talk about each rotation and what they do to help him come of age.

Why does Roy want to become a psychiatrist? Who does he meet that influences him in that direction?

Talk about the rift between the higher ups and the interns at the House of God. Why don't they get along? What do the interns do to cope with the rift between themselves and the higher ups?

Why is the hospital only named "The House of God"? What would happen if it actually had a name?

What helps Roy and Berry stay together during the internship? What does Roy do to destroy the relationship, and why does he do that?

What is the role of the Fat Man, and why do the interns come to love him? What does the Fat Man do to help the interns?

Why does Roy dislike Jo? Compare and contrast Jo and the Fat Man.

How does Pinkus save Roy? Does Pinkus have a healthier outlook on death? Why or why not?

Compare Roy's reaction to Dr. Sander's death to his reaction to Saul's death. Does he handle one better than the other? Which death was more "right" and which one, if either, was "wrong"?

Is Roy any more competent at the end than he is at the beginning, or is it just his attitude that changes? If he becomes more competent, how does he get that way?

Compare Roy's reaction to working in the MICU to his working on the wards. What is different about the MICU that makes Roy's reaction different than being on the wards.

Compare Hyper Hooper's response to death to Potts. What makes Hyper Hooper respond the way he does around death? What makes Potts respond differently to death?