

The Humans: A Novel Study Guide

The Humans: A Novel by Matt Haig

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Plot Summary

NOTE: The following version of this book was used to create this Study Guide: Haig, Matt. *The Humans*. Paperback edition. Published by Canongate, Great Britain, 2014.

The Humans is a tale of discovery, connection and the meaning of life, told from the perspective of an alien visitor to Earth who is waylaid on his mission by the various unexpected details involved in the typical human life.

The narrator described himself as being non-human and Andrew as being more alien than human from the little time the two spent interacting before Andrew was taken away. The narrator awakened in his human body, naked and on a motorway, confused by everything but observant of what was going on. He tried to make his way to Cambridge but was hit by a car, then when taken into an ambulance reacted with horror towards the humans and jumped out of the ambulance. He walked into a gas station where the clerk called the police on him, while he read a magazine in order to gauge the language. He ran away from the gas station and went to the campus of Cambridge University.

The narrator went into a bookstore and saw a book by Isobel Martin, Andrew's wife, briefly reading it. He tried to reach Andrew's office but was caught by the police and was taken to the station. The narrator had a voiceless "briefing" telling him that he must comply with everything now, that he had a mission to fulfill, and that being afraid among humans was understandable. The narrator was made to put on clothes, at which he mused upon the importance and value of clothes among the human race. He realized that he had been arrested simply for not wearing clothes which surprised him. The policemen started questioning him and called in a psychiatrist when the narrator gave strange answers. The psychiatrist questioned him and admitted him to a psychiatric institution. The narrator met his (Andrew's) wife for the first time who was very concerned about him and then she went home after they spoke for a while.

The narrator then went to the dining area and met a patient named Zoe. Zoe asked the narrator some questions and they had a brief discussion about philosophy while the narrator took stock of the people around him. The narrator convinced a nurse that he only had temporary insanity and Isobel took him home. The "call from home" reminded the narrator not to become swayed from his mission or influenced by humans, who were a destructive race. The narrator absorbed as much information about the family as he could while resting in the bedroom. Isobel brought a TV into the room and turned on the news, which greatly confused the narrator due to its skewed priorities and bias. He started to plan his mission when Isobel went to get groceries, and he met Newton who was initially wary of him. The narrator rode a bike to the college where he logged onto his computer and saw how much of the hypothesis he had solved; it turned out to be a very important discovery. The narrator read the description of the Riemann hypothesis which the original Andrew had solved and he deleted the file.

The narrator looked through the original Andrew's emails and saw that he had forwarded his answer to the Riemann hypothesis to his colleague, Daniel Russell, an



esteemed professor with a strong reputation. He realized that action needed to be taken and that he must follow a sequence. He deleted the email and attachment and put a virus into the computer so the discovery could not be found by anyone else. He saw a photo of Isobel and his son Gulliver and realized he was running out of time to follow the sequence. He was warned by the people from home to be like a prime number and strong in his mission. He returned home to find out more about his old character from Isobel and he met Gulliver. When Isobel went out to walk the dog the narrator tried to gain information from Gulliver who was angry with him for not being there for him.

The narrator read more books including some on poetry and tried to gain more information from Isobel over dinner. He received a call from Daniel which meant it was time to follow the sequence. The narrator went to the Russell house and after a brief conversation eliminated Daniel while making it look like he had a heart attack. He experienced remorse later and contemplated mortality for the first time. The narrator listened to some music later with Newton, healing him in order to gain his trust, and he saw Gulliver skipping school. He followed him to see him standing by the train tracks before returning home.

The narrator learned of an example of human humility through the story of Grigori Perelman who turned down a prestigious mathematical prize in favor of anonymity and a quiet life. The narrator and Newton bonded over food and Gulliver told the narrator not to tell Isobel about his having skipped school. Isobel came home and the narrator observed the grace with which she moved while entering the house. Isobel told him to phone his mother and he tried to find out if he had told his mother anything, which he had not. The narrator told the aliens from home that he had completed the mission and there was no need to eliminate Isobel and Gulliver; they said that someone else would be sent in his place.

The narrator prepared to eliminate Gulliver when the latter attacked the former in his sleep, with the narrator allowing him to. Isobel tended to his injuries when he felt pain for the first time. He understood for the first time why humans sought company in the dark. He asked for more time to complete the mission, saying that humans were more complex than they had thought. He found an unpublished novel by Isobel describing her current life at home. He was contacted by his friend Ari who indicated he knew a secret and the narrator thought he would have to take another life. He puzzled over how humans had not yet discovered immortality and that they acted in certain ways in order to cope. He went to a football match with Ari, from whom he found out that he had been having an affair with a student.

The narrator and Isobel went to Daniel's funeral where he admired Isobel's offer to help his widow. Later the narrator found a book he had written and experienced regret that he had destroyed humanity's chances at advancement. He went to give a lecture where he described the odds of finding extraterrestrial life, and the student, Maggie, approached him and started flirting. The narrator tried to tell Ari his secret at lunchtime but was prevented by extreme pain inflicted by the people from home. He told Isobel about Gulliver skipping school and realized he really did care. Later that night he found Gulliver on the roof attempting suicide and he saved his life. He realized the finality of



death and acknowledged how he had done the opposite of his mission. The aliens from home told him he had been corrupted and the narrator agreed he had been.

Isobel reminded the narrator that he had never really been there for Gulliver but that he had done a great thing the other night saving his life. He manipulated the online accounts of those who had been bullying Gulliver. The narrator and Gulliver took Newton for a walk and encountered his bully, and the narrator told Gulliver to fight back. The narrator saved Isobel from being taken by the aliens from home and appreciated her fully for the first time. The narrator asked to be made human and was granted his wish from the aliens from home, disconnecting him and leaving him alone. The narrator realized what it meant to be fully human for the first time, struggling with all the small difficulties of the daily routine.

The narrator and Isobel enjoyed a pleasant evening together with wine, and the next day while hung over he saw a stranger lurking outside the house who then ran away. Isobel began to notice how different her husband had become and the narrator was on the verge of telling the truth but decided not to yet. Later that night there was an intruder who had been on Isobel's computer, and they tried to forget about it by going to the theater and bonding all over again. They faced Zoe and her new boyfriend on the way home who attacked the narrator, leaving him in severe pain. He realized in hospital that he would one day have to tell his family who he really was, and when he returned to work he was invited to the pub by Maggie. They had a few drinks and went back to her place but he ended up going home. He told Isobel about Maggie who was furious and kicked him out, making him realize the seriousness of what he had done.

The narrator got drunk and sat with a homeless man on a park bench, who had seen a downturn in his own fortune. They talked for a while then he received a call telling him that Ari was dead. He ran home and realized that a replacement had been sent to carry out his mission and that was who had intruded the other night. He encountered the replacement who told him that he had become just like the humans. The narrator pretended to go along with the plan and told him what Gulliver would be doing; he then hid while the replacement posed as him. The replacement started to manipulate Gulliver's mind but the narrator started playing the radio in order to thwart the process. Gulliver snapped out of it and stabbed the replacement.

The replacement died and the narrator burned his hand on a hot plate in order to make it look like it had all happened to him. He told Gulliver and Isobel his true identity and Isobel started mourning for her real husband. The narrator realized he had to leave but typed some life advice for Gulliver on his computer before going. He went to teach at Stanford University and traveled the world but started to miss his family; he returned home when invited to give a lecture at Cambridge. He turned Maggie down and saw Isobel, who gave money to the homeless man who he had met on the park bench. He realized that he loved her and that he was fully human now because all he wanted was to go home to live with his family again. Upon this realization he started walking back to the Martin home.



Preface; Part I: "The Man I was Not" – "Starting the Sequence"

Summary

In the Preface, titled "An Illogical Hope in the Face of Overwhelming Adversity," the narrator addresses the reader in order to tell them that humans really exist. Humans are described as being a "real bipedal life-form of mid-range intelligence" (ix). He states that they are strange and that they would frighten with their appearance. The narrator goes on to outline the appearance of humans, considered to be shocking, and their strange customs and ways of living. The normal life aims of humans are outlined, again considered to be highly unusual to the reader/audience. The narrator tells of how he came to discover poetry, which has opened his mind enough to give humans a chance. It is pondered whether there might be meaning on earth and in human life. The narrator urges the reader/audience to give the story a chance, and wishes peace.

Part I is titled "I Took My Power in My Hand." In the first chapter, "The Man I Was Not," the narrator introduces the setting, Earth, and the type of story which is about to be told, which is about "everything and nothing" (3) and, in short, about being a human. He states that he was not human to begin with, that he had to learn the language from a magazine, but that he wrote the book in the human language for authenticity. He had to inhabit the role of Professor Andrew Martin, a mathematician from Cambridge University who was attempting to solve an impossible mathematical equation, in order to fulfill a role. He did not have an opinion on music or wine, care about his image as an author, or have any of the habits that humans tend to have. He tried to outline Andrew Martin as a man who was just like the reader/audience, who may have ultimately managed to solve the ultimate equation. He met Andrew Martin very briefly before he was taken away, allowing just enough time for the clone to be made, but they did not feel as though they had enough time to get a full impression of Andrew Martin's life. He had to ensure that no one found out about the discovery that he had just made.

In "Detached Nouns and Other Early Trials for the Language-Learner," the narrator starts the story with when he was hit by a car because he has to start somewhere. The narrator inhabited the body of Professor Andrew Martin, but Andrew Martin will hereafter be referred to as the narrator as that is his real identity. The narrator was confused about the weather but realized that it was a relevant subject where he was now. He found the environment completely hostile and inhospitable. He remembered that he needed to breathe. He noted with curiosity that motorways were required on Earth, because he came from a place where travel was instantaneous, and after further bewilderment, he was hit by a car and sent flying.

The man in the car tried to see if he was alright but he was distracted by the appearance of the man. It turned out that the narrator was sent here as a punishment from his original home. He awoke in an ambulance where he also found the appearance



of the paramedics troubling, then he wrestled away and leaped out of the ambulance. He longed to see the stars in the night sky but feared the rain, and wondered why he was attracting so much attention, not thinking it was because he was naked because he did not think it could be "something so trivial as a lack of artificial body-covering," (10) and he tried to follow the sign to where he was supposed to be going. Passers-by spat on him and he spat back in return thinking it a friendly greeting.

In "Texaco," the narrator approached a gas station, surprised that cars did not do anything on their own, and continued to spit on people. He approached the counter where the clerk tried to call security and he continued spitting. He started to sample items of food from the stalls and the clerk called the police. He expressed surprise that information still had to be consumed in paper form and read an article in a magazine in order to gauge the language. The clerk tried to stop him from leaving but he escaped anyway and ran away. He took comfort in the idea that atoms could still be found there and that they always obeyed the laws of the universe. Police cars started approaching and he ran towards Cambridge.

In "Corpus Christi," the narrator tells of how he was not supposed to provide the account of human experience but having become fascinated with Earth some time ago he feels compelled to. He was surprised to see that buildings, such as the ones at Cambridge, were stationary and did not move. While he was thinking about how humans had to be very selective about what books they read because they had so little time, he went into a bookshop and was laughed at by the people there. He saw a book by Isobel Martin, who was supposed to be his (Andrew's) wife. He waited until no one was looking then stole some of the books and ran away to look at them, looking for the Riemann hypothesis, while people continued to stare. He saw a man who looked down on his fortune. He did not know how he knew the man had sad eyes but he says that he somehow knew. He continued to puzzle at the nature of the buildings when to his dismay it started to rain. He approached a building and attempted to decipher the meaning of the words "Corpus Christi," while trying to cope with the texture of the grass below. The police took him away and he said his first words to them, that he was Professor Andrew Martin and that he wished to see his family. He hated the touch of the policeman and wanted them to let go but he complied anyway because he had to.

In "Intermission," the narrator had a voiceless "briefing" telling him that he must comply with everything now, that he had a mission to fulfill, and that being afraid among humans was understandable.

In "Human Clothes," the narrator was made to put on clothes, at which he mused upon the importance and value of clothes among the human race. He realized that he had been arrested simply for not wearing clothes which surprised him. He also puzzled at the recurrence of the rectangle-shaped room. He put clothes on, after trouble figuring out how to, then prepared to act like a normal human being.

In "Questions," two men came in and took the narrator to another room for questioning. He felt a unique type of anxiety which came from being so far from those who understood him. The policemen acknowledged who he was to them - Professor Andrew



Martin - who had a notable academic reputation. The other asked what he had to say and he told the policemen who he was, or at least his identity in the form he was currently in. The policemen demanded to know why he was walking around naked and he continued to recite facts about himself. He stated how he did not like wearing clothes and the policemen submitted him for a psychiatric evaluation. He said he was under a lot of pressure but a different kind to what the psychiatrist was asking.

In "Coffee," the psychiatrist said that the university talked of Professor Andrew Martin overworking recently and that everyone was concerned about him, especially his wife. The narrator pondered the idea of marriage and how it made little sense. He was offered coffee and hated it so much that he spat it out everywhere. The psychiatrist continued asking him questions and he reminded himself to comply. He wondered why humans thought they had free will as he was placed in a psychiatrist institution.

In "Mad People," the narrator observed how madness was not tolerated in people unless they had a special skill to offer and often it depended more on the time people were living in. He remarked how it was important to blend in so as not to be labeled mad by anyone.

In "The Cubic Root of 912,673," the narrator was visited by his wife and he was initially horrified by her appearance as he was expecting to be. He remembered that he was supposed to be pretending to know her well and gaining information about her in the meantime in order to complete his mission. He observed her stressed facial expression and what she looked like. She asked how he was feeling and he asked if anyone had been to his office. He kept asking if she knew what he had been doing at work, and he realized that he would have to kill her as part of his mission because of what she might know. Isobel tried to find out what led to his breakdown but got nowhere, and the narrator was confused by her touch and her expression. She got up to leave and said goodbye.

In "Dead Cows," the narrator went to the dining area where he saw more people and was confused and disgusted that they were serving beef, or cow. He explains the role of the cow as assigned by humans and he did not want to eat one so he tried to eat some vegetables, finding them also disgusting. He went to sit near a plant and was not troubled by its appearance. He was then greeted by a fellow patient named Zoe.

In "The World as Will and Representation," Zoe asked about how long the narrator was going to be there. He became less willing to be there while also being repelled by her appearance. Zoe tried to find out where she knew him from and then recognized who he was. She revealed that she could not have been one of his students because she hated mathematics, which angered him because of how important mathematics was to his world. She revealed that she was more into philosophy. She outlined the philosophy of Schopenhauer then described what was wrong with everyone in the room, including another man who thought he was from another planet. The narrator tried to gauge from Zoe whether anyone else might know what he had to learn, but she could not answer so he asked her the meaning of life. She could not give an answer so he asked about love. She concluded that there was madness in love but also reason in madness and the



conversation ended as the narrator walked away. He tried to ask the man who thought he was from another planet what one he was from and was disappointed when it turned out to be nothing he recognized; he realized that he was alone here. He thought he should have left with Isobel and then left the room to get away from everything.

In "Amnesia," the nurse who supervised him with Isobel was tracked down by the narrator, and he convinced him that he was not insane and that it was a temporary episode he had and nothing more. He avoided the brain scan because it would reveal his secret identity by convincing the nurse that he did not have amnesia. He made up whole memories and a life in order to seem genuine and the doctor concluded that he had simply had an episode of temporary insanity brought on by stress. The narrator said that he had been experiencing a break from reality, but now felt "as real as the sun" (45), which satisfied the doctor. The doctor recognized Andrew already from a book he wrote and called Isobel to take him home.

In the next section titled "Intermission," the "call from home" reminded the narrator not to become swayed from his mission or influenced by humans, who were a destructive race. It outlined the various failings of humans and that he was to proceed with the "mathematical certainty" (46) of his mission.

In "4 Champion Row," the narrator was lying in bed describing all the things in the bedroom he could see, and what he saw in the kitchen downstairs, particularly noting the things he remembered from his home such as limestone and calcite. He noticed shapes and words and two photographs of himself and Isobel during happier times. He noted the famous location in one of the photos, a relic of older civilization, and then saw the photo of their son as a baby. Isobel kept watch over him and he tried to be distant from her knowing what he must do. He asked once again if he said anything of note to her the previous day and she said no.

In "The War and Money Show," Isobel brought a TV into the room and unknown to her the narrator lightened the weight of it with his mind. She put on the news for him, watching him as he watched it, and he made some observations about what he watched. He noticed that the news had no information on any non-humans or on mathematical and scientific discoveries but rather only on politics. He thought that the news should be called "the war and money show" (pg 51) because of how violent humans could be based on the news. There was no news on the Riemann hypothesis which was a surprise. He also learned that humans cared mostly based on proximity, or what was happening closest to them. He pondered that people do not even care what is happening outside of their planet let alone their solar system, and that ideally they would only care about what was happening right in their very home. He saw the story about his breakdown on the local news then. People had been trying to contact the Martins all day and the narrator reminded himself to stick to the plan of the mission.

In "A Stranger," the narrator and Isobel attempted to talk some more, and he thanked her for the sandwich when he had never thanked anyone before. She noticed that his heart was barely beating and she looked at him with worry, which he noted was an appropriate reaction. Isobel went to the supermarket to get groceries and the narrator



used that as a chance to carry out his mission. He noticed that the TV signal was affecting the gifts which held the technology in his hand he needed to communicate with those back home. He went in search of a computer and found the family dog who growled at him. He found a computer and radio in one room, which he thought to be very lacking in sophistication. He did not find information on the Riemann hypothesis in his files or online but found directions to where he needed to go.

In "Starting the Sequence," the narrator rode a bike to Fitzwilliam College, noting the architecture along the way. He was spotted by the cleaner, to whom he explained that he needed access to the building. He met someone on the stairs who seemed to know him well and he assured her that he was fine while wondering if she knew anything. She did not seem to and she left him to go into his office. He noted how stationary and lacking in advancement the room and everything in it was and he searched his computer, finding the Proof of the Riemann Hypothesis. In it Andrew outlined the importance of mathematics throughout human history, and how far civilization might have come if there had not been major setbacks throughout history. It concluded that the mathematical discovery he just made could set humans on the path to advancement once again.

Analysis

The audience which is presumed by the narrator is important to note in *The Humans*. The narrator is writing for the benefit of those who are not human and will not be familiar with the ways of humans, and so describing humans becomes a necessity. Humans are described as being "a real bipedal life form of mid-range intelligence" (ix) which immediately, along with other uses of language, creates a sense of alienation by making the familiar - Earth and humans - seem unfamiliar and strange.

Being dropped in the middle of nowhere in a remote corner of the universe evokes a sense of isolation in the reader, which the author expands upon continuously in the way everyday aspects of the surrounding environment and its people are described at literal face value. The narrator is deeply troubled by the appearance of humans, particularly the shape of the nose, and so the reader gains an insight into how drastically different his perceptions must be if he can consider a person who would be deemed attractive by other people, such as Isobel, to be ugly. However he overrides his repulsion because he knows that he is on a mission, believing that he is acting for the greater good of the universe. The narrator also views the technology around him as primitive, noting that Earth computers are still very much at the "pre-sentient phase of their evolution" (59). This implies that computers have advanced by a long way where he comes from, even becoming almost human. He also finds the lack of appreciation for mathematics to be unfathomable, and coming from a place where mathematics is deemed the most important thing, this is understandable.

This detached narration of all the things which human readers would consider to be normal serves to force the reader to question what they consider to be normal in everyday life. The various quirks of human nature make sense within the context of



everyday human interaction but, devoid of this context, they only serve to baffle a visiting alien. For example, in the psychiatric institution, something as normalized in human society as beef is seen by the narrator for what it really is - part of a cow, and he can only conclude that "the last thing a human wants to think about when eating cow is an actual cow" (37). The narrator responds to the strange disconnect shown here by only eating vegetables from then on.

Furthermore, the relative lack of reason humans apply to any given situation, in favor of emotion and bias, is something which is held in contempt by the alien and those of his species back home. When the narrator finally starts adjusting to life with the Martin family and in his role as Andrew Martin, he becomes more acquainted with the unexpected priorities of typical humans, particularly by way of the news. Calling it the "war and money show," (51) the narrator is baffled by the sheer limited scope of what people deem to be worthy of broadcasting, and concludes, in his logical way of thinking, that the ideal show would indeed be set in one's home and be all about that very person. The irony, of course, is that his own focus is drawn ever inward as time goes on, from the outer reaches of the universe to the homely confinement of the Martin home.

At this stage in the novel, the narrator is still very "alien" in his attitudes towards humans, viewing them with the same distrust and apprehension as his community back home, and he still intends to commit to his "mission" of eliminating those who might have knowledge of the Riemann hypothesis which the original Andrew had solved before being taken away. However he also commits to learning the ways of humans, initially in order to devise a full report on them for purposes of study, but later on his motives begin to change.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author increase the immediate sense of remoteness from his home planet, which the narrator experiences at the very beginning?

Discussion Question 2

The narrator learns the language almost instantly but lacks the appropriate context in which to place it due to being unfamiliar with human ways. How does he compensate for this lack of context and become able to adapt to the social mores of society in order to better blend in?

Discussion Question 3

The narrator cannot fathom the various emotions which Isobel is expressing simply through non-verbal language. How would this limit his initial knowledge of the people around him when he first arrives at the Martin home?

Vocabulary

bipedal, cerebral, externality, hypothesis, primitive, telekinetic, ungulate



Part I: "Primes" - "Intermission"

Summary

In "Primes," the narrator continues to read the document in which Andrew wrote about Bernhard Riemann, a German child prodigy who suffered a series of breakdowns when attempting to carry out his mathematical study. The nature of prime numbers is outlined, how there are as many of them as there are numbers in existence and that there are always prime numbers no matter how high anyone is counting. Humans had always struggled to decipher a pattern in prime numbers but Riemann came very close by identifying a model with which to put them in order, although he never completed the work and people had been trying to do so ever since. The discovery of the hypothesis could lead to great advancements in human technology and he eventually saw that the original Andrew Martin had found the answer. The narrator deleted the file.

In "A Moment of Sheer Terror," the mathematical equation was written down.

In "The Distribution of Prime Numbers," the narrator looked at the original Andrew's emails and saw that he had forwarded his answer to the Riemann hypothesis to his colleague, Daniel Russell, an esteemed professor with a strong reputation. The narrator realized that action needed to be taken and that he must follow a sequence. He deleted the email and attachment and put a virus into the computer so the discovery could not be found by anyone else. He saw a photo of Isobel and his son Gulliver and realized he was running out of time to follow the sequence.

In the section titled "Intermission," the instructions from back home told the narrator to be like a prime number, to be strong and unyielding in his mission.

In "Glory," while doing some research on Isobel, the narrator found out that she was a historian and that she was considered to be very intelligent by human standards. She came home and asked how he was going and he asked where Daniel Russell lived, with her being surprised that he did not remember. It emerged that they were rivals in academia, although with a functional working relationship. Isobel reminded him that there was a prize available for solving the Riemann hypothesis and that one winner once turned it down. She also told him that he used to be motivated by glory, money and ego; then Gulliver, their son, came home.

In "Dark Matter," Isobel went to walk the dog and the narrator called the number he found. A female voice answered and told him that he had ended up all over YouTube. Gulliver entered the room and the narrator observed his appearance. Gulliver asked why he did the naked stunt and the narrator said he did not know, with Gulliver saying that this was going to make school much harder for him now. Before leaving angrily he said that the narrator talked to him last night and the narrator followed Gulliver to his room where he was on his computer, watching a video of his dad during his breakdown. The narrator tried to find out what he spoke about to Gulliver last night but he was too



angry to talk. The narrator tried to mirror his son's language but it only ended up annoying him even more. Gulliver ended up telling him that he mentioned solving the Riemann hypothesis but ultimately he did not care because it had not been good for the family. The narrator told him he had not solved the Riemann hypothesis after all and left the room when Gulliver did not want to talk anymore.

In "Emily Dickinson," the narrator read some more history books, finding that discrimination had been a constant feature of human history. He then found a poetry book and saw a poem by Emily Dickinson, in which certain words, "fulfilling absolute decree" (78) caused him concern. Isobel came home and started making dinner, with Gulliver leaving the house immediately after. She prepared chicken which surprised the narrator and he said he did not want to eat meat. Isobel gave him a diazepam which appeared as "green as knowledge" (79) and he took the pill.

In the next section titled "Intermission," the narrator was warned, simply, to be careful by those back home.

In "Dishwasher," the vegetable stir-fry dinner which Isobel had made tasted of "Bazadean body waste" (pg 81) to the narrator, and he continued to try to find out what he said to Gulliver the night he disappeared. Isobel said he did not give anything else away but that the two of them did not get along normally. The narrator began to notice more things about Isobel which differentiated her from other humans, particularly that she always had an expression which suggested that she was searching for something. She continued to be very observant of the narrator and even went as far as to say "It's almost like an alien clone is in my kitchen" (pg 82) when the phone rang. It turned out to be Daniel Russell, who asked how the narrator was doing, and he realized that his mission had to be carried out then. They arranged to meet at Daniel's house.

In the next "Intermission," the message from home was simply that they were waiting.

In "A Large House," Isobel insisted on driving the narrator but he assured her that he would be alright going alone. He went to the house and Daniel's wife, Tabitha, answered the door. She seemed to know him well and he assured her that he was alright now. The narrator tried to find out if she knew what Daniel knew but she did not. Tabitha invited him in and offered him a drink, and it emerged that Daniel had recently suffered a heart attack from overworking. The narrator went up to Daniel's study.

In "Daniel Russell," the narrator did not know where Daniel's study was but found him soon anyway. Daniel had been reading the Riemann hypothesis document the original Andrew had sent him and Daniel remarked that it was exhausting just looking through it. The narrator asked if he had told anyone but he had not and simply wanted to congratulate him, advising him to wait until the controversy surrounding him had died down before announcing anything. Daniel advised the narrator to take it easy in the meantime, and the narrator started to reveal that he was not really Andrew. Daniel grew very concerned and offered to take him home but the narrator had to stay to complete the mission.



In “The Pain,” the narrator insisted that Daniel pat him on the back, as he said earlier he would do. When he did, the narrator took a reading from him and then Daniel momentarily caught a glimpse of his real face. Before he had a chance to scream the narrator paralyzed his jaw and induced a heart attack, then called for Tabitha.

In “Egypt,” Tabitha called an ambulance and tried to put an aspirin in Daniel's mouth, with Daniel trying in vain to warn her about the narrator not really being Andrew. Tabitha tried to get him to hold on by reminding him about their trip to Egypt, but he died before the ambulance reached the house, and the narrator quietly left the house.

In “Where We Are From,” the narrator describes how different things were where he is from; how there was no love or hate, passion, families or remorse, because reason and technology had reached a stage where it had overtaken everything. Mathematics had been mastered so that great distances could be traveled instantly and the people could biologically renew themselves at will. There was no sense of the individual and they only considered the collective. The narrator explains that “action needs to be taken” (96) if human mathematical understanding was greater than their ability to cope with it, and therefore he had to take Daniel's life. Later that night he had his first nightmare, where he was surrounded by death and the prospect of his own mortality.

In “The Dog and the Music,” the narrator had Newton the dog to keep him company the next day, and Newton was still very wary. Newton was old and nearly blind and the narrator realized that he must heal Newton if he wanted to get on his good side. The narrator made him better, for which Newton expressed great gratitude. Newton stayed by the narrator's side while he worked out his next move, and after telling him to go away the narrator realized he liked Newton's company and called him back again. He played some music influenced by the solar system and after thinking it ridiculous to be influenced by lifeless planets he felt himself being soothed by the music, which he deemed to be just like counting. He started to listen to more music of various genres, feeling as if he understood humans a bit better by doing so. He ended by listening to “Clair de Lune” by Debussy and was shocked by how much it represented space. However he forced himself to remember that humans were “a species of ugliness and violence” (100) and then he was distracted by Newton. He took the dog for a walk, thinking about how humans and dogs were actually close in intelligence. He passed a man with whom he had a brief conversation about Daniel and then about his own well-being before parting. He felt sorry for Newton who, as a dog, was not as free as he seemed to think he was. Newton barked to alert him to the fact that Gulliver was walking towards them, skipping school, and when he saw them he turned the other way. The narrator wondered if he could be trusted, and if he should have acted earlier, and he started following Gulliver who lit a cigarette and tried to hide. They then walked to the edge of the railway tracks where Gulliver stood very close to where the train passed, and the narrator waited to see what would happen. The train passed and Gulliver went home.

In “Grigori Perelman,” the narrator realized that Gulliver may still know too much—even just the knowledge that the Riemann hypothesis could be solved—but he could not act too quickly so as not to raise suspicion. He went home and looked up Poincare



Conjecture, a mathematical puzzle which had been solved by Grigori Perelman, who had won a prize for it but had turned it down. He was not interested in money or fame, contrary to what the narrator had been briefed on humans that money and fame were all they cared about. He went to look for food.

In “Crunchy Wholenut Peanut Butter,” the narrator tried eating random combinations of food until he saw some peanut butter and gave some to Newton who urged him to try it. He enjoyed food for the first time, and realized that he had also enjoyed music and company that day too. The narrator told Newton that he knew that Newton discovered his identity early on and then confided that he killed Daniel, but for the greater good. He told Newton about how the mind and body were all connected, and they could connect to other minds and bodies. Technology was also built into his body which allowed him to communicate with home and possessed many other abilities, which allowed everything to work in harmony. The narrator and Newton ate the peanut butter until it was all gone and Newton licked the jar clean. Newton asked the narrator why he had come here and he told him that he was here to erase information and also to observe humans and what they were like. They sat for a while until Gulliver came home, who asked the narrator not to tell his mum that he was not at school. The narrator asked him why he was by the train tracks and Gulliver ran up to his room.

In “Isobel’s Dance,” Isobel came home and the narrator observed the grace with which she carried out all her movements upon entry. She noticed that Newton seemed livelier than usual, and as they exchanged words the narrator realized that he was becoming used to her, and he was becoming less repelled by her all the time. She asked if people had been calling and the narrator said he never answered the phone. It turned out that there had been lots of calls and Isobel related who had been calling. One name in particular made Isobel act strange and the narrator remembered that there were more types of language than words. Isobel noticed the mess in the kitchen and reminded him to call his mother back.

In “The Mother,” the narrator phoned his mother to find out if she had been given any information. His mother was keen to know how he was and wondered if he and Isobel were still having trouble. The original Andrew had told his mother about how he had been working hard, and his mother told him about lots of other things but no details about what he had been working on. She told the narrator about how she and also his father had been suffering ill health, a remote concept to the narrator, and the conversation started to depress him as he realized how terrible a thing it was to grow older as a human. He suddenly ended the phone conversation and a look from Newton told him to pick up the phone and say goodbye properly.

In the next “Intermission,” the narrator communicated back home to inform them that there was no more danger and that he had eliminated Daniel who was the main person who knew. They asked if he had eliminated Gulliver and Isobel and he told them that there was no need to as they posed no risk. They insisted it must be done and the narrator told them he could manipulate Gulliver's brain so that he would forget. However, they reminded him that it would no longer work when he returned. They told him that if he did not complete the task then someone else would be sent in his place.



Analysis

The narrator is motivated by pure logic, to the extent that the act of erasing the single biggest advance in knowledge in human history is as easy for him as literally deleting a file. He notes the ease, at one point, of humans erasing bacteria by cleaning, saying "I could wipe out a few of (the humans), no problem, and for a far greater cause than hygiene" (31). This statement illustrates the deemed inferiority of humans by his species. The finality of this attitude, and of deleting a file carrying such immense value, is almost chilling with the sheer ease with which this task is undertaken.

Just as chilling is the pure logic with which he decides to eliminate his rival, Daniel Russell, and then his wife and son. He attempts to justify this by saying that nothing, where he comes from, is done without a reason and therefore there is no such thing as remorse. Therefore, as much as he attempts to embody the person who he has been sent to replace, the gulf between the old and the new Andrew is characterized when Isobel informs him that he was once motivated by glory, whereas he is now motivated by the greater good of the universe. The author reinforces this logical persona via the communications the narrator receives from the aliens at home, who remind him to be unwavering and uncompromising in his mission just like a prime number. They tell him "You must not weaken, you must distance yourself, and you must not change after interaction. You must be indivisible" (67). Since mathematics is the backbone of their entire civilization, this reinforces the narrator's identity as an alien being, merely in transit in a human body until he has done what needs to be done.

However, at least on the surface, the actions of the old and new Andrew appear the same, so his cover is secure for the time being. Yet it is the gulf between the old and the new Andrew which Isobel begins to notice, turning attention onto the narrator which he does not find entirely welcome. He is forced to confront firsthand the irrationality of the human mind, and he puzzles for some time as to how she can do things purely for other people, with no apparent reward. Similarly he does not understand her pure dedication to her husband and son, despite also getting rather little in return. Yet he begins to learn things through not only interaction with other people, but through reading the various books he encounters around the house.

Books play a pivotal role in the subsequent development of the narrator as he comes to see words as tools for conveying not just facts but emotion, by way of poetry. Contrary to the rigid reason with which he is expected to live back home, he encounters a passage inviting him to do the exact opposite. Upon reading Emily Dickinson, he sees the words "The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience" (78), which shows that he can afford to become more emotionally open. Soon he also reads a story about a mathematician who, unlike the original Andrew, turned down a significant prize and recognition for an immense mathematical discovery, preferring a quiet and anonymous life. It is at this point the narrator realizes that humans, contrary to what his species had come to believe, are not purely motivated by greed and gain. Through the acts of reading, listening to music, spending time with his



canine companion Newton and with his family, the gulf between the human and the alien experience begins to close.

This elimination of differences introduces conflict with regards to the narrator's attempts to remain true to his mission, and after actually completing the task of eliminating Daniel Russell, he experiences remorse for the first time in his life. This confuses him greatly, so much so that he does not even recognize it properly for what it really is at first, so rare is the emotion back home. Similarly, the narrator begins to see his pure logic falter, little by little, as he starts to inhabit his new body so fully that he cannot help but become, more and more, like the man he is imitating. Except now, with his fresh perspective, it is considered to be an improvement on the original Andrew Martin. Indeed it is through his fresh perspective that he begins to notice how troubled his son Gulliver has become, and it is implied that his observations of the warning signs of depression exhibited by Gulliver are what would eventually lead to him saving his life.

Discussion Question 1

The narrator experiences remorse for the first time in his life after killing Daniel. How does the author convey this, especially while using the still mostly-logical language which the narrator is used to using?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the narrator purposefully make the language of mathematics more comprehensible to humans, bearing in mind that he is presuming to be talking to a non-human audience?

Discussion Question 3

How much, and in what specific ways, does the narrator's increasing concern for Isobel and Gulliver compromise his mission?

Vocabulary

acclimatised, conjecture, homeopathy, indivisible, interstellar, mesmerising, totalitarianism

Part II: "Sleepwalking" - "Intermission"

Summary

Part II is titled "I Held a Jewel in My Fingers." In the first chapter of this section, "Sleepwalking," the narrator was preparing to eliminate Gulliver by manipulating his movements in his sleep. He instructed him to get up from bed, walk to his door and was about to tell him to fall forward down the stairs when something stopped him. He felt as though he needed more time then Gulliver started attacking him while still sleeping. The narrator allowed him to do so in order to be able to understand the violence then he woke up. Isobel came up and saw what had happened.

In "I Was a Wasn't," Isobel cleaned the narrator's injuries in the bathroom, with the narrator being able to heal himself but not allowing himself to so that she would not get suspicious. He apologized for everything, "for the past and the future" (127) and they went to bed. Isobel was concerned that she did not know Gulliver anymore, and the narrator suggested that they not try to understand so as much as accept, and felt as though he was starting to know better how it felt to be human, and starting to know Isobel more. He remembered how where he came from technology had replaced dependency on other people and began to actually appreciate pain. The narrator asked Isobel if she thought that humans were knowable and she was too tired to answer the question fully. The narrator acknowledged the need for humans to find comfort in the dark and he felt this with Isobel's presence.

In the next chapter titled "Intermission," the narrator asked for more time, and they said that he did not need more time. He insisted that there was more to humans than they thought and they were far more complex, and that he needed to gather more information. He had come to learn much about them already, such as their need to have control over their environment and that was why they kept creating things, in order to bring them back to their true selves again. He explained how Gulliver attacked him but then changed his mind when he woke, and also about the mathematician who turned down the prize money for his discovery. He insisted that he could learn from Isobel and Gulliver, but the aliens back home insisted that they must die.

In "Wider than the Sky," Isobel told Gulliver that he was suffering from sleep psychosis and noticed that the narrator's cuts had healed completely overnight. She offered Gulliver the chance to stay home from school but he said he was fine. The narrator needed to find out more about Isobel and Gulliver so he went into Isobel's wardrobe and found a novel written by her. It described a protagonist who seemed just like Isobel, then he confessed to reading it later on which made her angry. He got a call from his friend Ari, who revealed that he knew that the original Andrew had a big secret and then the narrator realized that he would have to take another human life.

In "A Few Seconds of Silence over Breakfast," the narrator contemplates that it was easy to assume the form of a human, as humans and non-human beings were made of



the same materials, but it was another matter to become accustomed to the human form and lifestyle. He had to remind himself that he was a stranger to his son and his wife. He observed her motherly concern for her son, and her beauty which was the same as any type of beauty.

In the next "Intermission," the creatures from the narrator's home demanded to know what was taking so long and he told them that he was still accumulating information. He told them that things had stopped making sense and they reminded him to stick to his mission.

In "Life/Death/Football," the narrator pondered how humans had not yet solved the problem of death and that they seemed to live their lives in a way which seemed very predictable on the surface. However he noted that there were various smaller things which humans got up to in the meantime which still had significance. He went to a football match with his friend Ari, who reminded him that mathematicians had a history of going mad. He told Ari that everything was fine now and quoted poetry to Ari's surprise. Ari revealed that the secret the original Andrew had told him was that he was having an affair with a student and that things were not going well with Isobel. The match ended and someone threw a can at the narrator's head which he missed and the can thrower, with some others, came over to confront him. Ari told him to go away but the narrator intervened telepathically, making them go away. It started to rain and the narrator ran for cover due to hating the rain.

In "Lightbulb," Isobel was changing a light bulb when the narrator came home and the light bulb fell to the floor. The narrator fixed the old one telepathically and Isobel embraced him, then he felt the comfort of having someone as a companion.

In "Shopping," the narrator and Isobel went to Daniel's funeral and saw Tabitha, and Isobel offered to help her during the difficult time. The narrator admired how she did something completely for someone else.

In "The Zeta Function," Isobel asked the narrator if he was sure he was ready to go back to work again and he assured her that he was. He went to his office and was able to take in more details of his surroundings and he regarded the books as being very primitive. He found a book written by himself, an uncorrected proof copy of "The Zeta Function," which he read and found very disheartening because of how close he came to something unattainable only for it to come to nothing. The prior accomplishments of humans were listed but they would not advance humanity in the same way. There were many advanced things which they had not yet done and the narrator realized that he had destroyed the chances of that happening in the future. Isobel phoned and reminded him that he had missed a lecture.

In the next "Intermission," the creatures from home reminded the narrator to be careful and that they were listening.

In "The Problem with Equations," the narrator walked into the lecture hall where the students were waiting and he started to get to work. A student joked about his incident



and everyone started laughing except for one. The narrator dissected the joke and turned it around in his favor so that they were laughing with him instead. Rather than talking about what he was meant to that day he talked about the equation on the t-shirt of the boy who made the joke. It was called Drake's equation which calculated the odds of there being life in the Milky Way galaxy. He outlined the factors which made up the equation and added more of his own including the odds of those able to communicate with Earth actually wanting to and doing so. After the lecture a student named Maggie came up to him, who appeared to know him very well. He tried to work out the type of relationship she had with him before.

In "The Violet," the narrator and Ari met in the college cafe and the narrator told him about trying to explain Drake's equation. They discussed Fermi's Paradox, how aliens must have made contact now if they existed and Ari outlined that it pointed to an unpopular theory that humans were not at the center of everything. Humans rejected the idea that the earth was so old and that they had not been around for very long because it would point to their lack of importance. The narrator asked what might happen if an alien were to land on earth and Ari said that it would be best for them not to reveal that they were one. The narrator experienced a severe pain in his head and saw violet everywhere. The pain and the color gradually disappeared, taking away the narrator's chance to reveal his secret.

In "The Possibility of Pain," the narrator knew that the pain had been a warning to him, and Gulliver came home with a bruised eye. Isobel tried to talk to him but he told them to leave him alone and went to his room. The narrator wondered if he should tell Isobel that Gulliver had not been going to school, and he realized that he really did care about Gulliver.

In "Sloping Roofs (And Other Ways to Deal with the Rain)," narrator was unable to sleep that night and went to talk to Newton but he was asleep. He noticed cold air coming from the top of the house and he went to Gulliver's room where he found a note saying "I'm sorry" then found Gulliver on the roof in the rain. The narrator felt a connection and wondered if he was actually capable of completing his mission. It turned out Gulliver had taken all of the narrator's diazepam tablets and was planning on jumping off the roof. The narrator told him not to jump and Gulliver recalled a memory of when he and his father were on holiday when he was eight, and said that was the last good memory he had of them. He said he felt stupid all the time and the narrator tried to reach him and they both ended up falling off the roof of the house. The narrator broke his legs but was able to heal himself with great effort and then he tried to save Gulliver. He began to hope this time, rather than simply try, to bring Gulliver back to life.

In "The Thing with Feathers," the narrator realized that death was an impossible thing to return from, like a black hole, and made a massive effort to save Gulliver's life. Isobel woke up just as Gulliver started showing signs of life again, and the narrator was overcome with pain. He was only aware of footsteps behind him as he faded and remembered a poem about hope by Emily Dickinson.



In “Heaven is a Place Where Nothing Ever Happens,” the narrator had a dream in which he was back on his home planet, free from fear and pain. However soon he began to miss the imperfections which made life interesting. He acknowledged that perhaps he did not appreciate such a planet as his home anymore.

In “In-Between,” the narrator returned to his form on earth, as the gifts had intended for him to do. He got up and went to hide in the garden while Isobel tended to Gulliver and called an ambulance. He knew that he only needed to say one word and he would be back home and he chose not to, not really knowing why. Newton went out to join him in the garden and the narrator felt love for the dog.

In “Intermission,” the aliens from home told the narrator that he had been corrupted by humans, and he argued that humans had emotions for a good reason—to preserve themselves. They said that they wanted him to come home but he wanted to remain.

Analysis

The growing influence of the dark, and of vulnerability, becomes more of a factor for the narrator in this section of the novel. His own vulnerability, triggered by the sensation of pain, manifests in his request for more time in completing his mission. What is most significant about this moment of pain is not that he feels it but that he allows himself to. Both pivotal moments of vulnerability occur in the dark: the first one when, preparing to eliminate Gulliver, he is instead attacked by his son.

He had noticed the darkness in Gulliver from the beginning, describing his clothes as being “as black as space,” (72) which is significant for someone who has actually come from there. Rather than fight back, he simply allows Gulliver to run his course. The second is when, having allowed Isobel to heal his cuts (despite possessing the capacity for self-healing) he lies in the dark appreciating her presence. The more he becomes aware of the power of the dark on Earth, the more he understands the need for companionship which many humans share. He also sees the need to help Gulliver out of his own darkness, which is worse than he initially expected. He notices that “There was so much darkness across his face he might as well have been all bruise,” (168) and describes him as being “a black hole,” (pg 188) so the narrator takes it upon himself to be there more often for his son and act as a sort of guide.

The narrator’s vulnerability reaches its peak during a simple conversation with his friend and colleague Ari. When asking what he thinks the reaction would be if an alien made their presence known on Earth, Ari says that it would be a very bad idea to do so. Indeed the narrator never gets the chance because he ultimately is subject to the control of the aliens back home, who trigger intense pain in him in order to stop him from revealing his identity. There is an irony that he is prevented from exposing himself and making himself known - and being subject to the full scope of human reaction - by those who are still, ultimately, in remote control of his body.



This is the first time in the novel when the narrator seems to fully grasp the complexity of humans, particularly that they are more than just the inferior beings which his species views them as being. This is apparent in his growing reluctance to take human life, growing “weary at the probability that I would have to switch another human life into non-existence” (136) which is in part because he begins to fully appreciate the permanence of death. Confronted with the realities of the mortal human body by way of pain, his attendance of Daniel's funeral (the death of whom he caused in the first place), and later, Gulliver's attempted suicide, make something which had previously been a distant memory into a current reality, and a threat to those for whom the narrator has started to care.

The sense of loss comes not only in terms of human life but in the advancement of human existence: the narrator begins to genuinely mourn for the lost potential of advancing human civilization, again due to the actions he was forced to undertake. However he comes to deem this as a necessary action, because humans are simply not equipped psychologically to deal with the consequences of such discoveries as his species was at home. Furthermore, yet another - more human - weakness makes itself known to him, further compounding his certainty that humans are not ready for advanced technology. It emerges that he, or rather the original Andrew, had been having an affair with a student, and although the narrator cannot fathom either how he could have been drawn to such a person in the first place or how he could betray Isobel who he has come to be close to, he acknowledges the limitations of his understanding of being human.

Discussion Question 1

The narrator begins to move from describing metaphorical to literal pain. How does the sudden pain inflicted on the narrator exemplify the vulnerability of the position he is now in?

Discussion Question 2

What does the emergence of the character of Maggie indicate about the original Andrew's past, and how the narrator must proceed with "being" in his body in the future?

Discussion Question 3

How does saving Gulliver's life make the narrator reflect upon the reality of death, and how it affects the human experience?

Vocabulary

binary, etiquette, extraterrestrial, incandescent, mediocre, neutrality, pathos, penultimate, regeneration, velocity



Part II: "Two Weeks in the Dordogne and a Box of Dominoes" - "Places beyond Logic"

Summary

In "Two Weeks in the Dordogne and a Box of Dominoes," Isobel and the narrator were in the living room while Gulliver and Newton were upstairs, and Isobel went over the previous night saying they could have been killed. Isobel asked what happened to the narrator's tablets and he said that he threw them away. They decided that Gulliver was better off at home than in the hospital and the narrator asked if what happened to Gulliver was because of the night he had his breakdown. Isobel reminded him that he had never really been there for Gulliver, despite what the narrator said about the time he and Gulliver spent quality time together on holiday in France. Isobel reminded him that he was largely absent for Gulliver's early years and that she was the one who had to make all the sacrifices for the family when he made none. The narrator said that they would probably be better off without him and Isobel said that she needed him to be there and that he did a great thing the other night with Gulliver. He went upstairs to see how Gulliver was doing.

In "Social Networking," the narrator pondered social networking on earth and at home. Earth did not have the technology to synchronize thoughts and feelings so it was very limited in comparison, but the systems were very easy for him to hack into. He manipulated the online accounts of those who bullied Gulliver and sent them viruses, enjoying the thrill of doing so.

In "Forever Is Composed of Nows," the narrator and Gulliver went to the park to walk Newton and Gulliver expressed surprise for not being more injured, and that he did not want the narrator to save him. The narrator told him that he had much more time left to live, and when Gulliver lit a cigarette he asked to try it. The narrator suggested that they go to France and play dominoes again and Gulliver ended up telling him that he felt that too much pressure was put on him due to him being Professor Andrew Martin's son. A dead leaf fell into the narrator's hand and he brought it back to life again, with Gulliver noticing. Gulliver saw some people he knew from school and they started laughing at him; the narrator told him to start sticking up for himself and went over.

In "Violence," the boy who had been bullying Gulliver approached the narrator for a fight, and he told him that he would lose. The narrator told Gulliver that he was at an advantage because he could surprise and to fight like he did during his sleep. The boy hit Gulliver at first but then Gulliver hit back and won the fight. The narrator realized that violence was only just beneath the surface in humans and that he was more troubled by how they tried to keep it hidden.



In “The Taste of Her Skin,” the narrator and Isobel were in bed and the violet color which was the warning sign for the narrator started to come back. He was temporarily overtaken by the creatures from home and they were about to kill Isobel. The narrator fought back and became himself again at the last minute and instead told Isobel that he loved her, knowing that he just saved her life.

In the next “Intermission,” the narrator told the creatures from home that he could not allow himself to be controlled like that again and that he wanted to be disconnected and become human. The aliens from home warned him against it but ultimately granted him his wish, telling him that he chose to limit himself to a lonely place and that the consequences were his to deal with now.

In “The Rhythm of Life,” the narrator explains how love was the most frightening thing there was because of how much it changed everything. The narrator woke to find himself feeling mortal and human, anxious for that reason and also knowing that the hosts were going to send another person in his place. That fear was overtaken with the day-to-day worries he now faced being a real human with a human life. He started to grow frustrated at the lack of human imagination in how they spent their time during life, doing the same thing almost every day. He felt that there should be more days that were fun than those that were spent working, and puzzled at the amount of time required simply to prepare for a day and to be presentable.

In “Teenagers,” Isobel continued to worry about Gulliver, saying that he had always had a resistance to connecting with people from a young age. The narrator asked about the importance of friendships and Isobel said that they kept people in touch with the world. She recalled how her brother committed suicide due to financial worries and the narrator felt sad about how easily humans succumbed to worry. He told her that Gulliver had not been going to school and Isobel had a row with Gulliver over it. Gulliver was angry at the narrator for betraying him and the narrator apologized, waiting outside his door for a long time until he was forgiven.

In “Australian Wine,” Isobel poured a glass of wine for the narrator and they went to sit in the garden, joined by Newton. Isobel told him that he normally hated Australian wine, and they enjoyed the moment together looking up at the moon.

In “The Watcher,” the narrator was hung over from the wine he drank the night before and tried to relieve it with a glass of water and a shower, then he read some poetry. He had the feeling he was being watched and Newton tried to reassure him. He saw someone watching him who ran away and chased him but the man got away.

In “How to See Forever,” the narrator watched Isobel communicating with a friend online and marveled at the unlikelihood of human existence and how unlikely it was for Isobel to have existed in the first place. Thinking about the minute odds of any person to come into existence at all and for the world to be the way it was now, he understood why religion was important to humans, as the existence of a god seemed to be just about as likely. The narrator shared this thought with Isobel and she was impressed with how different his world view had become. He noticed how beautiful she was, and



contemplated her journey through life and all the stages she experienced to become who she was now. He was on the verge of telling her the truth about who he really was but could not bring himself to do it so he digressed instead. He said they needed a new sofa because he hated purple and Isobel found it funny because he always acted like an emperor and emperors traditionally wore purple. Isobel told a story she read once about a couple who were having separate affairs online but when they met it turned out to be with each other but instead of driving them apart it only made them love each other more.

In "The Intruder," later that night Isobel heard an intruder and the narrator went downstairs alone to investigate. He started to feel fear for the first time, as he had never had need for fear back home. He noticed that Isobel's laptop, which she had closed earlier, was now open and the screen was glowing, indicating recent use. He went back upstairs and so as not to worry Isobel told her everything was fine.

In "Perfect Time," Gulliver played a song for the narrator and Isobel, and temporarily the narrator forgot to worry.

In "A King of Infinite Space," the narrator and Isobel went to see Hamlet at the theater and then went for dinner, leading them to talk about whether they feared death. Isobel preferred not to discuss it then. The narrator told her that she should publish the novel he found in her wardrobe, and she was reluctant but appreciated the time they were spending together getting to know each other all over again. Isobel then recalled their first date and the narrator was able to feel like he really was that person she was talking about and that he knew her long ago. The narrator was about to tell her his secret all over again when they saw two figures approaching them acting aggressively so they crossed the road to try to avoid them. It turned out that it was Zoe, the girl Andrew met at the psychiatric institution, and her new boyfriend. Zoe saw them then.

In "The Art of Letting Go," the narrator told Zoe's boyfriend to leave them alone and he became aggressive, physically grabbing Isobel when she spoke up. The narrator told him again and then he got beaten. He woke in an ambulance with Isobel who told him she loved him and he now understood the purpose of love.

In "Neuroadaptive Activity," the narrator awoke in hospital in severe pain for the first time in his life. He considered the nights on earth to be the loneliest he had known and tried to console himself with prime numbers. The doctors did tests and found unusual neurological activity in his brain. His friend Ari came to visit him and said he admired him for sticking up for his wife and it was then that the narrator decided to tell him who he really was. Ari did not believe him despite the narrator trying to explain and wanted proof. He realized that if Ari did not believe him then Isobel never would and that he would one day have to tell Gulliver.

In "Platykurtic Distribution," the narrator returned to work because he was growing lonely at home and understood now why people worked, though he welcomed the solitude of his office. There was a knock on the door and when he answered it was



Maggie, who acted very flirtatious with him. She invited him to a pub which he accepted which he would later realize was a mistake.

In "The Hat and Feathers," the narrator observed the inside of the pub they went to, realizing why people in this country might have invented pubs and wondering why there were so many straight lines. They ordered drinks and she told him that he was a hit on Youtube. He tried to change the subject and asked her what it meant to be human.

In "The Ideal Castle," Maggie described being human as being like a child receiving a gift which was not assembled and they had to work it out but neither they nor anyone they knew could figure out how to.

In "Somewhere Else," the narrator found out that Maggie wanted to go somewhere else, and confirmed that they had been having an affair while the narrator was still the old version of himself, and she wanted to continue the affair that night. He began to have immediate regrets and they proceeded to a certain point before he suddenly left.

In "Places Beyond Logic," the narrator returned home to find Isobel was worried about him. Although he felt it was wrong to do so he confessed to having been with Maggie. Isobel reacted furiously and then demanded to know who she was. The narrator said that he did not realize the significance of what he did until it was too late and Isobel said she did not even know him. He tried to explain that he was from another planet far away and she said she wanted a divorce. He tried to stop her leaving and she slapped him, leaving him there with Newton.

Analysis

Color begins to feature more prominently in the novel, primarily as an indicator of extreme emotions. Black is continually present as an aura around Gulliver, indicating his extreme dark moods and isolation, synonymous with the remoteness of space. However another color begins to emerge over time. Initially experienced in conjunction with extreme pain, the narrator sees violet everywhere whenever he is about to expose his true identity to another human. Violet also coincides with a threat to Isobel's life which the narrator thwarts at the last second, indicating his species' association of violet with violence. It is uncertain whether Isobel's explanation that purple was traditionally the color of emperors is a coincidence but it is intended as a reference to the narrator's perceived superiority. Considering himself to be high above all others, as the alien who would become Andrew considered himself in relation to humans, he would eventually become humbled both by the experience of pain and by his request to disconnect from the aliens from home and become fully human. Now he would experience the full range, good and bad, of the human experience.

The emergence of violence as a theme in the novel becomes more apparent the more time the narrator spends among the humans. Coming from a completely rational society - in which even murder is only committed methodically and for what is deemed to be a good reason - violence for its own sake is a remote concept for the narrator. It is only



when he encounters the raw teenage angst in Gulliver and begins to feel all the emotions which come with being a human which can potentially lead to violence that the narrator begins to see why humans sometimes resort to it. After tolerating the violence inflicted on him by Gulliver while he was sleepwalking, the narrator can see that his "violence was all inward. It was time for him to push some the other way," (188) which leads to the decision the narrator makes to physically stand up to Gulliver's bully and encourage Gulliver to do the same. He later enacts violence in defense of Isobel, which he later comes to see as having done the right thing. In this case the violence is justified and it leaves him as vulnerable as anyone else.

The narrator will later develop an on-the-spot theory as to one of the causes of human violence - "Earth dwellers still seemed to be a long way off from understanding the link between straight lines and acute forms of psychosis, which might explain why pubs seemed to be full of aggressive people" (229) - when he is invited to a pub, a place of such potential violence, by Maggie. The introduction of Maggie shows another side to the original Andrew which was previously hidden from his family, a sign of his potential for duplicity and deception even before his form was replicated by an alien. It also stands as a trial for his humanity, in terms of whether he will not only proceed with the affair, but also lie about it to Isobel. He does proceed with the affair but realizes his mistake early on and leaves Maggie, all the while confused as to what is and is not expected of him in a marriage.

His instinct leads him to believe it is wrong but the exception to his increasingly human tendencies comes when he immediately tells Isobel about what he has done. The narrator learns a harsh lesson about the meaning of loyalty and what it is in relation to love, and it costs him his family and new life. The narrator faces a very human situation but the way in which he addresses it shows a hybrid of human and alien emotions and instincts which makes it uncertain how he will proceed from then on. The narrator explains, "There were rational things to do here, I was sure, but I had come a long way since rationality," (220) showing a profound leap in his character from certain alien to uncertain human.

Discussion Question 1

How does Isobel make it clear to the narrator that she prefers "his" version of her husband to the original one?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the narrator's increasing tendency towards violence make him more human?



Discussion Question 3

Why did the narrator decide to tell Isobel the truth, despite apparently knowing on some level that what he did with Maggie was wrong?

Vocabulary

authoritative, delicacy, empathise, immortality, phosphorescence, regenerate, simulation, synchronisation



Part III: "An Encounter with Winston Churchill" - "Home"

Summary

Part III is titled "The Wounded Deer Leaps the Highest." The first chapter in this section is "An Encounter with Winston Churchill." The narrator went out to buy a bottle of wine, drank it, and then bought another and sat on a park bench next to the man he saw on his first day. He started a conversation with the man about the concept of free will and how they came to be where they were now. The man had lost his job, his wife had left him, and then he developed a painful condition in his leg. The narrator asked how to cope with loving someone who hated him and the man did not know. The narrator tried to heal the man's leg but was unable to. He said that he recognized the narrator and saw him on the street where Ari lived but the narrator thought it impossible as he had never been there. When the man left he phoned Ari and a woman answered, telling him that he was dead.

In "The Replacement," the narrator ran to his house and no-one seemed to be in. He did not have a key and rang the bell, and someone let him in. He walked into the house to see Newton asleep and then in the living room he saw another version of the narrator, in the form of Andrew, who claimed to be his replacement. He said that he had been sent to destroy anyone who might have been told about who the narrator really was, and that the people from home were still listening. It turned out that the replacement was the one who broke in and went on Isobel's computer the other night and he had been living with a woman he had convinced was his wife nearby.

The narrator tried to explain why there would be no point in killing anyone and the replacement said how hypocritical humans were. He said humans had not learned anything from their time on earth and would one day have the knowledge to venture beyond earth and posed a threat to beings in other parts of space. The replacement concluded that although he and the narrator were sent to kill they were meant to do it out of logic and reason, and that Gulliver had to go because the narrator had told him. The replacement told the narrator that he had become like the humans and the narrator agreed with him.

In "A Game," the narrator admitted that he had been weak and had been corrupted by living among the humans and told the replacement about what would be the best way to kill Gulliver to rouse the least suspicion; he then told him he would go hide.

In "90.2 MHz," the narrator waited and heard his replacement talking to Gulliver, who was surprised to see him there. The replacement started exercising mind control on Gulliver, telling him to kill himself, and the narrator started playing music and radio at top volume, interrupting the process. He went into the kitchen and started playing more music and got into a struggle with the replacement. The narrator started to tell Gulliver



the truth, but was contradicted by the replacement. He told Gulliver to keep the radios on as it interfered with the replacement's technology, and he struck the narrator, landing him on the floor. He was about to turn off the radios when Gulliver stabbed him in self defense.

In "The Ultimate Crime," the narrator got Gulliver to help him put the replacement's hand on the hot plate in order to burn out the gifts. He ordered him to tell the people from home that the mission was off but he ended up dying. The narrator heard Isobel come home and told Gulliver to keep her away then he burned his own hand on the hot plate.

In "The Nature of Reality," the narrator pondered the concept of reality, and how humans came to the important realizations in life. They always made discoveries which changed how they view everything and he realized that it also happened on an individual and personal level. The only difference between everyone was how much it made them change.

In "A Face as Shocked as the Moon," the narrator thought that Gulliver would have an easier time accepting everything that had happened due to his age and thinking everything was strange anyway. He also thought that he would not really miss his real father as he was never truly there to begin with. The narrator and Gulliver dragged the body of the replacement into the garden as Isobel watched on in disbelief. The narrator knew she did not know the whole truth and would need far more time to absorb everything. She was prescribed pills and retired to bed for three weeks in order to cope, grieving for her real husband and for what she thought was her life.

The narrator knew that she would struggle to trust him because he posed as her husband and that it did not matter that he never wanted to do any of this in the first place. He considered telling Isobel that it was all a lie after all and that he had been her husband from the beginning but he could not do this as he needed to stick to a story. Gulliver more readily accepted him as an alien than as his dad and asked where he was from, and the narrator tried to explain. The distance of his home planet was unfathomable to Gulliver and the narrator did not expect him to understand. Isobel came downstairs and asked what they were doing. She was still tense at the situation and the narrator decided that he had to leave.

In "The Second Type of Gravity," the narrator went up to Gulliver's room to say goodbye, and Gulliver told him that he was not unlike his real dad because of some of the things he had done. He said that he had never felt comfortable with his life and that he had no excuse to have problems because he thought he came from a well-adjusted family even if that was not the case. He asked what the narrator's home planet was like and the narrator told him that it was free from all the things which concerned humans but that also it was more boring for that reason. Gulliver went to speak to someone on the phone and the narrator typed some advice for him on his computer.

In "Advice for a Human," the narrator produced a long numbered list of every single piece of life advice he could think of for Gulliver to use throughout his life.



In “A Very Brief Hug,” the narrator said goodbye to Isobel and then felt everything collapsing inside him when he left the house.

In “The Melancholy Beauty of the Setting Sun,” the narrator explained how black holes were very tidy and involved no mess and so he must create as little disorder as possible, so he decided to remain in the form of Andrew Martin. He moved to Stanford University to continue his work but made sure he never contributed too much to the advancement of technology, reminding his peers that solving the Riemann hypothesis was impossible. He tried to continue life as normal but never allowed himself to get close to anyone because they would start asking questions about his past. He saw one of Isobel's books and spent some time reading it. He traveled the world in order to forget Isobel but only ended up being reminded of her more so he returned to Stanford and turned to nature. He began to want to go home to see if Isobel and Gulliver were alright and around the same time he was invited to give a lecture back in Cambridge.

In “When Galaxies Collide,” during his lecture the narrator warned against exploring mathematics too much and that humans had reached the limit of what they could safely learn. Maggie approached him and invited him to the pub but he turned her down. He walked towards Isobel's college and then saw her, but she did not see him. He observed her and realized how much he missed just being with her and he watched her walk away. She gave money to a homeless man who turned out to be the one who the narrator met on the park bench some time ago.

In “Home,” the narrator followed the homeless man and sat down on the bench with him. The man told him how he lost everything and the narrator said he had too. The man asked the narrator for money and he gave him some, then he left. The narrator began to wonder about his purpose in the universe and he saw Newton, then Gulliver. Gulliver had grown up and joined the band the narrator had encouraged him to and started reading poetry. He told the narrator that Isobel missed him but the narrator did not think returning home would be a good idea. They talked for a while and then Gulliver left, reminding the narrator that he knew where they lived. The narrator realized there was nothing logical about wanting the best for Gulliver and Isobel but he also did not want his past life of logic and reason anymore. He knew what he wanted now and he started walking home.

Analysis

For the first time the narrator is made to be fully human, and to suffer the weaknesses and powerlessness which that would involve. He requested to be disconnected from the people at home and made fully human even though he would experience pain, and there would be other costs too. His honesty about his affair costs him his relationship with Isobel (and subsequently Gulliver) and he finds that he cannot even help strangers, as he discovers when attempting to heal the homeless man. He is now as vulnerable as any human can expect to be, as much as the homeless man whom the original Andrew would most likely not have given a second thought to. By the end of the novel, the narrator associates colors with emotions seemingly naturally: “I felt blue with sadness,



red with rage and green with envy. I felt the entire rainbow," (280) with no particular lesson being acquired in making such an association.

Despite being helplessly human, there is one power which the narrator still has to his advantage, and that is the knowledge of the true power and capacity of radio. When he discovers that a replacement has been sent to complete his mission - to eliminate Isobel and Gulliver - he immediately goes to defend them and is able to use radio signals as a means of thwarting the mind control the replacement tries to exert upon Gulliver. He even acknowledges this potential for radio to come in handy, and to retain a place within an increasingly technological society, when the narrator passes on some life advice to Gulliver before leaving. One of these pieces of advice is "Never be too far away from a radio. A radio can save your life," (272) and he also gives a lesson in prioritizing things: "The news should start with mathematics, then poetry, then move down from there," (271) managing to effectively combine the wisdom of being both a human and an alien. He finally realizes the full weight of being not only a human who has made mistakes, but also a being who has given up peace and immortality in order to be such a human. The advice is universal and is a statement on the human condition in general, reminding people to see things from a different perspective and to appreciate what they have.

There is a return to the "external perspective" technique used by the author at the beginning of the novel, which shows humans in a different light to what they might otherwise be used to. The "full circle" narrative technique is employed when the narrator makes his departure for another university, traveling the world and turning to nature before returning to where he came from in order to be with his family again. Furthermore, he is able to give advice from an outsider's perspective but also as one who has lived as humans have, even if only for a short time. The sense, by the end of the novel, is that the narrator could resume his life with the Martin family, but subject to their forgiveness, which is a situation which anyone could potentially find themselves facing, thereby making his transition to being human effectively complete.

Discussion Question 1

How is the narrator's newfound powerlessness, as a human, emphasized towards the end of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

How does the narrator's complete turn of loyalty, from the beings from home to his new family, affect who he has become as a person?

Discussion Question 3

What is the narrator's motivation for withholding crucial information on mathematical knowledge which he knows would greatly advance the human race?

Vocabulary

apocalypse, disingenuous, hypocrisy, objective, transference



Characters

The Narrator

The name of this being from far away is never known, only that he has been beamed to earth in order to complete a mission in the guise of Professor Andrew Martin. Despite inhabiting his body, and to all the other characters actually being him, the personality manifesting through Martin is that of the alien.

The character development of the narrator is one of the more interesting in the novel because the "line" between him and the real Andrew becomes increasingly blurred, and by the end of the novel this character actually "becomes" Andrew, in a sense.

Isobel Martin

A respected historian and the wife of Andrew Martin, Isobel maintains a sense of calm and dignity throughout the strange events which occur over the course of the novel. She notices a change in her husband, who is not really her husband, but from the allusions she makes to her marriage in the past it seems as though many of these changes are, she feels, for the better.

She experiences falling in love with "Andrew" all over again, when unbeknownst to her, it is for the first time with someone else completely. She is shown to carry the worries of coping with a drastically changed husband and a troubled teenage son with admirable grace.

Gulliver Martin

Son of Andrew and Isobel Martin, Gulliver is shown to be juggling the stresses of growing up with the additional pressure of living up to his father's reputation. Despite coming from a relatively stable background he is increasingly unhappy and reaches the point where he is suicidal before the narrator intervenes and points him in a better direction.

Gulliver, in his allusions to the past, is shown to have had a very complicated and estranged relationship with his father, and like Isobel, finds his relationship with his father changed largely for the better, primarily because Andrew is a completely different person.

Newton The Dog

Newton, the family dog of Andrew, Isobel, and Gulliver, plays a silent but prominent role in the novel. Largely overlooked by the "original" Martin family, he is paid extra attention



to by the narrator who inhabits Andrew's body and extra meaning appears to be conveyed in his looks and expressions, although it is unsure whether it is simply the narrator's interpretation or an actual ability to read the mind of the dog.

Newton is initially suspicious of the narrator, growling at him all the time, but soon warms to him and grows to trust him, as he apparently cares for Newton more than the original Andrew had ever done.

Ari

A long-time friend and colleague of Andrew, Ari is a down-to-earth and pragmatic character who, despite making significant strides in his field of work, does not suspect that a being from another planet is right in front of him. Even when told directly he does not believe him at first.

He has a very easygoing demeanor but appears to genuinely care for Andrew's well-being and wishes the best for him and his family.

Daniel Russell

Daniel Russell is a long-time rival and colleague of Andrew's, who is competing (albeit in a supposedly friendly way) with him to solve the Riemann hypothesis. Due to his knowledge of Andrew's success solving the puzzle, the narrator has been assigned to "destroy" Daniel in order to keep it a secret.

He is portrayed as a highly successful and prominent figure in his field of study, but the fact that he has suffered health-wise from his efforts in the past mean that his being eliminated by the narrator raises little suspicion.

Tabitha Russell

The wife of Daniel Russell and also apparently good friends with Andrew, Tabitha is portrayed as a warm and friendly older woman who is trying to aid her husband's recovery only to, unfortunately, lose him the second time when the narrator eliminates him for his knowledge.

Zoe

A fellow patient of the narrator in the psychiatric institution to which he is admitted following his incident, Zoe is portrayed as a troubled but free spirited young woman who knows a lot about philosophy.

She reappears later on with her new boyfriend who attacks the narrator, having resumed her former volatile lifestyle of being drawn to dangerous men.



Maggie

A student in one of Andrew's classes, it emerges that Maggie and the original Andrew had been having an affair. The narrator only discovers this when Maggie acts strangely around him and it is one of his friends who informs him of the nature of their relationship.

Little is revealed of her personality, except that she is drawn to the narrator and that she leads a disorganized lifestyle perhaps not entirely centered upon her studies, and this is all revealed through the narrator's observation of her. After very briefly resuming the affair the narrator has a change of heart and leaves Maggie.

Andrew Martin

Despite being the "main" character in the novel, at least in purely physical terms, very little is known about the "real" Andrew Martin, and he is only described through retrospect and never shown in person.

From allusions to him in the past, he is portrayed as a workaholic who neglected his family emotionally and was never really present throughout their life together. He was "taken" at the point when he solved the Riemann hypothesis so it is never really known what effect this would have had on him but everything else about the events which followed are attributed to a nervous breakdown.



Symbols and Symbolism

Nudity / The Human Body

The human body, especially in its natural form, symbolizes the innate vulnerability of human beings.

The narrator is transported into the body of Andrew Martin, in the most precarious scenario possible: naked, at night and in a strange place. He is now in a position where, despite the superior intelligence and emotional restraint of his species, he is at a marked disadvantage. He is immediately deemed mad, mocked, exposed (in person and online), and locked away, showing a stripping down not only of his body but of his reputation. Coming from a place where clothes are seemingly arbitrary, he begins to learn that nudity is looked down upon but primarily in the part of the world in which he has landed, and indeed “It seemed people didn’t mind someone being naked in a rainforest so long as it was nowhere near their lawn” (51).

As the narrator becomes more vulnerable, and as he rebuilds his reputation both in the eyes of his family and his peers, the body becomes less of a source of shame and more a source of curiosity and fascination.

Nighttime

Nighttime symbolizes the loneliness the narrator feels on Earth, especially shortly after his arrival.

He had come from another part of the universe where there was still night but he claims that Earth has the darkest and loneliest nights he has ever –seen: “This was night to the power of night to the power of night. This was night cubed. A sky full of uncompromising darkness, with no stars and no moon” (6). Although the night sky can be lit up by celestial bodies, the narrator mostly sees the darkness and it takes some time for him to adjust to the lack of light. As with humans who are in a dark place for a long time, the lights which exist in the nighttime only become visible after some time, and it takes the narrator some time spent on Earth to start seeing them.

He notices that “There was moonlight, starlight, airglow, streetlamps, and sunlight backscattered by interplanetary dust, but the humans still spent half their time in deep shadow,” (128) which shows that even some humans do not see the lights to which they should have become accustomed by now.



Stars

Stars symbolize the things which take time to become apparent, especially from the narrator's perspective, where he has to spend time on Earth in order to appreciate the stars in the sky.

The narrator has come from far away and doubtless will be familiar with countless more stars than any human could ever hope to be, but even from Earth he realizes that he is much too far away to even see any of the stars with which he would be familiar. Indeed it takes him some time to adjust to the light level of Earth in order to see the stars which are closest by, but there are reminders of home, or at least places like home. When he and Isobel share a glass of wine he notes that "The glass had been distilled from rocks and so it knew things. It knew the age of the universe because it was the universe," (202) which shows that ultimately even the farthest stars are in a way accessible to everyone.

Ultimately even the farthest away stars will, also, reach whoever cannot see them - "when galaxies collide they pass right through" (284) - as the narrator realizes about Earth. It will one day reach other stars simply by continuing on its course, which humans often forget because things seem so still from where they are.

Books

Books symbolize the potential of the written language to convey wisdom, albeit within the constraints of the human perspective.

When the narrator first arrives on Earth he is bemused by the way humans have to take time to read books in order to acquire knowledge, whereas back home he can simply swallow a capsule in order to instantly know something. Furthermore there is the strange language humans use which he has to learn very quickly and through unusual means. He learns, initially, by reading signs and then by reading magazines. It is all completely alien to him, as he notes, "Before I read *Cosmopolitan*, in the garage, I had never even seen this written language," (3) but his ability to put everything in context means that he can quickly learn. When he learns that Isobel is an author he reads her books almost instantaneously in a bid to see things from her perspective.

Numbers

Numbers symbolize all that the narrator and his species value in life, and the stuff which makes up the very universe.

The narrator grows confused by the lack of importance many humans place on mathematics and wonders why it is not far more prominent in everyday life. From his encounter with a young woman who claims to not like mathematics (which to him is unfathomable) to the complete lack of mathematics in the news, he feels instantly at



odds because to him mathematics is everything, even saying “if God exists then what is He but a mathematician?” (60).

Numbers, crucially, lie at the heart of the Riemann hypothesis, the very secret which the narrator has been sent to Earth to suppress and keep solely in the hands of the beings at home. He becomes aware that, with the exception of the original Andrew Martin, humans were only part of the way to fully understanding the potential of numbers, although they already grasped that prime numbers were a mystery worthy of solving the higher up one can go. Prime numbers are a source of pride and joy for the narrator's species, who instruct him to be like a prime number throughout his mission. Therefore numbers give him a sort of code of ethics to adhere to.

Poetry

Poetry symbolizes the potential of the new language encountered by the narrator to convey hidden beauty and meaning.

The human experience is a mystery to the narrator when he first lands on Earth, seeing that humans are less rational and more emotional, or irrational. He does not see the point of language initially except to convey information, and thereby treats every word he encounters as literal instructions, which does not bode well for him when Cosmopolitan is his first source of the language. However when he first encounters poetry he is taken aback by how those words can arouse certain feelings, and one poetry extract moves him in particular: “The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience” (78).

The narrator begins to take the poetry to heart and, as he comes to appreciate Isobel and Gulliver all the more, he becomes increasingly receptive to poetry.

Music

Music symbolizes the rhythm of human life which becomes increasingly apparent to the narrator the longer he spends on Earth.

Music is not a feature of life back home for the narrator, so when he first decides to try music while spending some time alone in the house, he listens to every type and genre he can find. He does not like all of it but eventually he finds some that, for him, epitomizes not only the human, but the universal, experience. He begins to see how music can be something which he can appreciate for its own sake, and eventually he sees this rhythm playing out in everyday life.

When observing Isobel coming home, he notes that “She seemed to be continually operating above the task she was doing. A melody, rising above the rhythm. Yet she was still what she was, a human,” (110) showing a type of music present regardless of whether he is actively listening to it. Music helps the narrator fit in more comfortably with human life.



Radio

The radio symbolizes the main form of communication for the narrator's species, especially when they are communicating across a long distance.

Radio is something which the narrator notices is a feature not only of his life back home but of life on Earth. It is also the means by which the people from home communicate with him and issue commands instantaneously, and indeed it is far more advanced where the narrator is from - "where I am from everything is seamless. Minds, bodies, technologies all come together in a quite beautiful convergence" (108) - with the technology for receiving the radio signals contained within his very body. Yet over time he grows more defiant of the orders being issued to him and comes to see radio as merely a one-way system designed to unduly influence the listener. His eventual rebellion against his replacement by using (human) radio to thwart the technology is symbolic of this change.

He even acknowledges the value of radio in his later advice to his son, saying "Never be too far away from a radio. A radio can save your life," (272) but clearly this is meant so that one can use radio for the right purpose.

The Face

The face symbolizes what the narrator initially finds repellent about humans but, later, what he will come to find fascinating and even beautiful.

The human face is a source of bafflement for the narrator when he first arrives on Earth, finding faces - especially noses - to be extremely ugly to the point where he cannot look at anyone. As he describes upon first seeing a person, "The face seemed so alien, full of unfathomable openings and protrusions. The nose, in particular, bothered me. It seemed to my innocent eyes like there was something else inside him, pushing through" (8), which leads to the question of what members of his own species must look like. Yet the more time he spends among humans the more accustomed he grows to their appearance and before too long begins to see more than ugliness, appreciating the full scope of emotion on them.

He observes, primarily, Isobel's face, with her being the person with whom he spends the most time, finding her beautiful eventually. However he also observes that of his son Gulliver, who he soon learns is very troubled. At first the emotion is difficult to see but soon he notices that "There was so much darkness across his face he might as well have been all bruise" (168). The inner turmoil within Gulliver becomes apparent to the narrator and so the face becomes a mode of communication instead of a source of repulsion.



The Martin House

The Martin house symbolizes the concept of home, primarily as being a single place where people live.

In the place where the narrator comes from, home is a far more fluid idea, to the point where seemingly even buildings do not remain stationary. Furthermore the narrator never intended to spend so much time in any one place; only enough time to complete the mission and then to return. However as he spends more time experiencing the Martin house as a place to live and spend time with other people, the house comes to represent far more for him and, by the end of the novel, the only place he really wants to be.



Settings

The Campus of Cambridge University

The campus of Cambridge University holds great significance, not just for the world at large - due to being one of the foremost centers for study and research in the world - but for the narrator personally.

This is where the original Andrew, before being taken, conducted his life's work and where he solved the elusive Riemann hypothesis. It is also the setting for the introduction of the narrator, while assuming the form of Andrew. He is spotted having his "breakdown" while running around the campus and then tries to return to normality all appearances when he goes back to work, when in fact he is trying to do the opposite and undo the work which has already been done.

The university is where he inevitably returns near the end of the novel, a sign of coming full circle.

The Psychiatric Institution

The psychiatric institution is where the narrator is committed due to his erratic behavior, largely caused by his slowness to adapt to the ways of humans—namely wearing clothes in public. His conduct is attributed to a mental breakdown and he is treated as a patient for a few days, where he sees various other "abnormal" members of society, and one in particular, a girl called Zoe.

This is the place where the narrator learns how not to be, after a discussion about philosophy with Zoe, and where he prepares himself to meet his new "wife" and start acclimatizing himself to being Andrew Martin so that he can be released and carry out what he was sent here to do.

The Martin Home

The Martin home is where the narrator starts to attempt to settle into his human life, and where he slowly begins to effectively become the man who he has been pretending to be.

He learns firsthand about the ways of humans, particularly within the context of the family, through his wife Isobel, his son Gulliver, and his dog Newton. He witnesses their various emotions and their concern for him and each other, starts to display more "human" characteristics such as listening to music and reading poetry and, crucially, this setting is where he begins to actually come to love his family.



The Russell Home

The Russell home is not a place where the narrator spends much time, and the location where he actually carries out the mission he was sent to Earth to undertake. It is a brief but brutal visit in which the narrator destroys Daniel, making it look like the result of another heart attack, and had the narrator stuck to his mission this would have represented the setting of the culmination of his efforts.

The fact that it only plays a minor role, and serves as a catalyst for his newfound remorse, indicates the trajectory of the character development of the narrator.

The Park Bench near the Martin Home

The park bench is where the narrator endures some of his crises in his new life. During his first time there, he is drunk and despondent and questioning everything, and there meets a homeless man who has sunk far lower in life. This homeless man talks to the narrator, giving him some wise words spoken from a life lived rough for a long time, and the bench becomes the place where the narrator also comes to realizations and takes his next steps in the story.



Themes and Motifs

Isolation

Isolation characterizes the experience of the narrator throughout the novel, in addition to his observation of the human experience.

When transported from home into the body of Andrew Martin, the narrator feels the isolation immediately, noting that the world around him is "the most alien place I had ever seen in my life" (17) and nothing like home. He is immediately treated like an outcast by everyone he encounters due to the crime of being naked in public, leading to a diagnosis of temporary insanity and committal to a psychiatric institution, which only compounds the isolation. However, even when he gradually adapts to life on Earth (including wearing clothes) the sense of remoteness from his home lingers. Especially through his vastly wider perspective of the size of the universe and the sheer distance between Earth and his home, he is all too aware of being the only one of his kind anywhere nearby. He keenly feels "The anxiety that came from the fact that the only beings who knew who I was were a long way away. They were as far away as it was possible to be" (27). However, he soon comes to realize that this feeling is not unique to him, even if the reason for his isolation is unique.

During his time with the Martin family, the narrator learns that his "wife" Isobel had been feeling isolated from her husband for a long time before he was taken, and that his "son" Gulliver feels even more so, to the point where he attempts suicide. The narrator comes to see that being human, in itself, can be a very isolating experience, as humans grapple with constant contradictions in their existence.

Mathematics

Mathematics comes to form the backbone not only of the narrator's entire experience of life and the universe, but also of the novel.

The one thing the narrator and the original Andrew Martin have in common is a deep reverence for mathematics, seeing it as the key to all knowledge. The narrator, in the beginning, imagines what it must have been like as Andrew the human experienced the ultimate human discovery, "as his mind arrived at a place no human mind had ever reached before, the very edge of knowledge" (4). He can appreciate the achievement, even if humans are still far away from the discoveries already made by the narrator's own species. The narrator understands that human knowledge has come so far, and that they already understand the value of prime numbers, particularly how much rarer they become the higher the number. Yet it is this knowledge, the solving of the Riemann hypothesis, which the narrator has been sent such a long distance to sabotage, eliminating first Andrew Martin (before taking his place) and then any other people Andrew might have told. The beings from his home planet agree that humans are not



ready for this knowledge and so it must be stopped, but mathematics still plays an enduring role, with the narrator seeing mathematics in more than just the obvious places.

The narrator sees rhythms in everything, from Isobel's movements to the various features of nature, and particularly when appreciating the music collection at home: "Listening to music, I realized, was simply the pleasure of counting without realizing you were counting" (99). He begins to understand why humans do not place such importance on mathematics. Elements of it appear in many things anyway so there is perhaps less need to have its principles as an explicit universal rule.

Relationships

Relationships are alien to the narrator in the beginning, making little sense, but come to define his existence by the end of the novel.

Where the narrator comes from there is little connection with anyone else because everything is defined entirely by reason. Even the communications with home, via his "gifts" which are implanted into his body, are largely perfunctory, issuing commands as and when they are required. The beings from home claim to be looking out for the best interests of the greatest number of beings but the narrator, as he "becomes" Andrew, begins to lose sight of this interpretation of what really matters as he comes to know his new family. He struggles with the concept of depending upon another person initially: "Two life forms in mutual reliance" (94). However, this comes to define his new existence. As the reason which he once prized so highly loses significance while on Earth - as it is not quite so important to human beings as it is to his species - something which comes to mean more to him takes priority.

Despite not being able to explain the reasons behind his abandonment of the mission - to eliminate Isobel and Gulliver - he grows to see them as being far more important. When coming to know his "wife" he sees her less as a curiosity and more as a partner in life, and he sees his "son" as someone to care for and guide, and eventually, "I saw him not as a special entity, an exotic collection of protons, electrons and neutrons, but as a - using the human term - as a person" (. 167). This shows that he is now thinking more like a human and less like an alien.

Change / Evolution

Change is something which the narrator claims is part of the universal experience, and yet he feels the need to offer the caution at the beginning: "Let us humour ourselves and do the same. Let us open our minds entirely, for what you are about to read will need every prejudice you may have to stand aside in the name of understanding" (x). This indicates that even advanced species may not understand the particular changes which happen to human people.



The narrator's species understands the universe as being in a state of constant change, and even time itself is never static and cannot be held onto. They also understand that humans do not adapt well to change, despite undergoing it all the time, and indeed the narrator, as Andrew Martin, is not expected to spend anywhere near long enough on Earth to undergo any of his own change. Yet the change in his character begins early on, albeit slowly. At first this change, in terms of the new environment, is spoken of in universal terms - "The air always had oxygen in it wherever you were. But that was pretty much the only consistent thing" (145) - which shows the scale of the change with which the narrator has to cope. Yet the change in personality is the truly unexpected one, as he effectively becomes human in his nature.

Furthermore, through noticing the capacity for adapting to circumstances shown both by humans, and by his own adopted family, he sees that change is what defines existence, and that nothing stays the same.

Mortality

The theme of death is one which the narrator was never expecting to deal with outside of a highly controlled environment. Although his species has the capacity for immortality, they possess the power to take life from others should they deem it necessary.

The idea that one could die is unsettling from the beginning for the narrator when he becomes Andrew. He sees it as a necessary evil but expresses little to no emotion when initially tasked with the mission of eliminating people. The first sign of the change in attitude is apparent when he reacts badly after eliminating his rival, Daniel Russell, and feels remorse for the first time. Eventually becoming "weary at the probability that I would have to switch another human life into non-existence," (136) it is still some time before he begins to actually ascribe value to human life, and subsequently a fear of mortality. When faced with the imminent death of his son Gulliver, the narrator is struck with the permanence of -it:"Death meant death. A zero squared was still a zero," (168) and he is compelled to reverse the process he is meant to be enabling due to that life suddenly, for him, having value.

When the narrator eventually demands that he be made fully human, he feels the fear of mortality for the first time, but it gives him a new respect for life. He realizes that "To experience beauty on Earth you needed to experience pain and to know mortality," (283) meaning that it is considered to be death which gives value to life.



Styles

Point of View

The entire novel is told from the point of view of the narrator, an extraterrestrial, who inhabits the body and life of Andrew Martin. This means that there is an extra layer to the first person narrative because it is not truly in the first person. The narrator is seeing everything, from his point of entry onto the planet Earth, from the perspective of a particular person, but he retains the thoughts and feelings he has carried over from his previous life.

From this point of view, however, the progress of the "new" Andrew Martin can be seen unfolding, and slowly the narrator appears to actually "become" the person he is inhabiting. He does not become the exact person Andrew Martin was once but he begins to feel the same love towards his new family and for humans in general, that might be felt by an actual human.

Language and Meaning

The language of *The Humans* is rich with initially detached observations of the planet Earth and of human nature, which gradually become less detached and more emotionally involved. The language, in short, becomes less "robotic" and alien, and more "feeling" and human, throughout the novel.

Many scientific words and terms, which will not be generally familiar to most people who are not scientists, are introduced but they are also explained so that non-scientists might be able to understand them. The language is aimed, by the admission of the narrator, at the people of his home planet, so even his speaking English - or indeed any human language - is somewhat out of keeping with this admission. However, early on the narrator, for reasons of authenticity, chooses to narrate in this language.

It happens to be a convenient language for any humans reading it, which is implied to be merely a coincidence.

Structure

The structure of the novel is a linear one, with a narrator describing the events as they happen, in an orderly sequence. Every so often the narrator steps outside the "live action" of the narrative to make commentary about things he finds to be curious, bizarre or simply of personal interest, such as scientific theories and general thoughts and feelings he is then having. For example in the chapter "Where We Are From," the narrator has just eliminated Andrew's colleague Daniel Russell with minimal emotion - at least on the surface. He begins to describe what life is like back home and the personality characteristics of his species, such as lacking emotion and irrationality. The



quote “Where we are from there is no remorse because action has a logical motive and always results in the best outcome for the given situation” (95) becomes more poignant in contrast to his description of having his first nightmare later that night, as a result of what he has done. However these diversions from the linear narrative make the story feel more expansive, as if everything extends far beyond what is immediately happening during the particular scene in question.

The novel is divided into three main parts with a quote from a well-known human scientific or literary figure foreshadowing the events to come. This serves as a frame for the following chapters and gives the novel more of a distinct shape. Each part contains chapters with titles which often hint at what is about to happen in a very abstract way which makes sense only after reading. The title "Sloping Roofs (And Other Ways to Deal with the Rain)" is a good example, as it seems like an innocuous title which belies the climatic event which is about to take place, namely Gulliver's attempted suicide - on the roof of the house.



Quotes

... a human is a real bipedal life form of mid-range intelligence, living a largely deluded existence on a small water-logged planet in a very lonely corner of the universe.

-- The narrator (Preface (An Illogical Hope In The Face Of Overwhelming Adversity))

Importance: Because the narrative is aimed at non-humans living in a far away area of the universe, a description of humans is deemed necessary. He is, particularly, described in relation to the audience, with it being implied that he is far more intelligent and enlightened than humans are.

I was a forty-three-year-old newborn on planet Earth."

-- The narrator (The Man I Was Not)

Importance: The quote shows how utterly unprepared and ill equipped the alien being is for life as a human. He will automatically be presumed to be a competent human being in the middle of his lifespan but in fact knows absolutely nothing about the world into which he has come.

This was, I would later realise, a planet of things wrapped inside things. Food inside wrappers. Bodies inside clothes. Contempt inside smiles. Everything was hidden away."

-- The narrator (Texaco)

Importance: The narrator has come from a place where everything is transparent because all motives are pure and based on reason. There is nothing to hide so he is puzzled by the tendency of humans to hide behind things in every sense.

... we must conclude that madness is sometimes a question of time, and sometimes of postcode."

-- The narrator (Mad People)

Importance: When committed to the psychiatric institution for doing something which the narrator finds very trivial he comes to understand that to be deemed mad on Earth is usually down to the particular situation. Many people who would be deemed mad in other situations are excused because they have compensated somehow but not others who do the wrong thing at the wrong time.

if God exists then what is He but a mathematician?"

-- The narrator (Starting The Sequence)

Importance: The narrator comes from a place where there is no God because the only ruler is reason. However as he comes to appreciate the human need for a God of some nature, it makes more sense to him to view God as the creator of the main thing - mathematics in this case - which the universe hinges on.



A prime number is strong. It does not depend on others. It is pure and complete and never weakens. You must be like a prime. You must not weaken, you must distance yourself, and you must not change after interaction. You must be indivisible.”

-- The beings from home ((Intermission))

Importance: The narrator receives frequent communication from his fellow beings back home, who remind him to remain on track on their mission. They are a rational species and the most rational thing to them is mathematics, the prime number being the culmination. They model themselves on prime numbers because of their dependable and predictable nature.

Where we are from there is no love or hate. There is the purity of reason. Where we are from there are no crimes of passion because there is no passion. Where we are from there is no remorse because action has a logical motive and always results in the best outcome for the given situation.”

-- The narrator (Where We Are From)

Importance: The narrator espouses the "philosophy" of his civilization back home, which had been echoed during communication with the people there. He is saying that mistakes are impossible because everything is done for the best possible reason and that there is no room for many of the emotions and complications which are characteristically human.

She seemed to be continually operating above the task she was doing. A melody, rising above the rhythm. Yet she was still what she was, a human.”

-- Isobel (Crunchy Wholenut Peanut Butter)

Importance: The narrator while still in his state of "pure reason" slowly begins to appreciate the various habits and routines of humans, particularly his wife. While initially scornful and critical of human behavior this is one of the first times he begins to appreciate the motions which are typical of being human.

Death meant death. A zero squared was still a zero.”

-- Gulliver (Sloping Roofs (And Other Ways To Deal With The Rain))

Importance: When faced with the very real possibility of his son dying, the narrator still sees death as a remote and long-forgotten concept, but also appreciates the finality of it. Interpreting things in mathematical terms yet again, the narrator acknowledges death as a point of no return.

She then made the most complex facial expression I have ever seen on a human. A kind of frustrated scorn, tinged with sympathy, which slowly softened into a deep, wide humour, culminating in forgiveness and something I couldn't quite recognise, but which I thought might have been love.”

-- Isobel (Two Weeks In The Dordogne And A Box Of Dominoes)

Importance: This is another instance, much later on when becoming far more familiar



with the family, when the narrator is presented with a key example of the complexities of humans. Not naturally being able to recognize facial expressions, he understands now just how much unspoken feeling can be conveyed through the motions of the face.

If there is a sunset, stop and look at it. Knowledge is finite. Wonder is infinite.”
-- The narrator (Advice For A Human)

Importance: The narrator appears to have had a complete revelation in his attitude towards the superiority of knowledge above all else. He appears to finally recognize the limitations of pure knowledge in the scope of the overall human experience, and that simply admiring something for its own sake is a worthy thing.

I wanted to live with people I could care for and who would care for me. I wanted family. I wanted happiness, not tomorrow or yesterday, but now.”
-- The narrator (Home)

Importance: Now it is finally clear what the main objective is for the narrator - the pursuit of a happy human life. Things have become clear to him now and it is time for him now to try to make it happen, and that because he is now no longer immortal, there is no more time left to lose.