

# **In the Small Study Guide**

**In the Small by Michael Hague**

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# Plot Summary

"In the Small" by Michael Hague with Devon Hague is a graphic novel that tells the story of a horrid attack on mankind that leaves its future in question. The story begins on a sunny day in September in the downtown section of a large American city with soaring skyscrapers and crowded streets. Moments later a strange blue light encompasses the city. The light penetrates into every corner of the world, down to the bottom of the sea and all the way to the earth's core.

The light disappears after just a short period of time. The birds begin to sing again and the cows resume grazing in the pastures. The only creatures that seems to be impacted by the light are the humans. They are reduced to just one-twelfth their size. Also impacted are the machinery and inventions of men. Helicopters and airplanes fall from the skies. Trains and trucks cease to function.

The human's clothes literally fall off of them because of their newly diminished size. The humans do not seem to be impacted in any other way but their new stature causes them many problems. Just prior to the moment when the light hits, Mouse Willow, a young intern who works at his father's office in a downtown skyscraper, had passed out on the floor. Mouse had become overcome because he had a premonition of the impending tragedy. His father believes him because he has had such visions all his young life and they had always proven to be accurate. When the blue light strikes, everything is thrown into chaos.

Bob Willow, Mouse's father, is stuck on the top of his desk and has to whinny down a phone line to get to the floor. All the humans are naked because their clothes fell off of their bodies. Mouse is a natural leader, and his instincts tell him to lead the group outside if they are to survive. At the same time, back at the Willow home, Mouse's mother, sister, Beatrix, and his grandfather have all been miniaturized. Beatrix has to rescue her grandfather from the garden where he was working. A normally harmless garter snake is about to attack him until Beatrix is able to stab the snake and save her grandfather.

The two youngsters lead survivors on treks to find their way to safety. Beatrix helps a neighbor find her children at school. And Mouse leads what becomes an army of survivors to safety. They both head back to the Willow house where the family greenhouse is going to be used to restart civilization. The two youngsters have many obstacles, tragedies and challenges to overcome on their way to safety. They have to fight animals like house cats, common spiders, rats, and snakes that are now menacing and monstrous beasts. Mouse and another survivor he meets along the way both have the ability to foretell the future. Both seem to be guided by the hand of God. They are also warned of a future that somehow lies mysteriously in the past and to beware of demons that walk the earth.



# Pages 1 through 15

## Pages 1 through 15 Summary

The opening scene is that of a downtown business area of a large city. Workers in casual dress are seen walking along the street, presumably to their jobs. One man is carrying a lunch box. A woman has a lap top carrier across her shoulder. The backdrop of the scene is a cityscape of large skyscrapers that soar into the bright blue skies. Most of the cars on the street are taxis. The look and feel of the picture is reminiscent of a large city like New York. The only text on this page is, "It was a beautiful September day."

The city is suddenly encompassed with a mysterious blue light. It covers everything. There is a smoky quality about the light. But the light doesn't just stop at the city limits, the light penetrates deeply into the ocean where jellyfish and starfish flourish. The tunnels beneath the city where subways operate is also flooded. The light isn't just restricted to the city or the ocean. The light is scene by explorers in caves. And its impact isn't just limited to America. It encompasses the Far East and, in fact, the entire world. Although no one could easily determine it, the blue light races through the earth's mantle all the way to its core.

But the light only lasts a short time. It disappears as quickly as it had appeared. Everything returns to normal. The birds are singing in the country. The cows are once again grazing on the grass. The skies are blue and the plants and flowers seem unharmed. There is something very wrong. It seems that the people are all gone. But on close inspection, But they aren't gone. They have just been greatly reduced in size. Their clothes fall off of them because they are now so much smaller.

The light has reduced human beings to one-twelfth of their former size. Additionally, it seems that all of man's technology has been rendered useless. Helicopters and jets plunge to earth. Trains and trucks cease to work. Fires break out in the large buildings and cathedrals but no one is able to put them out. Worse yet, there are injured people in need of medical assistance. But there is no one to help them. Law enforcement officers are just as impacted leaving the cities without protection. The people are now smaller than rats and are facing new dangers. Some people are desolate and ready to give up. They feel that they have been relegated to the bottom of the food chain. Others, however, are determined to survive.

On September 7th, several days before the blue light hit, a businessman named Mr. Willow is interrupted by his assistant who tells him that his son just fainted in the copy room. Mr. Willow rushes to his son's side. His son, who he calls Mouse, is on the floor and just coming to. He tells his father that when Mrs. Reynolds, who was wearing a bright blue dress, walked by it caused him to have a vision which then made him feel faint. He fears that there is a great catastrophe that is going to strike all of mankind.



Mr. Willow fears that Mouse might be right since his premonitions have always been accurate. He decides that he better check on his wife and daughter, Beatrix. It is just then that the light hits. His wife is seen on the kitchen counter, now smaller than her toaster. She is frightened and worries about where her daughter is. She calls for Beatrix who at first doesn't answer. Beatrix is stuck on a top shelf of her bookcase, dwarfed by the size of her books and movies. Her mother hears Beatrix calling for her and rescues her. Beatrix is concerned about the whereabouts of her grandfather, George.

## Pages 1 through 15 Analysis

The only text on the first page is: "It was a beautiful September day." The graphic is that of a city that very much resembles New York City. The skyscrapers are seen against a clear blue sky. The combination of the large American city, the bright blue skies and the "September day" is a not so subtle reference to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. It's a premise with an ominous tone hinting to the reader that something very bad is about to happen.

The reader learns that the menace is a mysterious "blue light." At this point, it is not clear what the impact of the light is or what danger it represents. People do seem to be afraid of it or at least are startled by it. The light is all encompassing and does not seem to be targeting any certain area. It is a powerful light which is evidenced by the fact that it penetrates all the way to the earth's core. The question that lingers at this point, is what the source of this light is and what harm might it bring to earth. The chance that the light is from an alien source is certainly a possibility.

The menace as left everything in tact: the skies are blue again, the animals and plants seem to be unharmed. But the people all seemed to be gone. The light apparently targeted the humans. But they weren't gone. They had been reduced to 1/12th their normal size. Man's machinery had also been targeted by the light. Planes and trains and trucks no longer worked. People were desolate and feared they couldn't survive. They had good reason since they were smaller than the rats that roamed the street still at their normal size. It is apparent that someone or something wants to destroy the human race in a very slow, cruel manner.

Mouse Willow apparently had a vision of the catastrophe a few days before it happened. His vision was triggered by a bright blue dress that a co-worker wore. Why did the blue dress trigger Mouse's vision? It apparently was a precursor of the blue light that was about to strike earth. Mouse apparently has psychic powers because he seemed to have been right about the vision. Mr. Willow fears that Mouse's vision is right because he was right about other premonitions. Mouse is a psychic and may become the leader of the humans because he will be able to foresee other dangers.

Back at the Willow home, the light strikes and reduces Beatrix and her mother to a size smaller than their books or toaster. They feel they are living in a nightmare with good reason. They have no idea what happened or how Mr. Willow and Mouse are and

Beatrix' grandfather is. Did this strike everywhere or was it just them somehow. At that point they just don't know. They are terrified.



# Pages 16 through 30

## Pages 16 through 30 Summary

George had been outside when the blue light struck. He has shrunk in size and is standing next to a giant shovel. Apparently, he was working in the garden. He is terrified when he sees a frog that is much larger than he is and a bee that is about the same size as he. He's worried about his family and he climbs through the yard, which is now like a jungle, and struggles to get back. But since he's so small, he gets confused and lost and can't find his way.

Back inside, Beatrix and Mrs. Willow take a huge screwdriver and open the window so Beatrix can crawl out and look for her grandfather. Once she gets outside, Beatrix desperately calls for him. Meanwhile, George is completely confused about what has taken place. Beatrix walks around outside. She is frightened of the animals in case they, too, weren't shrunk. She decides to try to protect them and fashions a weapon out of a scrap of wood. As George is trying to make it back to the house, he encounters a huge snake. It's about to attack him when suddenly Beatrix appears and stabs it with her make-shift weapon.

Beatrix pulls her grandfather along toward the house. He gets winded and wants to rest. She warns him that they have to move along. They don't know what dangers they may encounter. Beatrix finds a scrap of cloth that George can cover himself with. Beatrix sees something ahead. Unfortunately, it's a huge black cat who has the body of a human hanging from his mouth. It terrifies them. They rush back to the house and Mrs. Willow helps pull them through the window back to safety. She is very upset that her daughter had battled a snake in the yard. Beatrix and her grandfather are thirsty from their escape from the yard. George struggles to get the top off a plastic bottle of water but finally gets it open and pours water in a saucer where they all drink from.

Beatrix wonders about her friends at school. She theorizes that the blue light was nature's way of protecting itself from its biggest enemy - man. It's called the Gaia effect. The other creatures weren't a threat to earth. That's why they weren't targeted. Mouse had told her all about the theory. The phone rings. How will they answer that huge thing?!

Back in the office, Mr. Willow had been stranded on top his desk. He isn't sure what happened to everyone else. Mouse and the others find him. He climbs down the phone cable to get the floor. Mouse is sure that the blue light impacted the entire earth and everyone is now small. It was the exact vision he had. Will tells Mr. Willow that some people didn't make it. Eight of their co-workers are dead and another ten are badly injured. Mouse tells his father that they have to get out of the building if they are to survive. They will have to leave the dead and injured behind. But Mr. Willow says that he cannot leave the people he worked with for fifteen years. But Mouse reminds him



that there are no doctors, hospitals or police. They must leave in order to have a chance at survival.

Alan, the head of the company, declares that it's obvious that they were the victims of a terrible terrorist attack. Will disagrees. How could terrorists make them shrink to six inches in size. Alan does not want to listen to what Mouse has to say. He's just an intern. When Will disagrees again, Alan tells him he's fired. Alan reminds him that there's a new reality - that there's nothing to get fired from! Everything has been destroyed. Alan agrees to listen to what Mouse has to say.

Mouse tells the others that he's had visions as long as he can remember. One of his visions was that humanity would end with atomic bombs or viral disease. But earlier that day, he saw a vision about the blue light. He now envisions their demise if they stay there. He foresees a safe place where they can stay. They all hoist one of Alan's golf clubs into the hall so they can reach the elevator button. They are able to push the down button. They take the elevator to the lobby. When they arrive in the lobby, they find total destruction. There are fires and crumbled concrete and bent steel beams. Mouse finds a path and leads the others to the outside.

## Pages 16 through 30 Analysis

The world has become a new reality. Now a simple garden snake and a house cat are seen as menaces. The author is creating a new world in which man does not dominate. People are left without clothes and with no defenses against the dangers that are part of this new existence - much as it was for man when he first evolved. Beatrix is proving to be a brave and a loving granddaughter. She is heroic when trying to locate her grandfather and fighting off the garden snake that now appears as big as a dragon. That she was able to create a weapon from scraps she found in the yard shows her intelligence and adaptability. She also shows that although she is naturally frightened, she is determined that she and her family will survive this horrible tragedy.

The reader is given a hint as to what happened. Rather than an alien attack, the possibility has been presented that perhaps it is Mother Earth herself that is relegating man to a lesser status - something referred to as the Gaia effect. The other animals and plants have been spared. Of all the creatures on earth, man is the only one who tampers with the environment and with nature itself. Perhaps earth wants to return nature to its original pristine condition and sees man as the obstacle in doing so. The message of this story may be environmental in nature.

Mouse's psychic powers predicted the event but he didn't have time to warn anyone. In order to survive, the others may have to rely on Mouse to keep them out of danger.





# Pages 31 through 62

## Pages 31 through 62 Summary

Mouse has led his co-workers outside. He fashions shoes for himself and a make-shift sword. It is just in the nick of time because a spider is about to attack them. Mouse slices the spider in half. Mr. Willow is worried about his daughter because he just saw a young girl ripped in half who reminded him of Beatrix. The people find a water source.

Back at the Willow house, George has made it to an upper shelf in the pantry where he pushes some food down to the floor. Beatrix finds doll clothes for her and her mother.

Mouse leads the others to a place where he knows they will be safe. Some choose to leave the group to look for loved ones. Mouse tells them he's going to take them through the tunnel. The others are afraid that the tunnel could collapse in on them. Alan wants to take the bridge to escape. Mouse agrees to lead them to the bridge but has bad vibes about it. He was right. When they arrive at the bridge, it is engulfed in flames.

The others agree to listen to Mouse from now on. Everyone's hungry so they decide to travel to a mom and pop restaurant they know of. Perhaps they can find some food there. As they travel further, they find a vicious street gang that assaults and tries to kidnap one of the women. These ruffians claim they own the block. Mr. Willow tangles with one of the men and is knocked unconscious. Mouse responds by stabbing the man in the heart with his sword. The group drags Mr. Wilson inside. Mouse lays down beside his unconscious father and grasps his hand. He falls asleep and has a horrible vision in which he is visited by death, who resembles his father, and who warns him that his future is in the past.

Back at the Willow house, Beatrix and her grandfather decide to venture out and see how the neighbors are faring. First, they plan to visit the Hoyles. The sons are both engineers and can build anything. Once they arrive, they call out to Jack and Nancy but no one answers. They are able to get inside but are met by the Hoyle's huge pet cat. They find Jack outside but he has bad news. The cat got Nancy. They leave Nancy behind and lead Jack and his two sons back to their house. On they way they find another neighbor, Dr. Helen Germain who is in a panic. Her children are at school and she doesn't know how to get to them. Beatrix vows to find them.

They return to the Willow residence where they decide to turn the greenhouse into a sanctuary where they can grow food. Jack and his sons plan how they can reinforce the building and divert the water from a fresh stream to it so they have a source of fresh water. Beatrix takes off in search of Dr. Germain's kids.

Back at the city, Mr. Willow dies from his wounds. Mouse feels guilty because he didn't warn his father about the gang. They have to leave him behind but Mouse makes a gravestone for him: "Bob Willow, husband, father, hero." He vows to learn what his



father was warning him about in his dream. The army of survivors grows after Mr. Willow's death and Mouse becomes the leader. They meet another group who appear to be peaceful and are led by a woman named Ruth. Mouse encourages everyone to travel to the tunnel. Ruth and her group decides to join them. They encounter trouble in the tunnel. There is a loud explosion and they are trapped. Someone is coming toward them with lights. Mouse tells the others not to fear. Their savior is coming for them and will lead them out of the tunnel. They hear a voice say, "I'm the D-A-V." The D-A-V tells Mouse that the voices in his head told him that he and his followers were coming. D-A-V doesn't have visions. The angels visit and speak to him. Some in Mouse's group are skeptical of D-A-V. They refer to Mouse as their messiah and would rather be led by him. But D-A-V seems to know where he's going and everyone follows him. He says that they have prepared for Mouse and his army.

## Pages 31 through 62 Analysis

It's a matter of survival for both Mouse and his sister Beatrix. They are both emerging as leaders in their own groups. They both face tragic events, but are determined to survive and lead their groups to a safer place. There are strong references to Jesus Christ in the story. Mouse is referred to as the Messiah. Mouse calls D-A-V their savior who will lead them to safety. The overall symbolism is one of renewal and rebirth.

Man has been reduced to his lowest form and must learn to exist without the help of inventions or devices to help them. He is at one with nature and must learn anew how to survive. However, they look to god-like figures for that survival. The other people in his group are being referred to as Mouse's followers and there are references to his saving mankind and being the Messiah. The parallels to Jesus Christ are undeniable.

Mouse is gaining a following and becoming a stronger person because of the challenges before him. Even though his father is killed in a fight with a vicious group, he shows his strength and knows he must go on for the sake of his followers and mankind. The mysterious D-A-V tells of being visited by angels. They encounter another group, a peaceful group, headed by a woman named Ruth - who is a figure in the Bible.

On the home front, Beatrix and George rescue some neighbors and bring them back to the house. They are going to make the Willow greenhouse their sanctuary - another religious reference.



# Pages 63 through 92

## Pages 63 through 92 Summary

The angel had given D-A-V strict instructions to help Mouse. When Mouse and his group arrived at D-A-V's shelter, he showed them to a room that was equipped with spears. Everyone in the group takes a spear. Members in the group are wondering if Mouse and D-A-V are the chosen ones. Was God guiding them, they wondered. The women in the group admire the nice clothing that they find in the D-A-V's shelter. Mouse asks the D-A-V why they were selected to foretell the future. He asks the D-A-V if he ever had a vision about a girl on a mountain.

Beatrix and Dr. Germain are making slow progress toward the school. They are in tall grass and can hardly see where they are going. They hide from some men that Beatrix thinks are dangerous. Beatrix tells Dr. Germain that she was named after Beatrix Potter. Her brother 's nickname is Mouse, named after the artist Hieronymus Bosch. They see a pack of dogs across the street. They hope they don't cross over to them.

Dr. Germain tells Beatrix they need to get out of the weeds. The insect bites could be poisonous to them at their small size. Looking for a place to stay the night, they bypass a garbage can because the smell of food would attract animals. They find a turned over mail box and decide it would be a safe place to stay.

Mouse and the D-A-V are leading the group through the tunnel when they encounter a rat. Just when the rat is about to attack Mouse, the D-A-V kills it with his spear. They find their way to the end of the tunnel and a vent that leads to the outside. But before they can escape, the group is attacked by rats. A bloody battle ensues. The rats are pushed back but one of the women's husband is taken away by them. Mouse tells her they have to move on. They reach the outside through the vent. The D-A-V tells the others to follow him to a shelter where they have food, water and transports. When they arrive, they see a skateboard that has been converted into a transport.

Back on the road with Beatrix and Dr. Germain, Beatrix becomes ill when she sees a dead body that's been partially eaten by bugs. Dr. Germain encourages her and they travel on. They meet with other survivors who are on their own journey for survival. They tell the peaceful people they meet about the greenhouse and point them in that direction. They avoid others who are lawless and cruel. It's been five days of travel when Beatrix and Dr. Germain finally arrive at the school. Dr. Germain collapses in agony when they see that the school has been burned down. They find dead children outside but no sign of the doctor's children. They see that one building is still standing and fortunately her two children are safe inside. She gratefully reunites with them.

Mr. Magellan is protecting the children in the building. He was Beatrix's coach when she attended the school. He was only able to save a few children. He explained what happened when the blue flash hit. Chaos broke out in the school and he was only able



to lead these few children to safety. Dr. Germain is the only parent who has come for her children. Beatrix invites everyone back to the greenhouse.

Weeks pass and Mouse's army moves closer to D-A-V's shelter. They have stacked supplies on top of the skateboard transport. Some ride on the skateboard and some walk alongside it. They live by a simple rule: protect the weak and punish the wicked. The former office workers in Mouse's group have become seasoned warriors. Mouse is still haunted by the dream and vision he had about his father.

Beatrix continues to lead the group back to the greenhouse. They use mud to hid their scent so they don't draw predators. They have become true survivalists, able to move easily through the forest and do not miss any opportunity for food or water. They finally make it back to the Willow house but a mesh now covers the window where Beatrix had first escaped. Beatrix sees that there are unknown people at her house. Her mother spots her and assures her that everything is fine. The people are peaceful survivors who have joined their community.

A scout tells Mouse and the others that he spotted a mall just ahead. The mall is huge and abandoned. It's a safe place to stay but there is no source of food or water so they can't stay long. Members of the army are able to access the stores and take some essential supplies they need. They pick up a mirror that will allow them to make a fire by aiming it at the sun. They find freeze-dried food and waterproof tarps.

## Pages 63 through 92 Analysis

There are more references to God. Some of the members wonder whether Mouse and the D-A-V are "chosen ones." They also wonder if God is guiding them. Mouse feels an affinity for the D-A-V because they both possess powers to foretell the future. Both Mouse and Beatrix are proving to be strong and brave leaders. Both youngsters are demonstrating their ability to survive against the horrible odds and are becoming examples for the people they are leading.

It is apparent that Beatrix and Dr. Germain are gathering peaceful survivors to join them at the greenhouse where they would be safe and would have a constant supply of food and water. When they return to the greenhouse, other survivors have already joined the commune. The commune represents the restarting of civilization.

The reader learns that Mouse is still haunted by the vision he had about Death and his father. It was a warning about the future but he apparently has not figured out what it means. The message was that the future was in the past. It could mean that man will have to return to his primitive beginnings and eschew modernity. This foreshadowing tells the reader that the meaning of the premonition will be revealed by the end of the story. Since Death was the messenger, it sets an ominous tone.

Mouse's army has adapted a survivalist mentality. They will protect the weaker ones of the group and will punish the evil. This tenet shows their unity and their determination to

survive the horrible ordeal to a new reality in which they can exist in. "Survival of the fittest" and "the human instinct to survive" are two phrases that the story calls to mind.



# Pages 93 through 124

## Pages 93 through 124 Summary

Mouse and his followers are anxious to get to their destination, Mouse's house, which they refer to as the Promised Land. Mouse says he hopes it's not too late. A young boy named Seeker appears at Mouse's front gate asking for him. He tells Mrs. Willow that someone named Poppit told him to ask for Mouse. Mrs. Willow tells Seeker he is welcome to stay there. He calls for the rest of his group which is a bunch of wild children led by Poppit, who is blind. He is carried on the shoulders of a large man called Mountain. Mrs. Willow asks about Mouse.

The Willow community takes to the wild children but Poppit remains a mystery. Beatrix tells her mother that she must go out with the gang to find something very important. Her mother doesn't want her to go fearing that she'll be lost. But Beatrix is determined to go. She mentions to the wild kids that she needs to leave to find the treasure. Poppit and the others want to know what the treasure is and go with her.

Mouse and his army will soon come to the promised land and there will be no more traveling or worry. He has noticed that since the blue flash hit, no one has been sick. The D-A-V is visited by angels who tell him that everything will be okay. But they also need to be aware of demons that walk the earth. The next morning, Mouse leaves with the scouts. He is relieved when he finds his house still standing. He sees George's clothes in the garden but since his body isn't there he figures he might still be alive.

The wild kids meet up with Mouse. They tell him that his mother and sister are still alive. They knew who he was and that his name was Mouse because their leader Poppit had a vision about him. They go to the house and Mouse reunites with his thankful mother and grandfather. He tells them the sad news that his father didn't make it. Mouse learns that Beatrix left two days before with Poppit and several of the other wild kids. Mrs. Willow doesn't know where they were going.

The Hoyle brothers designed and built some walk-ways that were scaled to their new size so they could get around the house and grounds. The rest of Mouse's army arrives and Mouse tells them to come in. That night, everyone celebrates being at the commune together. Bumble Bee, one of the wild kids, tells Mouse that Beatrix and the others were going to a place where there was an old buried treasure. Immediately, Mouse connects his dream about a future in the past with the "old buried treasure." He realizes where he can find Beatrix. She and the others are stuck in a hole that is guarded by a dog. They finally escape but then encounter what looks to be hundreds of scary looking men. But Beatrix is relieved and happy to see that it's her brother and his followers. The scout tells them that the museum doors are open. The D-A-V tells them that the rustling sound is just the wind. But Mouse knows that it's not the wind. He yells for everyone to get out. An owl swoops down and grabs Kim, one of Mouse's followers, before she can get away.



Beatrix leads Mouse and the others to a display of miniatures in the museum. They find all kinds of things that are just their size and that they can use - tools, working machinery and even a steam engine for transportation. Now Mouse understands what the message from his dream was. Their future will be brighter with the miniature items that they discovered in the museum. But Mouse warns them to be careful because danger still lurks.

That winter, a demon is lurking outside the Willow House and the greenhouse that is covered in snow. The demon says that the the city belongs to him and the other demons. By spring, the transformation of the humans to demons will be complete.

## Pages 93 through 124 Analysis

There are more references to God in this section. Mouse and his army are traveling to Mouse's house which they refer to as the Promised Land - a direct reference to the land that was promised by God to the Jews. Poppit is a blind child who has the gift of premonition. There are several blind prophets in the Bible including Eli. Poppit is also portrayed as a mysterious character which sets him apart as special and unusual and that there's more to him than meets the eye. The blue flash that rendered the people small was also apparently a healing force. Mouse notices that no one has fallen sick since the blue light impacted earth. Was the light from God since it had a healing element?

After Mouse and his army arrive, the people all celebrate living together. It is another indication that civilization is being reestablished and that man has survived his worst tragedy. The walkways that the Holye brothers constructed and the miniature items that the Army finds are two instances that demonstrate man's ability to adjust and cope with a new reality. The D-A-V once again is visited by angels who assure him that everything will be fine but to beware of demons who walk the earth.

This episode ends with the new commune established and apparently thriving. However, the demons are lurking outside. The reader learns that the blue light was harmful to man, contradicting Mouse's theory that it was a healing force. According to the demon, all humans will eventually be transformed into demons. The angels' warnings to the D-A-V was accurate. They told him to watch out for demons not knowing that the humans would turn into demons. It is obvious that this is a cliffhanger designed to create interest for the next episode.



# Characters

## Mouse Willow

Mouse Willow is a young man who works as an intern in his father's downtown office in a large American city. When a mysterious blue light encompasses the city, as well as the rest of the world, mankind is thrown into chaos. All humans are shrunk to one-twelfth of their normal size. Mouse has had premonitions all his life and they've always been accurate. Just before the light struck, he passed out because he had a horrid premonition that mankind was going to be destroyed and it nearly was.

After Mouse recovers, he emerges as a leader of the group of workers from his father's business. He has a sense of where to lead them to safety and finds his way outside. Mouse must stand up to great pressures and loss that he encounters along the path to safety. His father is killed in a conflict with another group of survivors they encounter. Other members of his group are killed and injured.

Mouse instills confidence in the other members of the group and he leads them through many challenges and dangers including an attack by rats which are now bigger than the people are. He has a premonition that the future now lies in the past and that he must return to his home to see if his mother, grandfather and sister survived. His instincts tell him that he must lead his army of followers to the Willow house where civilization will be saved.

## Beatrix Willow

Beatrix Willow is the younger sister of Mouse Willow. She is nicknamed "Beat" and was named after Beatrix Potter. When the blue light strikes earth, Beatrix is at the family home with her mother. Beatrix and her mother are of course shocked when they are shrunk to one-twelfth of their normal size. Even though she is very young, Beatrix seems to take over and begins to display the same leadership skills as that of her older brother.

Beatrix is immediately concerned about the welfare of her grandfather who was working in the garden when the light hit. She manages to crawl through a window and make her way to the yard which is now like a dense jungle. Just when a garter snake is about to attack her grandfather, George, Beatrix strikes it down with a weapon she fashioned from a scrap of wood she found in the weeds.

Beatrix is also concerned about how her neighbors are faring after the disruptive event. She locates Dr. Helen Germain who is frantic over the fate of her young children who were at school when the blue light struck. She leads Dr. Germain to the school and where they find her two children who survived the ordeal. She also finds a neighbor and his two adult sons who are engineers. She brings them back to the Willow house where





they construct walkways to a scale that allows the miniature people to make their way around the complex.

Beatrix proves over and over again that she is brave, intelligent, and resourceful in dealing with a dangerous threat and that she has the ability to readily adapt to a new reality.

## **Bob Willow**

Bob Willow is the father of Mouse and Beatrix. He is in his downtown office when the blue light strikes. Bob does not make it home. He dies from wounds that he suffered in a conflict with a group of rogues.

## **Jackie Willow**

Jackie Willow is the mother of Mouse and Beatrix. She is at home with Beatrix when the blue light strikes and encompasses earth.

## **George**

George is the grandfather of Mouse and Beatrix. He is outside gardening when the blue light attacks earth. Beatrix saves him from an attack by a garter snake.

## **D-A-V**

D-A-V is one of the survivors. He helps Mouse and his group find their way to safety. Angels visit him and tell him about future events.

## **Dr. Helen Germain**

Dr. Helen Germain is a neighbor of the Willows. Beatrix escorts her to her children's school where she finds them safe and sound.

## **The Hoyles**

Beatrix checks on one of their neighbors, the Hoyles, and brings Mr. Hoyle and his two adult sons who are engineers back to the Willow house. The two sons construct miniature walkways so the now tiny people can get around more easily in the complex.

## **Poppit**

Poppit is the leader of the wild children. Poppit is blind and has the gift of prophecy.

## Ruth

Ruth is the leader of a peaceful group that Mouse and his followers encounter. They join up with Mouse's group and travel with them to the Willow complex.



# Objects/Places

## Office Building

When the devastating blue light strikes earth, Mouse Willow is at work as an intern in his father's office in a large skyscraper in the downtown section of the city.

## The Blue Light

A mysterious blue light encompasses earth, from the cities to the country and from the seas all the way to the core of the earth. The blue light only targets human beings.

## The Gaia Effect

The Gaia Effect is the theory that Mother Nature will eventually rebound to avenge the damage that man does to the earth. It may be the source of the devastating blue light that impacted only the humans.

## The Willow Residence

When the blue light hits earth, Beatrix Willow and her mother are at the family home. Mouse's mission is to lead his followers back to his home.

## The Greenhouse

The Willow's have a greenhouse on their grounds. Beatrix and her mother decide to make a commune in the greenhouse for survivors of the blue light because food can be grown there and it has a fresh water source.

## The Transport

The D-A-V and his group transformed an abandoned skateboard into a transport. The survivors place their piles of supplies on the board so they can move to another location.

## Miniature Walkways

The Hoyle brothers are both skilled engineers. They create miniature walkways for the tiny people so they can make their way around the Willow complex.



## **The School**

Beatrix escorts Dr. Germain to her children's school. They find the school burnt to the ground except for one small building where they find her children to be safe and sound.

## **The Tunnel**

Mouse leads his co-workers through a tunnel to escape to the streets so they can begin their journey to safety. In the tunnel, they are confronted with hundreds of rats and have to fight them off to escape.

## **The Museum**

Mouse and his followers find miniature objects like tools and even a steam engine in a museum. They take the items so that they can have a brighter future.



# Themes

## Survival Instinct

"In the Small" is fundamentally the story of man's instinct to survival, even under the most trying of circumstances. With all the dangers that lurk in the world - terrorist threats, nuclear weapons attacks, economic collapse, and global warming - no one would think that the enemy of man could be the earth itself. Apparently, the eerie blue light that encompasses the world in this story is an example of "the Gaia Effect." The theory is that when Mother Earth becomes so enraged with the damage that man has caused to nature and the earth that she will strike back. In this story, the blue light that she emanated from Mother Earth targeted mankind and made it so small that it would no longer be able to do much damage.

In this story, man is almost devastated by this blue devil. But an overarching theme that emerges from this story is that man's instinct to survive is strong, effective and relentless. When the people are shrunk, their clothes fall off of them. The people find rags and scraps and make clothes and shoes. Beatrix finds some old doll clothes for her and her mother to wear. Mouse and Beatrix both set out in the strange new world and create weapons to use against familiar creatures like cats and dogs that have now pose dangerous threats to them.

The Hoyle brothers are both engineers. They construct a miniature walkway in and around the Willow house so that the survivors can get around the large complex. The survivors abscond with a normal-sized skateboard to act as a supply transport for them. The survivors raid a museum and take tools and devices from a miniature display in order to make their lives easier.

The new reality of being smaller than a rat was quite a challenge; however, this story demonstrates the strength of the human spirit and its infinite drive to survive and adapt.

## Religion

"In the Small," a graphic novel by Michael Hague, is the story of survival and renewal which is an inspired topic that is religious in tone. The main character, Mouse Willow, is a young man has the gift of premonition which, arguably, is a skill that is often attributed to God or god-like characters in literature.

Mouse leads his co-workers and others who join the group to what he is convinced is a safe place where they can begin anew. Eventually, the group is referred to as his "followers." He, at various times is called a prophet, and even the Messiah. Eventually, the group refers to their destination - Mouse's own house - as the Promised Land where they will find safety and renewal. The Promised Land is a Biblical reference to the land that God promised to the Israelis. The fact that it is Mouse who is leading them strengthens the parallel between Mouse and the divine.



Another character, a strange hippie-like survivor, simply referred to as the D-A-V is visited by angels who tell him of future events. The wild children who join the commune are led by a blind child who is a prophet and has visions of the future. This character is reminiscent of the blind prophets in the Bible, specifically Eli. Another group is led by a woman named Ruth whose namesake in the Bible is the featured person in the eponymous book in the Bible.

The group of humans who are threatened by the blue light are lost and frightened - just like the lost souls who are in need of God's grace. Mouse is the young man who becomes their leader and leads them to the Promised Land.

## Leadership

Whenever tragedy strikes or a challenge presents itself to man, leaders inevitably emerge. The story of "In the Small" is about a devastating assault on mankind that threatens its very existence. In this story, there are two leaders who rise to the occasion. Mouse Willow is an intern where his father works when a strange blue light strikes earth and makes all humans shrink to one-twelfth of their normal size. He has the gift of premonition and has a vision of where he can lead the others to safety. He has the manner and bearing of all leaders. He is serious and exudes a confidence that eases the concerns of others. He believes in him when he assures them that he can lead them to safety. Mouse demonstrates ideal leadership skills by his calm and steady manner and his demonstrated leadership and survival skills. By virtue of his behavior, he engenders a strength that calms the worries of the others.

It is not by accident that the other leader that emerges in this story is Mouse's younger sister, Beatrix. They had the same parents and apparently had been raised to be strong and forthright. Beatrix is a risk taker. To save her grandfather, she battles a garter snake that now looms like a large dragon. Beatrix is able to soothe her mother's frayed nerves and take off with a neighbor who cannot find her children. Beatrix demonstrates superior leadership skills just like her brother. She fights off creatures, avoids other dangers and keeps her word to those she leads.

Both young people have to face tragedy, loss and great challenges. Their skills in standing up under the pressure and stress of the ordeal they must struggle through provide support to the others who they must lead to safety in order to save mankind and civilization.



# Style

## Point of View

"In the Small" by Michael Hague is recounted in the third-person and limited, omniscient perspective. The featured points of view are those of Mouse Willow and his sister, Beatrix Willow. These two youngsters are leaders of their respective survival groups. From these perspectives, the reader gains the insight of the youngsters' struggles and the challenges they face and the conflicts, both external and internal, that they have with their friends and relatives.

Author Hague is also the illustrator of the graphic novel. He is talented in telling a story through the limited dialog and text of this genre of literature. His ability to accurately portray the story through his artful, colorful and relevant drawings brings richness and depth to the story.

One premise that is suggested to explain the attack of the blue light is referred to as the Gaia Effect. This allegedly occurs, according to this fictional account, when Mother Nature becomes so distraught over the damage that mankind has done to the earth that she strikes out to avenge nature. Since this is made part of the story, it is apparent that the author may be a save-the-earth advocate or an activist against global warming.

## Setting

"In the Small" by Michael Hague is a graphic novel about a horrible menace that hits earth and targets all of mankind. The setting in which the story begins looks to be New York City. There are tall skyscrapers and the streets are loaded with taxi cabs. The sky is bright blue and everything looks fine. However, just a few moments later, a eerie blue light encompasses the city. But it not only strikes the city, the blue light impacts the entire world and penetrates down to the bottom of the sea and even to the earth's core. The attack of the blue light is depicted in the graphics that help tell this story.

The protagonist, Mouse Willow, is a young intern at his father's office in one of the big skyscrapers when the blue light strikes. The humans are miniaturized to one-twelfth of their size and the office and the terrain outside now present quite a challenge for the tiny people to navigate through. Mouse and the office workers are seen in a big tunnel that leads to the outside. Just as they are about to escape through a vent, they are attacked by rats that are now bigger than they are.

Beatrix, Mouse's sister, and his mother and grandfather are at the family home when the blue light strikes and they are miniaturized as well. Mrs. Willow is pictured next to her toaster which looks to be larger than a car. Beatrix goes out in the yard to find her grandfather. The yard is a jungle and Beatrix has to fight a garter snake that looks like a dragon.



While Mouse leads his followers on a trek through a myriad of obstacles, Beatrix leads her neighbor, Dr. Germain, to her children's school through rugged and tough terrain to learn if her children survived the attack. On each of these treks, the youngsters are met with animals and insects that could easily kill them and with terrain that has become their bitter enemy.

In the end, both kids reach their home again where their greenhouse is being turned into a commune for other survivors. It's a place that has access to fresh water and a place where they can grow food.

## Language and Meaning

"In the Small" by Michael Hague is a graphic novel about the potential end of mankind brought on by the sudden attack of a mysterious blue light that encompasses the earth. There are many references to the premonitions and visions that the protagonist, Mouse Willow, has. He had foreseen the end of mankind. Another survivor of the assault on man is a hippie-like character referred to as the D-A-V is visited by angels. He tells of them whispering to him of things to come.

Since the story is told in a graphic novel format, the dialog is clipped and limited to the dialog balloons above the heads of the characters. In addition to dialog, the story depends on small blocks of text that explain and move the story along.

The language of survival is used. Those who lived through the attack, are forced to improvise, finding scraps of rags to serve as their clothing and creating make-shift weapons to protect themselves from the dangerous creatures and men they encounter on the journey to safety. They find places to stay like a turned-over mailbox which is a perfect safe house for their new miniature sizes.

There are also many parallels and references between Mouse and God or Jesus. The term "promised land" is used in reference to finding their way to Mouse's house. The people who Mouse leads to safety are called his "followers" while he is referred to as a prophet and even as the Messiah. The overarching theme of the story is rebirth and renewal which is also religious in nature. There is a mysterious blind prophet named Poppit who is reminiscent of blind prophets referred to in the Bible like Eli. The survivors are looking forward to the safety of the Willow greenhouse which they refer to as a sanctuary - another religious reference. Angels talk directly to the strange survivor called the D-A-V.

## Structure

"In the Small" by Michael Hague is a graphic novel that is told in one continuing narrative and not separated by chapters or sections. The story begins on a September morning in a large city when a strange blue light encompasses the world and causes havoc. There is a brief flashback to a few days leading up to the attack in order to demonstrate that the main character, Mouse, had a premonition about the event.





Otherwise, the story is told in chronological order and covers roughly a six-month period.

The story ends on a cliffhanger indicating that there will be another episode or sequel will follow this story to explain the ending that leaves the fate of the characters in limbo. It is not clear if "In the Small" was preceded by another book and is actually a part of a series.

The story is told through the dialog of the characters and in the detailed and beautiful graphic illustrations that accompany the story. The drawings illustrate the massive destruction caused by the attack on earth by the mysterious blue light. The artwork provides support to the story that is told in just the brief text and dialog balloons contained in the book. The people of earth are reduced to one-twelfth their normal size. The illustrations help to demonstrate the new stature of the humans. By depicting humans next to rats, house cats, common spider and garden snake, the size differential is made quite apparent. These common and normally non-threatening animals are portrayed as gigantic menaces to the newly miniaturized humans. The illustrations aptly capture the danger that the humans face.



## Quotes

"It was on a beautiful September day" (p. 1).

"The blue flash had reduced mankind to feeble insignificance - a mere one-twelfth of its former size" (p. 6).

"I'm afraid you're awake, beat. And I don't know what's going on. We're both living in a nightmare. I hope to God your father and Mouse are okay" (p. 15).

"Whatever happened, God's sure got a hell of a sense of humor" (p. 18).

"Maybe it's something to do with the Gaia effect. That's why other creatures aren't affected. The Gaia effect. Mother earth's natural way of protecting herself. You see, the other creatures weren't a threat to her" (p. 23).

"Some leave to search for loved ones, but most stay with Mouse, trusting him like a prophet to lead them to safety" (p. 35).

"Why doesn't God just kill us and get it over with" (p. 58).

"Beat invites those who show kindness to her home. They avoid the lawless, the selfish and the cruel" (p. 78).

"They live under a strict set of rules. Protect the weak and punish the wicked" (p. 86).

"Beatrix! I told you, No! I don't care what it is - you're not to leave the fence. Your father and brother have already been lost to the wild. I don't want to lose you, too" (p. 96).

"The angels says they're real happy for us...you know? They're all happy we've become more than human...but the angel gave a warning, man...we just be careful. The angels said demons walk the earth" (p. 100).

"By the spring, the transformation of human to demon would be complete" (p. 124).

## Topics for Discussion

What parts of this story is reminiscent of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on New York City?

What are some references to God or Jesus Christ in this story?

Why did both Mouse and Beatrix become leaders? What leadership qualities did they both demonstrate?

Although it is not directly explained in the story, what could be the possible source of the blue light?

What demonstrates how man can adapt to a new reality? In what ways were the characters in the story inventive in coping with the ordeal they were struggling through?

What two characters did Mouse have a lot in common with and why?

When Beatrix was traveling to the school with Dr. Germain, why did it take so long to get there? What dangers did they meet along the way?