

Island Study Guide

Island by Aldous Huxley

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Plot Summary

Will Farnaby is awakened by a voice yelling, "Attention". He first thinks it's his wife, Molly, telling him that he must get up for work. As he pushes himself up on one elbow, he remembers going down a corridor to Molly as she lay dying in a hospital bed. He then realizes that he's on Pala after having shipwrecked on the Pala Straight and the voice is a mynah bird. Two children find him and they bring their grandfather, Dr. Robert MacPhail, to his aid. He treated and carried to a nearby shelter by Dr. MacPhail and his research assistant, Vijaya, accompanied by Murugan—a young boy Will has already met along with the dictator of a neighboring country and who Will soon discover is the future ruler of Pala.

Pala is a Utopian society. Crime is almost non-existent. Children are taught to accept others, to actively handle their anger, and to make the most of their individual talents. All these lessons spill over into adulthood. Families bond together to raise children in Mutual Adoption Clubs, meaning children learn many ways for families to function and interact.

The island has effectively kept the Outside out. The natural resources—including oil—has not been commercially mined, a fact Murugan wants to change. Murugan didn't grow up on Pala and is being controlled largely by his mother, who wants to exploit Pala's resources to create an industrialized society. Murugan has become enamored with the dictator of Rendang—Colonel Dipa. There's likely a sexual relationship between the two as well.

Will himself is not all he seems. He's a journalist, but his boss also owns an oil company and Will has been promised a huge bonus if he'll help pave the way for his boss's oil company to gain the drilling rights on Pala. Will sets out to do just that. Along the way he's exposed to many aspects of Palanese society and overall, he likes what he sees. He slowly begins to think that helping an oil company corrupt the island is not what he should do. When he's headed to the bedside of Dr. MacPhail's wife, who is dying, Murugan demands his attention, saying that something big is about to happen. Will refuses to accompany the young ruler to his mother's side. Though he wavers some, he doesn't change his mind and leaves Murugan to angrily return home alone.

There are extensive passages related to the philosophy of Pala as presented by the forefathers who created the current society. There are additional lengthy debates between Will and the Palanese on an array of topics.

Will finally arranges to partake of the "makshe-medicine", a medicine that likely is in mushroom form and aids a person to a level of personal fulfillment difficult to attain otherwise. As he faces his own shortcomings and learns to deal with his past, he finds that he's become attached to Susila, a widow and mother of the two children who originally found him after his shipwreck. He's with Susila when Murugan, Dipa, and Dipa's soldiers invade Pala. There are gunshots at the home of Dr. MacPhail and the

procession then passes by Susila's home. After the convoy has passed, he hears a mynah yell, "attention".



Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 Summary

Will Farnaby is awakened by a voice yelling, "Attention". He first thinks it's his wife, Molly, telling him that he must get up for work. As he pushes himself up on one elbow, he remembers going down a corridor to Molly as she lay dying in a hospital bed. He tells himself that it was an accident—that it must have been an accident. He recalls the last time he saw her before that, when she said that she still loved him despite everything. He remembers watching from his window as she got in her car and he feels remorse, though he's also happy that he can now turn to that other, younger body that he craves. He'd wanted to be with Babs and had told Molly that just before her wreck. The night after the funeral, he and Babs had sex again and he continued the affair until the day he arrived home to find that she'd bored of him and was kicking him out in favor of another, though most of the details aren't revealed until later in the story.

Will then discovers that the voice yelling "Attention", and "Here and now, boys", is a mynah bird. Will then remembers the shipwreck that left him on the coast of Pala. He remembers climbing a cliff and seeing snakes that terrified him. He remembers that he fell. Then his remembering is broken by a child's voice. Mary Sarojini MacPhail and her brother, Tom Krishna, arrive. Mary Sarojini sends Tom Krishna for help and she cautiously offers Will a banana. She tells Will that everyone on the island speaks English as well as Palanese.

Will begins to recount the shipwreck, but falters, showing his fear. Mary Sarojini tells him that he has to "get rid of this", and makes him retell the shipwreck and his encounter with snakes again and again until he can see that it's over and there's no need to continue to be afraid. She says that's a common practice on Pala.

They've just talked to the point that Will is able to laugh when Dr. Robert MacPhail arrives with his research assistant, Mijaya Bhattacharya. Will then sees a young man who will later be introduced as Murugan Mailendra, destined to be ruler of Pala. Will had seen the boy five days earlier at Rending-Lobo—a city off the island—where Murugan and Will were each visitors of a dictator named Colonel Dipa. Will notes that the boy offers a small, almost imperceptible shake of his head and decides that the boy doesn't want Will to indicate that they'd already met. He holds the boy's secret though he wants to know why.

Will is transported by stretcher back to the Experimental Station where the Palanese study plants, animals and growing conditions where he's set up in Dr. MacPhail's bungalow.

Meanwhile, Susila MacPhail, mother of Mary and Tom and daughter-in-law of Dr. Robert MacPhail is just leaving her home when she sees a beautiful flock of birds. Her first instinct is to check the reaction of Dugald, though her husband has actually been dead



for some time. When Dr. MacPhail tells her that an Outsider has been found, her first comment is that he's probably unhappy. Dr. MacPhail tells Susila that he's started Will on antibiotics and that he wants her to help him raise his body's resistance to give healing a chance. Dr. MacPhail and Susila talk briefly and she offers an update on his wife's condition. Lakshmi is dying of cancer.

When Susila arrives in Will's room, he says only that he's "miserable". They talk briefly and then Susila says that she visited Wells, England, after the war. He says he's also been to Wells. For the next half hour, she uses her voice to paint a picture of Wells, including the swans on the lake there, the buildings, and the scenery. When she's finished, Will is in a deep trance-like sleep. Susila tells Dr. MacPhail that she also offered Will indirect suggestions that his body should heal while he's asleep and that she's certain he's doing just that.

Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 Analysis

It's interesting to note that Will immediately thinks of Molly upon awakening, though it's been a year since her death. Will is bloodied and bruised, shipwrecked off the Strait of Pala, and as soon as he realizes that Molly is dead, he recounts her death and his actions rather than turning his thoughts immediately upon his current situation.

Mary Sarojini asks Will what his mother would have done to comfort him and he says that she would have cuddled with him and said, "My poor baby". The child is amazed and says that means he would have held to that fear. The fact that Mary Sarojini is appalled by what most children would have considered fair treatment for an injury or fear is one of the first examples of the culture difference Will is bound to discover on Pala.

Will is amazed at his good luck that occurred through the bad luck of the shipwreck. His boss, Molly's uncle, Joe Aldehyde, had offered him a significant sum of money if he could find his way to Pala. While Will is officially on a journalism assignment, Joe hopes Will can pave the way for him to obtain the rights to the rich oil deposits on Pala. Joe told Will that if he did arrive on Pala, he should seek out Rani—the widow of the previous Palanese ruler and self-proclaimed leader of the Crusade of the Spirit, a religious sect of sorts.

When Will sees Murugan, he's reminded of his days with the boy in Colonel Dipa's company. Will has immediately suspected that there's a sexual relationship between the two and admits that Murugan is a handsome child. He's actually seventeen and Will is to learn that Murugan has turned down relationships on Pala, largely due to his mother's teachings.

Susila MacPhail is feeling a pain similar to that felt by Will because of Molly's death. Susila's pain is over the loss of her husband, Dugald. It's interesting to note that Susila compares it to the pain of a "phantom limb" that goes on hurting even though the limb has been amputated. Will and Susila seem to be handling their grief in different ways.



Will's pain is not a healing kind. Susila is supposed to be so much advanced because of the teachings and philosophies of Pala, but she admits that she has to remind herself that there are reasons to go on with life.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Dr. MacPhail visits his wife early the next morning. Lakshmi says that she'll soon see her last morning. Lakshmi and Dr. MacPhail talk about their lives together and she says that she was "like a flea", always hopping off to something new. He says that she educated him in ways no other could have.

Will reads from the small book given to him by Dr. MacPhail. It's called, "Notes on What's What, and What it Might be Reasonable to Do about What's What". Among the observations are, "Nobody needs to go anywhere else. We are all, if we only knew it, already there". There is also a discussion about faith and belief. Faith, according to the text, is "justified confidence in our capacity to know who in fact we are". Those with a strong belief in something or someone will take unanalyzed words too seriously: "Give us this day our daily Faith, but deliver us, dear God, from Belief". Will was given the book as Dr. MacPhail headed out to a Privy Council meeting—a governing body that handles the affairs of state until the new Raja is of age. Dr. MacPhail says that the book outlines the underlying principles, but not the history of the island.

Will begins to question Murugan on his plans for the future of Pala. Murugan says that his priority is modernization and that he believes oil royalties are the key to making that happen. Murugan then says that his mother wants to sell to Southeast Asia Petroleum because she knows the owner, Joe Aldehyde. Will then tells Murugan that Joe is also his boss, though he works in the newspaper business, not the oil industry. Murugan says that weapons are a necessity to earn the respect of other nations and that manufacturing chemical and biological weapons is easy if one has the capabilities of manufacturing insecticides.

Murugan says that Dr. MacPhail and Vijaya want things to go on as they are, "forever and ever". A female voice parrots the phrase, prompting Murugan to jump to his feet and introduce his mother, the Rani. Will notes that she's well over two hundred pounds but sits in a chair without looking—in the manner of one who knows that nothing untoward can ever happen to her. Rani says that she heard a voice telling her to go talk to Will and that she walked all the way. When it's time to leave, she'll send Murugan for the car, saying that the little voices said nothing about walking back.

The Rani introduces Abdul Pierre Bahu, Ambassador of Rendang, and then begins talking about her life. She says that she and Murugan left Pala for Murugan's health and that their time away was happy. She tells Will that she's a natural psychic and then talks of her own quest for the Path. The Rani studied in Lausanne, learning to do strenuous breathing and concentration exercises. After she'd learned to seek the will of the Master—Koot Hoomi—she was instructed to organize a World Movement to save Humanity from self-destruction. The movement, called the Crusade of the Spirit, is now the Rani's passion.



Their talk is interrupted by Radha Appu, a nurse who makes a "perfunctory knicks" to the Rani and seems less than happy to see Bahu. Murugan—who'd been sent away by his mother to retrieve their car—returns and Radhu says hi, quickly adding his title, "your majesty". Murugan and the Rani leave Bahu to visit a little longer with Will while Radha prepares to give Will an injection.

The Rani continues, and says that Pala's "smooth bright skin concealed the most horrible rottenness". The Palanese encourage their young people to engage in sex and Murugan resisted. His mother says that an older woman sought to teach Murugan but he resisted that as well.

As they continue to discuss Pala, it's Bahu who says that Pala—in its infinite rightness—is wrong. That it's simply wrong to have a place so perfect when countries all over the world are suffering. He says that it's an "affront to God".

The Rani soon learns of his connection with Joe and says that makes it clear why "my little voice was so insistent". Rani knows Joe because he consulted with her on spiritual matters. There is some discussion of the reasons Joe seems to know ahead of time what stocks to buy. Rani calls Joe "the man with the kite" because he is always firmly planted on the ground but seeking the spiritual. As they talk about oil, Rani says that the Palanese will soon be changing their policies, meaning oil companies will have the option to bid on drilling rights. Will says that Joe will pay whatever their highest bid is, plus twelve and a half percent. Bahu, asked if he will put in a good word with Colonel Dipa, hedges by saying, diplomatically".

Chapter 5 Analysis

The philosophical viewpoints are varied and almost seem to be "bullet points". One of the points made is that a person must know "who we think we are" in order to know "who in fact we are". Another is, "The more a man knows about individual objects, the more he knows about God".

Murugan has obviously given great thought to what changes he'll implement as ruler of Pala. He plans to industrialize and to raise a military presence. It's not entirely clear whether he has been making all these plans on his own or if his mother and Colonel Dipa are actually pulling the strings and Murugan is simply mimicking what they say. It's interesting to note that the people of Pala know Murugan and must know what kind of ruler he'll be, but make no effort to stop him from taking leadership of the country.

The Rani says that she's interested in selling the rights to Pala's oil fields in order to further her Crusade. Wills says, "All I'm interested in is money". He says that Joe is willing to pay him for doing very little and that he wants to collect on that. To Bahu, he says that he's certain Joe would be even more generous to anyone else who helps. Joe's feelings on this point will change over the time he spends on Pala. He'll eventually tell himself that someone is going to exploit the country for the oil fields, so he might as



well benefit from it. He'll later recant and distance himself from the deal, but he'll be right—someone else will simply take over and make the deal happen.

Radha will soon elaborate on her reaction to Bahu, saying that he'd offered money for her sexual favors. When she turned him down, he offered more money. To Radha, who had spent her life in Pala society, trying to bribe her was an affront that she found repulsive. It seems that the sexual act was fully accepted on Pala as a course of nature but that adding money into the equation made it sordid. Radhu drops a curtsy toward Murugan and leaves it to him to take it as an indication of her respect or mockery. There's no real indication as to which she meant for it to be.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

When the Rani and Murugan have gone, Radhu says, "golly" and Bahu says, "golly" as well. Bahu offers to leave but Will asks him to stay. Radha speaks of Will's mental state, saying that she's never met an Outsider who didn't have problems.

Once Radha is gone to get Will's lunch, Bahu suggests that they "get down to business". He says that he wants ten times Will's promised payoff to put his weight behind the plan to allow Joe's company to drill for oil on Pala. Will agrees to send a letter to Joe immediately to that effect. The conversation then turns to Pala and Bahu continues to point out the downfalls of the island people. He says that people are "all demented sinners" and that pretending to be good is wrong.

Radha returns with lunch and tells Will that she's met other Outsiders—including some American doctors who spent their time lecturing on what the Palanese people were doing wrong. Radha says that American medicine is "fifty percent terrific", and cites the great antibiotics available. But she says there are no efforts at prevention. She says that it takes a whole-body approach to make it happen but that Pala pays doctors to keep people well.

After Bahu leaves, Radha tells Will that Bahu had offered money for sex and when she turned him down had upped the price. Will says that's common on the Outside. Will questions Radha about Murugan and she tells him that she had tried to seduce Murugan. Radha says she was infatuated by Murugan in satin pajamas but that she quickly regained her sense and returned to Ranga, her boyfriend. Radha says that she got into bed with Murugan but he ran to the bathroom and cried until she promised that she wouldn't touch him again.

Radha and Ranga gently tease each other as young people in love are bound to do. Ranga is soon to go to the Outside for college and Will answers questions about the girls he's likely to encounter on the Outside. Will says there will be many and that they'll find Ranga irresistible.

Will asks if Murugan had another girl and if that was the reason for rejecting Radha. Radha says she doesn't think so. Will asks if he might have had relationships with boys and whether that would be acceptable. Radha says that society does accept that kind of relationship as long as it's positive for those involved. Will is told that the people of Pala can avoid pregnancy through a mental process. For those who don't want to go to those lengths, birth control is provided monthly. The goal has been to eliminate unwanted pregnancies and the population has been largely stable.

Ranga says that Murugan invited a group of young people to hear his discussion on an array of topics, including oil, industrialization, television, armaments, and the Crusade of



the Spirit. None of those invited were open to the changes Murugan proposed, saying that they didn't need the consumer goods that Murugan seems to covet.

The talk then turns to maithuna. Ranga explains that when "you do maithuna, profane love is sacred love." Will suggests that maithuna is "birth control without contraceptives", but Ranga says it's also sexuality experienced throughout the entire body. He says that it's not a technique that turns love making into yoga, but is an overall awareness. Will seems to believe that the distribution of contraceptives are a good idea. He recalls the horrible conditions in overcrowded areas such as China.

Ranga says that the fact that there are no organized religions to object to birth control. The fact that the island has no natural harbors meant that there were no invaders. And that two men—Andrew MacPhail and Murugan the Reformer (the current Murugan's great-grandfather)—selected well for the society's organization. The result of all these has created the current Pala society. In addition, the Experimental Station has discovered ways to optimize the growth of food and animals in the tropical climate. The founders of the society realized that an increase in food production typically prompts an increase in population and the founders worked even harder to keep the population under control and to educate the people of the reasons.

As Ranga and Radha leave, Will sends his letter for mailing. He feels a twinge of conscience—that he's about to betray the people of Pala by paving the way for an oil company to exploit the land and bring in the outside influences to corrupt the society.

Chapter 6 Analysis

While Bahu has no official Capacity at Pala, he does have some influence. First, he seems to be on good terms with the Rani and that's a situation that is bound to include the opportunity to offer advice. But Bahu is also close to Colonel Dapi—the Rendang dictator. Pala is bound to become closer to Rendang after Murugan assumes the throne because the boy wants to do things just as Dapi has done. Bahu believes his support for Joe's company will help convince Dapi to approve that contract and Will apparently thinks so as well.

Radha and Ranga say they won't ask each other to promise faithfulness while Ranga is away at college. They each say that the other is his or her own person. With the exception of Radha's question regarding the number and kind of girls Ranga is likely to meet on the Outside, there's no indication that either is concerned. The two have been friends since childhood and lovers for two and a half years. It's a mark of the society and their upbringing that each respects the other to that point. It's also interesting to note that Radha says that Ranga forgave her for the "pajama episode" with Murugan. Again, it's not entirely clear what's expected from the partners of a relationship of this kind.

The concept behind maithuna is complicated, though Ranga, Radha, and Will discuss it at length. Will will soon be introduced to a drug—a mushroom—that is said to promote the experience. Ranga says that maithuna is dhyana and that dhyana is contemplation.



The entire discussion makes Will think back to his nights with Babs. In her apartment, the light from a nearby neon sign flooded the bedroom alcove, sometimes pink and sometimes green. He likens the green to "corpse-like" and the pink to the "cheapest vulgarest illusion".

As Will sends his letter, he seems to be working at trying to justify his action. He knows that he's about to introduce a corrupting force into the society but notes that someone will take the step—and that he might as well earn the money for helping Joe be the person who gets the rights to the island's oil.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Will continues reading from "Notes on What's What". He discovers a passage talking of the "me as I think I am" versus the "me as I am in fact". In this passage, the author writes that one third of all sorrow the person "that I think I am" must endure is unavoidable. Will then finds a poem written by Susila and folded into the book. The poem talks of remembering the dead as "gentians", a blue trumpet-shaped flower. Will's thoughts turn to his father who had belittled his mother's attempts at painting. When Susila returns, Will asks her about the poem and says that he can't imagine his own father as a gentian—only as a turd.

Will and Susila talk at length about childhood. Will's was unhappy because his parents were unhappy with each other. Susila says that her own parents were not happy together but that her childhood had been happy because she'd always had the opportunity to escape to another of her parents' homes. She explains that children are taught what to expect from those with different personalities and different temperaments. But she said that her parents were still disappointed in each other. Susila says that on Pala, the "ex-child" and the "woman who used to be called mother" form a new relationship when the child is grown. If they like each other, they are close. If not, they simply drift into new families, new friendships, and away from each other.

Families on Pala belong to a MAC—a Mutual Adoption Club. Every family agrees to be responsible, caring, and loving toward one another. Children are encouraged to spend time among all the families so that they have a taste of other home lives. Grown children don't belong to the same MAC as their own parents or siblings. Instead, there's an entire second set of families ready and willing to step in whenever the child needs additional guidance or help. Susila says that the child has responsibilities and chores anywhere they stay so that it's not like being a guest. Susila says that the MAC is also important for the older people who have no small children and no longer work. In those cases, caring for the children gives them a purpose, making their lives vital even though they've raised their own children.

Will says he had a home to escape from his own parents' anger at each other, but that his Aunt Mary died young, leaving him again at the complete mercy of his parents.

Will then asks about the trance Susila induced the day before. Susila explains that the mind is like a little boy who wants to help but is incapable of performing a specific task. He's eventually sent away so that others can complete the work. She says that's what she did. She then turns her voice to that soft, melodious tone that she'd used the day before, but Will tells her that he's now onto her "tricks" and they both laugh.

Susila says that there are no "Billy Grahams" or "Alcatrazes" on Pala. She says there is a judicial system to settle disputes but that people are turned back to their MACs and their



own families rather than placed in prison. She says the crimes are typically small and that there's no need for incarceration.

Will asks Susila about her husband, but he's really thinking about Molly and Babs. Under Susila's urging, he talks about Molly, the accident, his role in the event, and his relationship with Babs. He says he told Molly he wanted out of their marriage because he was in love with another woman. She left the apartment in the rain and was in an accident that took her life. He describes meeting Babs on a plane and that he was immediately taken with her. He'd been prepared to give up his marriage for Babs but soon after Molly's death, when Will and Babs had been living together for a short time, Babs informed Will that she was interested in someone else and told him to leave.

Will says he'd almost changed his mind about marrying Molly before the wedding, but couldn't bring himself to withdraw the proposal. Susila suggests that Molly loved him as "a Sister of Mercy" rather than as a "Wife of Love". Will admits that he'd had affairs even before Babs and that Molly wanted him to stop. He says he looked at it as Molly restricting his freedom. He says that he "hated her for being so unhappy".

They end their discussion with Will asking if the death of Susila's husband is relevant to the "here and now" the mynah birds are always chanting about. Susila says that with regard to the fact that she must go on caring for her children and doing her job, it's completely irrelevant. She says the key isn't to forget the past, but to remember while being free of the past. Will asks if Susila will help him and she promises that she will.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Will and Susila's discussion of the MAC is a signal that this Utopian society has not created a race of people who are fully in tune with each other, always caring and never on each other's nerves. There may be bad marriages on Pala, but people are taught to deal with those situations. Instead of children growing up in bad family situations, the young people move from one home of their MAC to another. Susila says that her own children sometimes spend a few days away from home but that she herself as a child had sometimes gone to one of the other families for a month or more before returning home. There are several interesting points to this. It's not like a child of divorced parents who goes to the other parent each time he or she is mad at the other. Instead, the parents work together to resolve problems the child faces.

Susila's son Tom will later go to the home of another of his MAC families because he's been in trouble at home for bringing his pet lizard in the house. Tom and his sister both go and Susila's feelings aren't hurt. Tom's father has died and he'll be spending time with a family who has an adult role model who will talk to him about the lizards, backing up Susila's own rules.

It's also interesting to note that the children apparently don't ask permission to be away from home but do ask the MAC family if it's alright to be there. This means that alternate families aren't invaded without notice. It's important to note that just because a family

belongs to a MAC doesn't mean that the blood family ceases to be important. Susila will later tell about having a picnic with Dugald's family shortly before he died.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Dr. MacPhail, Will, and Susila talk about their "next door neighbor", Colonel Dipa. He's gathering more armaments and is calling for the reuniting of the Greater Rendang—a territory that included Pala before the various nations were on their own. Will points out that Pala is in a precarious situation because they've ignored the outside world, making them unpopular with all developing nations. They've also got a Utopian society, making them unpopular with underdeveloped nations. In addition, Murugan has told Will that there's no military force at all so Pala has no way—and no intention—of defending itself against an invasion.

Will asks for permission to remain on Pala for three months. He says that he likes what he's learned so far and that he wants to learn more. Susila says that she'd be willing to take the risk of having Will stay. Dr. MacPhail and Susila agree to his request.

Dr. MacPhail goes through the history of Andrew MacPhail's family. James and Janet, his parents, were devout Calvinists and expected the children to follow in their footsteps. The oldest son, Tom, became a minister. The oldest daughter, Mary, married a minister "and duly died in childbirth". Next in line was Jean, who never married but devoted her life to caring for her parents. Annie—the prettiest of the girls—fell in love but the man was Anglican and the marriage forbidden. Ten years later, Annie was involved in a whirlwind courtship and when the man returned to the sea for a two-year voyage, Annie, "pregnant, friendless and despairing", committed suicide. The next son, Alexander, joined an acting company and his parents never allowed anyone to talk of him again. Andrew was the youngest, quiet obedient and dutiful in all aspects except one—he was caught masturbating and severely beaten for it. When he went away to medical school, he discovered that foul language and sex didn't bring down the wrath of God. Dr. MacPhail says that Andrew's siblings were destroyed or tamed by their parents but Andrew thrived despite those same parents.

Andrew signed on as a ship's surgeon and sailed on a three-year voyage. He broke his leg, forcing the ship's captain to hire another surgeon and leave Andrew behind. He practiced medicine in Madras, growing wealthy but increasingly bored. Then a man from Pala offered him a "princely" price to go to Pala. Andrew arrives to discover that the Raja had a huge tumor on his face. Andrew knows that the Raja will be dead in a couple of months without surgery, but admits that so many people die while undergoing surgery or in the recovery stages that he's likely to die either way. He wonders what will happen to him if he's the man who "kills the king".

Andrew draws from an article he's read about hypnotism. Although it takes hundreds of repetitions, he finally succeeds in putting the Raja under, adding that he won't choke while he's asleep but will breathe freely. It works and Andrew spends the next three weeks preparing for the operation. He regularly puts the Raja into a deep trance, and



finally has a "practice run" through the surgery, explaining exactly what will happen and telling the Raja that he will sleep through the entire ordeal. And he does. Andrew successfully removes the tumor and the Raja begins to heal.

Then Andrew is called to help the Raja's daughter, who has a completely pain-free childbirth, thanks to Andrew's hypnosis. He is made advisor to the Raja and begins working to change the things he doesn't like about Pala while enhancing those he does like.

Chapter 8 Analysis

When Will asks permission to remain on Pala for some months, he says that it's to learn more about this society that has captured his interest. It's fairly obvious that Will is still hoping to close the deal between Joe and Murugan, though it's also obvious that at least some of what he's learning is sinking in. It's not difficult to see that Will is quickly changing his mind about the Palanese people and their culture, and that he's becoming increasingly close to Susila.

Will learns a great deal of the history of Pala from Dr. MacPhail. As the story unfolds, it's interesting to note that Andrew MacPhail has been raised in a strictly religious home and that he's moved from those teachings, as many young people are apt to do.

It's also interesting that Andrew has the knowledge to put a person into a trance for a pain-free procedure, but has never before tried to apply that knowledge. When he has the opportunity, he does try it but there's no real explanation for the fact that he's so doggedly determined to make it work—other than the fact that he fears what will happen to the surgeon who kills the Pala Raja. It seems that Andrew, had he been a true skeptic, would have given up after the first few hundred passes and seeing that the Raja was not falling asleep. Yet he continued to pass his hands over the Raja's body until the method worked. There's no real evidence of what it was that did work, though it seems evident that tone of voice has a lot to do with it since Susila was able to put Will into a trance using only her voice.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Will arrives at the lab to find that Murugan is reading something, but hides it before Will can see. When he convinces Murugan to allow him to look, Will discovers that it's a Sears and Roebuck catalogue. Will suggests that the catalogues be distributed to the people of Pala for free to encourage them all to want possessions. He says they'll then be clamoring for progress but Murugan says it won't work.

Then Murugan reveals that the people of Pala have "dope" in the form of yellow mushrooms. Dr. MacPhail and Vijaya say there's nothing wrong with it, though Murugan disagrees. Dr. MacPhail says that the people who consume the mushrooms are happy but Murugan argues that it's a "false" feeling. MacPhail says, however, that rather than the brain producing consciousness, perhaps the brain only transmits the consciousness—meaning that the feelings created by the mushrooms are real. MacPhail says that there's no way to prove whether he or Murugan is right in their hypothesis, but that it doesn't even matter.

Dr. MacPhail says that some people react very little to the mushrooms and that they've had to find "other approaches to liberation" for those people. In an effort to make Murugan see his point of view, MacPhail says that he and his wife took the "medicine" together for the "last last time", and that his wife, even facing the final days of a debilitating illness, had suffered no ill effects but only a "mental transformation". Outside the lab, he admits that it probably had no impact on Murugan.

When they reach the summit of the mountain, Dr. MacPhail says that Palanese children, at a certain age, are sent to "climb a precipice and then give them four hundred milligrams of revelation". They receive the moksha medicine before they begin the climb and then participate in a religious ceremony at a temple located at the bottom of their climb. It's near that temple, at a summer house, where Dugald's family gathered for a picnic shortly before his death.

The ceremony includes a talk by Vijaya. He speaks about danger, shared with a friend or several friends, and the importance of each doing what will make them all safe. He talks them through the climb, down past the bottom of the rock cliff and into the forest. And Vijaya says that next the students realize that there's a "beauty made one with the horror of the jungle". At this point, Murugan, who is reading a science fiction novel, yawns. Next, Dr. MacPhail takes the floor. He challenges the young people to figure out what to do with the moksha-medicine experiences and to devote their lives to being what they really are. His talk is interrupted by a messenger who says Murugan is needed by his mother.



Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Murugan knows how many pages are in the catalogue and where his most coveted items are found. As Murugan, Will, Dr. MacPhail and Vijaya talk, "scooters" becomes a symbol of all consumer goods that are to be desired. Vijaya says that the big question is "to scoot or not to scoot". Will says that he's been in many impoverished countries and that the answer is always "to scoot". While Murugan believes that the young people of Pala have been raised to dismiss the worldly items, he himself has been raised away from Pala and has those desires. It's interesting to note that there's bound to be conflicts as the desires of the ruler are balanced against those of the people he rules.

Will asks Dr. MacPhail if he believes rock climbing is a good idea despite the fact that his son was killed while climbing. Dr. MacPhail says he supports the activity and Will says, "But poor Susila". Dr. MacPhail says it's sad for Susila and for the children and even for him, Dugald's father, but that it wouldn't have happened if Dugald hadn't made a habit of risking his life. It seems that the Palanese society has made plans for dealing with the various personality traits but they apparently did nothing to help Dugald deal with his thirst for adventure.

The speeches offered by Vijaya and Dr. MacPhail are great rambling dialogues, filled with challenges for the young people to make the most of their lives, their choices, and their opportunities. Both speak of symbols, from hawks to the brazen images of the temple, though there are no real religious overtones other than a fidelity to self.

It's interesting to note that Murugan is reading "science fiction" while studiously ignoring the events taking place around him. It's also interesting that the Rani calls for her son's presence and it's granted, though it interrupts an important event in the lives of the young people. Though Murugan has said that leaders on Pala don't incite self-sacrifice, this seems to be an example of that very thing, though it's not recognized as such by Murugan.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Dr. MacPhail tells Will that his wife has had a restful night and then leaves Will to return to "Notes on What's What". One of the points made is that people of all classes can partake equally of the moksha medicine. His reading is interrupted by a phone call from the Rani. She says she's called about an "urgent matter" and Will guesses that it's oil. He's correct and the Rani says that the issue has come to a head more quickly than anticipated. She says that she wants to send a cable to Joe, and that she wants it to indicate the urgency. Will, thinking of no way to decline, agrees. The Rani says that she's certain the deal will go through because she says Joe has promised to back the Crusade and that God wants the Crusade to succeed, implying that Joe's backing of the Crusade will be through the oil deal.

Vijaya picks up Will, introducing him to Leela Rao, "librarian, secretary, treasurer, and general keeper-in-order". Leela says that she's heard about Will from Radha and Ranga, her students. It's then that Will learns that Leela is a teacher of the love yoga that Ranga and Radha talked about. Will wants to ask if Leela is the older woman the Rani says tried to "instruct" Murugan on the ways of love, but can't find the words to ask.

Leela says the tropical climate is bad for books and paintings and Will says that once Pala has been invaded by those who would industrialize it, a "Golden Age" of art and literature is bound to follow. Vijaya says that he feels his children will see this come to pass.

There are no conformist religions on Pala. Some people retain the remnants of religious acts, such as a child offering a bouquet of daisies to a bronze image in a temple, but those are not enforced nor discouraged. As Vijaya says, "we accept it as we accept that spider web. . . Spiders can't help making the traps and men can't help making symbols". He says that some religious acts work, but not because of the deity one is praying to. Instead, the repetition tends to take a person to a better level—"it really gets you somewhere," as Leela says. Vijaya says that it doesn't matter what one says—that it can be "Hey Diddle Diddle" or the name of God. The point is that the person becomes less self-absorbed. The only down side, according to Vijaya, is that you can "hey-diddle-diddle yourself downwards as well as upwards", a problem that doesn't exist with the Palanese self-awareness methods.

Will sees a painting by a Palanese artist which triggers an extensive discussion on the role of a landscape with meditation because, as Vijaya says, "Landscapes can really remind people of what they are". Vijaya says that it's up to the individual to determine when and how often he or she should meditate. Some people love the meditation rooms and others find it oppressive, and therefore counterproductive. Vijaya says his wife, Shanta, drops by the meditation room almost every day.



The conversation turns to intelligence and Leela says that she has neither the brains for genetics and biology nor the talent for poetry or acting. She says that she's good at understanding people, at helping them. She says that she knows that she's valued for that. She asserts that Pala is the perfect place for stupid people because everyone learns their value as a person and the stupid people don't envy the smart—"because we're given just as much as they are. Sometimes even more". Leela also explains that the moksha-medicine can take an individual to the same place as meditation. Will asks why meditation is needed and she says that the moksha is "the banquet" and a banquet is "too rich and lasts too long" for everyday enjoyment.

Chapter 11 Analysis

It's notable that the author of "What's What" indicates that all who partake of the moksha medicine become equal, though Susila will later tell Will that experiences vary from one person to the next.

Vijaya seems to believe that the invasion of the industrial age is inevitable. It's interesting that he is a staunch supporter of the Utopian society of Pala, but that he's not willing to fight for it. In fact, the Pala culture has taught people with violent tendencies how to control those impulses. It seems now that saving the island from violent people in society has condemned it to a pacifist state that will make it easy for someone else to step in and take over—the Palanese people simply don't know how to resist.

Will discovers a beautiful landscape picture and he's taken aback that he doesn't know the artist—a Palanese. He's told that the artist's work was revered on Pala and was never released to the rest of the world. It seems that the people of Pala have distanced themselves from the Outside to an extensive degree.

It's typical of Will to want to know that if it's possible to reach the same levels by way of both meditation and the moksha-medicine, then why would anyone go to the trouble of meditation. Leela's explanation, that the moksha-medicine is too rich for everyday, seems to be accepted. Will is looking at things from his "Outsider" perspective. If a goal can be reached by simply taking a dose of medicine, why bother to do anything else? He has similar questions regarding the manual labor required on Pala. Especially for those who are determined to have violent tendencies, manual labor is a must. Even for those intellectuals, digging in the soil, chopping wood, and other manual labor jobs are a regular occurrence. Will objects to the need for it, saying that he wouldn't want to be forced into those laborious jobs, but admits that having his father work off his anger in the log woods might have been positive for the rest of the family.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Will notes the number of birds around Vijaya's home. Shanta is nursing their baby, Rama, and Will is about to learn several interesting facts about Pala's culture. One of those is that Vijaya is not the child's biological father, and that it was by choice. The couple already have two children and decided that they would dip into the island's pool of talent for their third and final child. They used artificial insemination from the artist whose work Will had admired in the meditation room. That artist's sperm has been frozen until use. The idea was to selectively do away with negative genetic traits. Shanta says that most couples who have a third child use artificial insemination.

Children on Pala are coached from birth to accept things as "good". For example, Vijaya holds a bird near Rama, rubs the bird's feathers on Rama's head and quietly says, "Such a good bird", stressing the word "good". Shanta says that she'll do the same thing tomorrow with a borrowed pet python. The idea, according to Vijaya, is that "food plus caress plus contact plus 'good' equals love". A dog, Toby, comes near and licks the baby while Shanta says the dog is good. Will suggests that he should get in on the act and he caresses Rama's head while Shanta croons to the child. Shanta tells Will that a new generation can evolve to be like the people of Pala—that no one is immortal and that the bullies and greedy people will eventually die, meaning that the next generation could be whatever they want. She reminds him that's how the current society evolved on Pala.

As Will and Shanta are talking about snakes—the fact that Will doesn't like them because they're poisonous and Shanta pointing out that there's a statue of a Buddha with a snake coiled about him and covering his head to protect the god from rain—Tom and Mary Sarojini arrive. The children ask if they can have dinner with Shanta's family. Tom is sent to ask Vijaya if there's enough food to share with the two children and Shanta questions Mary, who says that Tom has been in trouble with their mother for bringing lizards in the house. Mary tells Shanta that they can go to one of the other families if it isn't convenient and Shanta says that she's certain it's alright, but that she thought Tom should have some time with Vijaya. When Mary is gone, Shanta confirms that Will has just seen the MAC "in action". Shanta says that it's perfectly alright for the children to share lunch there, but that she wanted Tom to have time to talk with Vijaya. Shanta points out that Tom has no father and needs a male figure to help him with his growing pains—including his need to brag and to bring lizards in the house.

Chapter 12 Analysis

As Will is touching Vijaya's baby, he considers that he understands why Bahu doesn't like Pala—they are simply "too good". Will says that he can understand that the child would associate the kind voice, the touching, and the gentleness with love. But he wants to know what will happen when the child grows older and realizes that people



aren't always good. Will is looking for ways to discredit what the Palanese are teaching. The argument would hold true in most societies, but Will has forgotten that on Pala, people are basically good and the child is getting an important lesson on the realities of life. It's interesting to note that Will asks to be included in the touching session, though he's already admitted to himself that he doesn't particularly like babies and is glad he and Molly never had any.

The MAC seems fraught with problems. One issue that's never discussed is how the parents communicate. Because crime is virtually non-existent, there is no need to worry that someone has kidnapped a child, but it does seem that parents would worry that a child might have been hurt in an accident or simply become lost. Because children are apparently free to go to any of their many homes, it seems they could be missing for days before anyone actually notices. There are no details of any communication between these families, but it seems that it would be necessary to let others know where a child is staying. It's noteworthy that Mary asks if it's convenient and says that if it isn't, they can try one of the other homes in their unit. With that, it seems evident that children take their ability to stay with others seriously. Mary immediately offers to help Shanta's twins wash up for dinner—evidence that the children take their chores seriously even when they are with another family.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Will learns that the people of Pala don't say grace before meals, but say it with meals by taking time to fully chew the first bite of food, swallowing only after they've fully tasted the food. Will admits that he tastes this food in ways he's never tasted before. Shanta says that food is a "not-me" outside the person, that tasting is a "not-me" inside the person, and that paying more attention to the "not-me" may make a person pay more attention to the "not-me" on the "further side of the consciousness".

Mary Sarojini and Tom are on "scarecrow" duty in the afternoon and Vijaya agrees to deliver them to the field. The scarecrows are a "Future Buddha" and a "delightfully gay, Eastern Indian version of God the Father". The children pull a string to put the scarecrows in action. At the school, Will meets Chandra Menon, the Under-Secretary of Education, and school principal, Mrs. Narayan. Mr. Menon explains that the goal is success. Will asks what kinds of success and Mr. Menon asks what the role of an American child is. Will answers that they are raised to be consumers. He then asks what the role of a Chinese child is, and Will says that's to make the nation stronger, usually by serving as "cannon fodder" or for other military duties. Mr. Menon says the goal in Pala is to raise children to be full human beings. He says that begins with assessment of the child to seek out problems and offer ways to solve those issues. The key, he says, is that it's a whole-body approach. The child's nutrition is assessed along with his gifts and talents.

Among those gifts are those who can distort time. For example, those children can work a problem that should take an hour in a matter of minutes, but without showing signs of rushing. They also teach tolerance, likening different personalities to animals so that even the youngest can understand.

While Mr. Menon admits that "Greater Rendang" might happen, he says their job in the meantime is to go on educating their young people. Over the next few hours, Will tours the school. He sees children working at problem solving and then sees others who are learning to stamp their feet as a way to exorcise any negative emotions. Will next visits Susila's classroom where he hears her teaching students how to eliminate physical pain, but warns them not to ever ignore pain—that they should always tell an adult so that someone can address the problem. She then takes them through a series of pretending games, having them visualize their way into gales of laughter.

Will and Susila leave the school together and encounter Murugan and the Rani. The Rani is skeptical of Palanese education and says the scarecrows are designed to scare little children away from religion. As they leave, Susila's lack of love for the Rani is evident and Will laughingly suggests that she "stamp it out" as the children had done, earning him a laugh from Susila.



Chapter 13 Analysis

It's interesting to note that both Vijaya and Shanta recognize that the way they say grace differs from the way that's common in the Outside.

Students are also taught to take deep breaths when they are angry in order to get control of his or her emotions. They also teach the youngsters to realize that when their anger comes through, it creates a crack and a beautiful aroma spills out. If they breathe deeply, they can smell that beautiful scent. Will seems rather amazed that children will actually do that, but is assured they will.

Will points out that a Palanese stamping his feet won't keep the oil companies from invading the country to drill and won't keep Colonel Rengang from taking control of Pala. Mrs. Narayan says that simply being reconciled to whatever fate has in store is "a great achievement". It seems that most people expect that Pala is to be invaded—it's merely a matter of when and how. It's also evident that there's to be no resistance when it happens and no effort to stop it.



Chapters 14 and 15

Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

Will and Susila continue talking about Will's life. He says that when he realized that Molly was dead, he was almost relieved that he was truly free to be with Babs. He suddenly remembers that he'd had a dog as a child, that the dog had become sick and died, and that he'd be repulsed by the sick dog but was still willing to be near because he loved the animal. He also recounts his time with his Aunt Mary. He'd loved her because she provided an escape from his unhappy house, but when she became ill she changed dramatically. As it was evident that she would soon die, she began to hate everyone who wasn't sick. Susila says that she doesn't believe in an afterlife, that a person should concentrate on living his or her life before death rather than focusing on what might or might not come after.

As they're talking, Susila is called to the bedside of her mother-in-law. She tells Will that the end is near and that Dr. MacPhail can't be reached. Susila sends Will and Mary Sarojini away, telling them to go to the hospital in about an hour. The two make their way to the market, then, at Mary's suggestion, go to a puppet show. The show is about Oedipus, only there's a twist. A Palanese girl and boy convince the mother not to hang herself and help the story have a happy ending. When the show is almost over, Murugan approaches, demanding that Will return with him to talk to the Rani. Will says that he has to be at the hospital. When Murugan insists, he shakes the boy off and sends him home. As they walk toward the hospital, Will briefly considers that he should go to Rani and do whatever she wants. He doesn't and he and Mary go on to the hospital room.

Mary is sent to another of her MAC homes while Susila comforts Lakshmi. Radha does yoga at the foot of the bed and Will watches from a seat in the corner. At one point, Lakshmi says she's outside her own body, but Susila urges her to return. They talk of times past for awhile, then Dr. MacPhail arrives, saying he took so long because the phone lines were down and his vehicle broke down. Susila, Will and Radha then leave the couple alone as Dr. MacPhail urges his wife to leave her body, move onward, and give up the pain she's suffered.

Will and Susila see Murugan and the Rani's car and they briefly wonder where the royalty could be headed at that time of night. Will says that "they're up to no good", and then tells Susila everything about his dealings with the oil company and his hope to gain the rights for his boss. Susila isn't angry and says that the enemy is simply oil in general and that exploitation is inevitable.

When they go to Susila's, Will asks to try the mokshe-medicine and Susila, learning that Dr. MacPhail had approved the plan, agrees. There follows a long night of talking, a dream-like state, and emotions. At one point, Will says there's nothing "of any importance except this blazing uprush of bliss and understanding". Will tells Susila that



he's learned that eternity is "real as shit", and Susila approves of his observation. With Susila leading and offering direction at times, Will goes on a fantastic whirlwind of emotion and observation himself.

When it's over, Will cries and says it's the only way he can express his thankfulness. They soon see Murugan with Dipa's soldiers riding across Pala with loudspeakers blaring. The message is that Pala and Rendang are "marching forward, hand in hand". Susila and Will realize that the soldiers have stopped at Dr. MacPhail's house: "There was the sound of a single shot; then a burst of shots from an automatic rifle". Susila and Will watch as the procession begins again, passing by their location and continuing with the loudspeakers projecting the voice of the Raja.

As the procession disappears, Will and Susila continue to stand at the window. They hear one of the island's mynah birds say, "Attention".

Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

As Mary and Will are walking around, Will asks Mary how much she knows about dying, and confesses that he hadn't seen anyone die until he was at least her age. He says that his teachers didn't teach about those things, that they only taught words. Mary asks if his teachers were "just stupid". Will is learning more about the Palanese culture, but he's also exposing Mary to his own society by way of their conversations. Mary is sorry for Will because of his upbringing. They also meet a woman in the market who asks if Will is really from Outside. When he confirms that, she says, "we're all very sorry for you". It's interesting to note that the Palanese people don't object to their children knowing the ways of the Outside, and that they are confident they will simply want to remain Palanese.

Will's knowledge of dying is limited. There's no real explanation why Susila wanted him at the hospital as she was comforting her dying mother-in-law and no apparent reason Will would want to be there, but they both agreed to the plan. For her part, Mary understands dying because it's part of the Palanese curriculum. One could argue that it makes sense because dying is a natural part of living and most people are afraid of dying because of the unknown element. Since there are apparently few violent deaths on Pala other than the occasional accident, it seems reasonable that death would be treated more as a natural occurrence than as something to be feared.

Will's experience on the mokshe-medicine could be likened to a trip on one of several drugs popular in the 1960s. There are indications that the medicine is in mushroom form and is grown in the experiment station. Will's experiences take him on a roller-coaster ride of emotion. For most people, the experience seems undesirable. But the number of people willing to take hallucinogens attests to the fact that at least some people find it a positive experience worth repeating. While many of Will's statements seem to make little sense to the reader, Susila seems to fully understand and to be able to offer direction and advice. That could be because what he was experiencing mimicked what she herself had experienced.



The inevitable invasion of Murugan and Dipa's soldiers arrives just at the end of Will's mokshe-medicine experience. It's noteworthy that Murugan had told Will that something important was about to happen. That appears to be an indication that Murugan was not in control of the events in any form or fashion, but was simply going along with what his mother and Dipa decided. The fact that they apparently kill Dr. MacPhail is significant because there seemed to be no one—including the doctor—willing to resist. It's left to the reader's imagination to decide what probably happened inside that home before the gunshots.



Characters

William Asquith Farnaby

Will awakes on Pala with an injured leg to the sound of birds yelling for "Attention!", but doesn't immediately realize that he isn't at home in his London flat. Immediately upon regaining consciousness, his thoughts turn to Molly, his deceased wife. Will continues to blame himself for her death, though Susila will later suggest that it's not that he blames himself but that he simply hasn't gotten past the agony of losing someone.

Will is a journalist but is also the high-paid front man for Joe Aldehyde, Molly's uncle. Will travels the world, covering events for Joe's newspapers. While some of those travels are legitimately news assignments, Will is more often told to represent Joe on an array of business deals, perhaps paving the way so that a particular deal will go through smoothly. In the case of Pala, Joe knows that there are rich oil deposits and he hopes that Will can find an opportunity to encourage the people of Pala to allow him to purchase drilling rights. Will is on the way to accomplishing that when the leaders apparently give in to the demands for immediate action by the dictator of a nearby country.

What happens to Will is typical of cynical men who become heroes—he's awakened to the bigger picture and learns to look beyond his own personal and selfish desires. In this case, Will has every reason to expect that Pala will eventually be taken over by someone who wants the oil deposits or will sell those rights to some drilling company. Despite this knowledge, he—at the last possible moment—decides that he doesn't want to be part of that. Before this enlightenment, Will convinces himself that he's to benefit greatly from being part of that transaction and that someone is going to benefit so there's no harm in it if he is that someone. Later, he can't bring himself to be involved and watches with other Palanese as their island country is taken over by a dictator.

Will's life becomes an open book through his own self-discovery and his willingness to reach out for the healing powers of others. He was raised in an unhappy home with an alcoholic father and a pious mother. He thought he was in love with a woman and married her anyone once he'd discovered that it wasn't really love. He'd been secretly pleased when his wife miscarried so that he didn't have to deal with a child. He'd had several affairs and felt there was nothing wrong with it. And he had finally decided to leave his wife for a woman who turned out to be every bit as unsatisfactory as his wife had been.

Susila MacPhail

Tom and Mary's mother and Dr. MacPhail's daughter-in-law. It's Susila who first helps Will go into a trance to allow his body time to heal and to escape the pain of his injuries.



Susila is a widow. Her husband, Dugald, died in a climbing accident. There are hints that the death was suspicious because he was an avid, experienced climber, but no one ventures a guess as to the cause. Susila has not gotten over losing him. She speaks often of the grief. Though she can't turn the pain of grief off as one turns off the pain of childbirth, she seems to have other ways of coping. She talks of the fact that others need her as a reason to go on living.

Susila is a teacher and Will sits in on one of her classes. Later that same day, Susila is called to the bedside of her mother-in-law who is dying and Will goes along, remaining in the room as Susila and a young nurse stay with the woman until her husband arrives.

By the end of this story, Will seems to have realized true love in his relationship with Susila, though there's no real indication of her feelings for him.

Murugan Mailendra

A young man studying soil science and plant breeding under Dr. MacPhail. Will had met Murugan days before his arrival at Pala, but from a signal from Murugan, doesn't mention it to the others at Pala. Murugan had been the guest of Colonel Dip—dictator of a nearby country, and Will wonders if there might be more than simple hero worship involved. Will later learns that Murugan is actually the Raja of Pala and that his mother has discouraged Murugan from interacting with young girls, driving him to the relationship with the old man—Colonel Dipa

Murugan apparently had a "tendency toward TB" or had consumption—depending on which time his mother is telling the story—as a child, and he and his mother went away for all his childhood years. As a result, he wasn't raised as other children of Pala and doesn't value the things they value. Instead, Murugan is looking for the material things in life and has decided—likely with his mother's help—that selling Pala's natural oil deposits will be the answer to attaining those material things.

Will recognizes Murugan for the spoiled young man he is and eventually refuses to bow to the demands of Murugan—and his mother. When that happens, Murugan says that he doesn't know what his mother will do and Will suggests that he go home and find out.

At the end of the story, Murugan and his mother are joined by Colonel Dipa as the colonel's military forces take the first steps toward taking over Pala.

The Rani

Wife of the ruler of Pala. In this case, the Rani is widowed and is mother of the boy who will soon be crowned king. She is also the self-proclaimed leader of the Crusade of the Spirit. She weighs more than two hundred pounds—one hundred kilograms—and Will notes that she takes a seat with the confidence that she won't meet with any mishap.



The Rani is an arrogant woman and has reared her son to believe that her world is law. She has avoided many of Pala's traditions, despite the fact that her son, Murugan, is to take over as ruler of the island as soon as he is of age.

Dr. Robert MacPhail

Mary Sarojini's grandfather who arrives to tend Will's injuries. Dr. MacPhail is descended from the doctor who first arrived in Pala to tend the Raja who was suffering greatly from a tumor on his face.

Mary Sarojini MacPhail

The little girl who finds Will when he first wakes on Pala. Mary Sarojini is a wise little girl and Will thoroughly enjoys his time with the child.

Molly

Will's wife who died in a car accident following his announcement to her that he wanted out of their marriage. Will is guilt-ridden over the timing of the incident and seems to wonder whether it was truly an accident.

Vijaya Bhattacharya

Dr. MacPhail's assistant who carries Will on a stretcher to the Research Station. Vijaya has a strong grasp of Palanese culture and takes on the task of answering many of Will's questions and of teaching the young people he comes into contact with. He's a big man and says that he could easily have been a bully in some other culture.

Dugald MacPhail

Mary's husband and Dr. MacPhail's son. Will was told he died in a mountain climbing accident.

Abdul Pierre Bahu

Ambassador of Rendang who is on Pala and is on very good terms with the Rani. Bahu believes Pala must change simply because there are so many suffering people in the world that the happiness of the Palanese are an affront to God.



Colonel Dipa

Dictator of Rendang. Colonel Dipa is with Murugan when Will first meets him. The Colonel lets Murugan drive his expensive sports car and the boy is exceedingly reckless. At that point, Will believes there's more to the relationship than just an older man being friends with a young man. He's convinced that it's purely sexual until he discovers that Murugan is the Raja of Pala and that the two are plotting taking over Pala for the oil.

Radhu Appu

The nurse who attends to Will while Dr. MacPhail is away. She's the person who tells Will about the "yoga of love" and explains many of the social practices of the Palanese society. She is also the woman who sits with Susila while Dr. MacPhail's wife is dying.

Joe Aldehyde

The head of Southeast Asia Petroleum, a copper company, a string of newspapers, and Will's boss. Joe knows the Rani. She calls Joe "the man with the kite" because he is a "captain of industry", but affairs of the soul are what matter.

Aunt Mary

Will's aunt who died when he was young. Will describes her as someone he cared for greatly. He "escaped" his own unhappy home to stay with her in the country and later spent much time at her house near his own in the city. She contracted cancer and died at forty-two. Will says that she became someone he didn't know, someone unlike his Aunt Mary. She hated others who didn't have cancer and harped about her own misfortune.



Objects/Places

Pala

An island where Will winds up after being shipwrecked. The island has a unique culture, filled with ideas of equality and compassion, where pain can be hypnotized away and people learn to control their emotions in ways completely foreign to today's society.

The Pala Straight

The section of the sea next to Pala where Will encountered the problem with his boat.

Outsider

A person not from Pala.

Shivapuram

A place in Pala. This is where Dr. MacPhail goes to attend a meeting of the Privy Council.

The Crusade of the Spirit

A movement led by the Rani at the bidding of Koot Hoomi.

The Experiment Station

Also called "Rothamsted-on-the-Tropics" after a famous research facility, the purpose was to create better ways of producing food sources to eliminate the possibility of a famine on Pala.

Gentian

A blue trumpet-shaped flower. Susila writes a poem that compares the dead to a gentian, but Will claims that he cannot picture his father as a gentian, only as a turd.

MAC

A Mutual Adoption Club. On Pala, some fifteen to twenty-five couples form a unit called the MAC. Children are encouraged to move into and out of other homes, especially if



their own is not a happy, loving environment. The MACs are made up of young and old and children are adopted into a new MAC when they become adults, accepting the responsibility for all children in their unit.

The Mynah Birds

These talking birds are plentiful on Pala and have been taught to say specific words, including "attention". The goal is to remind the people of Pala that it's necessary to pay attention. The yelling of one of these birds is the first sound Will hears upon waking in Pala.

New Rothamsted

A major city on Pala.

Rendang

A nearby country, ruled by dictator Colonel Dapi. The colonel is calling for the entire original Rendang province to be reunited—including the island of Pala.



Themes

Greed

Greed is an overriding theme of this book, though there is a limit to the number of people who exhibit the trait. First, there's Will Farnaby. Will is a journalist and has seen some terrible things. When he encounters the Palanese society, he is eventually won over to all the things that are right about the culture. But before that, he's eager to earn the bonus his boss has promised by paving the way for the attainment of the right to drill for oil on Pala. Will leaves home with the idea that the money is there for the taking, but doesn't know how he could accomplish those goals. It raises the question whether Will's shipwreck was actually an accident or if he'd done it on purpose with the express idea of having some time on Pala to work on Joe's behalf.

Murugan is another who is greedy, but it's easy to argue that greed is not the driving point with the young ruler. It's more likely that Murugan is easily led and simply sees things that he wants. Some of those things are consumer goods—a scooter, for example. Others are intangibles. He envies the way Dipa inspires self-sacrifice among his people and wishes he could do the same.

Dipa is another matter. He is absolutely greedy for power and knows that money is the way to accomplish that. He wants to corrupt Pala so that he can benefit financially and he's willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen.

Joe Aldehyde is another who is ultimately greedy. He wants the drilling rights to Pala because he knows he can make money. Rather than coming out front and bidding against others for the right, Joe says that he'll pay whatever the top bid is, plus a percentage. It's the Rani who calls Joe the "man with the kite", because he has his feet planted firmly on the earth but is interested in spiritual things.

The Rani is perhaps, at least in some ways, the most greedy of all. She claims to have created the Crusade of the Spirit at the bidding of the Master. She also claims that she wants to exploit the oil on Pala in order to fund her campaign. Aside from the fact that she's founded nothing more than a cult faction, she's using it to make money. In some ways, this makes her greed more reprehensible. Not only is she willing to sacrifice the people of Pala, she's seeking the power to make everyone take on her view of religion.

Tolerance

Tolerance is one of the most common teachings of young children in the Palanese schools. Even the youngest children are taught to be tolerant of each other. To help those youngsters with that task, children are labeled. To some, that may seem in itself a form of intolerance, but the Palanese children are taught to use those labels. For example, the children who are labeled "sheep" like a certain thing while those labeled "cat" like things that are completely different and those called "guinea pigs" are different



yet. Children then learn to take everyone at their strengths and weaknesses as a matter of course.

That tolerance spills over in a big way to the adults—and is the reason Pala will ultimately fail to survive. Murugan and the Rani have nothing but their own selfishness and greed in mind. They care nothing for Pala and are openly derisive of many aspects of the culture. Murugan is about to take over the throne and yet he hates the country and all it stands for. Despite this, the people of Pala have no intention of overthrowing their government, taking a stand, and refusing to submit to Dipa's army when he invades. Their tolerance, in this case, may have gone too far, though there is essentially no other option. If one considers that had the Palanese people revolted, they would have actually been going against their own culture. Therefore, they can't revolt because that in itself would have changed Pala, making it something else entirely.

There's also a tolerance for the young people and their desires. In some exclusive modern-day societies, the young people are kept separate from any outside influence. Those youth are not allowed to interact with other cultures for fear that they'll find something in those cultures they like. In the case of the Palanese youth, that separation doesn't exist in any form other than the island's borders. Though Pala offers passports to visit to only a few outsiders, the people of Pala are free to go off the island. Will first saw Murugan on Rendang and Murugan wanted Will to keep it quiet only because he didn't want anyone to know that he'd been talking to Dipa. In another case, Ranga makes plans to attend a university off Pala.

Coming of Age

Will Farnaby is a character with flaws, emotional issues, and worries that prevent him from realizing his full potential. Over the course of the novel, Will learns about himself, others, and even his own feelings, creating a deeper understanding that will help him survive what's yet to come.

One of Will's biggest emotional issues has to do with his wife and her death, though he's focused solely on the death until his sessions with Susila. It's only then that Will confesses that he'd considered not marrying Molly but was too much a gentleman to withdraw his proposal. He also comes to admit that he'd felt a sense of relief when Molly died because he was truly free to do as he pleased.

Will had affairs all during his marriage. When Molly discovered his infidelities, she was unhappy. Will considered that a form of emotional blackmail—that she was unhappy in an effort that he should also be unhappy or should do what she wanted from him so that she would be happy.

Will comes to realize that Molly was what she was—that his marriage to her didn't change her essential personality. Will also comes to learn some things about himself—including that he's capable of truly loving someone and that it doesn't matter if the relationship culminates or not—loving is simply enough.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in third person, usually from Will Farnaby's point of view. In some ways, this is limiting because the reader learns mostly of an event if Will is present or if someone tells him of it. However, it's effective because Will himself is on a mission to learn about Pala and the reader learns as Will learns. Will is an astute student because his job is journalism. He works at learning facts and gaining information and he sets about to do just that on the island of Pala.

There are occasions when the point of view is changed. Early in the story, Susila MacPhail is leaving her home when she sees a flock of birds break through the trees. She "was on the point of turning to catch the expression of delight on Dugald's upturned face", when she remembers that he died in a rock climbing incident. This look into Susila's thoughts is one of the few times the point of view is seen from any direction other than Will's. The point of view overall is effective and the reader will learn what is necessary for understanding the story line while leaving at least a few points to the reader's imagination.

Setting

Pala is a Utopian society but has not managed to be a place where everyone is happy with things as they are. Pala is an island and it's Nurse Radhu Appu who explains to Will that the island's grim coastline has saved them from hostile invasion by foreign countries that would have changed the society. Because there are no natural harbors, there are no places for those invaders to land. Pala was settled by Dr. Andrew MacPhail and Murugan the Reformer.

It's Dr. Robert MacPhail who explains that Pala was once part of the Rendang territory and that the Rendang dictator, Colonel Dipa, is now calling for that territory to be reunited. Pala is rich in oil deposits but has declined offers from the East and the West for drilling rights. He fears that leaves Pala ultimately at the mercy of Dipa.

Language and Meaning

The Rani often lapses into French, saying that it's more natural for her than either English or Palanese. The words are not always then translated but they seem also non-essential to understanding the story line. The Rani also occasionally points out words that are to have a capital letter. She speaks of Province being always on "our side," and then elaborates that it's "'in the eyes of those who Truly Understand' (capital T, capital U)". While she doesn't always point out the capital letters, they fall often within her speeches, seeming to emphasize specific words. For example, she tells of the revelation that led her to the head of the Crusade of the Spirit. She says it was revealed



to her that the movement was "destined to become a Mighty Force. A force for Good, a force that will ultimately Save the World". The capital letters are used in exposition and dialogue of other characters as well. The constant use of the capital letters could be distracting but ultimately tend to make the reader place emphasis on those words—likely what the author had in mind.

Another point on the subject of language and meaning is that there are deep discussions involving some of the greatest minds of science, philosophy, psychology and literature. In some cases, those references are explained. More often, it's up to the reader to draw from his or her own knowledge. For example, there are references to Pavlov and his dog. Unless the reader knows that Pavlov was a master of psychology and that he conditioned a dog to drool to a specific sound because the dog came to associate that sound with feeding time, the reference is lost, or is at least less effective. There are many such references and it's likely that few readers will have the background to fully understand all references.

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Structure

The book is divided into fifteen chapters of varying lengths, running up to about forty pages in some cases. The chapters are numbered only with no names or named sections to clue the reader as to the upcoming content. While there are not many absolute surprises, the lack of chapter names is one way the author leaves the reader in suspense.

Some sections of the book are taken from an imaginary work called, "Notes on What's What, and What it Might be Reasonable to Do about What's What". This text is meant to be entirely philosophical and varies only somewhat from the text of the rest of the book. The text is cumbersome and lags significantly from the story line itself. It does greatly resemble some of the conversations between Will and various Palanese characters who are discussing the philosophy of life on Pala. There are sections that likely become difficult to read and to understand for an average reader. As a whole, if the reader can grasp the concepts of these dialogues and excerpts, the story continues to flow smoothly.



Quotes

"'Attention,' the voice insisted without the slightest change of tone. Leaning on one elbow, Will looked about him and saw with bewilderment, not the gray wallpaper and yellow curtains of his London bedroom, but a glade among trees and the long shadows and slanting lights of early morning in a forest." Chap. 1, p. 1

"Yes, what was all the fuss about? The snake hadn't bitten him; he hadn't broken his neck. And anyhow it had all happened yesterday. Today there were these butterflies, this bird that called one to attention, this strange child who talked to one like a Dutch uncle, looked like an angel out of some unfamiliar mythology and within five degrees of the equator was called, believe it or not, MacPhail." Chap. 2, p. 15

"Newspapers were only one of Lord Aldehyde's interests. In another manifestation he was the Southeast Asia Petroleum Company, he was the Imperial and Foreign Copper Limited. Officially, Will had come to Rendang to sniff the death in its militarized air; but he had also been commissioned to find out what the dictator felt about foreign capital, what tax rebates he was prepared to offer, what guarantees against nationalization." Chap. 3, p. 24

"This self-canonized world-savior, this clutching and devouring mother - had she ever, for a single moment, seen herself as others saw her? Did she have any idea of what she had done, what she was still doing, to her poor, silly little son? To the first question, the answer was certainly no. About the second one could only speculate. Perhaps she honestly didn't know what she had made of the boy. But perhaps, on the other hand, she did know. Knew and preferred what was happening with the Colonel to what might happen if the boy's education were taken in hand by a woman. The woman might supplant her; the Colonel, she knew, would not." Chap. 5, p. 64

"'Flaunting your blessedness in the face of so much misery - it's sheer hubris, it's a deliberate affront to the rest of humanity. It's even a kind of affront to God.'" Chap. 5, p. 66

"'All I know is that in my day there was nobody in his universe. No boys and, still more emphatically, no girls. Only Mother and masturbation and the Ascended Masters. Only jazz records and sports cars and Hitlerian ideas about being a Great Leader and turning Pala into what he calls a Modern State.'" Chap. 6, p. 87

"But from this dark little outsider, this stranger to whom he already owed so much and with whom, though he knew nothing about her, he was already so intimate, there would



come no foregone conclusions, no ex parte judgments - would come perhaps, he found himself hoping (he who had trained himself never to hope!), some unexpected enlightenment, some positive and practical help." Chap. 7, p. 116

"Which would you rather be eaten by - a wolf or a tiger? So far as the lamb is concerned, it hardly seems to matter. Joe would be no worse than his competitors." Chap. 8, p. 134

"But whether we shall be able to persuade you people to follow our example, or whether we shall even be able to preserve our tiny oasis of humanity in the midst of your worldwide wilderness of monkeys - that, alas,' said Dr. MacPhail, 'is another question. One's justified in feeling extremely pessimistic about the current situation. But despair, radical despair - no, I can't see any justification for that.'" Chapter 8, Page 141

"Stupid fools get nowhere; it's only the knowledgeable and clever ones whose folly can make them wise or produce good results. Fortunately, these two fools were clever." - Dr. MacPhail talking of Andrew MacPhail and the Raja, Chapter 8, Page 156

"Light dawned; the Colonel's purpose revealed itself. The serpent tempted me, and I did eat. The tree in the midst of the garden was called the Tree of Consumer Goods, and to the inhabitants of every underdeveloped Eden the tiniest taste of its fruit, and even the sight of its thirteen hundred and fifty-eight leaves, had power to bring the shameful knowledge that, industrially speaking, they were stark-naked." Chap. 9, p. 163

"His only gifts were hatred, low cunning, a set of indefatigable vocal cords and a talent for non-stop talking at the top of his voice from the depths of his Peter Panic paranoia. Thirty or forty million deaths and heaven knows how many billions of dollars - that was the price the world had to pay for little Adolph's retarded maturation. Fortunately most of the boys who grow up too slowly never get a chance of being more than minor delinquents." Chap. 9, p. 185

"And when it has passed, what will you do with this experience? What will you do with all the other similar experiences that the moksha-medicine will bring you in the years to come? Will you merely enjoy them as you would enjoy an evening at the puppet show, and then go back to business as usual, back to behaving like the silly delinquents you imagine yourselves to be? Or, having glimpsed, will you devote your lives to the business, not at all as usual, of being what you are in fact?" Chap. 10, p. 208

"We accept it. Accept it as we accept that spider web up there on the cornice. Given the



nature of spiders, webs are inevitable. And given the nature of human beings. So are religions. Spiders can't help making flytraps, and men can't help making symbols." Chap. 11, p. 220

"And suddenly he could almost understand, from the inside, why Mr. Bahu so hated these people. Why he was so bent - in the name, as usual and needless to say, of God - on their destruction. 'Good,' Shanta was still murmuring to her baby, 'good, good, good.' Too good - that was their crime. It simply wasn't permissible." Chap. 12, p. 235

"And as he spoke he was seeing, in a vision as brief and comprehensive and intensely circumstantial as a drowning man's, all the hateful scenes he had witnessed in the course of those well-paid pilgrimages to every hellhole and abattoir revolting enough to qualify as News. Negroes in South Africa, the man in the San Quentin gas chamber, mangled bodies in an Algerian farmhouse, and everywhere mobs, everywhere policemen and paratroopers, everywhere those dark-skinned children, stick-legged, potbellied, with flies on their raw eyelids, everywhere the nauseating smells of hunger and disease, the awful stench of death." Chap. 14, p. 286

"It's what happens when part of you forgets all about the rest of you and carries on the way people do when they're crazy - just goes on blowing itself up and blowing itself up as if there was nobody else in the whole world. Sometimes you can do something about it. But generally it just goes on blowing itself up until the person dies." Chap. 14, p. 296

"His face was expressionless; but behind this mask of indifference he was violently angry. Angry with this ill-mannered boy before him, so ravishing in his white silk pajamas, so odious in his spoiled silliness. Angry, as he caught another whiff of the letter, with that grotesque monster of a woman, who had begun by ruining her son, in the name of motherly love and chastity, and was now egging him on, in the name of God and an assortment of Ascended Masters, to become a bomb-dropping spiritual crusader under the oily banner of Joe Aldehyde. Angry, above all, with himself for having so wantonly become involved with this ludicrously sinister couple, in heaven only knew what kind of vile plot against all the human decencies that his refusal to take yes from secretly believing in and (how passionately!) longing for." Chap. 14, p. 309

"The last of the cars passed by. Disregarded by the darkness, the fact of enlightenment remained. The roaring of the engines diminished, the squeaking rhetoric lapsed into an unparticular murmur, and the intruding noised died away, out came the frogs again, out came the uninterruptible insects, out came the mynah birds." Chap. 15, p. 354



Topics for Discussion

Who is Murugan? How was his childhood different from other children of Pala? What impact do you think that has on his reign as ruler? Would it have been different had he been raised in Pala?

How does Will come to be on Pala? Why would he have originally wanted to be on Pala? What had he been instructed to do if he should find himself on Pala?

Who is Joe Aldehyde? What is his familial relationship to Will? How does Joe know the Rani?

What is Murugan's relationship with Colonel Dapi? Does his mother know he's been talking to the Colonel? What impact does that relationship have on the future of Pala?

What are Will's attitudes about drilling for oil on Pala? How do they change over the course of time? Why do you think he changes his mind about his role in the scheme? In the end, does it matter that he changed?

How do the Palanese deal with pain? When children are taught to deal with pain, they're also taught not to ignore it. Why do teachers say that's important? What are some other things children are taught to deal with? How do those techniques differ from today's society? Is it for the better?

Bahu says that Pala is simply too good to go on, that it's an affront to God, and that it's wrong for something so perfect to exist while people are suffering in other parts of the world. What do you think about the possibility of a Utopian society? Could it exist today? Why or why not? Would you choose to live in such a society?

Compare Will's grief for Molly to Susila's grief for Dugald. In what ways are they the same? Could Susila have used her meditative techniques to eliminate or lessen her own grief? Was Will's grief a product of his loss or his guilt?