

The Last Book In The Universe Study Guide

The Last Book In The Universe by Rodman Philbrick

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Last Book In The Universe Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section One - Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4.....	4
Section Two - Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.....	7
Section Three - Chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12.....	9
Section Four - Chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16.....	12
Section Five - Chapters 17, 18, 19, and 20.....	15
Section Six - Chapters 21, 22, 23, and 24.....	18
Section Seven - Chapters 25, 26, 27, and 28.....	21
Section Eight - Chapters 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33.....	24
Characters.....	27
Symbols and Symbolism.....	31
Settings.....	34
Themes and Motifs.....	36
Styles.....	40
Quotes.....	42



Plot Summary

In a post-Apocalyptic future, everyone in the dangerous, greedy Urb uses probes to induce hallucinations that allow them to escape their problems--everyone except a teenage boy named Spaz, who has epilepsy which prevents him from using them. Spaz was raised by a foster family, but was forced on the streets when his parents feared his seizures would be contagious to his younger sister Bean. Now he works for a crime boss named Billy Bizmo and collects on his debts for him. In the process, he meets an old hermit named Ryter and discovers he's writing a book--the last known book in the universe. Spaz tells him that books are pointless since nobody reads them anymore, but Ryter argues that it's important to preserve ideas and memories for the future. Spaz is too busy surviving day by day to worry about the future.

Spaz receives word that his sister is dying and wants to see him. Though it's against the rules--and though he's been expressly forbidden by Billy Bizmo to go-- Spaz travels between the boundaries known as "latches," accompanied by Ryter and a little street urchin named Little Face who doesn't speak. Along the way, they encounter a girl named Lanaya, who is one of the proofs--or "improved genetic species"--who are thought to be smarter and better than normals like Spaz who live in the Urb. Lanaya is different from the other proofs, though, and offers to help them get to Bean.

Bean is nearly dead by the time they reach her and there seems to be little hope. Ryter diagnoses her with leukemia, an illness there used to be a treatment for but which they've lost over time. Lanaya offers to break the rules by taking Bean back to Eden, where the other proofs live and where advanced technology may be able to save Bean's life, even though it's forbidden for normals to go to Eden. Once there, Bean is healed, and Spaz discovers Lanaya is being raised to be a Master of Eden, one of the lawmakers. As Lanaya and her parents interact with the normals, they come to appreciate their intelligence and ability to survive and realize there is much they can learn from them. The other proofs disagree, however, and cast Spaz, Ryter, and Bean out, though Lanaya's parents adopt Little Face and keep him as their own.

Back in the Urb, Spaz and Bean are separated again and Spaz struggles to return to his old life now that he knows what being in Eden is like. Everything soon changes, however, when probes are banned in the Urb and the other normals come after Ryter, blaming him for the change. Spaz tries to save Ryter, and his book, but the mob kills Ryter and destroys the book. Before Ryter dies, he tells Spaz that he is now the last book in the universe. Spaz learns that his life was spared because his father is Billy Bizmo. Billy wants Spaz to follow in his footsteps, but Spaz decides to become a writer like Ryter. He receives a message from Lanaya telling him that today they may have lost, but the future will be theirs.



Section One - Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Summary

Spaz lives in a world where territories are divided up and ruled by latch bosses. His particular territory is run by people called Bangers. People escape their dreary surroundings by using probes, which are needles they stick into their brains that give them hallucinations. Spaz can't use them because they give him seizures which will kill him. Spaz is thinking back on his life and trying to figure out how to record what happened to him. He was inspired to do so by a man named Ryter, whom he was sent to rob by the Bangers, and who ended up changing his life.

Spaz searches for Ryter in the Stacks, where people without any other home live. Spaz works for a gang boss, Billy Bizmo, who has taken a strange liking to him. Spaz steals things for Billy, even though he feels bad about it. Spaz meets a little boy who can't talk and names him Little Face. Spaz gives him a choxbar to show him where Ryter lives. Ryter's left the door open and has his things stacked up as though he's waiting for him. Spaz is suspicious, and notices Ryter hiding something. Ryter tells him it's a book, and Spaz accuses him of lying.

Ryter is surprised that Spaz can remember libraries; most people have forgotten things that happened in the past because their brains are so addled from using probes. Ryter tells him that it's important to remember, which is why he's writing down his memories. Ryter believes everyone has a story, but Spaz is skeptical. He takes the rest of Ryter's things but leaves the book, telling himself he'll never see him again.

On the way home, Spaz encounters a female proof--or people with improved genetics, who live in a territory called Eden that the normal people aren't allowed to go to. The proofs are known for being incredibly attractive and intelligent. The female proof asks Spaz about himself, which is unusual, since proofs usually look down on normals. She gives him a bag of food. Spaz goes home and watches a 3D, which is like a movie, but can't stop thinking about Ryter and his book.

Analysis

It may take some time to get used to the terminology used in the novel. The author uses some strange and unfamiliar terms to describe the futuristic setting of his book. However, within these strange terms are generally familiar words with slightly different meanings. For instance, a 'gummy' describes an old person who has lost most of their teeth (and have just gums instead), and a chocolate bar becomes a choxbar. The choxbar is one of the symbols used throughout the novel, of a rare and special treat that poor people like Spaz and Little Face don't usually get to have. Little Face's first experience of having a choxbar is when Spaz introduces it to him, and he loves it so



much that it eventually stands in place for all of his other words for the course of most of the novel.

Just like familiar words can be seen in the terms Spaz uses to describe the future, Spaz's descriptions of the past contain things which the reader can recognize as belonging to our current time. One example of this is when Spaz remembers that books used to be held in a library; libraries no longer exist in his time, but today there are several throughout the world. Spaz also passes through a place which used to be a mall. The way he describes it is skewed from what the readers' perception of an actual mall would be like; for instance, he describes merchandise and jewels stacked on top of each other, which is not how malls actually function. However, the reader can still recognize tidbits of truth and things which are familiar. This is also a way for the author to indicate that although the world has greatly changed, it is still our world.

One of the main symbols used throughout the novel is introduced in this section: the symbol of the book. Spaz indicates that no one has use for books anymore and that they are pretty much extinct, as alluded to in the title of the novel. He also suggests that books are worthless, though to Ryter, it is the only possession of his that matters, and the only possession that he tries to hide so Spaz won't take it. Through this encounter, the reader learns that Spaz is probably different from other Bangers, since not only does he see through Ryter's ruse, but he also lets him keep the book anyway. The impact of this idea--capturing stories and memories--stays with Spaz long after he leaves, and will eventually act as the inciting incident that begins his journey.

In addition, one of the major themes of the novel--that the future can be better than the present--is addressed in this section. This may seem like a strange theme to be included in a novel that paints such a bleak future in terms of where we are today, but Ryter continues to hold out hope that there will be a need for books and stories in the future because people will change. Spaz does not yet believe this, although ironically, he will become the change that Ryter hopes to see.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Spaz think that people made up the way people used to live in the past? Do people sometimes get so nostalgic about the way things used to be that they forget all the bad things about it?

Discussion Question 2

Why do people continue to use probes if it makes them forget important things? Is there anything in our society now that could be similar to using a probe?



Discussion Question 3

How can Spaz both desire and hate the proofs at the same time? How can something be beautiful and ugly all at once?

Vocabulary

probe, electrode, seizure, genetically, unit, ancient, alongside, assorted, rubble, tunic, hoarding, emissary, implied, retain, pun, geezer, spewing, primitive, specific, crummy, gizmos, armored, shuddering, implanted, edible, dingy, hologram, solar, chute



Section Two - Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8

Summary

Billy and his Bangers wake Spaz up to collect Ryter's things. Billy asks if there was anything else and Spaz lies about the book. Billy asks where Spaz got the food, and Spaz tells him about the proof girl. Billy has heard rumors about the girl: she's a slummer who likes to spend her time with the normals. Billy warns him that if the other proofs find out, they'll kill him. He leaves, and Spaz worries about lying to him. If Billy finds out, he'll either be banished or killed.

Spaz returns to the Stacks to take Ryter's book. Little Face appears, asking for more chocolate, and takes Spaz to Ryter's place. Ryter seems hopeful to see him, so Spaz decides to steal the book later. Ryter asks him about his life. Spaz remembers his foster sister, Bean, who was very close to him. He doesn't know who his real parents are. Bean's father was scared that Bean will be infected by whatever makes Spaz have seizures. Ryter tells him not to hate his epilepsy: it's part of what makes him who he is. Spaz is upset and runs away.

Spaz goes back home and finds a runner, or a messenger, who tells him that his sister is dying and wants to see him. Bean lives in a different latch and Spaz is forbidden from crossing over. Spaz goes to see Billy to get permission to go, even though he is threatened with death for doing so. Billy is under a probe but Spaz wakes him up. He explains the situation but Billy refuses to let him go. Spaz decides he'll have to break the rules.

Spaz remembers Bean being ill when they were younger. He was the only one who could get her to take her medicine and could cheer her up. Bean started to get better and Spaz was so excited that he went into one of his fits. Her father, Charly, demanded that Spaz be sent away. Now, Spaz packs his bags and goes to the Stacks. Little Fox follows him and Spaz takes him back to the others living there, who think he's come to steal something and surround him. Spaz has a seizure. When he wakes up, Ryter is taking care of him. Spaz explains what happened with Billy, and Ryter decides to go on the journey with him. Spaz doesn't want him to come because he'll slow him down, but Ryter wants to go on one last adventure.

Analysis

There is a strong sense of danger throughout the novel. Nearly every encounter Spaz has had so far has been one of life and death. This provides a clear distinction between this world of the future and the world of now. This also helps provide clarification for why Spaz's world is why it is, and why many characters behave as they do. Spaz seems to have a good heart but still works for lowlifes and lies, steals, and cheats. All of this is done so that he can stay alive. The normals who turn on him when he returns to the



Stacks may seem vicious, but they are similarly protecting themselves and their homes. In this world, most people do not trust each other, which is why Spaz finds Ryter and his openness so strange.

One of the recurring symbols of the novel of epilepsy. Spaz's very name is a shortened form of 'spasm' which describes one of Spaz's seizures. Spaz sees his epilepsy as a symbol for everything wrong in his life; without it, he would still be with Bean and her parents, not forced to fend for himself. Many see epilepsy as something to be feared, since it is something they do not fully understand. Ryter sees epilepsy as a pivotal part of Spaz's story, and something that may actually indicate his cleverness and specialness.

Ryter references Don Quixote, a fictional character who goes on a grand journey and is known for his large imagination. This is very similar to Ryter himself, and indicates the kind of role he will play in Spaz's journey. The fact that Spaz does not recognize the name--and translates it as Don Keehote--reiterates how little books have come to mean in this society, and how much has been forgotten from times before.

Discussion Question 1

Spaz doesn't know which would be worse: death or disfavor (having no protection and fending for oneself). How can something be worse than death?

Discussion Question 2

Today we know that epilepsy isn't contagious. What does it suggest about Spaz's world that people are afraid of him and shun him? Are there illnesses that people have shunned in the past? Today?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ryter agree to help Spaz with his journey, even though Spaz has stolen from him in the past?

Vocabulary

invade, goodies, pawing, ratty, mulls, charity, forbidden, particles, disfavor, smooched, foundling, banish, prejudice, epilepsy, compensates, ambition, mope, assume, enforcers, guardians, enforcers, impostor, remedy, doze, wreckage, prances, taunting, ancient, intervened, puny



Section Three - Chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12

Summary

Little Face tries to follow them but Ryter sends him away; it will be too dangerous for him to follow them. They decide to travel along the underground Pipe that travels between the latches. It used to be connected to a water system but it dried up during the Big Shake that destroyed society. Spaz worries that Ryter won't be able to make it but he insists he has to finish his book. Ryter notes that Billy must have taken a particular interest in Spaz to forbid him to leave. Ryter learns about the proof girl who gave Spaz food and is warned that interaction with proofs is dangerous.

Ryter and Spaz hear someone following them. It's Little Face. Spaz thinks he'll slow them down, but Ryter points out that he's looked after himself all this time. There's a break in the Pipe and Little Face ends up showing them how to get around it. They make it to the next latch and discover skyscrapers from before the Big Shake that have been abandoned. They are overtaken by a tribe known as the Monkey Boys.

The Monkey Boys paint their faces, sharpen their teeth, and grow their fingernails like claws. They don't just look like animals but have become like animals. They take Ryter, Spaz, and Little Face to their headquarters and call for their leader, Mongo the Magnificent. They discover that the Mongo they worship is actually a hologram. Ryter demands to see the real Mongo. The Monkey Boys are hesitant, but one of them finally agrees to take them to see him.

Mongo is in a room that stinks like rot. Mongo has been inside a probe for so long that his body has started to rot and his hair is falling out. He is practically dead. His probe lets him believe he is living in Eden in the life of a proof, and he is completely unaware of the real world around him. Mongo frightened the other Monkey Boys into never waking him up. Ryter suggests that the boy who led them to Mongo's lair should become the new leader. He is afraid but agrees and calls himself the Great Gorm. He wants Ryter to stay as his adviser, but Ryter tells him of their mission, and advises him to be careful who he trusts.

Analysis

Ryter compares the world they live in now to Dickensian London. Charles Dickens was a famous author in Victorian England, and his novels were known for their depiction of a different side to London than people were used to seeing in novels: the streets, the alleyways, and poverty. Much like Spaz's future world, Dickensian London is often portrayed as dark and dangerous, with characters constantly in life or death situations.



Referencing these classic novels helps to paint a more vivid picture of Spaz's world for readers who are also familiar with Dickens's books.

In addition, Charles Dickens, along with many other famous people throughout history, are referenced by Ryter as having been epileptics. Ryter makes this connection to help Spaz understand that epilepsy does not have to hold him back; not only have many people lived successfully with epilepsy, but as Ryter believes, epilepsy might actually be a sign of extreme talent. Epilepsy may be the brain's way of compensating for this excess of intelligence.

As Ryter and Spaz travel through the Pipes, there is a moment where they believe there is a monster following them; instead, it turns out to be Little Face, their friend. This occurs often throughout the novel, with a character seeming dangerous at first, but actually turning out to be an ally. Many people warn Spaz about becoming involved with a poor girl, Lanaya, but she ends up playing a pivotal role in their journey. In this section, the Monkey Boys at first seem too wild to communicate with, but Ryter ends up getting through to one of the boys, Gorm, and making an ally out of him.

The Great Gorm begins as just an ordinary boy, but Ryter persuades him that he has it in him to become just as powerful as Mongo the Magnificent was before; after all, Mongo the Magnificent was only human before he became a latch boss as well. This coincides with one of the themes of the novel, which is greatness coming from unexpected places. This ties, again, to Spaz, who no one besides Ryter seems to believe will amount to anything, particularly because he has so many obstacles against him. However, through the course of the novel, he ends up becoming Ryter's last and greatest hope for the future.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Spaz get so annoyed by Ryter telling him about famous people who also suffered epilepsy?

Discussion Question 2

What can the reader guess about what happened to the world to make it like it is now, based on the clues from this section? (The Big Shake, water sources drying up, etc.)

Discussion Question 3

Why would someone choose to be stuck inside a probe, like Mongo, instead of living their real life?

Vocabulary

pest, innumerable, gestures, radiation, devised, ruins, pylons, masterpiece, functional, frayed, underfoot, refugees, reassuring, ponder, forbidding, trudge, scurry, delicate, hunched, talons, fastened, eerie, wreckage, scampering, swarm, seized, fortress, interfere, splendid, wrenches



Section Four - Chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16

Summary

Ryter, Spaz, and Little Face are escorted to the next latch. Spaz worries about his foster sister, Bean. They are dropped off at the Pipe and begin their journey again. Ryter discusses poetry and literature to distract them from the journey and from some of the frightening things they hear in the pipe. Spaz gets angry with Ryter for some of this chatter, but Ryter explains he is only trying to make him think.

As they get to the end of the pipe, Spaz smells fire. As they leave the pipe, they see buildings and everything else on fire. They can hear a mob howling and a girl shouting. It's the proov girl, Lanaya. The mob has taken her food and is trying to kill her. Ryter makes a distraction and the mob chases him. Spaz and Little Face help Lanaya get to her vehicle and they drive away. Spaz makes her stop to let Ryter in. They travel to the Forbidden Zone, which is filled with mines to keep the normals from getting into Eden. They tell Lanaya why they're on this journey, and Lanaya agrees to take them to Bean.

Lanaya knows how to get them through the mines; she makes the journey all the time. Ryter wonders what her guardians think of her spending so much time with the normals. She tells him to mind his business, but Ryter admires her spirit. Little Face befriends Lanaya. Their vehicle encounters a patrol from Eden, but Lanaya manages to get them away. As they approach the next latch, they come across Lotti Getts, the boss of this latch.

Spaz has a history with Lotti: when Charley had him kicked out of his latch, he met her for the first time and has feared her ever since. Now, Lottie and her gang surrounds the vehicle. Lanaya claims they're there to trade, but Lotti suspects them of bringing probes into her latch. Lotti recognizes Spaz and tells him disobeying Billy is a killable offense. Spaz explains he's trying to see his sister. If she lets him, he'll do whatever she wants. Lotti will let him in if he finds whoever's been bringing probes into her latch.

Analysis

Spaz learns that Ryter was bluffing about Mongo. He didn't know for sure that something was wrong with the latch boss, just suspected, but he acted so sure of himself that everyone did as he asked. Spaz also realizes that Ryter was bluffing when they first met, about how old and helpless he was. Just as Spaz is braver and stronger than anyone gives him credit for, Ryter is more capable than anyone would suspect. This goes along with the theme of unexpected greatness; as Ryter said at the beginning of the novel, everyone has a secret story, as well as hidden gifts that cannot be suspected just by their surface.



Ryter quotes Robert Frost's poem "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" and claims that the lines in it have gained literary immortality. One of the reasons Ryter is so passionate about leaving behind a book is because books can continue to "live" on even after the people who have written them are dead. Losing these words means losing a connection to the past; perhaps because of this, Ryter believes that the future will be lost if people forget the meaning of words and the importance of learning from the past.

Spaz grows angry with Ryter for questioning him and trying to make him think. Spaz lives in a time where people don't question their circumstances or try to learn from their surroundings. Spaz hasn't gone to school, or even ever read a book, though he has formed a different kind of intelligence in learning how to survive. Ryter may seem strange or even sometimes like he's bullying Spaz, but in truth he is trying to open his mind to new possibilities and teach him a different way of thinking. He wants him to learn that there is more than just physically surviving; it may be even more important for ideas to survive.

Similarly, the time that Spaz lives in has shaped the way he shows affection. Spaz has lost almost everything that matters to him, and has hardened himself to not feel anything or care about anyone to keep himself from getting hurt. Even though Ryter sometimes gets on Spaz's nerves, he is deeply worried about Ryter when he is being chased by the mobs. When Ryter returns, Spaz doesn't quite know how to show his emotions, but it becomes clear to him that Ryter has come to mean more to him than he ever would have suspected before.

Discussion Question 1

The Pipe once seemed frightening to Spaz, but when he returns to it after Mongo's territory, he claims it feels like home. How can something that used to be scary turn into something that feels comfortable?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Lanaya refuse to believe that the people would hurt her, even though they were surrounding her and trying to burn her?

Discussion Question 3

What does Ryter mean when he says that goodness cannot be engineered? How is Lanaya good "despite her breeding"?



Vocabulary

pathetic, bluffing, faint, tactical, urban, rubble, winded, immortality, mimicking, acoustics, plods, myth, odyssey, scrawny, spew, gritty, sags, wheezing, hovels, flimsy, maidens, bleary, restraints, intact, engaged, colliding, roving, barren, console, regal, glitch, huffily, excursions, scornfully, engineer, ignorant, musing, initial, breeding



Section Five - Chapters 17, 18, 19, and 20

Summary

Lanaya suggests going behind Lotti's back, but Spaz knows she'll be watching his family. They try to come up with a plan. Lanaya suggests figuring out who is selling probes and find out who he's buying them from. They will pretend they want to trade probes. They go to Traderville, where people do all kinds of underhanded business. Lanaya trades some jewelry for chox bars, and Little Face says her name for the first time. Lanaya has traded here before and asks for a merchant named Bender. Lanaya asks about the probes but Bender insists he never sells them, though after some prodding he finally gives her a name. They go to search for the individual named and are surrounded by a group of warriors named the Furies.

Lanaya tells the Furies that they're searching for Vida Bleek, and underworld trader. He appears and Lanaya tells him they're looking for probes. Bleek threatens them but takes them into his office for trading. Bleek figures out that they're trying to rat him out, but he isn't afraid because he's been planning to overthrow Lotti. He tells Lanaya that the prooves are the ones who are giving the normals probes. Lanaya denies it. Bleek signals for the Furies to kill them but they're attacked by Lotti's Vandals, and Spaz and his friends escape.

In his fear, Spaz resents Bean for sending for him and getting him into this mess. Ryter reminds him that Lotti is distracted now, which means they can go see Bean without any interference. They drive to Bean's house. Lanaya thinks the Furies and the Vandals intentionally let them go but doesn't understand why. She thinks it might have something to do with Spaz. Spaz worries about what he'll find when they get to Bean.

Spaz remembers a time when Bean wanted to see Eden so he helped her find a patch of sunshine. After that, Bean believed he can do anything. Bean's parents let in Spaz and the others but aren't happy to see them. Charly, his old foster father, reacts strongly to Lanaya, since he's never seen a proov before. Spaz's foster mother Kay tells him that Bean has been asking for him. Bean and Spaz reunite, and Spaz learns Charly was the one who sent for him. The healer has stopped visiting Bean because she's too far gone. Ryter diagnoses her with leukemia and says there used to be a way to cure it, but it's been lost. Lanaya asks to see Bean and Bean thinks Spaz and Lanaya like each other. Spaz tells Bean stories to make her feel better.

Analysis

Hierarchies play an important role in Spaz's world. Prooves seem to be on top, with the normals underneath. The normals are further divided, with latch bosses on top, richer



normals underneath, poorer normals after that, and deefs (or "defects") like Spaz at the bottom. One of the symbols that indicates where someone resides in that structure is their fatness. Spaz and all of his friends are described at various points as being extremely thin, but they encounter a merchant named Bender who is said to wear his fatness like an armor. This fatness indicates that he has enough money to eat and to keep himself in comfort, which means that he is doing significantly better than many of the others around him. This correlates with other times throughout history, when fatness was a sign of wealth and status.

Lanaya believes herself to deserve special privilege because of her status. However, she notices that Spaz seems to get special treatment as well, though she doesn't understand why, since he is only a normal, and a normal who is supposed to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. She believes that the Furies and the Vandals intentionally let him go, which indicates that he must be someone important. This foreshadows Spaz's true heritage, which is the son of one of the latch bosses, Billy Bizmo, which takes Spaz from the bottom to nearly the top of the hierarchy. Ryter believes him to be important for an entirely different reason: because of his intelligence, and his ability to remember what other people have forgotten.

Another symbol used in this section is the Furies, the warriors who work for Vida Bleek. Though their faces are covered, they are said to be all female. This alludes to the furies in Greek mythology, who were female spirits that brought vengeance upon those who had done wrong. They particularly take revenge on people who have lied, or sworn a false oath. Bleek uses them to screen his visitors; Bleek himself listens to his visitors and determines if they're lying or telling the truth. The liars, he believes, deserve to be killed.

One of the themes of the novel is the power of words, stories, and memories. This is addressed in this section in multiple places. Spaz refers to himself as a "deef," which Bean dislikes because the word is offensive to her. Spaz argues that it is just a word and that it holds no power. Later, the only consolation to Bean's suffering and fear is to have Spaz tell her stories about people who live happily. Hearing these happy stories helps Bean to forget her own situation, if only for a little while, indicating the power that words truly hold.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Little Face say Lanaya's name before Spaz's? What do the times that Little Face chooses to speak indicate about his desire to survive?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Lanaya not afraid of being attacked or killed like Spaz and the others are? What does this indicate about her background?



Discussion Question 3

Bean doesn't like the word "deef" but Spaz tells her it's just a word. Do words have the power to hurt people? Are there words in our society that are forbidden from being used?

Vocabulary

brutal, eroding, viable, merchants, underworld, elevated, haggle, densely, weaponry, stock, summoned, blubber, impulse, cunning, stealthy, uttering, elegant, furies, whirring, invulnerable, tribute, inflicts, poised, deserted, turf, dissolve, assassins, vandals, spastic, triumph, glands, defect



Section Six - Chapters 21, 22, 23, and 24

Summary

Bean goes into a coma. Ryter tells Spaz he's sorry that things have turned out this way. Spaz is angry with himself for having hope and wants to give up on the world altogether. He goes outside to get some space, and Ryter and Lanaya join him. They've come up with a new plan. They're going to take Bean to Eden to try to cure her.

Charly doesn't want them to go to Eden because it's against the rules. Ryter argues that there's nothing left to lose. Lanaya promises that Bean will be safe under her protection. Charly and Kay agree. Spaz carries her to Lanaya's vehicle. The Vandals return, having won their battle with the Furies, and Lotti allows them to pass between latches to thank them for helping her. She asks Spaz to tell Billy Bizmo about her victory and warn him about what happens to her enemies.

They reach the Barrier which separates the normals from Eden. Spaz is astounded how different the world looks in Eden: bright colors, plants and vegetation - life. Spaz is overwhelmed by how beautiful it is. Ryter thanks Spaz for bringing him on this journey so he could see this. They travel through until they reach Lanaya's house. It is bigger and more impressive than they anticipated. They realize Lanaya is more important than they realized.

Lanaya shows them her home, and Spaz is overwhelmed by its opulence. They meet Lanaya's guardians, Jin and Bree, whom she calls "contributors." They're concerned about Lanaya bringing normals into Eden, but help once they see how ill Bean is. They don't know if they'll be able to cure her but agree to try. They go to a room that shows whatever images people ask for. Ryter asks to see the Grand Canyon and is overwhelmed by its beauty. Spaz asks to see what leukemia does, and learns that it used to be treatable but that they've lost the information on how to do so. Spaz is upset and runs off.

Analysis

The dynamics of Spaz's group have changed quite a bit since the beginning of the group. The initial plan was just to help Spaz get to Bean. Ryter came along for the adventure, Little Face came along because he had nowhere else to go, and Lanaya agreed to help because Spaz and Ryter rescued her earlier. However, now that they've found Bean, the others could easily leave Spaz to his own devices and move on. Instead they decide to go on an even more dangerous journey, partially because they've come to care for Bean and want to help her if they can, but also because they love Spaz. The group has gone beyond being strangers traveling together and have become family.



Conversely, even though Kay and Charly raised Spaz as a young boy, they do not seem to think of him as belonging to them in any way. These strange family dynamics are also explored when Lanaya's guardians, Jin and Bree, are introduced. For all intents and purposes, they are her parents, but Lanaya refers to them as "contributors." Because Lanaya was created as a genetically improved being, Jin and Bree aren't thought of as parents in the traditional way. Instead, they contributed their genes to help create a child, though most of the work is thought to have been performed by science. Though they seem to care for Lanaya, the dynamics are not the same as might be expected with a "normal" child and her parents.

The symbol of the color blue is referenced in this section. Spaz remembers when Bean found a blue plate and fell in love with it. To Bean, the color symbolizes hope. In her world, this color is almost never seen, so finding it seems like a miracle. As Spaz and the others cross the border into Eden, the Barrier is made up of the color blue. This continues the idea of hope, because Bean's only hope rests on them traveling to the other side into Eden. When they get to Eden, Spaz sees blue sky for the first time, giving him hope that there may be a way to save Bean in a place like this. Hope is generally thought of as a good thing, but it can also be a dangerous thing, especially for people like Spaz who have had so much taken from them. Even as he marvels at the sight of the blue sky, he fears for the time when it will be taken away from him again. Before he didn't know it even existed, but now it will be devastating for him to lose it now that he knows it's possible.

Another symbol addressed in this section is Eden, the territory where Lanaya and the other proovs live. It is dramatically different from any other place that has been encountered yet in the novel, filled with beauty and hope. The name Eden references a place in the Bible, where the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, are said to have lived. This place was a paradise, where animals did not hurt each other, and where Adam and Eve were kept completely innocent. Once they lost that innocence, they were forced to leave. This foreshadows what will happen as Spaz and his friends learn more about the truth of Eden and what the proovs are really like.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Lanaya and Ryter continue to help Spaz even though they did what they promised by bringing him to Bean?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Charly break Bean's plate? Why does he send Spaz away?

Discussion Question 3

Why do Spaz and Lanaya think so differently about the colors of the world? How have their life experiences been different?



Vocabulary

numb, thrums, whoop, straddling, mute, cackles, smog, variations, conversational, occupies, lush, lunar, contributors, apparently, unlimited, stabilize, authority, cyber, gauzy, erosion, puny, transparent, organs, abnormal, anemia, extinction



Section Seven - Chapters 25, 26, 27, and 28

Summary

Doctors examine Bean but none can figure out how to help her. Lanaya shows them around the Prime Laboratory, where babies are genetically altered. They learn the original babies were altered to help them survive radiation after the Big Shake. They learn that proovs generally live to be about 100 and that there's no way to stop aging, just help people age gracefully. Spaz visits Bean, who is still in a coma. Jin explains to Spaz the importance of Lanaya being a Master, a proov who was designed from birth to be a leader. Ryter tells him about proovs giving the normals probes as a way to get rid of them. Jin is horrified and says he will talk to the Masters about it. Bree tells Spaz they may have discovered a treatment that will help Bean, but it's risky.

Bean is injected with improved genes to help her recover. Bean wakes up and tells Spaz she dreamed they were in Eden. Spaz tells her they're really there. Ryter is excited for Spaz's happy ending and can't wait to write it down. Spaz argues he didn't do anything, but Ryter tells him they never would have made it this far if it weren't for him. Lanaya tells Spaz that people in Eden are beginning to talk about them and they'll have to move. Spaz is worried about Bean but Lanaya reassures him they'll take care of her. They return to Lanaya's house. Bean has dreamed about this kind of place, but in the Urb, with grass and trees and people not having to be afraid. It's going to be hard to return to the Urb after seeing this. Lanaya vows to try to help them stay.

Lanaya and Jin play chess; Jin is one of the best in Eden. Bean has never played and asks if she can try. Jin takes it easy on Bean at first, but she ends up beating him. They play several more times and Bean is a match for Jin. Lanaya and Jin marvel at this proof that normals can be just as smart as proovs. Bree has been spending a lot of time with Little Face and announces that she's going to adopt him. Jin reminds her it's against the rules. Little Face speaks up and insists that he loves Bree, ending the argument.

Jin starts to treat Little Face like his son. Bean, Ryter, and Spaz enjoy their time outside. Bean is growing stronger and healthier every day. Ryter worries that he'll die before he can finish his book, but Bean reminds him that his life will live on through his words. They avoid talking about what will happen if they have to go back. A ship approaches and proov Enforcers handcuff them to take them to see the Masters.

Analysis

One of the main themes of the novel is the hope for a better future. This is addressed in this section, in particular chapter twenty-five--which is named "Thinking About the



Future"--in a conversation between Spaz and Jin. Jin explains why Lanaya is so important to his people: because she is part of the hope for a better future, and will help the proofs plan for that. Spaz doesn't understand worrying about the future when they won't even be alive to see it, but Jin argues that this is why the world is in the state it's in now: because no one prepared for anything bad to happen in the future, and it took them completely by surprise. As the rest of the section reveals, things aren't perfect even in Eden, but Lanaya represents their hope that things can become better.

One of the ways that imperfections in Eden's society begins to peek through is the fact that some proofs have been selling probes to the normals. Ryter believes this is an attempt to exterminate the normals, and is perhaps the most effective way; he claims the best way to kill people off is to take away their memories. As has been shown with Mongo the Magnificent, probes make people lose their will to live in the real world; as Spaz has shown, he can better remember things than anyone around him because he can't use probes. One of the ways Ryter wants to correct this is through keeping a record of his memories, and by encouraging Spaz to do the same. That way, as Bean later tells Ryter, his memories will continue to live on even after he's gone.

Bean discusses some dreams she's had about the Urb: that it is full of grass and trees and people help each other instead of turning their backs on one another. Lanaya thinks what she's talking about sounds like Eden, but in many ways, Bean is describing the world before the Big Shake, or the world as we know it. There are certainly things wrong with the world, but for the most part people are safe and don't have to be afraid for their lives every time they leave the house. Though much of the book stresses the importance of planning for a future, these reminders about the privileges of the world as it is now may be written to encourage an appreciation for the present.

One of the symbols used in the novel is that of chess. Chess is known for being a game of intellect, and appears in various films and pieces of literature. Instead of creating a fictional future game, using this game to show Bean's intelligence allows the reader to connect her skill to something recognizable in the present. Because of chess's symbolic connection to extreme intelligence, this particular game is more effective at showing Bean's intelligence than using another game from present time might be, such as cards, backgammon, etc., even if they would indicate a similar level of intelligence.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jin say that the proofs are so eager to help Bean when normals die every day? How is it easier to ignore the hardships of others when they're hidden from view?

Discussion Question 2

What does Ryter mean when he says "animals are easier to exterminate than humans"? Has there been any time in history when people were treated more like animals than humans?



Discussion Question 3

How was Lanaya a different child than most to raise? Why has Bree missed raising a child when she is Lanaya's guardian?

Vocabulary

eruptions, radiation, nuclear, lifespan, modification, preserved, tolerate, toxic, incorporated, coding, wistfully, compelled, perished, evasively, pipe, spout, exterminate, exist, chemotherapy, inject, dreading, therapy, spindly wheezing, ragged, three-dimensional, warfare, animated, perking, standoff, ecstatic, exasperated



Section Eight - Chapters 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33

Summary

They're taken to a gathering of thousands of proovs, where Ryter is waiting for them. They're being held on trial because many proovs want them to be banished. Little Face is missing, but it's implied that he's with Bree and that he's safe. Lanaya is also on trial for her part in bringing them there. The Masters of Eden oversee the proceedings. Lanaya argues that she is merely saving their lives because they saved hers and tells the whole story. Lanaya accuses the proovs of looking down on the normals and selling them probes to destroy them. She insists that genetic improvements were supposed to make them smarter and better able to survive, but Bean, Ryter, and Spaz prove that isn't true. The proovs are angry and leave. The masters tell her she may be able to change things someday, but not yet, and banish Bean, Ryter, and Spaz back to the Urb.

Spaz is returned to the Stacks and thinks of Eden as a dream. Bean was dropped off first and they didn't even give her a chance to say goodbye. She promises to find him again. The Urb is hard to adjust to for Spaz now that he's seen the other side. Ryter fears that he won't finish his book, but not because of old age--because he's an outsider, he thinks he'll be blamed for the changes that are about to happen in the Urb. Spaz worries Billy Bizmo will come after him, but Ryter tells him he doesn't have anything to worry about. Spaz is confused; Billy doesn't care about him. He falls asleep and hears the sound of approaching motorbikes.

A mob approaches. Spaz tries to get Ryter to leave, but Ryter tells him there's nothing to fear. The mobs surround them and grab Ryter. He asks Spaz to save his book. Spaz tries but the mob takes it from him and destroys it. Billy finds Spaz and tells him the proov enforces disabled all the probes so none of them work anymore. People have gone wild and blame Ryter. Spaz begs Billy to save him, but Billy tells him he already used all of his influence to make sure they blamed Ryter instead of Spaz. He saved Spaz because he's his son.

Spaz runs away from Billy and follows Ryter. He tries to untie him but the mob fights him off. Spaz apologizes for not saving his book but Ryter tells Spaz he's his book now. The mob kills Ryter. Spaz passes out. When he wakes up, the mobs are gone. Spaz goes to Ryter's house but everything is gone. Spaz tries to forget what happened but can't. Billy tries to make things right with Spaz, but Spaz wants nothing to do with him. He gets a voice recorder so he can follow in Ryter's footsteps. A runner gives him a message from Little Face and Lanaya. She tells him the future is theirs.



Analysis

Ryter tells Spaz that writers need a challenge. When life is too much for others to bear, writers find the story in it and learn from it. This indicates why Ryter is so different from everyone else that Spaz meets in the Urb, and how he can always be so optimistic even when everything in the world seems to be going wrong about him. This may in part be because of his hope for the future, which most other people have lost.

Spaz is initially haunted by the memory of Eden, feeling that it would be better if he'd never been there so that he wouldn't know how bad life is in the Urb by comparison. He wishes he could forget. This is Spaz's first taste of what many other people have experienced by using the probes. They get a taste of a better life, and find it that much harder to cope with the real world once they return. Though Spaz wishes he could forget, Ryter stresses the important of remembering, and turning that memory into a thing of hope instead of something that will hold him back.

When the mobs come for Ryter, Spaz is terrified, but Ryter tells him that the only thing to fear is fear itself, though he can't remember where the quote came from. This is a reference to the first inaugural speech by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR overcame many obstacles to serve as president, including polio, and would eventually lead the United States through some of its darkest hours--such as the Great Depression and World War II--though he died before the war ended. This is similar to Ryter, who also had to overcome many obstacles and lived through some very dark times. Through his efforts, much like FDR, it is indicated that there will be a much better future.

By the end of the novel, Ryter's book has been destroyed, but he tells Spaz that he is now the last book in the universe. Ryter's reason for writing was to record his memories and ideas to achieve literary immortality. He also believes that there will be a better future where people will need these things. Spaz is not a physical book, but he will be able to carry on Ryter's ideas and use them to help form a better future. As he works toward this, he is given Ryter's old name, which is revealed as a homophone for "writer"; the two sound the same, but the spelling has been changed over time because people no longer have books which means they no longer have writers, though some of the meaning has still remained over time.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the proovs object so much to being compared to normals? How does this make them blind to their suffering?

Discussion Question 2

How can Ryter be happy to be home again, even if it's in the Stacks?



Discussion Question 3

What does Ryter mean about Spaz being the last book in the universe? Why do people begin to call him Ryter?

Vocabulary

enforcers, ruins, summoned, violation, evidence, unhinged, platform, transparent, geezer, contemptuously, anarchy, reigns, benefited, thumps, appropriate, shunned, heckling, lustrous, risked, paradise, hush, confer, instant, accelerating, dangling, scraggly, accomplished, astonished, blazes, scorch, deactivated, despair



Characters

Spaz

Spaz is teenage boy who has been forced to live on the street after he began to have epileptic fits. Spaz was raised by a foster family, and was very close to his younger sister, Bean, though his foster father, Charly, was always distrustful of him. In the post-Apocalyptic world that Spaz lives in, people no longer understand what epilepsy is and Charly fears that it will be contagious. To survive, Spaz has become a Banger, or a debt collector for a Latch Boss named Billy Bizmo.

Because of Spaz's epilepsy, he is unable to use probes--a devise that causes people to have hallucinations and be able to escape into a better world. Due to this, Spaz has better memory than most other people. He's sent on a job by Billy to collect from an old man named Ryter, and when he does so, he discovers that Ryter is writing a book--the last known book in the universe. Most people have forgotten about books and libraries, but not Spaz. He thinks Ryter is a fool for wasting his time since people don't even read anymore. Ryter has hope for a better future, but Spaz is far too practical, and too pessimistic. He's too busy trying to survive to worry about the future.

Spaz's soft spot is his sister, Bean. His time with her is the happiest and safest he's known. When Spaz learns Bean is ill, he risks his life and goes on a dangerous journey to reach her, even knowing it will probably only be to say goodbye. Spaz doesn't think much of himself, but is kinder than he gives himself credit for, and inspires loyalty in various people along the way--including Ryter, Lanaya, and Little Face. All put their lives on the line, as well, to help Bean and Spaz.

Through his adventures, Spaz ultimately begins to see things from Ryter's point of view and believe that the future can be better. Though the novel seems to end on quite a bleak note with Spaz being cast out of Eden, separated from Bean, and Ryter being killed, Spaz determines to follow in Ryter's footsteps and work to build a better future.

Ryter

Ryter is an old man whom Spaz calls "gummy" because his teeth are falling out. He's skinny and eccentric, never quite behaving how people expect him to. In Spaz's bleak, dark world, Ryter is continuously optimistic, seeking to see the best in people and look on the bright side of life. Ryter has devoted his last years to writing a book, even though people no longer read, and believes that preserving ideas and memories will be necessary for the future.

Ryter is an outsider, even in the shanty-town-like Stacks where he lives. Spaz immediately marks him as being strange when he arrives to take Ryter's things and finds them all stacked and prepared, with Ryter willing to hand them over without a fight.



The only object Ryter owns of any value is his book, which Spaz begrudgingly lets him keep.

Ryter also develops an interest in Spaz and encourages him to think and to question the world around him, even when this makes Spaz angry. No one has ever believed in Spaz like Ryter does. In a time when people are generally selfish, Ryter agrees to go on a dangerous journey with him, a journey which ultimately results in his death.

Yet Ryter continues to live on afterward in the lessons he's taught Spaz and in the idea of fighting for a future which he's instilled in him. In this way, he's achieved the "literary mortality" that he's described to Spaz. Even though his physical book has been destroyed, his legacy--as well as his name, Ryter--lives on through Spaz.

Bean

Bean is Spaz's foster sister and has always had a close bond with him. One time Spaz helped her find a spot of sunlight and ever since then she's believed that he can do anything. Bean looks for the best in people and has shown herself to be intelligent from a young age, such as when she called Charly on his hypocrisy for calling people "rats."

Bean has also long been ill, suffering from leukemia, and relied on Spaz to take care of her, though because of his epileptic fits he was forced out of the house. Believing that she is dying, Bean asks Spaz to come say goodbye, which sets off the chain of events that leads to the main plot of the novel. Bean is eventually healed through the advanced technology of the proovs; in Eden, it is her intelligence and skill in the game of chess that causes Lanaya and Jin to question whether normals are as dumb as they've been led to believe. Ultimately, Bean is cast out of Eden and separated again from Spaz, though she continues to hold out hope that things can be better.

Lanaya

Lanaya is a proov, which means that she is part of an elite group whose genes have been genetically altered, making her much more physically attractive, as well as supposedly smarter and more resourceful. Lanaya is even more advanced than most proovs, in that she was created to be a Master, or one of the lawmakers and leaders of Eden. Lanaya has a deeply inquisitive mind and is constantly pushing the boundaries. Though most proovs are content to live their lives in Eden, Lanaya travels often to the Urb to learn about normals and to help them when she can. Lanaya proves herself to be brave and kind, which--as Ryter suggests--is something that belongs to her alone, not her genetic altering. Though Lanaya is ultimately unsuccessful in persuading the other proovs to accept and help the normals, her last message to Spaz indicates that she will continue fighting from Eden and do all she can to bring about a better world.



Little Face

Little Face is a young boy whom Spaz meets in the Stacks. He is orphaned and homeless, and when Spaz first comes across him, Little Face doesn't speak at all. He's also never tried a choxbar (or candy bar) before and doesn't understand when Spaz offers it to him in payment, though Little Face grows to love them so much that "choxbar" becomes the only word he says for a long time. Little Face ends up following Spaz and Ryter on their journey, and ultimately becomes attached to Lanaya's mother, Bree, who comes to view him as her son and decides to break the rules by adopting him. Little Face gradually picks up a few more words, though he still only speaks when really necessary. Though he is young, Little Face proves himself to be remarkably skilled at surviving, and finding other people who will help him survive.

Charly and Kaye

Charly and Kaye are Bean's parents and Spaz's foster parents. Charly, in particular, is painted in a bad light in various parts of the story. Spaz was kicked out of the house because Charly feared his epilepsy would be contagious to Bean, but he also distrusted Spaz long before that, seeming to resent the fact that Bean loved him so much. Kaye sticks up for Spaz a little, but ultimately does not intervene when he is forced out. Spaz also remembers Bean finding a blue plate that she loves which Charly smashes and tells her to forget about. Though it may be easy to view Charly as a villain, most of his actions are driven by fear for his daughter. He doesn't want her to get any sicker, and he doesn't want her to get her hopes up by dreaming of a better world. Charly ultimately proves how much he loves Bean by sending for Spaz when she gets sick, then allowing Spaz and his friends to take her to Eden, even though he knows she may die and he might never see her again.

Jin and Bree

Jin and Bree are Lanaya's "contributors." Unlike normal parents, Jin and Bree do not have Lanaya the traditional way, but instead contribute their genes to create a child. In many ways, Lanaya treats them more like contemporaries than like parental figures, though they love her and occasionally step in to provide advice when they feel it is needed. Jin is known for his ability at chess and is ranked as the sixth best in all of Eden. Though he voices his disapproval when Lanaya brings the normals into Eden, he also takes time to explain the society to Spaz and to teach Bean how to play chess. Bree also forms an unexpected attachment to Little Face, who lets her mother him like advanced, independent Lanaya never did. Even knowing it is forbidden, Bree insists upon adopting Little Face and hides him when the other normals are taken away. Based on the actions of the other proofs at Spaz's trial, Jin and Bree seem to be remarkably open-minded, even though they initially express concerns.



Billy Bizmo

Billy Bizmo is one of the main latch bosses in the Urb and rules his territory through the help of Bangers, whom he sends out to beat up (and kill) people as necessary and take whatever payment he feels he is owed. Spaz describes Billy as being especially dangerous because one can never really know what he's thinking. This proves to be particularly true in Spaz's case; for some reason, the latch master takes Spaz under his wing and seems to be particularly possessive of him. Spaz later finds out that Billy is actually his father. Unfortunately this discovery is made right after Spaz learns that Billy essentially threw Ryter to the mobs so Spaz could survive. Afterward, he tries to reach out to Spaz, though Spaz tells him he doesn't want to be anything like him.

Lotti Getts

Lotti Getts is another latch boss who crosses paths with Spaz and his friends. She is known by many nicknames, including "Boss Lady," "The Latch Queen," "Nails," and "The White Widow," and she has a reputation for cutting people with her long, sharpened nails and killing anyone who gets in her way. Lotti's henchmen are known as Vandals and do her bidding. Lotti seems to have fun threatening Spaz but ultimately keeps him alive--most likely because she knows he is Billy Bizmo's son and wants to avoid a war--though she does make his friends lead her to her enemy before letting them pass through her latch.

The Great Gorm

Without their leader, Mongo the magnificent, the Monkey Boys are in chaos until Ryter encourages one of the boys to step forward and become a leader. The boy is initially reluctant to do so, not believing himself to be special enough to be a latch boss, though Ryter helps him to believe in himself and his capabilities. The boy calls himself the Great Gorm and takes control of the Monkey Boys, allowing Spaz and his friends to pass through the latch. In some ways, the Great Gorm is a smaller version of what Ryter is doing with Spaz: encouraging him to think for himself and to aspire to bigger and better things to build a better future for his people.

Mongo the Magnificent

Another latch boss that Spaz and his friends encounter is Mongo the Magnificent, who used to run a crew named the Monkey Boys, though Mongo has since been under a probe for so long that he's lost all contact with the outside world and his body is essentially dead.



Symbols and Symbolism

Books

Books act as symbolism for hope for the future. When Spaz first comes to take Ryter's things, the only possession he attempts to keep for himself is his book--to his knowledge, the last book in the universe. Ryter hopes this book, which contains his ideas and his memories, will continue to live on long after he is gone. Spaz points out to him that no one even reads anymore, but Ryter believes they will in the future, and that they will need books like his. After Ryter's book is destroyed, he tells Spaz that he is now the last book in the universe, or the last hope for things to change.

Chess

Chess is known as a game that requires great strategy and intelligence. Lanaya and Jin--two proovs--play this game and have done so for many years, which distinguishes them from the normals--Ryter, Spaz, and Bean--who do not know how to play; in the world they live in, there is neither the time nor the luxury to have learned such a game. However, when Bean picks up the game, she is able to hold her own against Jin, indicating her advanced intelligence, and symbolizing to Lanaya and Jin that normals are cleverer and more self-reliant than the proovs have given them credit for.

Blue

The color blue is another symbol of hope that is found throughout the text. The first instance of this is when Bean finds a blue plate, which stands out as something exotic and beautiful in her world, which is primarily gray and brown. Bean believes that anyone looking at the plate would have to love it, but her father, Charly, destroys the plate out of fear for the hope that it gives Bean; it will be easier to survive if she does not dream above her station. Blue may also be tied to the idea of Eden or luxury; the city is surrounded by a blue barrier, which does not allow the normals to come through. Spaz is also amazed when he learns that the sky is blue in Eden, since in the Urb--like everything else--is gray.

Epilepsy

Spaz suffers from epilepsy, which is how he earns his name: Spaz, short for spasm. Many view epilepsy as something frightening because they don't truly understand it; because Charly fears it is contagious, he banishes Spaz from his house. To Spaz, epilepsy is symbolic that everything that can go wrong will. To Ryter, epilepsy symbolizes something else; he thinks it is proof that Spaz is somebody special, because he has so much to overcome which must mean that he's capable of great things. To



drive home this point, Ryter tells him of various great people throughout history who were thought to have epilepsy, and who went on to live exemplary lives.

Choxbars

Choxbars are another sign of luxury. When Spaz first meets Little Face, he offers him a choxbar to show him where Ryter's house is. Spaz thinks that his life is hard, but Little Face has never had a choxbar and doesn't even know what it is; when he has one, he likes it so much that for a long time it becomes the only word he can say. When Spaz first meets Lanaya, she is distributing bags of edibles, including choxbars. She can afford to give them out, and to her they mean nothing, but to the people receiving them, they indicate an unexpected luxury that they would never be able to afford on their own.

Eden

Eden is the territory where the proovs lives and seems like a kind of paradise compared to the Urb. It is full of grass and trees and plants and blue sky, and people are safe and well cared for. Eden is a reference to the paradise garden in the Bible, where Adam and Eve lived in innocence before they ate of the fruit of knowledge, lost their innocence, and were kicked out. Spaz and Bean eat apples in Eden, which may be a reference to the fruit that Adam and Eve partake. It is directly after eating this fruit that Bean and Spaz are forced to leave Eden--not, in this case, because they have lost their innocence, but because they threaten the innocence that the proovs live in, where they can ignore the hardships going on around them because they believe they are entitled to a better life.

Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was a famous author in Victorian London, particularly known for depicting the hardships of the lower class in a far more graphic way than had been done before. Ryter references his writing, comparing the Urb to the street life that Dickens made famous in his novels, so much so that a term--"Dickensian"--is used to describe the time period and lifestyle. Ryter also references Dickens because he was thought to have been epileptic, but still became one of the most famous authors of all time. This comparison to Spaz, who also suffers from epilepsy, may act as foreshadowing, since by the end of the novel, Spaz devotes his life to being a writer.

Ryter

"Ryter" is the name that Ryter goes by, and is assumed to be his given name. However, at the end of the book, it is revealed to be a homograph for the word "writer." Like many of the terminology the author uses throughout the novel, this word resembles a word that we use in day-to-day language in the modern world, but has been slightly altered. Because books are all but extinct, there would be no use for writers anymore in Spaz's



world, yet some memory of the word exists, though its spelling has been altered. Because it is so rare, the word has become not just an occupation, but a title, and may reference Medieval times when people were often named for their occupation (tailor, smith, thatcher, etc.).

Fatness

Fatness indicates opulence and wealth within the novel. Most of the characters are described as being thin, some to the point of being emaciated; however, Spaz and his friends encounter one merchant whose fatness suggests his wealth and success. Throughout history, fatness has indicated the same; most royalty and members of the upper class have traditionally been fat, while the poor have been thin.

The Furies

The Furies are Vida Bleek's warriors, who are said to be all female, and who are believed to be able to know if people are telling the truth before they deliver them over to Bleek. Their name refers to Greek mythology, and a group of all female deities of vengeance, who were particularly wrathful against liars and oath-breakers.



Settings

The Stacks

The Stacks is where Spaz first meets Ryter and Little Face. They are described as a kind of hobo village where no one really owns the land, but instead they set up temporary shelters and squat there because they have nowhere else to go. The stacks is made up of hundreds of rows of concrete boxes stacked on top of each other. The dregs of society live here, meaning those that have nowhere else to go. The area smells badly because there are no toilets so people have to urinate on the ground.

Eden

Eden is the home to the proovs, or genetically modified humans, who are at the top of the hierarchy in Spaz's society. Proovs can leave Eden, but no normals are allowed to enter. To keep out the normals, a Barrier of electronic, blue energy surrounds Eden, which is filled with mines meant to keep people out. Though the rest of the world is gray and brown, Eden is filled with color and life: plants, trees, and blue sky. Normals are forced to crowd together in tiny homes and makeshift buildings, but people in Eden have multiple, luxurious rooms and easy access to top technology.

The Urb

The Urb is the name for the various latches that exist outside of Eden, and presumably is shortened for "urban." It is mostly gray and brown with very little color or life. Most of the buildings are leftover from our current world, but have been damaged during the Big Shake which destroyed the world, as well as having become dilapidated and run-down over time. People are poor and desperate, most having to resort to terrible, criminal things just to stay alive. Most use a technology called "probes," which create dream-like hallucinations, to escape the drudgery of day-to-day life.

Latches

Latches are the names for the territories that exist in the Urb, most of them are separated by walls and other barriers to keep people from traveling through. Each Latch is run by a Latch Boss, who creates the rules that everyone living in the latch must follow, and who has a group of warriors that help him/her defend the territory and keep people in line. For example, Billy Bizmo has the Bangers; Lotti Getts has her Vanguard; and Mongo the Magnificent has his Monkey Boys.

The Pipes

The Pipes are an underground tunneling system which Spaz and Ryter follow to travel between Latches without being discovered. They are comparable to modern-day sewers, and are filled with run-off rainwater and old pipes that no longer carry water. The Pipes are said to extend all the way to the Badlands, which have been destroyed by radiation (presumably by nuclear warfare) and which are unlivable. People used to use the Pipes to move around from place to place but they have mostly been forgotten now.



Themes and Motifs

Unexpected Greatness

Many characters throughout the novel turn out to be quite different from what they're originally expected to be. Spaz thinks of himself as a nobody, even lower than most of the normals around him because he has a defect of birth (his epilepsy). Spaz doesn't expect much of himself and no one else seems to expect much of him either, until he meets Ryter, who questions him and challenges him and makes him think in ways he never has before. Through Ryter's influence, Spaz realizes he's capable of being a hero, and helping other people learn to think for themselves as well.

Ryter, similarly, does not seem to have much to offer on the surface. He is old, scrawny, and losing most of his hair and his teeth. He is not strong or handsome, like one of the proofs or the stars of the 3Ds that Spaz likes to watch. However, his kindness, his bravery, and his intelligence make him more exceptional than anyone would originally believe him to be, and he ends up completely changing the course of Spaz's life.

During their journey, Spaz and Ryter encounter a boy who works for Mongo the Magnificent and who is originally so unimportant that he doesn't even have a name. However, when Ryter asks one of the Monkey Boys to step up and take initiative, the boy is the only one to do so. Through Ryter's encouragement, he ends up becoming the new leader of the Monkey Boys, the Great Gorm. He is initially afraid to do so because, like Spaz, he doesn't see anything great in himself, but Ryter encourages him to believe in himself and what he can accomplish.

Lanaya may seem to be different from the above examples because she is a proof--and, it is later discovered, not just any proof, but one who has been specially modified to be a master and leader among her people. However, Lanaya's unexpected greatness comes in the form of her good heart, which Ryter points out is not something that can be genetically modified like beauty or intelligence. Lanaya cares about the normals even when nobody else does, which gives her courage to work for a better world, even when everyone else thinks it will be impossible.

The Power of Words

Ryter believes that words have the power to change the world. At first, Spaz thinks he is crazy, particularly since most of the books in the world have been destroyed and people have, for the most part, forgotten they even existed. Yet Ryter argues that the greatest hope for the future is to record memories and ideas so that others can learn from the past. People may not have any use for books now, but he continues to hold out hope that they will again.

Many of the terminology used throughout the novel shows how words have morphed and changed over time from the way they are used in modern day. Many terms



reference something from this time period that has been mostly forgotten in Spaz's time period--like books--but which people continue to pass down, even without fully understanding their meaning. For instance, the Urb is probably shortened for the word "urban" which refers to city life; Eden is a reference to the Bible; and Ryter is a homonym for the occupation of a writer.

One word that carries particular weight is the word "deef," which is shortened for "defect." This refers to someone who was born with some kind of sickness or ailment that marks them as different from others, and puts them at the lowest point of the social hierarchy. Spaz refers to himself this way because of his epilepsy. When he calls himself a deaf in front of Bean, she objects, but Spaz shrugs it off and claims it is only a word. Bean knows different, however, because it changes the way others see him, but even more importantly, how he thinks about himself.

Little Face begins the novel by only being able to say one word--"choxbar"--which comes to fill in for everything else he's trying to say. Eventually he also learns Lanaya's name, which seems to be enough to get him by. However, when his fate is being debated by Jin and Bree on whether or not to adopt him, Little Face finally uses his words to express what he wants: to stay with Bree. Though he continues to only use words sparingly, Little Face shows the power of what words can accomplish by speaking up when it matters the most.

Hope for the Future

Another one of Ryter's strange ideas is the hope for a better future. One of the reasons he wants to preserve his book, even though nobody reads anymore, is because he hopes that this will not be true in the future, and that there will be a need for knowledge and ideas once again. One of the ways that Ryter shows this is investing his time in teaching younger people--particularly Spaz--to think for themselves, and to question what they've always assumed. Ryter's hope for the future is so strong that at the end of the novel, he allows the mob to blame him for the dismantling of the probes so that Spaz will be able to escape and go on to live his life; Ryter knows he doesn't have much left to give, but his ideas can continue to live on through Spaz, who becomes his last novel, or the best hope for a better future.

The proofs also seem to place great hope in the future. Just as Ryter has invested his time and wisdom in Spaz, the proofs have invested time and technology in developing genetically superior offspring, such as Lanaya, who have been specially crafted to find ways for them to survive. As Jin explains to Spaz, part of why the world that was didn't last was because people did not plan well enough for the future. When disaster struck, they were completely unprepared, and left behind the chaos that has now overtaken their world.

The proofs' plan backfires in part, however, because Lanaya proves to be more open-minded than they anticipated. She not only schemes for a better world for the proofs, but for all of humanity. Many of the proofs find this idea offensive because they believe



themselves to be superior creatures and thus more entitled to survival, but Lanaya believes that they have much to learn from the normals and should all be striving to help each other. Though her attempts to make this happen are initially overturned, Lanaya's last message to Spaz suggests that she will continue to work for this, and continue to hope for a future where they can all benefit.

Literary Immortality

Closely tied to the power of words is the idea of literary immortality. Ryter first introduces this idea when he quotes a line of poetry written by Robert Frost, from his poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." Though Robert Frost has died hundreds of years before, he continues to live on because Ryter remembers his words. That Ryter can remember this poem is particularly telling, since Frost is referencing a world that Ryter can no longer remember. He has never had a horse, or seen woods covered in snow, or a farmhouse or frozen lake; on the surface, the words should be meaningless to him, but because Ryter remembers them, they retain their meaning, and keep the memory of that world alive even though it is long gone.

Ryter also references various other authors and great thinkers throughout the course of the novel, including Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Again, these are all figures in history that Ryter has no personal connection to, only a memory of. Though others have forgotten them, they live on through his memory.

Ryter hopes to achieve his own literary mortality by writing his book. Ryter suspects that he is close to death, but knows that his words can continue to live on after he is gone. As Bean explains, his book is like his life, but it won't end when his life ends, because other people will be able to read it, and it will live on through them. Though Ryter's book is eventually destroyed, his legacy lives on through Spaz, who writes his own book that immortalizes Ryter for anyone who reads it.

Fear of the Unknown

Fear of the unknown is another recurring theme that can be found throughout the novel. One of the first examples of this is when Spaz is kicked out of the home he was raised in because of his epilepsy. People do not understand epilepsy because the knowledge of that disease has been lost over time; some believe it indicates some kind of defect, or even something evil inside of Spaz. Others fear that it might be contagious and don't want him anywhere near them. Spaz, himself, fears the disease in his own way, which causes him to distrust himself.

When the proovs learn that Lanaya has brought normals into Eden, some initially seem uneasy by this, including Jin and Bree. As Jin and Bree get to know Spaz, Bean, and Little Face, they overcome their fear and begin to care for them. Others, however, demand that the normals be cast out. Even though Lanaya argues their case and shows that the normals are smarter and more resourceful than anyone has given them credit for, the proovs continue to fear them and to fear the change that would happen in their



society if they let themselves believe Lanaya. For them, it is easier to cling to what they already know and to turn a blind eye to anything that doesn't fit into that category.

When Ryter and Spaz hear a mob approaching at the end of the novel, Ryter senses that it will be for him. Because he is different from most people and chooses to think and remember, he has marked himself as an outsider. People fear him because he seems strange and they do not understand him. Billy Bizmo is partly to blame for allowing the mob to blame Ryter, but the mob was quick to choose Ryter as their scapegoat because he represents this unfamiliarity.

After Ryter is killed, Spaz is given the opportunity to take the safe route and follow in his father's footsteps, but instead chooses to lead a life like Ryter did, even understanding the dangers. Even though most people continue to fear the unknown, Spaz breaks the mold by embracing the unknown and trusting that it will lead to something better.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is told exclusively first-person point of view from Spaz's perspective, in present tense. This present tense helps to add to the immediacy of the novel. Since Spaz lives in a world of danger where he could die at any moment, having him write events as they are taking place instead of recalling things that happened in the past adds to the urgency and contributes to his sense of peril. Telling the story exclusively from Spaz's perspective helps to highlight the character growth that takes place throughout the course of the book. Spaz begins the novel as someone who lives from day to day, disdainful of the very idea of planning for a future. He also thinks very little of himself and what he contributes to the world, as is highlighted through his internal monologue which the reader would not be as privy to with an omniscient narrator. Through Spaz's journey, and particularly his interactions with Ryter, Spaz begins to believe in a better future, and also in his ability to bring this world about. The present tense suggests this future has not happened yet but still can, and thus adds to the sense of hope at the end of the book.

Language and Meaning

Though the vocabulary used in the novel is relatively simple, written to be understood by young readers, some difficulty may occur in the use of made-up, futuristic terms and phrases that the author litters throughout the novel. Most become clear through their usage in context, though some clues can also be derived from the root words or from similarities to words and phrases used today. For instance, when Spaz describes some of the different types of probes, he explains that "shooters" are violent and "sexbos" are erotic. Some of the terms also contain allusions, such as "Eden," which is the paradise-like world that "proovs" (or those who are genetically improved) get to live in.

Despite the strong use of vernacular, no clues are provided in the language to indicate where (in reference to current day) the novel takes place. Because the slang terms are entirely made up, it is unclear from contextual clues in the dialogue if the novel takes place in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, etc. As such, anyone reading it could assume that the novel takes place in his/her country or region.

Structure

The novel is broken up into thirty-three chapters. Everything takes place in one time period; though the year is never expressly specified, it can be determined that it is set at least 200 years in the future, and that some structure of the present world remains, though the government is wildly different. The chapters are generally short and end with some kind of cliffhanger, adding to the urgent tone of the novel and the danger of the world in which Spaz lives. The novel begins with Spaz directly addressing a potential



future reader ("If you're reading this...") though after this point, Spaz stops interacting with a potential reader and tells his story. The nature of the ending--in which Spaz begins to start writing the novel that becomes the book the reader has just read--gives it an almost cyclical effect, since Spaz's story resolves at the moment the novel begins. This gives it the feeling of the "literary immortality" that Ryter describes throughout the novel, since this cyclical effect makes it feel as though Spaz's journey doesn't truly end, just keeps going and going.



Quotes

Everybody has a story," he insists. "There are things about your life that are specific only to you. Secret things you know."

-- Ryter (Three)

Importance: From almost their first encounter, Ryter encourages Spaz to believe in the power of his own story. Ryter wants to record his own memories, not because he has done anything particularly extravagant or noble, but because he believes there is a value to stories, ideas, and memories. Spaz begins the story not thinking very much of himself, but through the help of Ryter and his other friends, he learns his own value and the power of an individual to change the world.

For some reason the idea of 'future' gets inside my head and won't let go. Future. That's like a time that doesn't exist yet. A world full of people who haven't been born yet, doing things that nobody's thought of yet.

-- Spaz (Four)

Importance: One of the recurring themes throughout the novel is the idea of a better future. Spaz has very little time for thinking about the future at the beginning of the book; as this quote shows, it is a novel idea to him, because he is so busy surviving day to day that he never has time to think about tomorrow. However, Spaz's journey teaches him that one of the main mistakes made in the past was to not prepare for the people who would come later, and that a better future is possible. If people refuse to change, then the people who follow may very well be the same; but because the future hasn't happened yet, anything is still possible, including good.

The epilepsy is part of what made you," he says. "Don't hate it.." "You think of it as a curse," he says. "But the 'curse' is also a blessing.

-- Ryter (Six)

Importance: Part of Spaz's personal story is his epilepsy. Spaz believes he is held back by this disease, and indeed, many times people have treated him badly because of it. Part of this fear is cause by ignorance, as people often fear what they do not understand. Ryter works throughout the novel to help Spaz understand his epilepsy--the ways that it has helped to make him stronger, and the ways it has helped to shape who he is. Looking at it through this lens can turn something that Spaz has always considered a curse into something that becomes one of his strengths.

The only real treasure is inside your head," he says, tapping the side of his skull. "Memories are better than diamonds, and nobody can steal them from you.

-- Ryter (Ten)

Importance: Most people in the Urb have willingly forfeited their memories so that they can escape into the fake, dream-like world they experience in the probes. Spaz cannot do so because of his epilepsy, which is one of the reasons Ryter reassures him it's a



gift; Spaz can keep his memories. In his world, possessions are often taken, and nothing is permanent or safe. However, Ryter teaches him that there is a worth to memories, ideas, and words. It is these things, not any possessions, which will help to change the world.

Until I saw what happened to Mongo, I thought getting canceled was the worst thing that could happen. Wrong. Being dead and not knowing it is much, much worse.
-- Spaz (Thirteen)

Importance: One of the side effects of using the probes is that some people, including Mongo, would rather stay stuck inside of their hallucinations than live out their real lives. Though Mongo may have originally done this to be happy, he has in actuality trapped himself in a prison of his mind while his body slowly deteriorates. Spaz and the others living out their real lives in the Urb suffer as well, but Spaz thinks it is better to know what he is suffering than to be kept in the dark. In some ways, this reflects the proovs who live in the paradise of Eden but refuse to acknowledge the suffering of other people around them, telling themselves that they in some way deserve it because they aren't as worthy. The world around them will inevitably have to change, and the world they know now will eventually have to die, but they live in a continuous state of denial.

The man who wrote the poem is called Robert Frost. He lived in the twentieth century," he says. "All that's survived of his poetry is that one line. But even one line is a kind of literary immortality." "Lit-er-ary im-mortality," I say, mimicking his know-it-all voice. "What's that?" "It means part of you lives forever," he explains. "The part of you that writes down words." "Yeah? And what if nobody cares about the words?" "Someday they will," he insists, and you can tell he believes that more than anything.
-- Spaz, Ryter (Thirteen)

Importance: The idea of literary immortality is referenced by Ryter many times throughout the novel. He knows he is close to dying and wants to leave the world a better place, but also just simply wants to be remembered. Words are his way of attempting to go on living after he's gone. Just as Robert Frost has long-since been dead by the time Ryter quotes his words, a part of Ryter can continue to live on long after they've forgotten who he is personally, so long as his ideas survive.

Feel free to lie, boy. I often find lies more interesting than the truth. They say more about the liar.
-- Vida Bleek (Eighteen)

Importance: Vida Bleek is a crime boss who prides himself on being able to see through peoples' lies. One of the people he calls out on her lying is Lanaya. Lanaya does not, perhaps, intentionally lie, but in other parts of the novel she has been shown to lie to herself. She claims to be going amongst the normals to give them supplies, but the fact that she keeps returning suggests that she is beginning to recognize how unjustly they are being treated by the proovs. This lie suggests that Lanaya knows everything she has been taught is wrong, but does not want to believe it yet. By the end



of the novel, Lanaya's eyes have been opened to this, and she resolves to do whatever she can to make it change for the better.

Get ready for worse, Spaz boy, my brain says. You of all people should know there's nothing so bad it can't get worse.

-- Spaz (Nineteen)

Importance: Compared to the people around him--particularly Ryter and Bean--Spaz may seem to be pessimistic. He, Bean, and Ryter all live in the same world, yet Spaz always seems to assume the worst. However, Spaz's cynicism is more understandable once his personal history is taken into account. Spaz already had a hard life when he still lived with Bean and her parents, having been born an orphan. Things only got worse as he began having seizures, was kicked out of the house, and was forced to go to work for Billy Bizmo to survive. Spaz has already seen his life get worse and worse, time and time again, so he is reluctant to hope that it could ever get better.

Imagine if the whole world was this color," she said to me, holding the plate up to the gray light of day. "Everything blue, even me and you. Wouldn't it be wonderful? If something was blue, you'd have to love it, wouldn't you? No matter what?

-- Bean (Twenty-Three)

Importance: The things that make Bean and Spaz marvel--like grass, trees, and blue plates--may seem common and everyday to the reader, but it helps to paint a picture of just how bleak their world is. Everything in Spaz's world is gray and dark. Finding something so bright and beautiful gives Bean hope, and makes her dream of better things. This is part of why Charly ends up breaking the plate right after Bean finds it--because he is afraid that Bean's hope of a better world will make it harder to survive in the world they live in now.

Oh what a wonderful story! I can't wait to write it down! Do you realize what you've done? You've given me a happy ending!" "But the proovs saved her, not me," I remind him. "And besides, it was your idea to come to Eden." Ryter shakes his head. It's as if his ancient, watery gray eyes can see all the way inside me. "Oh yes, we helped along the way, Lanaya and me, and even Little Face. But it was you who started the journey, son. None of this would have happened if you didn't have the courage to imagine it first." He's obviously zoomed, but I don't have the heart to tell him so. But I know who the real hero is, and it isn't me or even the brave Lanaya. It's an old man with a white beard and a walking stick and a heart so big it won't let him stop thinking he can change the world by writing things down in a book no one will ever read.

-- Ryter, Spaz (Twenty-Six)

Importance: One of the main themes of the novel is "unexpected greatness," or seeing something extraordinary in someone who seems ordinary. Ryter sees something extraordinary in Spaz, even though others have dismissed him as being a "defect," or someone whose genes have some terrible flaw. When Spaz first meets Ryter, he believes him to be just a crazy old man, but during the course of their journey, he understands not only how brave and good Ryter is, but how important his "crazy" ideas



are. By the end of the novel, Spaz admires Ryter so much that he honors his memory by taking on his name and his life's purpose.

I don't really mind the 'old' part. I'm just worried I won't have enough time to finish my book." Bean nods wisely, as if she expected that particular answer. "But would it ever really be finished? She asks. "I thought the book was your life, and it would only end when your life ends. Except it won't really end, because people will read it and remember, so in a way you'll live forever.

-- Ryter, Bean (Twenty-Eight)

Importance: This again refers to the theme of literary immortality that runs throughout the novel. Ryter references many writers throughout the novel, including Robert Frost, Charles Dickens, and Edgar Allan Poe. Though all of these authors have been dead for years, in a way they continue to live on because their words are still remembered. Ryter has sensed for a while that his life will soon be ending, which is why he is so passionate about finishing his book before he dies. This reflects a fear of death, even though Ryter never says so outright. Bean assures him here that he is capable of that same kind of literary mortality. Even though his physical life may end, his spirit and life will continue to live on.

The pages don't matter," he says. "You're the book now! You're the last book in the universe! Make it a good one!

-- Ryter (Thirty-Two)

Importance: Ryter's physical book has been destroyed, but the importance was always in allowing his ideas to live on. Spaz has changed dramatically through the course of the novel, beginning as someone who believes in nothing to one who sincerely believes in a better future and is willing to work for it. A large part of this change is because of Ryter's influence. Ryter's words will live on through Spaz instead of his manuscript, which makes him into Ryter's true last book. Spaz has always believed rather fatalistically that only bad things would happen to him, but Ryter's last words tell him that the choice of whether his life will be good or bad belongs to Spaz.