

The Mosquito Coast Study Guide

The Mosquito Coast by Paul Theroux

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Plot Summary

Mosquito Coast recounts the adventures of Allie Fox, a brilliant, talkative, irascible, manic inventor. Fox is a mass of contradictions, disdaining religion and American pop culture but refusing to buy foreign products. When Fox is unappreciated at work, he impulsively decides to move the family to the tropics. In Honduras, Fox purchases Jeronimo, a remote settlement where he creates a comfortable village. However, Fox becomes deceptive and delusional, and he ultimately destroys all he's built. As Fox leads his family into the jungle, he becomes more mentally unbalanced, ultimately causing his own destruction.

In the beginning of the tale, Allie Fox is critical of much of American pop culture, including the educational system, religion and the consumer society typified by aerosol cheese. Fox works as a handyman and jack-of-all-trades for a local farmer. After Fox's latest invention is coolly received by his employer, he impulsively packs up the family and decides to build a new life in the tropics. The family takes along only necessities like sleeping bags and tools, leaving behind their comfortable home and even leaving dishes in the sink. In Honduras, Fox purchases land on a small inland river and establishes a comfortable settlement with an assortment of native helpers. Fox is not satisfied with improvements like houses, a water wheel, an outdoor shower and privies with flush toilets. He builds a giant ice house capable of producing tons of ice. Fox is determined that the ice will establish his reputation as a miracle-worker in nearby villages. When three white men with guns enter the settlement, Fox tries to trick them into leaving. The men refuse, and Fox locks them in the icehouse, which soon explodes, burning down the entire settlement.

The Fox family flees by boat to Laguna Miskita, where, unassisted, they build a boat-like home and plant a garden. Fox's mental condition deteriorates, and he is convinced that the U.S. has been destroyed in a gigantic civil war and that he is the last white man alive. Torrential rains wash the garden away, and the house floats off with the Foxes inside. Fox takes his family upstream to Guampu. When the Foxes encounter the missionary settlement of Rev. Spellgood, they learn that the war was merely a delusion. Infuriated, Fox sets fire to the missionary's generator and airplane, and he is shot. The family, with a wounded Fox in tow, escapes by Land Cruiser and small boat to the sea. There, Fox crawls into the brush, attempting to return to the jungle, and dies. He is buried on the beach, and the family journeys back to New England.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Mosquito Coast recounts the adventures of Allie Fox, a brilliant, talkative, irascible, manic inventor. Fox is a mass of contradictions, disdaining religion and American pop culture but refusing to buy foreign products. When Fox is unappreciated at work, he impulsively decides to move the family to the tropics. In Honduras, Fox purchases Jeronimo, a remote settlement where he creates a comfortable village. However, Fox becomes deceptive and delusional, and he ultimately destroys all he's built. As Fox leads his family into the jungle, he becomes more mentally unbalanced, ultimately causing his own destruction.

In the beginning of the chapter, Charlie Fox's father, Allie Fox, drives past the mansion of Allie's employer, Tiny Polski, and into the tiny Massachusetts town of Northampton. The entire time, Charlie's father talks about the savages and how awful America is. When they pass the migrant workers who harvest Polski's fields, Father points his stub of an index finger at them and calls them "savages." Charlie is more scared by his father's finger than by the men. The finger is amputated to the second knuckle, blunt and scarred. Father continues to rant through the entire trip, with typical tirades: "'And that's probably why gas is so expensive. They put water in it. You don't believe me? If you insist there's morality in merchandising' - but I hadn't said a word - 'then maybe you'd like to explain why two-thirds of government-inspected meat has substantial amounts of cancer-inducing nitrates in it, and junk food - this is a proven fact - has no nutritional value whatsoever -'" Father drives around until he finds a parking meter with time left on it and parks.

At the hardware store, Father asks for an eight-foot length of rubber seal with foam backing. Once the seal is cut, he rejects it because it was manufactured in Japan. He curses the store clerk and walks out of the store. The two finally find an American-made product at a smaller store on a side street. When Charlie and his father return to the truck, a policeman is leaning on the parking meter. The policeman questions why Charlie is not in school, but his father insists Charlie is sick with a fungal infection on his toes and demands Charlie remove his shoe to show the man. Charlie starts unlacing his shoes, but the policeman quickly accepts the explanation and rushes off. Father likes the farm where he works, but he hates the town. That's why he keeps Charlie out of school, along with his brother Jerry and the twins, five-year-old Clover and April.

Father invented a pump for Tiny Polski a year ago. It has a sensor prong like a root that activates a switch when the ground is dry, to automatically irrigate the crops. Father is a genius with anything mechanical, an inventor with nine patents and six pending. He boasts that he dropped out of Harvard to get a good education. Father is more proud of his first job as a janitor than his Harvard scholarship. One of his inventions is a mechanical mop that jiggles across the floor and squeezes itself dry.



Chapter 1 Analysis

The family and Fox's effect on it is a major theme of the novel. Charlie clearly reveres his father and admires his mechanical genius. Still, he is uncomfortable enduring the most of Fox's constant tirades and embarrassed at the confrontation with the hardware store clerk. Fox accuses the man of working for the Japanese and berates and curses him in the store, in front of other customers. Far from being apologetic, Fox later bemoans the fact that he didn't make a bigger scene.

Allie Fox is highly critical of American culture and of all religion. He complains that the U.S. has degenerated into a mass of dope-taking criminals and morally corrupt millionaire sneaks. Father decries the necessity for locking doors. One of his favorite targets is unspecified "scavengers." He insists that there isn't a Harvard graduate that can do ten push-ups or change a flat tire. Allie Fox is a mass of contradictions. He is an inventor who rails against technology and a former Harvard scholarship student who berates the U.S. educational system and refuses to send his children to school. Fox is also highly intolerant of the Central American migrant workers who pick Polski's asparagus. He calls them "savages" and claims that they are full of disease and that they smile when they are mad, just before brutally attacking their enemies. Charlie notes that it is Fox himself who smiles when he is angry and keeps a straight face when telling jokes.

Fox is particularly critical of "funny bunnies," his derogatory term for homosexuals. Newspapers are "crap sheets," and everyone on Main Street is on drugs. Fox is also highly critical of stores that sell ice, bottled water and spring water. Fox despises religion, although he reads the Bible and can quote it extensively. He insists that there are parts of the Bible no one has ever read and parts of the earth humans have never seen. Part of Theroux's great skill is that the reader is inclined to agree with many of Allie Fox's pronouncements. Junk food is without nutrition; the nation does have crime and drug problems. Fox is merely ahead of his time in the home schooling trend. Fox seems to be merely a charming, irritable codger.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Charlie wakes up in the middle of the night knowing his father is not in the house. It's not just that he can't hear Fox's whistling snore. It feels as if there is a hole in the house where his father should be. Fearing for his father's safety, Charlie slips into his rubber boots and walks out into the farm fields surrounding their house. From a wooded windbreak, he can see the "savages," men with lighted torches walking across the fields.

The procession of men, gabbling happily, erects a cross in the field. Terrified, Charlie watches them hoist a dead man on the cross and hang him there. Charlie is convinced that the dead man is his father. Suddenly the migrant workers douse their lights and run silently towards Charlie. He has no choice but to flee.

Back in bed, Charlie remembers his father insisting that a war was about to come to America and saying, "It's coming - something terrible is going to happen here." He lies awake for hours, expecting the "savages" to attack. Finally at dawn, Charlie is awakened by his father, who demands to know where he has been. Charlie is covered with poison ivy. Charlie helps his father load his latest invention, the "Worm Tub" into the truck, and they drive to the farm. On the way, they pass the field with the cross and Charlie sees the dead body impaled there again. Allie Fox ridicules his son's fear, and Charlie realizes the form is only a scarecrow.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Just thirteen years old, Charlie feels responsible for his father, despite Allie Fox's many gifts. Although Fox is annoying and unpredictable, Charlie loves his father and fears for his safety. The nighttime excursion foreshadows Allie Fox's tragic death. Charlie is terrified that harm has befallen Father and that perhaps he has been attacked by the "savage" migrant workers. Fox has become more irritable and talkative in recent times. Charlie believes his father when he says that they will kill the smart ones first. Allie Fox is the smartest man Charlie has ever met, so he's sure to be the first killed. Charlie's mother is sympathetic to his horrible poison ivy rash, but Father insists it's Charlie's fault. Despite Charlie's obvious affection for his father, Fox shows little compassion or affection for his son. Tenderness seems to be beyond Fox's emotional range. Instead, Fox displays love for his family by subjecting them to rigors that will "make them tough."

Allie Fox rails against high prices, bad tempers and bloody crimes. He insists that America is going to erupt in a civil war and that he is the last real man alive. At this point, Fox uses the phrase metaphorically, to mean he is the last rational and ethical man in the States. One of Fox's inventions is an electric "Thunderbox" to defrost frozen pipes. It is effective, although the first time he used it, Mrs. Polski was almost

electrocuted because she had her hand on a faucet when Fox switched the contraption on.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The story that Allie Fox tells Charlie is that the family was successfully homesteading in Maine, living on a self-sufficient farm, when Tiny Polski heard of Fox's fame as an inventor. The wealthy farmer traveled to Maine and begged Fox to come to work for him. In fact, the family farm in Maine was a failure because Fox refused to use pesticides. Fox refused to eat for a while and was confined in an institution he called the Buzz Palace. After his release, Fox was fine, except that he forgot his children's names occasionally. The family went to Hatfield with nothing. Fox liked starting from scratch.

At the farm, Allie Fox shows his newest invention to Polski, who he calls the runt, Roly or Dr. Polski. Although Fox works for Polski, it is impossible for Charlie to think of anyone as his father's boss. At the farm, the two men discuss the bumper crop of asparagus that is being harvested. Polski bemoans the fact that he is running out of cold storage space. The farmer refuses to sell his crop until the price is higher.

Fox borrows a match from Polski and lights the burner on the "Worm Box." He puts a glass of water inside, and it soon turns to ice. Polski is highly critical, pointing out that Fox's contraption stinks and is highly flammable because it burns kerosene. Fox insists his invention is cheaper to operate than a refrigerator, but Polski is uninterested and brushes him off. Polski says that he saw a similar invention thirty years ago. On the way home with their machine, Charlie says it looks like a fat boy. Fox replies that when he builds a bigger one, he will call it "Fat Boy." Fox insists that Polski will change his mind and be interested in the invention.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Charlie knows that his father's version of events is not true, but it is difficult to know what portion of Fox's stories to believe. Fox's own account seems to indicate he was confined in a mental hospital and treated with electroshock, with resulting memory loss. Not eating could have been a symptom of depression or mania. Either way, Fox certainly seems to be going into a manic phase, showing symptoms of irritability, extreme talkativeness, high energy and impulsiveness. Seen through Charlie's eyes, it is difficult to distinguish Fox's personality and ingenuity from what may be symptoms of mental illness.

Fox's prototype freezer is a marvel of engineering, cheap to operate and with no moving parts, but Polski is correct that it is not an entirely new invention. Albert Einstein patented a refrigerator with no moving parts run only on fire in 1930. Despite his own preoccupation with the mechanical, Fox is highly critical of Polski's Jeep, calling it a "piece of diseased meat."



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Fox smiles as he drives past the scarecrow field again, to a dirt road with a *No Trespassing* sign. There stands a decrepit house known as the Monkey House. Inside, bare mattresses are on the floor in every room. The rooms are littered with trash like sardine cans and discarded food wrappers. The house seems deserted. There is an outdoor privy and a bucket for sponge baths. The two unload the "Worm Tub" and leave it in the house. Fox insists it will give the residents the ability to store milk and have decent food occasionally.

Later, in the Polski's cold storage room, Charlie and his father find Mrs. Polski's mink coat, hung in the cool shed to protect it from moths during the hot summer. The two work at routine tasks until mid-afternoon. They are digging a culvert when three kids from Hatfield pass on their bikes. Charlie crouches down to hide. He wishes the children knew his father had spent months inventing a gas-powered refrigerator and given it away.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Fox calls the migrant workers "savages," and yet he threatens to beat Charlie for calling their home the Monkey House. The fact that Charlie picked this term up from other children implies that in the past, the Fox children did attend school, even if sporadically. Charlie hides from the passing schoolchildren. He is ashamed of his ragged clothes and his father's menial labor.

Fox speaks compassionately for the first time, about the plight of the migrant workers who must live in the Monkey House. This is understandable, given the contrast between Mrs. Polski's fur coat in cold storage and the miserable living conditions of the migrant workers. Still, Fox is highly critical of the men for leaving the jungle to earn money in America. He sees them as leaving their primitive but idyllic home to become part of the moral and economic decay in the U.S. Fox's proclamation that "ice is civilization" is at odds with his criticism of those selling ice in town. This is just one of the man's many contradictions.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Polski comes to the Fox house after supper. Jerry and the twins are in bed, and Mother is swabbing Charlie's rash with Calamine lotion. Charlie confides his fears to his mother. He is afraid something terrible is going to happen, especially to his father. Father sends Charlie off to bed when Polski appears, but Charlie sneaks back and eavesdrops.

Polski wants Father to use his invention to refrigerate the barn, so the farmer will have space to store more asparagus. Fox refuses. Polski asks Fox to build another cold storage facility, but again Fox refuses. He insists that all Polski needs to do is sell some of the harvested asparagus, and his problem is solved. He will make up in volume what he loses in price, Fox argues. During their conversation, Polski accidentally sits on Fox's foot massaging stool and in his hydraulic massage chair.

Fox taunts Polski by describing an elaborate, multi-story cooling facility that will be cheap to operate. The only problem, Fox insists, is that he doesn't want to help Polski cheat people by manipulating the price. Polski becomes enraged and says if Fox continues talking like that, he will have no choice but to let Fox go. Fox replies that he will go where he's appreciated, finally identifying the true problem. The two men part angrily.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Charlie's undefined fears that something terrible is going to happen to Father give voice to his subconscious understanding that something is not right with Allie Fox. Mother is attentive to Charlie's physical needs, but she assures him that Father is simply brooding over a new invention. She sees Fox as brilliant and powerful. Even her patience is tried by the argument with Polski, however, and she calls Father a fool afterwards. Fox insists he just realized he wants elbowroom.

Fox claims his reason for refusing to help Polski is that he doesn't approve of the farmer's price gouging. In fact, Fox is offended that Polski didn't immediately recognize the worth of his invention and greet it with accolades. Fox's behavior is self-defeating, but he refuses to be swayed by Polski's proposals. Fox insists that profit is not his motive. In reality, it is unlikely that one farmer like Polski could control enough product to artificially inflate the price. Fox seems to be rationalizing, inventing logical arguments to justify his unbridled egotism.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The next day Father announces that the family is going shopping, and Charlie assumes they are going to the dump. That is where Father picks up most of the hardware for his numerous inventions and contraptions. The family rarely visits stores. They grow most of their own food, and there's always the risk of truant officers if the children are seen in stores during the day. Charlie secretly wants to go to school. He feels like a freak when he sees other kids. He also prefers the taste of commercial cakes like Twinkies to his mother's banana bread. The younger children are excited to be shopping, as well. Jerry plans to look at ten-speed bikes, and the twins are hoping for an ice cream cone.

To Charlie's shock, the family actually goes to a K-mart in Springfield, a nearby city. There, they purchase baseball caps for the kids, a compass and a bolt of netting fabric. Afterwards they go to the Army-Navy store and Sears. They buy camping supplies like knapsacks, canteens, hunting knives, waterproof sleeping bags and new shoes. As a last stop, Fox takes everyone into the A&P supermarket so he can exclaim over the high prices for fruit. It costs three dollars for a pineapple! They're charging thirty-nine cents for an orange! At a seed store, Fox buys large quantities of high-yielding hybrid seeds, which have been treated to resist mildew. Fox also buys morning glory seeds, because they'll remind him of his hometown in Maine, which he has dubbed Dogtown.

That afternoon, Father spends over two hours on the telephone. He goes in the workshop and gathers up his tools. About four o'clock, he gives Charlie an envelope to deliver to Polski. When the kids ask Mother where they're going, she replies that Father will tell them when he's ready.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The family usually buys only salt, whole-wheat flour, fruit, shoelaces and sundries in Hatfield. Shopping normally means a trip to the dump, where they help Father retrieve metal and wire, as well as parts for inventions. Charlie sometimes does odd jobs for Polski to earn pocket money for junk food like Devil Dogs and Twinkies. Polski calls Charlie's father peculiar behind his back. Keeping both of these secrets makes Charlie uncomfortable. Even Mother is embarrassed when Father haggles with the sales clerks at the stores. The kids are frightened to learn that not even Mother knows their destination.

Allie Fox's disdain for scavengers is another inconsistency in his personality. Since most of the parts Fox uses for his inventions are recycled, he is a scavenger himself. Yet, instead of seeing this as an honorable and desirable trait that conserves natural resources, Fox is extremely critical of scavengers, a term he applies very loosely. In particular, Fox hates the seagulls at the dump, which he calls scavengers.



When Fox chastises a clerk in a drugstore for the girlie magazines on display, he is infuriated by her reply that she just works there. He hates all politicians, but when a gas station attendant criticizes the president, Fox defends him. Fox is highly critical of the modern consumer products sold in K-mart. He insists the toaster isn't "earthed" right and will electrocute the user with faulty wiring. He disdains man-made compounds like Congoleum. The can opener is a lethal weapon, according to Father. He exclaims that the sleeping bags produced in Taiwan and Korea are made by undernourished children working long hours for miniscule wages.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

That evening as the Foxes eat dinner, there is a knock on the door. It is the migrant workers. One of them casually carries a machete in his hand. The men present Father with the machete, in thanks for the "Worm Tub." The next morning, as the Foxes leave, Charlie notices that the men have tied myriad red ribbons to the branches of the trees in the Foxes' yard. It is the last thing Charlie sees as he leaves.

Father takes his tools, the Thunder Box, the Atom Smasher and all the camping equipment the family purchased the day before. They leave everything else in the house - the dishes, the beds, curtains, Mother's radio and the cat asleep on the hydraulic chair. Father leaves the door to the house ajar. He drives the truck all the way to Baltimore, where the family boards a huge ship. All their gear is unloaded from the truck and stowed on board. Father still won't say where they are going. For several days the ship stays in port, while it is being loaded with cargo.

One day the family goes to the shore. It is early spring, too cold for swimming. Father asks, "Who's going to show me how brave he is?" Charlie is filled with dread, because he knows what is coming. Father dares him to sit on a rock amidst the incoming waves. Charlie waits in vain for his father to call him back. Instead, the man watches dispassionately as his son is repeatedly pummeled by icy waves that threaten to carry him out to sea. Finally, Charlie collapses, crying, and makes his way back to shore. On the way back to the ship, Fox gives the family truck to a black man they encounter by chance.

Chapter 7 Analysis

When the workers first appear, Charlie is afraid they are going to kill his father, again foreshadowing Fox's death. Charlie is surprised when Father speaks affectionately to the men in Spanish. Despite Fox's harsh words, he has shown great kindness to the impoverished men, and they are grateful. Charlie is filled with dread because he doesn't know where the family is going.

Charlie is also frightened by his father's "game" at the shore. They have played a similar game at Cape Cod, but this time his father seems to be regarding Charlie without affection, as a stranger would. Allie Fox has crossed a line by endangering his son. It now seems that he is capable of anything. Charlie has no doubt that his father intended to humiliate him and would have let Charlie drown had he not broken down. Mother, usually protective and solicitous, is oblivious to the danger, reading a book in the truck. She seems secure in the knowledge that Allie will protect the children. From the safety of the beach, Charlie's younger brother Jerry ridicules him for being afraid.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The Foxes sail from Baltimore on the ship, the Unicorn, in the middle of the night. At breakfast, the dining room is full. Two families, the Bummicks and the Spellgoods, occupy the other three tables. The Reverend Gurney Spellgood's family occupies two of the tables. He is a missionary and leads his family in a loud hymn before each meal. They hold a loud prayer meeting on deck each day. When Rev. Spellgood quotes the Bible, saying the last will be first, Father corrects him, pointing out that the passage from Luke actually reads, "Men will come from the north and south, and sit at table in the Kingdom of God. And behold, *some* of the last who will be first, and *some* of the first who will be last." Soon, Reverend Spellgood is so offended that he will barely speak to Father.

From a girl his own age, Emily Spellgood, Charlie learns where that the boat is bound for La Ceiba, in Honduras. It is only the second time he has heard of that country. Showing off in front of Emily, Charlie fishes with a piece of bacon rind. A seagull grabs the bait and screams like a person. Charlie can't dislodge the hook from the bird's throat. Finally, the gull flies off with the long fishing line dangling from its mouth. The Bummicks are even odder than the Spellgoods. They argue loudly with each other in a language Father says is Spanish. Father calls them half-and-halves.

Each evening, one of the families eats dinner with the captain. When it's the Foxes turn, they overhear a conversation about a faulty bilge pump on the port side. Father quickly proclaims that the problem must be a gasket on one of the cylinders. Captain Smalls assures him it is a centrifugal pump without cylinders. The talk turns to education, and Father disparages the American public schools, while Captain Smalls tries to defend them. Father has five-year-old Clover open an engineering manual and read from it to display her skill at reading. Trying to diffuse the situation, the captain offers Fox a cup of coffee. Fox declines, saying it makes him too talkative. The captain invites Charlie to visit the bridge one day.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Charlie knows the Bummicks speak Spanish only because Father tells him that is the language they are using. Isolated from school, the community and their peers, the entire family is dependent on Allie Fox for much of their information about the outside world. The children's perceptions, and to a lesser degree their mother's, are shaped completely by Fox's opinionated, bombastic pronouncements. Their dependence and ignorance is illustrated when Charlie only learns the family's destination by accident, from Emily Spellgood. Fox seems to have chosen this destination almost at random, for no better reason than because the migrant workers from Tiny Polski's farm are from Honduras.



The author employs irony in his description of the Bummicks and Spellgoods as odd. The Spellgoods are a well-dressed, conventional missionary family. The Bummicks seem unremarkable, except that they have brown skin and speak Spanish. The oddest of the three families, by far, is the Foxes. The scream of the hooked seagull, unintentionally trapped by an unfamiliar technology, foreshadows the Foxes' difficulties in the jungle. Allie Fox's hatred of the creatures, which mimics his scavenging tendencies, merely underscores the sense of foreboding.

Allie Fox is a mass of contradictions, an atheist who can quote the Bible extensively. Fox's abrasive behavior earns him no friends. He points out to the Reverend Spellgood that the Bible says that everyone who leaves behind a house, or a brother, will have everlasting life. The Reverend, Fox is quick to say, has left no one. Theroux illustrates Fox's ability to alienate others with the discussion about the bilge pump. Had Allie Fox simply acted modest and offered to help, the captain would likely have been grateful. Instead, Fox is arrogant and condescending, insulting the captain. The captain bristles back, and the two are soon at odds.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Emily Spellgood tells Charlie about her school in Baltimore and her father's two churches, in Baltimore and Guampu, Honduras. She asks Charlie if she can be his girlfriend. He says yes, but it has to remain a secret. Charlie visits the ship's bridge, where Captain Smalls tells him that life in Honduras is easy. On the Mosquito Coast, you need hardly any clothes and can just reach out and grab food to eat. The captain warns that the jungle is no place for Charlie, however. It is just like a zoo, he says. Except, the animals are on the outside, and the people are in the cages. The captain shows Charlie his sonar.

When Charlie returns to the deck, Fox is obviously jealous. He challenges Charlie to climb the kingpost, a huge beam secured by cables that juts over the sea. Charlie reluctantly shinnies up the post, over the raging sea. Captain Smalls appears and sends a sailor up the kingpost to rescue Charlie with a life harness. He angrily berates Allie Fox for endangering his son's life, but Father is unimpressed.

In the rough seas, the ship is listing badly. Captain Smalls has sealed the hull with the malfunctioning pump, and it has filled with water, shifting the ship's heavy cargo. Fox volunteers to fix the pump over the captain's objections. The two men strike a bargain. If Fox can't fix the pump, Captain Smalls will put them ashore at the next port, even if it's Cuba. Fox works all night repairing the bushings on the pump. He is a hero among the crew, although Captain Smalls is more furious than ever.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The reader recognizes that Father feels competitive towards Captain Smalls and resents Charlie's regard for him. Clearly, Father wants everyone in the family to be focused on and dependant on only him. Fox extracts revenge by forcing Charlie to climb the kingpost, a dangerous prank that could result in Charlie's death. This behavior is even more insidious because Fox tries to pass it off as a joke, or as making Charlie tough so he will grow up to be a brave man. On a deeper level, Allie Fox also seems threatened by Charlie's emerging manhood and compelled to humiliate his son. Some of Fox's erratic, paranoid behavior is offset by the affection the crew clearly feels for him when he repairs the pump and the ship is running smoothly again.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

When the Unicorn pulls in to La Ceiba, the Spellgoods are met by a Honduran girl choir dressed in pink. No one meets the Foxes. Charlie thinks he has never seen so many people standing around doing nothing. They pass an old woman in bedroom slippers selling oranges beside the road. Father buys six oranges for a quarter. The family walks around the town that evening. It is filthy, with raw sewage emptying into the sea. The beach is a junkyard. They stay overnight in a rundown hotel.

The next morning, Father moves the family to a hotel called the Gardenia that's even more rundown. He insists that most of the men in town, including Rev. Spellgood, have guns. Father devotes his time to charming the local residents. One of these men is Mr. Haddy. One night, Mother and the children return from exploring the swampy, fetid town to find Father deep in a conversation with Mr. Weerwilly, who is obviously drunk. Father has paid Weerwilly cash for seventeen acres of land, a hamlet called Jeronimo.

Chapter 10 Analysis

When Father buys the oranges, he demands to know how much they were back in Massachusetts at the A&P. The children dutifully reply thirty-nine cents each. Charlie is terrified when the Unicorn sails because it is their last link with home. Despite his father's frightening behavior, he feels the family would be lost without Allie Fox. They are far from anything they know with little money and no prospects for a job. The family has no way to return to the U.S. even if they wanted to. Theroux employs irony here. The reader is aware that it is Fox's own impulsive and possibly irresponsible actions that have put the family in this situation.

La Ceiba lacks the positive aspects of technology, as well as some of the negative. None of the houses have indoor plumbing or running water, and most of the people live in shacks. There is little industry or employment, except the fruit company, which pays slave wages. Despite the island's remoteness, the beach is littered with castoff wire, rusting metal and wood.

The presence of so many men with guns foreshadows future violent encounters in the jungle. Despite Allie Fox's frequent paranoia, he foolishly pays Weerwilly cash in advance for the land and hopes the man will be honest enough - and sober enough - to give him a deed later. Fortunately, Weerwilly is. The Hondurans like Allie Fox because he isn't condescending to them and shares his knowledge with them. Even so, Mr. Weerwilly insists Fox is crazy to purchase a town he has never seen. Frightened, Charlie checks his father's reaction carefully to see how he responds to being called crazy, but Fox is amused. The reader begins to suspect that Fox is, indeed, mentally unstable.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Father convinces Mr. Haddy to take the family and their mountain of equipment up the river to Jeronimo at night, in his small boat, the Little Haddy. Fox beguiles onlookers into helping him load the boat with one of his favorite stunts - performing a hundred push-ups. Haddy calls Fox "Fadder," assuming that is his name after hearing the children say Father. Fox offers to steer the boat, but Haddy insists that it is his boat and that he is the captain. Charlie falls asleep, and when he wakes, Father is steering the boat. Fox says he threw Mr. Haddy overboard, and Charlie believes him. Mother assures Charlie that Mr. Haddy is below deck, sleeping.

When the family reaches the port in Santa Rosa, Father refuses to stop the boat. Instead, he continues up the Aguan River, which Fox insists is deep enough to float the Little Haddy. They travel up the river, past villages with huts on stilts and overturned canoes on the riverbanks. Haddy stays in the front of the boat, checking for shallow rocks, and Fox steers. Just as they reach a man trying to scoop fish out of the river with a wooden bucket, the Little Haddy's motor catches on a rock. When Father asks where they are, Haddy replies they are in Fish Bucket. Seven or eight black men in shorts appear on the bank. Father speaks to them in Spanish, and they watch him tie the Little Haddy to a tree. Much to the family's surprise, the men reply in English.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Allie Fox shows the charming facet of his personality when he beguiles the local residents into helping him load the Little Haddy. Even more impressive is Fox convincing Haddy to let him steer the boat. Despite all the risks Fox takes, he is always successful, which inspires his family's confidence and increases his reputation as brilliant, invincible and indispensable. When the family arrives in Fish Bucket, it appears that Fox does have some kind of plan, at last.

On the trip to Santa Rosa, Fox rails against American culture again. He criticizes produce wrapped in plastic, people with boring jobs, junk food, corn flakes, interior decorators and, as always, cheeseburgers.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Jeronimo is the "muddy end of a muddy path." It has a huge tree and the remnants of Weerwilly's shack, falling apart. In the middle of the clearing, a burnt armchair sits smoldering. Three of the Zambu Indian men are named Francis Lungley, Buddy Smart and John Dixon. A family has taken up residence in Weerwilly's abandoned hut. The desolate shack is covered in morning glories. Father picks a blossom just as the man puts his face out the window. When Fox asks his name, the man replies that he is Maywit. Haddy says the flower is called a Maywit, and the people in the hut's last name is Jones. Father insists on calling them the Maywits. The Maywits share their food with the Foxes, including limes, bananas, avocados, cassava and a fruit drink they call wabool. The Maywits are a Honduran reflection of the Foxes, two parents and four children, a bit younger than the Fox offspring. With the Zambus' help, they unload the Little Haddy.

The next day, everyone plants beans, using Weerwilly's abandoned garden patch. Father's first invention is a waterwheel and rudimentary pump assembled from the scrap metal and parts he has brought from the states. It provides showers in an enclosed shed called the bathhouse. The remaining water is recycled to wash clothes and to flush the toilet in a privy Fox improvises.

Fox implements a policy that no one can be idle at any time. "If you see me sit down, you can do the same," he says. Father even eats standing up, though. Every time Father builds something, he says, "this is why I'm here." The rest of the family doesn't know why they're here, and they are too frightened to ask. Still, the constant work keeps their minds off the heat and insects. When Fox discovers a collection of tiny cars and elaborate bikes made from wire, he demands to know where the delicate tools that fashioned them are. The Maywits' son, Drainsy, admits he made them using only his teeth.

Chapter 12 Analysis

All of the Foxes are discouraged by the desolate appearance of Jeronimo except Father. He is exhilarated, saying this is exactly what he was hoping for: nothing! Fox has brought morning glory seeds all the way from Massachusetts, only to find the plant already thriving in the Honduran jungle. Again in the village, Fox rails against American camping equipment made by children in China and Japan. He reminds the children that each avocado was two dollars at the A&P supermarket. Continuing his eccentric behavior, Fox insists that there will soon be a war in the U.S., and despite Haddy's insistence, Father persists in calling the family the Maywits. In appropriating the authority to name people and objects, and in predicting the future, Father displays God-like powers. His behavior is also similar to that of Adam in the biblical story of the



Garden of Eden. Like Adam, Fox believes that he is the first man in creation, charged with populating the earth.

Charlie is amazed at his Father's endurance unloading the Little Haddy, because he knows the man has not slept in two days. Even after their hard journey, Father insists he never sleeps. Insomnia, a feeling of invincibility and excessive energy are frequent symptoms of mania. Fox insists the waterwheel is the perfect invention because it is self-propelled, uses available energy and is non-polluting. He adds that you would be certified as insane in Massachusetts for using it.

According to Fox, he respects the Zambus because they don't weave baskets or carve faces on coconuts, dance or write poems. He is unconcerned about the artistry Drainsy Maywit's elaborate statuettes display. To Fox, everything exists only to further his own plans.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Life is not easy in the jungle. The entire family toils endlessly to build a house and garden. Father claims he never needs sleep. Nevertheless, he seems more cheerful, which makes Mother happy too. One day, Mr. Haddy returns on the Little Haddy with a passenger, Mr. Struss. The man is a missionary from Santa Rosa who calls the Maywits the Ropers. Father refuses to give the man permission to set foot in Jeronimo. He challenges the Zambus to leave with the missionary. Fox forces the man to leave, without even a meal or a cool drink after his long journey. After the house and a gallery are constructed, Father starts everyone building a plant of copper tubing. Charlie begins to recognize the familiar form in the new plant they are constructing. When they harvest the Kentucky Wonder beans, Fox gives everyone a day off. It is their first day of rest in six weeks.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Although the Foxes and the Maywits toil ceaselessly from sunup to sundown, they survive only by the supplies such as oatmeal that the Foxes have brought from the states. Fox demands that they plant Americanized crops not native to the Honduran jungle, like yams, corn and green beans. The Foxes now have a comfortable house on pilings, a kitchen and a mosquito-proof gallery for gatherings. They have all the elements of a comfortable life, fashioned largely from tools and materials brought from the U.S. on board ship. Most of the necessary labor has come from the Indian and Creole residents of Jeronimo and the Fox children. Father is still not satisfied. He demands that they continue to build, starting a mysterious plant.

As much as Fox denigrates American culture, he is happy to use artifacts such as metal parts and sleeping bags. Fox ridicules the Zambus when they express Christian beliefs and a faith in God. When the missionary appears, Fox clearly feels threatened. He presents the Zambus with a false dilemma. They can renounce their faith and stay in Jeronimo, or they can leave. Uncomfortably, they all agree to stay.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The structure everyone is building under Father's direction resembles a box several stories tall with a metal lid, called Fat Boy. Most of the residents of Jeronimo, including the Maywits, think Father has run amok and built a silo. When they ask what he's going to store in it, Fox enigmatically replies that it's not what he'll put in it, it's what he'll take out. "He said he was making a monster. 'I'm Doctor Frankenstein!' he howled through his welder's mask." Fox says that all his inventions are inspired by the human body. He insists he doesn't believe in God because he can improve upon His work.

Indians and Spanish-speaking farmers come to gawk at the enormous creation. Several of the Creoles stay on, including Mr. Harkins, Mr. Peaselee and Mrs. Kennywick. When everyone is afraid of the new invention, Fox insists that Charlie will climb the interior to the top to show that it is safe. Shaking with terror but denying that he is afraid, Charlie climbs through the elaborate labyrinth of copper tubing, which reminds him of his father's marvelous, intricate and convoluted mind. When Charlie emerges, Fox forces all the male spectators, Zambus and Creoles, to complete the climb as well.

When Fox was finished welding Fat Boy, he goes to Trujillo with Mr. Haddy on the boat. While he is gone, life is more pleasant for the Fox children. Mother is not a harsh taskmaster, and for the first time since arriving in the jungle, they don't have to work all day. Delighting in their unexpected freedom, the Fox and Maywit children establish a camp beside a deep, spring-fed pool. They make lean-tos and huts. They construct hammocks from vines. The Maywit children teach them which native plants are edible. Soon, the children have constructed a town of their own with a school, church, store, telephone and even an imaginary radio. They call the camp the Acre. When the children play church, they baptize each other, and the Foxes learn that the Maywits' last name is actually Roper.

Finally, Father returns. He brings back ammonia and hydrogen to fill the copper tubes in Fat Boy. Fox warns everyone the compound is toxic, and he is the only one who has the skill to handle it. When he's done, Father fires up the Fat Boy and puts water inside. Finally, Father goes inside the invention and returns with huge cakes of ice.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The family's isolation has increased Fox's power. Fox's challenges to Charlie have moved past character-building incidents into the realm of abuse. The situation is even more manipulative because Fox sets it up so that Charlie has to endure terrifying ordeals while pretending not to feel fear. In reality, of course, fear is a healthy and normal reaction, and it's perfectly reasonable for Charlie to be afraid to climb inside a dark, three-story tower. Unlike her husband, Mother invents interesting games for the



children and is intrigued by the local ways of doing things. Through her friendship with the local residents, she discovers several rubber trees.

Fox extols the virtues of the superior varieties of corn, potatoes, yams and beans he has imported from Massachusetts, and he insults the local produce. He is particularly critical of cassava, which he refuses to grow. Fox dismisses the cassava as having little nutritive value. In reality, the plants are rich in calcium, phosphorous and vitamin C and provide more food energy per day than almost any other crop. The leaves are a good source of vegetable protein. Fox's derision simply underscores the way he devalues everything native to the tropics and lionizes himself as provider of everything good.

The Fox and Maywit children construct their own mock town in the jungle, complete with church, store and school. This mimicry of American culture suggests the children's homesickness. Through the construction of the miniature village, Theroux seems to suggest that such communities are universally human. Charlie feels that the Acre is a greater achievement than Jeronimo, because it doesn't rely on imported seeds and parts. Instead, it makes the best use of the jungle's natural resources.

Allie Fox embarks on a long rant about the evil of cheese spread packaged in aerosol cans. He says that his inventions are "natural" and therefore good, while bad inventions are always unnatural. By comparing his own creations to the intricate workings of the human body, Fox credits himself with God-like powers. By forcing the residents of Jeronimo to climb inside his tower, Fox proves his control over them and impresses them with his ingenuity.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Under Father's guidance, the entire family travels upstream in the Little Haddy taking ice to the Zambu. Father is amazed that missionaries have not penetrated the area, bringing American culture in the form of Diet Pepsi and Kool-Aid. He learns his mistake when the residents of the first village begin praying, assuming any white man must be a missionary. They have seen ice four or five times before, brought by missionaries. When the family returns with another shipment of ice, they find the natives have constructed a tiny replica of Fat Boy and are worshipping it.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Charlie begins to notice his Father's resemblance to Tiny Polski. Instead of fleeing from authority, Fox has simply made himself the dictator of his own little world. Fox rails about Twinkies, Diet Pepsi and Hershey bars, but he also denigrates the local avocados. At the Acre, the Maywit children show the Foxes a dark poisonous berry that repels mosquitoes when rubbed on the skin. As Father tries to bring "civilization" and increased technology to the jungle, the Fox children are becoming more comfortable with the native plants and resources.

Allie Fox extols the almost magical properties of ice, including reducing pain, preserving food and treating sunstroke, but in reality, his motives are quite different. Fox wants the Zambu to worship his inventiveness and technological knowledge. Thus, he is a missionary of sorts. He wants the Zambu to worship him, and he is furious to find they are worshipping Fat Boy instead.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

With the ice plant complete, Fox dreams of drilling a well to tap the abundant geothermal energy underground. Instead, he builds a huge iceberg from blocks of ice so that Mr. Haddy can float them downstream to show the residents of Fish Bucket. Next, he proclaims they will take ice to the Indians over the mountains. Exclaiming over his successes, Fox says repeatedly, "You feel a little like God."

Chapter 16 Analysis

The Foxes have finally established a comfortable existence at Jeronimo. Although everyone, including adults, children, Creole and Zambu residents, works every moment of the day, they have the basics of life. The farm is self-sustaining, no longer relying on food brought from outside. They have the only ice plant in the interior of Honduras, and yet Father is not satisfied. He craves increased fame and power, wanting to be recognized as the man who transformed this area of the jungle.

Fox still claims that he never needs sleep and seldom needs food, and his mania seems to be increasing. He clearly has begun to see himself as the God-like author of his own Eden, his own creation. Fox seems unable to appreciate the irony of his actions. By bringing technology to the jungle, he is gradually transforming Honduras into the very culture he hated in the U.S.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Father wakes Jerry and Charlie just before dawn to begin the trek over the mountains, bring ice to the Indian village there. They load huge blocks of ice on a sled for the journey, assisted by the Creole and Zambu men. They trek through the long, hot day, with the ice melting at every step. The Zambus crash the sled into a boulder, breaking the ice in two. Fox is bitten unmercifully by mosquitoes. When Charlie tries to tell him about the mosquito repellent berries, Fox is infuriated. Enraged at the Zambus, Father becomes increasingly irrational. He raves that he wants to sleep in his own bed and then immediately gloats that this is the first time ice has ever melted on this particular mountainside.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The trip over the mountains is Father's first major error in judgment, and he does not respond well to setbacks. He has greatly underestimated the distance they must travel, and the ice melts rapidly. Fox's appearance in the night, with a skull-like face and bony arms, foreshadows his death.

When the trek takes all day, Jerry tearfully asks where they will spend the night. Fox taunts him, saying they'll stay at the Holiday Inn and offering Jerry a roll of quarters for the jukebox. When they run out of food, Fox refuses to eat the native plants and animals found by the Zambus. Father insults Jerry for wanting a safe bed and a hot meal and then raves that he wants to sleep in his own bed.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Charlie wakes up to see his father slumped on the ground asleep. Fox quickly wakes and denies that he ever shut his eyes. The ice has melted to the size of a football, but Fox refuses to admit defeat. When Charlie remarks that from the mountaintop, the Honduran jungle looks desolate, Fox sarcastically replies, "You've never seen Chicago!"

Finally, the party arrives at a small village just over the mountains. The Indians here are a different tribe, and none of the men from Jeronimo is able to communicate with them. Fox delivers the tiny sliver of remaining ice to the headman of the village, but it fades away. The villagers tell Fox to leave, but he refuses. Eventually, three skinny white men wearing only shorts serve them food. Father assumes the white men are slaves and brags about all the comforts of Jeronimo, including the gardens, houses, running water, showers and ice plant. He gives the men directions to Jeronimo.

On the way back down the mountain, Father insists the Indians were amazed and confounded by the large block of ice he delivered. When Charlie disagrees with him, protesting that the ice was all but melted, Fox is angry and insulting.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Charlie notices that the women of the village are washing clothes that seem better quality than the attire of the villagers, but Father shushes him. Charlie and all the others are desperate to leave the village, but Fox insists they remain, demanding food.

For the first time, Charlie thinks of his father sardonically as the King of Mosquitia, or the Sole Proprietor of Jeronimo. Charlie is beginning to question some of his father's statements and assumptions. He is not so certain the white men were slaves, and his father's explicit directions to Jeronimo make him uncomfortable. This is a sign both of Charlie's growing maturity and his father's increasing instability. Fox's ability to rewrite recent history, even convincing the Zambus, is further evidence.

Despite Fox's pretense of kindness towards the Zambu and Creoles, he instantly makes common cause with the three white men against the villagers. Fox is offended to see the men treated like slaves and subtly urges them to leave the village.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Charlie wonders how he can protect his father from repeating the lie about the large block of ice he delivered to the Indians. He concludes that his Father will be saved only if something has gone wrong in Jeronimo. Like most wishes, he gets more than he bargained for. Jeronimo is strangely silent when they return. Although it is night, there are no lights on at the Maywits'. Mr. Struss, the missionary, has returned in a motorboat. In Father's absence, he accuses everyone of blasphemy and spreading the lies of science. He has taken the frightened Maywits away with him. When Charlie protests that their last name is Roper, not Maywit, Fox becomes infuriated. He insists the Maywits are coming back.

The Fox children still play at the Acre, although it's not as much fun without the Maywits. Since Fat Boy was built, Jeronimo is full of people who come for ice. They always want to talk and exclaim over Father's inventions. With the help of various visitors, Father begins to dig a well for water. The dry season comes, and they have to water the gardens laboriously by hand from the river, now merely a trickle.

One day, Mr. Haddy runs into camp, announcing that they have visitors approaching along the path. Father predicts it is the Maywits returning, but it's not. It's the three men from the Indian village in the mountains, and they have guns.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Charlie is old enough not to accept everything his father says at face value anymore. Yet, he still feels protective towards his father. Charlie wants to prevent the man from telling an obvious lie about how flabbergasted the village Indians were over the ice. With the ice melted and the Maywits gone, it's becoming increasingly impossible to believe in Father's infallibility. This wouldn't be important, except that Fox has built his entire personality on his intelligence, inventiveness and perfection.

Mr. Struss has seen the Zambu villagers upstream worshipping a replica of Fat Boy, and he assumes it is Father's doing. He is both right and wrong. Father wants the Zambus to worship him, not the ice plant. Still, Fox tries to pretend that he knew that the Maywits would leave all along and that he has precognition that they will return. Again, his "predictive" powers make him God-like.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Charlie recognizes the three white men's clothes as the ones the women in the Indian village were washing on the Fox's visit. The men act calm, as if they are used to taking over villages. They ask Father how many residents of Jeronimo there are, and he replies that there are thousands, counting the termites. Father tries to convince the men the entire village is infested with the insects. All of the houses are falling down, according to Father.

Mother cooks breakfast for the men, and Father tries to hurry them on their way. When the men declare their intention to stay, Father says there is no place for them to sleep. The men indicate the Maywits' abandoned shack, and Father says it's infested with termites, telling Haddy to rip the floor and roof off the shack. Over Haddy's objections that he has not seen any termites, Father insists. Fox offers the men his canoe to travel to Santa Rosa, but they are determined to remain at Jeronimo. Again, Father tries to convince the three unnamed men that there is no place for them to sleep, but they insist on setting up camp in Fat Boy, which they call the bunkhouse.

When the men are asleep in Fat Boy, Father urges Charlie to block the trap door on the top with a heavy board. He cautions Charlie that if the men hear him and start firing their guns, it could cause the ice plant to explode like a bomb, killing them all. Fox quickly lights the fire for the ice machine, claiming all the while that it was accidentally left on. The imprisoned men struggle to escape the freezing ice plant, banging on the walls and firing their rifles. Charlie knows that the pipes inside are so cold they will tear your skin off if you touch them. Suddenly there is another burst of gunfire, and the ice plant explodes. The blast destroys the ice plant, and all the houses catch fire. Father's face is half burnt, and his eyes are red. He pleads with the family to follow him, but he doesn't move. Seeing his father immobilized, Charlie leads everyone to safety in the Acre.

Chapter 20 Analysis

The three strangers invade Jeronimo as the Foxes invaded the Zambu villages. Father's inability to handle the situation illustrates his waning power or the disintegration of his personality. In the past, Allie Fox would have charmed the men, stupefied them with his amazing inventions or tricked them through superior intellect. Instead, he seems impotent to protect his family and home. Father tries ineffectually to convince the men that Jeronimo is worthless because it is hopelessly infested with termites. He also tries futilely to convince the men that the Zambus have poison-tipped arrows.

The family is in this predicament due to Father's arrogance and shortsightedness. He ignored warnings from Charlie and the Creole men that everything in the Indian village was not as it appeared. Too late, Fox realizes that the Indians were the prisoners, not



the white men. The three men are all the more ominous because they are never identified, although Charlie thinks they might be some kind of soldiers. Despite the men's stern demeanor, they have not really made any threats towards the residents of Jeronimo. The men's biggest sin is wanting to remain in Jeronimo a few days.

Allie Fox seems increasingly delusional as he denies that Charlie blocked the trap door immediately after the deed is done. Fox proclaims there aren't any locks in Jeronimo. Fox's refusal to accept responsibility for his actions in lighting the fire is even more frightening. Fox has developed an unlimited power to revise history. Clearly, the actions Fox is undertaking contradict his ideas of the utopia he has created. The destruction of Jeronimo is the inevitable result of Allie Fox abandoning his principles.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

All night, the fire in Jeronimo rages. The family is safe in the Acre, but they are plagued by mosquitoes. Mr. Haddy's boat, their best home to escape, has been burned. The children sleep under a lean-to. Alone, Charlie sits up all night watching. Allie Fox sleeps long into the morning, after everyone is awake. No one wants to hear what he will say. Mother finds the children's baskets and helps them gather yautia, guavas and wild avocados. She praises the children for building the Acre and learning so much about the jungle.

Father rises after thirteen hours of sleep, puts his baseball cap on his head and proclaims he barely slept a wink. Father insists he's happy Jeronimo is destroyed, because it makes him free. He also claims he tried to diffuse the situation with the three white men peaceably. He insults the Acre, calling the huts, tree swing, baskets and hammocks "pure monkey." He refuses to eat any native plants. Father insists they move on, without salvaging even his tools or the remaining food from Jeronimo. Surveying the river, poisoned by ammonia leaked from Fat Boy, Father breaks into tears, the most frightening sight Charlie has ever seen.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Charlie and Father's roles are reversed, as Charlie stays awake all night while Father sleeps soundly. Father's need for sleep likely indicates that his manic phase is winding down. Fox's grasp on reality also seems to be slipping. Echoing his sentiment on leaving Hatfield, Father says he is glad to be free of encumbrances. Fox has also rewritten history to insist that he tried to handle the situation peacefully, when in fact he murdered three men. Fox's insistence that they leave their few remaining tools and the little food they have in Jeronimo echoes their escape from Hatfield, but it carries overtones that are more ominous. This time, Fox's actions are clearly the conduct of an unbalanced man, instead of striking a blow for freedom.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

With Mr. Haddy, the family hikes over jungle terrain towards the sea. Mother says the three men might have been harmless, but Father calls them "scavengers." Eventually, they meet a Miskito Indian, who shares his garden produce with them. The man is one of the Indians to whom Fox has given seeds as payment for work. Thus, the vegetables he is sharing are grown from seed Fox imported from Hatfield. The man also gives the Foxes his canoe-like boat, called a pipanto, in which to travel downriver. As the family leaves the village, Fox disparages the man's hut.

Father refuses to allow anyone to touch the five huge baskets of produce the Miskito man has provided. He insists they will be the seeds for a new garden. Instead, he tells the family to gather "monkey food." On the way down the river, Father remarks that the group will soon be at Brewer's Lagoon, on the sea. From there, they could walk all the way to Panama, if they liked. Mother remarks that they could walk back to Cape Cod, as well. This is the first time she has mentioned returning to the U.S. in any way.

Father responds by proclaiming that Cape Cod and the entire U.S. has been blown away in an immense nuclear war that burned everything. He says their present predicament is a vacation compared to trying to survive in the rest of the world. Once again, Father proclaims that he is the "last man alive." This time, he seems to believe it is the literal truth. At first, this information seems unreliable. Fox has no private source of news from the outside world. Any visitors who are likely to tell him current events would be overheard by other family members. It is a measure of the Fox family's admiration for Father's intelligence, and their dependency on him, that they believe this amazing assertion. Despite the disaster at Jeronimo, Fox's exploits so far have a strong history of success, which also inspires confidence.

Chapter 22 Analysis

When Mother is thirsty, Father insists she should be able to survive seven days without water. This is both a fallacy and an indication of Father's unreasonable demands on the family. He seems to regard ordinary human frailty as cowardice. When Jerry wants to eat a single tomato from their large supply, Father inexplicably exclaims, "Who said anything about brain damage?" No one has, but it is hard to avoid the growing realization that Father is becoming increasingly irrational. The author employs dramatic irony here. The reader can more easily see Fox's deterioration than his family can, although they no longer support Father in everything. From the safe viewpoint of the 21st century, the reader also has no doubt that father is wrong about America being destroyed in a vast war during the 1980s. Isolated and relying only on Father for information, the Foxes believe his pronouncements.



In an otherwise faultless and well-written narrative, Theroux makes a rare error in calling the garden seeds the Foxes brought from the states "hybrids." As any gardener knows, seeds from hybrid plants do not reproduce true to type. Hybrids are the man-made mingling of two different cultivars. Their seeds revert to one of the original cultivars. New hybrid seeds must be purchased every year. In fact, the seeds such as Kentucky Wonder Beans, which Fox brought from America, are non-hybrid varieties, superior plants created through natural selection, which do reproduce true to type.

Despite Fox's railing against technology, he is eager to have the seeds for hardy, mildew-resistant, quick growing plants. Fox's preference implies cultural imperialism, as he rejects abundant native plants and food for imported Yankee varieties. When they argue about eating the produce, Father inexplicably tells them to gather "monkey food," something he has adamantly opposed in the past.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Floating down the river, Jerry begins to question Father's talent as an inventor. Charlie thinks his father is driven to invent hydraulic chairs and water wheels because he craves comfort. Mother suggests that Father is a perfectionist, compelled to improve upon every machine he sees.

After several days, the group arrives in Brewer's Lagoon. It's a soggy patch of ground near the ocean, covered with green algae. Father insists Haddy leave them, returning to Santa Rosa on foot. Father gives Haddy his watch in return for his demolished boat. The family takes the pipanto up the nearest creek. When they reach a spot Father declares is suitably untouched, they upend the pipanto on shore and camp under it. Soon, Father is planning a new settlement complete with house, chicken coop and garden.

The labor is even harder now, without any tools. Charlie, Father and Jerry comb the beach regularly, salvaging any metal parts or tools they find. Among other items, they find lumber, a hammer head and toilet seats. One day, they discover an Evinrude outboard motor on the beach. It has no gas or sparkplugs, so it's inoperable.

One by one, the family members fall sick, succumbing to a malady Charlie calls the "squitters." Only Father is unaffected. Jerry is the weakest of all. They are visited by a Zambu Indian named Childers, who is on his way to church. While Father talks to Childers, Charlie realizes that of the two, his father looks more like an uncivilized savage. Father is rail thin and sun burnt with long tangled hair, dressed only in raggedy shorts.

For the first time, Mother begins to question the family's fate. While Father insists she should be thankful he saved their lives, she counters that he is the one who endangered them in the first place. They argue about leaving the camp, and Mother goes for a long walk. When she returns she admits, under duress, that the family will remain here for the rest of their lives.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Jerry begins to question Father's talents as an inventor. Charlie realizes Father invents things because he craves the comforts of a soft bed, running water and an automatic foot massager. The reader understands the irony of Fox's desire for creature comforts and his simultaneous rejection of American culture, even if Charlie does not. Despite his craving for comfort, Father plans nothing more technologically advanced than flush toilets in the new settlement.



Mother begins to question the move to Honduras. Always dedicated to caring for the children, she clearly is unhappy with their living conditions. The family has little food and poor shelter. Although she is beginning to doubt her husband's wisdom, Mother has a great deal to lose. If she admits that Father is fallible and moving to Honduras was a mistake, she has to admit that her entire marriage and life have been based on a fallacy. Reluctance to abandon her beliefs and self-esteem, along with pressure from Father, keep her in line.

Despite Father's disdain for scavengers, that is exactly what he has become, beachcombing for tools to rebuild their lives. The house they construct resembles a barge, or Noah's Ark. The Ark symbolizes their sense of being the sole survivors of a worldwide devastation, destined to rebuild the world.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

The new settlement in Laguna Miskita is afflicted with a drought. The water in the lagoon retreats daily. Each day dark clouds gather over the coast near Brewer's Lagoon, but by afternoon, they dissipate without any rain. Father becomes increasingly infuriated, turning his anger on the family. Jerry develops a new nickname for Father, calling him "Farter." To plant their seedlings, the family must crack the earth's crust and make troughs. They laboriously haul buckets of water to soak the roots. Father designs a mechanical pump to water the garden, but it requires seven men to operate.

Father refuses to eat the native food and says he will go without sleep until it rains again. He spends the nights rebuilding the Evinrude outboard motor. When Mother calls the outboard his toy, Father replies that it is the only thing that is keeping him sane.

Suddenly, the sky begins to thunder. The entire lagoon comes to life. Monkeys begin to howl. Tiny turtles, iguanas and alligators begin to hatch from their eggs in the mud. Mr. Haddy visits and comments on how close the barge-like house and the garden are to the lagoon. Fox is disappointed that Haddy has sold his gold watch to buy a new boat. Father coerces Mr. Haddy into admitting that there has been "trouble" in the U.S. and that it was wiped out.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The family is becoming increasingly restive under Father's control. Haddy offers to take them all on his next voyage, to swim, fish and play in the surf. Father says no, insisting that there is too much work to be done at the settlement. When Jerry exclaims that if the outboard motor is fixed, they can go home, Father insults him.

Theroux employs irony when Father says the outboard motor is all that is keeping him sane. Jerry, Charlie and Mother have doubts about Fox's sanity. They question his allegation that a war has wiped out the U.S. population, and yet they aren't sure. Mother, in particular, faces conflict if she admits to herself that she is subjecting her children to terrible depravation for no reason. She says that if the U.S. has been destroyed, the members of the Fox family are the luckiest people on earth. If not, they have made a horrible mistake.

Without the free labor supplied by the Zambus and Creoles of Jeronimo, Allie Fox's inventions are of little use. Fox claims to have a new respect for the Zambus who manage to eke a living from the jungle, although he still says they "live like hogs." He has decided that lack of ice in the tropics is not a problem, but lack of hot water is. Theroux foreshadows the eventual flood of the house in Haddy's comment that it is too close to the lagoon. Naturally, Father disregards Haddy. Mr. Haddy names his new boat

after the watch that Father gave him - the Omega. He offers to bring sparkplugs and oil for the outboard motor, but Father declines.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The rain finally comes, falling fiercely like blades from the sky. The Foxes stay dry inside their barge-like house. In the middle of the stormy night, Charlie is awakened by Mr. Haddy. Haddy has brought spark plugs, a drum of gas and oil for the outboard motor. Haddy says the river will overflow and destroy the garden. He tells Charlie that if Father will fix the outboard motor and get the family to Brewer's Lagoon, Haddy will take them to safety.

The next morning, the garden is waterlogged. Half of the seedlings are bent and have to be gently reset. It continues to rain hard over the next week, and most of the garden is washed away. Father begins to refer to the front of the house as the "bow," as if it were a boat. Father finds the drum of gasoline that Haddy left and assumes it is debris washed up by the storm. Hoping for escape, Charlie shows Father the spark plugs and oil. Charlie claims he found them while beachcombing. While they are arguing, the barge-like house begins to move. Soon, it is afloat on the floodwaters.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Mother and Jerry want to return to the U.S., but Father insists that there is nowhere to go. He proclaims the Foxes the last outpost of civilization. Although Charlie secretly disagrees, they don't have any proof. When the house begins to float, Jerry is elated, thinking they will return to La Ceiba and go home. Instead, Father proclaims that any fool can drift downriver. He plans to go upriver, away from civilization, with the outboard motor. Instead of saving the family, as Haddy intended, technology in the form of sparkplugs and gasoline actually exacerbates their problem.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Father says he has saved everyone's life and demands to know what they are going to do to repay him. Fox completely ignores the fact that he got the family in this predicament. He insists that downstream "it's a toilet." Even Mother suggests they take their chances on the coast. Instead, the family travels up the river. Jerry and Charlie work in the bow of the boat, sounding the river for shallows and watching for rocks. They travel in silence except for the outboard motor. The noisy Evinrude frightens all of the jungle creatures into silence. When they pass Zambu or Miskito men in kayaks traveling downstream, Father insists the men are doomed.

When Father is not listening, Jerry says that one day he will take the dugout and let the current carry him downstream. The twins tell Father, and he forces Jerry into the small boat and shoves it off, abandoning the boy. Terrified, Jerry hangs onto the tiny, swiftly moving boat and howls. When Jerry is almost out of sight, Father snatches up a rope he has secretly secured to the tiny boat and pulls it back.

The family passes flooded villages that have been temporarily deserted. Father takes the bags of rice and beans he finds in the huts and harvests the limes, papayas and plantains from the trees. Father insists he is not stealing, just taking things the villagers don't need. When birds beat them to the fruit, Father calls them "scavengers."

Suddenly one day the outboard motor snaps and then goes silent. It has lost a cotter pin, dropping the irreplaceable propeller in the river. Father ties a rope to Jerry and forces him to dive repeatedly in the muddy alligator-infested waters, looking for the prop on the bottom of the river. When Jerry is exhausted, Father forces Charlie to dive instead. Neither can find the prop.

Finally, Father himself disappears over the side with the rope attached. The rope comes unknotted, and Father is missing for hours. Mother, Jerry and Charlie plan their next move. They will build a wooden rudder for the boat and float downstream to the coast, where they can hope for rescue. Eventually they'll make their way back to America, back home. Suddenly Father bursts out of the water, screaming that they are traitors.

Chapter 26 Analysis

As the family experiences repeated setbacks and begins to question the wisdom of Allie Fox's actions, he becomes increasingly manipulative. When family members disagree with him, Father calls them "savages." He ignores signs of civilization upstream, like aerosol cans and food wrappers floating downstream. The only family members who still accept Father's views without reservation are the six-year-old twins. When Father forces Jerry to dive in the dangerous river, Mother begs to go in his stead.



In Fox's mania, he believes that acts of cruelty such as his abandoning Jerry to the swift river somehow prove he is an intelligent, rational, thoughtful person. In reality, even if a young boy is frightened to be abandoned in the jungle alone, that certainly doesn't prove that his father is sane. In fact, Father's increasingly violent, abusive and manipulative behavior suggests he is losing his sanity. A further sign of his deterioration is Father's new willingness to steal from the native villages while decrying the animals that do the same thing.

Father proclaims that the family's hardscrabble, hand-to-mouth existence and backbreaking work is the new future. He laughs to think that once he placed his faith in technology like monorails and space capsules. Even as he denigrates technology, Fox relies on an outboard motor - rare in the jungle - to transport the family.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

For three days, Jerry and Charlie are punished, forced to ride in the dugout towed behind the boat. When Father finally allows the two back aboard, they are sick and sun burnt. After eleven days traveling upriver, they encounter an inhabited Miskito village. The villagers, a clan named the Thurtles, share their food with the Foxes. When Father learns the men have some gasoline, he trades them a chisel, a toilet seat and a mirror for it. When the Foxes depart, the villagers ask if they are going upriver two days, to Wumpoo. The name sounds familiar to Charlie, although he can't think why. That night in his hammock on board, Charlie realizes that the men were saying Guampu and why it's familiar.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Jerry is frightened of Father, but he also suggests killing him. It seems to be the only way the family will ever escape the man's control. Father tries to charm the villagers just as he did at Jeronimo. This time, his talkativeness and actions, including tickling the unsuspecting men with the stub of his forefinger, merely seem manipulative and insincere. Father uses the primitive conditions of the village to bolster his argument that the world has been thrust into darkness by a catastrophic war.

Fox is still enthralled with the very technology that he rejects. He encounters a wheelbarrow in the village and admires its design. Yet, he tells the village men they don't need an axe, better tools to make their boats or electricity. Still, Father is adamant that he needs the gasoline and that the villagers do not.

The three items Fox barter to the Indians for the gasoline symbolize both the best and the worst of civilization. The men can hollow out their dugout boats more efficiently with the chisel, so it represents transportation. The toilet seat represents sanitation, and the mirror represents vanity. To Fox, all three symbolize the fatal shallowness of civilization, which is overly preoccupied with convenience and outward appearances. In this bargain, each side is trying to cheat the other, since Father is foisting the dregs of popular culture off on the Indians, and they are giving him gas so befouled with water that it's useless.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Only Charlie realizes the significance of the name Guampu. The gasoline from the Miskitos is bad and constantly fouls the outboard's valves. Finally, in a fit of rage Father throws the motor overboard. The family uses long poles to propel the boat up the river, against a current that is gentle this close to the source. They pass several inviting clearings for settlements, and Mother suggests they make their home at one. The others impassively agree. Only Charlie urges the family to press on to Guampu.

Five days from the Thurtles's village, the family hears a plane high overhead. Father denies it is an airplane, insisting it is just loud crosswinds. From the bow, Charlie sees a can of Diet Pepsi and an empty green bottle floating downstream. Later that day, Mother hears church music coming from the trees. Father insists it is birds singing.

The boat rounds the corner, and the family sees a beautiful, clean, orderly village with a white church, complete with steeple, surrounded by neat bungalows. A generator chugs gently beside a shed, and there is a sewer pipe emptying into the river. There's even a small trash dump full of bottles and cans and a basketball net with backboard. Father wants to rush away, but Mother wants to stay and ask for help. Charlie suggests that they have found Guampu, and the Spellgoods' mission.

The Foxes hear Reverend Spellgood's voice coming from the church. They open the door and see a congregation of Miskito Indians listening raptly. They are focused on a TV and VCR in front of the chapel, showing a tape of Spellgood preaching. Father jerks the TV cord out of the wall, and the Indians file calmly out the door. Father hustles everyone back aboard their shabby, leaky boat. When Clover wants to stay and explore the paths in the village, lined with whitewashed stones, Father replies, "This place doesn't exist!"

After dark, Charlie and Jerry sneak out a hatchway and swim ashore. They creep to the largest house. Inside, they can see the Spellgoods watching TV and eating big bowls of ice cream. Seeing how well dressed they are, Charlie feels ashamed of his long hair, ragged shorts and mud-covered body. When the show ends, the Spellgoods argue good-naturedly whether they will watch *Star Trek* or the *Muppets* or play the video game *Space Invaders*. Instead, Rev. Spellgood insists they watch a tape of the *World Crusade for Christ*.

One of the younger Spellgood children comes onto the porch. Charlie asks him in Spanish to fetch Emily. When she comes, Charlie tells Emily they need help. They sit under a nearby tree. Emily excuses her absence by telling her parents it's just some Indians who want to be baptized. Emily explains that her family just returned from a nearby village in their nine-seat plane.



Emily calls Charlie "weird" and wonders if he's "nuts" when he asks if America has been destroyed. She agrees to help the Foxes return to the coast, but Charlie rejects the notion of being flown in the plane. Their father would follow them if they tried to float downriver, so Emily suggests they travel across land, in the mission's Land Cruiser. She agrees to get the keys for them. The Indians have taken the Land Cruiser before, she says, so her father won't be suspicious.

The Foxes admit they're afraid of their father. Emily tries to reassure them, telling them her father has a gun. Just then, the power generator goes off. Emily thinks it's a malfunction, but Charlie is sure that his father has sabotaged it. Before they leave, Emily asks Charlie to kiss her.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Charlie has reason to suspect that the family will find allies and reliable information in Guampu. To Charlie, the detritus of civilization is a sign of hope. Frightened by Father's horrible predictions of the future, only the past holds any hope. The thought that American culture might continue as it always has is consoling. It's also frightening, since the existence of a continuing culture in the U.S. will be conclusive proof that Father is insane.

The neat, ordinary appearance of Guampu contrasts with the family's predicament. They are floating in a boat made of wood and tar, without a motor, with few tools and little food. Everyone is sun burnt, gaunt from near-starvation and severely bitten. Even in the face of strong evidence such as planes flying overhead, Father insists that civilization has been destroyed. Father orders the children into the cabin and blocks the door so they can't escape. Soon they hear the sound of him leaving in the dugout. Later, a noisy small plane lands nearby.

Emily is shocked by the Foxes' appearance. While she and her siblings have grown over the past year, Charlie and Jerry are smaller than ever, scraggly, filthy and unhealthy. The ice cream the Spellgoods are eating symbolizes the epitome of technological civilization to the Foxes - extra calories, dairy products and frozen, to boot. Even the hot shower and Kool-Aid Rev. Spellgood casually offers the Indians sounds like an unimaginable luxury.

Charlie asks where on earth the Spellgoods got a plane. He means, how did they salvage such a valuable item from the collapse of civilization? Emily's response, that their church in Baltimore donated it, is Charlie's first clear intimation that despite his father's claims, nothing has changed in the outside world. When Emily confirms that Baltimore and the U.S. still exist, largely unchanged, Charlie's view of his father changes instantly. Kissing Emily is an odd experience for Charlie. At first, he can't wait for it to end. Then, when it's over, he wishes he were back on the riverbank kissing her again.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Back aboard ship, Mother is awake, and Charlie can tell by her tone of voice that she is frightened. Charlie tells her everything at home is okay, but Mother says it doesn't make any difference. Father hated living in America. She refuses to leave her husband behind. Without her to drive, they can't make it out of the jungle. Charlie and Jerry try to convince their mother to escape. They remind her that Father is missing and may never return. If they wait until daylight, it will be too late. Rev. Spellgood will notice the car keys are missing.

Suddenly, something blazes behind the bungalows. Huge flames light the trees, giving off the stink of burning gasoline. Charlie orders Jerry to grab the twins and tells his mother they must leave. Father appears on the shore, ordering them back to the boat. He has used the mission's gas to set fire to the Spellgoods' plane. The burning plane causes the generator to explode, and soon nearly the entire compound is aflame. Charlie and Jerry shout at their father, calling him a liar. They still want to escape. Again, Jerry suggests they bash Father's head in with a hammer to prevent him from following them. Charlie refuses.

Charlie suggests that Jerry jump to shore and run away with him, but Jerry says if they do, father will kill Mother and the twins. When Father comes aft to see why the two boys are delaying, he steps into the middle of a coil of chain. Charlie yanks the chain snug around Father's ankles, trapping him. Father struggles, falls over and hits his head against the side of the boat. Father is barely conscious, drooling and smiling. Jerry ties Father's hands behind his back.

From the shore, Spellgood is shouting at his unknown attackers on the boat in Spanish and the Indian language Twahka. Charlie hustles Jerry, Mother and the twins into the dugout. From the shore, Spellgood is firing shots at the boat, calling them communists and demons in Spanish. Father struggles to his feet just as another shot rings out. Father falls to his knees, crying out, "I'm all right! It's okay! I'm alive!"

When the dugout reaches the shore, Jerry gets out with the twins. Father calls out for them to help him because he's bleeding. Mother refuses to leave Father now that he is injured. She paddles the dugout, with Charlie a reluctant passenger, around to the dark side of the boat, away from the shore. With Charlie's help, she rolls Father into the small boat. There is a crack when he lands, as if his back were breaking. They row back to shore unseen. Spellgood continues to cry out at his unknown attackers, threatening revenge. Even untied, Father is unable to move his hands and feet. They drag Father to the jeep.



Chapter 29 Analysis

Mother admits that leaving Hatfield was a mistake, but she feels they all have to live with it. Her loyalty to her husband outweighs the damage to her children. Mother feels that by questioning Fox's authority, she will make an unstable situation untenable. Father still contends that America has been destroyed, after he sets fire to the plane. He accuses everyone of trying to undermine him, even Mother.

Despite Charlie's desire to escape and return home, he can't bring himself to harm his father. Allie Fox brings about his own destruction by blowing up the Spellgoods' plane and generator and setting fire to the compound. Imaging himself to be impervious to harm, the epitome of his delusion of infallibility, Fox stands up while Spellgood is firing at the boat.

Only the tragedy of Father's injury allows the Foxes to escape the jungle. As long as Father remained uninjured, he would remain in control, and Mother would refuse to defy him. As the Foxes flee, they hear shouts for help from the burning village. It seems to Charlie that the Foxes are the ones who should be shouting for help.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Mother drives the stolen Land Cruiser as fast as she can through the darkness over the twenty-eight miles of rutted track to Awawas. The river mud on Father smells like death. His face is blue-white. Once they reach the river, several Indians recognize the Spellgoods' car and greet them. Mother starts barking orders, demanding a boat, food and water. She tends to Father's wound. He has been shot in the neck. His spine is not broken, but red strings and fat are exposed in the wound. The Indians carry Father to a flatboat and give the Foxes beans, rice and coffee to take with them. As the Foxes leave, Father weakly raises his head and asks if they are going upriver. Mother tells him yes, as they turn the boat downstream.

At night, the Foxes anchor near mission villages. Mother demands food, water and medicine, and she receives it. The missionaries and Indians confirm that all is well back in the states. With Father injured, the twins are so that frightened they vomit. On the three-day trip to the coast, Father rants. He claims the human body is badly designed. Once they reach the coast, Father recognizes the sound of the surf, and he is furious. Even unable to more, his fury is fearsome.

The Foxes camp on the beach near Cabo Gracias, a village. There are no doctors. There are no boats to take the family to La Ceiba, where they could catch a banana boat back to America. For five days, the family lives on the turtle eggs they collect on the beach. Mother demands medicine and water from the villagers, who think she is a crazy woman.

Father's legs are still paralyzed, although he can move his hands a little now. Finally one day, while Mother is away in the village, a boat comes. Father tells Charlie to find out who it is. Charlie leaves the crippled man. The boat is full of turtles. The mainsheet is broken, and the boat owner needs some rope.

While Charlie is talking to the boat owner, he hears shouts from camp. It is the twins. Father has crawled away from the camp, to a slope of sand. Five vultures stand over him. When Charlie runs up, the creatures are attacking Father, ripping his flesh. Even as Charlie grabs a stick to chase the birds off, one rips out Father's tongue.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Mother acts in an uncharacteristic way when Father is incapacitated, issuing orders and demands. When an Indian tries to console her that death is simply an inevitable part of life, she vigorously disagrees, much as Father would have done. Allie Fox's death is foreshadowed in his smell, his pale white face and the way the Indians carry him feet first, as if they were pallbearers. Even in his weakened state, Father still tries to control



the family. He querulously asks if they are going upriver. Mother lies and assures Father that they are carrying out his wishes.

Ironically, Father is attacked by scavengers. These are the creatures he hates the most and most resembles. He has died while trying to crawl back to the river, where he can make his way upstream, away from civilization. In pulling out Allie Fox's tongue, the birds have symbolically destroyed him. Fox's very life has depended on charming and manipulating those around him by using words. Without his ability to speak, Fox is truly dead.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

The family might have starved on the beach, but Father's death draws attention to their plight. The death of a white man is a remarkable event on the Mosquito Coast. News travels fast. The villagers call Father a white missionary. How he would have hated that! Soon Mr. Haddy arrives and weeps. The Foxes remember they have been too hungry and exhausted to cry over Father's death. Mr. Haddy takes the family back to La Ceiba.

Chapter 31 Analysis

Mr. Haddy and the Fox family find it difficult to believe Father is dead. They keep expecting him to walk up at any moment, barking orders. Charlie stills hears his father's voice in his head, proclaiming that he is the last man alive. After their long stay in the jungle, believing the entire world had been destroyed, even the shabby taxi in La Ceiba seems like a wonderful artifact of civilization.



Characters

Allie Fox

Allie Fox is the protagonist of *Mosquito Coast*, the driving force behind the Fox family. In many ways, the novel is simply an exploration of Fox's personality. Fox's age is not specified, but since he has a fourteen-year-old son in 1980, it's assumed to be somewhere between thirty and fifty-five. Fox has strong and somewhat unorthodox beliefs that are often in conflict with each other. He thinks religion is manipulative, and he finds it impossible to believe in a God whose inventions Fox himself can improve upon. Fox insists that all his best inventions are based on the marvelous human body, even while he rails against man's frailty.

Fox decries cheeseburgers as being unhealthy, while constantly smoking a smelly cigar. He claims to abhor American pop culture, from TV to politics to magazines, but he thinks you can't blame everything on the president. Despite Fox's dislike for America, he refuses to purchase any products made abroad. Fox constantly wears the most American of hats, the baseball cap. When he decides to introduce high technology to the jungle, it is in the form of iced beverages, the most quintessentially American of luxuries.

Fox appears to suffer from a manic episode during the novel. Mania is typified by elation, euphoria, very sociable behavior and extreme impatience. Those in a manic phase often have racing thoughts, a strong desire for action and display impulsive behavior. They are talkative, self-confident and experience delusions of grandeur. Physically, in a manic phase people display a tireless hyperactivity, needing less sleep than usual and displaying fluctuations in appetite. Fox demonstrates all of these symptoms during *Mosquito Coast*. Fox's charm, lack of appetite, insomnia, creativity, impulsivity, impatience and constant activity all suggest he is in an episode of mania.

Episodes of mania are usually associated with bipolar disorder. Individuals with bipolar disorder (sometimes called manic depression) often experience extended periods of mania or depression, interspersed with periods of normal mood. Fox's yearlong manic episode is an unusually lengthy one. There is some evidence in *Mosquito Coast* that Allie Fox has suffered a previous bout of depression. In an early chapter, Charlie casually relates that his father was confined to a mental hospital he calls the Buzz Palace and apparently received shock treatment when Allie was younger. To Charlie, this seems to be just one more of Fox's fantastical exploits in a thrilling life. It is also possible that Fox is one of the rare bipolar individuals who experience manic episodes without any corresponding episodes of depression.

Fox's bipolar disorder is not the problem in *Mosquito Coast*; his lack of treatment is. Bipolar disorder likely has genetic origins. It is the mental condition most successfully treated with medication. Lithium has been used successfully to treat bipolar disorder since 1949. Today, more sophisticated drugs are also available. Many famous and



creative people have bipolar disorder controlled by medication, including entertainment mogul Ted Turner and actors Patty Duke and Carrie Fischer. Bipolar individuals often report heightened creativity during manic episodes. Beethoven reportedly had bipolar disorder and composed most of his music in manic states. Other famous figures with bipolar disorder include astronaut Buzz Aldrin, musician Axl Rose and artist Vincent Van Gogh.

Charlie Fox

Charlie is thirteen as the novel opens, the oldest child of Allie Fox. Charlie is entranced by his brilliant and personable father. He accepts everything his father says at face value, believing that cheeseburgers and the Japanese are evil, that the migrant workers are savages and that no one properly appreciates Fox's brilliant inventions. Although he accepts Father's point of view, Charlie does wish he attended school like the other children in Hatfield. He is ashamed of his shabby clothes and homemade haircut. Charlie avoids children his age, especially because he doesn't want them to see his father working in a ditch like a common laborer.

Father often shames Charlie into attempting almost impossible feats, such as clinging to a rock being pounded by waves at high tide. As time goes on, these feats become more dangerous, such as shinnying up the kingpost on a ship, where a slip will land Charlie in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Fox is particularly likely to victimize his son in this way when Charlie shows any signs of doubting Fox's pronouncements. Charlie dislikes these exploits, but he endures them, accepting that they will make him fearless, and thus a "real" man. As the family's trials in Honduras continue, Charlie comes to have a more objective view of his father, although he continues to follow Fox most of the time.

Mother

One of the most intriguing characters in *Mosquito Coast* is Charlie's mother. The woman lacks even a name of her own. She is called Mother by the children, and she is eventually called a variation of Mother or Ma by the residents of Jeronimo. The defining moment in Mother's life was her choice to trust Allie Fox, to put all her faith in his genius and embrace his worldview. Once Mother has undertaken that challenge, she seems unable to alter it, despite the hardship and harm to her children.

Mother seems to embrace a 1950s view of marriage where the husband has unlimited power and is always right. She continues to submit to Fox's dictums long after they become arbitrary and illogical. When alone for brief periods, Mother is nurturing and supportive of her children, but she refuses to interfere when Father endangers their lives. It is almost as if, having decided to place her faith in Fox's brilliance and sanity, she is unable to face the humiliation of admitting her mistake. By ignoring Father's mental disorder and giving him unlimited power over their family, Mother enables his disease. She is perhaps more responsible for the disastrous outcome than Fox, since she presumably is the saner and more objective of the two.



Jerry Fox

Jerry is Charlie Fox's younger brother. Jerry's age is never given in the novel, but it is likely somewhere between seven and eleven when the narrative opens. Jerry is the middle child between the five-year-old twins and the thirteen-year-old Charlie. There seems to be at least a two-year gap in ages, as Jerry is not especially close to either. Theroux uses Jerry's character in the last half of the novel as a mouthpiece for the family's increasing doubts. In particular, Jerry is unconvinced by Allie Fox's assertion that America has been destroyed and that he is the last man alive. Jerry's repeated suggestions that they simply knock Father in the head with a hammer and kill him to escape Honduras address the reader's doubts about Fox. They also allow Theroux to illuminate Charlie Fox's character more fully, by contrast.

Clover Fox

April and Clover Fox are five-year-old identical twins. Although the girls appear identical, they have very different personalities. Clover is the leader, always more vocal, more insightful and the more critical of the two. One trait the girls share is that they never, for one instant, doubt their Father's pronouncements. When Allie Fox claims that America has been destroyed and his family is lucky to have him, the girls agree wholeheartedly. This unquestioning acceptance is a function of the girl's young ages. It is also inspired by their mother's example.

April Fox

April Fox is Clover's identical twin. April is the less vocal twin. She only has three or four lines in the entire novel. The most powerful one occurs when the family goes into town and April hopes aloud that they will be able to buy ice cream. This shows that although the Fox children accept their father's pronouncements as unqualified truth at that early date, they are still normal kids.

Reverend Spellgood

Reverend Gurney Spellgood is a Protestant minister with a church in Baltimore and a mission at Guampu in the Honduras. The Spellgood offspring are so numerous that they are never identified individually. The Foxes first encounter Spellgood on board the Unicorn, when both families are traveling to Honduras. The minister embraces many aspects of popular American culture, which he calls wholesome. Spellgood tries to convert Allie Fox, a determined non-believer. Instead, Fox alienates Spellgood by besting the minister in a scripture-quoting contest. Despite his religious fervor, Spellgood carries a gun to defend the family against "communists." Spellgood eventually shoots Allie Fox after Fox attacks the mission.



Emily Spellgood

Emily is the Spellgood daughter about Charlie's own age. She develops a crush on Charlie aboard the Unicorn. Eventually, Emily helps the Foxes escape the jungle by sneaking them the keys to the Spellgoods' Land Cruiser.

Mr. Haddy

Mr. Haddy is the Foxes most loyal friend in Honduras. He owns a motor launch, the Little Haddy, which Allie Fox hires to transport the family and their extensive supplies to Jeronimo. Despite Haddy's protests that he is the captain of the boat, Fox ends up steering the vessel. The Little Haddy is demolished in the fire in Jeronimo. Of all the residents of Jeronimo, only Haddy accompanies the Foxes to Brewer's Lagoon.

The Maywits

The Maywits are a Creole family who live in Jeronimo. When Father buys the settlement, he apparently believes he has bought the family as well. Along with everyone else in Jeronimo, the Maywits work from dawn to dark seven days a week at Father's behest. Father requires the Maywits to renounce their religion or leave the comforts of Jeronimo. When Fox learns the family's name is actually Roper, he refuses to believe it.

Tiny Polski

Tiny Polski, a large, pig-like man, is a gentleman farmer and Allie Fox's boss at the beginning of the novel. Fox is a handyman on the Polski asparagus farm. Polski always dresses in worker's clothes like overalls and plaid shirts. However, his clothes are always spotless because Polski does no actual work. When Polski doesn't immediately understand the application of Fox's latest invention, Fox quits his job and moves to the tropics.

The Migrant Workers

On Tiny Polski's farm, asparagus is harvested by migrant workers from Honduras. Allie Fox is highly critical of the men, calling them savages and ridiculing them as monkeys. Still, Fox is respectful of the men in person and even kind. Fox gives the men the tiny prototype refrigerator called the Worm Tub. In gratitude, the migrant workers decorate the lower branches of the trees in Fox's front yard with red ribbons.



The Three Spanish-speaking Men with Guns

The safety, comfort and stability of Jeronimo are destroyed when three Spanish-speaking men with guns suddenly appear. Fox assumes the men are hostile and intend to take over the settlement. In fact, the men make no overt gestures of hostility. Their most threatening action is wanting to enjoy the settlement's hospitality for several days, not an uncommon event in the jungle. Even the presence of guns is unremarkable in a society in which virtually every adult male except Fox has a firearm. Fox is convinced the men are a threat and chooses to murder them rather than simply disarm or confine them.

The Village Indians

Indians of several ethnic groups speaking different languages populate the villages of Honduras. Often these villagers are generous and friendly. Fox has little interest in learning the languages and culture of the Indian residents. When Jeronimo is destroyed, a nameless Indian gives the family five bushels of produce. During the family's escape, they are given food, water, medicine, bandages and even a boat at various villages.



Objects/Places

Jeronimo

The Fox's first settlement in Honduras is named Jeronimo. The name Jeronimo suggests Geronimo, a famous Native American warrior whose name paratroopers often shout when jumping out of an airplane. Thus, the name carries connotations of a less complicated culture and tremendous bravery. At its peak, Jeronimo includes such marvels as a waterwheel, flush toilets and unlimited hot water for showers. Life is comfortable there, although every man, woman and child in Jeronimo must work non-stop seven days per week to achieve that comfort. The settlement at Jeronimo is a huge success, primarily due to the free labor provided by the Maywits and Indians. The food, tools and metal supplies the Foxes brought from the states play a huge part in Jeronimo's success.

The Acre

The Acre is a camp or pretend village established by the Fox and Maywit children near a deep pool. The miniature village soon includes lean-tos, huts, a store, school and church. Although Allie Fox rejects religion, capitalism and formal education, the children embrace them in their own tiny town. Theroux uses this situation to suggest that certain features of culture including trading, religion and education are an essential part of human nature.

Hatfield, Massachusetts

At the beginning of the novel, the Foxes have a modest home near the small town of Hatfield, Massachusetts. Their adventure starts when Allie Fox becomes disgusted with his employer and decides to seek a simpler life with his family.

The Worm Tub

Allie Fox is in the habit of naming his inventions. The "Worm Tub" is his name for his prototype icebox, powered by gas or fire and containing no moving parts. As Tiny Polski points out, it is actually not an original invention. Albert Einstein patented a similar device in the early 1930s. The name "Worm Tub" is significant because the invention certainly creates a complicated situation, or "opens up a can of worms," for the Foxes when it inspires Allie Fox to move to Honduras.



Fat Boy

When Charlie notes that the "Worm Tub" looks like a Fat Boy, his father remarks that when they actually build a full-sized, operating ice plant, they will call it the "Fat Boy." This name is reminiscent of the atomic bombs nicknamed "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" dropped by the U.S. during World War II. Just as the nuclear weapons destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Fat Boy is a technological marvel that destroys Jeronimo. Just as the bombs arguably ended the war, the explosion of Fat Boy initiates the chain of events that results in the Foxes eventual return home.

Honduras

Allie Fox denigrates the migrant workers on Tiny Polski's farm, calling them "savages." When Fox decides to take his family to the tropics, he chooses the homeland of these migrant workers, claiming they are simply "trading places."

The Unicorn

The Fox family sails on to Honduras on the banana boat the Unicorn, under the direction of Captain Smalls. Allie Fox never deigns to tell his family where they are going, and Charlie learns the truth accidentally from Emily Spellgood.

The Little Haddy and the Omega

The Little Haddy and the Omega are Mr. Haddy's boats. Initially, Mr. Haddy agrees to transport the family to the river. Under duress, he continues upriver under Allie Fox's direction. When the Little Haddy is destroyed in the Fat Boy explosion, Allie Fox gives his valuable watch to Mr. Haddy to compensate. Nevertheless, Fox is incensed to discover on his next visit that Mr. Haddy has traded the timepiece for a new boat, which he names the Omega after the watch.

The Barge-like House

After the explosion at Jeronimo, the family settles at Laguna Miskita. There, under Fox's orders, they build a sturdy, unwieldy but watertight house shaped like a barge. When the lagoon is flooded and the house floats, Allie Fox pretends that was his intention all along.

The Outboard Motor

The outboard motor symbolizes Allie Fox's complicated relationship with technology. As an inventor, Fox is constantly creating and improving on technology. Yet, as a man, he is constantly deriding and rejecting it. Fox's quest to seek a "simpler" existence with less

dependence on technology for his family upriver is possible only because he has the technology of the Evinrude outboard motor.



Social Sensitivity

the 1960s and 1970s, Americans began to question their country's image as the material paradise, "the land of opportunity." That questioning led to the founding of communes and other experimental societies. It also prompted some adventurers to escape the stifling, success-oriented climate of American city life to recover those Thoreauan values of self-reliance and resourcefulness in still untouched regions of the world. The hero of *The Mosquito Coast* is just such a frustrated fellow, who uproots his family from the security of their Massachusetts home and drags them to the Honduran jungle to help him build his own brave new world. Even though the family at first functions smoothly as a unit, the reader soon realizes that Father's missionary spirit has its darker side. In fact, his scorn for the natives' habits, especially their lack of industry in helping him to build an ice-making factory, begins to look more like the working out of America's "manifest destiny" on foreign soil. Father changes into a parody of the ugly American as he attempts to teach the inhabitants the technology needed to make their own ice.

The portrait of oppression suggests as well the consequences of an unharnessed patriarchy. Father's authority goes unquestioned by Mother, who qualifies as a classic enabler, indulging her creative child-husband yet trying to limit the damage his abuse inflicts on her children. The tragic conclusion of the novel signals an escape for Mother and her offspring from Father's control; readers hope that the narrator, thirteen-year-old son Charlie, can likewise escape the role of all-powerful male that Father tried to impose on him. In the surroundings of the Acre, the children's secret camp in the jungle, Charlie manages to establish a truly cooperative, natural society in which technology and its attendant hierarchy have no place. Although short-lived, this community appears to offer a reasonable alternative to Jeronimo, Father's settlement.

While deftly depicting the flaws in American society, Theroux also demonstrates that missionary zeal — both religious and technological — is a major cause of America's tarnished image in the world. (This view may stem from Theroux's own experience as a Peace Corps teacher in Africa.) The events of *Mosquito Coast* dramatize how the unthinking imposition of these values on native cultures can suppress human impulses and lead to destruction.



Techniques

By using a young first-person narrator, Theroux creates an effective point of view from which to observe Father's character. Readers experience the tension and ambivalence that Charlie feels, and alternately laugh and shudder at Allie's words. Charlie proves a faithful reporter, honest and less critical than the other children. His relationship with Father is psychologically complex, because Charlie both fears and respects him and this lends considerable tension to the story. The sensitivity of Charlie's vision can also be seen in his descriptive powers as he makes the jungle come alive. Readers may feel slightly manipulated, however, because many passages reveal the professional hand of Theroux himself.

Charlie also lacks the personality and perspective of such entertaining firstperson narrators as Huck Finn or Jack Crabb from Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* (1964).

Key episodes in *The Mosquito Coast* have biblical parallels. The leveling of Jeronimo recalls the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Babylon, with the accompanying implication that the settlement and Fat Boy represent unnatural evil. After the family relocates on a primitive raft, they experience a frightening storm and a flood tide that nearly swamps them. Here the parallel with the Flood and Noah's deliverance could have ironic relevance, since Father revives only to lead his family toward greater danger. The final event of the book, with the appearance of vultures on the beach, calls to mind the chapters in Revelation prophesying the Apocalypse. On the simplest level of fable, Father can be seen as receiving just punishment for his Satanic defiance of God and God's representatives. Yet Theroux is too complex a novelist to promote this moralistic reading. The parallels lend instead a mythic quality to plot and character, lifting *The Mosquito Coast* above the class of straightforward adventure tales.



Themes

Themes

The *Mosquito Coast* treats many subjects, but its main themes concern the potential destructiveness of the social rebel and of modern technology. The novel's protagonist Allie Fox rejects the shabby workmanship of America's mass-produced goods, the hedonistic features of its TV-influenced culture, and the self-satisfied pomposity of its religious establishment. Calling America a dead society, he takes his family back to nature, founding a settlement called Jeronimo in the Honduran jungle. Yet he brings with him the engineering know-how to build an ice house for his own pleasure and the benefit of the Mosquito Indians. The ice he produces clearly symbolizes a scientific Eucharist, the means of worshipping the technological god he believes will save them all. When Allie blows up the ice house (called Fat Boy, echoing the name given to America's first atomic bomb), killing three intruders whom he desperately fears, readers realize that this appealing, often hilarious loner has been transformed into a madman like Jim Jones, who destroyed his Jonestown encampment when it too was "visited" by snooping outsiders.

What Theroux seems to offer is a parable of the incestuous horror of patriarchy.

Forced to leave his now desecrated paradise, Allie finds that his iron-fisted control over his family is slipping. He seeks to regain it by bullying Charlie and his younger brother Jerry even more fiercely than before. He forces the family to head even further into the heart of the jungle's darkness, an outward sign of his own distorted inner world. When Allie is fatally shot by his alter ego, an evangelist named Reverend Spellgood, the minister believes he is dispatching Communists attempting to take over his jungle church grounds.

Theroux's ironic turn of plot here underscores the maniacal fervor of the missionary spirit housed in the rebel's personality.

Family

Mosquito Coast, at its heart, is a study of the personality of Allie Fox. Fox shows symptoms of mania, an extended period of increasing impulsivity, talkativeness, poor judgment, insomnia and inappropriate enthusiasm. This mania is exacerbated by the Fox family structure, most obviously the unqualified and occasionally pathological support of Mother.

Initially, Fox seems a harmless codger who reasonably rejects much of what is wrong with American culture, including obesity, crass materialism, wastefulness, economic exploitation, the trade imbalance and poor education. Soon, however, Fox's views become more extreme and are the justifications for him moving the family to an unknown tropical destination. Arriving in Honduras, Fox charms the local residents into



slaving unselfishly to build Jeronimo. When that settlement fails due to Fox's foolish pride, egotism and rampant thirst for technology, Fox has no one to bully and badger except the members of his own family.

Initially, Charlie is thirteen years old and accepts everything his father says at face value. Allie Fox is a genius and an oracle in his oldest son's eyes. Because the children are not allowed to attend school and are isolated, they have no basis to judge Fox's sometimes-unreasonable views. Despite the family's isolation, as Charlie matures in the jungle he begins to doubt some of his father's opinions. Part of this is a natural process of adolescence. Part is due to the disastrous consequences of Fox's actions, especially in killing the three Spanish visitors.

The twins Clover and April continue to follow their father blindly and attribute God-like powers to him throughout the novel. The twins' worship and Mother's unqualified loyalty allow Allie Fox to remain in control of the family almost until his death. After the disaster at Jeronimo, Jerry grows increasingly critical of his father's views and plans. Perhaps because Jerry was never as close to Father as Charlie was, Jerry suggests that they return to the U.S. even if they have to kill Allie Fox to do so. Jerry has been protected from the full force of Allie Fox's wrath for many years. He was never subjected to the dares and child endangerment that Charlie endures. This sense of safety may also have contributed to Jerry's tendency to challenge his father.

The most perplexing family member is the otherwise unnamed Mother. While Mother is a competent and reasonable adult, she never seems to question her husband's ridiculous exploits, even when he uproots the family to move to the tropics and refuses to tell anyone - even Mother herself - where they are going. She often tries to counteract Allie Fox's harsher actions, but she never questions him even when the family is starving. Only when Fox becomes clearly abusive on the trip upriver does she ineffectually complain or disagree. Part of this may be due to Fox's charisma. Having once been taken in, it is difficult for Mother to reverse herself and proclaim Father insane, without losing all her self-esteem. An even more important factor may be Mother's traditional view of marriage, in which a wife is always to support her husband. When she is placed in a crisis with Father injured, Mother shows herself more than capable of decisive and constructive action. She simply refuses to undermine her husband by acting in a forthright way while he is capable.

Technology

Allie Fox's relationship with technology is extremely complicated. There is situational irony in the fact that Fox is an inventor who decries technology as evil. Fox devotes most of his waking hours to developing and refining technology of some sort. Yet, he maintains that technology is evil and should be eliminated. Fox constant derides aerosol cheese, while creating a water wheel, flush toilets and an elaborate bathhouse with hot water in the jungle. While many of these contraptions are useful, but none is necessary. The local residents have survived many decades without such conveniences.



Charlie undergoes a major revelation when he realizes that all his father's inventions, from the automatic foot massager to the running water at Jeronimo, are designed to bring Allie Fox greater creature comfort. None of Fox's inventions or modifications actually makes the world a better place or solves pressing problems. Realizing that Fox's goal is the kind of indulgence he decries in others, Charlie loses much of his respect for the man.

Mastery of technology, a genius for mechanical inventions and unbridled egotism are Fox's defining characteristics. Although he is beloved and respected by the residents of Jeronimo, Fox longs to be worshipped like a God. This is his impetus for building the ice plant, despite Fox's many claims about preserving meat and eliminating pain. In fact, both the Foxes and the Honduran natives have other methods to preserve food and alleviate pain. The sole reason for Fox to create the ice plant is his self-gratification. Had the ice plant not produced disastrous results, it's likely Fox would have continued to add technology to Jeronimo until a catastrophe resulted. When Jeronimo is destroyed, Fox blames the advanced technology of the ice plant he calls Fat Boy, proclaiming that the next settlement will contain no such marvels.

Culture and Religion

As much as Allie Fox hates technology, he hates popular American culture and religion even more. Fox constantly decries the American educational system, cheeseburgers, obesity, TV, popular entertainment and girlie magazines. Nevertheless, he embraces some aspects of American culture, such as baseball caps and smelly cigars. When Fox builds his coup de grace in Jeronimo, it is a machine to produce ice for the most quintessentially American luxury, iced beverages. Fox's later belief that the entire American culture has been destroyed in some catastrophic civil war is based in part on his desire to destroy it.

Fox claims he wants a simpler life with less technology, and yet he automatically rejects the culture of the Indians and Creoles who have lived in Honduras for generations. In the jungle, Fox refuses to eat native foods. Instead, he prefers those grown from the seeds he imported from the states, superior varieties of beans, yams and corn created with modern technology. Fox ridicules the natives' designs for huts and houses, building in the style he is accustomed to in Massachusetts.

Despite the rich and often rewarding lives of the Creoles and Indians around him, Fox continues to view all "civilization" as inherently American. Chauvinistically, Fox overlooks that Honduras in Central America is also part of America. Instead, Fox uses the term exclusively to mean "pertaining to the United States." Thus, Fox feels he is rejecting "civilization" by remaining in the less populated interior of Honduras. Fox doesn't appreciate the fact that while the native inhabitants have a culture different from his own, it is still very much a culture. In fact, uncharacteristically, Fox doesn't even learn enough about the native culture to completely reject it. Like many American tourists, Fox learns he has become more American - and more devoted to the American way of doing things - by traveling. When Fox proclaims that he is the "last man left," he



means that he is the last white man and carrier of the (detested) American culture. This delusion suits Fox's inflated sense of self-importance perfectly.

Fox is especially critical of religion. At one point, Fox requires every resident of Jeronimo to disavow belief in God as a condition of remaining in the village. Fox sometimes claims that all his inventions, including the ill-fated ice plant, are based on parts of the human body such as fat, the brain, blood and muscle. Yet, Fox claims God was not a very good engineer and that Fox himself can improve on many of His creations. When he is injured, Fox again rails against the "design flaws" and frailty of the human body. Although he is a non-believer, Fox has read the Bible extensively and can quote from it. He arrogantly alienates the Rev. Spellgood aboard the Unicorn by besting the minister in a scripture-quoting contest.



Style

Point of View

Mosquito Coast is told in first person past tense, from the point of view of Charlie Fox, the son of protagonist Allie Fox. As his father's constant companion, Charlie is in a unique position to observe the man's progression into mania and eventual meltdown. As Father's constant companion and best audience, Charlie is in a perfect position to appreciate his father's inventive genius and charm.

When Charlie matures, his view of Father changes. Unremarkable events, such as Father's sojourn in a mental hospital when Charlie was younger and his shock treatments, begin to assume greater significance. When Father begins to claim, without any evidence, that the U.S. has been destroyed and that Fox is the last white man alive, Charlie is sufficiently mature to want proof. Throughout the novel, Charlie serves as the voice of reason. He urges his Mother to take the family to the coast or home to America. Yet, Charlie refuses to cooperate when Jerry suggests that they kill Father by hitting him on the head with a hammer. When Charlie learns that Fox is delusional, it clearly becomes necessary for the family to escape. Charlie is the one to take constructive action, wrapping his father's legs in a chain while the family leaves.

Setting

Mosquito Coast is set in Massachusetts and Honduras around 1979 to 1981. The timeline is evidenced by the fact that the Spellgoods have a home video game system with *Space Invaders*, a game first released for the Atari 2600 in 1980. The existence of the 1976 movie *Rocky* on video supports this approximate timeline.

Initially, the Foxes live in a modest frame farmhouse in rural Massachusetts near the small town of Hatfield. Their world is extremely constrained, with trips to the town dump to scavenge materials for Father's inventions being the most frequent outings. The family raises its own food and buys only salt, brown flour and sundries like shoestrings.

Allie Fox becomes disenchanted with the United States, which he persists in calling America. He decides to relocate his family to the tropics to enjoy a simpler life. He arbitrarily chooses the undeveloped interior of Honduras, a country he has never visited. Part of the action takes place on the banana boat the Unicorn, which transports the Foxes and their generous store of supplies. Once in Honduras, the family lands at La Ceiba, a sleepy, filthy, unsanitary town.

Allie Fox quickly arranges to have the family transported via river to a hamlet he has purchased named Jeronimo. Nearby, the Fox and Maywit children build a temporary camp, or play town, called the Acre. When Jeronimo is destroyed, the entire family takes refuge in the Acre. Then, they travel by boat to Laguna Miskita, where under Fox's direction they establish another abortive settlement. When Laguna Miskita is flooded,



the family continues up the river by boat to the Thurtle's village and Guampu. After Allie Fox sabotages the mission at Guampu, causing a fiery explosion, the family travels to Asawa and downstream to the coast near Cabo Gracias. From there, they are eventually able to secure a boat to take them back to La Ceiba.

Language and Meaning

Theroux takes great pains to render language accurately and at times phonetically in *Mosquito Coast*. The inhabitants of Honduras speak a mylange of Spanish, Creole and several Indian languages. English is the official language of the missions, spoken by many religious Hondurans regardless of ethnic group. In practice, nearly every member of every ethnic group is able to communicate, using a combination of sign language, pidgin and Creole Spanish. Even in the most remote areas, everyone is able to communicate with each other, although not necessarily fluently.

Theroux often replicates the Creole speech phonetically without in any way denigrating the speakers. For example, Mr. Haddy refers to Father's experiments as "spearmints" and his technological revelations, which approach religious experiences, as "speeriences." This serves a major plot point, as only Charlie realizes that the place the Creoles call Woompah is actually Guampu, the Spellgoods' mission.

The language barrier leads to some serious misunderstandings. In particular, when Allie Fox first takes ice to the village upstream, they begin to worship a replica of Fat Boy. Fox, of course, would much prefer that they worship Fox himself as Fat Boy's creator. The problem is exacerbated when Rev. Struss believes that Fox has polluted the religious beliefs of the villagers and the Maywits and takes them away. Another time, Fox attempts to take ice to a village across the mountains. Arriving with only a tiny sliver of ice remaining, Fox is unable to adequately express the marvel of ice to the residents and tragically unable to understand the situation in the village.

Structure

Mosquito Coast is divided into five books. Because it is essentially the story of a family's journey, it is appropriate that the books are divided geographically and named after destinations or turning points on the trip. The various legs of the journey are of different lengths, so the books are as well. The first book, *Banana Boat*, begins with the family at home in Hatfield Massachusetts. It details the family's life in Hatfield and Allie Fox's growing disenchantment with America in general and his employer in particular. The book ends with the family aboard the banana boat the Unicorn bound for Honduras, specifically with Allie Fox endangering his son Charlie's life in a fit of pique and a display of parental control.

The second book, *The Icehouse at Jeronimo*, details the family's journey from the time the Unicorn lands at La Ceiba. It follows the Foxes into the interior of Honduras, establishing a settlement at Jeronimo. The Foxes' village at Jeronimo features many comforts, including flush toilets and hot showers. In the final events of the book, Allie



Fox builds an ice plant. When the settlement is threatened by mysterious strangers, Fox explodes the icehouse, burning the entire village.

The third book, *Brewer's Lagoon*, covers events after the destruction of Jeronimo, through the abortive establishment of a new settlement at Laguna Miskita. It ends with the new settlement destroyed by flood. In the fourth book, *Up the Patuca*, the Fox family travels upriver in search of a new home. Eventually they arrive at Guampu, the Spellgoods' missionary settlement. At the close of this section, Allie Fox destroys the mission by setting fire to the airplane and generator. The final chapter is a book unto itself titled *The Mosquito Coast*, detailing the family's escape back to the coast and Allie Fox's death.



Quotes

"'This place is a toilet,' he said as we entered Northampton. He wore a baseball cap and drove with his elbow out the window. 'It's not the college girls, though they're bad enough. Look at Tugboat Annie over there, the size of her. She's so big it would only take eleven of her kind to make a dozen. But that's fat - that's not health. That's cheeseburgers.' And he stuck his head out the window and hollered, 'That's cheeseburgers!'" Chapter 1, pg. 4

"'They sell ice - ten pounds for a half a buck. But water's as free as air. Those dingbats are selling water! Water's the new growth industry. Mineral water, spring water, sparkling water.'" Chapter 1, pg.4

"[Allie Fox:] 'Would you really have taken off your shoes and showed that cop your healthy toes?' "'You asked me to,' I said. "'Right,' he said. 'But what kind of a country is it that turns shoppers into traitors and honest men into liars? No one ever thinks of leaving the country. Charlie, I think of it every day!' "He kept driving. "'And I'm the only one who does, because I'm the last man!'" Chapter 1, pg. 6

"He had grown up in a small fishing town on the coast of Maine - he called it Dogtown - where door locking was unknown. During the years he had spent in India and Africa he had kept to the same rule, so he said. I never knew for sure if he had been to those places. I grew up with the belief that the world belonged to him and that everything he said was true. "He was big and bold in everything he did. The only ordinary thing about him was that he smoked cigars and wore a baseball cap all day." Chapter 2, pg. 11

"'When it comes, I'll be the first one they kill. They always kill the smart ones first - the ones they're afraid will outwit them. Then, with no one to stop them, they'll tear each other to pieces. Turn this fine country into a hole.'" Chapter 2, pg. 16

"'Good-bye, America,' he said. 'If anyone asks, say we were shipwrecked. Good-bye to your junk and your old hideola! And have a nice day!'" Chapter 7, pg. 67

"'You're Mr. Fox,' one of the men said to Father on our first day at sea. 'You've already forgotten my name. But I remember yours.' "'Of course you do,' Father said. 'I'm much easier to remember than you are.'" Chapter 8, pg. 68

"'You're paranoid,' Mother said, and left the table." Chapter 9, pg. 84

"The captain meanwhile was shouting at Father and not waiting for answers. *Who do you think you are?* and *Are you trying to kill that boy?* and *You've got no right* - " Chapter 9, pg. 88

"'He's wonderful with strangers,' Mother said. But the strangers made me uneasy, for I had no clear idea of Father's plans, or how these people fitted in. I wished I had Father's



courage. Lacking it, I clung to him and Mother, for everything I had known that was comfortable had been taken away from me." Chapter 10, pg. 107

"It was not an easy life these first weeks in Jeronimo. It was no coconut kingdom of free food and grass huts and sunny days, under the bam, under the boo. Wilderness was ugly and unusable, and where were the dangerous animals?" Chapter 13, pg. 144

"Father's work was work. Mother's work was study and play, but mostly she left us to ourselves. We did not feel supervised as when Father was around, and little by little we ventured farther from the clearing, and even out of Jeronimo itself, away from the splash of our waterworks and the *googn* of our monkeys." Chapter 14, pg. 166

"'That's the trouble, really,' Father said. 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.'" Chapter 15, pg. 193

"The starlight made his face like a skull's and gave him bony arms. "'I want to sleep in my own bed!' he screamed. 'I tried to think of something to say. I decided, after all, not to ask him for any water. "'What are you looking at?' he said fiercely. 'This is the first time since creation that ice has ever melted here. Think of it! And you're saying that's nothing?'" Chapter 17, pg. 213

"He said, '*Stuck* with them? We're not stuck with anyone. If I believed things like that, we'd still be back in Hatfield.' His voice was flat, he was still stepping back and forth across the floor. 'No one who has the slightest spark is ever stuck with anyone in this world, or has to endure a minute of oppression. We proved that, Mother. We all choose our own thunderjug and sit on it and take the consequences.' "Mother was smiling. "'Thunderjugs,' Father said. 'That's what we used to call chamber pots down in Maine.'" Chapter 20, pg. 249

"Mister Haddy said, 'His spearmint almost kill us.' "'We're all right now,' Mother said. 'Charlie saved us.'" Chapter 21, pg. 259

"'Even if America's burned - even if it's destroyed - it's better than this. This is a stinking dump. I want to go home.'" - Jerry Fox, Chapter 25, pg. 307

"'Farter,' Jerry said. 'Farter, farter, farter.' "Father did not hear him. He was shouting, 'How can I be wrong if I'm going against the current?'" Chapter 26, pg. 323

"How had Father forgotten that name? Maybe because he hated to think about the past, the mistakes and failures. Turn your back and walk away fast - that was his motto. Invent any excuse for going. Just clear out. It had made him what he was - it was his genius. *Don't look back*. Yet for me the past was the only real thing, it was my hope - the very word future frightened me. The future spoke to Father, but for me it was silent and blind and dark. Guampu was part of the past, and with this name in mind I pestered him to push further up the river." Chapter 28, pg. 343

Adaptations

The motion picture version of *The Mosquito Coast* was released in 1986. It is directed by Peter Weir and stars Harrison Ford as Allie Fox. In spite of a good supporting cast that includes Helen Mirren, River Phoenix, Conrad Roberts, Andre Gregory, and Martha Plimpton, the movie is a disappointment. Ford is noted for his ability to carry an otherwise mediocre motion picture, but his Allie Fox is a selfish and foolish man who elicits little sympathy.

Robert F. Willson, Jr.



Topics for Discussion

At the beginning of the novel, the Fox children aren't in school, although they also don't have a formal home schooling program. (In the 1970s to 1980s, when the novel occurs, home schooling was almost unknown and possibly illegal.) What are some of the pros and cons to this situation?

Captain Smalls of the Unicorn sees the Honduran jungle as a place where life is easy. You can just pick food off the trees and wear hardly any clothes, and nearly everything is free. How is this different from Charlie Fox's view of Honduras?

What are some of the things Allie Fox hates about America? In your opinion, are any of his concerns valid?

How does Charlie learn where the ship the Unicorn is headed?

In the new settlement on Laguna Miskita, what challenges does the family face? What tools and resources do they have in Jeronimo that are not available in Laguna Miskita?

What happens to the settlement at Laguna Miskita?

Allie Fox regularly endangers Charlie's life by forcing him to complete almost impossible feats like climbing the kingpost aboard ship. Fox believes these exploits will turn Charlie into a "real man" who is never afraid. Is it true that "real men" are never afraid? Are Allie Fox's actions those of a responsible parent?

When Allie Fox declares that the United States has been destroyed in a huge civil war, Mother, Charlie and Jerry initially believe him, although he has the same sources of information that they do. Why?

Allie Fox appears to have bipolar disorder. He seems to experience an extended manic episode during *Mosquito Coast*. Research bipolar disorder on the Internet. What are the names of some famous and successful people who have bipolar disorder?

Do you think *Mosquito Coast* would have had a different ending if Allie Fox's bipolar disorder had been treated? Would there have been a story at all?

Compare and contrast Allie Fox's behavior in Jeronimo and on the trip upriver from Laguna Miskita.

Allie Fox prides himself on never striking his children, and yet he often belittles them. He repeatedly dares Charlie to attempt feats that endanger his life and manipulates the entire family into a life of starvation, illness and exhaustion. In your opinion, is Fox a responsible parent? Why or why not?

Why is Mother reluctant to disagree with Father, even when it becomes obvious that he is delusional? How does her behavior change after he is wounded?



After Jeronimo is destroyed, how does Father's behavior change? Do Charlie and Jerry still believe everything he says? How does Father react to their misgivings?

What is the significance of the vultures plucking out Allie Fox's tongue?

In your opinion, if Allie Fox had remained uninjured, would the family have escaped the jungle? Why or why not?

Literary Precedents

The Mosquito Coast belongs to the tradition of the novel of character.

Father's speech and behavior rivet the reader's attention, even though Charlie serves as first-person narrator. Theroux traces Charlie's development as the action unfolds — he clearly matures, gains insight — but this change comes as a reaction to Allie's actions. The closest American precedent for this technique is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), in which the narrator gives a detailed portrait of a complex character whom he both admires and fears. Gatsby's death, like Father's, both haunts and liberates the narrator. A recent popular precedent is James Dickey's *Deliverance* (1970), a novel about a Georgia hunter and he-man who convinces three of his less rugged, city-softened friends to take a perilous canoe trip down a beautiful but dangerous river soon to be flooded as part of a dam-building project. The narrator here is a sensitive man who is fascinated by their leader, both drawn to and pulling back from his influence.

Dickey suggests, as does Theroux, that life for modern man is a struggle between natural and civilizing influences.

Probably the most important literary precedent for *The Mosquito Coast* is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Conrad typically places his heroes in situations where the principles they have lived by no longer fit the circumstances in which they find themselves. Either they gain some degree of self-knowledge or they destroy themselves. Kurtz, the central character of *Heart of Darkness*, is a victim of self-destruction. We are told of his nightmarish crimes by a narrator named Marlow, who like Charlie does not understand all that he hears and sees. Theroux, of course, shapes his novel into a tract about an entire family's adventure (see also Johann Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson*, 1812), but like Conrad he does not allow the violent action to obscure his central theme of the irreconcilability of social and individual values. Political and economic questions, especially those related to a "civilized" foreigner out of place in a primitive society that he tries to rule, preoccupy both writers.

Although there are important differences in style and content in the two novels, it is hard to believe that Theroux could have written *The Mosquito Coast* without having read Conrad's powerful tale of exploration of a primitive world and the inner self.



Related Titles

Two other Theroux works offer portraits of heroes in unfamiliar surroundings attempting to survive and prosper. *Saint Jack* (1973) exposes the poverty, vice and political corruption of Singapore as observed by Jack Flowers, an expatriate American with the dubious responsibility of providing prostitutes for visiting businessmen and servicemen. His dream is to own his own brothel and win fame as a writer. The dream becomes a reality but at a price: He secures the money for the brothel from a man charged with building a rest and recuperation "center" for U.S. troops fighting in Vietnam. But the Army soon closes the place down, and Flowers is cast adrift. He manages to survive, however, believing that he still has "all the time in the world" to regain his dream. Like Allie Fox, he yearns for something better than his present life; unlike him, he finds a way of accommodating to the society in which he has chosen to live.

In a novella written after *The Mosquito Coast*, *Half Moon Street* (1984), Theroux portrays an American woman living in London and working for an investment think-tank seeking ways to recycle Arab petrodollars. She wants some adventure in her life and hires on with an escort service, dating interesting but dangerous Arabs with petrodollars to burn. Her adventure turns sour when her life is threatened, but she manages to escape with an enlightened understanding of the workings of high finance and underworld dealings.



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Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

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Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

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