Mutant Message Down Under Study Guide

Mutant Message Down Under by Marlo Morgan

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This book, subtitled "A Woman's Journey into Dreamtime Australia," tells the story of Marlo Morgan, a middle-aged, American woman and health care practitioner, who is taken on a physical and spiritual journey through the wilds of Australia. The book's narrative plays out a narrative and thematic pattern similar to those of many other quest narratives, exploring issues relating to humanity's relationship to nature, faith, and to itself.

The narrative begins with a terse, vivid description of how the author's journey starts - how she's picked up at an expensive Australian hotel, driven through intense heat and over rough roads into the Outback; how she's divested of her clothes and possessions, and how she's welcomed temporarily into a tribe of Aborigines who call themselves "The Real People." She is told that she is to be taken on a journey of discovery - of self, and of long forgotten, deeper truth.

The following chapters describe how the author arrived at the point of her journey's beginnings in leaving a successful life in America to pursue a childhood dream of visiting Australia. She became sensitive to the plight of urban aborigines and how worked to help a group of young Aborigines create successful lives and careers for themselves. It was this work, she is told, that led the more traditional aborigines, with whom she's traveling in the desert, to believe she was ready to at least begin the process of becoming enlightened.

As the author travels through the outback, she suffers a series of trials and setbacks that challenge both her physical and spiritual well being. At the same time, however, she also experiences moments in which she is made profoundly aware of the Aborigines' connection to the spiritual life beyond the physical. As the days of her journey lengthen into weeks and eventually into months, she becomes accustomed to eating what at first seems like strange food, communicating in what at first seem strange ways, and experiencing what at first seems like an uncomfortably intimate and trusting relationship with nature.

At one point in the journey, the author is given the opportunity to lead the tribe on its daily march. After an initial protest, she accepts the responsibility and leads the tribe further into the desert-like outback, where they walk for days without water or food. The author, frustrated with herself and close to despair, begins to hallucinate. She finally realizes she's being challenged to think and believe in the new ways she's being taught as opposed to the old ways she's known all her life. As she redirects her thought process, she becomes aware of a deep intuition that eventually leads both her and the tribe to food and water. Her success at adopting new ways of thinking and believing is celebrated, and she is led to the next level of initiation - a journey into one of the aborigines' most sacred spiritual sites.

During this phase of her journey, the author learns the meaning of her long-held desire/determination to visit Australia. She is told it was a desire to fulfill a destiny

determined before she was born. Also at this time, the author is given a mission - to take the message of spiritual truth she has come to understand out to the world of "Mutants," i.e., citizens of Western society, who have evolved away from the experience of harmony with nature experienced by the Aborigines.

The Aborigines eventually return the author to civilization, where she struggles to fulfill her mission to teach the old ways to the people of the new world. She concludes her narrative with a declaration of her determination to reward the faith placed in her by the Aborigines with responsibility and faithfulness to their teachings.

Introduction

Introduction Summary

This book, subtitled "A Woman's Journey into Dreamtime Australia," tells the story of Marlo Morgan, a middle-aged, American woman and health care practitioner, who is taken on a physical and spiritual journey through the wilds of Australia. The is a narrative and thematic pattern similar to those of many other quest narratives, exploring issues relating to humanity's relationship to nature, faith, and to itself.

"From the Author to the Reader"—In this brief introduction, the author comments that the book was written "after the fact and inspired by actual experience." She suggests that the story of the Aboriginal people she encountered while on her journey through Australia is similar to those of other indigenous peoples, such as the Native American. She adds that while many Western countries strive to improve race relations, the Aborigines, with whom she spent time in Australia, live a life transcendent of such needs (see "Quotes, p. xiii). She invites the reader just looking for "entertainment" to read and enjoy her story, but then offers an invitation to other readers (see Quotes, p. xiv), and concludes by revealing that "In the tradition of the desert people, I have also taken another new name to reflect a new talent. Sincerely, Traveling Tongue."

Introduction Analysis

This brief introduction raises the question of just how the book should be perceived - as a memoir, as a piece of fiction, or as a hybrid of the two. This ambiguity of intention could easily be perceived as a trigger for the controversy surrounding the book (see "Objects/Places - The Book"), but one thing is very clear—the author undoubtedly intends for her book to be perceived as conveying a core spiritual truth (explored and defined throughout the narrative), a truth manifest less in terms of the actual events than in the meaning embodied and/or evoked by those events.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This section begins with a brief disclaimer by the author suggesting that her "book is a work of fiction inspired by [her] experience in Australia. It could have taken place ... anywhere where the true meaning of civilization is still alive."

"Honored Guest." The author arrives at a hotel in Australia and is met by a driver who is to take her to a luncheon meeting. During the ride, she thinks about the invitation to attend an award ceremony, where she is to be honored for her efforts to help disadvantaged Aborigines become more self sufficient. After a four-hour drive across scorching desert, the driver and author arrive at a small settlement, where they are met by two middle-aged, scantily-dressed women. The driver introduces himself as the author's interpreter and gives her a scanty piece of clothing similar to that worn by the other women and tells her to remove all her clothing and jewelry. The author does as she's told, though hesitant. She undergoes a process of "purification," involving smoke from a fire and watches in horror as her clothes and jewelry are burned. She feels these people are welcoming and decides to see what's next, although she wants to reclaim a valuable ring from the fire. Much later she realized the ritualistic value of what she went through (see Quotes, p. 8.)

Chapter 1 Analysis

The first element to note about this section is the disclaimer. Here again the question of the book's essential nature is raised, as is the question of whether it's even necessary for that nature to be defined. The last few lines, in fact, suggest what both the events and the nature of the narrative eventually imply - that the story about to be told is archetypal and universal, and therefore true in the metaphoric, if not strictly literal, sense.

The second element to note here is the way in which the action of the story starts - with incident, rather than exposition. There is a certain degree of explanation of who the author is and why she's where she is, but for the most part, full explanation follows later. The sense of immediacy triggered by this narrative choice brings the reader into events as the author experiences them, and therefore increases the potential for reader identification with the author. In other words, the possibility that the reader will, on some level, go on the same emotional journey as the author.

The third element here is how the story's core metaphors begin to emerge. Specifically, the burning of the clothes and the loss of material possessions can be seen as the first stage in the author's symbolic letting-go of who and what she has been so she can become a more spiritually enlightened and/or connected being. In many cultures and spiritual traditions, fire is symbolic of purification, of destruction of what has gone before

so that new life can begin. In the same way as new life emerges from the ashes of a forest fire, in the same way as the mythical phoenix is reborn from the ashes of its flaming self destruction, so the new spiritual self is free to emerge after the old physical self is burned away. Thus the experience of the author, and the imagery with which that experience is enacted/narrated, can be seen as tying in quite significantly with traditional, archetypal actions and narrative.

Finally, the passing mention of the ring and its importance, without any reference to where it came from or why it's important, develops a sense of suspense, creating the desire in the reader to move forward in the narrative. It also foreshadows later revelations of the author's deep ties with her materialism-oriented past.

Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Stuffing the Ballot Box." The author is taken into a three-walled shed and is told to sit and watch, as the natives perform a rhythmic dance. While thinking about the value of items lost to the fire, rituals continue, which the author understands to be a series of tests. She is told to select a rock and she pretends to contemplate the pile until she picks one up and shows it to the others. She learns she's been accepted when Ooota, her guide, invites her to join them on a "walkabout" - a three month trek into the Australian Outback. Ooota simply starts walking, assuming she'll follow. The author, in the midst of a complicated mix of anger, confusion and curiosity, decides that she'll only go so far and then insist that she return home.

"Natural Footwear." The author immediately suffers injuries to her feet from spinifex, a kind of thorny grass. She is told to ignore the pain and eventually becomes accustomed to it. At first, her mind is full of worries and concerns about the life she's being forced to leave behind. As she walks, however, she marvels at the repeated visits of a circling falcon and the sips of water that seem to come at just the right time to rejuvenate her. She also marvels at how the aborigines, without any apparent communication, suddenly and in unison, change direction. The group sets up camp and the author's feet are treated by a woman, who sings a song of gratitude for the work her feet have done. The chapter concludes with the author wondering how she came to be where she is.

Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

On a narrative/story-telling level, there are several elements to note here. The first is the use of foreshadowing, most evident in the ritual of the rock, the importance of which becomes evident in Chapter 21. There is also foreshadowing in the reference to the aborigine named Tribal Elder, who under the name Regal Black Swan proves to be an important link to the author's past and present. The second noteworthy narrative element in this section is the way in which the author here, and indeed throughout the book, ends each chapter on a high point of interest. This creates a sense of eagerness in the reader to move on, to find out what's going to happen next - or, in the case of the ending to Chapter 3, what the author's going to next reveal about herself. In other words, the author is proving to be an adept storyteller.

On a thematic/metaphoric level, the first noteworthy element is the way in which the author, consciously or not, continues to develop parallels between this narrative and other similar journey/quest narratives (see "Themes - The Mythic Journey"). The first of these parallels, as discussed in relation to Chapter 1, was the purifying power of fire. Parallels developed here include the ritualized preparation, the resistance to departure, and encounters with individuals offering aid (which continue throughout the narrative). Above all, there are the manifestations of spiritual connection, which the author doesn't

yet recognize as such but will eventually realize are aspects of the purpose for her physical and/or spiritual journey. These manifestations of connection include the appearance of the falcon (which appears throughout the narrative as a kind of inspiration), the perfectly-timed sips of water, and the non-verbal communication between the members of the tribe. These encounters, and the awareness that arises from them, suggest to both the author and the reader that the author is on a journey into something new and strange, and, at this point, is beginning to accept both her circumstances and the possibility that she's on her way to learning something both significant and profound.

Finally, it's interesting to note the glimpsed mother/daughter parallel, with the author's concern for her daughter echoed in the concern shown by the grandmotherly woman for the author.

Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

These two chapters, recounted in flashback, narrate how the author came to be in Australia and the work she did there.

"Ready, Set, Go." The author is invited to move to Australia to work with the Australian health care system and teach about the use and benefits of an innovative medical diagnostic tool. She knows it would be a major change for her but realizes she's never going to have a chance like this again. She goes through a complicated process of assimilation into her new home, makes friends, and has an initial degree of success in her work. One day, while waiting for a friend, a young man reads her palm and tells her she has come to Australia to fulfill her destiny and meet a person whose soul was tied to hers before their births, which took place at exactly the same moment on opposite sides of the earth. He tells her their spirits agreed to meet again at this time and place in their lives.

"Getting High." The author writes that the one experience in Australia that made her unhappy was the state of the Aborigines. They were essentially invisible and the encounters with them she did have involved groups of young people obviously intoxicated on alcohol, drugs, or even gasoline. She was told that Aborigines in Australia are regarded as unintelligent, unreliable, and a dying race. The author designed and implemented a plan to create a business involving young Aborigines, a plan which included each member of the group taking a position they seemed both suited for and happy in, from accounting to cleaning. Her aunt the States gave financial support to the business, and how the Aborigine workers both enjoyed the work and became successful. The author includes excerpts from some of the literature describing the Aborigine way of life and the attitudes of white Australians - literature is filled with stories of cannibalism and religious mutilation. The young Aborigines with whom she was working spoke of their desire to distance themselves from their past and integrate fully into society - even to the point of marrying white people so their children would have paler skin. Her work seemed to be getting positive attention, including the honor she believed she would be receiving when she arrived at the hotel the day her journey began.

Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

The first element to note here is the parallel between the beginning of the journey described in previous chapters and the beginning of the journey here. Specifically, the way in which the author divests herself of her American life before moving to Australia parallels the way the Aborigines divest her of her clothes and possessions (that is, even MORE of her American life) before talking her on her journey. The second noteworthy element here is the appearance of the fortune teller in the café, which functions on

several levels. It creates a sense of mystery in the narrative (inducing the reader to read on); it foreshadows the later retelling of the same story by a different person (Chapter 21), and simultaneously foreshadows the revelation of the meaning of that story (Chapter 22). Meanwhile, an important symbol can be found in the passing reference (in relation to the author's feelings about leaving America) to the strange attack-like feeling of a nail being thrust into a board. This can be seen as paralleling the author's experience of having the sharp spines of the Australian desert plants thrust into her foot - both are painful challenges to integrity and wholeness, but both are necessary for the eventual construction of a new whole.

Chapter 5 introduces and portrays the ways in which Aborigines in Australia are perceived by the white population. This is interesting on a couple levels, the first being the way in which these perceptions parallel perceptions of non-whites (indigenous or otherwise) by whites in North America. There is something, it seems, in the white (Western?) race that makes it important for it to both feel and present itself as superior (for further consideration of this question see "Topics for Discussion - In What Other Cultures or Societies ...")

The second level of interest here is an ironic one. The author seems negatively disposed towards those Aborigines who desire to be westernized and/or assimilated into non-aborigine culture. At the same time, however, she also seems to have no qualms about creating employment programs, based almost entirely upon westernized business models, to which the Aborigines are drawn for their potential to make money and therefore fulfill that desire to become more Westernized. Yes, there is reference here to what she later describes as the aboriginal habit of allowing each individual of a community to nurture and/or function in society according to his/her own talents. But here, those talents are clearly subsumed into a business model with a goal that goes beyond simple individual fulfillment and into material success, a fundamental repudiation of what the author eventually will come to see as core aboriginal philosophy.

Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

"The Banquet." The author writes of how the pain in her feet began to be eased, and how members of the tribe seemed to be working together to create a meal of a large, white worm, which she thinks she can't eat but later, finds it's delicious after being cooked. They all sit in a circle, and tribe members reveal their names, shorthand descriptions of identity that have evolved over time, and continue to evolve, as an indication of the individuals' talents. Thus, Ooota tells her, members of the tribe have names like Story Teller, Sewing Master, and Secret Keeper. She is described as "mutant." As they prepare to sleep, the Sewing Master gives her a bundle of hides to sleep on, and they all share a special herb tea as a celebration of her acceptance into the tribe. She prayerfully thanks "the Power above." She decides the following day she's going to return home, and then is surprised and humbled when a prayer of welcome and gratitude similar to her own is passed through the members of the tribe and ends up with her.

"What is Social Security?" This chapter condenses the author's experience over several weeks of walking into a general narrative of experience. Each day, begins with a chanted prayer/hymn of gratitude to/connection with the Universe, expressing faith that food and water will be found, gratitude for the plants and animals that offer sustenance, and respectful, responsible connection with the providing, sustaining life force in all things. She learns to feed herself physically and spiritually, in ways she never had before.

Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

The most noteworthy element here is the way in which the author's spiritual journey towards a fuller, more open and more trusting relationship with nature (the Oneness, as the Aborigines calls it) begins to manifest. She learns through the incident with the worm that nature provides in ways she never suspected; she learns through the story of the names how nature defines identity (and not the other way around), and through both incidents (and others) how nature is an aspect of life to be harmonized with and respected, as opposed to being dominated and controlled. On a deeper level, the connection with nature (and therefore with the Oneness) manifests with the author staying with the tribe; her conscious mind, her willful Westernized mind, is the part of her that wants to go back home, but her sub-conscious mind, her reverent, prayerful, natural mind, is what keeps her on her journey.

"Social security" is the term used in America to identify a government financial program through which senior citizens are provided for in their old age - an artificial construct based on money, as opposed to the more organic construct of security based on connection with nature and on faith that nature (rather than government) will provide.

This, the author suggests here and throughout the book, is at the core of the Aboriginal spiritual truth - that nature is the true, ultimate, and only source of that which is necessary to live. For further consideration of this and other chapter titles throughout the book, see "Topics of Discussion - Many of the Titles ..."

Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

In these two chapters, the author describes specific experiences on her journey, and what she learned from those experiences.

"Cordless Phone." The author writes of a young men of the tribe who runs ahead. Later Tribal Elder steps sits on the ground, and falls silent, as does everyone else. Tribal Elder is being told by the young man that he has found a kangaroo, killed it, and is preparing to bring it back to them; however, the young man has fallen ill after drinking contaminated water and will need healing when he comes back. The tribe separates into two groups, one to heal the hunter and the other to cook the kangaroo. The author thinks about the mental telepathy between the young man and the Tribal Elder. Ooota tells her it's the preferred means of communication for "The Real People" (as the Aborigines call themselves). Any other type of communication can contain lies. The young man returns with the kangaroo. He is healed; the kangaroo is cooked, and the author contemplates yet again what she's learning about the inter-relationship of all things and how mental communication is a manifestation of that. She also writes of having to learn to forgive herself for her past and to live from a place of truth, adding that once she began to do so she also began to have her own experiences of telepathy.

"Hat for the Outback." This chapter begins with the author's description of swarming clouds of insects,and her disgust accidentally swallowing one now and again. A group of women take a strand of her hair to make a defense against the flies. They notice the author's hair is different colors - the shade she had died it for thirty years, and her natural shade. They smile as they see her becoming more aboriginal. The women present the author with a headband that, for a while, does keep the flies off her face. Regal Black Swan tells her the flies cleanse her body of dead skin, her nose of obstructions, and ears of wax. Without them, he says, she would not survive the difficulties to come. The next time the insects come, the author decides to not use the hat, and instead imagines herself in a beauty spa in New York. She realizes that she has indeed been cleansed and again realizes the inter-relationship among all things, a relationship that seems for her to be deepening with every step.

Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

Here again the process of the author's literal and metaphoric purification continues, with the physical experience of being cleansed by the flying insects also serving as a metaphor for the spiritual experience of being cleansed of old ways of thought. The irony here is that the author tolerates the experience of being cleansed by the bugs by imagining herself back in a spa in New York, thus eliminating a potential level of additional spiritual meaning. In other words, rather than fully accepting the experience of being crawled upon and cleansed, she distracts herself from it, giving it a meaning

associated with her old life and perspectives rather than her new life and experience. It could be argued that the author is still in the relatively early stages of her journey of transformation, or that old habits are harder to get rid of than she (and perhaps the aborigines) originally thought. Ultimately, however, the point here is that the author seems unaware of the irony, which suggests that in telling the story of what happened to her, she is perhaps less self-aware than she seems to believe she is.

The other noteworthy element of this section is the reference to mental telepathy, one of a few incidents in which the narrative includes incidents which seem to push credibility to its outer limits. The point is not made to suggest that such forms of non-verbal communication are impossible, but to re-focus attention on the question of the book's fundamental nature and how a reader can/should react to it. As previously discussed, the author describes the book as a work of fiction inspired by true experiences - where, then, does this incident and some of the narrative's seemingly fantastic incidents (in particular, the healing of the broken leg in Chapter 13) fit into the continuum of fact, fiction, and metaphor? On one level, the book seems fully grounded in realism - Australia exists, the author exists, Aborigines exist, walkabout (as a concept) exists, and people do come back from walkabout transformed. On another level, however, the parallels to literary mythic storytelling (see "Themes - The Mythic Journey") are so numerous and so obvious that a reader would be fully justified in wondering how much of what the narrative includes was/is real or was/is constructed to develop and/or define those parallels. In other words, is the reader intended to believe this incident really happened, or is the reader intended to see the incident as a manifestation of metaphoric meaning?

Chapters 10, 11 and 12

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Summary

In these chapters, the author continues her descriptions of specific, enlightening incidents on her journey.

"Jewelry." The author gives herself her first "talent-name" - Dung Collector, in honor of her skill at finding dried animal dung to use in fires. She also describes how a young girl of the tribe found and wore with a single, simple flower, returning it to the earth after a single day of celebrating its, and her own, beauty. The author compares the girl with a woman she knew back in America, who was causing herself increasing stress over how she should take care of an immensely valuable diamond necklace. The flower, she writes, "had meaning." The diamonds "had value."

"Gravy." The author and the tribe encounter the grave of a long-forgotten mutant. Tool Maker reconstructs the cross that marks the grave while Ooiota points out that they make no judgments of other people's beliefs. The author tells the tribe about gravy for meat and icing on cake. As she describes the process she went through to make some gravy, she contemplates the way both gravy and icing seem symbolic of Western culture's emphasis on the unnecessary over the basic. The author notices how healthy the tribe is; she's learning about healthy herbs and other natural medications, including a natural means of birth control, which she says the tribe never practices. Every life, they say, is an opportunity to experience and/or celebrate something new and wonderful. She asks if the Aborigines ever kill and eat other human beings? Ooota tells her they did, but in the deeper spirit of not wanting to create waste. The Tribe doesn't judge but wonders about how western society can allow wars in which thousands of people are killed, and thousands of lives and bodies are wasted.

"Buried Alive." The author eventually learn some of their words; they learned some of hers, and they both used sign language and gestures for fairly successful communication. The author discovers that a pack of wild dingoes is tracking the tribe because of her unusual scent - a combination of a lack of bathing, peeling skin, and secretion of long-held toxins. She agrees to undergo yet another cleansing process - being buried up to her face in sand, which absorbs all the smells and toxins leaving her body.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

Differences in attitude and perspective between Aborigine and western society are the predominant element in this section. Diverse perceptions of what makes good fuel for a fire, of beauty and body adornment, of how death (and life) should be commemorated, of how communication takes place, of how the value of human life is perceived, and of cleansing rituals are all manifestations of fundamentally dissimilar belief systems. The

book's key metaphor expressing these dissimilarities can be found in Chapter 11, in the author's discussion of/commentary on icing and gravy (see "Objects/Places"), which, as the Aborigines themselves explain, is a pure and obvious symbol of the West's obsession with the superficial and the unnecessary.

There is another, but perhaps less obvious metaphor, for the Western experience in the author's story of being buried alive to cleanse her of her dingo-attracting scent. That scent, as described by the author, can be seen as representing a combination of toxic "Westernness" - corrupt food, corrupt ideas, corrupt spirit - that is leeching out of her body as the result of her process of physical and spiritual purification. Meanwhile, the dingoes (wild dogs similar to North American coyotes or wolves) can be seen as representing the destruction of life, soul, and identity that hungrily waits when toxic Westernism becomes too dominant. Only cleansing in the natural way (re-connection with nature in general) can free the Westerner from the toxic dangerousness, or the dangerous toxicness, of the Western way of living, feeling, and believing.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

"Healing." The tribe chases in and out of a rain-cloud's shadow, but the joy of the day abruptly changed when a member of the tribe, Great Stone Hunter, fell off a cliff and broke his leg. Medicine Man and Female Healer work together to treat the injury. The author receives permission to watch. Medicine Man and Female Healer, at times accompanied by Great Stone Hunter, sing and chant as they begin the process of returning the leg to its original healthy state. At a high point in the chant, the broken leg slips back into place - apparently without actual physical manipulations from either of the healers. Female Healer applies a tar-like substance to the leg - a substance that seems to have been transformed from menstrual blood given to Female Healer by another member of the tribe.

Medicine Man and Female Healer believe that Great Stone Hunter broke his leg so the author could observe their methods of healing. This is important to the tribe and the author because the author is a healer, and they wanted her to see something of their healing methods. The tribe must have sensed her thoughts by their telepathy as she had been wondering if she'd get a chance to see how The Real People healed themselves. She also contemplates the nature of western medicine.

The next morning, the author marvels when Great Stone Hunter stands and walks as though nothing had happened except a fine, dark scar. Ooota tells her that the tribe had opened themselves to an injury/healing experience "if it was in the highest good for all life everywhere...." The entire tribe discuss the intricate, deep, mysterious and universally-connected relationship between body and feeling, spirit and meaning and life. This relationship is essentially based in giving - lovingly, positively, and selflessly. She also writes of The Real People's belief that illness and/or injury of any sort is an opportunity for the individual experiencing it to slow down and contemplate / appreciate the gifts of existence. Finally, she writes of her own belief that the beliefs of Western society and those of more spiritually-enlightened cultures will one day unite, "and a full circle of knowledge will emerge."

Chapter 13 Analysis

On one level, the incident narrated in this chapter might be described as miraculous, the sort of incident that appears in several (most?) stories of this nature (see "Themes - The Mythic Journey"). In such stories, such "miracles" serve as signposts, indications for the individual taking the journey that there is life and meaning beyond that to which s/he is accustomed. The incident here clearly fits into this narrative pattern, which means that again, given the admittedly-fictionalized nature of the book and the ongoing controversy over its origins, the question arises as to whether the incident actually took place. But

again, it must be remembered that here, as with other narratives of this nature, meaning, and not veracity, is the major concern.

The brief glimpse of pure playful joy at the beginning of this chapter serves to highlight another spiritual aspect of existence not necessarily explored here but in other belief systems - specifically, the Taoist philosophy of yin/yang, of the balance in existence between opposites, in this case joy and hardship. Here again can be seen the narrative's tendency towards echoing other spiritual truths, suggesting to the cynic that the author has picked and chosen elements to create a universally-meaningful story, while suggesting to the spiritual seeker that there is one ultimate truth at the core of all, superficially diverse belief systems.

Chapters 14, 15 and 16

Chapters 14, 15 and 16 Summary

These chapters contain more narratives of the author's experiences with the tribe, and the lessons learned from those experiences.

"Totems." The author and members of the tribe discuss The Real People's relationship with totems, "emblems that are reminders of ancestry." Each animal has specific lessons to teach. The soaring falcon teaches to look at the larger picture; the kangaroo teaches to always move forward; and the spider teaches that things of necessity can also be beautiful. The dolphin teaches joy, and the snake teaches the shedding of the old to make room for the new. The Real People draw the animal in the sand saying they understand it but have not seen it and they say it is her totem. The author recognizes the picture as that of a cheetah, an animal who "would put the welfare of her cubs before her own life, or that of her mate."

"Birds" One day a tribe member named Sister to Bird Dreaming offered to share her talent with the group if it was for the good of all. Later that afternoon, a flock of large and brightly colored birds appears, several of which are killed instantly by boomerangs. The author describes how every part of the bird is used - the meat for food, the feathers for ceremonial ornamentation and for menstrual pads for the women, the entrails for medicine, and the remainder to feed any wild animals who might need sustenance.

"Sewing" While sitting in a circle after an evening meal, the author contemplates the meaning of the circle—how they see it as an opportunity to study the person directly opposite for both positive and negative traits being mirrored back at you. She realizes that there is often a kind of reluctance in members of the tribe to sit opposite her. She also writes about the individual whom she sat across from on this particular night - Sewing Master, who methodically repaired the shoulder strap of a water skin. For her part, Sewing Master looks up at the author, smiles, and discusses the idea of business - how it started from a person's efforts to share his/her talent, but then became about making money and staying in business for its own sake. After explaining the Western view of business, the author wonders at how Sewing Master, who can't read or write, seems to have such a thorough understanding of how business works. She also expresses her admiration for Sewing Master's defined and purpose-driven sense of wholeness and identity.

Chapters 14, 15 and 16 Analysis

Here again in this section, there are resemblances in what the Aborigines teach to what is taught by other indigenous cultures - in this particular case, the culture of North American Indians, whose spiritual system is founded at least in part on a similar awareness of, and respect for, animals and their literal/symbolic natures. There are also

similarities between the way the two indigenous peoples react to animals who provide them with food and supplies, in that both perceive the offerings made by the animals as part of their fundamental nature. Finally, it's important to note the parallels drawn between the nature/purpose of the animals and the nature/purpose of humans. To be specific, Sewing Master, like the animals and like other members of the tribe, is defined by internal characteristics, rather than by external imposition of a name and/or a job (which seem to be the key sources of identity in Western culture). In other words, identity defines name, not the other way around.

All that said, Sewing Master's comments about business might seem, to the more cynical reader, to be an example of how the author has over-fictionalized her story - how she, determined to make a point about the shallowness of Western culture, has put her own observations and/or theories into the mouths and opinions of others. While considering Sewing Master's comments, it must be remembered that earlier, the narrative established that Ooota is the only member of the tribe to have encountered Western culture with any frequency or depth. In other words, there seems to be a disconnect in logic here that can't quite be explained away by the transcendent, spiritually-connected knowledge and awareness of The Real People.

Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Here again in these chapters, the author increases the range and depth of her experience with The Real People.

"Medicine of Music" This chapter begins with a re-definition of the term music - which in this context, means not medical medicine but "anything good that one contributed to the overall welfare of the group." Ooota comments that in the way of "The Real People," no talent is regarded as greater or less than any other - those who make music are treated with as much respect as those who find water. A day or so later, members of the tribe hold a concert in a canyon, using found objects as instruments - hollowed out gourds, a large rotten branch, thin pieces of shale. The music, writes the author, seems improvised at times and at other times seems to have been around since the dawn of time (see "Quotes", p. 111). At the conclusion of the concert, the musicians celebrate the sharing of their skill with each other as they replace everything they used to make the music. The seeds from the gourds go back into the ground, the shale goes back into the soil, and messages are left on the canyon walls to indicate where the food (i.e., the gourds) could be found.

"Dream Catcher" The morning after the concert, Spirit Woman leads the morning "prayer" ritual, offering her talent to the Oneness if it is the will of the Oneness that it be used. Later, as the tribe walks, they encounter a grove of trees where there is a large number of ornate spider webs. Spirit Woman and other members of the tribe capture the webs perfectly on a collection of specially treated hides, and Spirit Woman reveals to the author that her talent is to interpret dreams. The spider-webbed hides, she adds, help the dreamer capture and remember their dreams. At this point, the author discusses how the word "dream" to Aborigines isn't just a night-time dream, as it would be in Western culture - it is, in fact, any mental/spiritual manifestation of the connection with the spirit world. She then describes how Spirit Woman instructed her in a dance that would help her dream a dance to a specific question. The author dances, asking the question of what she was to do with the knowledge she is gaining on this journey. She then sleeps, and upon waking tells Spirit Woman her dream (the text doesn't include the details). Spirit Woman interprets the dream as meaning that the author is about to undergo significant change in her life (see "Quotes, p. 116). Spirit Woman also interprets a dream for Tool Maker, who comes to realize that it's time for him to pass on his knowledge to others and regain some balance in his life. In conversation with the author, he reveals that the work that had recently been painful for him is now easier. "When thinking becomes flexible," he says, "joints become flexible. No pain, no more."

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Here again, the narrative portrays The Real People as being profoundly respectful of, and attuned to, nature, their own individual natures and that of the world around them. This seems to be the author's essential purpose in telling this story - to suggest to the reader, and to Western society at large, that there is a great deal more to human existence than what we think, and have come to believe, there is.

And here again, the narrative includes incidents and actions that bear marked similarities to those of other indigenous cultures - specifically, the idea of creating dream catchers, which are an important symbol/tool in North American indigenous cultures. And again, the question becomes one of whether the author has calculatedly fictionalized elements of her narrative, including elements and experiences from other traditions in order to create the sense of transcendent, universal truth and meaning, or whether habits and traditions, like many myths, are common in belief systems across cultural boundaries.

On the other hand, an interesting aspect of the Aboriginal spiritual experience (as portrayed in Mutant Message ...) that doesn't seem to have a parallel in other belief systems is the ritualized offering of self and talent. In other traditional belief systems, individuals fulfill their responsibilities and roles, but there isn't as much of a sense that they make the offering to do so, or qualify that offering with the proviso that it fit with the will of the Oneness. There is a sense of respect and humility about this aspect of the Real People's spiritual life, a sense of surrender to the will of a greater spirit that seems somehow more deliberate and simultaneously more selfless than other expressions of compliance in other spiritual systems.

Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Encounters with forms of life and with the joy of living are the focus of this section.

"Dinner Surprise" Another morning, Kindred to Large Animals makes the offer for his talent to connect with large beasts be used, and later that day the tribe encounters four camels. Communicating through telepathy, the hunters agree that the elderly female is their prey, and quickly kill her (thereby giving her an opportunity to fulfill one of her purposes for being). They butcher the camel, preserving blood, organs, skin, hooves, and meat. Meanwhile, the author fulfills what seems to have become her purpose - collecting the dried dung left behind by other animals for fuel. One of the tribe members holds up the large bladder, saying that they've found the perfect container for the mutant who is "addicted" to water. The next day, the author writes, the Tribe's walk proceeds with the camel's hide held over their heads - to cure in the sun and to provide those underneath with shade.

"Un-chocolate Covered Ants" The air and sun are unusually hot, and the author is unusually uncomfortable. Bringer of Happiness runs out into the desert and returns with a large green leaf from a land is barren and dry. That night they eat a colony of honey ants for dinner. Bringer of Happiness tears the leaf into the perfect number of pieces, gives a piece to each person and says they're going to play The Creation Game. Each person puts her/his piece onto the ground with the aim of re-creating the leaf. Players can rearrange whatever piece they wish, but only one at a time. Eventually only one piece remains, and the author intuits it was meant for her to put it in its final place. When she does, the leaf is in its original form, and the tribe rejoices - this proves, they say, that she was meant to walk with them. The author then tries to teach the tribe about competitive games in the West. The tribe wonders how games can be fun when someone has to lose. The author creates a teeter-totter, and the tribe has great fun. She also teaches them to skip, using internal organs of dead animals as "rope". They discuss Jesus, whose name and presence and mission are known to the tribe, though they had no need of his teaching because he was as much a part of the Oneness as they already were. As she and the tribe drift off to sleep, the author contemplates their aging process, and wonders, as she stares at the stars, how she's going to carry the messages she's learned back to the West.

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

At this point in the narrative, it might be useful to consider the nature and scope of what the author seems to be learning. In very basic terms, her knowledge of the people and their relationship seems to be broadening more than deepening - she's encountering more and more manifestations of the people's relationship with nature and additional examples of how life in Western culture is comparatively superficial, but doesn't seem to

be encountering much in herself that manifests what she's learning. That state of affairs, however, changes in the next chapter, when the author is given a responsibility that directly challenges her to manifest in herself what she's been observing in the members of the tribe.

Meanwhile, an intriguing element introduced in this section is the reference to Jesus - specifically, the likening of his teaching and experience to those of The Real People. It could be argued that the People's view of that relationship is something akin to arrogance, especially if one comes to the narrative from a rigidly Christian perspective. It could also be argued, however, that both the reference and the People's attitude are manifestations of the book's core theme - that all spiritual life is ultimately connected, and that it's all ultimately about the same thing ... simple, selfless expressions of unity with nature, as manifest in individual identity.

The so-called "Creation Game" can be seen as a metaphor for the Aborigine perspective on human existence. In the same way as each person places a piece of the leaf into what eventually becomes a whole, Aborigine philosophy (at least as defined in this book) seems to suggest that each person places his/her life and/or talents into what also becomes a whole - the Oneness at the core of all things.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

"Out in Front" The author is told it is her turn to lead the walk, and she immediately protests that she's not ready. The walk is unusually hot and dry, and for two days the author leads without any immediate sign of food, water, or shelter. A gray rain cloud stays tantalizingly out of walking distance. The author realizes she's suffering from dehydration, and repeatedly asks for help from members of the tribe, but they don't respond, simply looking at her with expectation. As she walks on the third day, the author realizes she's becoming delirious, and hallucinates memories of her childhood and family. Suddenly she realizes she's thinking the way she would back home when the whole purpose of her trek is to think differently. She expresses gratitude to the Oneness for insight, and immediately is inspired to put her rock in her mouth. The moment she does so, her mouth begins producing saliva, and she's able to swallow.

The author prays to the Oneness for help in finding water, and hears, "Be water." At first, she's bewildered, but then mentally and emotionally puts herself in the place of water - rushing, still, tepid, ice cold, deep, shallow. She pushes old ways of thinking away and keeps focusing on being water. Finally, in the distance she sees a small mound, completely out of place in the flatness of the desert. She leads the tribe to it, sits at its top, and puts her hand in a pool of water left behind by the rain cloud. The tribe celebrates, and so does a wandering reptile, which supplies them with a meal. She realizes, now more than ever, the grace of the universe (see "Quotes", p. 136).

Chapter 21 Analysis

This chapter contains the first of the narrative's two climaxes, or high points in the action. The difference between the two is the role that the author plays in each - here the author is active, making the climax happen. In other words, this chapter marks the physical climax of both the narrative and the author's journey - she proves herself worthy of the teachings that have so far been offered to her, and manifests the sort of spiritual connection with the physical world that The Real People have displayed since the beginning. In the later climax (in Chapters 23, 24 and 25) the author is RE-active, accepting knowledge rather than developing it herself.

The full importance of the rock, foreshadowed way back in Chapter 2, finally becomes apparent here - it does indeed save her life, as Ooota foretold back when she chose it. It's interesting to note that the rock's function (to create nurturing fluid) is juxtaposed with an image of the female breast, itself in fact as well as in the metaphor here a source of nurturing fluid. The symbolic resemblance between the rock and the oasis might actually go on to an even deeper level - in her encounters with both, the author is like a child, discovering life (or in this case a new way of living) for the first time, with

both the rock and the mound of earth representing the nourishing power of Mother Earth.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

"My Oath" The author reveals lost all track of western time, but one day she woke with the conviction it was Christmas Day. When she returned to the western world, she discovered she had been right. She becomes aware that the tribe is having conversations that aren't being translated. She learns that they are discussing whether the gifts of Time Keeper and Memory Keeper, who together have the talent of aiding in detailed memory recall, are to be shared with her. For three nights, the tribe debates what to do, with several tribe members arguing against, while Tribal Elder and several others argue for. Finally the decision is made, and the author is led to what she discovers is a sacred cave, the last of the Aborigine's sacred sites (the others, she is told, have all been taken over by Mutants). The tribe goes into the cave, leaving her outside. One by one they emerge, and plead with her to prove trustworthy and never reveal the location of this secret place. The author pledges to keep the secret. Story Teller tells the author that she has been chosen to come on this journey in order to fulfill an agreement made between her and another soul before their births. The author is shocked to realize this is the same story she was told in the café before she was taken by the tribe (see Chapter 4). Time Keeper and Memory Keeper perform a ritual of purification and invocation and lead the author into the cave.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter narrates the beginning of the author's encounters with what she comes to believe is her destiny. Throughout this and the following chapters the book develops its spiritual climax, the point at which the author's connection with the deeper world of the spirit is at its most intense and immediate. Here again, the narrative manifests similarities with other stories of similar journeys (see "Themes - The Mythic Journey"). Often in such stories, the traveler's final encounter with the deeper meaning of life is presaged, or prologued, by ritualistic encounters with guardians that insist s/he prove him/herself worthy - as the author is confronted here. Meanwhile, the reappearance of the story of the author's secret destiny functions on several levels. It again foreshadows the truth about that destiny (revealed in the following section) and it creates a sense of intrigue and suspense (thereby drawing the reader further into the story in the same way as the author is drawn further into the truth of her existence). Finally, it reinforces the thematic point of the narrative and the simultaneous point of the author's journey - that all things and all people and all actions and all events are ultimately connected, and that that connection is inescapable.

For further consideration of the reference to Christmas, see "Topics of Discussion - What are the symbolic/metaphoric parallels ..."

Chapters 23, 24 and 25

Chapters 23, 24 and 25 Summary

These three chapters narrate the author's experiences deep within the cave.

"Dreamtime Revealed" The author is shown into a large central cave with several branching corridors, which open into other caves. These other caves hold the artifacts of The Real People's journeys into the mutant world, various artifacts used in spiritual rituals, and statues embodying various manifestations of human consciousness. That night, the tribe performs a ceremony in which the author is allowed to take part - she is to embody the spirit and way of the kookaburra, a beautiful, strong bird with a harsh cry that was to act as a messenger to the world. After the ceremony, a smaller group of tribe members sit in a circle with the author, with Tribal Elder sitting directly opposite her. He reveals that the elders of the Real People are preparing to leave the physical world and allow their souls to rejoin the Great Oneness. The author is to carry their message back to the Mutant World. Tribal Elder and several others retire to sleep, but the author is too intrigued to sleep and asks to stay up and talk with Ooota and Peace Maker, a very old man.

Peace Maker tells her of the nature of Oneness (see "Quotes", p. 151), and how the Real People have always had difficulty understanding how Mutants can practice the kind of religions which are full of rivalry, violence, and control. He tells her about the three kinds of Dreamtime - the time before time was defined by physical existence, the time after land appeared but had no character, and the time of now, the time in which "consciousness is still creating our world." He discusses how all the earth was once one large land mass, how the original people left for various parts of the world, and how some evolved into Mutants. He says that the core experience of all Mutants is that they live and work and feel from a place of fear, rather than a place of love and awareness of abundance. He also talks about how the Real People end their lives - by realizing that the time has simply come for them to choose to return to the Oneness, by celebrating that they're on the next stage of the journey, and by simply choosing to shut down bodily function. The author is promised that when the time comes for her to leave, she will be taught how to do so. She then prepares for sleep, aware that "the word Mutant seems to be a state of heart and head, not a color or a person; it is an attitude! It is someone who has lost or closed off ancient remembering and universal truths."

"Archives" The author is taken deeper into the cave. There she is shown into a chamber where Time Keeper and Memory Keeper, in the ways of others with similar gifts in the past, have chronicled not only the history of the tribe but also events in the history of both Australia and, without access to newspapers or any other form of similar communication, the world. She locates the carving representing the year of her own birth, determines the specific date, and discovers that the man named both Regal Black Swan and Tribal Elder is the person with whom she shares her destiny, as foretold by the man in the coffee shop (Chapter 4) and by Secret Keeper (Chapter 22). The two

compare the circumstances of their births and lives, and discover that they share what the author sees as astonishing, wonderful similarities. The author is allowed to leave her handprint on the time-keeping wall, and discovers what the Aborigines consider to be the meaning of the concept of "gift" - what the receiver truly needs, as opposed to what the giver wants the receiver to have (see "Quotes", p. 159)

"Commissioned" The next day, the author is taken into the deepest chamber in the cavern, a room lined with multicolored opals, which the tribe tells her is a place of ceremony and meditation - a place where people go to be married, to give thanks for birth, or to die. It's also, the author claims, the place where aborigines go to learn the art of vanishing, or disappearing into nature, an art that is legendary among non aborigines. Finally, the author is the focus of a final ceremony, in which she is again invited to take the part of the kookaburra and told she is to carry the secrets and stories of the tribe out into the world.

Chapters 23, 24 and 25 Analysis

As previously suggested, these chapters contain the narrative's spiritual climax, the high point of her encounter with her spiritual self and that self's relationship to the larger spiritual world. It's important to note here that, as previously discussed, she is in this moment essentially reactive, receiving knowledge as opposed to actively living it. It's also important to note that again, the narrative carries with it strong and insistent echoes of other, similar narratives of mythic and/or legendary stories of physical hardship and spiritual challenge leading to ultimate enlightenment of a sort that can, and in many cases must, be taken by the traveler back into the world from which s/he originally came. In many such stories, travelers encounter these profound spiritual truths in a cave or otherwise isolated location - the cave being, in mythic/symbolic terms, the dark womb of spiritual truth from which all life emerges and to which all life returns.

Also in such stories, the traveler is often given both a mission to accomplish once s/he returns home and tools to use to assist in that accomplishment. In this narrative, that process begins with the ritual of the kookaburra described here and continues in the following section, in which the author is readied for her voyage back to so-called "reality." Meanwhile, a key component to the specific mythic journey narrated in Mutant Message is the author's conversation with Regal Black Swan/Tribal Elder. There are several interesting layers of meaning to this encounter. The first is the way it physicalizes and dramatizes the essential purpose of the mythic journey in general and this journey in particular - the traveler's encounter with the self. Here, that self is a literal person, born in remarkably similar circumstances and having experienced remarkably similar lives. The second is the way the truth is portrayed as having been right under the traveler's nose the whole time - specifically, the person with whom the author shares her parallel life, whom she has on some level been searching for ever since she was born and more consciously ever since the encounter in the tea shop in Chapter 4. The lesson here, for the reader and for Western society as a whole, is that the truth of Oneness, of humanity's relationship to itself and to nature, is there to be found if only the openness and the will exist to find it. The third, and perhaps most important layer of meaning to

the encounter in the caves is the references to death. The author has, on her journey, died to the old ways of thinking and being (in the same way as other travelers on other mythic journeys have died). She is being awakened to new ways, more spiritually-attuned ways - she is, in short, being resurrected, born to new life and new relationship with God, emerging from a cave into transcendence in the way of countless travelers in countless mythic journeys before her.

Finally, the reference to disappearing Aborigines can be seen in a similar light to the "miracle" of healing performed in Chapter 13 - as a genuinely experienced manifestation of unity with nature, or as a metaphoric illustration of how that unity is possible.

Chapters 26, 27 and 28

Chapters 26, 27 and 28 Summary

These chapters chronicle the adventures of the author as she travels to the place where she is to be released back into the world.

"Happy Unbirthday" The author writes that rather than celebrating birthdays, the Real People celebrate when a person has moved into a state of deeper awareness - of oneness, or of skill or talent. After leaving the cavern, Secret Keeper (whose talent is for non-judgmental listening) has one such celebration, involving a banquet, singing, dancing, and storytelling in her honor. At the party, the author teaches them North American country dances, and Secret Keeper is told repeatedly what a gift it is for her to be part of the tribe.

"Wiped Out" As the journey draws to its close, a sudden torrential rainstorm envelops the tribe, separating them, injuring some, and washing away many of their belongings. The author is washed halfway down a cliff, but is rescued by the members of the tribe. Together they stand in the now gentler rain, remove their clothes so mud will be washed from them, and celebrate their survival. The author writes of her wondering disbelief - at the lack of attachment she and the tribe feels to what has been lost, and at the ease with which everyone resumed the trek in spite of their accident.

"Baptism" A day or two later, as they travel across the desert, the author is astonished to see a burst of flowers and plants, newly nourished with moisture, carpeting the once barren desert with soul-nurturing color and body-nurturing food. They arrive at a large pond, almost a lake, which the tribe laughingly says they knew the author would be excited about - she would want, they knew, to go swimming. The author almost rushes in, but they tell her they have to ask permission from the other inhabitants of the area first. They stand in silence for a while, and after a few moments a pair of crocodiles emerges and disappears into the nearby brush. The author is suddenly nervous, but the tribe tells her the pond is now safe, and she goes in, enjoying herself hugely in what she experiences as a kind of baptism, or symbolic cleansing. Later, a young crocodile offers himself to be the tribe's dinner, and they kill and eat it heartily. Still later, the killing of snakes for food leads members of the tribe to tell the author that one of the primary manifestations of oneness is that there should be no suffering, even in death - that no being experiences suffering except by asking for it on a soul level. This is why, they say, some souls ask to be born into disabled bodies, so both the soul and those around it can learn compassion. The author then writes that that night, she realized she had overcome her fear (see "Quotes", p. 175)

Chapters 26, 27 and 28 Analysis

This section of the book is rich with metaphor exploring and defining the author's state of being as she prepares to return to her old life with new knowledge. Story Teller's party celebrating her identity can be seen as an extension of the author's adoption of her own identity as The Real People's messenger to the world. The rainstorm is a metaphor for the cleansing process that the author has undergone throughout the course of the narrative, while the explosion of flowers and color represents the explosion of joy and truth and oneness in her as the result of that cleansing, and of the resultant acquisition of new knowledge. And then, as the author herself points out, she receives further cleansing into her new life in the form of the baptism in the lake. In other words, in the same way as the Christian ritual of baptism represents the individual's being born into a new life in Christ, the author is being born into a new life in union with The Oneness. Since the Real People have earlier described as being manifest in Christ, there is the sense that the metaphor isn't as blasphemous as some might contend. Finally, the emergence of the crocodiles from the lake can be seen as a metaphor for the dangers that await even in the most secure of individual belief systems - self-righteousness, close-mindedness, and a certain rapacious hunger for others to be converted to "the right way."

Chapters 29 and 30

Chapters 29 and 30 Summary

In these two chapters, the author's physical journey draws to a close.

"Released" One day, during the morning prayer/meditation ritual, Regal Black Swan / Tribal Elder draws the author into the center of the circle, acknowledges the value (to both the tribe and the author) of their trek together, and says the time has come to release the author on her mission into the world. Spirit Woman shows the author the distant city to which she is to return, the author says her goodbyes (sharing a particularly intimate moment with Regal Black Swan), and is reassured that they w ill all meet again, "without our cumbersome human bodies."

"Happy Ending?" The author describes her return to civilization - first to the city, where she borrows money to make a telephone call, makes arrangements for more money to be sent to her, and purchases clothes, shoes, food, and a hotel room. She calls family and friends, and is glad to learn that none of them had been overly concerned - her daughter says that if something bad had happened, she would have known. When she returns to her home, she finds that her absence has been understandingly excused - she learns that friends, colleagues and landlords have been told that she was on walkabout, and would be gone for an indefinite period of time. As she re-accustoms herself to life outside the tribe, she comes to realize the extent of the damage being done to the world, that there is so much to be done to rectify the damage, and that the Real People are right to choose to leave - to move on to the next phase of existence. She also realizes that very few, if any, in the outside world are interested in hearing what she has to say. She has a particularly uncomfortable encounter with Geoff, and their relationship breaks off. When she returns to America, she discovers that the disinterest there is even more intense, but discovers there are a few interested individuals who hear and want to understand what she has to say. She writes about the beginnings of her career as a speaker on the teachings of the Aborigines, how those teachings helped her help her father into a peaceful death - and how she has learned, through both of her journeys (through the outback and through home) that "everything is an opportunity for spiritual enrichment." The novel concludes with a story of how the author met with someone interested in making a movie of her story, how she was made uncomfortable by the meeting, and how she used the Aborigines' trick of making herself invisible to avoid even more discomfort. "I intend," she writes, "to spend the rest of my life using the knowledge I learned in the Outback. Everything! Even the magic of illusion!"

Chapters 29 and 30 Analysis

In these chapters, the author repeats the pattern followed by other travelers on mythic journeys - she leaves the world of new knowledge behind and begins the struggle of

both integrating her new self with the old world and teaching those in the old world the value of what she has learned. It's interesting in this context to note the ways in which the author, on one level, attempts to live according to her new beliefs while at the same time seeming to instantly return to the ways of living dictated by the old - the clothes, the money, the hotel room, the food. It's also interesting to note the contrasting responses of those close to her—her daughter, who already seems to have found a way to connect to The Oneness, in that she claims that she had an instinctive knowledge about her mother's state of being, contrasted with Geoff, whose habitual scorn for all things Aboriginal seems to immediately extend to those, like the author, whose beliefs have extended to include elements of the Aboriginal.

There is in all of this a final irony to note, in relation to the author's reference to the use of illusion. On the most apparent level, she seems to be referring to the power of making oneself seem invisible. The reader aware of the controversy over the nature of the narrative, however, might see the comment as referring to an illusion of truth - specifically, the author's creation of a narrative that professes to have been based on actual incidents but upon closer examination seems to owe a great deal more to other, myth-based narratives of other journeys. Here again, the question becomes whether the value of the message is more important than the authenticity of the medium through which the message is offered.

Characters

Marlo Morgan (Narrator)

Marlo is the book's author and narrator, a middle-aged (fifties), female, American health care professional. At the start of the book, and of her physical/spiritual journey, she portrays herself as urbanized, sophisticated, and with a strong sense of self. She believes she is a well rounded, thoughtful, sensitive human being with a degree of enlightenment. Through the course of the narrative, and as a result of the events she writes about, she portrays herself as experiencing a profound illumination, as having realized that that self-image is an illusion and that she was in fact selfish, superficial, and removed from what it truly means to live with awareness. At the narrative's conclusion, while she returns to some of her old ways (of dressing, eating, and communicating), she nevertheless portrays herself as having integrated at least a few of the lessons she learned while on her walkabout with the Aborigines (including the most titillating - the ability to disappear from notice). She also seems to have accepted the mission they gave her - to bring deeper awareness of those lessons (fundamental truths of existence), to the outside (mutant) world.

All this is the view of herself the author clearly intends to present. But as is often the case with authors of similar autobiographical/enlightening books, there is also a sense of smugness, of self-righteousness, even of arrogance - of "I've discovered the right way to feel/think/behave and because you haven't, you're a lesser human being." In other words, there is the sense that Marlo is not a humble prophet, but a self-important one.

Finally, it ought to be noted that in the context of the ongoing debate over the book's authenticity (see "Objects/Places - The Book"), Marlo has been accused of being an opportunist, of presenting fiction as fact, and of cultural exploitation. It must also be noted that there seems to be no concrete evidence to support either the author's contention that she went on at least part of the journey she narrates, or her critics' contention that she made it all up. The question, of course, is whether the spiritual truths explored by the narrative (which have undeniable echoes of accepted and valued archetype and myth) transcend the means by which the author came to explore them.

The Real People

Marlo refers to the Australian Aborigines as "The Real People," suggesting this is what they in fact call themselves. Their society is, she claims, similar to indigenous societies around the globe (North American Indians, African nomads, etc) - in tune with nature, experiencing a strong spiritual connection to the spirit of life, living free of material and/or political attachments or agendas. The lives and philosophies of these societies, and of "The Real People" in particular are, she writes, simple but mystic, ancient but thoroughly in the moment, faithful and reverent within their own culture but deeply

suspicious of outsiders and at times violently protective. She states that they claim they do not judge, but the reader might be justified in wondering whether suspicion and secrecy is, in fact, a form of the kind of judgment they claim to avoid. In a similar way, Marlo claims that the term "Mutant" is used by "The Real People" to describe people who have moved away from the simple, spiritually-oriented and/or connected life. Mutants, it seems, live in a Western culture defined by superficiality (see "Objects/Places - Icing and Gravy"), greed, selfishness, and exploitation. They have evolved away from enlightenment and towards self absorption and eventually self-destruction. The relationship between the two, "Real People" and "Mutants," is portrayed throughout the narrative as being full of tension and suspicion on both sides, with Marlo bridging the gap between the two perspectives symbolizing and embodying the possibility for harmony and acceptance between the age-old conflict between the material and the spiritual.

The Fortune Teller

This mysterious individual appears in a café where Marlo is to meet a friend and colleague. He reads her palm, and tells her she's about to encounter someone with whom she shares a destiny. At first Marlo thinks nothing of their conversation, but later when the same message is offered to her by different Aborigines with whom she's on her walkabout, she realizes that the fortune teller's appearance in her life was something more than just a random occurrence. She comes to understand that it was, in fact, a manifestation of the Real People's belief in the way all things and all people are connected.

Ooota

Ooota is the first of several important Aborigine individuals encountered by the author on her walkabout - he picks her up from her hotel, takes her out into the desert, and acts as her interpreter throughout her journey. He is her guide, and while in some ways he is her guardian and defender, he is also an adversary - he argues strenuously, at times, that she is not ready to learn what the Aborigines have to offer. While the narrative never makes the point explicitly, there is the sense that Ooota's frequent and ongoing contact with the Mutant world is what has made him so suspicious. He is the liaison between that world and that of the Real People, and as a result has seen the damage that can be done by too much unguarded contact between the two.

Tribal Elder (Regal Black Swan)

This individual is one of the several Aborigines with whom Marlo goes on walkabout. He is portrayed as being wise, generous, welcoming, and trusting. In a community where there are no real leaders, only those with carefully nurtured and respected talents, Tribal Elder is portrayed as being an example of compassion and transcendence. Late in the

narrative, it's revealed that he is the individual referred to by the Fortune Teller - the person with whom the author shares a destiny.

Great Stone Hunter, Tool Maker, Kindred to Large Animals

These are some of the male Aborigines Marlo travels with while on her walkabout. They are given names, she says, that reflect their talents and skills, names that change (she claims) many times throughout their lives as their talents and/or roles within the community change.

Sister to Bird Dreaming, Bearer of Happiness, Sewing Master

These are some of the female Aborigines Marlo travels with while on her walkabout. At one time or another each of them, like the male Aborigines listed above, plays an important role in Marlo's ongoing evolution from Mutant into someone more "real."

Urban Aborigines

Urban Aborigines are, according to both The Real People and Geoff (see below), Aborigines who have left the natural life of "The Real People" and have succumbed to the easy allure of the city - money, material success, and assimilation. They have, again according to both The Real People and Geoff, lost their true way and have become lost in a world they don't understand and where they don't belong. The author draws a parallel between these experiences and those of North American Indians, who have likewise fallen victim to North American cultural imperatives and lost their own ancient sense of identity.

Geoff

Geoff is a middle-aged, white man the author encounters during her pre-walkabout stay in Australia. He is white, educated, intelligent, and attractive. In narrative terms, he functions as a representation and/or embodiment of non-Aborigine Australians, giving voice to the perception that Aborigines are lazy, selfish, unmotivated, and unworthy of the kind of assistance Marlo wants to give them.

Aunt Nola

Nola is Marlo's beloved aunt back home in America, a source of what she (Marlo) believes is unconditional love and support. The connection between the two women, and the limited nature of that unconditional love, is symbolized by a ring given to Marlo

by Nola and which is one of the first things she (Marlo) loses at the beginning of her journey. It could be argued that both Nola and the ring represent the unenlightened, superficial life Marlo is asked to leave behind when she goes on walkabout with the Aborigines.

Objects/Places

Mutant Message Down Under (the book)

The publication of "Mutant Message Down Under" was a trigger for considerable controversy. While the author clearly makes the point that it was written as a work of fiction, she also makes clear that it was "inspired by [her] experience in Australia." It's important to note that nowhere in the introduction or acknowledgments does she make clear exactly what that experience was. It seems to be implicit in the narrative that that "experience" was having been on walkabout (see below), but since the book's publication, representatives of both the Australian Aboriginal community and the Australian white community have come forth to challenge much of the book's content. Depictions of Australian life, descriptions of the countryside, details of the walkabout experience, details of relationship - all have come under increasing scrutiny and have been regarded with increasing suspicion. As has been previously discussed, however, the question of whether the book's events took place exactly as described may be moot, if the point of the book is to enlarge upon an archetypal and universal theme (see "Themes - The Mythic Journey").

Australia

This is the setting for almost the entirety of the narrative's action. While some of the action (its opening and closing sequences and a two-chapter-long flashback section early in the narrative) take place in one or another of Australia's large coastal cities, much of the narrative unfolds in the large, barren, desert-like central section of the country known as The Outback.

The Outback

"The Outback" is the name given to the expansive center of Australia where most of the narrative's action takes place. Its extremes of climate (baking hot days, weeks without rain) and terrain (sandy deserts, sudden cliffs, jagged foliage) can be seen as symbolic of the extremes of spiritually torturous self-redefinition undergone by the author.

Walkabout

This is the term used in Australia to describe the traditional Aboriginal practice of walking through the Outback in search of spiritual enlightenment. There is a clear parallel in North American Aboriginal culture to the "Vision Quest," in which individuals go out into the wilderness and undergo a period of self-sacrifice and meditation in order to more deeply understand self, spirit, and the connection between the two.

The Oneness

This is the term used by the Aborigines to describe what in other belief systems might be described as Spirit, Great Mystery, the Holy Ghost, Yoga, or Karma (or, in popular culture, The Force). It means, essentially, that all beings, all things (living and non-living) are connected, all are part of and/or manifestations of one loving, providing source of life, and all function in harmony and/or intimate relationship with one another.

Marlo's Clothing

At the beginning of her walkabout, Marlo is asked to remove her western-style clothing and is then horrified to see it tossed into a fire and burned. The clothing can be seen as symbolizing her western-style attitudes and belief systems, while its burning can be seen as symbolizing the beginning of her process of purification, her separation from/cleansing of those belief systems.

Aunt Nola's Ring

At the same time as Marlo's clothes are burned, a precious ring given to her by her beloved Aunt Nola is also thrown into the fire. The ring, like the clothing, is symbolic of Marlo's ties with Western culture and beliefs. It also represents her ties to/reliance upon other people, meaning that her loss of the ring represents the beginning of reliance upon herself.

Marlo's Rock

The beginning of self-reliance is further symbolized by the rock Marlo picks and eventually uses as a means of quenching her desperate thirst. Specifically, her ritualized choice of the rock introduces her to her own instincts, while her later use of the rock reinforces the value not only of those instincts but also of the instinctive, native wisdom of the Aboriginal people with whom she's traveling.

Icing and Gravy

At one point in the narrative (Chapter 11), the author explains the concepts of both icing and gravy to the Aborigines with whom she's traveling. They're puzzled by both, seeing them as extra and unnecessary and as representative of Western greed and obsession with/focus on having more than what's simply sufficient.

The Clouds of Insects

As they travel through the Outback, the author and the Real People encounter clouds of insects, which settle on them and tortuously remain for several minutes, crawling in and

out of noses and ears and mouths. At first, the author finds it almost impossible to stay still when the insects arrive, but after being told they are in fact cleansing her, she develops the ability to accept, and eventually welcome, their presence. The insects can be seen as representing the powerful, inevitable, irresistible power of nature.

The Watered Mound

After leading the tribe on what seems like a hopeless course for several days, the author encounters what in other contexts might be described as an oasis - an area of water and fertility in an otherwise barren landscape. The author herself describes this particular oasis, founded upon a mound of earth, as resembling a female breast. It can therefore be seen as symbolizing the author's reconnection with her own eternal, ever-flowing feminine nature and also perhaps with her connecting with "Mother Earth."

The Cave

Eventually the author and the Aborigines reach a cave in the middle of the desert. Like caves in other archetypal/mythic stories (see "Themes - The Mythic Journey"), this cave represents the instinctive spiritual truths at the core of a journey, and in this case the truths at the core of the author's very existence (see "Characters - The Fortune Teller" and "Tribal Elder").

Dreamtime

This the term, according to the author, is used by the Aborigines to describe their ancient connection with the spiritual world, a connection transcendent of place, history, or experience (see "Chapter 23").

Themes

The Mythic Journey

The narrative of this book shares a number of characteristics with similar narratives found in myths, legends, dreams, psychological analysis, films, and art in ancient tombs. In these narratives, an individual makes a journey of profound spiritual transformation, often in conjunction with a dangerous physical journey. In broad terms, the various stages of this journey are similar from narrative to narrative - the traveler divests him/herself (sometimes willingly, sometimes reluctantly) of the worldly (things and knowledge alike), undergoes a series of trials (physical and spiritual and emotional), and encounters strange individuals (both allies and enemies). Along the way s/he faces challenges to his/her physical and emotional sense of identity, and emerges with deeper understanding (of self, of the self's relationship to the physical world, and of the self's connection with spirit). Often these journeys end in some kind of cave or cavern or other secret place, where the traveler is confronted not only with a core truth about him/her self, but a core truth about the nature of existence. Noted scholar Joseph Campbell has categorized narratives of this nature under the heading "the hero's journey," and defined them as manifestations and/or embodiments of the archetypal human quest for connection with the spiritual world beyond the physical. Both the action and the theme of Mutant Message Down Under clearly follow this pattern, with the author/narrator undergoing similar experiences to characters/individuals who have lived the myth in narratives past. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - Explore the similarities ..."

Manifestations of Spirit

The essential purpose of the mythic journey described above is to introduce individuals (those taking the journey and those hearing/reading about it) to the ways and manifestations of spirit - in short, to bring him/her into a closer relationship to God, the Great Mystery, the Oneness, karma, or however the unknowable is known in whatever spiritual belief system. This relationship comes about, in this narrative and in others of this sort, through both external and internal manifestations of that spirit - through the awakening and/or offering of mysterious, but strangely true, knowledge, through what might be described by observers as miracles, and/or through a deepening sense of faith and understanding. The reader and traveler alike have their eyes, hearts and spirits opened to a broader experience of fundamental human truth, which, here as in most narratives of this nature, can be distilled down to the tenet that every facet of existence is a manifestation of spirit, and that all such manifestations are connected. The author, like the central characters of similar narratives told throughout the centuries, is initiated into a mystery that, once it becomes apparent and accepted, seems truer and more important than anything previously known. Here and in other similar narratives, this is the ultimate manifestation of spirit, the inevitable destination of the parallel physical and spiritual journeys taken throughout narratives like this one - a sense of meaning and

connection that might not necessarily be consciously known, but can be consciously trusted.

The Superficiality of Attachment

One of the obstacles to the kind of trust and connection described above is attachment to the physical world - to things, to clothes and habits and relationships and beliefs that distract the human soul from its questing relationship with the spiritual world. In this and other similar narratives, that attachment is systematically, and sometimes violently, destroyed, with the aim of removing that distraction, purifying the traveler's intent, simplifying his/her ways, and opening those ways to connection to that which exists beyond, and yet within, the physical. In this particular narrative, this purification involves the taking away and burning of the author's clothes and other possessions, and the physical removal of the author from everything familiar and safe. The process even extends to the way external layers of skin are burned away by the sun and/or picked away by insects—literal and symbolic manifestations of the necessity for getting rid of that which has gone before. In this context, it's important to note the author's (and the narrative's) contemplation of gravy and icing, which the tribe of Aborigines clearly and pointedly sees as a particularly evocative manifestation of Western society's attachment to that which is unnecessary and superficial. In other words, gravy and icing become, for the tribe and for the narrative, the ultimate symbol of what has caused those in the West to mutate away from union with the Oneness, from a healthy relationship to/with the universe and each other. Gravy and icing are civilization. Connecting with the Oneness, and through that connection, connecting with other individuals, is living.

Style

Point of View

The book is narrated from the first person subjective point of view, giving it an atmosphere of immediacy. The reader feels, in many instances, very present with the author as she has her experiences - the sensations of heat, dryness and the irritation of the clouds of insects are evoked with particular effectiveness. The author's narrative of her emotional reactions to what's happening (her shock and fear when she sees her clothes being burned, her wonder resulting from the apparently miraculous healing of Great Stone Hunter, her desperation when she feels she's failing the tribe) is similarly engaging and evocative. On another level, however, the first person point of view also invites the reader to move with the author beyond the level of physical experience, opening up the possibility of participation in the narrative's spiritual journey as well. In other words, this particular point of view suggests that the reader, like the author, can become internally transformed by the external experiences being described. That said, and as previously discussed (see "Characters - The Author"), the narrative sometimes comes across as preachy rather than revelatory, an aspect of the book directly related to point of view. "I'm a better human being now," the author sometimes seems to be saying, "and because you haven't had the experience I had you're a lesser human being." Whether this is inspiring or off-putting depends upon the reader and his/her perspective, whether s/he is prepared to be inspired or resistant to being lectured at.

Setting

As previously discussed, the narrative is set almost entirely in Australia - specifically, the vast desert-like wilderness known as the Outback (see "Objects/Places - The Outback"). The harsh conditions of climate and terrain here are vividly portrayed, and when juxtaposed with brief glimpses of both Australian and American "civilization," these descriptions become even more dramatically evocative. Within the larger setting, there are several locations noteworthy for the key events that take place there. These include the shack where the author's possessions are ritually destroyed, the cliff where Great Stone Hunter falls and injures himself, the cave where the author is presented with the truth of both her identity and her mission, and the pool where she cleanses herself for her return to her home society. Both the larger and smaller settings have symbolic as well as literal value, in that both can be seen as representing and/or manifesting aspects of the book's central theme (see "Themes - The Mythic Journey"). The shack represents the purifying doorway through which the traveler must pass in order to leave his/her old self behind and begin a spiritual quest, while the cliff represents sudden challenges to body and soul encountered on the journey to enlightenment. The cave represents (as it does in many myths) core spiritual truth and identity, while the pool represents the gateway through which the spiritual traveler must pass as s/he returns to "the real world" with the new knowledge s/he has gained. In other words the setting, like the story itself, functions on both the literal and metaphoric levels.

Language and Meaning

The language used throughout the book is consistently artless, at times to the point of occasionally seeming amateurish. There is a certain roughness in phrasing, a certain messiness in sentence and paragraph structure, a certain clumsiness in development of metaphor that on one level might be seen as unsophisticated and a bit crude. This sense of "rough around the edges" carries through into structure as well (see below), and while it does give the sense that the story is more important than the way in which it's told, it also gives the sense that the author is, for lack of a better phrase, not really a writer. This is not automatically a bad thing - as mentioned above, there is a definite sense of both immediacy and intimacy about the narrative, a sense aided and supported by the rawness of the language used. In fact, it could be argued that the simplicity of the language is evocative of the simplicity of the narrative's truth, of the child-like naturalness at the core of the Aborigines' existence and which, the author seems to be saying, should be at the core of everyone's. In other words, language in Mutant Message Down Under evokes meaning in the same way as language in other, more artfully written works -in this work, meaning is that simplicity is ultimately both a means and an end.

Structure

Two relatively common structural techniques are employed in Mutant Message Down Under. The first of these is to start the narrative immediately with an incident (in this case the departure from the hotel and the journey through the desert) instead of with explanation of background (exposition). The second is to leave the narrative at a high point of interest (in this case, the beginning of the author's physical journey into the unknown) and divert into said exposition just long enough for the reader to become eager to find out what's going to happen next. That being said, the sense of rawness evident in the use of language throughout the book (see above) is also present in its structure. While the first few chapters rely on time-tested techniques to draw the reader in, the extensive middle section (Chapters 7 through 21) has little or no sense of chronological order to events. They are simply recounted as physical incidents leading to spiritual enlightenment, with virtually no sense of "this happened then this happened then this." Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing - it's interesting, in fact, to consider how this free-flowing, almost stream-of-consciousness structure can be seen as evocative of the author's experience. At the beginning of the narrative, she leaves cities (structure and order and intellectual understanding) behind. In the middle of the narrative, she journeys into the wilds of the Outback (timelessness, randomness, and spiritual insight). At the end of the narrative, she returns to the cities, where structure and order and understanding are given new meaning by the insight with which she returns. In short, the narrative's structure draws the reader into the author's experience in the same way as "Point of View" and "Language" above.

Quotes

"... somewhere in the dry heat of the Outback there remains a slow, steady, ancient heartbeat, a unique group of people not concerned with racism, but concerned only with other people and the environment. To understand that pulse is to better understand being human or human being-ness." From the Author to the Reader, p. xiii.

"If you are ... someone who hears the message [of this book], it will come through to you loud and strong. You will feel it in your gut, heart, head, and the marrow of your bones." From the Author to the Reader, p. xiv

"... I knew very little about any of the Aboriginal nations except the idle comments I heard occasionally. I didn't know if they were a close knit race or if, like Native Americans, vast differences, including different languages, were common." p. 3

"Much later I would understand that the releasing of attachment to objects and certain beliefs was already indelibly written as a very necessary step in my human progress toward being." p. 8

"I did not want to go. They were asking me to put my life in their hands. These were people I had just met, and with whom I couldn't even talk ... it was insane! Of course I couldn't go!" p. 16

"I have learned there are things I prefer, and others I avoid, but the word 'never' leaves no room for unseen situations, and 'never' covers a long, long time." p. 44

"I was found acceptable and worthy of learning the knowledge of the true relationship of humans to the world we live in, the world beyond, the dimension from which we came, and the dimension where we shall all return. I was going to be exposed to the understanding of my own beingness." P. 45

"The tribe carried no provisions. They planted no crops; they participated in no harvest. They walked the blazing Australian outback, knowing each day they would receive the blessings of the universe. The universe never disappointed them." p.52

"I had spent my life being reminded of job security, the necessity of acquiring a hedge against inflation, buying real estate, and saving for my retirement. Out here our only security was the never failing cycle of morning dawn and setting sun." p. 57.

"...the people back home ... could easily accept that humans around the world were cruel to each other, but would be reluctant to believe there were people on earth who were not racist, who live together in total support and harmony, who discover their own unique talent and honor it as well as honor everyone else." p. 63

"The interesting thing about their remarks and observations was that I never felt I was being criticized or judged ... it was more like a loving adult observing a child struggling to fit a left shoe on the right foot." p. 77

"It was such a delight to be among adults who had not lost the important sense of childhood fun. They would run ahead of the shadow, out into the bright sun, and taunt the cloud by teasing how slow the legs of wind were walking. Then they would come back to walk in the shade once again and tell me what a wonderful gift of cool air Divine Oneness provided for people." p. 87

"One major flaw, I knew, was asking too many questions. I needed to remember that these people shared openly, so when the time was right, I would be included. I probably sounded like some pesty child." p. 106.

"'Just as a musician seeks musical expression, so the music in the universe seeks to be expressed.'" p. 110

"It is truly amazing that after fifty thousand years [The Real People] have destroyed no forests, polluted no water, endangered no species, caused no contamination, and all the while they have received abundant food and shelter. They have laughed a lot and cried very little. They live long, productive, healthy lives and leave spiritually confident." p. 111.

"I learned that a time had come where I could no longer stay with the people, the location, the values and beliefs I held. For my own soul growth I had gently closed a door and entered a new place, a new life that was equal to a step up a spiritual rung on a ladder." p. 116

"It's okay to try out negative emotions and see how they feel, but it certainly isn't a place one would wisely want to stay. When the soul is in human form you get to play - to see how it feels to be happy or sad, jealous or grateful, and so on." p. 127

"...these people do not grow old like we do. True, their bodies wear out eventually, but it is more like a candle burning down slowly and evenly. They don't have one organ giving out at age twenty and another at forty." p. 128

"...mingling in the center is the position most Americans seem to lean toward. Not too rich, nor too poor. Not deathly ill, but never quite healthy. Not morally pure, but somewhere short of serious crime. And sooner or later we must step out in faith. We must lead, if only to become responsible for ourselves." p. 130

"...the world is truly a place of abundance. It is full of kind, supporting people to share our lives if we let them. There is food and water for all beings everywhere if we are open to receiving and open to giving." p. 136.

"This cave of the Real People tribe is not a place of worship. In fact, their lives moment by moment are acts of worship. This most sacred site is where they can record history,

and a place in which to teach Truth, to preserve values. It's a refuge from Mutant thought." p. 145

"...Oneness has no shape, size or weight. Oneness is essence, creativity, purity, love, unlimited, unbounded energy ..." p. 149

"...our culture is filled with elderly citizens who are forgetful, unresponsive, unreliable, and senile, while here in the wild as people get older, the wiser they become, and they are valued for their input into discussions. They are pillars of strength and examples for the others." p. 156.

"A gift has no attachment. It is given unconditionally. The persons receiving it have the right to do anything with the gift: use it, destroy it, give it away, whatever ... and the giver expects nothing in return." p. 159.

Topics for Discussion

Explore the similarities and/or differences between the journey narrated in Mutant Message Down Under and those described in other spiritual traditions - Christianity, Buddhism, Greek/Roman mythology, etc. Consider this question in both physical and spiritual terms - in what ways are the physical journeys similar? In what ways are they similar in their spiritual intent and/or outcome?

Consider the Aborigine naming practice described in Chapter 6. What might your name be if the practice was applied to you - where do your talents and identity lie? How might that identity have changed throughout your life? What about the names of those around you - parents, friends, teachers, colleagues? What might their names be?

Many of the titles of the various chapters function on literal, metaphoric, and/or ironic levels. Consider each title, and discuss the various levels on which it functions

What are the symbolic/metaphoric parallels between Christmas and the experience the author recounts in the cave beginning in Chapter 21? Consider both the literal events of Christmas and its various spiritual meanings. Consider also the fact that Christmas takes place near the winter solstice, a time of celebration and transformation in many other spiritual belief systems.

In a similar vein, discuss the parallels between the Christian experience/philosophy of baptism and what the author experiences as baptism in Chapter 28. In what other belief systems is there a parallel ritual?

Western, Caucasian history shows a tendency to dominate non-white and/or indigenous societies. In what ways has that domination manifested? What has been the results of that attempted domination for both the colonizer and colonized?

The narrative contains many parallels, some quite evident and some subtle, between the The Real People's spiritual experience and that of those who follow the teachings of Christ. Explore the narrative for further parallels - the notion of sacrifice, for example. Discuss whether this makes the faith and belief systems of The Real People more valid or sacrilegious.

Discuss the implications of the questions surrounding the origins of the narrative. Do doubts about the factual accuracy of the events narrated in "Mutant Message" affect in any way the power and/or value of its themes and message? Why or why not?