

Night Shift Study Guide

Night Shift by Stephen King

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Jerusalem's Lot

Jerusalem's Lot Summary

Charles Boone lost his wife a short time ago and suffered a fever afterward that left him confused. To help him recover, his friends contacted a cousin with whom Charles had recently reconnected after a falling out between their grandfathers caused a rift in the family. Shortly thereafter the cousin dies in an accident at his home, leaving the house to Charles. Charles and his companion, Calvin McCann, have gone to live in the house, which is called Chapelwaite. Almost immediately Charles and Calvin noticed strange things about the house. First, there are the strange reactions of the people in the nearest town when they learn where the gentlemen live. The people react as though Charles must be crazy if he has come to live in Chapelwaite. Then they begin to hear strange sounds in the walls. Charles believes it must be mice. However, one night after hearing the noise, Calvin attempts to locate the source and is unable to find evidence of mice. Calvin does find, however, a diary by Charles's grandfather that was written in code.

Shortly before discovering the diary, Charles and Calvin find a map that shows the location of a small town up the road from Chapelwaite. Charles and Calvin walk to this town, Jerusalem's Lot, and find a long-abandoned town situated around a church that is strangely untouched by time and vandals. In the church, Charles and Calvin discover a cross that is hung upside down and frightening paintings that imply that this church did not worship a benevolent god. In the diary, after Calvin has managed to decode it, Charles reads how his great uncle befriended the preacher of this church and had his brother, Charles's grandfather, procure a strange book for him called, *The Mysteries of the Worm*. Charles's grandfather becomes aware that this book has some sort of sinister power, so he apparently attempted to steal it away from his brother, causing the rift that separated the family for an entire generation.

The strange sounds continue in the house, so Charles decides to go to the basement to see if he can find the source and perhaps eradicate it. Instead of mice, however, Charles finds the trapped souls of his uncle and a cousin who died in an accident at the house. Charles becomes convinced that he must burn the book, which he saw at the church in Jerusalem's Lot, but Calvin is reluctant to allow him to return to the cursed church. Charles manages to sneak out of the house, but Calvin follows. When they reach the church, they find someone has made a sacrifice of a goat after destroying most of the church. Charles takes the book, which causes the pulpit to fall away and reveal a large hole under the altar. Something large and sinister pops out of the hole, something like a giant worm, and it throws Calvin across the church, killing him. Charles burns the book and escapes the church. However, a short time later Charles becomes aware that the noises are happening again. Charles realizes that there is some connection between members of his family and the evil that takes place in Jerusalem's Lot. Aware that he is the last surviving member of his family, since he has no children or other relatives, Charles decides to kill himself. However, Charles does not know that his



grandfather had several illegitimate children. More than a hundred years later, the great-grandson of one of these children comes to live at Chapelwaite, convinced Charles' story was a delusion caused by his recurrent fever.

Jerusalem's Lot Analysis

Charles Boone is a widower who suffers a fever after the death of his wife that caused him to have delusions. This is introduced early in the story, giving the reader reason to believe that Charles Boone might not be a reliable narrator. The story unfolds slowly, presented in a series of letters between Boone and a friend introduced only by the name Bones. Charles seems content and almost excited at the beginning of the story, embracing his new home and this opportunity to learn about a side of his family that has been estranged throughout all his father's generation and a large portion of his own. The reader feels Charles' optimism, his almost childish excitement. However, this tone quickly changes as the novel progresses. First the neighbors seem to believe Charles is insane for living in Chapelwaite; then they refuse to come to the house or provide services to Charles and his companion. To the reader, this seems to suggest something strange has happened in that house, but Charles is unconcerned, perhaps laboring under the belief that the townspeople are simply reacting to him through the bias of local folklore.

As the story continues to unfold and the abandoned town of Jerusalem's Lot is introduced, the reader begins to feel the sinister aspects of the story, especially when it is implied that the people of Jerusalem's Lot were Satan worshipers. The author uses the setting in a unique fashion that makes it a character in the story as well as using it to set the theme. Jerusalem's Lot is the personification of the evil preacher who convinced Charles' great-uncle to procure for him a book that appears to be the equivalent of the Bible to Satan worshipers. The name of the book is strange, but the reader comes to understand why when Charles returns to the church to burn the book and the true nature of the church is revealed. There actually is a great worm under the church and it seems that the whole town worshiped this strange creature. Charles believes the worm and the preacher have some sort of hold over his family, so he burns the book, but this seems to have no impact. Charles then kills himself, trying to break the hold Jerusalem's Lot has over him and his family.

The final letter in the story is not written by Charles, but by a great-great-nephew more than a hundred years later. This nephew seems to believe that Charles's letters were written while he was in the throes of a fever that left him delusional, again touching on the possibility that Charles was an unreliable narrator. However, the story does not only include letters written by Charles, but diary entries written by Calvin McCann. These entries are explained away by the nephew as fakes, but the readers are left to interpret this for themselves. The fact that the great-great-nephew can hear noises in the walls as well, implies to readers that maybe Charles was not so unreliable after all.



Graveyard Shift

Graveyard Shift Summary

Hall is a young man who has lived a transient life most of his adult years, going from being a respectable college student to a jack of all trades who moves on when he grows bored. At the moment, Hall is working the graveyard shift at a mill running the picker-machine. Shortly before the Fourth of July holiday, Hall's supervisor tells him he is getting volunteers to clean out the basement over the holiday. Since Hall does not have enough seniority to get holiday pay, he decides to volunteer. On the first day of the cleanup crew, the supervisor separates the men into two groups, one to move furniture and other abandoned items and the other to come up behind the first crew with a hose and wash the newly-cleared area. The first night goes well, with only one mishap when one of the men gets bit by the rats that live in the basement. However, as the crew moves deeper and deeper into the basement, they encounter larger, more aggressive rats. After several men are bitten, the supervisor orders everyone to wear gloves; however, this does not stop the rats from attacking other vulnerable areas on the workers.

On the fourth day, Hall spots a bat. Soon after, Hall notices a trapdoor in the floor and suspects the rats are coming from this area. Hall suggests to the supervisor that someone go down there and take a look. The supervisor is reluctant until Hall tells him that he read through the local zoning codes and discovered that forcing the men to work around the rats without calling in a proper exterminator is against the law. The supervisor then agrees to allow three men to go down into the subbasement. Hall insists that the supervisor be one of those men. Hall, the supervisor, and another man go into the subbasement where they find an astronomical number of rats, most extremely large and blind, some that have lost their legs, others that have grown wings. Hall forces the supervisor deep into the subbasement until they reach an area that cannot possibly be part of the building above them. Here they find a rat that is bigger than a human being. The supervisor falls, rolling into this rat's nest, and is killed. Hall turns to leave, but he, too, is trapped by the rats and killed. Waiting for them up in the basement, the other workers decide to send another team down to find out what the problem is.

Graveyard Shift Analysis

Hall is a transient who clearly does not like to be tied down to one place and struggles with authority. Hall is also smarter than the average working man, making him feel some superiority to the people with whom he works. When Hall is offered a chance to work during the Fourth of July holiday rather than having the week off without pay, he jumps at the chance. However, the work is dirty and difficult, made even more unpleasant by the large number of rats with which the cleaning crew must deal. Hall appears unconcerned about the rats at first, since he is never bitten. Hall is something of a self-centered man, someone who does not become upset about a situation until it directly



affects him. However, Hall takes an interest when he sees an opportunity to get back at his supervisor. Hall does some research that gives him power over his superior. This again touches on Hall's intelligence and his struggle with authority figures. Hall forces his supervisor to go down into a subbasement with him. Here, however, Hall shows his true colors as he forces the supervisor to his death without regard to his own safety, leading to Hall's own death.



Night Surf

Night Surf Summary

A group of teenagers hang out on the beach after burning a man to death. The teens found the man in a car on the beach. The man was delirious and clearly suffering from the A6 flu, a manufactured disease that has already wiped out the majority of the Earth's population. One teen, Bernie, is arguing with his girlfriend, a young woman he no longer finds appealing. When Bernie stops to talk to another of his friends, Needles, rather than deal with his girlfriend's tantrum, Needles reveals that he believes he has contracted the A6 flu. Bernie returns to his girlfriend and goes into the apartment above the concession stand. Bernie recalls how he used to come to this beach before the flu to hang out with his friends, how much simpler things were then. In the morning, Bernie tells his girlfriend about Needles. Bernie's girl is frightened because she thought they were all immune because they had had another version of the flu, a non-fatal version. Bernie speculates that Needles lied about having the other version, but he is not sure he believes that himself.

Night Surf Analysis

Bernie is the first person narrator of this story, showing the reader a frightening world where authority no longer exists. The world's population has been largely destroyed by a flu, A6, that has killed everyone but a select few who have immunity to the disease because of a lesser, non-fatal version. Bernie lives with a small group of teenagers about his age, living their lives the way they want, without concern to rules or morality, burning a man to death because he has the illness and because they can. However, Bernie's sense of security is shaken when he learns one of the other kids has the fatal version of the flu despite his claims of having had the lesser version and therefore was immune. Bernie tells his girlfriend that this other boy, Needles, lied about having the other version of the flu in order to ease her fears. However, Bernie wonders if that is even a possibility and believing himself that Needles would not have lied. Bernie now lives with the fear that he will get sick and die, as well as the fear that he will not die and will have to live in a world without structure, without purpose.



I Am the Doorway

I Am the Doorway Summary

Artie is an astronaut who has retired to the Florida Keys because of an accident that leaves him paralyzed. Artie is sitting on his front porch telling his friend and neighbor, Richard, why he believes he killed a local kid the night before. Richard does not believe Artie because the story is outrageous, so he asks Artie to start again, from the beginning. Artie tells Richard how he was sent into space on a mission to Venus. On the way to Venus, they had trouble with a radio transmitter they were using to transmit a generic message to anything that might be listening. Artie's partner went out to fix it and they continued to Venus. They made four orbits of the planet and returned to Earth. There was an accident on reentry causing them to hit the ocean hard. Artie's partner was killed and Artie is left paralyzed. Several years pass and nothing of interest happens. However, a few months ago, Artie is in Bethesda for his annual meeting with a NASA official who keeps tabs on Artie to be sure he is not experiencing unusual symptoms related to his time in space. Artie is not, but on the way home his hands began to itch.

Over the next few days, Artie began to notice odd things in his hands. First it was just red spots. However, Artie soon realizes he is seeing without his eyes. When Artie examined his hands, he saw twelve eyeballs on his fingertips and between his thumb and index finger. Rather than tell anyone and risk being thought of as insane, Artie begins wrapping his hands in bandages. A few days before, Artie realized he was losing stretches of time. The night before, Artie saw a local boy he often sees on the beach. Sometime later, Artie woke to find the boy dead. Artie buried the boy and now he is trying to convince Richard to take him to where he buried the body to prove his story. Richard agrees, taking Artie out on the sand in his ATV. When they arrive at the spot, Richard digs in the sand but does not find anything. Artie insists the aliens must have moved the body. Richard asks to see Artie's hands, to prove his story. Artie unwraps his hands, but only after Richard promises to run if anything strange happens. Artie shows Richard his hand and then blacks out again. When Artie comes to, he is back at his house and Richard is nowhere to be found. Artie knows he must stop the aliens before they kill someone else. Artie pours gasoline on his hands and lights them on fire. Artie's hands are ruined, surgically removed and replaced with hooks. However, the eyes have now appeared on his chest. Artie has decided to kill himself with a shotgun, hoping if he is dead the eyes cannot come back.

I Am the Doorway Analysis

Artie is the first person narrator of this story, a disabled astronaut with a strange story. Artie claims he is the doorway to some strange aliens. Artie once went on a space mission to Venus, a planet he claims to be sinister and frightening, only to be paralyzed after an accident on reentry. Artie received the Medal of Honor and was given a large



pension after this mission with the stipulation that he meet with a man from NASA once a year to be checked for any strange illnesses that might have resulted from his time in space. Artie keeps his end of the deal until eyes appear in his hands. Artie does not tell anyone out of fear of how the government might react to the eyes. Artie does not want to become a science project or for NASA to do something that will allow the aliens in his hands to be released into the general populations. These fears show Artie's depth of knowledge about NASA, and the fact that they are desperate to find a way to be allowed to continue space exploration. Artie is an intelligent and moral man.

However, Artie's morality is pushed to the limits when he realizes the aliens are killing people. Artie believes the aliens are frightened of humans, as well as curious, and that they are killing people to satisfy both these emotions. Artie tries to go to his friend, Richard, for help, but ends up getting Richard killed when he shows him the eyes to convince him his story is true. Afterward, Artie does the only thing he believes he can; he burns his own hands. To an outside observer, this might be the actions of a crazy man, but Artie is truly convinced he is doing the only thing he can do to kill the aliens in his hands. This makes the reader wonder if Artie is truly a reliable narrator. When Artie reports that he plans to kill himself because the eyes have appeared in his chest now, the reader believes Artie is either truly insane or truly a hero. Either way, it seems Artie will make the argument moot when he kills himself.



The Mangler

The Mangler Summary

Officer Hunton is a cop who is called to the scene of an accidental death. A woman was pulled into an automatic iron and fold machine. Hunton expects to find a machine that is not functioning properly but learns that this particular machine is functioning perfectly, including the safety bar that was supposed to keep the operator from getting their fingers or hands caught in the machine. When Hunton asks the inspector how the accident could have happened, the inspector can only relate a story about a refrigerator that seemed to have a mind of its own when it killed a little boy. Not long after, Hunton is playing cards with his neighbor when he learns that another worker at the same laundry received a burn when one of the machine's pipes split. Hunton goes to interview the woman and learns that these accidents began happening around the same time when one of the young ladies who works at the laundry cut her finger on one of the machine's clamps. Hunton tells his neighbor, Jackson, about this. Jackson suggests that the machine has become possessed with an evil spirit as a result of the young lady's blood.

Hunton learns of yet another accident with the machine. A supervisor lost his arm when the machine came on spontaneously during routine maintenance. Not only did the machine come on spontaneously, but the maintenance could not get it to turn off, even after flipping all the fuses in the building. Hunton and Jackson decide they must do something. Jackson researches rituals to exercise a demon from an inanimate object and comes up with several possibilities. Jackson assures Hunton that the exorcism will be a success unless they are wrong about the event that began the possession. Jackson tells Hunton that if the possession began with belladonna, there is nothing that can be done. However, Jackson does not believe that is a possibility since belladonna is uncommon in the United States. What Jackson does not know is that one of the women had some pills for indigestion that contained belladonna, and she accidentally spilled them in the machine the week before the first incident. Not aware of this, Jackson and Hunton go to the laundry and try to exercise the demon with prayers and holy water. Instead of exercising the demon, they make it angry. The machine takes on a life of its own, breaking free of the bolts that hold it to the laundry's floor and chasing Hunton down the street.

The Mangler Analysis

This story illustrates the theme of possession, suggesting that there are spirits in the world that can inhabit inanimate objects and wreak havoc on the world. Officer Hunton is a hardnosed cop who thinks he has seen it all. However, when Hunton sees what an ironing and folding machine has done to an innocent woman, he sees something that will give him nightmares. The accident is gruesome, but Hunton believes that that is all it really is, an accident that was caused by the negligence of a cost-cutting business owner. When Hunton learns that this is not the case, however, he becomes focused on



finding the truth about this strange machine. For a seasoned cop, Hunton is unusually open to the ideas of the supernatural or possession. When Hunton cannot explain the injuries and deaths surrounding this ironing and folding machine, he allows his neighbor to talk him into the idea that the machine might be possessed with a demon. Hunton goes with his friend to attempt to get rid of this demon but only angers the machine and causes it to do something completely unrealistic, take on a life of its own and follow him down the street.



The Boogeyman

The Boogeyman Summary

Lester Billings is at his first appointment with a psychiatrist, telling him that he believes he killed his three children. Billings tells the psychiatrist that he has been happily married for more than ten years. Billings's first child was born a year after his marriage and his second child came the following year. When Billings's first child was three, the child grew afraid of the dark, complaining about a monster in his closet. Billings did not believe his child. One night, the child seemed more afraid than before, insistent on sleeping with his parents. Billings did not want his son to grow up without courage, so he forced him to sleep in the room. The following morning, Billings's wife found the child dead. The coroner said the child died from crib death. Billings and his wife were heartbroken, but they went on with their lives. Billings moved their second child, a daughter, into their older child's room. For more than a year, everything seemed normal. However, when the daughter reached the same age as her older brother was when he died, she became afraid of the dark. The girl insisted a monster lived in the closet. This brought a memory to Billings, how the closet door was partially open the morning his son was found dead. However, Billings still insisted that the girl sleep in her own bed. A few mornings later, the girl was found dead, just like her brother. Again the closet door was partially open.

Billings and his wife moved to a new home and tried to put their lives back together. Billings's wife wanted to have more children, but Billings refused. The wife became pregnant anyway, insisting that her birth control failed. At first Billings did not want to bond with his new son but soon found it impossible not to love the child. It seemed everything would be okay this time, since Billings decided to allow the child to sleep in his room with him rather than alone in a separate bedroom. Billings would hear noises at night and see strange things. When Billings's wife left town for a few days, the strange noises increased. Billings knew it was the same thing that had gotten his other children. Billings did not want it to get him, so he forced his young son to sleep in his own room. The following morning, Billings found the child dead in his bed. After hearing all this, the psychiatrist asks Billings to return for more sessions. Billings insists he did not come to be analyzed, he simply wanted to talk to someone. Billings goes into the reception room, returns to the office and discovers that the doctor is really the Boogeyman in disguise.

The Boogeyman Analysis

Lester Billings is a loving husband and father who has suffered the unimaginable deaths of all three of his children. Billings has come to a psychiatrist to discuss these deaths, hoping to relieve himself of the burden of his grief. Billings tells a story that seems believable, a story that could happen to just about anyone. Billings's children die in their sleep, most likely from crib death. It is tragic, but there is nothing supernatural about it.



However, Billings believes there is something supernatural about it. Billings talks about his children's fear of a monster in the closet. Again, this is a normal fear. Billings talks about the closet door being ajar after each child's death. This does not seem unusual. To the reader, Billings appears to be a grieving father who is searching for someone or something to blame for his children's deaths, making him something of an unreliable narrator when he claims that a Boogeyman killed his third child because he was afraid the monster was coming for him. However, when Billings returns to the psychiatrist's office and finds that the psychiatrist is the Boogeyman, the reader realizes that Billings was right all along. The author successfully uses a bit of misdirection when he makes Billings appear unstable, unreliable, and wrong.



Gray Matter

Gray Matter Summary

A group of older men are hanging out in a local convenience store as a storm begins to brew outside. As they discuss the weather, a young boy comes and asks to speak to the store's owner, Henry. The old men recognize the boy as Timmy Grenadine, the local drunk's son. Henry recruits a couple of the old timers to go to Richie Grenadine's apartment with a delivery of beer. On the way, Henry tells the old timers the story Timmy told him. Back in November, Timmy's father got a six pack, like he usually does, and began drinking it. One of the cans tasted funny, but Richie drank it anyway because that is what a drunk does. Over the next couple of days, Richie began to act strangely. Richie acted as though he had the flu and shunned the light. Then Richie stopped bathing or even getting out of his chair during the day. Eventually Timmy noticed that Richie had developed some sort of grey fungus on his body.

Timmy has become frightened of his father's strange behavior. Henry is frightened, too, as are the old timers going to the apartment with him. They make their way slowly up the stairs to Grenadine's apartment. The smell becomes apparent before they reach Grenadine's floor. They also notice that all the lightbulbs have been broken. When they reach the door, the knock and tell Grenadine they have his beer. Grenadine insists they leave it at the door, but they want to see him. Grenadine opens the door, but it's not a human being they see. Grenadine's face is still there, but his body is like a mass of gray matter, some sort of jelly, with a pulsing pink line down the center. Grenadine is dividing. The old timers run back to Henry's store, leaving him there alone with what Grenadine has become. They wait at the store for someone to come, hoping it will be Henry.

Gray Matter Analysis

The theme of family is touched upon in this story. Timmy is a good kid, buying beer for his father in order to keep him happy while keeping his grades up. Timmy loves his father and would do anything for him. However, when Timmy's father has clearly become something otherworldly, the boy does not know what to do. Timmy goes to the only person he can trust, the man who sells him his father's beer.

Henry and his friends find Richie Grenadine turned into something otherworldly, something disgusting. Richie is a mass of gray jelly. This seems to be symbolic for the mess alcoholism can make of a person's life. Alcohol leads to destroyed family values, wrecked work ethics, and a complete change in a person's personality. Richie has done all this and more by being turned into this gray mass. Now Richie is threatening the only people left who care enough to see what he has become. The old timers who went with Henry to the symbolic intervention become so frightened that they run away, aware that they are leaving Henry to possible death. They sit back and hope, apparently a symbolic reference to the enablers in an alcoholic's life.



Battleground

Battleground Summary

John Renshaw has just returned from Florida where he assassinated the president of a toy company. Renshaw picks up a package on his way to his apartment and carefully opens it once alone. The package is from the same toy company his victim owned and contains a set of toy soldiers, complete with tanks, helicopters, and missiles. The package begins to move on its own and releases its contents, which are animated. Suddenly Renshaw realizes he is under attack by tiny soldiers. The bullets they are firing are minuscule, but draw blood just the same. Renshaw cannot believe what is happening at first, but then begins to fight the soldiers. Renshaw cannot stop them all at once, so he is forced to seek refuge in the bathroom. Unfortunately, the soldiers are able to use tanks and missiles to bust a hole in the bathroom door and gain access. Renshaw slips out the bathroom window and makes his way to the balcony where he begins a sneak attack on the soldiers from behind. However, Renshaw does not know that the soldiers have a thermonuclear weapon that they use to destroy his entire apartment and kill him.

Battleground Analysis

This short story illustrates the theme of revenge. Renshaw is a hired assassin who has just returned from killing the president of a toy company. The victim's mother has somehow figured out who Renshaw is and sends him a package that contains toy soldiers. These soldiers are somehow animated and have real, if miniature, weapons that they use to attack Renshaw in his own apartment. It takes time for Renshaw to realize that this is real and it is happening to him. This story seems fantastical, impossible, therefore it is not a surprise to the reader when Renshaw has trouble wrapping his own mind around it. Renshaw spends a great deal of the story trying to accept what is happening to him. Renshaw's struggle shows the reader Renshaw's character, intelligence, and sheer arrogance in believing he is untouchable and that he can survive something this unimaginable. Unfortunately for Renshaw, he underestimates his opponents and dies.



Trucks

Trucks Summary

A group of people are stranded in a diner while driverless trucks drive restlessly in the parking lot. One of the men in the diner tries to make a run for it, but is run down and thrown into a ditch. Now there are only four men and a woman left. Night comes and the people in the diner turn on the lights, but the lights go out a short time later. Worried about long term survival, they decide to gather as much water as they can before the pump on the well goes out. Two of the men slip out to the restrooms to fill some buckets and are spotted by a truck that comes crashing toward them. They barely escape. The next morning, the trucks appear to be running out of gas. One of the trucks comes up to the diner and begins beeping its horn. They realize it is Morse code and that the trucks are asking that someone come fill their tanks with gas. Everyone refuses but one man, who believes if they refuse they will be in danger. When the trucks realize what the people have decided, a bulldozer begins attacking the diner. Finally it is decided they had better begin fueling the trucks. They fill tanks until the gas is gone and it seems they have become the servants and the trucks the masters.

Trucks Analysis

The theme of revenge is explored here once more. The trucks, symbolic for servants or other subservient classes of people, have reversed their role, becoming the masters over the humans. The people cannot believe what is happening to them, living in a state of denial until people begin to die. Suddenly the people realize they must accept their new state of reality or face the same fate as their companions who did not survive the initial moments of this new world. The trucks have all the power because of their size and their ability to make the people subservient out of fear. The trucks have served for their entire existence; now they are able to get revenge on their owners and force them to serve for a while.



Sometimes They Come Back

Sometimes They Come Back Summary

Jim Norman has a nervous breakdown while completing his internship for his teaching degree. This causes Norman to be concerned that he will have trouble finding a job but is pleasantly surprised when he gets a job at Harold Davis High School. Norman enjoys most of his classes, except the final one of the day, Living with Literature. This class is little more than a glorified special education class. Norman, whose brother was murdered in front of him by three kids when they were young, begins having nightmares about that day shortly after beginning his job. Norman worries that this might be the beginning of another breakdown; therefore, he keeps the dreams a secret. Norman settles into his job but is saddened to learn after the Christmas break that one of his students was killed in a car accident. The student was in his Living with Literature class, one of the few to show promise. At the same time, Norman learns he will have a new student in that same class, Robert Lawson. When Norman sees the new kid, he sees an uncanny resemblance to one of the boys who killed his brother.

Norman is unsettled by the new kid in his Living with Literature class but does not allow the situation to upset his emotional balance. However, Norman begins having trouble with one of his students who seems to have befriended Robert Lawson. As Norman struggles with these unruly children, another of his students from Living with Literature dies. In her place a new student comes to the class by the name of David Garcia. Norman does not recognize the boy's picture, but the second he sees him, he recognizes the particular twitch this boy has. A few weeks later, the boy Norman has been having trouble with comes to him and tells him how Lawson and Garcia told him they want to kill Mr. Norman. Norman sends the boy home, assuring him everything is okay. However, Norman is frightened and does not know what to do. Norman contacts a police officer he remembers from the days before his brother died and learns that three of the boys who killed his brother died in a car accident shortly after Wayne Norman was killed.

Another student in Living with Literature disappears, making room for yet one more student, Vincent Corey. Vinnie is the leader of the boys who killed Wayne. Norman knows now it is only a matter of time. One of the boys threatens Norman's wife and then a few days later she is killed. Norman arranges to meet the boys at the school after hours. Norman arrives early and uses a book called Raising Demons to conjure a demon to help him. When the boys arrive, Norman is ready. The boys find themselves repeating the scene exactly as it took place when Wayne was killed. When it gets to the point where the boys stabbed Wayne, they simply disappear. Before the demon goes, it promises to be back, leaving Norman wondering what it is he has done.



Sometimes They Come Back Analysis

Jim Norman is a teacher who had a nervous breakdown the first time he taught high school and is now beginning a new job as a high school teacher. The reader right away wonders if Norman might not have another nervous breakdown from the stresses of dealing with troubled children. When Norman begins having nightmares about the murder of his brother and then begins seeing the boys who killed his brother, still young and insane, the reader begins to wonder if perhaps Norman has not gone over the edge again. Apparently Norman wonders the same thing because he never tells anyone about these boys or the fear that is beginning to plague his every waking hour.

The theme of revenge comes into this story, but not in a way the reader might expect. The revenge does not begin with Norman, whose brother was killed, but with the killers. The killers have come to get Norman because he escaped. Not only this, but Norman is still alive. The killers all died in a car crash weeks after killing Wayne Norman. It seems they are jealous of Norman for continuing to live and have come to destroy him. However, Norman turns the tables on these boys by conjuring a demon to take them back to where they belong. Unfortunately, the demon has crossed the threshold between worlds, opening up the possibility that it might haunt Norman, making his life more difficult than the three killers ever did.



Strawberry Spring

Strawberry Spring Summary

An article in the newspaper causes the narrator to recall a time when he was in college and several students were killed. It was a strawberry spring, a false spring, that brought cool weather and fog at night. The first night of fog ended when a young man tripped over the body of a co-ed. The young girl's throat was cut. Fear spread through campus until a rumor began suggesting that the young girl's boyfriend had been charged with the murder. That night, the narrator walked around campus as the fog once again rolled in. The next morning, the narrator woke to the news that another girl had been killed. Now people were frightened, convinced a serial killer was on the loose. They had even come up with a name for the killer, Springheel Jack. That night, the narrator stayed in to study for an upcoming test, his thoughts so focused on the killer that he spent most of the night staring out the window. The next morning, another girl is found dead. The police focused on a young man who later proved to be innocent. A storm blew in and the fog went away. No more girls were killed. Now, however, another strawberry spring had come and another girl has been killed. The narrator reflects on the fact that the girl was found near his home, that he was on campus when all the other girls were killed, and he has no alibi for any of the murders.

Strawberry Spring Analysis

This story is told in the first person narration by an unnamed narrator. This man was a college student when a serial killer was active on the same college campus he was attending. The murders took place during the fog that would blow in every night that spring, each crime growing more violent with each passing day. Panic spread throughout the campus and people began packing up and going home. However, the narrator remained, saw the crimes through to the end without becoming involved in the growing panic. The reader believes this narrator was simply cool headed, the kind of guy who is not easily rattled. However, when the reader learns that the crimes have begun again, near where the narrator lives, and that he has no alibi for any of the murders, including the most recent, this opinion begins to change. The narrator does not seem to know himself if he is guilty of these crimes. The evidence seems overwhelming, though, and the narrator's wife seems to believe in his guilt, making the reader wonder if perhaps there is no such thing as coincidence.



The Ledge

The Ledge Summary

Stan Norris is a tennis pro who is having an affair with one of his clients. Norris is speaking with his lover's husband, hoping to convince him to let the two of them go away together. Cressner, however, is a mobster who does not like to lose. Cressner offers Norris a bag full of money and his wife and then informs Norris that he has had one of his men move Norris' car and plant drugs in it. Cressner intends to have his friend call the police to report the drugs. Norris has already been to prison once, and he will surely go again when the police find the drugs. Cressner then tells Norris he will call his man off and allow Norris to leave with his wife if he will agree to a bet. Norris feels he has no choice. Cressner wants Norris to walk the two inch ledge that circles the building in which Cressner's penthouse apartment is located. A fall from the ledge would mean sure death. Norris begins, moving slowly and trying to keep his mind on his lover. Norris manages to stay on the ledge, even when a pigeon attacks him. Finally Norris arrives back at Cressner's penthouse only to find him waiting with one of his men. Cressner tells Norris that his car has been returned and the drugs removed. Norris is free to take the money and leave. Norris does just that, but before he reaches the door, Cressner tells him that Norris' lover is dead. Norris turns and takes out the hit man with the bag of money, then steals the gun and hits him in the face. Norris then turns the gun on Cressner and forces him out on the balcony, informing him that it is his turn to walk the ledge. Norris waits, but does not expect Cressner to return.

The Ledge Analysis

Stan Norris is a convicted felon who does not know how to do anything but teach tennis. Now Norris' life is in danger because he has fallen in love with one of his customers, the wife of a mobster. Norris appears to be a spontaneous, irresponsible person who allows his heart to rule his head. Unfortunately, this time it has led Norris into the hands of a mobster who likes to play with people's lives. Norris wants to convince this man to allow him to run away with his wife, but the mobster is not willing to let him go so easily. First Cressner wants to play with Norris' life by forcing him to walk a ledge, a symbol for the line between good and evil that most people walk every day. Norris walks the ledge and survives, only to find that Cressner has changed his mind about allowing Norris to go free. However, Norris manages to get the better of Cressner, forcing him to walk the ledge just as he had done to Norris. Now Norris waits, but he does not expect Cressner to return. Norris has managed to turn the tables on his enemy, but he does not improve on the situation, but shows himself to be the same as Cressner, forcing him to walk the ledge as well. These two men are more alike than the reader is originally led to believe, the story ending by showing that when things are reversed, they both behave exactly the same.



The Lawnmower Man

The Lawnmower Man Summary

Harold Parkette has always hired a neighborhood kid to cut the lawn with his mower, but when a cat accidentally got caught under the blades he sold the mower to appease his wife and daughter. Now that summer has returned, Parkette has tried to ignore the wildly growing lawn. It has gotten to the point, however, where he can no longer ignore it. The neighborhood boy has gone off to college, so Parkette decides to search the newspaper for someone to hire. An ad that promises cheap rates gets his attention. After Parkette calls, they promise to send someone right away. Parkette had expected a teenager, so he is pleased to find a professional looking man arrive at his door. Parkette shows the man the backyard, which is the longest and most in need, and then leaves him to his work. When Parkette steps out on the back deck a short time later, he is shocked to find the man naked and chasing after the self-propelled lawnmower, eating the lawn cuttings like a goat. Parkette yells at him to stop, but the man appears to not hear him. Parkette passes out after seeing the man eat a woodchuck and wakes to find the naked man leaning over him. Parkette insists that the man get dressed. The man explains that his boss has found a way to make lawn care more efficient, more natural. Parkette asks the man to leave. However, to Parkette's horror, the man goes around to the front lawn and begins to cut it the same way as he did the back. Parkette imagines the horror of his neighbors when they see a naked man eating his lawn. Parkette needs to find a way to force the man to stop. Parkette decides to call the police. While he is on the phone, the lawnmower man breaks into the house and tells Parkette he should not have called the police. The lawnmower man and his lawnmower chase Parkette through the house and out into the backyard where they run him down like the gopher.

The Lawnmower Man Analysis

Harold Parkette has never cut his lawn himself, but he did own a lawnmower that he was proud of until it accidentally killed a cat. Parkette gets rid of the lawnmower and finds himself unable to care for his own lawn. Parkette needs to hire a lawn care person to cut his lawn. Expecting a teenager, Parkette is pleased when a professional looking man comes to his door ready to get to work. Parkette is not so pleased when he discovers the man is something between a human and a goat who likes to eat the grass that his automated lawnmower cuts. Parkette returns to his first instincts and attempts to get rid of the man, but this fails when the man overhears his phone call to the police and tries to stop him. Parkette is run down with the lawnmower, much like the cat at the beginning of the story, adding a touch of irony to the story. This seems to be a classic horror story based on the theme of revenge, an ironic sort of revenge that could be seen as the cat's revenge on Parkette for its death or perhaps the revenge of a lawn that has been ill cared for and angry that Parkette has attempted to make the one person who does care go away.



Quitters, Inc.

Quitters, Inc. Summary

Dick Morrison runs into an old co-worker at the airport. The co-worker, Jimmy McCann, has stopped smoking and claims that he has turned his whole life around since he stopped smoking. McCann gives Morrison a card for the place where he went to stop smoking, claiming that it changed his life and Morrison should give it a try. Morrison goes to the address on the card and meets with a counselor, though Morrison is not fully committed to the idea of quitting just yet. The counselor tells Morrison to come back the following day if he really wants to quit. Morrison does, even though in the back of his mind he is still not committed to quitting. The counselor advises him that he will be watched twenty-four hours a day for the first two months of the program. If he should cheat one time, his wife will be brought to the office and given an electric shock. Should he cheat a second time, his son, a mentally ill young man who attends a special school, will be given the shock. With each successive cheat, Morrison's wife and son will suffer longer shocks and then beatings. Morrison does well the first few weeks despite a difficult time the first night. However, after one particularly difficult day, Morrison smokes half a cigarette on the way home from work. When Morrison arrives home he finds his wife gone. Morrison is called into the office of Quitters, Inc. where he is forced to watch his wife endure an electric shock. Morrison tells his wife about the program and she is surprisingly supportive. Later, Morrison is told he is not to gain weight and if he gains too much, his wife will lose her pinky. Morrison adheres closely to his diet. A year later Morrison is charged five thousand dollars, plus fifty cents for the electricity used to shock his wife, for the program.

Quitters, Inc. Analysis

Dick Morrison is a busy executive who is stressed and unhappy in his life. When he meets an old colleague in an airport, Morrison receives a card for a company that helps people stop smoking. McCann claims that this company changed his life and that it would change Morrison's if he gives it a try. Morrison decides to try but is not completely committed to the idea of not smoking again. Morrison cannot imagine what this company could do to convince him to give up cigarettes. Morrison quickly changes his mind when he realizes that the company he has gone to for help has placed his family in danger. Morrison does not want his wife or child harmed and this makes him commit to quit. The company has taken the vague idea of possible death from cigarette smoking and made it a tangible reality for Morrison's wife and son. Now the dangers of smoking have taken on a new life, a new reality, and Morrison finds new motivation to quit when it is no longer his health but that of his family members.



I Know What You Need

I Know What You Need Summary

Elizabeth is a college student who is studying in the Student Union when she meets a young man who seems convinced he knows exactly what she needs. Elizabeth has ice cream with him, but then blows off his advances by telling him she has a boyfriend. However, the boy, Ed Hamner, continues to pursue her by giving her the answers to a test about which she has been concerned. The answers prove to be accurate and Elizabeth passes the test. Elizabeth and Ed become friendly, but Elizabeth continues to keep Ed at arm's length. Over the summer, Elizabeth and her boyfriend go to Boothbay, Maine to work for the summer. Unfortunately, Elizabeth's boyfriend is killed in a tragic car accident. A few days later, Ed shows up, claiming Elizabeth's college roommate told him what happened. Elizabeth spends the remainder of the summer with Ed who seems to know what it is she wants and needs even before she does.

When school resumes, Elizabeth's roommate is concerned about her growing relationship with Ed. As time passes, the roommates' relationship becomes strained. One day, Elizabeth's roommate tells her that she has had a private investigator check Ed out. The report chronicles Ed's difficult childhood in which Ed's father lost his job and became desperate to make money. Ed's father began taking his son to Vegas and suddenly began to win at cards. Life turned around for the Hamner's, but Ed's father wanted more. After being kicked out of the casinos, Ed's father began playing the stock market. At the same time, Ed's mother was admitted to a mental hospital because she claimed that her son could read minds and helped his father win at both gambling and the stock market. Shortly after Ed's mother was released from the hospital, the family went on vacation. Ed's parents were killed in a car accident. Then Elizabeth's roommate tells her that she never told Ed about Elizabeth's boyfriend's death as he claimed. Ed also never took the class from which the test he provided to Elizabeth was from, as he said. All of this makes Elizabeth question everything she has believed about Ed. Elizabeth goes to Ed's apartment and finds a box full of strange artifacts, including a small red car eerily similar to the one that killed Elizabeth's boyfriend, and a doll that looks like Elizabeth. Ed finds Elizabeth in his apartment and confesses to using his extra-sensory perception to make her like him. Ed says he knew Elizabeth in elementary school and has wanted her ever since. Elizabeth demands that Ed leave her alone, but Ed promises that she will regret it for the rest of her life because no other man will ever give her everything she wants like he did.

I Know What You Need Analysis

This story is about the societal clicks that exist between peer groups and one man's attempts to move from a lower click to a higher in click by getting the girl he has always wanted. This boy, Ed Hamner, has the uncanny ability to figure out what people want and to give it to them. Ed uses this ability to seduce a beautiful young girl who would not



otherwise give him the time of day. Ed goes as far as to kill Elizabeth's boyfriend in order to play the sympathetic friend and worm his way into her life. However, a friend of Elizabeth's sees through his actions and tries to protect her. Ed turns out to be a manipulator who uses what should be a gift as a weapon to injure those who hurt him and to reward himself with the things he desires.

Elizabeth is a kind, young woman who is simply a victim of her place in society. Elizabeth is beautiful and as such expected to live a charmed life. When a boy comes into her life and seems able to predict her wants and needs without any effort on her part, she does not question his efforts because it seems that the "gifts" are exactly what she deserves because of her beauty. Elizabeth is not shallow exactly, just a product of her surroundings. When Elizabeth learns the truth about Ed, he warns her that she will never be truly happy because she will never again be with a man who can predict her desires and provide them to her. Even as Elizabeth is walking away, sticking to her guns, she realizes he is right and she worries what kind of life that will mean for her. Perhaps that small realization does suggest Elizabeth is shallow, or perhaps it just represents the shallower part of everyone's personality, a part of human nature.



Children of the Corn

Children of the Corn Summary

Burt and Vicky are an estranged couple who are making one last effort to save their marriage by making a cross country trip to visit Vicky's brother. Burt decided to leave the highway a few hours before in order to find some interesting scenery, but now they find themselves staring at nothing but corn fields. As they argue about when to stop for lunch, they run a child down in the street. Burt gets out in order to investigate and discovers that the boy's throat is cut. Burt loads the boy up in the trunk of the car, takes a suitcase he found in the corn field, and drives into the nearest town. Burt wants to find the sheriff's office to report the boy's death. However, when they arrive in town they find it completely deserted even though it is the middle of the afternoon. Vicky wants to turn around and go back to a town they passed earlier in the afternoon, but Burt keeps insisting that the whole town cannot be deserted despite evidence to the contrary.

Burt stops the car outside a church and decides to investigate. Vicky, who has an aversion to all things religious because of her preacher father, refuses to go with him. Burt takes the keys, and her keys, so she will not drive off and leave him stranded. In the church, Burt finds a book that tracks all the births and deaths of the people in town. The records go back twelve years and record deaths that occurred exactly on each person's nineteenth birthday. Burt hears Vicky blasting the car horn and goes back outside to find a group of kids converging on his car. Burt attempts to make it to Vicky's side, but a group of the kids turn on him. Burt manages to kill one boy before running off. Burt runs into the corn field and manages to hide there most of the day. Toward dusk, Burt finds a path in the cornfield that leads to a clearing. In the clearing, Burt finds a preacher, a cop, and Vicky hanging from a cross, all mutilated and dead. Before Burt can run for safety again, something comes toward him in the cornfield. Later, after Burt is dead, the children come to the cornfield where He Who Walks Behind the Rows tells them, through one of their own, that they have been disobedient and as a result will have to offer a greater sacrifice. The age of sacrifice is changed from nineteen to eighteen. Twenty children walk to their deaths that night.

Children of the Corn Analysis

Marital discord begins this novel with tension, distracting the reader from the mundane setting and the ordinary premise. However, the setting takes on a new light when the man, Burt, accidentally runs over a child in the street. Burt quickly gets out of the car and discovers that the child's throat had been cut before he hit him. Suddenly a mundane setting takes on more sinister meaning. Burt and his wife, Vicky, go into town to find someone in law enforcement to take the child and to offer some semblance of security to this rattled couple. However, marital discord continues to influence their choices, causing Burt to leave Vicky alone in the car while he investigates a local church. Burt discovers that no one in this town for the past twelve years has survived



past his nineteenth birthday. Burt also notices a unique use of corn and corn stalks all through the abandoned town, again making the ordinary cornfields take on a more significant role in the story.

Burt and Vicky are attacked by a group of children who steal Vicky away and chase Burt into the cornfield. Burt seems to believe he has outsmarted the children when he survives until dusk, but when he finds his wife and two other people dead, the reader knows that Burt's time is up. Burt dies. Then the reader is introduced to the children of the town, a group of innocents who seem to believe that they are being manipulated by a being that lives in the cornfields. He Who Walks Behind the Rows talks to them through one of their own and convinces them that they shall no longer live past their eighteenth birthday. Those who are already eighteen walk blindly into the fields, unconcerned, suggesting the cornfields were a symbol for a religion that induced a fervor like those that have ended in mass suicides many times in history. Perhaps Vicky was right to question all religious artifacts.



The Last Rung on the Ladder

The Last Rung on the Ladder Summary

Larry returns home from Los Angeles to find a letter waiting for him from his sister. The letter causes Larry to recall a time when he and his sister were small children. They lived on a farm that had an old barn with a third loft. There was a ladder that went from the floor all the way to that third loft, but it was old and the children had been warned not to play on it. One afternoon while their parents were gone, they began to play a game they had played dozens of times before. Larry and Katrina would climb to the top of the third loft and then jump down into the hay bin. Larry went first, then Katrina. Over and over they climbed and jumped, with no concern to their safety. Larry noticed that the ladder was getting a little loose, but thought nothing of it until it began to crumble under Katrina. The ladder disappeared below Katrina, leaving her hanging more than a hundred feet in the air with nothing below her but hard floor. Larry screamed for her to hold on and he begins to pile hay underneath her. When Katrina cannot hold on any longer, Larry tells her to let go. Katrina suffers a broken leg, but survives the fall. Later that night, Katrina confesses that she had no idea that Larry was piling hay below her, she simply let go because he told her to. Now the letter that Larry holds in his hand is a letter his sister wrote in the final days of her life. Katrina committed suicide by jumping off a building.

The Last Rung on the Ladder Analysis

Larry is a loving brother who lost touch with his sister through years of career ambition and divorce. Larry became so focused on his own life that he did not notice that his little sister was struggling in her own life, that she needed her big brother to save her as he once did when they were children. Larry's sister once fell when a ladder she was climbing on collapsed, but her life was saved because her brother was able to pile up enough hay to break her fall. The ladder has become symbolic of life's struggles, of the danger of falling off the path to safety and happiness. Larry has climbed his ladder and arrived at the top alone, but successful. Katrina, however, has fallen off and found herself alone, without anyone to rescue her.

The reader compares the lives of Katrina and Larry and wonders who truly fell off the ladder. Katrina is a prostitute in Los Angeles who jumped off a building to her death after reaching out to her brother and not receiving a response. Larry is a divorced lawyer who is successful in his profession, but isolated in his private life. Both appear to have wandered off the path to happiness, but responded differently. Larry is unable to save Katrina this time, but her letter has reminded him of a different time in his life and perhaps pointed out his mistakes. This time Katrina has rescued Larry.



The Man Who Love Flowers

The Man Who Love Flowers Summary

A man walks down the street and everyone who sees him can tell that he is in love. There is nothing extraordinary about him, but there is a serenity about him that screams romance. A flower vendor talks the man into buying a bouquet of flowers for his lover. The man takes them, the more expensive ones, even though he does not have the money to spare. The man continues on, moving into an alley where he sees his lady love walking toward him. The man calls out to her, but she does not respond. When he calls again, the woman tells him he is wrong, she is not who he thinks she is. The man pulls out a hammer and kills the woman. The man turns, returns to the street, and walks on. A woman sees him and thinks how in love he appears.

The Man Who Love Flowers Analysis

A man appears to be in love, walking serenely down the street to meet his lady love. People are happy at the sight of him, refreshed to see such happiness on the face of a young man. However, this particular young man is insane and kills a girl he mistakes for his lady love, a woman that the reader worries is either dead or never really existed. It seems the man represents the darker side of love, symbolic of a love turned to obsession, killing all that makes love a happy, bright emotion.



One for the Road

One for the Road Summary

Booth watches Tookey close up the bar as he has done most every night for many years. Booth and Tookey are both widowers who have little to go home for and tonight a storm promises a cold as well as empty bed. Before they can leave, a man comes into the bar with obvious frost bite. The man was traveling with his family when he got their car stuck in a snow bank on the turn off to Jerusalem's Lot. Tookey and Booth both know that that road is never plowed because no one is crazy enough to want to go to Jerusalem's Lot. They also know the chances of finding the man's wife and daughter, whom he left in the car, still alive is almost none. They discuss getting help, but decide it would be quicker to take Tookey's four wheel drive to the man's car. When they arrive, they find the car empty. The man refuses to believe his family is dead. The man follows footsteps in the snow, forcing Tookey and Booth to follow. They come across the man's wife, but she has clearly been compromised by the vampires who live in Jerusalem's Lot. Tookey and Booth know they have no choice but to walk away. Back at the car, the little girl appears, attempting to trick Booth into allowing her to bite his neck. Tookey saves him by throwing a bible at the girl. They drive away and forget they ever met the stranger.

One for the Road Analysis

Jerusalem's Lot has appeared in another of the stories in this book, a place where an evil preacher worshiped a worm under his church. Now Jerusalem's Lot is rumored to be the home to vampires. Tookey and Booth know this and are not crazy enough to go down the road to that evil place. However, a man from out of town does not know he should not go down that road and has managed to get his car stuck, leaving his wife and child to fend for themselves. The characters of Tookey and Booth are exposed here as they chose to help the man rather than turn him out or send him to the sheriff, who would most likely not go out there that night either. Booth, the first person narrator, describes the ride to the car as a sinister, dark ride during which they are followed by a dark character. When they arrive and find the car empty, it seems the rumors of vampires are true. There is nothing Booth and Tookey can do, but still they stay with the man, trying to convince him not to trust the woman he believes to be his wife. It is no good; they cannot convince the man. Faith and trust have ironically turned into a source of danger, taking the man's life from him and ruining his immortal soul. Tookey and Booth survive, but only because of their faith in one another.



The Woman in the Room

The Woman in the Room Summary

Johnny's mother is in the hospital, dying of cancer. Johnny has found a collection of drugs in her medicine cabinet and is surprised to find some powerful pain killers. The man knows an overdose of these drugs could kill a person. Johnny also knows that his mother suffers a great deal of pain and that she sometimes asks him to sneak her some aspirin. Johnny visits her several times with the pills in his pocket, but he cannot make himself give them to her. Johnny watches his mother grow sicker and still he cannot be sure if he can really do it. Finally Johnny's mother asks him to give her some aspirin, her head is hurting her. Johnny tells her he has some more powerful pills that will help her much better. Johnny's mother asks for the pills. Johnny carefully feeds her six of the pills. Johnny's mother goes to sleep and he leaves the room, careful to leave her purse beside the bed with the pill bottle on top of it.

The Woman in the Room Analysis

This story is less of a traditional horror story than a story of euthanasia. A man's mother is dying and she is suffering, but there is nothing the doctors can do for her. The man watches everyday as her pain grows and her will to live weakens. The man wants to help her, wants to end her pain, but he is not sure he can do it. The man does not know if he wants to end it for her or for him. It is harder and harder for him to visit to her and watch the pain destroy the woman she once was. Finally he does it, feeds her the pills, and then leaves them so that it appears that she took the pills herself. In its own way, this is a horror story, a story that no man or woman wants to live in reality. No one should have to watch a loved one waste away and feel powerless to do anything to help.



Characters

Charles Boone appears in Jerusalem's Lot

Charles Boone is a widower who recently inherited the family home built by his grandfather and great-uncle. There was a falling out between these two gentlemen that caused a rift between the two sides of the family until Boone and his cousin began corresponding with one another. After the death of his wife, Boone suffered a fever that left him delusional. In order to help him recover, Boone's friends contacted his cousin, who died shortly thereafter and left Charles the ancestral home, Chapelwaite. Boone has come to the house to live, hoping the new surroundings will help him recover his health. The first few days at the house are peaceful with the exception of the odd reactions of the people in the nearby town when they learn where Boone and his companion, Calvin McCann, are living.

After a time, strange things begin to happen in the house. Boone and Calvin begin hearing strange noises in the house, assuming it to be rats. They also find a map showing a town up the road from Chapelwaite. Boone and Calvin go to explore the town and find it strangely untouched by vandals or by time. They also find a church that is sinister, that appears to be for the worship of something evil. Later, they find a diary written by Boone's grandfather that describes the purchase of a book that Boone saw in the church. Boone becomes convinced that he must return to the church and destroy the book. When he does, Calvin is killed, but the book is successfully burned. Unfortunately, Boone comes to realize that the burning of the book has only deterred the evil temporarily, but that he is the gateway and he must die. Boone believes he is the last of his line, but is unaware of the illegitimate children his grandfather fathered in his lifetime. These letters written by Boone are presented by his great-grand nephew who has come to live in Chapelwaite more than a hundred years after Boone's suicide. The nephew does not believe his uncle's story, but believes him to have been suffering the effects of a fever.

Artie appears in I Am the Doorway

Artie is an astronaut who once went on a mission to Venus. Artie's partner, Cory, had to leave the aircraft before they arrived at their destination in order to fix a transmitter, and it is at this point that Artie believes Cory was infected with something alien. They continued to their destination and made four orbits before returning to Earth. An accident occurred upon reentry and the aircraft crashed into the ocean, leaving Cory dead and Artie unable to walk. Artie retired to the Florida keys with a medal and a generous pension. Every year Artie meets with a government official to make sure he is not suffering any ill effects from his time in space. It is after one of these meetings that something strange begins to happen to Artie. It began with itching. Soon eyeballs appeared in his hands. Artie could actually see through these eyes and feel the emotions of the creatures attached to the eyes.



After time, Artie becomes aware that the eyeballs are controlling his body, doing things that he cannot remember doing. One night, Artie realizes that the eyes have killed a young boy. Artie tries to tell his neighbor but is unable to convince him without showing him his hands. When the eyes are uncovered, they once again take over Artie's body and kill his neighbor. Artie then decides he must stop them. Artie burns his hands severe enough that they are amputated. However, this does not stop the creatures. Artie finds twelve eyes have appeared on his chest and decides he must kill himself to stop them completely.

Hunton appears in The Mangler

Officer Hunton is a cop who thinks he has seen it all. However, Hunton has never seen anything like the mangler. Hunton is called to the death of a woman at a laundry. The woman was pulled into a machine that irons and folds sheets. There is a safety bar on the machine that is supposed to stop the worker from being injured, but for some reason it did not work this time. An inspector checks the machine out and discovers that it is in perfect working order. Hunton begins to wonder how this accident could have happened if the machine was working correctly. A neighbor convinces Hunton that the machine is possessed by a demon, especially after two more accidents happen.

Hunton and his neighbor decide to attempt to rid the machine of the demon possessing it. They do some research and find a method they believe will work. Unfortunately, they are not right about how the machine came to be possessed and only succeed in making the machine angry. The machine breaks free of the braces that hold it to the floor and chases Hunton down the street. Hunton turns to the only person he can think of, the inspector who suggested to him in the first place that sometimes machines have a mind of their own.

Lester Billings appears in The Boogeyman

Lester Billings is a grieving father who believes he is the reason his children are dead. Billings had three children, all of whom have died in the night. Each of the children were afraid of a monster in their closet, the Boogeyman, but Billings did not believe the first two who tried to convince him of the truth behind their fears. The first child, a boy, insisted on sleeping with his parents, but Billings forced him to sleep in his own bed, afraid that if he indulged the boy's fears he would grow up to be a coward. Billings could not imagine raising a coward. The second child, a girl, complained of the same things, but again Billings did not want her to be weak, to depend on others to protect her.

Billings and his wife moved from their first home and bought a house. They believed everything would be better now. Unfortunately, they were wrong. They have a new baby, a surprise, and Billings finds himself drawn to this child like he never was with the others. Billings adores his son, indulging him in ways he never did the others. Billings even allows this child to sleep with him and his wife, unconcerned with turning him into a coward. Ironically, however, it is not the children who are the cowards, but Billings



himself. When the Boogeyman comes back and begins harassing Billings, he moves his son into his own room, making him a sacrifice to the monster.

John Renshaw appears in Battleground

John Renshaw is a cold-hearted assassin who travels the world to kill people for money. Renshaw is a very cautious man, never opening a package he does not recognize without caution. However, all the caution in the world could never be enough this time. Renshaw receives a package from the toy company that belongs to a man he just killed. In the package is a toy soldier set that includes tanks, helicopters, and bombs. The soldiers are animated, declaring war on Renshaw. Renshaw is shocked, unable to react until the pain of the tiny weapons makes its way through the shock.

Renshaw begins fighting the tiny soldiers but finds it difficult to fight these tiny creatures while they are bombarding him with bullets and bombs. Renshaw hides in the bathroom, but the soldiers make a hole in the door and get through to him. Renshaw decides to sneak into the living room behind the soldiers and launch a sneak attack. Unfortunately, Renshaw does not know that they have a thermonuclear weapon. Renshaw's fire bomb sets the weapon off and kills him.

Jim Norman appears in Sometimes They Come Back

Jim Norman is a young teacher who has only recently finished his training. During his first assignment after graduation, Norman had a nervous breakdown, leaving him unable to work for a time. However, Norman has recovered and is happy to be working again. The first few months of his new job go well, with the only dark cloud that of a class full of delinquents who would rather be somewhere else. Norman is also having bad dreams, mostly based around the murder of his brother Wayne when they were children. However, they are only dreams and do not affect his real life.

After Christmas, Norman learns one of his students in his Living with Literature class has died. In his place, a new student has been assigned to the class. This young man has an uncanny resemblance to one of the boys who killed Wayne. A few weeks later, another student dies and is replaced with another boy who is definitely the same boy who attacked Norman while his brother attempted to defend him. Finally a third boy disappears and is replaced by the leader of the boys who killed Wayne. Norman is unsure about what is happening, but knows that he must stop these boys. He contacts the police in the town where Wayne was killed and learns all three of these boys are dead. Norman begins to read a book about demons, hoping to find a way to stop these boys from murdering him like they did Wayne. Unfortunately, Norman is not able to stop them before they kill his wife, but he does conjure a demon to help him get rid of the boys. Now Norman has to worry about how to stop the demon.



Stan Norris appears in The Ledge

Stan Norris is a tennis pro who spent time in prison and therefore has few options in career choices. That is why it is unfortunate that he has fallen in love with one of his clients who happens to be married to a mobster. The mobster will not let his wife go. Norris has come to try to convince him to allow the woman to go. The mobster suggests a wager. If Norris can safely walk the ledge around his building, he will allow him and his wife to go. Norris does, but the mobster is not through with Norris. The mobster wants Norris to believe the mobster has found his wife and killed her. Norris gets control of the gun the mobster's man was holding on him and forces the mobster out onto the ledge. Now Norris is waiting for him to return, not confident he ever will.

Dick Morrison appears in Quitters, Inc.

Dick Morrison is an advertising executive who smokes and lives a life that is full of stress. Morrison runs into an ex-colleague and learns that he has stopped smoking. The man offers Morrison a card for the company that helped him and assures Morrison that it will change his life. Morrison goes to the company out of curiosity, only to discover that the company's success is based on threats against the client's family members. When Morrison smokes a single cigarette, the company steals his wife out of their home and submits her to momentary shocks.

Morrison sticks to the program, afraid for his wife and child. Morrison never would have quit on his own otherwise, was not determined to follow this program until he learned the consequences. Now Morrison is a changed man, closer to his wife and child than ever before, and smoke free. Now Morrison gives the card to another man, determined to get the company off his back and to leave him and his family alone.

Larry appears in The Last Rung on the Ladder

Larry is the personification of the modern man. Larry is career driven, spending so much time on advancing his career that he has lost his wife and lost touch with his sister. Larry and his sister were once very close, but now his sister does not even know his current address. After his sister dies in a fall, Larry receives a letter from her that reminds him of a time when he saved her life after a ladder crumbled while she was climbing it. The letter tells Larry that she wished she had not survived that fall, that he had not piled hay up to save her. Larry reads the letter and sees it as a cry for help that he missed because she did not have his proper address and the letter was delayed. Now Larry realizes what is important in life and hopes to never forget it again.

Johnny appears in The Woman in the Room

Johnny's mother is dying of cancer. Johnny visits her every night and sometimes sneaks her aspirins because the doctors do not seem capable of giving her enough medication



to cover her pain. Johnny has been forced to watch his mother wither away and he is no longer able to do it without drinking before arriving at the hospital. Johnny has found some pills that he knows will kill his mother and debates whether or not he can give them to her. Johnny eventually does, hoping that the medication will put her out of her misery at last.



Objects/Places

Chapelwaite appears in Jerusalem's Lot

Chapelwaite is the name of the family home Charles Boone comes to live in after his cousin's death.

The Mysteries of the Worm appears in Jerusalem's Lot

The Mysteries of the Worm is a strange book that appears to be a bible for satanic worshipers. This book also appears to have strange powers; therefore, Charles Boone burns it to break the power its followers have over him and his family. However, this does not appear to break the connection, so Charles kills himself to end the cycle.

A6 appears in Night Surf

A6 is the chemical agent that caused a worldwide flu, killing everyone who contracted the disease except for a handful who appear to be immune due to another version of the flu that was not deadly. However, the survivors begin to doubt their immunity when one of their own becomes sick with the deadly version.

The Hadley-Watson Model-6 Speed Ironer and Folder appears in The Mangler

The Hadley-Watson Model-6 Speed Ironer and Folder is a machine in a laundry that automatically irons and folds sheets that an employee feeds into it. This machine appears to take on a life of its own when it begins killing and maiming the people working around or on it.

Beer appears in Gray Matter

Richie Grenadine is an unemployed alcoholic who enjoys a six pack of beer every night in front of the television. Grenadine gets a bad beer one night that causes him to slowly transform into some sort of jellied mass of gray matter.

Toy Soldiers appears in Battlefield

John Renshaw receives a package from the same toy company whose owner he just returned from assassinating. The package contains a set of toy soldiers who are animated and declare war on Mr. Renshaw.



Trucks appears in Trucks

All different kinds of vehicles appear to come to life on their own, most specifically large trucks, such as semis.

Raising Demons appears in Sometimes They Come Back

Raising Demons is a book filled with incantations. Jim Norman uses one of these incantations to conjure a demon who helps him defeat the three boys who killed his brother and have returned to kill him.

Switchblade appears in Sometimes They Come Back

The killers use a switchblade to kill Jim Norman's brother and intend to use the weapon to kill Jim.

Hot Rod appears in Sometimes They Come Back

Vinnie Corey drives a hot rod when he returns from the dead to haunt Jim Norman. This same car appears to be the car that ran down Jim's wife before they were married, leaving her with a broken leg.

Ledge appears in The Ledge

There is a ledge outside Cressner's apartment that wraps around the entire building. Cressner bets Norris the right to run off with his wife if he will walk the entire ledge.

Lawnmower appears in The Lawnmower Man

The Lawnmower Man has a mower that appears to have a mind of its own, cutting the grass without help from the Lawnmower Man and changing paths when it sees something it wants to cut down.

Ledger appears in Children of the Corn

Burt finds a ledger in the church that lists the names of all the people living in the town dating back twelve years. The book also lists the deaths of these people, all of whom died on their nineteenth birthday.



Hammer appears in The Man Who Loves Flowers

The man in love kills a young woman with a hammer.

Bottle of Pills appears in The Woman in the Room

Johnny feeds his dying mother six pain killers before leaving the pill bottle in her purse so it appears she took the pills herself.



Themes

Possession

Several of the stories in this collection feature examples of possession. One of the most obvious is *The Mangler*. This story is about a machine in a laundry that begins killing people spontaneously even though it appears that all the safety mechanisms are working. One man loses his arm because the machine comes on without anyone turning it on and refuses to go off even when all the power to the building is cut. The characters in the novel begin to believe that the machine contains the spirit of a demon that came into the machine when a young virgin cut her finger on the machine. However, the men are mistaken about how the demon came to possess the machine, resulting in their attempts to remove the demon causing it to become more powerful and to run down the street, attempting to kill these men.

Another story containing an example of possession is *Trucks*. *Trucks* is about a time in which all the trucks become animated, moving on their own without benefit of drivers. These trucks are also malevolent, intent on killing people who try to stop them from doing whatever they want to do. It seems that the servant has become the master, the trucks no longer serving man but expecting man to service them by filling their tanks with gasoline. The story ends with the main character wondering how long it will be before there are no longer enough humans to service the needs of these vehicles.

Battleground and *Lawnmower Man* both contain inanimate objects that suddenly appear to have a life of their own. The toy soldiers in *Battleground* fight a war against Mr. Renshaw, who is much bigger and much more powerful, but less equipped for a war. The soldiers are willing to die to exact revenge on Renshaw for killing the man who owns their toy company; they destroy Renshaw with a thermonuclear bomb. *Lawnmower Man's* inanimate object is a lawnmower that seems to be conscious and able to make choices as to where to mow. This object seems less sinister until the man who hired him decides to call the police. Suddenly this object chases him down, again making a conscious choice that should be impossible for an inanimate object, suggesting it, too, is possessed somehow by a being with intelligence, making possession a theme of these fascinating stories.

Family

Family is a theme in a group of these stories because of their relevance to the overall plot of the short stories. Family is touched upon in "Gray Matter" when the young boy comes to the only man he feels he can trust, Henry, and tells him how his father has changed. This boy is deeply concerned for his father and frightened for his safety, speaking to the loyalty of family. In the "Boogeyman," Lester Billings is grieving the deaths of his three children. Billings feels responsible for their deaths because he forced



them to sleep in their own beds, afraid of allowing them to grow up cowards, only to learn their fears are real and the Boogeyman does exist.

Family appears in "Sometimes They Come Back" as well when Jim Norman's brother, Wayne, is killed attempting to protect Jim. Wayne's killers come back for Jim, nearly twenty years later, eager to finish what they started all that time ago. To prove they are serious, they kill Jim's wife. In "Quitters, Inc.," family is the power the company has over Dick Morrison. Morrison learns from a friend that this place can help him quit smoking and change his life. Morrison gives it a try, not really convinced anything can help him quit smoking but curious just the same. The company threatens to shock his wife and child and to beat them if he should ever smoke again. They also threaten to take Morrison's wife's fingers if he gains too much weight. A lifelong smoker, Morrison never thought he would quit, but it takes only one slip and he never smokes again.

Finally, family is an essential theme to both "The Last Rung on the Ladder" and "The Woman in the Room." In Last Rung, Larry was close to his sister when they were children but has lost touch with her as an adult. After Larry's sister commits suicide, he hears her cry for help and regrets not being there for her. However, his sister's experiences have taught Larry what truly matters in life. In "The Woman in the Room," Johnny is watching his mother waste away in a hospital where it seems no one can do anything to help her. Johnny cannot watch his mother suffer, watch her in pain while no one seems concerned. Johnny decides to end it all for his mother but struggles with the decision because he does not know if he has the strength to do what must be done. Johnny does it, however, taking away his mother's pain for the last time and taking away his own.

Revenge

Revenge touches on some of the stories in this book, making it a theme of some of the stories as well. Revenge is clearly a theme of "Trucks." Trucks have been created and designed to serve man, but in this story the tables have turned. The trucks are animated, able to drive on their own, but still dependent on man to fill their gas tanks. The trucks force survivors to work for them under fear of being crushed under the building that serves as their only refuge. It seems the servants have become the masters in this story. Another revenge story is "Lawnmower Man." A homeowner has sold his lawnmower because it killed a cat but now is at the mercy of lawn care companies to do the work for him. One such company sends a strange man who seems to be half goat and a lawnmower with a mind of its own. When the man tries to call the police to make this man leave, the lawnmower runs him down, much like his own lawnmower did to the cat.

Another revenge story is "I Know What You Need." A young man has learned early in life that some people get everything they want and some do not. This man, Ed, has the ability to read people's needs and uses this gift to trick a young woman into falling in love with him because she is the type of girl he would never be able to get otherwise. Ed is getting revenge on society, proving that even a loser can get the cheerleader.



Finally, "Graveyard Shift" contains a story of revenge. In this story, a young drifter works for a supervisor who is brisk and occasionally brutal, forcing his crew to work with rats that are clearly more aggressive than ordinary rats. This man takes his supervisor into the subbasement where he believes the rats live and leads him to his death, getting him back for all the unkind things he ever did to his employees.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in these stories differs from story to story. Jerusalem's Lot is told as though through letters, making the point of view third person omniscient. Many of the other stories are also third person omniscient, told through the eyes of one narrating character and told in such a way that the reader is allowed to not only see the action of the plot, but the thoughts and feelings of the main character as well. Some of the stories are told in the first person point of view, restricting the narration to a single character, but allowing the reader full access to that character's thoughts and feelings, as well as actions. Finally, some of the stories are told with an authorial voice, such as "The Man Who Loved Flowers," telling a story while moving from mind to mind so that the reader gets a full view of the story from all points of view, not just one.

The points of view in these stories all work well within their respective plots. Jerusalem's Lot is told through letters, which works because the action that represents the bulk of the plot happens more than a hundred years in the past and is implied to be from an unreliable narrator. Due to the time difference and the uncertainty about the truth of the story, it is necessary for there to be some distance in the narration which the letter format allows. Other stories are told in the third person omniscient point of view, which also works well because it allows the reader to get to know the character quickly, something that is most important in short stories. This also applies to those stories that are told in the first person point of view. Finally, the author also uses an authorial voice in one or two stories that allows him to tell a story without sticking to one particular character or allowing too much intimacy between reader and character, which is important in a story where the main character is not sympathetic, such as "The Man Who Loved Flowers."

Setting

The settings vary in each story. Most of the stories are set in Maine, some in cities and others in rural areas. Some have more specific settings, such as "Jerusalem's Lot," which takes place in Maine near a town named Jerusalem's Lot. "I Am the Doorway" is set in Florida, making the beaches of the keys an important part of the story, while "Night Surf" also takes place on a beach. "Children of the Corn" takes place in the Midwest where corn is a primary crop. "One for the Road" also takes place near "Jerusalem's Lot," using that same geographic area as its setting, although it takes place many years after the original short story.

Most of the settings in these novels are background, just a backdrop against which to build a story. However, in some of the stories the setting becomes a part of the story. "Children of the Corn" is one such story in which the setting is vital to the story. If the story were set in Maine, or in a place where corn is not grown, it would not have the



impact, nor would it make as much sense, as it does. "Night Surf" and "I Am the Doorway" also have settings that seem vital to the story, since each is set in a place that has some connection to the overall plot of the novel. Finally, "Jerusalem's Lot" is named after its setting, a small, imaginary town where terrible things have taken place and continue to plague the people leaving nearby. This, too, makes the setting almost a character in the novel because it is so vital to the overall plot development.

Language and Meaning

The language in these stories changes with each plot, moving from the educated speech of a man living over a hundred years ago to the slang of modern man driving cross country with his angry wife. The author uses simple English in all the stories, but the inflection and use of slang changes as the characters and settings change. Some of the stories that take place in Maine include dialogue that uses native phrases, such as strawberry spring, that people in other parts of the country might not recognize, adding to the feel of the setting of the novel. Some of the stories take place elsewhere; therefore, this native phrasing is missing in those stories.

The language of the stories work because the language changes to fit the plot of the story. The man in "Jerusalem's Lot" writes with dignity and formal sentence structure while the tennis pro in "The Ledge" tends to speak with more slang, using words that might not be familiar to someone more accustomed to educated language. The author fits the language to the story and setting, using it as a tool to tell the stories more efficiently, making the language work within each, individual story.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty short stories, some more than twenty pages long, some as short as four or five pages. The book begins with two introductions, one by a famous author, the other by the writer of these stories. Each story has a proper title that touches on the plot of the story or a set of characters within the story. The titles vary in length but serve to give the reader a hint as to the content of the following story.

Each of the stories is structured a little differently. The first story, "Jerusalem's Lot," is written as though through a series of letters. "Graveyard Shift" is divided into time lines. "The Boogeyman" is done all in dialogue while "The Last Rung of the Ladder" is almost completely exposition. Each story is structured in such a way that the prose flows evenly with the plot and comes together to create a perfectly balanced story.



Quotes

"Yet I am the gateway, and I am that last of the Boone blood. For the good of all humanity I must die...and break the chain forever." "Jerusalem's Lot," pg. 34

"After the guy was dead and the smell of his burning flesh was off the air, we all went back down to the beach." "Night Surf," pg. 54

"There were eyes peering up at me through splits in the flesh of my fingers. And even as I watched the flesh was dilating, retreating, as they pushed their mindless way up to the surface.

But that was not what made me scream. I had looked into my own face and seen a monster."

"I Am the Doorway," pg. 70

"The machine was still running. No one had shut it off. The machine he later came to know intimately: the Hadley-Watson Model-6 Ironer and Folder. A long and clumsy name. The people who worked here in the steam and the wet had a better name for it. The mangler."

"The Mangler," pg. 77

"We got back. Carl and Bill Pelham jumped up and started asking questions right off. We wouldn't answer, neither of us. We just turned around and waited to see if Henry was gonna walk in outta the snow. I was up to 32,768 times two is the end of the human race and so we sat there cozied up to all that beer and waited to see which one was going to finally come back; and here we still sat.

I hope it's Henry. I surely do." "Gray Matter," pg. 119

"But they're machines. No matter what's happened to them, what mass consciousness we've given them, they can't reproduce. In fifty or sixty years they'll be rusting hulks with all menace gone out of them, moveless carcasses for free men to stone and spit at. And if I close my eyes I can see production lines in Detroit and Dearborn and Youngstown and Mackinac, new trucks being put together by blue-collars who no longer even punch a clock but only drop and are replaced." "Trucks," pg. 146

"Jim remembered the warning in Raising Demons—the danger involved. You could perhaps summon them, perhaps cause them to do your work. You could even get rid of them.

But sometimes they come back.

He walked down the stairs again, wondering if the nightmare was over after all."

"Sometimes They Come Back," pg. 175



"I've been thinking about that foggy night when I had a headache and walked for air and passed all the lovely shadows without shape or substance. And I've been thinking about the trunk of my car—such an ugly word, trunk—and wondering why in the world I should be afraid to open it.

I can hear my wife as I write this, in the next room, crying. She thinks I was with another woman last night.

And oh dear God, I think so too." "Strawberry Spring," pg. 185

"When your looks go and men stop trying to give you anything you want, you'll wish for me!...I know what you need.

But was she so small that she actually needed so little?

Please, dear God, no." "I Know What You Need," pg. 256

"The children of the corn stood in the clearing at midday, looking at the two crucified skeletons and the two bodies...the bodies were not skeletons yet, but they would be. In time. And here, in the heartland of Nebraska, in the corn, there was nothing but time."

"Children of the Corn," pg. 284

"People move around so much now, and it's funny how those crossed-off addresses and change-of-address stickers can look like accusations." "The Last Rung on the Ladder," pg, 287

"If there was bloodstains on his suit, they wouldn't show, not in the dark, not in the soft late spring dark, and her name had not been Norma but he knew what his name was. It was...was...

Love.

His name was love, and he walked these dark streets because Norma was waiting for him. And he would find her. Someday soon." "The Man Who Loved Flowers," pg. 304

Topics for Discussion

Why is Jerusalem's Lot told in letters? Who are these letters intended to reach? Do they reach this person? Who is the author of the letters? Who is the author of the final letter? What is the significance of the final letter? What does it suggest about all the previous letters and the story as a whole? Do you believe this conjecture?

Where did the rats come from in Graveyard Shift? What is odd about these rats? Are all the rats odd? Why are the men afraid of the rats? Why do the rats begin to disappear? What is below the building in the subbasement? What does it do to the supervisor? Why does Hall take the supervisor down there? Is Hall sane at the end? Why or why not?

What is growing in the hands of the astronaut in "I Am the Doorway"? Where did they come from? How did they get inside of him? What do they make him do? How is this possible? Does he know what they are doing? How does he try to stop them? Does it work?

What happens to Richie in "Gray Matter"? Is he sick? How did he get this way? Why does his son not notice the changes for so long? Why does the son not do something sooner? Why do the others leave Henry alone? Why do they hope that Henry returns to the store? What if he does not? What do they believe will happen? Will it?

Discuss "Battleground." What does the main character do for a living? Why? What was his last job? Why is he so careful when he opens the package? What should he have done with the package? What is in it? What do they do? Is this story realistic? Could Renshaw have defeated his enemies? Why does he not?

Why do the people in "Trucks" begin fueling the trucks? What might have happened if they had simply waited for them to run out of gas? Would all the trucks have run out of gas eventually? What worries the main character at the end? Why does he not feel optimistic about the trucks breaking down eventually? Why does he feel new trucks will start appearing? Is he right?

Discuss "The Last Rung on the Ladder." What is the significance of Katrina's letter? Why does it make Larry feel optimistic? What does the letter say about Katrina's state of mind? Is it a cry for help? Who needs the help? Why did Larry not get it in time?