

Number 9 Dream Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Eiji Miyake and his twin sister, Anju, are the illegitimate children of an affair between their mother and a married man. Raised by their grandmother, they have little contact with their mother, and they do not know the identity of their father. Following Anju's death at the age of eleven, Eiji rejects his mother entirely and becomes obsessed with discovering the identity of his and Anju's father.

Now nineteen, Eiji has come to Tokyo to follow his only lead, Akiko Kato, but he is turned away, when he attempts to see her. When he writes to try and set up an appointment, she rejects him utterly. With no other avenues available, Eiji tries to contact his mother, who has recently written him from a mental health clinic for alcoholism and depression. By the time he calls, however, she has checked out.

Eiji's next leads turn out to be bad ones. Due to a harmless lie told by someone else, Eiji is mistaken for the son of a prominent, corrupt police chief and is kidnapped by a yakuza boss. Further complicating matters and even confusing Eiji into believing that his father is a gangster, yakuza bosses are referred to as "Father." By the time Eiji realizes his mistake, he is already entangled in a violent yakuza war and barely escapes with his life and all his body parts.

Eiji's first real lead comes in the form of a letter from his grandfather on his father's side. Eiji meets his grandfather, who pretends to be a family friend, and is given a journal that belonged to his great-uncle during World War II. He also learns that his grandfather has little respect for Eiji's father, thinking him dishonorable and unscrupulous. However, when they agree to meet again in one week, Eiji hopes his father will be present.

Here, the idea of meaning comes to the fore. Eiji's meaning thus far has been to find his father, but reading his great-uncle's journal opens up new perspectives for him. Also influential is the new relationship he is developing with Ai Imajo, a waitress he has met. All the people around him, in fact, seem to have found some kind of meaning in their lives, and Eiji is beginning to question the validity of his own goal. When he is ambushed by his stepmother, his father's legitimate wife, at the meeting he had planned with his grandfather, Eiji finally gives in to her insistence that he stop searching for her husband, but Eiji's surrender is prompted by his own feelings, not by his stepmother's threats.

Eiji is working as a cook in a pizza kitchen, his third job in Tokyo, when his mother calls him at work. She has returned to the clinic. Ai Imajo has already suggested that Eiji try to reestablish a relationship with his mother, and when his mother mentions that she is planning to marry an old friend, Eiji decides to visit her. Then, during Eiji's last shift at the pizza kitchen, an order comes in for a unique pizza to be delivered to the law firm where Ms. Kato works, and the name on the order is the same as Eiji's grandfather's surname. The order was placed by Eiji's father, Daisuke Tsukiyama, who turns out to be a partner in the same law firm. Eiji volunteers to deliver the pizza, and this is how he meets his father, as a pizza boy.



The meeting is anticlimactic. Eiji is supremely disappointed with the kind of man his father turns out to be, exactly as his grandfather described, and he does not even reveal himself. He delivers the pizza, and after a bit of small talk, he leaves.

But Eiji's search for his father has helped him begin to reconnect with his mother, and he has built a group of caring friends in Tokyo. As Eiji travels to see his mother, he has a number of dreams in which the importance of all these people becomes evident. The meeting with his mother, as he later reports to Ai, is neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. "Fragile" would be the proper word. He plans to visit his uncles and see Anju's tomb before meeting his mother again, and he is unsure when he will return to Tokyo. He wants to try and help his mother recover from her depression and alcoholism, and he wants to meet her fiancé.

On the way to his hometown, Eiji encounters a typhoon that almost seems like another dream. He weathers it in garden shed, and when he reaches his grandmother's house, no one is home. This is a repetition of the scene in which he returns home from his overnight trip as a boy: when he arrives, he finds everyone gone, then falls asleep, only to discover, when he wakes, that Anju has gone missing during his absence. Almost immediately, he knows his twin sister has drowned. In the present, Eiji again falls asleep and is later awakened by a radio news flash. There has been a massive earthquake in faraway Tokyo. Eiji imagines all kinds of devastation. He cannot reach Ai or any of his friends by phone. He opens the door and begins running.



Chapter 1, "PanOpticon"

Chapter 1, "PanOpticon" Summary

Eiji Miyake, a small-town boy with an active imagination, has come to the big city of Tokyo on a quest to discover the identity of his father. His only lead is Akiko Kato, whom he believes is his father's attorney. Sitting in the Jupiter Cafy, Eiji daydreams about confronting Ms. Kato, who works in the PanOpticon building across the street, demanding information about his father. However, Eiji is afraid and reluctant to act, and hopes that Ms. Kato will just happen to come into the cafy, where he can persuade her to help him. Of course, she does not. As Eiji sits, trying to gather his courage, his attention is drawn to one of the waitresses, who has a "perfect neck." He soon convinces himself that she is out of his league and returns to the problem of his father.

Instead of following his plan and simply trying to meet Ms. Kato, Eiji constructs an elaborate fantasy in which he infiltrates PanOpticon and Ms. Kato's law firm, Osugi and Bosugi, by masquerading as an aquarium cleaner. Hidden in his toolbox is a combination pistol and tranquilizer gun that he uses to knock out first the receptionist, then Akiko Kato's bioborg, then Ms. Kato herself. In this fantasy, Eiji locates and escapes with Ms. Kato's file on his father, only to discover that the ink with which the information has been printed disappears when exposed to air.

Procrastinating, Eiji waits around in the Jupiter cafy for most of the afternoon, daydreaming, watching the customers, and listening to what is said by the waitress with the perfect neck and her two coworkers, whom he calls Dowager and Donkey. When the waitress with the perfect neck leaves the cafy on an errand to buy coffee filters, it begins to rain, and Eiji's active imagination takes over again, creating another fantasy in which it rains so much that the entire city of Tokyo is flooded, and he must play the hero and rescue her from the torrent and from a vicious crocodile. This daydream ends with Eiji's drowning, after which he is cremated. An elaborate funeral is held in which his family, powerful politicians, and famous celebrities, including Yoko Ono celebrate Eiji's heroism.

Instead of going out in the rain, Eiji decides to call Ms. Kato's office, but once he convinces himself to do so, he is told that she is in a meeting. Content for the moment with the information that Ms. Kato is at work and not away as he had begun to fear, Eiji goes to the restroom. He has been at the Jupiter Cafy for a long time and has drunk a lot of coffee. While he is in the restroom, he indulges in yet another extended daydream. This time, Eiji imagines that he sees Ms. Kato walk past the window of the Jupiter Cafy. He decides to follow her. She enters the Ganymede Cinema, and Eiji trails her into the theater, where she meets a tall stranger. The film, called *PanOpticon*, begins. It is about a prison psychiatrist and one of his patients, who believes himself to be God. Eiji moves within earshot of the couple, and hears Ms. Kato, addressing the man as a government minister, tell him that his son, Eiji Miyake, has come to town.



Ms. Kato then tells a number of lies to the Minister concerning Eiji's intentions, saying that Eiji is psychotic and wants to destroy his family, and she tries to convince him that Eiji must be "liquidated." Eiji tries to intervene and tell his father that Ms. Kato is lying, but before the situation can play out, Eiji's daydream is interrupted. A customer whom Eiji thinks of as "Lao Tzu," is knocking impatiently on the restroom door.

The waitress with the perfect neck has returned from her errand by now, and it has stopped raining. Eiji decides to have a final cigarette before crossing the street to PanOpticon and attempting to see Ms. Kato in person, but when his waitress, whose shift is nearly over, gets a call on her cellular phone, Eiji finds himself eavesdropping on her conversation. She catches him at it, and when her call is over she confronts him. Eiji, embarrassed, is unable to respond satisfactorily to her challenge and is left mulling over what he should have said to her: that he is sorry and that all he wanted was to know more about her.

The afternoon is nearly over. The waitress with the perfect neck has left, and Eiji is out of excuses for delay. He crosses the street to see Ms. Kato, but since he has no appointment, PanOpticon security turns him away before he can even get on the elevator. The brief rain shower has turned Tokyo hot and muggy. Unable to follow his only lead, Eiji despairs of ever finding his father. Discouraged, he heads back to the capsule apartment he has rented.

Chapter 1, "PanOpticon" Analysis

In the opening of the book, Eiji is obsessed with finding his father. He has almost no information, so he creates it. The only things he knows for sure are that Akiko Kato knows his father and that she is an attorney for Osugi and Bosugi, in the PanOpticon building. Everything else is pure conjecture on his part. This complete lack of information, coupled with Eiji's obsession, drives much of the action in the novel, bringing on a series of real-life adventures and revelations that turn out to be as amazing as any of the ones Eiji concocts.

Eiji's early plan for finding his father is centered on the prepared speech he plans to give Ms. Kato. The speech is dramatically repeated word for word during several of his daydreams, and although Eiji never gets a chance to deliver the speech, it demonstrates his flair for the dramatic, as well as his ongoing lack of a realistic plan.

In the beginning, Eiji does not belong in the big city. He is from a small town on an island where everyone knows one another, but in Tokyo he is alone. His Kyushu accent stands out, as does his deep tan, and the fantasies he constructs show that he has no idea what to expect.

The fantasies Eiji indulges in also show his immaturity. At this point in Eiji's life, the world revolves around him, and he is prone to self-pity, but his experiences will begin to change this. Eiji's immaturity is also evident in his reluctance to act on the scant information he has. It takes him an entire afternoon to gather the courage to try and see



Ms. Kato, and he makes up excuse after excuse for his procrastination. His daydreams counterbalance his frustration with his own reluctance. In them, he is all action, making decisions with utmost efficiency.

Eiji's tendencies are most easily seen in his encounter with the waitress with the perfect neck. When he first notices her, he convinces himself that he is not her type, but then he imagines himself fighting a crocodile and sacrificing himself to save her from a flood. Later, Eiji's misguided attempt to learn more about the waitress by eavesdropping rather than by talking to her mirrors his reluctance to approach Ms. Kato directly.

Notably, the chapter sets up a cycle that Eiji will move through more than once during the course of the book: one of hope leading to disappointment. When he finally gets the nerve to call Ms. Kato, he finds she is in a meeting. When he finally gets the nerve to try and see her, he finds that he must have an appointment. Interestingly, although he is depressed as he walks home, Eiji also seems almost relieved to have put off tackling his problem.

Finally, the structure of the chapter models the structure of many of the following chapters. In this one, Eiji, as the narrator, is constantly switching back and forth between fantasy and reality, so that at first it is difficult to tell the difference. Once we get to know Eiji a bit, however, we begin to get the picture. This structure plays an important role throughout the novel, because it causes us to constantly question what is real and what the narrator is simply imagining. Therefore, one maintains an objective distance from the story he is telling.



Chapter 2, "Lost Property"

Chapter 2, "Lost Property" Summary

The chapter opens with a flashback to when Eiji, as a boy, decapitates the statue of the thunder god in his village shrine. He climbs onto the god's back and saws off his head to get revenge for what happened to Anju. At this point, we do not know who Anju is or what has happened to her, but in subsequent flashbacks we learn that Anju was Eiji's twin sister who drowned when they were eleven.

Throughout the night, Eiji dwells on his memory of the days surrounding his twin's death. Anju is an avid tree-climber, and Eiji has followed her to the top of an escarpment and up a tree, from which they can see for miles around. They celebrated their birthday a week before, but now Anju is unhappy because, the next day, Eiji will leave on an overnight trip with his middle school soccer team. This will be the first time the twins have been separated since their mother left them to be raised by Wheatie, their grandmother, and Anju is being somewhat antagonistic toward Eiji, calling him slow and ugly, and trying to scare him by climbing recklessly.

Eiji gives her a champagne bomb, which placates her for a bit, and they talk about flying and what probably happens after death. From their vantage point, they have a view of the sea, and when Eiji points out a giant rock being submerged by the incoming tide, Anju claims she is going to swim out to it one day. When they were younger, Eiji had told her that it was a magic whalestone, and that if they set foot on it, it would come to life and take them anywhere they desired. Anju says she had believed Eiji's story when she was younger, and thought that if she ever made it out there, it would take them to their mother and father. Eiji says that Anju will never be a strong enough swimmer, but he is no longer fully involved in the conversation. Instead he is daydreaming about his upcoming soccer match, which soon causes another brief argument.

Later that night, they are awake, and Anju relates a conversation she overheard in town about how their mother abandoned them with Wheatie so she could chase men in Tokyo. Eiji tries unsuccessfully to comfort her. In the early morning, the twins are still awake talking about their mother, and Anju tells Eiji another story, where we discover that their mother also has a drinking problem. Then Anju asks Eiji not to go. He says that he has to go, and she begs him not to, but when he insists that he will be back the next day she becomes angry and says that Eiji is not the only one who can do grown-up things. When Eiji asks what she means, he gets no answer. They finally sleep, but at dawn, Anju is nowhere to be found.

Eiji, concentrating on his soccer game, comes up with the idea that if he practices and becomes a great soccer star and wins the World Cup, his fame will bring his family back together, and he decides that this is such a big undertaking that he should ask for the thunder god's assistance. At the shrine, he swears that the thunder god can have anything, anything at all, if he will make Eiji into the greatest soccer player in Japan.



During the game, Eiji scores a miraculous goal, but his excitement upon his return to the island is dampened by the fact that Anju is not there to greet him at the landing. He does not meet her on the road, and there is nobody at Wheatie's when Eiji arrives. He decides they must have all gone to the house of one of his uncles. But Anju is nowhere to be found. When the family finds Eiji at Wheatie's, they demand that Eiji tell them where his twin is, but he has no idea. Suddenly, he remembers their conversation of the day before and runs upstairs to find that her swimsuit is gone. He remembers his promise to the thunder god, that he would give anything at all to become the greatest soccer player in Japan, and he realizes that the thunder god has collected. Eiji tells the adults to look in the sea. Anju has drowned.

Eiji's memories come forward bit by bit in the course of a hot Tokyo night. It is Saturday, September 2, one week after his afternoon in the Jupiter Cafy. Eiji's unsettled thoughts keep him awake all night as he watches time crawl past on the photo shop clock across from his capsule apartment. Mixed in with the memories of his sister are flashbacks of the week just ending, beginning with Tuesday, his first day working in the Ueno station lost-property office. Eiji's boss, Mr. Aoyama, has strong, old-fashioned ideas and an exaggerated sense of his success and the importance of his own position. We find that a Mrs. Sasaki hired Eiji, and that he landed the interview with the help of Buntaro, his landlord. One person who has made an impression on Eiji is Suga, one of his coworkers. Suga has a Ph.D. in computer systems, and he is also a hacker who believes he can get a job with the U.S. Government by hacking a secret Pentagon website. A deeper impression, however, has been made by events surrounding Mr. Aoyama, the Ueno stationmaster.

Due to some impending reorganization of station management, Mr. Aoyama has become increasingly paranoid, even believing that Eiji has been sent to spy on him. He stays on Eiji's back throughout their time working together. However, it is not a long time. When Mr. Aoyama gets the news that he will, in fact, be demoted, he snaps, barricading himself in an office with a hostage. Eiji returns to this memory several times in the course of the night, so that it is interspersed with Eiji's recollection of the soccer game and his sister's death. Mr. Aoyama's hostage taking makes national news, and even Mr. Buntaro, Eiji's landlord, is following the story when Eiji comes home from work. The situation ends in tragedy, however. Shortly after Eiji arrives home, Buntaro calls him downstairs to see the newest development. Mr. Aoyama is on a ledge outside a window. Everyone sees him jump.

While Eiji is dealing with these two intense memories, he is having a bit of a crisis of his own. Early in the chapter, he says that he is determined not to contact "her," but we are not told who this person is. Instead we learn that Eiji's rented capsule is above the Shooting Star video store run by his landlord, Buntaro Ogiso. We also learn that the capsule is roach-infested, and that Eiji is lamenting the loss of Cat, a cat that has adopted him. We also get the flashbacks. "She" is not Akiko Kato. We learn that Eiji has already written to request an appointment with Ms. Kato, and that he has already received a reply. Ms. Kato refuses to help Eiji and urges him to forget about trying to find his father. Ms. Kato has turned out to be a dead-end as a source of information.



This is where the other woman comes in. Eiji has received another letter, but before we are told whom it is from, Eiji must deal with the memories previously described.

At two o'clock in the morning, Eiji again insists to himself that he is not going to contact "her," because she will try to convince him to give up looking for his father. At 2:34 AM, Eiji is watching a cockroach that has been fighting for its life in a glue trap. At three o'clock, his mind still racing, Eiji is thinking about Mr. Aoyama. His thoughts are interrupted by the ringing telephone. This is surprising, but it turns out to be a wrong number. Someone has misdialled, intending to call a pizza kitchen, and tries to order a bizarre, special order pizza dubbed the Kamikaze, with mozzarella crust, banana, quail eggs, scallops, triple chilis, and octopus ink.

Finally, after this misplaced phone call, Eiji's mind turns to the other letter he received. The "her" to whom Eiji has been referring is his mother, who has written for the first time in a long while. She is at a mental health clinic, and says she has written the letter to help herself heal. In it, she reveals the shocking reason she decided to leave the twins with their grandmother. One night, after the twins' father, who had his own legitimate family, had abandoned her she decided to throw Eiji off the balcony, and only a freak accident prevented it. After that, she realized that she could not care for her children. This does not garner any good will from Eiji, obviously, but contacting his mother may now be the only way he will be able to discover the identity of his father. When six o'clock arrives, he calls the clinic from which the letter was sent, Miyazake Mountain Clinic, and asks for Mariko Miyake, his mother, but he is told that she checked out the evening before. Exhausted, Eiji finally gets a few minutes of sleep, only to be awakened by the arrival of Cat, who is not dead after all.

Once Eiji gets the thunder god's head off, he throws it into the sea near the whalestone.

Chapter 2, "Lost Property" Analysis

The young Eiji Miyake decapitates the thunder god statue as an act of revenge for the death of Anju, but it is clear that he feels in some way responsible, since he had previously offered the thunder god everything in return for becoming a soccer star. Also, his and Anju's argument the day before her death certainly would have affected him, and cutting off the head could be seen as an attempt to take some measure of control over a situation in which he has none. Eiji's later search for his father echoes this, as it is in many ways a similar attempt by Eiji to win some control over his own destiny. Unfortunately, as the events in Chapter 2 demonstrate, events are often beyond control. In many ways, the story as a whole may be seen partly as Eiji's quest toward an understanding of this fact.

The relaying of events in "Lost Property" is even more fractured than in "PanOpticon," the first chapter. The organization is similar. Eiji stays rooted in one place while his mind wanders willy-nilly, but this time, instead of indulging in childish fantasies, Eiji is dealing with a number of real events. As in the first chapter, Eiji is trying to decide whether to



contact someone. In the first chapter, it was Ms. Kato, but in this chapter it is his mother, who has written him a letter.

Eiji's feelings toward his mother are complex, and there is no hope of ironing them out any time soon. For his part, Eiji has no interest in doing so, and the content of his mother's letter certainly does not encourage him. But now that Ms. Kato has turned out to be a dead end, contacting his mother may offer Eiji his only hope of finding out about his father. In the end, he does attempt to contact her, but is unable to.

Eiji's twin sister figures prominently in his thinking, and provides some of the motivation for Eiji's quest, as he places some of the blame for Anju's fate on his father. Eiji and Anju's relationship, as it is slowly revealed during the course of this chapter, is also complex. As twins, they are clearly close, and they have been brought closer by their mutual feelings of abandonment by their father and then their mother, but Anju is not quite as judgmental of their mother as Eiji is. It is clear that Eiji reviles their mother, having buried many of his own feelings regarding her, while Anju is less certain. However, they certainly have many traits in common, such as their active imaginations and their curiosity about their father and their family's past. As Eiji's story progresses, we will begin to see that he has not really dealt with his sister's death, and has simply been displacing his emotions, onto the thunder god, onto his mother, into the quest for his father.

As for Eiji's experiences in Tokyo over the past week, it is encouraging to see that, despite his insomnia and the tumult in his mind, and despite the disturbing tragedy of Mr. Aoyama's suicide, Eiji is less alone than when he first arrived. He has found a job and formed a kind of friendship with his coworker Suga: before Mr. Aoyama's death, they are united in their dislike for him and his tightly wound personality. Eiji likes his immediate boss, Mrs. Sasaki, and he is forming something of a relationship with his landlord, Buntaro, who likes to make harmless jokes at Eiji's expense, but who seems like an honest and forthright person. Eiji even has a pet, Cat, which he intermittently mourns, believing it to have been killed, but which shows up at the end of the night, seasoning some of Eiji's pessimism with a bit of hope.

Finally, the result of the seemingly disorganized presentation of the events related in the chapter, although reminiscent of the presentation of the daydreams in Chapter One, has somewhat different effects. In "Lost Property," events from discrete timelines are told in a way that mirrors thought, so that what readers experience resembles what Eiji is going through. For Eiji, everything is mixed up. He does not recount one story from beginning to end, but several at once, each interrupting the others, and all of them interrupted by related concerns that have an immediate bearing, such as the letters he has received, his situation at the moment, his quest, and his own analysis of what is going on around him.



Chapter 3, "Video Games"

Chapter 3, "Video Games" Summary

On his twentieth birthday, one week after his sleepless night, two weeks after his afternoon in the Jupiter Cafy, Eiji is killing time by playing video games in a Shibuya arcade. Before leaving the arcade, Eiji gets into a brief discussion with a slightly older Tokyoite who watches him play while waiting for a date.

Afterward, Eiji wanders the streets for a short time, exploring the area before choosing a cheap restaurant for dinner. Earlier, Eiji received several birthday cards, but he also received another letter, this one from his father's wife, who has been informed by Ms. Kato that Eiji has been asking about her husband. In the letter, she first uses his illegitimate status to try and shame him. Then she accuses him of attempted blackmail and threatens him if he does not keep away from her family. While Eiji is pondering the implications of this letter, he realizes he has left his cap, the last gift Anju gave him, in the arcade. He returns and finds that the guy he spoke with earlier is wearing it.

His name is Yuzu Daimon. His date has stood him up. He returns Eiji's cap, and he and Eiji play some pool together before deciding to go out for a few drinks, Daimon's treat. He seems to have quite a bit of money due to his father's position. They go to a Christmas-themed bar where Daimon smoothly picks up a couple of girls Eiji refers to as Velvet and Coffee. After spending some time in another arcade, the group moves to an exclusive club called Queen of Spades, where Daimon is evidently known, and there is some back-and-forth between him and one of the hostesses, Miriam. There appears to be some tension between them.

Eiji, Daimon, Coffee and Velvet party in one of the club's private rooms, drinking and smoking marijuana, which is a new experience for Eiji, and he and Velvet make out. At the beginning, Miriam reluctantly serves them, but Daimon's behavior toward her is so bad that another hostess later replaces her. After this happens, Daimon convinces Eiji that they should take Coffee and Velvet to a love hotel. Daimon again says he will pay. Drunk and influenced by the marijuana, Eiji ends up having sex with Coffee, his first sexual experience, and he does not find it at all satisfying. It's a disappointment, really. He wakes up and finds out not only that he has been left alone, but that he has been left with the bill. He narrowly escapes the powerfully-built management by dodging through the kitchen of an adjoining restaurant.

In bad shape from his narrow escape and from the previous night's debauchery, Eiji wanders the city until he finds himself near the Jupiter Cafy, where he resolves to spend the last of his money on a small breakfast and a subway ride back to his capsule.

"Lao Tzu," one of the customers from Eiji's last visit is there, playing a handheld video game. When he gets up to go to the restroom, he offers it to Eiji to try out. The game, called Virtua Sapiens, allows the user to choose a specific person to meet, and Eiji



chooses his father. The program begins to play the role of Eiji's father, responding to questions and information as a real father might. Eiji becomes engrossed, until his playing is interrupted by a man shouting at one of the waitresses, who turns out to be the girl with the perfect neck, from before. She has come in, while Eiji was playing the game. Arguing over the change she has given him, the man becomes extremely abusive, calling her horrible names and threatening her. Eiji, who is not quite himself after his experiences of the night before and his narrow morning time escape, approaches the man and, almost without thinking, head butts him and threatens even more violence if he does not leave at once.

Having rescued the waitress with the perfect neck, Eiji returns to his table. The waitress soon comes over to Eiji's table and offers to buy him a cup of coffee, introducing herself as Ai Imajo. They talk for a while, and Eiji tells her why he has come to Tokyo. Ai suggests he put an ad in the newspaper personal columns. Now that Eiji has a new plan for contacting his father, he feels that things are looking up. Plus, he has impressed Ai Imajo.

Later the same day, by pure coincidence, Eiji runs into Miriam, the waitress from the night before, at Ueno Park. At first, he does not recognize her, but she certainly recognizes him, and accuses him of spying on her for Daimon. Angry, she says that Eiji should tell Daimon that he is worthless and that she never wants to see him again and that he should drop dead, and that the same sentiments apply to Eiji. Suddenly, Eiji realizes that Miriam was the girl who had stood Daimon up the night before, and he tries to explain that he only just met Daimon and that they do not really know one another, but Miriam thinks he is a liar and kicks him between the legs. As Eiji is writhing on the ground, Miriam says that she knows who Eiji is, and that he is exactly like his father. Before this statement has had time to register with Eiji, she pedals away on her bike. After she is gone, Eiji discovers that she has dropped a library book written in Korean.

Given this new lead in the search for his father, Eiji begins by trying to relocate the Queen of Spades, a feat that is much more difficult than expected. After nearly giving up, he stumbles across it, but when he asks the women there about Miriam, they give him the cold shoulder and insist that he leave.

By four in the afternoon, Eiji is at Imperial University looking for Suga, his former coworker at Ueno station. Suga hacks the computer of the Tokyo library where Miriam borrowed her book, and Eiji learns that Miriam is Korean, and that her name is Kang Hyo Yeoun. He also learns her age, and most importantly, her address. He takes the book over that very afternoon, finds her at home, and asks about his father, only to find out that Miriam is mistaken, and does not know his father at all. At the Queen of Spades, Daimon had written in the guest book that Eiji was his stepbrother, because only blood relatives of members are allowed in. Miriam warns Eiji to stay away from the Queen of Spades and her apartment. She tells him that the Queen of Spades is no ordinary club.

Having reached another dead end, Eiji finds an arcade and buys some coins. A round of video games offers scant consolation.



Chapter 3, "Video Games" Analysis

This chapter marks the beginning of a dark turn to Eiji's life in Tokyo, and serves to illustrate how inexperienced he really is, but it also demonstrates that Eiji is capable of taking charge, rather than allowing events to run over him.

As the letter from his stepmother shows, Eiji's quest has already made him an enemy, casting a shadow over any other attempts he might make in the direction of finding his father, and the consequences of Eiji's night out with Daimon begin to show elements of danger almost immediately.

Daimon is extremely charismatic, and Eiji, who has had very little interaction with others outside of work, might be drawn to any variation from his routine, not to mention the fact that it is Eiji's twentieth birthday, which now makes it legal for him to enter a bar. Additionally, as a twin, being alone on his birthday has an added significance for Eiji. These are some of the reasons Eiji allows himself to become involved in a situation he does not fully comprehend. His small-town upbringing also works against him, since it has not prepared him to be as skeptical as he might be of people's motives.

Daimon's primary motive is to get back at Miriam for standing him up. Eiji, of course, has no idea that he has stumbled into the middle of a fight. This prefigures an even bigger fight that Eiji has stumbled into: a war of succession among the Japanese mafia, or yakuza, that will play out in the next chapter. Its yakuza connections are the reason Miriam warns Eiji away from the Queen of Spades. Essentially, Daimon uses Eiji for his own purposes, as will the yakuza bosses later on.

The night includes Eiji's first drug experience and his first sexual encounter, but the most important experience is Daimon's wholly unexpected betrayal, when he abandons Eiji with the bill for the love hotel. Eiji has let himself be led by Daimon, and Daimon has left him in a compromising situation. Although Eiji escapes relatively unscathed, his experience has certainly had an effect. His head butting of the belligerent customer at the Jupiter Cafy might be seen as another attempt to regain the initiative, similar to his sawing off of the thunder god's head, an attempt to make up for his recent lack of control. He might also be responding to coming up short in other situations where he has failed to act decisively, as in his first attempt to reach Ms. Kato, and in his belated attempt call to his mother.

After the head-butting incident, where Eiji is rewarded with the attention of Ai, the waitress with the perfect neck, Eiji does become more decisive. When he runs into Miriam at Ueno Park, he immediately takes advantage of the opportunity he gets when she leaves her book behind. This is in stark contrast to the way he spent his first afternoon at the Jupiter Cafy.

Unlike the first two chapters, "Video Games" is told in straightforward chronological order. Contrasted against the organization of the previous chapters, the more standard presentation gives us a feel of being swept along by the action, which is what happens to Eiji. The structure of the narrative, and the state of mind of the narrator, Eiji, go hand

in hand. For example, although the story has so far been told in first person, present tense, the scene describing Eiji's first drug experience and first sexual encounter is written in third person, as if Eiji's consciousness were disconnected from his body.



Chapter 4, "Reclaimed Land"

Chapter 4, "Reclaimed Land" Summary

Eiji is in trouble. We have no idea why, but his life is in danger. It is one week after Eiji's misadventure with Daimon. As Eiji's execution gets closer and closer, we are filled in on the details of how he came to this point.

Four days prior, when Eiji is getting cash from an ATM to pay for the newspaper personal ad that the waitress Ai Imajo suggested, the screen flashes an unusual and surprising message: *Father will see you shortly, Eiji*. When he tries to show the bank teller, the message disappears. Later, Eiji goes down a list of people who could possibly have sent this message, but he comes up empty. The next day, he tries the same machine again, and again he gets a message, this one even more mysterious: *What dark room has no exits but only entrances into darker rooms? Father is watching*. Again, the message disappears before Eiji can show it to anyone. The next day, Friday, Eiji tries the machine once more. This time: *Your breathing space is all used up. Father is warning you. Father is coming for you today*.

Eiji goes to lunch, and when he comes out of the noodle shop, two men in a black Cadillac are waiting for him. They are yakuza muscle, as evidenced by a dragon tattoo. With his usual skill at creating nicknames for strangers, Eiji dubs them Frankenstein and Lizard. They say that Father has sent them to pick Eiji up, and although Eiji is a little skeptical, their demeanor leaves him no choice but to accompany them. As they drive out of the city, Eiji easily convinces himself that his father is a yakuza man.

They reach an entertainment complex, parts of which are still under construction, and Eiji is taken out of the car and locked in a restroom. Locked in with him is Yuzu Daimon. Eiji wants to know what Daimon is doing here, and after they argue a bit over the love hotel betrayal, Daimon explains that there is a yakuza war of succession going on. The old leader, Konosuke Tsuru, is elderly and sick, having barely survived a recent heart attack and fled the country. His top two men are fighting for leadership. Daimon's father, a corrupt police chief, is in the pay of Jun Nagasaki, who is the current top dog, but it is Ryutaro Morino who has kidnapped him, and according to him, Miriam is the reason. As Daimon says, he fell in love with the same girl as Morino. Lizard soon comes for Daimon, and Eiji is left alone with this information, trying to decide whether his father is Morino or Nagasaki. He does not have to wait long, as Lizard soon comes for him.

When he is brought into the room where Father is waiting, Eiji suddenly realizes that "Father" means "yakuza father," and that none of these men is his actual father. Furthermore, he soon realizes that he has been brought here, because Morino wants to know why he was at the Queen of Spades. Eiji finally convinces Morino and his group that he does not know Daimon, that he is not a spy for Jun Nagasaki, that he did not go to the club to harass Miriam, and that he has not been having sex with Miriam. As he is letting Eiji go, however, Morino plays his final card. He has a file folder he says is full of



information about Eiji's real father. When he throws it in the garbage, Eiji asks if he can have it. Morino refuses and tells him to get out before he is beaten senseless. As he is leaving, Eiji finds Daimon very ill. The yakuza have drained a liter of blood from him, and he is too weak to move. Eiji possibly saves Daimon's life by putting him in a taxi and sending it to his capsule apartment, then calling Buntaro to ask if he will help Daimon up to Eiji's capsule. Eiji wants to get back into the building and find his father's file.

Just before he makes his assault on the building, Eiji sees Ai Imajo playing the piano for the grand opening of one section of the complex, and she smiles at him. She remembers him.

Eiji sneaks back into the building, finds the room where he met Morino, and finds the file in the garbage, but the only thing in it is a photograph of Akiko Kato and his father, whom he recognizes by the man's resemblance to himself. This is part of Morino's trick. Written on the photograph is a note leading Eiji to a pachinko parlor where Morino and his group are waiting. As Eiji arrives, the manager of the pachinko parlor is thrown through a plate-glass window as punishment for going over to Nagasaki's side.

Morino is on a killing spree, trying wrest leadership of the yakuza away from Nagasaki. He forces Eiji to sign a blood-oath declaring one day of loyalty in exchange for the information on his father, then forces Eiji to watch a gruesome yakuza-style execution, where bowling balls are hurled at the faces of Nagasaki men. Eiji is forced to participate as well, but his bowling ball misses the mark, fortunately. From this point until we find him about to be executed, Eiji witnesses violence after violence, torture, killings, all in the space of a single evening. As this progresses, Eiji finds that Morino has extremely detailed information about him, including everything from his musical tastes to the death of Anju. A private investigator somewhere has done a lot of work.

At nearly midnight, near the end of Eiji's contract, everything comes to a head. Morino and Nagasaki will soon meet. Eiji is told to hide on an unfinished bridge. Nagasaki shows up with nine cars full of armed men, but Morino has had their weapons booby-trapped with undetectable high explosives, which he detonates with his cell phone. The men, including Nagasaki, are blown to bits. Morino then orders Eiji killed, which brings us up to the present moment. Subhataar, another of the yakuza tough guys, comes up the bridge to execute Eiji, but when he gets close, he tells Eiji to kneel down, for his own safety. Eiji refuses, determined to meet death on his feet. But Subhataar is a double agent, working for Mr. Tsuru, the former boss. He punches a number into his cell phone and all the Cadillacs explode, killing Morino and his men. The entire battle between Morino and Nagasaki has been orchestrated to end in their mutual destruction. Subhataar, deciding against killing Eiji, releases him, but warns him that if he ever breathes a word of what he has seen, he will be killed immediately.

Chapter 4, "Reclaimed Land" Analysis

Eiji's desire to locate his father, along with the confusion caused by Daimon's lie and the practice of calling yakuza bosses "Father" have landed Eiji in a heap of trouble. His

single-minded focus on his quest allows him to be controlled, and it is only by the sheerest luck that he survives this encounter with the underside of Japanese society at all.

The gritty violence that the gangsters engage in contrasts dramatically with the imagined violence Eiji commits in the first chapter and the videogame violence of the third, and it sickens Eiji. However, this does not cure him of his vivid imagination, which still has a strong influence on him, as it will continue to throughout the book. Eiji tends to live in an area where reality and imagination or memory bleed into one another, and the overlap between these is explored again and again.

The real lesson in this part of the story is perseverance and survival. Eiji takes an extreme risk to continue the quest for his father, and even when his life is on the line, he continues to act according to his beliefs, as when he refuses to kneel when he believes the gangster is about to shoot him. Additionally, we are happy to see actions by Eiji that reveal his ability to forgive and to help his fellow human beings, as when he saves Daimon despite Daimon's earlier questionable behavior. Revenge is not an overpowering part of Eiji's personality. This knowledge intensifies our dismay when we witness, in a flashback near the end of the novel, Eiji's self-righteous cruelty toward his mother, when he says to her face that he has no mother.

Finally, this chapter is presented in almost linear fashion because of the large amount of action that occurs, but a great deal of tension is gained by our knowing at the beginning of the chapter that Eiji's life is in real peril.



Chapter 5, "Study of Tales"

Chapter 5, "Study of Tales" Summary

Left alone on the bridge, Eiji runs as fast as he can from the scene of the exploding Cadillac's, but he cannot get far on foot. Fortunately, Buntaro, who has come looking for him, rescues him. This information is withheld from the reader until later in the chapter. The chapter begins with Eiji waking up in a strange house, which reminds him of his childhood after the death of Anju, when he shifted from family member to family member and often woke up in unfamiliar surroundings. He is frightened both by memories of what he has recently experienced and by the idea that he will be hunted down, either by the police or the yakuza. He has no idea where he is, but the house is a comfortable one, well furnished in an old-fashioned style, with no TV and no telephone. Finding a secret room and a book manuscript, Eiji begins reading, and over a period of several days, as Eiji progresses through the manuscript, he receives various visitors to the house, which, as it turns out, belongs to Mrs. Sasaki's sister, the author of the story he is reading.

The All-Consuming is the first chapter of the manuscript Eiji finds, and it is the title of the first

section of Chapter 5. The lead character in the story is Goatwriter, an author who happens to be a goat. There are also Mrs. Comb and Pithecanthropus. Mrs. Comb is Goatwriter's maid, and Pithecanthropus is his best friend and something of a handyman. They live on the Venerable Bus, which carries them through time and space, seemingly at random. Goatwriter has been hard at work on a manuscript, but after he loses it, he must throughout the morning to recreate it. Then, after a brief nap, he awakens to find that the newly written pages have disappeared as well. Apparently, someone has stolen them, and Goatwriter, Mrs. Comb, and Pithecanthropus leave the Venerable Bus to go in search of the thief.

Eiji, frightened by the house's unfamiliar sounds, begins to fear that someone will come for him at any moment. He decides to hide out in the writing room, but first he must hide all evidence that he is in the house. It has been five weeks since he left his village for Tokyo. He is trying to relax with a cup of tea, when he is frightened by the beep of a fax machine. It is only a message from Buntaro, who says he will be there at six o'clock.

Goatwriter and his friends, following a scent trail, discover the home of the ScatRat, but it quickly becomes clear that ScatRat is not the culprit, and the party returns to the Venerable bus, where Goatwriter begins a rewrite of his tale. When Mrs. Comb offers to prepare dinner, Goatwriter says he is full, this despite the fact that he has not eaten all day. Then it dawns on Mrs. Comb that Goatwriter's manuscripts were never stolen at all, but that Goatwriter has been eating his pages as he wrote them.



Eiji falls asleep and misses Buntaro's visit. When he awakens the next morning, he is startled to find an old woman in black leaning over him, but it is only Mrs. Sasaki, Eiji's boss at Ueno Station. Confused at first, Eiji is surprised to find out that she is Buntaro's mother. She has him take a hot shower while she prepares a meal.

The next chapter in the Goatwriter story is *Hunger*. Mrs. Comb goes to the market to sell her eggs (she is a hen.) On her way, she meets God in the guise of a hippie. He tells her that if she ever needs anything, to let him know.

Mrs. Sasaki feeds Eiji a wonderful meal, and she tells him that this house belongs to her sister, who is abroad. She also says that it would not be a good idea for him to return to his job at Ueno, since people may still be looking for him, but that he should not worry about anything until later. She soon leaves

Mrs. Comb finds that the town where she hoped to find a market for her eggs has been destroyed by war and that the people are starving.

Yuzu Daimon appears next, to thank Eiji for saving him and to apologize. They share a cigarette in the garden, and Eiji tells Daimon his whole story, including his search for his father, which is why he first came to Tokyo. Daimon listens attentively, but he has his own news. He has married Miriam, and they are going to disappear for a while, but he promises to do what he can to help Eiji find information about his father.

Mrs. Comb is in big trouble. A mob of hungry people has gathered, and they want to devour her. She has flown to the top of a statue, but it is only a matter of time before they capture her. She tries to distract them with stories, but to no avail. Then, by sheer chance, she is saved by God, the hippie she met earlier, who takes her back to the safety of the Venerable Bus.

Eiji spends his time alone reading. He reads a number of novels in addition to the Goatwriter manuscript. He begins to feel more comfortable, and enjoys meals and talking with Mrs. Sasaki and Buntaro. It seems that he is safe, as no one has come looking for him. A fax comes from Daimon, providing the mailing address of the detective that compiled Morino's file on Eiji's father. Daimon suggests caution, but wishes Eiji luck in finding his father.

Witch Shrouds is the next chapter of the Goatwriter saga. This time, Goatwriter and his friends are captured by Queen Shrouds, who wants to digitize Goatwriter and raid his brain so that she can synthesize every story he could possibly write and thereby become famous. Goatwriter writes for his own fulfillment, however, which places him in a position antithetical to Queen Shroud's. Luckily, the group escapes in the end when Pithecanthropus unplugs the giant computer in which the virtual Queen Shrouds lives.

Eiji writes a letter to the detective, asking for her help. This is Eiji's Plan G for finding his father, as nothing else so far has worked. Mailing it requires him to leave the house. Nothing bad happens as a result, which seems to provide a boost of confidence. When Buntaro shows up later, Eiji asks him what he can do about the rent on his capsule, since he no longer has a job, and Buntaro offers to let him work in the Shooting Star for



a week while he and his wife go on the first vacation they've ever had. Eiji is grateful, but Buntaro has other news for Eiji. Ai Imajo has been looking for him. Also, Buntaro has brought a postcard that was delivered to the shop that day. It is from Eiji's mother, asking him to please burn the last letter she sent. She begs him to burn it. She is writing from Nagano, where she has been staying at a hotel owned by a long-time male friend of hers. She says she dreams about Anju, and once again she asks Eiji to burn the last letter.

The Study of Tales is the last section of the manuscript written by Mrs. Sasaki's sister. Goatwriter, always in search of the "truly untold tale," leaves the bus and wanders into a dense forest. He believes that by searching in caves and books, he has overlooked the profound hidden in the obvious. A girl directs him to the highlands, where the truly untold tale can be found, but warns him that he must be prepared to pay everything. Goatwriter finds a sacred pool where he gives up his body. When he returns to the Venerable Bus, he sees that his previously written chapter headings form a sentence: "The All-Consuming Hunger Witch Shrouds the Study of Tales." Having discovered this secret, he is now ready to begin his real work on a blank page.

Before Eiji leaves the house of Mrs. Sasaki's sister, the detective, Mrs. Yamaya, visits him but when he asks whether she will give him the file on his father, she says consequences must be considered. Before Eiji can find out what she means by this, they are interrupted by a pair Mormon missionaries knocking on the door. Eiji listens to them and takes a tract they offer him, and by the time he closes the door and makes it back to the living room, Mrs. Yamaya has disappeared.

Then, Eiji receives another unexpected letter. This one is from Takara Tsukiyama, who saw Eiji's personal ad in the newspaper and thinks that Eiji may be his grandson. He wants to meet. Eiji is ecstatic. He goes out for a haircut, gets change for a telephone, and tries to reach Ai at the Jupiter Cafe. This is her day off, but she has left her number for Eiji, if he should happen to call. He calls the number, but when Ai answers, he becomes embarrassed. Still, he muddles through, and she is kind enough, or likes him enough, to ignore the silly things he says during their brief conversation. He ends by asking if he can call her, which, of course, he has just done. She makes a soft joke about this, but things are looking good.

Chapter 5, "Study of Tales" Analysis

The key to this chapter is its direct opposition to the previous one. Here, Eiji finds himself in a cozy home, a protected environment, interacting with people intent on helping him. "Reclaimed Land," the previous chapter, takes place in a bleak, half-finished, modern wasteland. There, Eiji is surrounded by people who want to hurt him. Eiji has come up against the hard realities of dog-eat-dog competitiveness and has barely survived. Now he is recovering in a hidden room in a warm, old-fashioned house.

Mrs. Sasaki plays a mothering role, waking Eiji, feeding him, and telling him to shower. Eiji recovers quickly. Each of Eiji's visitors is there out of concern for Eiji and not for



themselves. The new relationships he has begun since coming to Tokyo, as trivial as they may have seemed before, have taken on the utmost importance. These people have become a kind of substitute family. Even the missionaries who come to the door, regardless of the fact that they do not really know Eiji, can be seen as having concern for him on a spiritual level.

It is during this time of healing that Eiji gets his first big break regarding his father, in the form of the letter from his grandfather. This, along with the new letter from his mother (asking him to burn the previous one), can be seen as a new connection as well. Equally important, from Eiji's point of view, is the information that Ai has asked about him. All of these connections fill a void in Eiji's life as it has been described thus far, a void that until now he has been content to fill with somewhat immature, imagined adventures. The search for his father, which has largely been an imaginative exercise as well, might also be seen as an attempt to fill that void, a void left by the death of Anju and his separation from his mother.

Eiji's reading of the manuscript and the novels might also represent a forward step in his maturity, as the title of the chapter is "A Study of Tales," suggesting that Eiji is not merely consuming the stories he reads, but is analyzing them. This is a step forward, because it shows that he is moving beyond mere escapism and wishful thinking. Finally, the tale the manuscript tells is an allegory for Eiji's entire experience.



Chapter 6, "Kaiten"

Chapter 6, "Kaiten" Summary

Eiji meets his grandfather at the expensive Amadeus Tea Room. Perhaps to avoid the possibility of an embarrassing situation, his grandfather pretends to be someone else, Admiral Raizo, an old family friend. The two of them talk, and Grandfather makes it clear that he has little respect for his son, who sold the family's five-hundred-year-old sword. Eiji's grandfather puts great stock in bloodlines, and he seems to think that his son is an embarrassment who has no respect for the family heritage and no honor. The grandfather has met Eiji to discover whether Eiji is any better.

Evidently, the grandfather is satisfied, because he loans Eiji a journal, his most prized possession, and tells him to read it before they meet again in seven days. He says that Eiji's father has never seen the book and never will. In the guise of Admiral Raizo, Eiji's grandfather has not told Eiji much about his father, other than the family name, Tsukiyama. He is making ready to leave when Eiji asks whether Admiral Raizo knows what it is that his grandfather wants. "Admiral Raizo" says that Eiji and his grandfather both want the same thing: meaning.

Eiji has plenty of time on his hands during the long hours working at Shooting Star while Buntaro and his wife are away on vacation. He begins reading the journal, which belonged to his grandfather's elder brother during World War II. Eiji's great-uncle, Subaru Tsukiyama, was the suicide pilot of a *kaiten*, or manned torpedo. The journal chronicles his training and intense final days, and offers Eiji an insight into his family history that the lack of a father had denied him. Eiji's great-uncle is a man driven by honor who finds his life's meaning in volunteering to sacrifice his life for his country. After all his preparation, he pilots his kaiten perfectly, striking an American warship dead-on, but his craft fails to detonate and glances harmlessly off the side, leaving him to slowly suffocate as his air runs out.

Eiji manages to run the Shooting Star without much trouble, and he spends his down time reading the journal and talking to Ai on the telephone. He thinks about the days following Anju's death and begins to consider the meaning of his own life, and whether his search for his father is really that important. He begins to suspect that perhaps his own life stopped when Anju's did.

One night, as Eiji is reading the journal at work, he is surprised by the appearance of Masanobu Suga, who is extremely drunk. Suga is upset over something, and as Eiji is trying to keep him under control as he ricochets around the video store, Suga blubbers a story about an accident he once witnessed, which he might have helped avert if he had acted. A car hit a young boy in the street, and Suga did nothing to save him. This memory seems to haunt Suga. The boy was killed. Eiji must do something to help his friend, and takes him upstairs to his capsule. The next day, we find that Suga's drinking binge stemmed from his failure to hack the Pentagon computer's "Holy Grail." He has



given up, saying that the whole thing is a wild goose chase. Holy Grail was his ultimate meaning as a hacker, and he now feels as if his life has none.

During one of their many phone conversations, Ai and Eiji are discussing why different people have different meanings for their lives. They are talking about the journal, and Ai asks if Eiji wants to hear something private about her. She is a diabetic and has to shoot insulin. She says this changes what her meaning might otherwise have been. Eiji says that his meaning has been to find his father, and now that he will meet him within a week, he wonders what he will do afterward. Ai's meaning is her music. She plays some over the phone to help Eiji relax. She has an audition the next day, and is worried. She hopes to get into a prestigious school in Paris. We later find that she passes her auditions and is even awarded a scholarship, but then she must contend with her father, who forbids her to go to Paris and attend the Conservatoire.

Buntaro returns from vacation with his wife, who is pregnant with their first child, a boy they have already named Kodai. He is refreshed and happy and ready to get to work, and Eiji is pleased to see them, but now he must find another job. Fortunately, one comes up almost immediately. When he calls Ai's apartment, she is not home. Her roommate answers. After a bit of chatting, in which she grills Eiji about whether or not he is a nice guy for Ai, she offers him a job at Nero's, the pizza kitchen where she works.

The day of Eiji's anticipated meeting with his grandfather at the Amadeus Tea Room has arrived. He hopes also that he will get to meet his father, but those hopes are soon dashed. His stepmother and half-sister have ambushed him. It seems that his grandfather has died, and Eiji's stepmother found out about the intended meeting from the man's diary. Further, Eiji discovers that Admiral Raizo was actually his grandfather Tsukiyama. Eiji's stepmother again accuses him of attempting to take advantage of his patrimony to obtain money from the Tsukiyama family. She then threatens him again, and says that Eiji's father does not want to meet him, because he is ashamed of him, "an illegitimate reminder of the worst mistake of his life." She says that Eiji's insistence is only causing pain for everyone. Finally, Eiji has had enough, and tells the woman that she wins. Eiji's father obviously does not want to meet him or he would have contacted him already.

Eiji leaves the Tea Room in a state of mild shock, unable to fully comprehend what he has done, but he decides that it is the right thing. The fact that Eiji's father does not wish to acknowledge him makes any further search meaningless. Eiji realizes that the implication is that his own meaning is now up in the air, much like Suga's, or Ai's, or Subaru Tsukiyama's after his kaiten failed to detonate.

Chapter 6, "Kaiten" Analysis

Having recovered from his run-in with the yakuza, and buoyed by the help of his friends, Eiji is looking forward to meeting his grandfather. Although he still does not know the identity of his father, the journal his grandfather gives him forms a link with the paternal



side of his family and gives him a sense of place in the grand scheme of things, especially since Eiji's great-uncle was in the military during World War II. Knowing even this little bit of his family tradition goes a long way toward replacing something Eiji feels is lacking. Every Japanese family was significantly affected by the war, but without a family history, Eiji is missing a historical context that most Japanese must take for granted.

The journal also opens up the idea of meaning, which becomes a central theme from here on. Eiji realizes that his meaning so far has been limited to finding his father, but he now feels that this is not enough. Ai has her music. Subaru had his mission. Eiji's grandfather had his family heritage. Buntaro has his family and the son who is about to be born. During their conversations, Eiji and Ai talk discuss the idea of meaning and how it keeps changing. Suga's situation in some ways parallels Eiji's. Since he has surmised that his quest of hacking the Pentagon is a wild goose chase, he has no sense of purpose. This is similar to what Eiji is going through as he questions the usefulness of his quest to find his father. Suga's situation also parallels that of Eiji's mother. Like her, Suga responds to his felt lack of purpose by drinking and becoming depressed, although to a lesser degree.

It is clear, finally, from the description Eiji's grandfather gives of his son, that he cannot see the meaning in his son's life. For his son to so easily dismiss the family heritage, as the sale of the heirloom sword symbolizes, is beyond him. Much of Subaru's journal is addressed to Eiji's grandfather, so that the sacrifice made by his brother is very close to his heart. The importance of the sword and journal is intensified by the fact that the family originally hails from Nagasaki, one of the two cities obliterated by the H-bomb near the end of World War II. There must be very little of the family history left intact in the form of physical objects, and the city he remembers from his childhood no longer exists.

The importance of these ideas to Eiji's quest for his father is immense. Eiji's search for his father is, in many ways, a search for meaning, and to discover that his father's life seems devoid of meaning is the same as Suga discovering that his Holy Grail is a hoax. Eiji is slowly realizing that he is no longer fully invested in this quest. His life is beginning to be about something else, something less selfish and more realistic. Chapter 6 is the novel's linchpin.



Chapter 7, "Cards"

Chapter 7, "Cards" Summary

The kitchen at Nero's where Eiji works nights is hot and cramped, but Eiji finds that his job assembling pizzas is not difficult. He fits in easily with his coworkers, although some he likes better than others, and Sachiko Sera, Ai's roommate, is a kind and capable manager.

Although they have talked for hours over the telephone, Eiji and Ai have not been on an actual date. In fact they have not seen one another since Eiji head butted the abusive customer in the Jupiter Cafy. One morning, after his shift, they meet and go to McDonald's for breakfast. Eiji tells Ai about sawing the head off the thunder god, and Ai tells him of her decision to go to France in spite of her father's threat to disown her. Her family wants her to stay and lead the kind of life they would choose for her. Later, when Ai offers to buy Eiji a new cap, he responds that the old one he wears was a gift from Anju. This is the first time he has mentioned his twin sister to Ai. He then has to tell her his whole story.

When Eiji arrives home, Buntaro's wife gives him a letter. It is from Kozue Yamaya, the detective who worked for the yakuza boss, Mr. Morino, and who visited Eiji when he was hiding out at the home of Mrs. Sasaki's sister. In the letter, Ms. Yamaya tells a sad tale of how, because of her husband's debts, she was made a sex slave of the yakuza. At that time her name was Makino Matani. By sheer luck, she one day managed to escape, but on the same day she lost her son, whom she had been allowed to keep with her. After many hard years, Ms. Yamaya became a private researcher and was slowly building up information on the yakuza organization in an effort to find her son.

Eventually, by working with the gangsters, Ms. Yamaya discovered that her son had been murdered and his organs sold on the black market to rich parents of sick children. Following that, she compiled all the data she could uncover about the yakuza organization and tried to get someone in authority to use it, but the yakuza owns everyone, including the police and politicians. Due to her attempts, they have had Ms. Yamaya eliminated. However, the information she compiled has been posthumously sent to a number of people whom she hopes will act. Eiji is one of them, partly because he shares the same first name as her murdered son. Eiji, of course has no idea what to do with the disk he has received.

For their next date, Ai is coming over to Eiji's to prepare a meal. In the middle of it, Suga shows up looking much happier than before. After a sudden brainstorm, he has succeeded in finding his Holy Grail, hacking the Pentagon, and has been offered a job, just as he had hoped. He is on his way to Texas, but before he goes, he gives Eiji his finest computer virus, which he cannot take with him. The virus spreads by sending itself to every address in a victim's address book, and any message can be attached.



After Suga leaves, the rest of the date goes well, until Eiji shows Ai the letters from his mother. As he is walking Ai to the subway, she becomes upset and tells him that he should contact his mother, that she obviously wants Eiji in her life. Eiji is skeptical, and still harbors some resentment toward his mother, but Ai insists that he is being self-centered and self-delusional. Then she jumps on him for smoking all the time. The argument ends when she gets on the train, and Eiji has no idea whether she will call him again. He throws his cigarettes away, but Ai is not looking in his direction. He is left alone on the platform.

There is a message on Eiji's answering machine. His father wants to meet him. He claims that he had no idea that Eiji was looking for him, and blames his wife for keeping the news from him. He wants to meet. Eiji is ecstatic. After his argument with Ai, this is very happy news. He is to meet his father's assistant, who will bring Eiji to his father. But the caller turns out to be a fraud, a paid actor. Eiji has been tricked yet again by the yakuza. This time, it is Mama-san and Mr. Tsuru, who has made a partial recovery. Eiji and three other men have been brought together to play cards for their lives. Mr. Tsuru has clearly lost his mind, but he still commands the obedience of his followers. One of the other men loses the game, but before his death sentence can be carried out, there is an accident and Mr. Tsuru is killed. Mama-san, it turns out, is the real power, and now that the figurehead, Mr. Tsuru, has died, she assumes full authority and sets Eiji and the other men free. Once again, Eiji has narrowly escaped death.

Back at Nero's, Eiji tries to settle into a routine night, but his shift is interrupted by a telephone call from his mother. She is getting married to the friend she wrote about in her last letter, a respectable hotel owner. She says he would love to meet Eiji. She says she is checking back into the clinic to try and get over her drinking problem, or to begin to, before they are married. Almost before he knows what he is saying, Eiji says he wants to come and see her.

Eiji will have to quit yet another job. He explains to Sachiko, who is understanding, but she tells him to call Ai before he leaves. When Eiji acts unsure, she makes him promise.

Before the end of Eiji's last shift, a call comes in for a special pizza, the Kamikaze. Eiji recognizes the ingredients from the misplaced phone call he received before. Then he sees the name on the order is Tsukiyama, his father's name, and the delivery address is Osugi and Bosugi, PanOpticon. His father has ordered the pizza. He prepares the pizza, then volunteers to deliver it.

Eiji's meeting with his father is, if anything, anticlimactic. When he enters the office, his father is arguing over the phone with his stepmother. It is clear that he is henpecked. It is equally clear that his relationship with his wife is not an honest one. Eiji does not even like his father's first name: Daisuke. His father yells into the phone. The end of the conversation is icy. Eiji delivers the pizza. They make a little small talk, in which Eiji's father tries to be clever. He is terribly proud of the special pizza, as if it were a major achievement. He does not recognize his son. Eiji leaves without ever revealing who he is. He despises his father. They seem to be polar opposites. Eiji's grandfather was right.



Before leaving Tokyo, Eiji goes to a computer store and asks to try a computer with a fast modem. Using it, he unleashes Suga's virus by emailing it to Tokyo Police headquarters. He attaches the information on the disk from Ms. Yamaya. It will reach every email inbox in Japan.

Chapter 7, "Cards" Analysis

This chapter begins the downward momentum toward the end of the novel. Eiji and Ai's relationship has matured to the point that they are now dealing with one another's very private issues. Eiji is fully involved with the people around him, and with Ai's help is now ready to try and reconnect with his mother. At the same time, he successfully completes his quest. Just as Ai has said, in phone conversations in the last chapter, once he found that his meaning was to father, it changed, so that their actual meeting is much less important to him than he imagined it would be. His purpose has already shifted. He wants to care for others and connect with them in ways that he has not since the death of Anju. Meeting Daisuke Tsukiyama serves primarily to confirm this shift in Eiji's state of mind, and to accentuate the change in his level of maturity over the course of the story.

Eiji's maturity also shines through in the boldness of his actions, again in contrast to his dithering in the first chapter. He is well aware of the danger of acting against the yakuza, but when he puts two and two together and possession of Suga's virus puts him in a unique position to disseminate Ms. Yamaya's information, he unleashes it without hesitation. Also, it is certain that some of the strength to act comes from the self-assurance granted by the open, honest relationships he has built, relationships that could never have developed if he were still living his escapist, wish-fulfilling fantasies.



Chapter 8, "The Language of Mountains is Rain"

Chapter 8, "The Language of Mountains is Rain" Summary

In the final chapter, Eiji's dreams, his reality, his hopes, and his memories begin to mingle as he makes his way toward his home region to visit his mother. By the end of the chapter, it becomes difficult to tell which parts are dreams and which are real.

Eiji's first dream is a pastiche of elements from earlier in the novel: Debussy, war, the barber, Shooting Star, soccer, Wheatie, Goatwriter, the bell in the thunder god's shrine. Kodai, the son of Buntaro, who has grown up. Eiji awakens to find himself in the cab of a freight truck, the free ride that one of the delivery drivers at Nero's arranged for him. As they drive, the man tells Eiji the story of why he is alone: he sleepwalks, and acts out his dreams. He nearly split a man's skull once while dreaming about chopping watermelons in half.

While waiting for his next ride, Eiji manages to get in touch with Ai. They make up. He tells her that he saw his father, and she wants to hear all about it. She thanks him for throwing his cigarettes away, which she did see, after all.

Eiji's next dream is about Anju. He has scored a winning goal, and she is alive again. Her kite is stuck in a tree, and she wants him to get it. He insists that she is the better climber. She reminds him that she has diabetes. It takes a long time to reach the kite, and Eiji realizes he has left Anju alone without food or water. She is locked in his guitar case with no air.

Eiji wakes up in the cab of another truck. This driver tells him the story of his first love. His girlfriend left him, because her parents said he was too low-class, so he planned to commit suicide, but he fell asleep during the train ride out to where he planned to hang himself, and he dreamed that the girl had hanged herself first. It was nasty. He changed his mind. He realized he had never loved her in the first place.

As they get closer to his hometown, Eiji begins to take note of the landscape, and he remembers a visit his mother once made to see him at his uncle's house. When his uncle suggests that he should have brought his guitar and played something for his mother, Eiji responds that he has no mother. Remembering it, Eiji regrets saying that, even though he was young at the time.

Almost to Miyazaki, where his mother is staying, Eiji takes a bus. Here he has a third dream. He dreams he is talking with Mr. Aoyama, the Ueno stationmaster who committed suicide. Mr. Aoyama tells Eiji that he is one of Eiji's dead. In other words, he will visit Eiji's mind. When Eiji wonders why Anju never visits, since she certainly ought



to be one of his dead, Mr. Aoyama replies that she is not really dead, because Eiji will not allow her to die.

When he awakens this time, Eiji meets an old woman he refers to as Mrs. Persimmon. She offers him a fruit in exchange for the dream he just had. She already seems to know what it is about. He tells it to her, but when he leaves Anju out, the woman knows it, and demands that he tell her. Then she gives him a persimmon.

The Miyazaki Mountain Clinic is fairly isolated, and Eiji has to walk up a long road to reach it. When he arrives, Eiji's mother is having lunch with the other patients, or members. While he is waiting in her room, Eiji falls asleep and has another dream. In it, he meets John Lennon in New York. When asked what his favorite song is, Eiji replies that it is "#9 Dream." John Lennon is delighted, and goes on to explain the meaning of the song. He says that "#9 Dream" is the son of "Norwegian Wood," and that both of these are ghost stories. The woman in "Norwegian Wood" puts a curse of loneliness on the listener, but the two spirits in "#9 Dream" offer a blessing of harmony. When Eiji asks what the title of "#9 Dream" means, Lennon replies mysteriously that "The meaning of the ninth dream begins after all meanings appear to be dead and gone..."

Eiji's meeting with his mother is not reported directly, but through a later telephone conversation with Ai. He says that he was laughing so hard that he woke up, at which point he found his mother standing in the doorway. They talked for three hours, and agreed to try and start over. The big things, however, they avoided talking about, such as Eiji's father and the time Eiji said he had no mother. Eiji says he began to see his mother as an actual person. His guitar, it turns out, used to belong to her. Eiji is going to visit his grandmother and his sister's tomb, and then he is going to meet his mother again, as well as the man she is planning to marry. Ai knows these things before he tells her.

On the train from Miyazaki to Kagoshima, Eiji runs into Mrs. Persimmon again. She tells him she is a witch who absorbs dreams. As Eiji gets closer to home, the line between dream and reality becomes more and more blurred. He dreams that he and Ai are living in the Amadeus Tea Room as brother and sister, when a hideous bird attacks them. When Eiji talks to Ai again, he tells her about the dream. Later in the same conversation, he tells Ai he loves her. She is shocked. Terribly embarrassed, he tries to explain that it just slipped out. She asks him if he means it, and he finally manages to say that he can't say he doesn't mean it. In response, she plays Scarlatti's K. 8 in G minor, and Eiji listens until his phone card is empty.

As Eiji arrives in Kagoshima, a short ferry ride from his home island, typhoon eighteen hits, and he is forced to take shelter for a long time in a garden shed while the storm tears across the landscape. He has another dream, this one dominated by his real-life need to pee, but near the end of it someone asks him what he did with Anju, and tries to blame him for her death. Eiji yells at him to "Fuck off." When he awakens, the typhoon is winding down. He relieves himself through a crack in the door, but when he turns around, he finds that someone else has been in the shed with him all along. It is a woman. She puts her hand in Eiji's boxers. Surely this is a dream. Or is it? As her lips



slide open, Eiji glimpses Mrs. Persimmon sitting in the corner, watching and eating a persimmon.

In Eiji's next conversation with Ai, she tells him of strange things happening in Tokyo: pigeons flying into buildings, trees full of black crows. Ai also offers to let Eiji stay at her place when he returns to Tokyo. With this conversation in his mind, Eiji continues home, seeing a few old faces along the way, but when he arrives at his grandmother's house, no one is there. Eiji falls asleep and dreams of Anju drowning, but it is a peaceful dream. He is sorry he cannot save her, but she knows he is sorry. She is resigned to her fate and wants Eiji to go away, so he will not drown, too.

Eiji is awakened by a news bulletin blaring out of the radio. There has been a massive earthquake in Tokyo. Eiji thinks about all his friends there and all the terrible things that might have happened to them. He tries to call Ai, but cannot get through. He tries Nero's and Ueno: same results. He cannot reach the Tokyo operator, even. Images of the devastation flash through his mind. Eiji cannot think straight and simply begins running.

Chapter 8, "The Language of Mountains is Rain"

Analysis

Eiji's journey to meet his mother and then to his home is broken up by a number of dreams. There are as many dreams in this chapter, it seems, as there are actual events, and reality begins to blur, an effect that intensifies toward the end of the story, until we are no longer one hundred percent sure whether some events are dreamed or real. Sprinkled throughout, also, are Eiji's conversations with Ai, and these tend to help anchor us in reality. But in the end, when the earthquake occurs and Eiji cannot get through to her, even this safety line fails, so that it is difficult to distinguish between our objective reality and Eiji's (our narrator's) subjective one.

One reason for Eiji's sudden avalanche of dreams is that he is processing his experiences at a deeper level than he has earlier in the book. Contrast all this sleeping and dreaming with Eiji's sleepless night in the second chapter. Contrast the dreams, which are unconscious, with Eiji's conscious fantasies in the first chapter. As we have slowly discovered, Eiji has not really dealt with the death of his twin sister, and as he gets closer and closer to home he begins to realize this as we have. Although he recalls the events surrounding her death, he has buried the emotions that go along with them. Now, really for the first time, he is dealing with them.

This journey began with Eiji's quest for his father, but his experiences have led him back to himself. His decision to visit his mother was a definitive one, as she represents the part of himself that he has hidden, but his relationship with Ai has been the catalyst. As an important woman in his life, she echoes all the other women in his life, especially Anju, who was his most important companion, and Ai's inclinations move him toward reconciling with his mother and facing up to the death of his twin, or allowing her to finally die, as Mr. Aoyama would put it.



In the beginning, Eiji is alone, with only his daydreams and his quest as comfort, but in the end he is surrounded by people and has built a real connection with Ai, so perhaps the John Lennon in Eiji's dream is correct, and Eiji's favorite song, "#9 Dream," does offer a blessing of harmony. Certainly, Eiji's story in the beginning lacks the harmony that it seems to have developed by the end. As for the earthquake, it seems to be real, but whether it is or is not, Eiji's reaction to it reveals the value he has now discovered in life, a value that has nothing to do with his patronage or any fatalistic sense of abandonment.



Characters

Eiji Miyake

Eiji Miyake is the novel's main character. Following the death of his twin sister just a week after their eleventh birthday, Eiji's driving ambition has been to discover the identity of his father and to meet him, but many obstacles stand in his way, and not all of them are external.

Over the course of the story, it becomes clear that Eiji has dealt with the death of Anju by not dealing with it. He withdraws from everyone connected with his sister. Shortly after her death, he goes deep into the woods as an escape, and when he comes out he can no longer stay in his grandmother's house, where he and Anju grew up. Instead, he spends his adolescence moving from one uncle's house to the next. He rejects his mother completely, and although she is rarely around anyway, it becomes clear that, over time, this rejection is damaging Eiji as much as it is damaging his mother.

Eventually, Eiji latches onto the quest for his father, and moves to Tokyo to find him. He is twenty years old now. During his time in Tokyo, Eiji's search leads him into many situations, some dangerous, and he meets a number of people. Some of these are dangerous as well, but Eiji slowly begins to emerge from the shell of imagination he has built to protect himself, and begins to connect with the people around him in ways that he would not allow himself to connect with the people he was familiar with in his youth. Doing so allows him to eventually begin to reconcile with his mother, and to finally begin to deal with the death of his twin sister. Eiji does finally discover his father's identity, but it comes as a let-down, because by this time, he has already realized that the importance of the relationships he is building on his own is greater than the importance of being recognized by a man who does not want anything to do with him. What Eiji has been searching for, as he realizes by the end of the novel, is meaning, and he realizes that the most valuable meaning for him is embodied in his regard for others.

Anju Miyake

Anju Miyake is Eiji's twin sister. She is something of a tomboy and loves to climb trees and play outdoors. They share a rich imaginative life, and their own twin-language. Despite the somewhat confrontational nature of their last day together, it is clear that they are very close. Their abandonment by their mother has intensified their co-dependence to the point that Anju begs Eiji not to go away on his overnight trip. After she drowns while he is away, Eiji is reluctant to deal her death. She is an overshadowing presence throughout the novel, haunting Eiji's dreams and memories in unexpected ways.

Anju's death is part of Eiji's motivation for finding his father, as well as for rejecting his mother, as he puts some blame for her death on each of them, as well as on himself. As



Eiji matures, Anju becomes the template by which he judges other women, who sometimes, by an action or a look, remind him of her. Eventually, Anju becomes the common ground on which Eiji and his mother can begin to build a new relationship.

Mariko Miyaki

Mariko Miyaki, Eiji and Anju Miyake's mother, is the former mistress of Daisuke Tsukiyama, their father. After being abandoned by Tsukiyama, who is married with his own legitimate children, Mariko falls into a cycle of depression and alcoholism, looking for one man after another to care for her. After she comes very close to throwing baby Eiji over the balcony, Mariko realizes that she cannot properly care for her children and decides it would be best to leave them with her family.

Eiji later condemns Mariko for abandoning them and cuts off all contact. However, after he moves to Tokyo, she reaches out to him several times by letter and once by phone. Near the end of the story, mother and son have begun to re-form a fragile relationship, and Mariko is trying to free herself from her alcoholism. She is planning to marry an old friend and has begun to believe that it is possible for her to finally live a happier life. It is Eiji's decision to finally respond to her overtures that opens the way for him to begin to deal with Anju's death.

Ai Imajo

Ai is the waitress with the perfect neck. Eiji is initially attracted to this very specific physical quality, but also by the contrast between her behavior and that of her evil-stepsister type coworkers at the Jupiter Cafy. After an embarrassing first encounter, Eiji later captures her attention, when he rescues her from an abusive customer in dramatic fashion.

Ai is a piano student, who hopes to attend the Conservatoire in Paris. However, she must overcome her family's objections to do so, despite the fact that she has won a scholarship. She seems to like Eiji, and they talk for hours by phone, slowly building a deep relationship. It is her suggestion that Eiji contact his mother, and she is very supportive, when he does so. Also, it is because of her objections that Eiji quits smoking. She is a diabetic and has, by necessity, always been very focused on her health. Eiji is in love with her. Their relationship helps him begin to unlock some of the complex emotions surrounding Anju's life and death.

Sachiko Sera

Sachiko is Ai's roommate and Eiji's boss at Nero's. She is somewhat protective of Ai, but is convinced of Eiji's good heartedness. She offers him a job, and turns out to be a kind and capable manager. When Eiji explains that he needs to go and see his mother, even though he has only been working at Nero's for a short time, she is very understanding.



She even suggests that Eiji call Ai before he leaves, attempting to mediate a spat they have had.

Buntaro Ogiso

Buntaro is Eiji's landlord and owner of Shooting Star video. Although a bit gruff and prone to making small jokes at Eiji's expense, Buntaro is friendly and helps Eiji in a number of ways, not the least of which is rescuing him from the reclaimed land after Eiji has escaped death at the hands of the yakuza. He also helps Eiji get an interview for a job at Ueno station, and when Eiji has to give that up, Buntaro gives him a short-term job at his video store. He has a wife named Machiko, who is pregnant with their first child, a son they have already named Kodai.

Mrs. Sasaki

Mrs. Sasaki is Eiji's boss at Ueno station lost-property office, whom Eiji later discovers is Buntaro's mother. She is kind, and Eiji feels from the beginning that she is a person one must always be totally honest with. Eiji stays at her sister's house for a while, and Mrs. Sasaki helps him through a difficult time, as he is hiding out from the yakuza.

Masanobu Suga

A capable computer hacker and Eiji's coworker for a short time at Ueno Station lost-property office. Later, he helps Eiji find Miriam by hacking the library computers. Suga's meaning in life is to hack the Pentagon. This is the hacker Holy Grail. If he succeeds, he believes that the U.S. government will offer him a top job. It turns out that he is correct, although he does deal with a bit of disappointment, when it looks as if he has been on a wild goose chase. The discouragement he feels at this time is uncharacteristic of this normally upbeat guy. Before he leaves the country to take up his new job in Texas, Suga gives Eiji a computer virus that he later uses to spread the information Ms. Yamaya has gathered about the yakuza organization.

Yuzu Daimon

Son of a corrupt police chief. Daimon uses Eiji to help him get back at his girlfriend, and in so doing inadvertently involves Eiji in a yakuza war of succession. He and Eiji are kidnapped, and after Eiji is released he finds that the gangsters have drained a liter of blood from Daimon as payback for his treatment of Miriam. Eiji helps Daimon get to a safe place. Later, in thanks, Daimon gives him his prized MacArthur cigarette lighter as well as contact information for Mr. Morino's private investigator, who has a file on Eiji's father.



Goatwriter

The lead character in the story written by Mrs. Sasaki's sister. Eiji reads it while hiding out from the yakuza. Goatwriter's adventures with Mrs. Comb and Pithecanthropus are an allegory for Eiji's experiences in the novel.

Daisuke Tsukiyama

This is the man who fathered Eiji and Anju before abandoning their mother to return to his legitimate family. He is apparently a habitual philanderer. According to his own father, he lacks honor, giving no thought to his family heritage and taking as little responsibility as possible for his actions. He makes no effort to contact Eiji, despite the fact that he could hardly fail to know that Eiji has come to Tokyo in search of him. He is a henpecked husband in an unhappy marriage and is a partner in the law firm of Osugi and Bosugi, in the PanOpticon building. The most interesting thing about him is his odd taste in pizza, of which he is inordinately proud. It is because of Daisuke's regular Kamikaze pizza from Nero's that Eiji is finally able to discover that Daisuke is his father. Throughout the novel, Eiji's one desire is to meet his father, and everything he does is seen through this desire. Slowly, however, Eiji begins to question the real importance of meeting this man, so that when they do, Eiji does not even reveal himself as Daisuke's son.

Takara Tsukiyama (Admiral Raizo)

This is Eiji's paternal grandfather. The Japan he grew up in, with its emphasis on honor and sacrifice, disappeared after World War II. His personality has been molded by pre-war Japan, but he must live in contemporary Japan. The contrast is evident in his familial relationships. His brother, Subaru Tsukiyama, was the honor-bound suicide pilot of a manned torpedo during the war, but his son is a decadent lawyer who fathers and abandons illegitimate children and sells the Tsukiyama sword that has been in the family for five centuries. By giving Eiji his brother's journal, Grandfather Tsukiyama attempts to bridge this gap and create new meaning for his life.

Subaru Tsukiyama

This is Eiji's great-uncle, his grandfather's elder brother. The suicide pilot of a manned torpedo, he is dedicated to sacrificing his life for his country. Eiji inherits a journal Subaru kept during training for his mission, and by reading it gains a new perspective in the different kinds of meaning people attach to their lives.



Mrs. Tsukiyama

This is Eiji's stepmother, his father's legitimate wife. Eiji's first contact with Mrs. Tsukiyama is by letter, shortly after he contacts Ms. Kato for information about his father. Mrs. Tsukiyama is only interested in protecting her status, and accuses Eiji of planning to blackmail the family. She also threatens him and attempts to shame him. Later, she uses the same tactics, when she and her daughter ambush Eiji at the Amadeus Tea Room. Eiji finally gives in, when she convinces him that his father will never want to meet him, but her victory is hollow, because Eiji has already begun to question the importance of meeting his father. The last time we encounter Mrs. Tsukiyama is when Eiji delivers the Kamikaze pizza to his father, and she is on the telephone. She is clearly difficult to live with.

Akiko Kato

A colleague of Daisuke Tsukiyama, Eiji's father, and Eiji's first lead in trying to locate his father. The lead goes nowhere, however, as Ms. Kato coldly rebuffs Eiji's requests. In many places, she represents the enemy. For example, in his daydream about the Tokyo flood, Eiji describes the crocodile as watching him with "Akiko Kato eyes."



Objects/Places

Eiji's Cap

The cap Eiji wears is the last birthday gift he received from Anju. While no description is given of it, it must be in pretty bad shape by the time he comes to Tokyo. Ai offers to buy him a new one, and this is how she comes to find out about Anju. Also, it is because Eiji forgets the cap at the arcade that he meets up with Yuzu Daimon and ends up at the Queen of Spades.

Subaru's Journal

Subaru Tsukiyama kept a journal of his experiences training in the Japanese military, and it was later given to his brother, Eiji's paternal grandfather, for whom it became a prized possession. Eiji inherits it in turn, when his grandfather dies after lending it to him. Reading it, Eiji connects with his previously unknown past, and begins to think about the meaning of his life and the quest to find his father.

The Sword

This ancient sword is another Tsukiyama heirloom, having been in the family for five hundred years. To the great disappointment and anger of Eiji's grandfather, Eiji's father sold the sword to an American businessman. For Eiji's grandfather, this proves the worthlessness of his son, and he warns Eiji that his father is without honor or scruples.

Guitar

Eiji is an avid guitar player, though not nearly the musician that Ai is. He plays when he is alone, sometimes practicing John Lennon tunes in the middle of the night. He is surprised to find out, when he finally meets his mother, that the guitar once belonged to her. This is a shared interest that will perhaps help them reconnect.

Whalestone

A massive stone that rises out of the sea near Eiji's home island. When he and Anju were younger, he told her that it was a real whale that had been turned to stone by the thunder god, and that if they were to swim out to it and touch it, it would come to life and, out of gratitude, take them anywhere they wanted to go. When she was younger, Anju wanted it to take them to their mother and their father. She is trying to prove that she can swim out to it, when she drowns.



Holy Grail

Holy Grail is the ultimate meaning for any computer hacker. It is a secret Pentagon computer that, if hacked, will lead to an instant job with the United States government. In Biblical terms, the Holy Grail is the cup from which Jesus Christ drank at the last supper. The quest to find the Holy Grail is so famous that the term "holy grail" is now used to refer to any kind of ultimate goal.

General MacArthur's Lighter

Yuzu Daimon gives Eiji this valuable platinum lighter to thank him for saving his life. It was once given to MacArthur by a group of Japanese citizens requesting MacArthur's help. The inscription reads: *To General MacArthur on occasion of seventy-first birthday, January 1951, from Aichi Citizens Repatriation Committee - Earnest Beseech to Assist Countrymen Captured USSR.*

"#9 Dream"

"#9 Dream" is the title of a song by John Lennon. As Eiji's dream version of John Lennon alludes, the song refers to dancing spirits, which is likely why it is connected with the story of Eiji and Anju. The dream Lennon also says that the spirits "bless the listener with harmony." He goes on to say that "the meaning of the ninth dream begins after all meanings appear to be dead and gone." Perhaps this applies directly to Eiji's life. Finally, the words "Ah, bowakama pousse pousse," from the song, appear to be meaningless, which perhaps means that they can mean whatever we want.

Kamikaze Pizza

This is the special-order pizza created by Eiji's father, Daisuke Tsukiyama. When he orders it during Eiji's last shift at Nero's, Eiji recognizes the address and the surname, and figures out that this Daisuke is his father. He delivers the pizza, and this is how he finally meets his father. The pizza is a strange combination of banana, quail eggs, scallops, triple chilis, and octopus ink on a mozzarella crust.

PanOpticon

In the novel, PanOpticon is the name of the office building where Eiji's father and Akiko Kato work. The word Panopticon refers to a prison designed so that inmates can be observed at all times without their knowledge, the idea being that if they know they might be watched at any given moment, they will behave whether or not they are actually observed.



Jupiter Cafy

The opening scene of the novel takes place in the Jupiter Cafy, where Eiji is staking out the PanOpticon building. Ai Imajo is a waitress at the cafy, and this is where she and Eiji meet.

Shooting Star

Shooting Star is a video store owned by Buntaro Ogiso, Eiji's landlord. It is downstairs from Eiji's capsule apartment. When Buntaro goes on vacation, Eiji runs the store for a week, and it is the scene of Suga's drunken story of the child he saw killed by a car.

Queen of Spades

An exclusive club where Eiji first stumbles into the yakuza underworld. He goes there with Yuzu Daimon, who is trying to make one of the hostesses jealous. Mama-san, who runs the club, is a powerful yakuza figure. She eventually takes over leadership of the gangs.



Themes

Dealing with Loss

The central theme of the novel, as far as Eiji is concerned, is dealing with loss. Eiji has lost his closest friend and family member, his twin sister, and is left with a massive hole in his life. Once he rejects his mother, who is distracted by serious problems of her own, Eiji can see no one and nothing with which to fill that hole, so he refuses to come to terms with his sister's death. She is all he has, and he cannot imagine life without her. As he gets older, Anju's absence is unmistakable, and Eiji begins trying to fill the void with other things, such as his obsession with the music of John Lennon. Later, his obsession shifts to the idea of finding his father. Eiji is displacing his emotions. When it begins to dawn on him that he will never have a relationship with his father, and that it is probable that any relationship with him would be unsatisfying anyway, he begins to move toward an understanding of the fact that he needs to let Anju go. Key to this progression are Ai Imajo and his mother. As they become more important to him, they begin to crowd the hole left by Anju's absence, until Eiji finally comes to realize that if he does not make room for them, he may well drown in his own way. Wrapped up in all this are feelings of guilt and blame, which make the situation doubly confusing for Eiji, but he finally understands that he is not responsible for Anju's death and that Anju would not blame him for failing to save her.

Imagination vs. Reality

A key idea throughout the novel is the merging of imagination and reality. As we can see in the beginning of the book, Eiji has an active imagination and is fond of creating his own reality. At the end of the book, as he realizes that the extent to which he has done this goes way beyond simple daydreams, we get the dizzying awareness that much of what we think of as objective reality is in fact subjective, created by us out of our own interpretations, emotions, and prejudices. Much of Eiji's world is created out of his experiences as a child: the concept he has of his mother, his fantastic ideas about his father, the comic and movie characters on which he sometimes bases his actions. Zax Omega, for example, is a fictional character, but Eiji uses him as a role model. The implications of Eiji's subjectivity affect every aspect of his life. Once he makes the decision that his mother is a drunk, he sees everything she does from then on in that light, drawing his own conclusions without regard to specific facts. He easily convinces himself that his father is a gangster, which requires a great deal of inventiveness on his part, but it is so easy, because he has already convinced himself that his father is a wealthy, important man. In a way, the novel can be seen as a long, slow, waking up.



Good and Evil

Part of Eiji's journey is characterized by how he deals with people. Although he finds himself in dangerous situations, Good and Evil are not clearly marked territories. When he is young, Eiji can afford to label people, as he does his mother, but as he matures he is forced to consider the complexities that give rise to a given individual's actions. Daimon, whom we might consider a bad guy due to his treatment of Miriam and his betrayal of Eiji's trust, turns out to be a nice enough fellow who puts Eiji in touch with Ms. Yamaya. The same goes for Buntaro, Eiji's landlord. At first, he is a typical money-sucking, tax-evading landlord, but Eiji soon comes to see him as a caring man, friendly in his own way. Likewise for Mr. Aoyama, who begins as the world's worst boss, but then we are moved to pity, when we see the stress that is causing his behavior. Each of the characters is two-sided, even Eiji's father, though it is unlikely that Eiji is ready to admit this to himself. Eiji's father hides out at his office, because his wife is so demanding. Nothing is as simple as the terms "good" and "evil" suggest (even regarding the yakuza), and coming to understand this is another part of Eiji's growth.



Style

Point of View

The story is told primarily from a first-person point of view, present tense. Eiji is the narrator and main character, and the world is seen through his eyes and interpreted according to his experiences. However, because there are multiple stories contained within the main story, there are times when the narrative slips into third-person omniscient, where the narrator is not a character in the story and has access to information the characters do not possess. This is most notable in the Goatwriter story. Also, a number of letters are contained within the book, and these are written from the point of view of the sender. This is also true in the case of Subaru Tsukiyama's journal. One notable shift in point of view occurs on the night of Eiji's twentieth birthday. In this case, the narrative shifts from first-person to third in order to accentuate the strangeness of Eiji's experience. It is as if he is watching himself.

Setting

Tokyo is the capital of Japan, both politically and economically, and with a population of over eight million it is the largest city in the country. Many people think of Japan as only Tokyo, with its modern high rises and miles of neon criss-crossed with highways and subway lines. Like many Japanese cities, Tokyo was destroyed by U.S. bombs during World War II and has been rebuilt almost from scratch. As the headquarters of multinational corporations and as an entertainment Mecca, Tokyo provides opportunities that attract a wide range of people.

For Eiji Miyake, Tokyo would seem almost like an alien land after growing up in the tiny rural village of Anbo, on Yakushima Island in southern Kyushu. He would stand out in Tokyo not only because of his farmer's tan, but also for his accent. The fast pace of life in Tokyo would be totally new to him and would require quite a bit of adjustment. Also, the sheer size of the population would pose a challenge for someone who is accustomed to a familiarity with everyone he meets, or at least with the family of everyone he meets.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is contemporary English. Since the story is set in Japan and uses Japanese characters, the challenge of presenting uniquely Japanese experiences in English could be a difficult one, but it is handled with an eye to clarity rather than by piling on the Japanese terms. The few Japanese words that are used are either familiar to readers of English or are presented in a context that makes their meanings clear. Additionally, and equally as important, the author avoids heavy use of ultra-contemporary English slang, which might be a temptation, when writing about young people. By avoiding this, a foreign feel is created and maintained throughout the story.



Additionally, texture is introduced by varying the language. The yakuza speak a certain way. The characters in the Goatwriter story speak another way. Suga speaks his own geek-speak. Eiji's grandfather speaks yet another way. The speech of each group or individual helps characterize them. When Eiji first comes to Tokyo, he stands out because of his Kyushu accent, and Ai even makes a little joke about it. She is no native Tokyoite herself, but her lack of a strong accent reveals how long she has been living in the city.

Structure

The structure of the novel is very dynamic. It is divided into eight chapters, each of which is about fifty pages long. All are titled according to a central metaphor. This is fairly straightforward, but the structure of the individual chapters varies wildly. The organization of each chapter depends on the effect desired, but can generally be related to the narrator's state of mind in any particular one. For example, in the second chapter, probably the most complex one, chronologically, Eiji's mind is racing, and as he goes back and forth from one train of thought to another, so do we as we try to piece together the narrative. The simplest chapter, structurally, is probably the third, which recounts Eiji's run-in with the yakuza. Since it contains a lot of action, with one thing happening after another, events are presented in the clearest, most straightforward manner.

One thing to look for is repetition. Events in the story often occur in cycles or are revisited. One obvious example is the story of Anju's drowning. It is not until very near the end of the novel, after we have visited this part of the story several times, that we actually see Anju drowning (recreated in Eiji's dream). To complexify our reaction to the scene, we have already seen Anju suffocating in Eiji's guitar case in one of his earlier dreams. Further, the drowning scene is a repetition of the daydream Eiji had in Chapter 1, where Tokyo is flooded, and he drowns while trying to save Ai. Finally, we make a connection between Ai's peril in the imagined Tokyo flood and Anju's peril as she sinks to the bottom of the sea, and from which Eiji cannot save her.



Quotes

"We are both busy people, so let's cut the small talk. You already know my name, or at least you knew it, once upon a time. Eiji Miyake. Yes, Ms. Kato, *that* Eiji Miyake. Why am I here in Tokyo? Think about it. I am here to find out who my father is. And why you, Ms. Kato? You know his name and you know his address. I never threaten anyone. But I am telling you that you are going to give me the information I want. Right now." Chapter 1, p. 3

"Something broke in me. Quite calmly, I decided to throw you off the balcony." Chapter 2, p. 75

"Between the bank and Ueno is the seediest noodle shop in all of Tokyo. As Tokyo has the seediest noodle shops in Japan, this is probably the seediest noodle shop in the world. It is too seedy even to have a name or a definite color." Chapter 4, p. 154

"You straight citizens of Japan are living on a movie set, Miyake. You are unpaid extras. The politicians are the actors. But the true directors, the Nagasakis and the Tsurus - you never see. The show is run from the wings, not under the spotlights." Chapter 4, p. 160

"Fear is not necessarily a weakness. I disdain weakness, but I disdain waste. To survive, you must persuade yourself that tonight was another man's nightmare into which you accidentally strayed." Chapter 4, p. 194

" 'Sir! Nobody stole your pages! You were eating your own pages as you wrote them!' Goatwriter's words stuck in his throat." Chapter 5, p. 207

"People without time bombs built into their genes are not likely to have the same meaning. Maybe the truest difference between people is exactly this: why we think we are here." Chapter 6, p. 282

"Holy Grail is just an exercise in infinity. In meaninglessness." Chapter 6, p. 285

"I changed my mind about the meaning of life again.... You look for your meaning. You find it, and at that moment, your meaning changes, and you have to start all over again." Chapter 6, p. 291

"A weird thought, that - I am not made by me, or my parents, but by the Japan that did come into being. [Great-uncle] Subaru Tsukiyama was made by a Japan that died with surrender. It must be tough being made by both, like [Grandfather] Takara Tsukiyama." Chapter 6, p. 292

"Remember: it costs more to keep a pony in straw than a whore in fur." Chapter 7, p. 351

"I can't imagine ever needing to remember that." Chapter 7, p. 351



"I always thought of [my mother] as a magazine cutout who did *this* and did *this* but never actually felt anything. Today, I saw her as a woman in her forties who has not had as easy a life as the rumor mill on Yakushima reckons. When she talks, she is sort of in her words. She told me about alcoholism, about what it does to you. Not blaming it or anything, just like a scientist analyzing a disease. An alcoholic, she says, is three things: a wounded person who desperately needs love and support; a person controlled by a parasite that lives in that person but is not that person; and a wounded person who will devour love and support until nobody and nothing remain." Chapter 8, p. 381



Topics for Discussion

Which are more exciting, Eiji's imagined adventures or his real ones? Which are more meaningful?

Knowing that Eiji's twin sister drowned when they were young, why do you think Eiji daydreams about rescuing Ai Imajo from a flood? What does this tell us about his character?

The chapter titles are chosen as central metaphors for what goes on within the chapter. Are there also correlations with Eiji's state of mind, personality and development? "Lost Property," for example, refers to Eiji's job, but what "property" might be lost? What are the implications of its loss?

The Goatwriter story Eiji reads in the home of Mrs. Sasaki's sister is an allegory for Eiji's own experiences, meaning that the events in the tale correspond in some way with the events in Eiji's life. What parallels can you see between the situations Goatwriter and his friends encounter and the ones Eiji encounters?

Masanobu Suga's and Subaru Tsukiyama's situations at first seem completely different, but there are distinct similarities. What parallels can be drawn between these two characters?

Think about the women Eiji encounters in the story. How do the wildly different roles they play fill in for Eiji's absent mother? How about for his lost sister?

Why doesn't Eiji reveal himself to his father? What does this tell us about the change in Eiji's character over the course of the story? If he had met his father when he first arrived in Tokyo, how might the meeting have been different?