

# **On Such a Full Sea Study Guide**

**On Such a Full Sea by Chang-Rae Lee**

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## Plot Summary

On *Such a Full Sea* follows the adventures of Fan, a young woman who is often mistaken for a child. She leaves the confines of her sheltered home in B-Mor, a region formally known as Baltimore with the hope of finding her boyfriend, and father of her unborn child, Reg, who happens to be free of any genetic markers for C-illness.

It is an indeterminate amount of time into the future, and life is quite different. The world is divided into three different classes: B-Mor, Charters, and Counties. Fan makes her way through these different areas with the help of people she meets along the way. When Fan injures her leg, she is taken in by a former veterinarian named Quig. Fan distrusts the people she meets at Quig's, but befriends a young boy named Sewey. Sewey is sick and in need of medication. Quig and Sewey's mother Loreen take Fan to one of the Charters to get medication for Sewey, although she does not know where they're going or why.

Quig bonds with Fan while teaching her how to drive. Quig tells Fan about how his wife and daughter were killed before he started the settlement where he lives. They are in a car accident in the county and a county family helps them and offers them food and shelter for the night. When the county family decides they want Fan to stay with them, they drug and tie up Quig and Loreen. Fan rescues them and they hurry out of the county.

When they reach the Charter, Fan meets Mister Leo and Miss Cathy, a well-to-do couple who negotiate with Quig for the needed medicine. Part of the exchange involves them giving Fan to the couple, presumably as a servant. On her first night in the house, Mister Leo rapes Fan and Miss Cathy catches him, striking him in the head and leaving him with brain damage. Miss Cathy keeps Fan at the house and includes her in with the group of Girls that she keeps in her chambers.

The Girls help Fan to escape, although at great risk to their health. Two of the girls willingly contract botulism in order to cause a scene in which Fan can leave. Fan leaves with Vik, the doctor who comes to treat the girls. Vik allows Fan to stay with him. He takes her to a housewarming party and is introduced to Oliver and Betty. Vik is having an affair with Betty and Oliver is one of his oldest friends. Vik and Betty get into an argument and Vik ends up leaving Fan with Betty and Oliver. Oliver reveals that he is Fan's older brother who was offered a place in a Charter after testing out of B-Mor.

Oliver is a very successful medical researcher who has developed a drug that shows promise in curing C-illness. Fan tells him about Reg's C-free status. Oliver presumably locates Reg, who is in custody of a pharmaceutical company. When Oliver discovers that Fan is pregnant with Reg's child, he takes advantage and agrees to sell Fan to the pharmaceutical company. Betty figures out the plan and arranges for Fan to escape with the aid of Vik.



# Chapters 1-3

## Summary

Fan, a young woman who still looks like a child, is revered by the people in her hometown of B-Mor after she leaves the comfort of home to see what exists outside of the town. She suffers many traumas, including a leg injury, being held captive, and raped on her journey. She also befriends many people who help her along the way.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to B-Mor, an island community that was formally Baltimore. It is sometime in the future. The most marked change is that a strict social structure is in place. The people of B-Mor are descended from New China. They farm fish hatcheries and sell to the Charter communities. They also grow vegetables, herbs, and ornamental flowers in the tanks.

Fan, a young woman who is often mistaken for a child, works as a cleaner in one of the fish tanks. While the residents of B-Mor are destined to stay in their community, their needs so well met that they don't even consider moving, Fan leaves B-Mor. The narrator begins Fan's story and reveals that Fan preferred being in the tanks over being outside of them at one point in her life. The workers in the grow facility often become romantically entangled and this is permissible. Fan meets and falls in love with Reg, even though they are physically mismatched: Reg is tall and Fan very short. Reg goes missing and Fan is thought to have gone off in search of him. The residents of B-Mor greatly admire Fan, even though they question why she may have poisoned the fish tanks she cared for before she disappeared.

Chapter 2 reveals that the weather in B-Mor, and in most other places, can be both very hot and very cold and wild storms can be expected. B-Mor has indoor gymnasiums, pools, and underground shopping malls to help people avoid the extreme weather. In the open Counties, residents can only rely on their basic needs to be met. The sewers in the open Counties are from hundreds of years earlier and flood rains can cause the sewers to back up and cause a stench that reaches into B-Mor if their air filtration malfunctions. The people of B-Mor don't want to take for granted the amenities that living in their settlement provides. Periodically, portraits of Fan and Reg will appear on the side of the row houses, but are quickly painted over. The narrator details how the settlements came to be, including the Charters. The people of B-Mor are well cared for by the governing council and feel that they have survived long enough to regard their lives as the best possible lives for them.

Chapter 3 details that Fan left about a week after Reg disappeared and after a large flood during which several residents died. Among the dead is Joseph, a 12-year-old who died while trying to save his brother's friend from drowning; he got trapped in a drainage pipe. Joseph was well-liked and possessed a natural aptitude for diving. Joseph's family wears their mourning clothes and white gloves. During Joseph's funeral, Fan remains composed and sits with Joseph's brother. The people in attendance are aware of Fan's



presence. When Fan comes toward the others in the buffet line, she remarks simply “Where you are.” The narrator remarks that this signaled a collective interest in Fan. Not long after the community sees her at the funeral, Fan’s image is captured on video, walking out of B-Mor toward the toll way.

## Analysis

The settlement of B-Mor is an isolated world and it functions as symbol throughout the entirety of the novel. Formerly Baltimore, the coastal city has broken from the mainland at some point. The reader is made aware that the setting is in the future, but the exact amount of time that has transpired between present day and the setting of the novel is unclear. Much of the technology and modernizations are similar to present day. By doing this, the author allows the reader to feel comfortable in the new setting without overwhelming the story with copious amounts of new technology. What is important about B-Mor isn’t technological advancements, but rather the social structure that’s been built. B-Mor is a community that provides for its residents. Additionally, having B-Mor be an island symbolizes how fragmented the social strata are in this new world.

The narrator introduces Fan as an extraordinary person and someone that the reader should not only root for, but revere. The theme of Class Structure is represented by how the residents of B-Mor embrace the idea that they are special and that their social status is preferred over life in the Counties or in the Charters. Fan is special because she originates in B-Mor.

The theme of Class Structure is further demonstrated by how much is made about the amenities available in B-Mor. Much of what is revealed shows B-Mor as a utopia. This idea of perfection begs the question: why, if this world is so perfect, would anyone voluntarily leave it? The reader never witnesses Reg’s departure; it is possible that Reg did not leave on his own, especially since he was in a strong relationship with Fan. Fan, however, leaves willingly, but is motivated to find Reg.

The exact time of Fan’s department is unknown, but it coincides with a major flooding event. This begins to emphasize the theme of Control vs. Freedom. As an act of nature, there is no controlling the flood. The flood symbolizes Fan’s birth into the world. B-Mor is like a pregnant state and the water symbolizes the amniotic fluid. This also foreshadows the eventual reveal that Fan is pregnant. Fan is more comfortable in the water than out of it, which suggests that she prefers the comfort of the womb. Fan exits B-Mor because she has to, in order to find Reg.

Prior to her department, Fan attends Joseph’s funeral. The themes of Death and Sacrifice are both illustrated by how Joseph died trying to save the life of his friend’s brother. This symbolizes the sacrifices that Fan will have to make on her journey. It also helps her to understand that she may be required to sacrifice her life for the greater good. Joseph drowned helping someone, but no one was there to help him. He gets stuck in the drainage pipe and cannot move forward or back because of the size of the



pipe and the building water pressure. This foreshadows that in order for Fan to survive outside of B-Mor, she needs to rely on others for assistance.

The theme of Identity is explored in Fan's name. Her name reveals layers to her character. When considering the actions of a fan, Fan's journey helps to spread what is good about B-Mor out into the world, just as a fan would blow air out away from its source. Additionally, the people in B-Mor admire her greatly and they are her fans.

The phrase Fan utters at the funeral is "Where you are". This statement is never elaborated on, nor is it given any context outside of her simply saying it. If she is saying it to Joseph's body, perhaps it symbolizes her concern for Reg's safety. It could also indicate that she, like Joseph, must leave B-Mor. She must sacrifice herself for the greater good.

## Discussion Question 1

What tone does the novel set by introducing B-Mor, a community from which very few ever leave, as an ideal place?

## Discussion Question 2

The narrator explains that the governing council provides the residents of B-Mor an ideal place to live. What does this reveal about the narrator?

## Discussion Question 3

Fan speaks the phrase "Where you are" at Joseph's funeral, but doesn't elaborate. What connotations might this phrase have?

## Vocabulary

razed, scaffold, ungainly, cohort, foraging, infractions, directorate, trademark, inexorably, reminiscent, formidable, luminously, hatchery, prowess, mortician



# Chapters 4-6

## Summary

Chapter 4 begins with Fan traveling through the settlements that inspired the design of the Charters. She travels on foot and is struck by a car, ending up in a ditch filled with rain-water. Quig and Loreen, the people who hit her, stop, thinking they've hit a deer or a dog. They mistake her for a little girl. Quig declares that he won't nurse her back to health, but Loreen convinces him otherwise. When Quig lifts Fan out of the ditch, she passes out from the pain of her leg injury. She comes to and announces that she's going to be sick. She vomits on Quig's shoes when they pull over. They take her to their home in one of the county settlements called the Smokes. Quig gives Fan an injection for the pain. She dreams of being cradled by a sea plant and then fighting a sea creature. She wakes to find Quig lifting her from the car and placing her on a table inside a building. Quig tends to her wound, thinking that her leg may be broken. Loreen questions Fan about where she thought she was going, and determines that Fan can't be more than eleven or twelve. Quig gives her another injection.

The next morning, Loreen brings Fan oatmeal to eat. Loreen remains cold toward Fan. Fan eats for the nourishment and later asks for a bathroom. Loreen tells her to make do with what she can find until Loreen can get her something else. She also threatens Fan with a whipping should she soil the cot. Loreen leaves her for some time. Fan ends up relieving herself in a bucket of paint. Loreen catches her and causes Fan to fall. Loreen beats her. Quig stops the beating and reminds Loreen that he told her to "be gentle."

Chapter 5 begins a few weeks after Fan left. Rumors about her journey have reached B-Mor and there is speculation about whether she left willingly or was sent away. Details are given about the ways in which B-Mor is not perfect. Women do not need to fear assault, healthy food is provided, and employment is reliable, but inflation is hurting the community, as well as the implemented health care system. Much of the health care offered has become too great a cost for the people to afford. C-illness (cancer) treatment, for example, puts too much strain on the family, and as such, people who develop it opt to let the disease run its course without burdening the family.

Fan remains in the care of Quig, but does not trust him, in spite of his saving her life after the accident and after Loreen beat her. She continues to have vivid dreams from the drugs. Sewey, Loreen's young son, comes to visit with Fan. He brings strawberry soy milk with him and shares with her. He promises to bring more. Sewey remains Fan's only human contact for the following days. He tells her about life in the compound without prompting; he likes to talk. He tells her that people come to Quig for medical care and often negotiate services for the care. In his previous village, Quig was a veterinarian. He left the Charter in which he lived with his wife and daughter after they were caught selling animal tranquilizers on the black market. His wife and daughter were killed, but Sewey doesn't know what happened to them, just that he was instructed not to ask about them again.



Chapter 6 gives information about Reg and what he meant to Fan. They were each other's first love and were thought to have a chaste relationship. Since their departure, B-Mor is regarded as a changed place. Graffiti of their images pops up nightly in B-Mor, and they are quickly painted. There is a rumor that Reg's blood line is C-free.

The people of B-Mor are aware that they will likely succumb to some type of C-illness. The Charters can afford some C-treatments, and tend to live about ten years longer than the people of B-Mor. They then suffer what is called the Crash, a degenerative condition. The people of B-Mor are at peace with their end of life fate with a C-illness. At one point, all the people of B-Mor were evaluated for a genetic marker for liver disease. Later on, only certain people were checked for a genetic marker, and most of these people were thought to be of mixed race.

Reg was known to be of mixed race, with his height and afro being more obvious markers. The narrator reveals that Auntie Virginia, who married into the family and didn't appear in any way to have native blood, was revealed to be of mixed race. Not long after, Auntie Virginia joined Uncle Kellan, a truck driver, on one of his long-hauls. They did not return to B-Mor. By the end of the chapter, the focus returns to the chaste status of Fan and Reg's relationship. The assumption is that Fan must have initiated more because Reg was not thought to be overly desirous when it is discovered that Fan is pregnant.

## Analysis

Chapter four introduces the reader to Quig and Loreen. While it's Loreen who insists they attempt to care for Fan, she later demonstrates her disdain for Fan as Quig tends to her wound. Loreen sees Fan as a resource, something they can use. She judges her for traveling on her own, thinking she can't possibly be responsible enough to take care of herself. The theme of Identity is explored in how Fan is often mistaken for being a child. Loreen mistakes Fan for being younger, something that many, if not almost all, people do when they encounter Fan. This works both as advantage and disadvantage throughout the novel. It symbolizes how Fan never is who she is assumed to be, and this is mirrored in the way the narrator tells her story from the safety of the sheltered life in B-Mor.

Chapter five compares the lifestyles of B-Mor with the Charters. Charter people must continually work to pay for the lifestyle they've become accustomed to, further developing the theme of Dependence. The residents of B-Mor consider themselves at an advantage because they are taken care of by the government and their needs are met. The refusal of end-of-life care is marked as a noble self-sacrifice and reinforces the theme of Sacrifice. The people of B-Mor are characterized as having a sense of superiority over the lifestyles of the people in the Charters and the Counties. They favor structure and government involvement, yet the people have an expiration date. The people are much like the fish that the B-Mor provides to the Charter. When they are young and fresh, they are desirable, but once they've reached a past due date, they are discarded. From this the reader can ascertain that the narrator is youthful. It is clear that





the narrator understand the operational aspect of the community, but doesn't fully connect to the human element. The fact that the narrator remains content with the older residents going off to die suggests that the narrator is nowhere near an older age.

The theme of Class Structure is evident in how there is no class mobility. B-Mor residents have one opportunity to move into the Charters. Charter people are unable to move into settlements like B-Mor because no jobs would be available. The jobs in B-Mor have a long line of apprentices to fill the position once it is vacated. The citizens of B-mor are cared for in every which way.

Fan has vivid dreams while she's under sedation. This is the first of a few dreams that Fan has. No other characters are mentioned having dreams. That's not to suggest that the other characters are incapable of dreaming, but rather that Fan's dreams are worth noting. Fan is special. She has dreams, even if they're not outwardly expressed. The dreams in her sleep symbolize that she is capable of more than just being part of the waking world. That the dreams often involve some kind of vivid distress foreshadows the coming hardships that she will face as she continues her journey.

Chapter six reveals information about Fan and Reg's relationship and explores the theme of Sex vs. Intimacy. Much is made about their relationship being chaste, but the end of the chapter reveals that Fan is expecting Reg's child. This further reveals the denial that the people of B-Mor are in with regard to their situation. The perception in B-Mor is that life there is perfected for them. The residents have achieved their best selves. Fan getting pregnant out of wedlock, works against the preconceived idea of what raising a family looks like. The narrator acknowledges that other young people fool around, but Fan, more so than Reg, is held to a different standard. By doing this, the narrator acknowledges that Fan does not belong in B-Mor. Rather she is meant for some type of mobility. It's clear that the residents have elevated her to hero status, but the exact reason why remains elusive. In a way, she is their ambassador. This becomes a metaphor for how the people of B-Mor regard their lifestyle as preferred and want to spread it into the other communities.

## Discussion Question 1

Fan is often mistaken for a child. What advantages and disadvantages might this present for her on her journey?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the narrator's view of older people in B-Mor? What does the narrator's attitude reveal about him?



## Discussion Question 3

The narrator presumes that Fan must have initiated a sexual relationship with Reg that resulted in her pregnancy. What does this reveal about the narrator's attitude toward women?

## Vocabulary

ossified, ravenous, penumbra, scrounged, concordances, clerestory, quell, interminable, admonish, rickshaw, mores, flagrant, indomitable, doldrums, tableau, amputated, festering, cloister, impetus, filial, mirthful, unadulterated, pyre, self-immolate, blatant, indolent, untenable, epoch, palliatives, cadre, ingenuous, anomaly, nascent, annexation, covenants



## Chapters 7-9

### Summary

Chapter 7 returns to Quig's compound. Most of the occupants arrived as patients. If they were able to serve a purpose, they were invited to stay. Sewey takes Fan on a tour of the compound. Quig continues to monitor the healing progress of Fan's leg, which is revealed to be a bruised bone instead of a break. Fan helps Sewey with his job managing the line of people waiting to be treated by Quig. Fan streamlines the process and makes the waiting room more efficient.

Sewey introduces Fan to his friend Eli and they all go to Cold Pond one afternoon. People don't go into the pond because it's regarded as too dangerous, deep and poisonous. It's hot out and Eli decides that he's going in regardless. Sewey tries to stop him. Eli jumps in and begins to sink; his pockets are full of stones from their earlier hike. Fan saves him and none of them speak of what happened. T

They go to Eli's hut for dinner. As is custom, Sewey brings something for the meal. He shares with Fan so that she can abide the custom as well. They play a game and meet Eli's mother Penelope. Penelope differs from Loreen in appearance and disposition. All the women in the compound offer themselves to Quig, though he is not one to take them up on their offer. He does, however, have a physical relationship with Penelope.

Chapter 8 returns to B-Mor a few weeks after Fan's department. The residents enjoy their free-day in the parks. The parks have ponds with colorful fish, which are culled every other year. The fish are fed by pellets and people are not allowed to feed the fish anything else. A child throws a piece of a cracker into the water and the fish come up to eat it. People watch the fish and then start throwing more and more food into the water to watch the frenzy. The park staff stops it, but this begins to happen at other parks.

It is then revealed that the fish that dies off before Fan left was not an isolated incident and that she likely was not responsible for killing the fish. Rather, there were other blights in other tanks, but the people in control did not want it to get out that the fish they were exporting might be contaminated. Charter biologists are brought in to assess and fix the problem and an outbreak of that scale does not happen again. There is a Back to Soil movement which is people growing things the natural way instead of in the grow facilities and that this might be healthier. Charter people can be treated multiple times for an illness, while the people of B-Mor can only be treated once. That Reg is C-free is of great interest to the people of B-Mor. The people of B-Mor hold Fan in regard because of the hope that the child she carries could be the key to eliminating C-illness.

Chapter 9 begins with Loreen waking Fan to go on a road trip to a Charter village in the north near a place once known as Syracuse. They travel largely in silence except for Loreen who mumbles while she knits, a side effect of the pain pills she continually takes for a toothache. It has also made her decidedly more pleasant to be around. Quig drives



the car and Fan asks to learn how. He has her mimic his movements. She keeps her arms up doing so until they're sore. Fan notices Quig is watching her instead of the road. Quig veers off the road and the sudden movement causes Loreen to stab herself in the chin with one of the knitting needles. Recently, Quig traded two young men and Fan begins to suspect that Quig and Loreen are taking her to be sold or bartered. Sewey had been sick lately and they were traveling to get needed medicine for his illness. Fan wonders what Quig was like when his family was alive.

## Analysis

Chapter seven opens with Fan in Quig's compound. She is helpful and streamlines the waiting lines. This harkens back to the efficiency of life in B-Mor. Only Fan could be able to do this for them because she has had the privilege of living in B-Mor. Fan is easily adaptable to the situation and maneuvers it well. It is almost as though she is swimming through the places she goes like a fish and adjusting with the current instead of against it.

Fan accompanies Sewey and Eli to Cold Pond. Its name is foreboding and continues to develop the symbolization of water. The people speculate that the water is toxic. When Eli jumps into the water, it reminds the reader of Joseph trying to save his friend's brother from drowning. Water has been established as a source of danger, yet the reader already knows that Fan is more comfortable in the water than out of it. Eli gets into trouble under the water, but Fan is skilled and motivated enough to save him. Reinforcing the theme of Sacrifice, Fan sets aside any fear or risk to herself and goes after him because it is the right thing to do. This reinforces her characterization as a hero figure. She doesn't realize, of course, that Eli has pockets full of stones from the hike. These stones – from the wilderness of their hike – threaten her safety. They can pull her under and she faces the threat of drowning as well. When she and Eli are able to get out of the water, it symbolizes that the rocks, or rather the wilderness, isn't as fearful of a threat as might have been assumed. It establishes that Fan will be able to survive outside of the protected world of B-Mor.

The fish in chapter eight are ornamental. These aren't the fish that the people of B-Mor make a living off of, rather they are there to co-exist in a contained setting. People don't feed the fish; the fish are allotted there pellets and nothing else. The fish symbolize the people of B-Mor and this continues to develop the theme of Dependence. The fish in the pond are no different than the people of B-Mor. They are contained and have their needs provided for them. When the boy throws the cracker into the pond, the fish instinctively rush to the surface. The frenzy is what the governing council in B-Mor fear. The cracker is symbolic of the graffiti. It's why they paint over any graffiti of Fan and Reg that pops up overnight. They want to prevent giving the people hope that there is more. The balance of the settlement requires that the people feel content with what is provided for them.

Fan and Quig begin to bond in chapter nine. Quig begins to teach her to drive by having her mimic his movements. By doing this, Quig keeps his distance from Fan. The theme



of Dependence is witnessed here as Quig doesn't want to get close to her because he recognizes that to best utilize her is to trade her for something else. Additionally, her childlike appearance must remind him of his own daughter. He can see in Fan something that he misses and can never again have. Because Fan is mimicking him, what she is doing is not real. Quig can detach himself from what may befall Fan (and it isn't good) in order to be able to follow through with it. Further, it foreshadows a behavior the reader witnesses when Quig can do nothing to save his family when he finally confesses to Fan how they died.

The themes of Sacrifice and Heroism are both seen in how Fan anticipates that something bad is going to happen. She recognizes that she is likely to be sold. She doesn't try to prevent it or escape. Her behavior is largely conditioned by the lifestyle in B-Mor. She only knows a life in which someone else provides for her. She already relies on Quig, Loreen, and Sewey to provide basic necessities for her. She understands that the next place she will go will also provide for her. It should be noted, however, that this is what the narrator perceives about Fan as there is no way for the narrator to be certain about the incidents that transpire.

## Discussion Question 1

Fan proves to be useful in Quig's compound, but she is not allowed to stay. Why does Quig decide to barter her? What advantages and disadvantages are there to doing so?

## Discussion Question 2

Quig distances himself from Fan. What does this reveal about his character?

## Discussion Question 3

How does knowing that the narrator cannot know the exact details of Fan's story shape the narrative?

## Vocabulary

shanties, corrugated, unmitigated, scrim, festoon, neoprene, succor, laudable, harangue, sundry, culling, aberrant, mar, gloaming, suppuration, enervation, exogenous, endemic, axiom, tureens, rime, circumspection, brambly



# Chapters 10-12

## Summary

Chapter 10 discusses Quig's life before living in the compound. He had a normal Charter life, and was educated in veterinarian medicine. He married a woman named Glynnis, and they had a daughter named Trish. Pets were highly regarded in the Charters and Quig made a great living until an outbreak of a hemorrhagic fever crossed from animals to humans. Domestic animals were put down and Quig lost his practice. Quig and Glynnis took other jobs to try and make ends meet. Eventually, Glynnis started selling the leftover veterinary drugs on the black market. They were caught, tried, and convicted, which resulted in their banishment from the charter. This was all the information Penelope gave Fan. Quig and Fan talk while they're in the car while Loreen's sleeps. Quig asks Fan if she wants to drive for real this time. Fan agrees and Quig offers to tell Fan what happened to his wife and daughter.

Throughout Chapter 11, Quig tells Fan about what happened to his family. The family has been banished from their Charter and are now traveling in the Counties. Quig considers any options that might be available to them, like training to work in the service class and returning to a Charter, although he knows this is unlikely to happen.

They go to a family diner and have a nice meal and stay in a place called the Who Falls Inn, co-owned by Landon and Dale. A Danish family is also staying at the inn. Quig knows that they won't be able to afford staying long at the inn, but they stay and enjoy the food and shelter. Dale and Landon discuss having Quig and Glynnis work for them. Quig considers it, but isn't sure about dealing with strangers all the time. They begin to discuss terms.

The inn is robbed by two gunmen. They kill everyone except for Landon and Quig who are separated from the rest of the group in a locked room. The gunmen take whatever cash they can find and leave. The only reason they didn't kill Landon or Quig is because they were out of ammunition.

Chapter 12 finds Fan continuing to drive after Quig finishes telling his story. Loreen is asleep in the backseat. When she wakes she sees Fan driving and screams. The scream causes Fan to move into oncoming traffic. Quig grabs the wheel to avoid a head-on collision. The accident knocks them off the road. The other vehicle stops and The Nickelmans, county people, get out to check on them. Their car isn't damaged. They are hospitable and offer to let Fan, Quig, and Loreen stay the night. They tow the car back to their shelter, which is an underground dwelling dug out from the root structure of a large oak tree. They have dogs and chickens. Because of their religious beliefs, they are vegetarians, but their religion isn't revealed.

The Nickelmans make up an acrobatic group called the Bounding Nickelmans. They teach Fan some steps and she takes to it quite naturally. The youngest girl, Hilton, takes



a liking to Fan and wants her to stay and join the performance group. When Fan needs to use the outhouse, Hilton takes her to it, but it's a trap. Quig and Loreen are drugged and tied up and the dogs are being wound up. Fan slashes Hilton's face with a fence spike to get free. Fan frees Quig and Loreen. They take Hilton with them to ensure they can get out alive. As soon as they're in the clear, they let Hilton out of the car.

## Analysis

As chapter ten begins, the reader gets some insight into how the world changed from its present state and this explores the theme of Survival. Clearly something radical has happened, but thus far, it has not been revealed. In a way, it's beneficial to hold off the reveal of there being a hemorrhagic fever that killed off a large portion of the population after it jumped from animal species into humans. It gives the reader time to settle into this new world and understand how and why it works without the lingering questions that might intervene about what happened during the outbreak. On *Such a Full Sea* is not about a pandemic and the struggle to adapt. Rather it is a book that exists in a time that has already adjusted to catastrophic change. Many elements remain in place. A person from today might feel quite comfortable entering any of the three settings even without basic understanding of how the groups work.

The reader can ascertain that the outbreak happened within relatively recent times because Quig witnessed the outbreak firsthand. His family suffered dire consequences from the outbreak. He didn't lose his family to the outbreak, rather it was how they reacted to the outbreak that brought them to their fate. Once the animals had been put down, there was no need for veterinarians, but Glynnis saw an opportunity to profit off of some of the meds. Once Quig and Glynnis are caught, they are banished from the Charter. This demonstrates how easily one can fall from a social status and demonstrates the author's use of the theme of Class Structure. Regardless of what Quig attempted to do to support his family, his options were limited.

Quig and his family are thrust into the Counties after the drug conviction. The theme of Control vs. Freedom is demonstrated by their decision to break the law has led them into a land of lawlessness. Quig suffers the ultimate punishment when his wife and daughter are killed during an armed robbery. Since Quig views Fan as a child, surely she must remind him of his daughter. Quig understands the value of Fan enough to trade her, but he seems to develop genuine, if not feelings, but admiration for Fan. He can slip into the father role with her, and does so by teaching her to drive. But he's also careful not to get too close. He tells Fan the story of his wife and daughter's murder not to shock her or to satisfy some curiosity she may have, but rather to remind himself of why he shouldn't get too attached to Fan. That attachment would surely result in pain. It's better for Quig to trade Fan than it is for him to grow too attached.

The Nickelmans offer an opportunity for Quig to redeem himself. When it turns for the worse and he, Loreen, and Fan are all put in jeopardy, Quig is faced with the similar lawlessness that he encountered when he was traveling with his family. After being drugged, Quig isn't in any position to help. It's Fan that helps to rescue all of them. She



ensures their safety in way that Quig wasn't able to when his family was originally attacked. This helps to elevate Fan to a hero-like status. It shows her natural aptitude for survival, subsequently revealing more about the theme of Survival. The narrator makes mention of Fan's natural aptitude for many things, e.g. swimming, dance, etc. Since the information the narrator has is, at best, second hand, it is possible that the narrator has placed Fan in the hero position. As the reader will see in coming chapters, Quig struggles with his decision to trade Fan. Whether the root cause is because of guilt for Fan saving him, his sadness over the loss of his own family, or the guilt he feels in bartering with her life remains unclear.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is it important for Quig to tell Fan about what happened to his family?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do the Nickelmans decide to kill Quig and Loreen, but keep Fan? What does this reveal about them?

## Discussion Question 3

What can be ascertained about a group of people who won't kill animals for food, but are willing to kill humans in order to keep another?

## Vocabulary

exorbitant, malaise, equity, lustrous, melee, arbitrary, decrepit, fastidious, marauders, elided, ruminated, countenance, desiccated, haughty, malice, transgression, extrapolations, vertigo, livid, lithe, moot, beleaguered, delectable, endows, adamant, poultice, fetid, iridescent, garroted





# Chapters 13-15

## Summary

Chapter 13 opens with doubt being cast on Fan's motivations for leaving. The people of B-Mor admit that they may be projecting that Fan wanted something bigger for herself. They also regard her a genius who is different from the rest of them. It goes on to detail how her brother Liwei was one of the few people to test out of B-Mor for a place in one of the Charters. The test is very difficult to pass; Fan did not do well, as is the result with most people. Those who do pass the test leave B-Mor and never return, not even to visit. The narrator speaks of the lack of need for faith in B-Mor. They feel that they are already living in a higher plane.

Fan continues to drive. Quig and Loreen continue to recover from the drugs the Nickelsons gave them. They go to a village called Seneca, which is a Charter with nice shops. They reach their original destination before the car accident. They pull into the driveway of a villa and are greeted Mala, a servant who works for Mister Leo and Miss Cathy. Fan is led to a room to get cleaned up and falls asleep. She dreams about being in the water. The dream begins peaceful and devolves into a dream about drowning. Loreen wakes her and they dress for dinner. Loreen emphasizes how important the dinner with Mister Leo is. When Quig comes to get them for dinner, Quig cannot look at Fan directly.

Mister Leo is introduced at the opening of Chapter 14. He greets Quig and Loreen warmly and stoops down to Fan when he introduces himself. He is handsome and warm and friendly. He shows them pieces from his art collection and suggests that Fan might find more enjoyment in joining Mala in the kitchen. Fan helps Mala while she prepares the dinner. Mala is talkative by nature and tells Fan about her work schedule: she goes to see her family once every 20 days. Her children are provided with education because of her job and that the family has enough money for her family to live comfortably, while her husband is a stay-at-home dad. Mala has a suite just off the kitchen; she shows it to Fan and shares with her some family photos on a handscreen. Mala leaves the room and Fan sees a protected file on the handscreen. She uses 21 as the password and it opens. She finds pictures of another young girl, but Mala isn't in the photos.

Mala returns and Fan tucks the handscreen away. There's tension between them. Mala questions how old Fan is because she's smart and strong. Miss Cathy enters before Fan answers. Miss Cathy is kind to her and finds her directness when answering questions interesting. At the dinner, Miss Cathy doesn't speak much. Quig and Loreen are exchanging Fan for medicine for Sewey and drilling equipment for Quig. Fan asks Mister Leo if he knows Liwei. Mister Leo says he does not. After Quig and Loreen leave, Mister Leo gives Fan a red lacquered box with a silver locket inside. Inside of the locket is a small diamond. He tells her that the necklace is a secret. That night when Fan is in bed, Mister Leo comes into the room and rapes her. Miss Cathy interrupts him.



Chapter 15 returns to B-Mor and the narrator talking about cutbacks to production because of an oversupply of fish and produce. A man's body was found in a pond with jars of gravel tied to his wrists and ankles. Rumors spread that his family killed him because he was responsible for getting the family in debt. The narrator mentions Cousin Gordon, one of the elders, and symptoms he experienced from declining health. The healthcare system does nothing for him since he is simply going through the aging process. They find him in a backyard after a fall; he is disorientated and this behavior continues.

## Analysis

Periodically through the novel, the narrator acknowledges that the information about Fan may not be completely accurate. Sometimes they even wonder what Fan's true motivations might have been. Since the reader only knows what the narrator presents about Fan, it's unclear on what her motivation might have been. At no point is the perspective of Fan given. The reader is not privy to her thoughts or motivations. Even if her sole motivation was to go and be with Reg, their relationship remains a mystery. The details given are bits and pieces of rumors and what witnesses have put together to create the story.

In a way, Fan has de facto celebrity as a result of her brother Liwei testing out of B-Mor. This reinforces the theme of Identity. The exams are exceedingly difficult and it a one-person-in-a-generation-type test. With Fan being the younger sister of someone with such an extraordinary mind, it makes a compelling argument for why the people see her in a different light. It is paradoxical then when the narrator insists that there is no need for faith or a higher power in B-Mor because they feel they have already reached a higher plane, yet they need to elevate Fan to an almost god-like status.

When Fan leaves the Nickelmans, she is driving. She continues on the path Quig originally set out for them. With Quig and Loreen drugged, Fan has a unique opportunity to escape. She has already contemplated that Quig may be preparing to trade her for something, so why doesn't she try to escape? From living in B-Mor, Fan has learned that needs will be provided and this further explores the theme of Dependence. She works well in the confines of a community. She knows that she needs to get to one of the Charters in order to find her brother and she has connected that her brother may be able to lead her to Reg. This foreshadows the meeting between Fan and her brother. If Fan understands that Reg's departure is connected to his C-free status, it's possible that she may realize the jeopardy that awaits him. That vulnerability may be what drives her.

When Quig, Loreen, and Fan arrive at Mister Leo's villa, the environment appears too good to be true. The contrast between Quig's place in the Smokes and Mister Leo's home in the Charter demonstrates the theme of Class Structure. It's a beautiful home and Mister Leo offers a warm greeting. He interacts with Fan, indulging her questions about Lewei. It is possible that Mister Leo lied about not knowing him and somehow



tipped Liwei off that his sister was looking for him, but this possibility seems remote. Mister Leo is interested in what serves his present needs, and that, sadly, is Fan.

Mister Leo gives her the red-laquered box – red a color of danger and passion – and inside is a locket with a diamond in it. A locket is meant to be kept closed. If the reader isn't already suspicious of Mister Leo's motives, when he tells her that the gift is a secret between them, it is understood that Fan is in danger. He rapes her to show power and ownership. She belongs to him as a result of the trade, thus signifying the theme of Control vs. Freedom.

Miss Cathy interrupts them, however, but the reader doesn't immediately know how and to what result. Instead, the narrator returns to B-Mor and details problems with production, debt, and sick elders. This interlude lets the reader ponder what might have happened, but also gives the opportunity to see how the events that Fan experience mirror what is occurring in B-Mor. The production issues mirror Sewey's illness, which sets Quig off to get medication for his treatment. This mirrors the debt the man experiences in B-Mor. The sick elder becomes Mister Leo, and as a result of Miss Cathy's action, needs medical attention.

## Discussion Question 1

Why don't the people of B-Mor see a need for faith or an afterlife?

## Discussion Question 2

Fan dreams of drowning. What does this reveal about her at this point in the novel?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Mister Leo give Fan the gift in secret? What does this reveal about his character?

## Vocabulary

junction, fettered, deciles, acrid, insularity, stint, slake, epithet, talisman, chockablock, prams, burnished, lackadaisical, dowries, carafe, caftan, disincentive, ominous, primacy, entrenchment, dank, credenza, abettor, blandishments, stricture, emblematic, notorious, assuage, antecedents, irrepressible, balk, tantamount, nihilistic, furloughs, chide, vestigial



# Chapters 16-18

## Summary

Chapter 16 begins with the narrator considering change and hope and the rarity of contemplating being a free as Fan. The focus returns to Fan after being attacked by Mister Leo. Miss Cathy hit him over the head with a stone statuette when he attacked Fan. The blow to the head caused brain damage and Mister Leo is now wheelchair bound and needs to be cared for and fed. The wound wasn't noticeable and his condition was mistaken for a stroke. Mister Leo had enough money to provide for them and his care. His caretaker is named Tico. Miss Cathy agrees to honor the deal Mister Leo made with Quig and gives Loreen a second set of vials for Sewey's treatment as well as money.

Fan stays with Miss Cathy. They go shopping and Fan gets a stylish haircut. Fan is secretly hopeful that when she goes out with Miss Cathy that she will run into Liwei in the Charter, but she has no way of knowing where he is or what he might look like. One day they drove to a service neighborhood in the Charter and pass the dorms. Tico told Fan about the dorms, which is where he was raised. Sometimes people would be able to move out of the dorms, but most couldn't make enough to get ahead and move out. When Fan sees a playground, she asks to get out and play. Miss Cathy allows it, but Fan uses it as an excuse to try and get into one of the dorms. Miss Cathy panics when she can't find Fan. She scolds Fan when they're reunited and when they return home, Miss Cathy scrubs Fan clean.

They never go back to the dorms, but each time they return from going out, Miss Cathy performs the cleansing ritual on Fan. When Miss Cathy finds Fan having a snack with Mala and Tico one evening, she takes Fan to her room and kisses Fan on the forehead. Miss Cathy takes Fan to her suite and tells her there's a spot for her. When they get to Miss Cathy's room, Fan hears giggling and then the girl Fan saw in the pictures on Mala's handscreen comes out from behind the door. She is followed by six other girls, some grown women. All have huge eyes that have been altered to look like each other.

Chapter 17 opens with the narrator revealing that when stories are told about Fan that the details change. It isn't intentional, but merely something that occurs. The narrator continues with Fan's story and how the Girls are kind to Fan and accepting of her. The Girls take turns sleeping with Miss Cathy. When Miss Cathy wakes during the night from a bad dream, she then changes places with one of the Girls and sleeps in the warmth of her spot. The Girls introduce themselves to Fan by number: One to Seven. One and Two had their eyes done to look like anime characters and then the other girls followed suit. They invite Fan to be number Eight, but they continue to call her Fan. The Girls paint murals on the white walls of the bedroom suite. They use magic markers that Miss Cathy provides them. There is great detail and feature the girls in different scenes. The girls have assigned colors and when that color is required, that girl completes the task.



Fan gets the Girls to start exercising and they all grow stronger. There is some competition in the mural painting and they sometimes argue over colors. All the Girls were assaulted by Mister Leo, but they don't blame Miss Cathy for it. Fan tells them about Reg and that she's searching for Liwei. Six draws the scene of Fan meeting Liwei and Three declares that Fan must depart as soon as possible.

In Chapter 18 the narrator tells of demonstrations in B-Mor after Fan's departure and that many people are shaving their heads. Back at Miss Cathy's, Six waits for Fan to finish the mural of Reg because she wants to get it right. The Girls help Fan try to get out of the house. They ask Miss Cathy if they can go out with her, but she denies them. She treats the Girls like her pets. They attempt to get out of the house with a medical emergency. This happened once before when Three had appendicitis and an EMT came to the house and took her to the hospital. In the first attempt they eat spoiled rice cakes in hopes that a doctor might be called, but they only suffer a brief period of diarrhea. The second attempt leads to Four and Five eating spoiled canned goods; the both get botulism poisoning. Dr. Vik Upendra comes to the house to treat them and finds the girls near death, but Miss Cathy won't let them leave the premises.

## Analysis

After revealing that Mister Leo assaulted Fan, the narrator contemplates Fan's freedom, this exemplifies the theme of Control vs. Freedom. It's an odd juxtaposition to consider what it must be like to be her in light of what just happened to her. The narrator seems to be distancing from Fan's hardships, and instead focusing on her freedom.

The reader learns that Miss Cathy has bludgeoned Mister Leo. It is convenient that the blow didn't call attention to a brutal attack, but instead masked itself as a stroke. Miss Cathy reveals herself to be reluctant to let anyone go to the hospital, so it seems out of character that she would allow Mister Leo to be treated as well.

Miss Cathy spends a great deal of time in denial and it takes a major shock to call her to action. This is evidenced by her decision to strike Mister Leo. Miss Cathy shows some fondness for Fan. She prefers her in a similar manner to how the narrator views her. The characters that interact with Fan become like a surrogate for the narrator, Miss Cathy in particular. The theme of Dependence is illustrated in way Miss Cathy cares for Fan, takes her shopping, gets her haircut, and even indulges in letting her play on the playground. All that Fan has is dependent upon Miss Cathy providing it. When she discovers that Fan has run off to try and access the dorms in her quest to find Liwei, she panics. She can't believe she would run off, much as the narrator can't believe Fan left B-Mor. When they return to the house, Miss Cathy scrubs her clean, returning her to the sanitized world she should be accustomed to since she's from B-Mor.

The theme of Identity is explored when Fan is introduced to the Girls. They have all been stripped of their former identities and are known by their number. Whether this is an invention of the narrator is unclear. It's possible that the influx of names would detract from Fan. Instead, the reader recognizes them as being a number in a series of



victims. Since Fan refused to take a number and the Girls refer to her by her name, indicates that she is viewed as a survivor and not a victim.

The Girls are dependent upon Miss Cathy, each other, and now Fan, further illustrating the theme of Dependence. Fan empowers the Girls by teaching them strength training. Fan is athletic and this serves her in many ways. Empowering the Girls gives them purpose. It shows the reader how Fan can help them, while be healing herself. Fan develops strength with them. They work as a team. The Girls want to help her because they feel connected to her. The murals start to reflect Fan's influence as well.

The Girls provide a community similar to B-Mor for Fan. Much like Fan being submerged in her tank with the fish she cares for all around her, Fan feels comfortable with the Girls around her as well. Miss Cathy's chambers are ultimately a confined space, and this is something to which Fan is accustomed.

Much as Fan is willing to sacrifice herself for the greater good, the Girls do so for her. The theme of Sacrifice is illustrated by the Girls' actions to free Fan. Their first attempt ends in minor stomach troubles, but the second attempt leads to two of the Girls nearly dying. The important aspect is actually that they don't die. Outside of Joseph, or the occasional reference to someone from the past, death does not play a role. People come close to death, but somehow are saved or make a miraculous recovery. Is this the workings of the narrator sanitizing Fan's story? Or does Fan and company cheat death because of her hero status?

This section also marks the introduction of Dr. Vik Upendra. He is vital to the Girls survival and he notices something special about Fan. Because of this, he ends up being a critical person in Fan achieving her freedom.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Miss Cathy feel a special connection with Fan? What does this reveal about her?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why do the Girls paint murals? What do the murals represent?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Who do the Girls risk their lives to give Fan the opportunity to escape?



## Vocabulary

crestfallen, waif, patronize, entrepreneurial, pliant, abraded, penal, opulence, fealty, pall, duvet, vigilance, expropriated, whorl, reticence, barracks, suppurating, gradations, spectrum, anime, miniscule, visceral, insinuation, motif, ornate, filigreed, aviary, cacophonous, limpid, dumbwaiter, supple, conscript, piqued, patent, ablutions, discernible, unassailable, corpus, stratagem, engenders, irradiate, volition, charismatic, , nonchalance, proximal, thrum



# Chapters 19-22

## Summary

Chapter 19 returns briefly to B-Mor and a hand-painted sign that reads: FREE REG. The narrator discusses how the people of B-Mor do not spend time thinking too far into the future because their security is ensured. Back in the Charter house, the girls are nearing death and Vik tries to get Miss Cathy to allow him to take them to the hospital. Fan sets box tops on fire to try and trip the fire alarm. Mala asks Fan to get a bag together for the sick girls and to pack one for herself. Mala gives Fan her bus fare card and tells her to take any bus to escape, but Fan hesitates to leave just yet.

Fan finds Miss Cathy curling Seven's hair. She asks to join in. The Girls paint each other's nails. Uncharacteristically, Miss Cathy offers to paint Fan's toes. They all remain in denial that something dire is happening to two of the Girls. Miss Cathy remembers how her mother would brush the tangles out of her hair when she was young. She tells Fan that she used to run when she was younger and that once she got lost in a thunderstorm and ended up in the Counties. Fan puts her hands on Miss Cathy's shoulders as Miss Cathy looks at her reflection in the mirror. Miss Cathy tries to pull away and Fan forces her to look. She fights her, but finally relents. Fan asks her to imagine a country landscape where she is free and no longer confined. They go to the room where Four and Five are. The other Girls, Mala, Tico, and Vik are there. Vik starts chest compressions on Five's chest.

Chapter 20 details Six's last great mural. Four and Five were taken to the hospital and Fan accompanied them. Both survived and Fan did not return. The final image on Six's mural is a large portrait that could be Fan, although Six shrugs when asked if it's her. Fan asks to stay with Vik at his condo. He agrees. She gets cleaned up and admires her growing belly, even if its appearance remains slight. She goes to sleep. Vik serves her jasmine rice and chicken broth when she wakes. She tells him she'll leave in the morning and he asks where she plans to go. He offers her the guest room for as long as she likes. She senses that Vik knows that she's older than she appears. Vik puts on a movie and smokes from a hookah. They watch the movie and eat popcorn together. Vik falls asleep and Fan is comfortable with him.

Chapter 21 finds Fan shopping with Vik; she prefers shopping with him than Miss Cathy. Vik is shopping for a housewarming gift; he looks at kitchen gadgets. He messages his girlfriend who he doesn't see often. He takes Fan to the fitness center. Vik is a former competitive swimmer. He asks Fan if she wants to get in the water, but she declines. She doesn't want to chance Vik noticing that she's pregnant. Fan speaks with Mala to check on the Girls. The Girls no longer have to live sequestered upstairs in Miss Cathy's suite. Vik takes Fan to a weekend market in the Counties called the Circus, where they have street food. It's unusual to eat natural food as it's unsanitary. Fan eats sea cucumber and fried beef. Fan compares Vik to Reg: Reg being quick to express himself





and Vik being more in control. They eat blackberry pie and talk about C-illness. Vik doesn't really believe in the possibility of C-free.

Chapter 22 finds Vik and Fan at the housewarming party for Oliver and Betty at their custom-built villa. Oliver is a blood C-specialist who developed a drug that showed a 60% efficacy in year-long trials. The pharmaceutical company is prepared to pay him enough money for it that he can retire while he's still very young, live lavishly, and spend time with his wife Betty and their children: a daughter Josey, and infant twins. Vik has suspicions about the drug and how survival rates were measured. Vik introduces Fan to Betty. The other guests talk about what they would do with all the money and they talk about traveling the world. Oliver enters with bottles of champagne. He talks about some other research he may work on.

Josey greets Fan energetically. They eat vegetables and Josey announces they can have dessert now. Josey stuffs cake and cookies into her mouth and begins to choke. Fan takes action. Josey plays with Fan and while in the room, overhears a conversation between Betty and Vik. They are arguing over messages and how they couldn't be together any longer. Betty was going to make an effort with Oliver now that he will be around more. Later, Fan comes downstairs to find Vik leaving in a hurry. Oliver comes to Fan and tells her that he's her brother.

## Analysis

From the sign that reads FREE REG, the reader can ascertain that the people of B-Mor have some knowledge of what is happening to Reg. The reader can identify Reg as symbolic of this security in how his DNA may ultimately help them, but it's unclear when this might happen. The narrator speaks generally about Fan's quest to find him, but this is the first indication that something is known about Reg's whereabouts. Ultimately, it doesn't bode well. It foreshadows the coming danger that Fan will encounter as the novel progresses.

The narrator also discusses how the people of B-Mor are not concerned with what will happen too far into the future. Because their lives are so well-managed by the governing council, the residents of B-Mor lack a need to look into the future, reinforcing the theme of Class Structure. There isn't a need outside of their fate with C-illness. Since they are fatalists when it pertains to C-illness, it doesn't become a concern.

The themes of Death and Sacrifice are illustrated by how two of the Girls are near death and have reached this state in an effort to help Fan. The grimness of the situation gives a sense of urgency to Fan's departure. It is possible for Fan to stay and be with the rest of the Girls to help them in the transition if the Girls die, but the reader knows that Fan must escape. If for no other reason than the fact that her pregnancy will soon begin to show.

Six creates her final mural and it features an image that resembles Fan. The mural is symbolic of Fan's journey; it is being created as she goes along. When Six is asked



whether or not the image is of Fan, she shrugs. It's almost as if that image must stand in for Fan since she is leaving the Girls. The Girls have bonded with Fan and consider her part of their family. They will mourn her loss, perhaps in ways similar to how if one of them were die. Having this image of Fan looking down on them can keep them together. The Girls have grown under Fan's tutelage. They are stronger and are gradually seeking independence. It's also important that the mural not be a true representation of Fan. Much as the Girls know about Fan, they cannot really know her. They will not have the opportunity to spend enough time to truly get to know her. The Girls are left with an image like the ones that appear in B-Mor. They serve as reminders of something and someone that they cannot fully comprehend.

Fan flees with Vik. As she has had to do before, she must trust someone to help her on her journey. Fan is wise enough to know that a threat exists wherever and with whomever she goes. Vik is no different. He seems like a nice young doctor. It's logical to assume that because he's a doctor he wouldn't do her harm, but there's no way of truly knowing. For this reason, she remains leery of him.

Vik is very much at ease about Fan. When they get to his condo, he is relaxed. He offers her food and he enjoys his hookah pipe. He tells her he has a girlfriend and they watch a video. All these things indicate that Vik feels comfortable in her presence. He behaves as he normally would and asserts no power over Fan. He is merely generous with a place to stay.

Fan doesn't appear to outwardly bond with Vik, but she follows him willingly. Whether she sense that Vik may be instrumental in reuniting her with Reg or even her brother remains unclear, but she trusts Vik and stays with him. She is leery of one aspect, however, and that's with regard to her pregnancy. She doesn't divulge the pregnancy to Vik and she declines to go into the water when he takes her to the fitness center. After leaving B-Mor, Fan only goes into the water twice during the course of the novel. The first is to save Eli, and the second is forthcoming when Pinah nearly drowns. For someone who so loves the water to resist the temptation to go show great restraint. It's not merely that she's hesitant because her clothes may cling to her belly and reveal her pregnancy, though that plays a part. Rather it represents that Fan is making a sacrifice. She foregoes all that keeps her safe by leaving B-Mor. The water is a place of safety for Fan and because she remains in danger, she cannot submerge herself in the water until there is a tremendous need to do so.

Vik takes Fan to the Circus where they eat natural food. Fan is alarmed by this because the residents of B-Mor are so conditioned to sanitized food, and really all parts of their lives. The lifestyle Fan is accustomed to is juxtaposed against the carefree approach to food in the Counties. In this way, the theme of Control vs. Freedom is demonstrated. By doing this, Vik opens Fan up to possibility. He shows her that while life in the Counties differs from that in B-Mor, it is manageable and survivable. This newfound freedom gives her permission to explore and enjoy something new.

While there's no clear indication that Vik is making arrangements to hand Fan over to Oliver, the reader has to wonder if what he may or may not know. It seems highly



unlikely that someone would befriend a stranger, take them to a housewarming party, and then discover that the homeowner is actually the long-lost brother of the person he brought with him. If the assumption is then that Vik knows who Fan is to Oliver, then how? Is it possible that Mister Leo contacted someone? Miss Cathy? And ultimately, one has to ask: what's in it for Vik? It's equally possible that Vik knows enough about Oliver to suspect that Fan could be his sister. Regardless, Vik ends up taking Fan to Oliver.

Even if it's coincidence, Fan is fated to reunite with her brother. Vik's hasty departure suggests that there's more to his level of discomfort with regard to the situation. Yes, he argues with Betty, and presumably over the ending of their affair, but would he really leave Fan in haste if he didn't already know who Fan was? This suggests that Vik is aware to some extent, but isn't comfortable with what he's done. This foreshadows the motivation Vik has for helping Fan escape.

## Discussion Question 1

What does the appearance of the "FREE REG" sign indicate?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Fan continue to hide her pregnancy, even from Vik, who is a doctor?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Vik take Fan to the housewarming party? Does Vik know more than he lets on?

## Vocabulary

ethos, rends, meticulous, bulwarks, hawker, exhortations, noxious, reverie virulent, skeins, guileless, gelid, microcosms, tumult, lecherous, residual, enigma, peruse, parlay, incipient, concentric, deign, prerequisite, clement, splash, melange, periphery



# Chapters 23-26

## Summary

Chapter 23 reveals that the narrator will refer to all “sister” or “brother”, an interconnectedness because of the familial relationship between Fan and Oliver. There is a rally in B-Mor protesting the qualifying score for testing out of B-Mor being raised. A resident who considered his healthcare in B-Mor to be poor took photos of the staff who treated him and broadcast their names and addresses. More tags pop up that read: FREE ME, REG. I MISS REG. Workers strike.

Oliver talks with Fan. She notes that he doesn't look like their parents, but that she also couldn't remember what they looked like enough to be sure. Oliver senses her skepticism. He asks her questions about B-Mor to convince her. He tells her that he told Vik to leave her with him. Oliver reveals that he knows about Vik's relationship with Betty, after seeing his number on Betty's handscreen and hundreds of messages. After the party ends, Oliver has a conference call with the pharmacorp's scientists. Fan talks with Betty. She mentions Vik's parents and Fan says he never mentioned them. Betty reveals that Vik's parents died of different C-illnesses. The next day Oliver and Betty detail the next stage of their plan, which is to convert their home into a replica of where Oliver grew up in B-Mor. Fan is asked to provide details and Betty includes a suite for Fan and Reg in their plans.

At the beginning of Chapter 24, the narrator comments on the evolution of B-Mor and that there is a thought that one day B-Mor will be preferred to the Charters. The story continues with Oliver and Betty changing the house. Oliver has bought other lots around them and razed the houses to make room for his plans. They live in trailers on the grounds while the construction is underway. The cramped quarters cause stress at first, but they adapt. Fan begins to bond with Josey and Oliver declares that he prefers to be called Liwei now. Liwei talks about his aptitude for playing the violin and swimming in his youth because he excelled at them. He says he likes that he can play the violin, but wouldn't miss it if he never did again. He talks to Fan more about B-Mor and about how he couldn't stay angry with Vik over the affair with Betty. At the time he was busy with work and Betty seemed happy. He also still considers Vik his friend. Liwei wants to help find Reg.

Chapter 25 finds Fan further involved with her new family. The narrator wonders if Fan had known people would be interested in her departure if she still would have gone. Fan is unaware that Liwei is up to something else. He has asked about Reg's whereabouts and no one can say for sure, but that because of his being C-free, he is a priority for the pharmacorp that is buying the company Liwei sold his drug to. Betty and Fan talk about what Reg was like and more romantic, personal details, such as Reg being a good kisser.



Liwei, Betty, Fan, and the children, along with the children's nanny Pinah, all take a trip to the fitness center. Vik is there and has a heated conversation with Betty. Vik walks away and asks Fan how she is. Vik and Liwei race in the pool and it goes on for some time. Betty tries to get them to stop. The two men get in a fight and lifeguards and others try to break it up. In all the commotion, no one noticed that Pinah was floating face down in the water. Fan sees her and jumps in and saves her. The lifeguard revives Pinah and Liwei notices Fan's pregnant belly under her wet shirt.

Chapter 26 opens in B-Mor and discusses the fine specimens of fish. The narrator reveals some changes in B-Mor with the public works and programs to employ older, retired citizens. When the narrator returns to Fan's story, Fan is preparing to go see Reg at one of the lab facilities. Betty helps her pick out an outfit. She chooses a black, athletic top and pants because it most resembles the wetsuit that Reg was used to seeing her in. There is some delay in Liwei's contract being signed and getting payment. Betty and Vik are still in contact with each other, though the family has quit the fitness club after the fight. When it's time to go and meet Reg, Betty is dressed similarly to Fan. Liwei announces that the contract has been signed and the money released. A car waits for Fan to take her to see Reg. Fan notices that something is amiss. When she gets into the car, Vik is inside and they drive off. Betty, dressed like Fan, gets into the car that is meant to go to take Fan to Reg.

## Analysis

Immediately following the revelation that Oliver is Fan's brother Liwei, the narrator reveals that the people of B-Mor shall refer to each other as sister and brother going forward. The people of B-Mor have a vested interest in Fan, and in particular her unborn child. These new monikers indicate a continued connection with Fan, but part of their ownership of her. Others who have left B-Mor – such as Lewei – never come back. They're not banished, but they are no longer part of B-Mor. Because Fan didn't leave B-Mor because she tested out of it and rather because she voluntarily left, there is the possibility of her return. In fact, there's hope that she returns because she may hold the key to longevity for the people.

But there is something more ominous occurring. Signs now read I MISS REG, FREE ME, REG. One can work with the assumption that Fan is in captivity at some point. Who else would miss him and need to be freed? Are these holdovers from when she was confined with Miss Cathy? Do they actually foreshadow that while Fan gets away, it may not be permanently? Either way, it sets a foreboding tone that indicates that all is not right.

The theme of Identity is explored in Oliver's interactions with Fan about his past. Oliver senses Fan's skepticism and tries to reassure her of his identity. She believes him, but remains aloof. Granted, it's not out of character for her to be that way. Fan stays with Liwei and Betty. She bonds with them and their children. She is, for the time being, a part of their family.



When Fan and Oliver talk about swimming and Oliver's ability to play the violin, Fan asks him if he still enjoys playing. Oliver is disconnected from the music, but appreciates that he's still able to play. In some respects, this mirrors Fan's relationship with the water. Obviously, she can still swim, but she's been reluctant to enter the water. Yes, her primary motivation is to continue to hide her pregnancy, but what if there's more? What if this disconnect is what signals to Fan the familial bond that she shares with her brother? Certainly, Fan is appreciative of her swimming talent when she saves someone from drowning.

Fan does not comment on the affair between Betty and Vik, though she is aware of it. When Oliver tells her about it, he seems rather unmoved by it. He must turn on Vik, not because he wants to – he still considers him a friend – but rather because he needs to because that is what is the right thing for appearances' sake. Fan doesn't pass judgment on any of them or comment in any way that marks disapproval. She does, however, bond with Betty. She and Betty discuss Fan's romantic relationship with Reg. It is young love and honest. Whether this serves as motivation for Betty to ultimately help Fan escape is unknown, but it is a strong indication of the bond Betty shares with Vik. That Vik and Betty acted together to help Fan indicates the level of trust and mutual respect they share.

The fight between Vik and Oliver in the fitness center pool brings the conflict between the two men to a head. Even though Oliver has indicated that he's at peace with the affair, the tension is there. Is it really about the affair, or does it reflect that Vik is, in some way, undermining Oliver's deal with the pharmaceutical company? Since the reader is unaware of the details of the deal and only knows that there is some delay in finalizing the contract, it does call attention to the relationship between the two men. It is during this fight that Pinah gets in trouble in the water. Fan is the one who notices her and jumps in to save her. The lifeguard performs CPR and revives her, which foreshadows that Fan is in need of assistance. It is when she is drenched that Oliver notices her protruding belly and Fan's secret is out.

Because the reader never meets Reg, it is a logical question to ask whether or not the pharmaceutical company ever located him. It's clear that Oliver didn't know about Fan's pregnancy, so if there was motivation in keeping her, it may have been to lure Reg to them. The discovery of the pregnancy and the having Fan in, for lack of a better word, custody opens up a unique opportunity for Oliver to negotiate with the pharmaceutical company.

The final chapter begins with a discussion about the fish in B-Mor. The story has come full circle and harkens back to the opening pages in which it was revealed that Fan took care of the fish tank. Changes are happening in B-Mor, and the general tone of the narrator is content, if not somewhat happy. The tone doesn't differ altogether from the tone narrator's tone in the novel, but there is something more at ease as this chapter opens. When the focus returns to Fan's story, Fan is dressed similarly to how she would look in her wetsuit. She does this in anticipation of seeing Reg and making him feel comfortable, but it gives the reader a sense of comfort as well. Fan, in her makeshift wetsuit, is where she belongs.



The theme of Freedom is emphasized in the final moments of the novel. The bait-and-switch of the cars assures Fan's escape. Vik and Betty have conspired to get her out of Oliver's possession. Since Betty gets into the car that is meant for Fan, the reader knows that Vik and Betty have to part. They sacrifice their bond in order to assure Fan's freedom. There's no indication that Fan will ever be reunited with Reg, but she and her child have an opportunity for freedom. As the novel comes to a close, the ending remains open-ended. Fan is in the car and she and Vik are driving as fast as possible to get away. The makeshift wetsuit symbolizing how Fan would be able to glide through the water. The final line of the novel "You need not come back for us" suggests that the people of B-Mor have gotten what they need: whether it's the drug Oliver developed, or a new drug manufactured after testing Reg, but it seems as though the people of B-Mor are content with their story of Fan. In turn, they have set her free.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Oliver is really Fan's brother? Why or why not? Support your answer.

## Discussion Question 2

What does Oliver's desire to rebuild B-Mor in the Charter reveal about his character?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Betty work to free Fan instead of Oliver?

## Vocabulary

palettes, bullhorn, surreptitious, malice, self-aggrandizing, muckrakers, eponymous, derelict, brethren, inciting, firmament, arduous, feral, putative, precarious, chimera, trepidation, particulates, ionized, commemorations, unfledged, paramount, egress, aegis, etymologies, boon, travails, renascent, blithe, imminence, obfuscation, aberration, tacit, au pair, phobic, parse, circumvent, perilous, holistic, quandary, garret, mewls



# Characters

## Fan

Fan is the main character of *On Such a Full Sea*. Originally from a settlement called B-Mor, she works in one of the large fishing tanks. She takes tremendous care of the fish and feels more comfortable in the water than out of it. One of the things she likes to do is sink to the bottom of the tank and hold her breath until she can't take it any longer. When Fan leaves the settlement, the people of B-Mor find it uncharacteristic of her because she would never leave her fish.

Though she is a young woman, Fan is often mistaken for a child. She uses this to her advantage as she navigates her way through the Counties and the Charters. Her petite frame and short height contribute to her childlike appearance. While in B-Mor, Fan had a boyfriend called Reg. She cares deeply for him and is in the early stages of her pregnancy with his child. She keeps her pregnancy a secret for as long as she can as the pregnancy would reveal her age and perhaps cause problems because of her relationship with Reg.

She is perceived as not seeking fame though she undoubtedly has achieved it in her former home. While she doesn't say much, she is thoughtful and caring to those around her. She is also protective of those who have helped her along the way. The people of B-Mor regard her a genius and type of folk hero.

## Quig

A middle-aged man, Quig was once married and had a daughter. He was a veterinarian by trade and his family lived well in one of the Charters. After domestic animals were killed off after the hemorrhagic fever outbreak. Quig's family struggled financially. He tried to find other ways to support his family and his wife Glynnis got him involved in selling the drugs from his veterinarian practice on the black market. He was convicted and he and his family were ostracized from the Charter.

After he loses wife and daughter in a brutal robbery, Quig establishes a settlement in the Counties where he trades for medical services. This is how he meets Loreen, Penelope, and others. He hits Fan with a car and takes her back and cares for her.

A caregiver by nature, he helps her to get well, but understands the value she has. Knowing that Loreen's son Sewey is in need of medication, Quig sets out to trade Fan in one of the Charters. Along the way, he teaches Fan to drive and confides in her about the loss of his family. He can be distant emotionally and commands control of a situation without much effort. He isn't one to raise his voice and mostly seems to be motivated by doing what is right. He feels guilty about what he's doing to Fan, but justifies it by viewing it as something that needs to be done.





## Dr. Vik Upendra

Vik is an emergency room doctor in one of the Charters. A nice-looking, well-educated young man, he was once a competitive swimmer. He treats the Girls when they get sick with botulism poisoning. He saves their lives and takes Fan with him. He offers Fan a place to stay after she escapes Miss Cathy's place. Fan accompanies him to the Circus in the counties and he introduces her to natural food. Oliver is one of Vik's best friends, yet Vik is having an affair with Oliver's wife Betty. When Betty discovers that Oliver is going to sell Fan to the pharmaceutical company, Vik helps Fan escape.

## Betty

Betty is Oliver's wife. With her husband preoccupied with work, she begins an affair with her husband's friend Vik. She has three children: Josey, a young girl, and twins. She enjoys planning the new house that she's building with Oliver and looks forward to having her husband being more present in the marriage after his retirement. She befriends Fan quickly and is protective of her. When she discovers Oliver's plans for Fan, she arranges for Vik to take her away from the Charter.

## Reg

Reg is Fan's boyfriend and the father of her unborn child. He is never seen throughout the book and it is assumed that he is in the custody of a pharmaceutical company. He differs from many of the residents in B-Mor because of his height. The height difference between Reg and Fan is a source of humor in B-Mor. He has an Afro, is of mixed race, and has a simple demeanor. He is accepting and easy-going. Reg is thought to be special because a blood test revealed that he is C-free. Because of this, his blood is thought to hold the cure for C-illness.

## Loreen

Loreen works in the settlement with Quig. She is abrasive and crude. When Fan comes to stay, Loreen is initially cruel to her; she doesn't give her much food and delays bringing her a bucket so that she can relieve herself. Her son Sewey has a C-illness and she is complicit with Quig in trading Fan for treatment for her son. She begins to warm up to Fan, but never does so fully.

## Mister Leo

Mister Leo is a rich, powerful man who lives in one of the Charters. When Quig, Loreen, and Fan first meet him, he is warm and hospitable. He negotiates with Quig and reveals his shrewdness as a businessman. He gives Fan a red-laquered box with a locket inside that has a diamond inside of the locket. He sexually assaults Fan the first night



she is in his house, and it is revealed that he has assaulted the other girls as well. When Miss Cathy strikes him during the assault on Fan, he is left in a near-catatonic state and is confined to a wheelchair.

## Miss Cathy

Miss Cathy initially appears somewhat demure and non-confrontational. She strikes her husband, Mister Leo, when she finds him raping Fan. When the doctors presume he had a stroke, she does nothing to suggest otherwise. She takes control of the house and keeps Fan and the arrangement made with Quig and Loreen. Additionally, she gives Loreen another set of vials for Sewey as part of the arrangement. In her chambers, she has seven Girls who surround her and alternate sleeping with her because of nightmares. She refused to allow the Girls with botulism to go to the hospital so as not to upset the remaining girls. She relents and doesn't stop Fan when she leaves.

## The Girls

The Girls are seven girls of different ages and gradient heights who dress all in white. They've had a procedures on their eyes to make them look large like an anime character. Miss Cathy has them alternate with her when she wakes from a nightmare. They're devoted to her and each other. Together they paint murals on the wall and help Fan escape.

## Oliver/Bo Lewei

Oliver is a blood C-specialist for a pharmaceutical company. He is Fan's brother. Originally he hails from B-Mor, but was one of the rare people who test high enough on the standardized test to leave the settlement for a Charter. His intelligence is vast and he's made a fortune from his medical research that allows him to retire in his thirties. His friend Vik is having an affair with his wife Betty. Oliver and his wife have a daughter and a set of twins. He agrees to sell Fan to the pharmaceutical company after he learns she is pregnant with Reg's child.

# Symbols and Symbolism

## Fish Tank

The tanks sustain life. They are used to raise fish, grow vegetables, herbs, and flowers. The products from the tanks sustain all of B-Mor, from their own food to the exporting the goods to the Charters, which keeps their economy alive. It is also where the reader first meets Fan. She feels comfortable in the tanks, more so than out. That Fan leaves the tanks to go on her quest and is held in high regard by the people of B-Mor demonstrates what an impact the tanks have on the citizens of B-Mor.

## Water

Water is present throughout the novel. It is both a positive and destructive force. B-Mor is an island. The B-Mor economy relies on the fish tanks. They are fearful of natural water sources, however, such as Cold Pond, the hurricanes that bring flooding. A flood signals Fan's departure. Joseph drowns in the storm drain. It also symbolizes the amniotic fluid of Fan's pregnancy.

## The Girls

The girls represent how a community comes together to support one another. It's the closest Fan comes to experiencing B-Mor outside of the settlement. Their needs are provided for them. They're uniformly dressed. Their murals mirror the graffiti back in B-Mor.

## Graffiti

After Fan leaves B-Mor, graffiti starts popping up around the settlement. It is often images of Fan and Reg and the graffiti is quickly painted over, often within hours. The images remind the residents of the people who were strong enough to leave, but the powers that be don't want them to incite others. The graffiti symbolizes the control of the masses and how if one leaves, they cannot come back. The painting over tries to erase that anyone left of their own accord.

## Murals

The murals that the girls in the Charter create differ from the graffiti. They are allowed to remain and be expanded upon. There is opportunity for growth in the Charter, even if the girls are ultimately sequestered. That Fan is able to escape is indicative of this opportunity for growth.



## **B-Mor**

B-Mor is Fan's point of origin. It is the place she works and meets Reg. The settlement is rigidly structured and the residents are proud of where they're from and what it provides. In a manner of speaking, it is ironic that Fan would be heralded for leaving, but the very name of the settlement holds a clue as to why: it can be interpreted to "be more".

## **Fan's pregnancy**

While Reg remains elusive and his possibility of bringing an end to C-illness, he has passed on his genetic material to Fan's unborn child. Since Fan does not deliver the child in the novel, the pregnancy represents the hope people must cling to that one day something can be done to help them.

## **Reg**

Reg is held in high regard because of how he differs from most of the people in B-Mor. He's tall, has an Afro, is of mixed race, and is C-free. He represents hope and promise. Since he is never seen, that promise remains unfulfilled.

## **Fish**

Fish appear throughout the novel. When Fan is first introduced she works in the fish tanks. The fish in the ponds surface when people start throwing food into the ponds. There is a plastic aquarium at Oliver's house that has plastic fish inside of it. Fish is an export for B-Mor. The fish represent life, sustainability, and what remains unexpected below the surface.

## **White**

The Girls dress all in white, reminding the reader that while Master Leo has robbed them of their innocence, they remain innocent victims.



# Settings

## B-Mor

B-Mor is an island on the Atlantic Coast, which was formerly Baltimore, Maryland. It is a very structured society in which the needs of all of its residents are provided. The community is austere and plain in appearance. The residents are proud of their environment and the services they provide to the Charter communities. B-Mor is the home of Fan and her brother Bo Lewei, both of whom leave B-Mor.

## The Charters

The Charters most resembles an upper to upper-middle class environment. The residents have nice homes with many amenities. It is a place select residents of B-Mor are promoted to if they can pass a rigorous exam given to them once during their youth.

## Master Leo & Miss Cathy's House

Master Leo & Miss Cathy's home is where Quig and Loreen leave Fan. It is a large house in one of the Charters where Fan is assaulted by Master Leo and taken in by Miss Cathy. Miss Cathy's chambers has large murals depicting the Girls and Fan. The Girls created the murals with magic markers. Otherwise, the space is mostly white.

## The Counties

The Counties are wild and lawless. It is a place people from B-Mor and the Charters fear. When Fan, Quig, and Loreen are in a car accident, they encounter a County family. Initially, the county people show them hospitality in their shelter excavated from under the root system of a large tree. The family, however, is willing to kill Quig and Loreen in order to keep Fan.

## Oliver & Betty's House

Oliver and Betty have a home in one of the Charters. Oliver's financial success has afforded him the ability to buy the properties around him and expand the home into a vast commune resembling the place he remembers from his childhood in B-Mor. He consults Fan on the particulars for how it should be built before negotiating her transfer to a pharmaceutical company because of her pregnancy. The room designated for Fan is white, which Betty helps to design.



# Themes and Motifs

## Death and Rebirth

It's apparent from the early stages of *On Such a Full Sea* that a major transformation has transpired. An outbreak of some type of hemorrhagic fever has altered human existence. It's unclear how far into the future the novel is set, but it's clear that present world no longer exists. Death casts a shadow over the society.

Early on, Joseph drowns and Fan's reaction during the funeral stands out. She says: "Where you are." The vague nature of the statement marks a transition. Surely there is more: more to be said, more to come, more expectations, and even more death. But that death leads to a different course of action.

Shortly after, Fan departs B-Mor and the reader begins to witness the rebirth of Fan, B-Mor, and the lives she interacts with. Fan reinvents herself, or rather the narrator reinvents her. She is a source of hope and pride for the people of B-Mor.

During her journey, Fan interacts with those who would have died had she not intervened: Eli's near drowning, Quig and Loreen being held captive by the Nickelmans, the Girls nearly dying from botulism, and Pinah's near drowning. Fan is able to help each of these characters come back from the brink.

The presence of water throughout the novel also harkens the idea of rebirth. Fan is introduced in the tank and seems to be born from it, almost like a baptism. Similarly, Eli and Pinah are reborn from the waters. Oliver and Vik are former competitive swimmers; when they have their fight, the altercation takes place in the water. The fight ends in a draw, but Vik finishes the battle by helping to secure Fan's passage to her escape and a new life.

In fact, the entire novel is in a state of gestation. This is also apparent with Fan's pregnancy. She does not give birth; rather, the novel exists in a state of waiting to be born. It begins in the water and ends with Fan being born into the world.

## Class Structure

Society is comprised of three specific classes in *On Such a Full Sea*: B-Mor, Charters, and the Counties. There is a miniscule amount of class mobility. By and large, a person's petition in their given class is fixed.

The counties are the most marginalized of the classes. They are poor and can, at best, hope for their basic needs to be met. What amenities still exist are old and unreliable. The sewers in the counties are hundreds of years old, existing without renovation, upgrade, or upkeep. When the sewers fail, everyone is aware. The counties lack healthcare and reliable food sources. It is a region marked by lawlessness and a



struggle for survival. There is no room in the other classes to accept people from the Counties. People can fall from the Charters or B-Mor into the Counties.

The Charters most closely resemble what the reader would recognize as upper middle class and higher. The emphasis is on having many things: from a large home to assorted gadgets to having enough money to afford repeated medical treatments. An extremely small percentage (e.g. one person in a generation) has the opportunity to rise out of a settlement like B-Mor and be accepted into a Charter. Within the Charter, there is a sub-class referred to as the servant class. There are people who more closely resemble the people of B-Mor than those of the Charters.

B-Mor is a highly structured settlement and the class division that the reader learns the most about. The narrator and Fan are residents of B-Mor. It is a working class settlement that maintains a high level of satisfaction and pride. The narrator repeatedly identifies the people of B-Mor as achieving their best selves and having all of their needs met, including food, shelter, and healthcare.

It is also a group resigned to this fate. Because there is a cap on the amount of medical treatments one can receive, the citizens are limited. The life expectancy in the Charters is higher, but the people in B-Mor seem to understand their fate and are happy because of or in spite of it.

Overall, the class structure seeks to emulate the unspoken class system of the current year in the Western world. While there may be treatments available for certain ailments, the ability to pay for them can stand in the way. Likewise, there is an appearance of class mobility, but the odds of achieving upward mobility are low. This new world order mirrors the present day issue of understanding that it is easier to fall below one's class standing than it is to rise above it. Mostly, it reinforces that the majority are fated to stay in the current standing.

## Heroism

There are multiple ways of looking at what a hero is or does. A hero might be someone who saves someone's life, calls awareness to the plight of underprivileged, or stand up to an injustice. In each case, a sacrifice must be made. For Fan, sacrifices abound.

Fan achieves hero-status not by her own choosing. The narrator and the people of B-Mor have elevated her to folk-hero status. It's done largely by their perceptions of what Fan has accomplished or endured. Like many folk heroes, the real story of Fan is not known. It is based on rumors and hearsay and the story can change to fit the needs of whomever is telling it. Fan appears heroic to compensate for the trials she's endured. She is fearless because she left a place that people generally don't leave.

She offers the people of B-Mor hope. Her pregnancy may hold the key to curing C-illness. As the novel progresses, subtle changes can be seen, such as the retired people going back to work. The possibility of curing what B-Mor understands as its fated killer, is appealing to them.



Making Fan the hero exceeds preconceived ideas about what a hero might look like. Fan is a very small, young woman who is often mistaken for a child. Since the narrator has very nearly elevated Fan to a savior status, Fan's appearance works against expectations. She doesn't seek to be a hero, but when it is required of her, acts on instincts to save others. This is evidenced by how she saves Eli and Pinah from drowning, and saving Quig and Loreen from the Nickelmans.

## Sex vs. Intimacy

When Fan and Reg's relationship is first introduced, it is referred to as being chaste. The narrator isn't under any delusion that the young people of B-Mor aren't having sex. In fact, it's outwardly acknowledged. The relationship between Reg and Fan, however, is presumed unconsummated. This proves false when it is revealed that Fan is pregnant with Reg's child. The narrator indicates that a sexual relationship must have been initiated by Fan because the narrator doesn't regard Reg as one who would do so.

This counters readers' expectations, ultimately. What is the motivation for initiating sex? And why is it Fan? The narrator establishes that the two have a respectful, intimate relationship that is without sex. Considering that Fan's pregnancy may be the only tangible evidence of being about to cure C-illness, the reader must presume that Fan initiated sex in an attempt to get pregnant. This fits the hero narrative that been created for Fan.

The sexual nature of the affair between Betty and Vik also remains unclear. The reader is made aware of the relationship and it is logical to assume that it would be sexual in nature. Oliver's response to finding Vik's messages on Betty's phone alters this perception. He remarks incredulously how innocent the messages were. Perhaps this helps Oliver distance himself from the reality of his friend's relationship with his wife. At the very least, Vik and Betty's intimacy is driven by an emotional need for each other. Perhaps this is why they are the appropriate couple to save Fan and her unborn child.

While the novel does not dwell on sexual violence, evidence of it or the looming threat of it is present. As Quig treats Fan's leg injury, she is leery of having him touch her thigh. She is, like the Girls, raped by Mister Leo. When Vik falls asleep next to her on the couch, Fan is startled to feel his hand touch hers and relieved to discover that he's just drifted off to sleep. She is conditioned to be fearful of unwanted advances even when something can be construed as harmless.

While Quig and Loreen are often seen together, they lack any type of physical relationship. The women who trade for services in Quig's compound make themselves sexually available to Quig, although he does not carry on relationships with them. He does, however, have an emotionally intimate relationship with Penelope that becomes physical at times.





## Control vs. Freedom

Control and freedom are emphasized greatly throughout the novel. The structure of B-Mor demonstrates a lot of control. The governing council provides the needs of its residents. The counties people can only expect their basic needs to be met. While B-Mor can expect more amenities – from shopping to parks – the society is quite strict. The graffiti that pops up is quickly covered just as the feeding frenzy of the fish at the park is put to a stop.

While the setup of B-Mor remains strict, people are free to go. The challenge is in finding where that might be. Because the chance of securing a place in one of the charters is miniscule, people appear resigned to their positions. It's not that Fan wants to escape B-Mor, so much as it's something she must do in order to get to Reg. She exercises her free will to do. That they never find each other is inconsequential. Fan is driven to perceived freedom.

Along the way Fan submits to her freedoms being taken from her. The accident which hurts her leg leads her to being held captive at Quig's place. She is then bartered by Quig and Loreen in exchange for medicine and drilling equipment, and eventually cash. She is confined at Mister Leo and Miss Cathy's place until the Girls help arrange an opportunity to escape. Vik gives her shelter, but leaves her with Oliver who, in turn, arranges to sell her to a pharmaceutical company. Each time Fan is able to get free of the situation.

In the final chapter, Fan may suspect that something is amiss, but her focus is on being able to reunite with Reg. It is indicated that Reg is being held by a pharmaceutical company, but there is no verification of this. If he is, however, then Reg represents confinement and Fan represents freedom. Betty and Vik have conspired to assure Fan's freedom. The open-ending demonstrates the freedom she achieves, although it's not a choice she makes for herself. There is no need to know what her next stop may be because it is contingent upon her freedom. The final line of the book "You need not come back for us" reinforces this sentiment. The people of B-Mor may have control over Fan's story and image back home, but they are willing to set Fan free and she allows it to happen.

## Survival

The theme of survival is emphasized greatly throughout the novel. The novel takes place after a significant outbreak of hemorrhagic fever and society has changed to best meet the needs of the people. The people of B-Mor grow herbs and vegetables and raise fish to sustain them and to provide for the Charters. The counties people have a more challenging way of survival by having to fend for themselves in a climate that is harsh and unpredictable while also living in a lawless culture.

Reg has a genetic anomaly that keeps him from contracting c-illness. This is key to treating and/or curing c-illness. It's why the pharmaceutical company is interested in



Reg. It remains unclear as to whether the company has Reg, but the discovery of Fan's pregnancy and the companies' subsequent interest in the child suggests they may not.

Fan faces continual struggles for survival. Quig hits her with the car and injured her leg. She must rely on Loreen to bring her food and drink. She is traded to Mister Leo and endures his assault. Afterwards, she must rely on Miss Cathy. By trusting the Girls and Vik to help her escape, she continues on her quest to locate Reg. Later, when she is left with Oliver, she is unaware that her freedom is in jeopardy. Betty and Vik are key to her survival.

Quig also endures much hardship to survive. He lost his veterinarian business after the outbreak. He ended up selling drugs to get by and support his family. He survived the brutal killing of his wife and daughter during a robbery. Also, he is key to the survival of many who come to his settlement for medical treatment.

## Dependence

From the introduction of Fan in the tanks, tending the fish, dependence becomes a clear theme. The fish are dependent on Fan to live.

The first person plural narrator is also emblematic of dependence. The story is told from the perspective of one that is actually many. The group is dependent upon each other to hold B-Mor together. They rely on Fan to help them: whether it's her quest to find Reg or her pregnancy that could help to save them from c-illness. The people of B-Mor are also dependent on the governing council. The council ensures their safety, food and water, and health care.

The Girls are not only dependent upon Miss Cathy, but on each other as well. At one point, Miss Cathy denies two of the Girls medical treatment at the hospital because of the Girls' previous struggle to cope without one of them during an earlier medical emergency. Conversely, Miss Cathy is dependent on the Girls; she needs them to help stave off her nightmares and get return to sleep.

When Miss Cathy strikes Mister Leo while he is assaulting Fan, she renders him dependent upon the in-home healthcare attendant, Tico. His head injury leaves him completely helpless to feed and care for himself.

## Identity

Identity is a theme throughout the novel. Readers are introduced to Fan and Reg by name. Their images are painted on walls and fences, but are quickly painted over to mask their identity and what they represent.

The people of B-Mor are largely a nameless collective "we", putting their faith in Fan to help them; readers do not get to know them individually. All that they do and perceive is for the collective identity of B-Mor. They seek to be their best selves in order to



represent their community. In doing so, the people of B-Mor consider themselves living a preferred and special life.

Oliver has reached a pinnacle of success in his work. This achievement affords him the lifestyle he wants to live. He can afford lavish things, such as champagne, but is recreating B-Mor in the Charter. Upon connection with Fan, he chooses to go by his given name – Bo Liwei – in an effort to reclaim his birth identity. By doing so, he forges a father connection with Fan to gain her trust and further associate himself with the hope Fan holds with regard to c-illness.

The Girls have a shared identity. They live together in small quarters, dress alike, and have effectively been stripped of their individual identities. Some have even had surgery to make their eyes appear similar to each other. For the purpose of ease, they are identified by their number. When Fan arrives, the Girls accept her as one of their own and gladly offer to make her “Eight.” Fan never relinquishes her identity, however. They continue to use her name and help her to escape, with two of the Girls becoming violently ill and near death in the process. The Girls learn from Fan and grow collectively, even if they don’t achieve individualism.

## Sacrifice

The theme of sacrifice is present throughout the novel. When Fan first leaves B-Mor, she neglects the fish she so ardently cared for and this confuses the narrator. The narrator struggles to understand why she would let them die. The fish are sacrificed so that she can go on her journey – a journey which has the potential to save lives in B-Mor.

Fan, likewise, is sacrificed as well. Quig and Loreen trade her for the medicine to help Sewey. Fan understands that she’s being traded and doesn’t resist it. Perhaps it’s her exchange for Quig and Loreen helping her after leaving B-Mor, or it could be that she does willingly because it’s an advancement toward her goal of reaching Reg.

It is during her time at Mister Leo and Miss Cathy’s that Fan meets the Girls. She bonds with them and tells them of her plans to find Reg. The Girls assist Fan in her efforts to escape. The Girls devise a scheme to get Fan out. They eat spoiled food to make themselves sick. While their initial attempt results only in temporary digestive strife, the second attempt ends in botulism poisoning and two of the Girls nearly die

In an early part of the novel, Joseph dies attempting to save his friend’s brother from drowning during one of the floods. He risked and lost his life to save another. Though the outcome for Fan is different, she twice risks her life (and exposing her pregnancy) by saving Eli and later Pinah from drowning.

Also, in the final moments of the novel, Betty sacrifices herself so that Vik can help Fan escape. While the severity of her sacrifice cannot be known, she does risk the unknown to assist Fan.



# Styles

## Point of View

On Such a Full Sea is told from the perspective of a first person plural narrator representing the residents of B-Mor. The narration stays with the same narrator throughout and is an unreliable narrator.

The narrator describes incidents that were not witnessed firsthand. At times the narrator indicates that the information given is based on rumor. Other times the narrator declares that “we cannot know” for certain what transpired and then continues telling Fan’s story.

While Fan is the central character of the novel, her perspective is not given. The reader only sees Fan’s trials and tribulations through the narrator’s lens. The evolution of Fan to hero status counters the information given about her. The reader cannot know why Fan left or makes the choices she does and what motivates her to do so. Further, it remains possible that Fan never makes any of the decisions the narrator details.

The narrator is biased in the descriptions of the class structure. As a resident of B-Mor, the narrator claims that life in B-Mor – a life lacking in upward mobility and with a shorter life expectancy than those in the Charters – is preferable.

The narrator also wants the reader to marvel at all that Fan is or does, despite the fact that most of what saves her is because of the outreach of others – in particular, people from the Charters. Yes, bad things happen to Fan, but she is cared for by others, more so than by her own doing: a lifestyle with which the people of B-Mor are most comfortable.

## Language and Meaning

The language used in On Such a Full Sea is deceptively straightforward. The story of Fan takes the tone of someone telling an adventure story or fairy tale. The action is filtered through the lens of someone who did not witness any of the events that transpired.

The vocabulary relies on more advanced words, seemingly to give the narrator more authority in telling Fan’s story. As such, it disconnects the reader from the action and prompts questions about what is or is not true. The reader is told that Fan is the hero, but her success (or failure) is contingent on the interactions with others. The language helps to keep a safe distance from the horrors that befall Fan. The reinforcement of how childlike she appears works to shape the character as an innocent.

There’s very little in the way of dialogue in the novel. Since much of the story is based on hearsay – source of which is never identified – what sparse dialogue included cannot



be relied upon for any level of accuracy. During these fleeting bits of dialogue, the narrator inserts himself into the action of the story to fill in possible gaps.

The narrator's tone changes based on whether B-Mor or the Charters are being discussed. B-Mor gets preferential treatment, with more flattering language; it is clearly the preferred place for the narrator. When the Charter settlements are mentioned there is a tone of disapproval and an understanding that while the Charters may have more, they lack in security.

## Structure

*On Such a Full Sea* has 26 chapters that are on average 15 pages each. It is a novel that takes place hundreds of years in the future, but in a society that features many of the same amenities people have today: from handscreens (tablets) to kitchen gadgets to government provided healthcare. The novel features a dystopian society.

The plot recounts Fan's story from when she left B-Mor – the exact date remains unknown – to when she escapes being sold to a pharmaceutical company with Vik, a doctor she befriended in one of the Charters.

The novel is open-ended with her escape to freedom presumed rather than verified. Throughout the novel, the narrator breaks from Fan's story to ruminate over the benefits of life in B-Mor and to give some historical background on the settlement. Flashbacks aren't employed so much as the narrator takes the reader on a tangent about something that may be useful to know in order to aid in understanding Fan's plight, or to justify why the narrator considers B-Mor the ideal place to live and be cared for.

The main story line follows Fan on her presumed quest to find Reg. Her travels mirror what is known about the social structure: violence/danger is encountered in the counties, and safety is only presumed in the Charters, but Fan is only safe within the confines of B-Mor.

Aside from the asides about the social structure, Fan's story is told in a linear fashion, comprised of what the narrator has been told about Fan.



## Quotes

For you have done your job, you have labored and nurtured, you have helped secure the foundations of B-Mor in this fraught civilization without heed to your own dreams, ever modest, unfinished.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** The idea that something is unfinished speaks to how the people of B-Mor live only to their preconceived expectations placed upon them. Likewise, it foreshadows the ambiguity of Fan's ending.

Moment to moment we act freely, we make decisions and for opinions and there is very little to throttle us.

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** The quote represents the perceived idea of control over our destiny.

It's too easy to say it was some temporary insanity, or some raging, dark grief over Reg, especially when she never once exhibited such capacities.

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** It speaks to rationalizing the choice Fan makes and how the B-Mor residents can make sense of her leaving.

Charters are equally sheltered, but whether they wish to recognize it or not, the native fuel of their society is risk, and when they fall, they fall from heights that very few can survive.

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 40)

**Importance:** The narrator tries to justify why it's better in B-Mor rather than in the Charters.

It's not clear what our people think of the existence of God, or the afterlife, or why we are here.

-- Narrator (Chapter 13 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** The people of B-Mor have all of their needs met and are content enough in their lives that they lack a need for a higher power or an afterlife.

It's our common character on display, which is why we invest so much of ourselves – often totally beyond reason – in particular figures and performers, both fictive and of flesh.

-- Narrator (Chapter 15 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** The narrator justifies the response to Fan's sudden celebrity. They keep



her as their own so that they can feel part of her glory since it's the closest they will ever come.

He was stuck in a rut of wrong thinking, or no thinking, whatever you wish to call it, and was never going to break it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 15 paragraph 15)

**Importance:** The power of thought can lead to displeasure and/or discontent.

Whenever we tell the story of Fan, details are apt to change.

-- Narrator (Chapter 17 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The details change because Fan's story needs to fit the narrative for the people of B-Mor. The adaptations connect to their needs. The truth ultimately doesn't matter; it's about how the story best fits their needs.

For at some point each of us will be asked to embody what we feel and know.

-- Narrator (Chapter 18 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** The narrator speaks to how the residents accept their fate.

Behold a fire from the opposite shore.

-- Narrator (Chapter 19 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** The saying was used by the original people who inhabited B-Mor and was meant to be taken quite literally. Now it represents anything impending and often takes a foreboding tone.

She moves on, she pushes forward, this is her guileless calling and we have to remind ourselves that it's perhaps more laudable simple to keep heading out into the world than always tilting to leave one's mark on it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 20 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** The only way the narrator can understand Fan is by framing it as something she must do instead of something that she wants to do.

For none of us can resist such hopeful flashes, which are, in the end, what lights our way through the ever-dimming world.

-- Narrator (Chapter 23 paragraph 68)

**Importance:** The people of B-Mor are at the mercy of the powers that be and Fan represents the hope that sustains them through a view that can seem powerless.