

Oryx and Crake Study Guide

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood

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Plot Summary

Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* takes place in a future world where scientific achievements and particularly genetic experimentation are the focus of society. Mankind's obsession with science ultimately allows the ethically blind idealist Crake to destroy human society.

The protagonist, Jimmy, is the only son of two genetic scientists. His mother quits working when he is young, due to an untreated nervous breakdown. Jimmy's father rises to prominence as a researcher but fails as a father. His father does not understand that young children do not understand ironic humor, so he has a hard time communicating with Jimmy. Both of Jimmy's parents usually forget his birthday.

Jimmy's mother abandons the family and escapes into the pleeblands (dirty, lawless cities) when Jimmy is a teenager. He finds it hard to make friends and only really talks to his classmates when he is creating comedic skits to entertain them. Midway through high school, Jimmy befriends Crake, a transfer student. Jimmy and Crake share similar online and gaming interests, and they bond over their obsession with a child porn star who will later be known as Oryx.

Although Jimmy is intelligent in using words, he graduates from HelthWyzer High as an average student. He gets accepted at a third-rate college, the Martha Graham Academy, where he studies problematics. After graduation, Jimmy takes a job as a librarian but gets fired because he cannot bear to throw out books. His next job involves writing ads for self-help products. Even though Jimmy doesn't have any interest in his work, he has a knack for what he does and soon starts climbing the corporate ladder.

Jimmy finds it easy to relate to women sexually but hard to have intimate emotional connections. By his mid-twenties, he has given up on romance and settled for a collection of married sex partners. However, his interest in women fades when Jimmy falls into a depression after learning that his mother has been executed for treason.

Crake re-enters Jimmy's life while Jimmy is feeling depressed. Crake, a brilliant scientist, now works for Paradise, a project in the RejoovenEsence compound. Crake hires Jimmy to work on an ad campaign for BlyssPlus, a Viagra-type drug that will clandestinely sterilize its users. Trusting his old friend, Jimmy doesn't stop to ponder the ethics of the product. While working with Crake at the RejoovenEsence compound, Jimmy meets Oryx and finds that he is as attracted to her as ever. Oryx, who has been subjected to sexual abuse from her early days as a child porn star to her later experiences as a prostitute, works for RejoovenEsence as well. She teaches simple botany and zoology to the children of Crake, a genetically altered humanoid species that lives in the bio-bubble at Paradise. Although Oryx is officially Crake's girlfriend, Jimmy and Oryx start an affair.

Crake places Paradise under Jimmy's charge in the event that something should happen to Crake. One night Oryx and Crake disappear, and then Jimmy learns from



news reports that a viral plague has broken out worldwide. The virus was transmitted via BlyssPlus. Later that evening, Crake stages his own death. He uses Jimmy's love for Oryx and slits her throat so that Jimmy will shoot him.

After several weeks of remaining locked in Paradise, watching humanity die out on the TV news, Jimmy decides that he must lead the Crakers to a green area where they will have enough food to survive. He tells them that his name is Snowman. Once out of the compound and settled in an arboretum near the sea, Snowman continues to protectively monitor the Crakers from a distance. Meanwhile he suffers from starvation, bug bites, the threat of wild animal attacks and the idea that he is losing his mind.

Finally, Snowman decides that he must return to Paradise to get more food and supplies. While at the RejoovenEsence compound, he sees corpses and the remnants of ordinary human life. He injures his foot while running away from pigeons that threaten to attack him. Snowman makes his way to Paradise via a rampart that runs the length of the compound.

After Snowman replenishes his supplies, he heads back to the arboretum. The Crakers tell him that they have been visited by three people like him. Snowman follows his fellow survivors' tracks to the beach and sees them sitting before a campfire. He is about to approach the trio as the novel ends.



Section 1 (pages 1-12)

Section 1 (pages 1-12) Summary

Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* takes place in a future world where scientific achievements and particularly genetic experimentation are the focus of society. Mankind's obsession with science ultimately allows the ethically blind idealist Crake to destroy human society.

Snowman wakes up before dawn, although it is impossible to say exactly what time it is because his watch is broken. Anyway, there is no official time anymore. He scratches his bug bites. Snowman has been sleeping in a tree. After climbing down, he wraps himself in a dirty bed sheet and puts on a Red Sox replica baseball cap. He urinates in the bushes.

Near the tree is a hidden cache of small items, including mangoes. Snowman takes out a pair of sunglasses with a missing lens. He recalls a line from a book but cannot remember what book it is.

Snowball sees a group of naked children on the beach. They have been swimming without fear of the lagoon. They collect flotsam and inspect it. The children approach Snowman, calling him by name in singsong tones. They ask him to identify the found objects. Snowman tells them that the objects, including a computer mouse, a pop bottle and a fast-food container, are harmless.

Snowman reflects that the children say "Snowman" without knowing what a snowman is. Crake ruled that every name must not have a physical equivalent. Snowman thinks that "Abominable Snowman" is a fitting name for himself.

The children ask Snowman what is growing out of his face. He tells them that his stubble is feathers. They ask for feathers of their own. He pretends to ask Crake for feathers on their behalf, using his watch as though it were a microphone. Then he tells them to go away.

Section 1 (pages 1-12) Analysis

In the first section of the book, Margaret Atwood sets up a futuristic, post-apocalypse world where the children don't know what facial hair is and where everyday objects like a computer mouse are obsolete. She also introduces the motif of pseudonyms. Throughout the novel, the names that people choose to call themselves will provide insight into the characters' thoughts and emotions. Jimmy has given himself the name "Snowman" according to Crake's rule, which states that no one in the society of Crakers can have the name of someone or something else that currently exists. Global warming has made snow obsolete, so the children have no notion of what a snowman is. Snowman is himself a remnant of another time in history, so it is fitting that he has an



anachronistic name that holds no meaning in the present. Also appropriate is the modifier "Abominable," since Snowman is presumably the only member of the human species who has survived catastrophe.



Section 2 (pages 13-33)

Section 2 (pages 13-33) Summary

Once upon a time, Snowman was called Jimmy. His earliest memory is of a bonfire. After seeing the bonfire, he has to walk through disinfectant, while wearing his rubber boots with ducks painted on them. Jimmy worries that the disinfectant will harm the ducks.

The fire burns a huge pile of cows, sheep and pigs. It reminds Jimmy of when he cut his own hair and set fire to the strands, causing an argument between his parents. He thinks that the fire is pretty, but he wishes that he could rescue the animals. Jimmy hears his father say that the bug that killed the animals was transmitted to them intentionally.

Jimmy's father works as a genographer for OrganInc Farms and is a key architect of the pigoon project. The pigoons have been designed to grow human-tissue organs that are resistant to microbes and viruses. Suspiciously, OrganInc's cafeteria frequently serves pork products. Jimmy sometimes eats there with his father and Ramona, a lab technician. Afterwards Jimmy gets to visit the pigoons, whom he considers his friends.

Jimmy lives in a grand company-supplied home in an OrganInc compound. His family never visits the cities, which are known as "the pleeblands." The cities are not safe.

Jimmy knows that his mother met his father when she still worked for OrganInc as a microbiologist. By the time Jimmy is in first grade, she has quit working and is emotionally unstable.

Section 2 (pages 13-33) Analysis

Every detail that Atwood presents about Jimmy's parents foreshadows how his parents' actions will negatively affect Jimmy's life. The pigoons his father helps create will become a personal threat to Jimmy later in the novel, and the genetic splicing pioneered in the pigoon project will lead to a worldwide calamity that will cause Jimmy much physical and emotional suffering. Ramona, the lab assistant, and Jimmy's father already seem suspiciously intimate, and Jimmy's mother exhibits the emotional instability that will soon lead her to abandon her son.



Section 3 (pages 35-46)

Section 3 (pages 35-46) Summary

Snowman dislikes the glare and humidity of noon, so at around 11 o'clock he retreats into the forest. He remembers that he had initially made himself a lean-to in which to sleep and avoid the sun, but he has switched to the tree because of the rakunks, pigeons and wolvogs that prowl at night.

Snowman worries that he is forgetting things. He thinks that carving a chessboard and playing chess may help his mind. He considers keeping a journal, but he knows that no future human beings will be able to read.

In the afternoon a storm comes, and Snowman goes to a pile of rubber tires for shelter. He drinks water out of beer bottles and wishes for actual beer. He then regrets torturing himself with impossible thoughts.

Section 3 (pages 35-46) Analysis

Section 3 illustrates Atwood's capacity for creating suspense. In describing Snowman's environment, she lets slip just a few intriguing details at one time. The reader does not have any idea what has happened to mankind, but it is becoming clear that Snowman is the only survivor who can read. Section 3 draws out questions from the reader, such as: What are rakunks and wolvogs? Why are these animals scary? At first, Snowman's panic about getting caught out in the sun or the rain may seem melodramatic, until the reader realizes that the climate Snowman experiences is harsher than the one we know. This section serves to simultaneously set the scene for the novel's action and engage the reader in making theories about how the plot will unfold.



Section 4 (pages 47-92)

Section 4 (pages 47-92) Summary

Snowman sees a rakunk and remembers having one for a pet when he was ten. It was a late birthday gift, because Jimmy's parents never remembered his birthday until he reminded them. An OrganInc scientist, working at the lab in his free time, created the rakunk, a genetically modified skunk that is calm and clean. Jimmy names his rakunk "Killer," even though it is a sweet animal.

Soon after Jimmy's birthday, his father transfers to a higher-level job at NooSkinz, a subsidiary of HelthWyzer. The family moves to the HelthWyzer compound, where security is tighter than it was at OrganInc. Sharon, Jimmy's mother, resents the presence of armed guards.

Jimmy attends HelthWyzer Public School, where he establishes himself as the class clown. Through a hidden microphone, Jimmy hears a conversation between his parents. Sharon says his father's work is immoral and that the company preys on desperate rich people with its overpriced, overhyped medical discoveries.

As an adolescent, Jimmy is considered medium-cool. His invented insult, *corknut*, becomes a fad at school. At lunch he makes his hands into puppets called Evil Dad and Righteous Mom and performs biting humor skits for his schoolmates. When his parents fight in the evenings, Jimmy is comforted by his only real friend, Killer.

One day Jimmy comes home to find that his mother has left. In a note to Jimmy, she says that she has taken Killer with her to liberate the pet. Sharon has destroyed Jimmy's father's computer with a hammer and other tools. She has also wrecked her own computer, presumably to erase correspondence with people outside the compound.

CorpSeCorps, the compound's armed guards, take Jimmy's father to interrogate him. They ask Jimmy question, such as whether his mother has a boyfriend and did she ever visit the pleeblands. Jimmy is forced to go to counseling, which proves to be a waste of time.

After some time passes, Ramona moves in, and Jimmy's father makes no attempt to hide their sexual relationship from Jimmy. Later, Snowman wonders whether his father started his affair with Ramona before Sharon left. Ramona tries to be a friend to Jimmy. She cooks Jimmy dinner and watches DVD movies with him when his father is not at home.

Jimmy starts getting postcards from his mother, signed *Aunt Monica*, from places like England and Argentina. The cards only say, "Hope you're well."

Crake appears a few months before Sharon disappears. Sharon finds him likable, saying that he is more adult and honorable than the other kids Jimmy knows. Jimmy,



who knows Crake better than his mother does, has his doubts about Crake's "honorableness." After Jimmy's mother disappears, Crake says that she must have needed change. He encourages Jimmy to read the Stoics. At this point, Crake is still called Glenn.

Glenn enters HelthWyzer High in the middle of the school year, and the teacher chooses Jimmy to give him a tour of the school. Although Glenn is practically silent, Jimmy invites him to hang out at the mall later that afternoon. The boys see their Hoodroom and Ultratexts teacher, "Melons" Riley, heading toward an adults-only nightclub with a date. Imitating their Chemlab teacher, Crake jokes about where the man's hand might be on her body. Although he never displays this humorous side in school, Crake soon earns the awe of his teachers and fellow students.

Crake becomes Jimmy's lab partner in Nanotech Biochem class, and Jimmy's grades improve. Frequently after school the two boys play computer games in Crake's bedroom. The games include Barbarian Stomp, chess and Blood and Roses. For one game, Extinctathon, they choose nicknames: Jimmy becomes Thickney, for a "defunct Australian double-jointed bird that used to hang around in cemeteries," and Glenn becomes Crake, for an extinct red-necked Australian bird that was never very numerous.

In addition to online games, Jimmy and Crake surf the Net, viewing such things as surgeries, nude newscasts and executions. Crake uses the online password of his mother's boyfriend, who is called "Uncle Pete," to get the boys into porn sites. While Jimmy and Crake watch executions and porn, they smoke joints stolen from Uncle Pete's stash.

Crake and Jimmy continue to watch porn online. One day they visit a site called HotTotts, which specializes in movies of "real sex tourists." On this site, they first encounter Oryx. She is licking whipped cream off a grown man's body. She appears to be about eight years old, and she stares at the cameraman with contempt. Later, when Jimmy and Oryx are acquainted, he shows her the photo and asks her to explain what she was feeling at the moment the image was taken. She says simply that she if she ever got the chance, it would "not be her" down on her knees.

Section 4 (pages 47-92) Analysis

The pseudonym motif continues in this section. Nicknames that Jimmy and Glenn adopt to play Extinctathon foreshadow the boys' future experiences. Both nicknames are extinct animals, as required by the game, and the human species will become extinct by the end of the novel. Glenn takes the name Crake, after a bird that was never very numerous. This detail foreshadows the small, elite group of scientists that Crake will join during his college years. The bird is named for its "crake-crake" call that is often heard even when the bird cannot be seen. This description aptly fits Crake's character in the novel, because even though he is no longer with Jimmy, Crake's words are constantly present in Snowman's mind. Jimmy's first nickname, Thickney, is eerily prescient,

because it identifies a bird that lived in cemeteries. After plague kills the rest of humanity, Snowman will be forced to walk among the corpses of his fellow men.



Section 5 (pages 93-110)

Section 5 (pages 93-110) Summary

Snowman sees a huge rabbit that is the result of breeding in the wild between regular rabbits and genetically modified ones that have escaped from their cages. Snowman wishes that he could catch the rabbit for food, but then he remembers that he established a law that rabbits were sacred to Oryx and therefore could not be eaten. Snowman, being the only person alive who knew Crake, has the authority to make laws and create myths.

Some of the children approach Snowman and ask him questions. He tells them that Crake says they need to stop asking so many questions, or they will be toast. The children ask him what toast is, and he is reminded that he cannot use arcane metaphors with them.

The sky darkens, and the men and women appear. The women have every imaginable skin color. Their bodies are smooth and free of fat and body hair. Snowman feels no lust for the flawless females, because their bodies seem unnaturally perfect. The people have been genetically modified so that they have glowing green eyes and smell like citrus fruit, which is supposed to ward off mosquitoes.

The people bring Snowman a grilled fish wrapped in leaves. The men and women all have the names of historical figures, like Abraham Lincoln and Empress Josephine. Crake established this naming system for his own amusement. The men and women do not eat flesh themselves, but they hunt one fish per week and cook it as Snowman has requested.

After Snowman has devoured his fish, the people ask for a story. Snowman tells them that in the beginning there was chaos. The people in the chaos were killing the Children of Oryx and eating them. Oryx asked Crake to get rid of the chaos in order to protect her people, and Crake poured the chaos away. This, Snowman explains, is how Crake did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness. By getting rid of chaos, he cleared room for the Children of Crake and the Children of Oryx.

As Snowman tells his story, he feels bitterness because he has turned Crake into a god for the people. He wishes that he could be a god in the myths. After all, Snowman is the one who moved the people to safety. His stories have made him merely the prophet of Oryx and Crake.

One of the women asks Snowman to tell the story of Crake's birth. He does not want to have to create the details of young Crake's life, so he says that Crake came out of the sky like thunder and lightning.

From a distance, Snowman hears a surprising bellowing sound. Unable to sleep, he climbs down from his tree perch and finds a bit of Scotch in his cache. Back in the tree,



Snowman drinks and howls at the stars. A pack of wolvogs approaches the tree. They look like the domesticated dogs of recent history, but they are fierce and quick to attack. For a while, real dogs sought Snowman's companionship and protection, but he turned them away because he couldn't feed them. Now he thinks that maybe he should have used the dogs as food. Snowman scares off the wolvogs by throwing the empty Scotch bottle at them. Snowman tries to conjure Oryx, but tonight she doesn't appear to him. He masturbates alone.

Section 5 (pages 93-110) Analysis

Section 5 provides characterization for Snowman, serving to define him as a man of words. He appreciates language and once enjoyed learning words from old books. Snowman regrets that many words and sayings have become obsolete because they are meaningless to the Crakers, who can only understand literal language. Snowman, who earned his living as a storyteller, manages to weave elaborate myths for the Crakers out of simple language in order to pacify their curiosity and guide their actions.



Section 6 (pages 111-144)

Section 6 (pages 111-144) Summary

Snowman wakes up in deep darkness. Now Oryx comes to him. He tells her that his feelings for her aren't just sexual. He truly loves her. In a flashback, Jimmy asks Oryx about her childhood. She refuses to say much, but he deduces that she lived in a hut in a village in a place like Vietnam or Cambodia. She cannot remember the language she spoke as a child, because she was sold to a child-dealer who visited the village every once in a while. The village people referred to the selling of children as apprenticeship, which implied that the children would be trained to work in jobs outside the village. After leaving the village, the children would be trained to sell flowers to tourists on the city streets. With the earnings from selling one child, a parent could give the remaining siblings a better chance in life.

Oryx does not like to talk about her past. She says that she doesn't care about what happened to her long ago, so why should Jimmy care? Hearing about the child-dealer makes Jimmy angry. He would like to kill the man who purchased Oryx and took her from her home.

Crake and Jimmy discuss poverty. Crake points out that *homo sapiens* does not reduce their population when resources dwindle. In fact, just the opposite occurs: starvation seems to act as an aphrodisiac.

Oryx's mother sells Oryx's brother along with her, thinking that the two children can look out for each other. The dealer takes the boy grudgingly, because Oryx's brother has a black tooth, and boys are generally harder to manage.

After the children and the child-dealer leave the village, the child-dealer demands to be called Uncle En. He tells the children to pretend that he is their uncle. Uncle En has underlings who carry guns. The men take the children for a long journey on a muddy road, across a river and through a forest. In the forest, Oryx is comforted by familiar birdcalls that remind her of her village. Then the men take the children to a car that has been left in a remote village. Soldiers stop the car at a gate, and Uncle En says that these are his orphaned nieces and nephews. The soldiers do not believe the child-dealer but let him pass anyway.

In the chaotic city, the children are overwhelmed. Uncle En imprisons them in a small room on the top floor of a three-story building. They are told that even when Uncle En seems to have left the city, he monitors their actions via his gold wristwatch. If a child tries to run away or keep any of the money for himself, the watch will notify Uncle En, and his men will punish the child with beating or burning.

The more experienced children teach Oryx and her brother how to sell roses to the tourists outside expensive hotels and shops. Their work is illegal, because selling on the



street requires a special permit. Uncle En renames Oryx SuSu. Her small frame and charming smile make her a top seller. Oryx's brother is a poor seller, and he runs away out of fear that Uncle En will trade him to a pimp.

One day, on orders from Uncle En, Oryx lets a strange man take her up to his hotel room. The man gets completely undressed and approaches Oryx, but just then Uncle En barges into the room. Uncle En acts angry, and the strange man pays him off with a lot of money. This scheme becomes Oryx's game. She enjoys knowing that the strange men think she is helpless when she is not, and she enjoys the praises she receives from Uncle En.

One day Uncle En is gone. A tall man with a pockmarked face comes to the children's room and tells them that he is their new boss. The man sells Oryx to a man who makes movies. The movies are financed by the men who star in them, and girls like Oryx have to do whatever the male stars say to do.

The cameraman, a white man named Jack, says that he comes from a country that has better movies and fewer germs. He tells the girls that he almost died from a disease caused by drinking this country's water. Jack does "movie things" to Oryx when the cameras are off, so she becomes familiar with his penis. In return, he teaches Oryx to how to speak and read English. Jack nicknames the building where the movies are filmed "Pixieland," and he calls his young stars pixies.

Section 6 (pages 111-144) Analysis

This section introduces the back-story for Oryx's character. Oryx serves as a pawn for a string of varied men who exert power over her from the moment she gets taken from her childhood home. Her life provides a painful example of the desperate existence led by impoverished people when there are too many humans and too few natural resources to support them. Forced into slavery at an early age, Oryx lacks the maturity to know that her situation is a moral outrage. Since she never has enough control over her own life to gain perspective on the events that happen to her, she will bounce from one abusive situation to the next without knowing that her experiences are not just. Oryx's easy willingness to participate in prostitution scams and pedophilic relationships at a young age mirror her later compliance with Crake's bioengineering scheme.



Section 7 (pages 145-169)

Section 7 (pages 145-169) Summary

Snowman wakes up feeling the effects of a hangover. He opens a can of Sveltana No-Meat Cocktail Sausages. He knows that he is starving to death. He thinks that he should go back to the RejoovenEsense Compound, because there is probably still a lot of canned foods and booze there. Crake's bubble-dome should also contain guns. He sets off to the Children of Crake's camp to tell them he is going. He doesn't want them to assume he is missing and wander off looking for him. The Crakers are his responsibility.

As Snowman approaches the Crakers, he sees the men performing their morning urination ritual. The scent of their urine keeps wolvogs, rakunks, bobkittens and pigeons away. The men urinate in a ring around the camp to protect its inhabitants.

Snowman sees that a boy has been injured, and the women are purring to him. Crake installed the purring feature after realizing that cats purr at the same frequency as the ultrasound used on bone fractures and skin lesions. The people tell Snowman that one of the Children of Oryx, a bobkitten, has bitten the boy. They plan to pray to Oryx and ask her to tell the animals not to bite them anymore.

One of the women is breast-feeding her one-year-old baby. Snowman is surprised, as usual, by how fast the children grow under Crake's design. The baby looks like a four-year-old. Another one of Crake's innovations is the caecotroph, a bit of semi-digested herbage that gets expelled through the anus and re-swallowed several times a week. The Crakers never have to cook their food.

Snowman tells the people that he will make a journey to try to talk to Crake. He tells them he will be back in two or three days. As he starts to leave the Crakers' settlement, Snowman finds that he is crying.

Snowman judges by the sun that it is 9 a.m. when he turns inland. He hears a bobkitten sound its pre-fight warning call to another bobkitten. Snowman remembers that bobkittens were first introduced to control the green rabbit population. They have proven to be more dangerous than originally thought.

Snowman also hears the sounds of humans mating and knows that he must be hearing the activities of four men and one woman who is in heat. As Crake designed them, a woman gets fertile once every three years, a condition that is obvious to the men because her buttocks and abdomen turn bright blue. It is only the blue skin that stimulates the males, so the Crakers don't feel lust. This system has eliminated unrequited love and sexual competition from the human experience.

In a flashback, Snowman and Crake, in their early twenties, discuss the possibility of a species that either mates for life or has total guilt-free promiscuity. Jimmy questions



courtship that must always succeed, wondering what would happen to art. Jimmy feels he should defend art since he attends the Martha Graham Academy. Crake dismisses art as something people do to amplify themselves to seem more attractive, leaving Jimmy feeling that he has been insulted.

Section 7 (pages 145-169) Analysis

In this portion of the novel, Atwood describes the Children of Crake's genetic modifications, which employ a sense of irony. By splicing human DNA with the genetic codes of other animals, Crake has added innovations that result in a species that is ironically less, not more, complex than man. The Crakers' colorful enhancements, such as their ability to heal themselves with purring and their simian mating habits, lead to peaceful behavior that utterly bores Snowman.



Section 8 (pages 171-218)

Section 8 (pages 171-218) Summary

Due to environmental changes, HelthWyzer High holds its graduation on a warm day in February, before the start of the rainy season. A HelthWyzer product, SoYummie Ice Cream, is served at the event. Crake graduates at the top of the class, and the school that makes the highest bid for him is the Watson-Crick Institute. That school is like what Harvard was, before Harvard drowned in a flood. Jimmy is an average student who tests well on words but poorly in math, even though Crake has tutored Jimmy in his math courses. Jimmy suspects that the only reason he got accepted by the Martha Graham Academy, a low-profile school, is because his father knows the academy's head from their summer camp days.

Ramona, who has married Jimmy's father by now, attends the graduation. Crake's "Uncle Pete" is there also, but Crake's mother is now dead. Crake has taken his mother's recent death - by bioform infection - in stride.

For the vacation following graduation, Crake and Jimmy join Uncle Pete at the Moosonee HelthWyzer Gated Vacation Community. The boys keep track of news reports of public resistance to HelthWyzer's new invention, the Happicuppa coffee bean that has been designed so that all the beans mature simultaneously. Protests and riots have broken out on farms and in Happicuppa cafes. Anti-Happicuppa fanatics bomb the Lincoln Memorial, killing five Japanese tourists. During one news report, Jimmy and Crake see Jimmy's mother at a protest at the Happicuppa headquarters in Maryland. After spotting Jimmy's mother, Crake confides in Jimmy that his father didn't just die; he jumped off an overpass.

At Martha Graham, Jimmy finds himself in a depressingly run down school facility surrounded by a tacky section of the pleeblands. The focus of the school is the performing arts. Most art forms taught there are outmoded. Jimmy majors in Problematics, nicknamed Spin and Grin by the students.

Jimmy's first roommate is a vegan named Bernice who burns his fake leather sandals to protest animal abuse. To protest his sexual activities with female students, she burns Jimmy's jockey shorts. Jimmy soon moves into a new single room. He realizes that he attracts semi-artistic, caring, idealistic women. He uses his sad life tale to prey on their sympathies and get them into bed. Eventually each woman tires of his routine and dumps him, leaving Jimmy feeling sad.

In the present, Jimmy thinks about Oryx. Unlike the women he dated in college, Oryx never felt sympathy for him because of his mother's disappearance. He thinks that may have been why she hooked him harder than the others.



Jimmy and Crake keep in touch via email and online chess games. In correspondence with Crake, Jimmy brags a bit about his sexual conquests. He wonders whether Crake avoids relations with women or whether he is just more discreet. Crake tells Jimmy that Watson-Crick is nicknamed Asperger's U. because so many of its students are geniuses who are socially inept. Jimmy is writing a term paper. He enjoys finding and reading arcane books. His paper, an analysis of twentieth-century self-help books, provides him with much humor material.

After a year apart, Jimmy visits Crake at Watson-Crick over Thanksgiving vacation. On the train ride to Watson-Crick, Jimmy looks out the window at the pleeblands and realizes that he wouldn't know how to operate within that environment. The pleeblands seem mysterious and exciting to him.

At Watson-Crick, CorpSeCorps men who guard the school stop Jimmy as he enters. They ask him questions about his mother. He tells them he is there to see Crake, a student in the transgenics department.

Crake introduces Jimmy to his classmates as "the neurotypical." He takes Jimmy on a tour of the facility and shows off the students' inventions, including a rock that provides water when struck and wall paint that changes color to match its owner's mood. Jimmy is worried when he sees a chicken that grows dozens of edible parts, which will be sold in fast-food restaurants as ChickieNobs. Wolvogs, dogs that have been bred to be super-vicious, also concern Jimmy.

On the fourth day of Jimmy's visit, Jimmy asks Crake whether he has a girlfriend. Crake explains that pair-bonding is discouraged at Watson-Crick and says that Student Services arranges visits with prostitutes for the students. Student Services can get you any kind of person you request, Crake says.

Jimmy finds the Watson-Crick students odd, so he happily spends his visit playing games and watching TV with Crake in Crake's luxurious suite. One night Crake tells Jimmy that he believes HelthWyzer creates diseases in order to sell more medicine. Crake tells Jimmy that this is what his father knew, and for that knowledge he was pushed off a bridge. He explains that after his father's death he found evidence of this theory on his father's computer. Crake says that he suspects his mother or Uncle Pete played a role in his father's death, to keep the evidence hidden. He speculates that Jimmy's mother, like his father, knew too much information.

Jimmy and Crake play Extinctathon. Crake has continued playing the game since the boys were in high school and is now a grandmaster. He uses a picture of eight-year-old Oryx wearing a flower garland as his gateway to the online game. In the game, Crake enters a hidden playroom called MaddAddam and sees bulletins about animals that have been genetically hacked to go haywire. Crake explains that the MaddAddam group consists of people who want to shut down the whole system. Jimmy warns him against getting more deeply involved with the subversive group. During his visit, Jimmy is awakened by Crake's nocturnal screams. He asks Crake about his nightmares, but Crake claims that he never dreams.



Section 8 (pages 171-218) Analysis

In this section, Atwood introduces one of the novel's important motifs, Crake's dreams. Later in the novel, when Jimmy must expose the Crakers to corpses affected by plague, he will tell them that they are just walking through one of Crake's dreams. Crake's horrifying dreams, and especially the fact that he doesn't recall having them, introduce the question: Is Crake sane? He speaks with certainty of HelthWyzer's strategy to make people sick in order to sell them cure but offers no proof that this notion stems from anything more than paranoia. Crake's claims that his father was murdered, perhaps by his mother or by Uncle Pete, are also unfounded. Fittingly, Crake, who suffered from nightmares, manages to turn the whole world into a nightmare for his fellow humans.



Section 9 (pages 219-238)

Section 9 (pages 219-238) Summary

Snowman exits what used to be a park and enters a semi-residential area. He sees abandoned vehicles and empty stores and houses, which have been overtaken by vines and weeds. He imagines that he isn't the only human left. He recalls Crake saying, during his visit to Watson-Crick, that it would take the destruction of just one generation to eradicate civilization permanently. Snowman sees vultures flying overhead. He makes his way to the RejoovenEsense compound. At the entrance he sees a headless guard. The man's spraygun has been stolen.

At the RejoovenEsense compound, buildings such as houses, restaurants and shopping malls still stand. In the distance, Snowman sees his destination, Crake's dome, which towers above the trees in the compound's central park. Snowman needs to find food and escape the sunlight, so he enters a house.

Inside the home, he finds a dead man wearing pajamas on the bathroom floor. In the bed, he sees the remains of a woman lying in bed, with her hair intact as though it were a wig. He looks at himself in the mirror and is shocked by how old and haggard he appears. He takes a fresh sheet from the linen closet to replace the soiled one he has been wearing. A child's room down the hall is deserted.

In the kitchen, Snowman eats some stale food and tosses a flashlight and some knives into a garbage bag. He has a strange sense that he has broken into his own childhood home from twenty-five years ago. He feels that he is the missing child.

Snowman sees a pack of pigeons rooting through a garbage can outside the house. He brandishes a stick toward them, but it fails to scare the pigeons away. The sky darkens with an impending twister, and the pigeons leave to seek shelter. Snowman enters a security building, where he sees several guards but no guns. The lights go out, and he fears that rats will crawl up his legs in the dark.

Section 9 (pages 219-238) Analysis

In this section, the novelist continues to build suspense. Snowman's journey is stalled by the fierce weather, so it will take a long time for him to reach his destination. In the strangers' home, Snowman finds artifacts that provide clues for the reader about the mystery that is at the heart of *Oryx and Crake's* plot. The resident of the home wrote himself a note to get the lawn mowed, and then he wrote a reminder to go to the clinic. After that, he was unable to write anymore. The note about the clinic hints that an illness caused the catastrophe that wiped out mankind. The sight of the dead woman lying in bed confirms that people were not killed by bombs or by a natural disaster.



Section 10 (pages 239-261)

Section 10 (pages 239-261) Summary

After graduation, Jimmy attains a summer job at the Martha Graham library but gets fired because he cannot bear to throw out books. Then he shacks up with his girlfriend, a conceptual artist from the Texas pleeblands named Amanda Payne. She has two male roommates who are also artists. The roommates shun Jimmy after he brings home a bucket of ChickieNobs for dinner one night. Amanda's roommates believe that human society is a monster that leaves behind corpses and rubble. Amanda works on a project called Vulture Sculptures, which involves arranging dead-animal parts into four-letter words and photographing vultures tearing them apart.

Jimmy takes a job with AnooYoo, a minor compound that specializes in self-improvement products. Amanda dismisses the company as a collection of cesspool denizens who prey on people's phobias.

Jimmy moves into an apartment at the AnooYoo compound. He writes marketing materials for cosmetic creams, workout equipment and enhancing drugs. He feels estranged from his coworkers, from single women and from his family. Although unfulfilled by his work, Jimmy begins climbing the corporate ladder. He involves himself in a string of sexual relationships with unavailable women.

Jimmy finds that he is losing his figure as well as his hair. Via email, he keeps in touch with Crake, who heads a cutting edge research project at the powerful RejoovenEsense compound.

On the news, Jimmy thinks he sees Oryx in a news report. A prosperous San Francisco pharmacist has been charged with keeping her locked in his garage, but she testifies that she was locked in so that nobody bad could get to her. Instead of feeling victimized, she says that her captor liberated her from making movies. The pharmacist is ordered to pay for her schooling. The girl, who seems to be an older version of the eight-year-old whose photograph Jimmy still keeps, says that she wants to study child psychology.

The CorpSeCorps continue to question Jimmy about his mother several time a year. He is hooked up to a lie detector during the interrogations. In his fifth year at AnooYoo, CorpseCorps agents visit him and show him a video of his mother's execution for treason. In the video, she looks at the camera and urges Jimmy to remember Killer and to not let her down.

In the following weeks, Jimmy is not feeling like himself. He has lost interest in sex and his many illicit lovers. Minor irritations, such as a lost sock, feel like major setbacks. He begins having nightmares about young slender women who wear floral garlands and ribbons.



Section 10 (pages 239-261) Analysis

In this section, Atwood provides the clearest depiction yet of any of Jimmy's lovers. Amanda Payne becomes a key character not because Jimmy feels particularly close to her, but because circumstances force him to move in with her. He seems unable to have any meaningful connection to women, perhaps because of the emotional damage his mother did when she abandoned him. As part of his seduction act, Jimmy gains a lover's sympathy by dramatically recounting how his mother left. It appears to the woman that he is bearing his soul to her when really he just providing an excuse for his inability to make lasting attachments.

Jimmy's relationship is hampered by financial worries, his incompatibility with her roommates and her judgment of AnooYoo. The relationship does not reach its breaking point, however, until Amanda utters the word "Love." Clearly, this is too intimate for Jimmy.

The only woman Jimmy seems to feel love for is Oryx, a woman he has only glimpsed on the Net and on the news. Curiously, in both situations, Oryx was being abused. Perhaps Jimmy is drawn to Oryx because of her pain, which reminds him of his own emotional damage.



Section 11 (pages 263-280)

Section 11 (pages 263-280) Summary

Snowman wakes up from a disconcerting dream in which he was five years old and about to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He finds himself in the RejoovenEsence gatehouse. He sees a land crab in the corner of the room and throws a bottle at it. Snowman plans to head toward the central mall in search of food.

Snowman starts walking outside, but two groups of approaching pigeons force him to retreat into the gatehouse. He bolsters the door, which has a broken lock, with a large desk and wonders how long it will take his pursuers to get inside.

Snowman opens an interior door and finds a steep flight of stairs. Knowing that pigeons have legs too short for the stairs, he scrambles up them. Behind him, he hears the crash of the desk falling as the pigeons breach the exterior door. Snowman emerges into the watchtower. He knows that the pigeons have him trapped.

In the watchtower, Snowman finds the deserted guards' quarters, including a sleeping room and a bathroom. He drinks water from the back of the toilet. In the kitchenette he finds matches and a wet cigarette, which he smokes. He also finds a bonanza of nonperishable food. Snowman finds a radio. He hears a man speaking in Russian, and, amazingly, with the CB function, a man's voice sending out a message in English. Snowman shouts, "I'm here!" Then, he hears only silence.

Snowman tends to a cut on his foot from stepping on his broken bourbon bottle on the floor below. He tries to clean the wound, fearing infection. That night, he dreams of his absent mother. The next day, Snowman packs food and supplies for himself, applies sunscreen and removes his sheet, for fear that it will snag on something and slow him down. He is ready to escape the watchtower.

Snowman disassembles the emergency air vent, which leads up like a chimney. He makes his way up the vent and then realizes he has forgotten the radio. Snowman has entered a six-foot-wide rampart that runs all the way around the Compound. He plans to get to Paradise, a dome that can be seen over the trees. He ducks below the rampart's observation slits to avoid being spotted by the pigeons. In the far distance, Snowman can see smoke. He wonders whether the Crakers could have started a fire big enough to create the smoke.

Section 11 (pages 263-280) Analysis

The emergency radio acts as a symbol for Jimmy's central conflict. He has always wanted to connect to other people, but his attempts to have friends and lovers have typically proven inadequate. Being a wit did not earn him friends, and being a sex addict did not win him a romantic partner. Now that he is all alone in the world, the amazing

discovery of other voices talking should be foremost in Snowman's mind. Yet he manages to leave the means of communicating with the other survivors behind.



Section 12 (pages 281-329)

Section 12 (pages 281-329) Summary

Snowman continues his journey across the rampart, suffering in the sun. He thinks that he never wanted to hurt anyone, and he remembers what his life was like following his mother's execution. In a flashback, Jimmy is still avoiding human contact, and he has difficulty waking up most mornings. He has a fight with one of his married lovers, accusing her of wanting his company only for sex. Then Crake shows up at Jimmy's apartment and consoles him. He has learned of Sharon's death via brainfrizz.

Crake invites Jimmy to join him on a bar excursion to the pleeblands. He has pleebland passes, which are only given to important people. Jimmy has never before set foot in the pleeblands. Before they leave, Crake shoots Jimmy with a homemade all-purpose, short-term vaccine to prevent getting ill from the germy city. During their night out, Crake offers Jimmy a job. Too drunk to realize what he is saying, Jimmy accepts the position.

Hung over, Jimmy arrives at work late Monday morning. Suddenly he is surrounded by his superiors, who congratulate him on his new position and ask to be remembered fondly as he starts his terrific new job. Crake also has notified Jimmy's lovers, who send Jimmy good-bye emails.

At the RejoovenEsence compound, Crake and Jimmy eat lunch at a gourmet restaurant, and Crake explains that his unit, called Paradise, is working on "developing immortality." One initiative is BlyssPlus, a prophylactic pill that would provide unlimited sexual desire and energy, lift moods and prolong youth. In addition to these known effects, BlyssPlus would also secretly sterilize its users, for the purpose of global population control. Crake tells Jimmy that he will do the ad campaign.

Crake takes Jimmy to the Paradise dome, which includes a lush park enclosed in a protective bubble sealed with an airlock. Inside the Paradise office complex, Jimmy recognizes the names on researchers' nameplates from the Extinctathon game. They are all grandmasters from the MaddAddam group. Crake has persuaded them to work with him in exchange for destroying records of their old criminal activities. Since Jimmy will need a MaddAddam-style name to fit in, Crake suggests that he be called Thickney.

Through a two-way mirror in Crake's office, Crake shows Jimmy the Crakers, who live in the bubble-dome. He explains that the Paradise Project has engineered people who reproduce, grow rapidly and die when they turn thirty. They have enhanced immune-system functions so they won't easily get sick.

Crake explains that the scientists are not allowed to leave Paradise, and the RejoovenEsence executives are not allowed to enter. The project is to remain top secret until its official unveiling. The two Paradise initiatives, Crake says, work together. The Pill would stop haphazard reproduction, and the Project would replace it with a better



method. Crake says that the people in the bubble are the floor models to show to future clients who will want to engineer their offspring.

A few days later, Jimmy sees Oryx in the bio-bubble. She is naked like the Crakers and wears neon green contacts to resemble them. Crake tells Jimmy that she teaches them about plants and animals. With disappointment, Jimmy notes that Crake speaks of Oryx with love in his voice. Crake explains that he met Oryx through Student Services at Watson-Crick, when he requested someone who looked like the girl in the HotTotts video.

After meeting Oryx, Jimmy silently bemoans the fact that she is off limits, since she is Crake's girlfriend. He begins making trips out to the pleeblands to have sex with prostitutes in useless attempts to satisfy his craving for Oryx. Then, one night, Oryx comes to Jimmy's suite and seduces him. She says that her sexual relationship with Crake is work, and what she does with Jimmy is for fun. Jimmy asks Oryx what it was like to be locked in the garage, and she says she is thankful for the experience, because that is how she got to America. Crake asks Oryx to take on another role, marketing BlyssPlus to her contacts in the pleeblands. Jimmy worries for her whenever she leaves the compound.

Crake tells Jimmy that he is putting Jimmy in charge of the Crakers in the event that anything should happen to Crake. One night, after a visit to Jimmy's suite, Oryx announces that she is going out to get some pizza. Jimmy asks her not to leave, and he asks her to run away from Paradise with him. Oryx tells him that she would never leave Crake, because she believes in his vision to make the world a better place. She makes Jimmy promise to take care of the Crakers in case she and Crake should ever leave Paradise.

Jimmy is worried because it is taking Oryx an extremely long time to return with the pizzas. Then, since Crake is off campus, he gets called in to monitor an epidemic of fatal infection that is sweeping the world. Jimmy cannot reach Oryx or Crake by cell phone, but finally he hears from Oryx. She tells him she is sorry and that she did not know the pills she gave out would make people sick. Their phone call gets disconnected, and Jimmy vows to himself that he will let her back into the compound even if she has been infected. He resets the codes on the door leading into the airlock. Then Jimmy gets a video call from Crake, who appears drunk. He says that he is in a pizza place at the mall, and everything will be okay.

Jimmy straps on a spray gun and sends the three scientists who have come to him in a panic back to their rooms, saying that he will keep them safe but that they need to sleep. Once they get past the corridor, he locks the door so that they cannot get back into the bubble.

Finally, a bloodied Crake returns. He demands to be let in to Paradise, but Jimmy won't open the entrance. Crake argues that he is safe from infection, because he prepared for this. He tells Jimmy that Jimmy is also immune. The vaccine was included in every shot Jimmy gave himself before visiting the pleeblands.



Jimmy lets Crake get beyond the airlock. Crake is carrying Oryx, who appears unconscious. He says to Jimmy, "I'm counting on you," before slitting her throat with a knife. Jimmy shoots Crake.

Section 12 (pages 281-329) Analysis

Section 12 is the longest section in the novel, which indicates that it is the most important section. After baiting her readers with tiny parcels of information, Atwood finally lets us in on the mysterious absence of Crake, Oryx and the rest of humanity. The action rises to an effective climax as Jimmy confronts Crake and as Crake forces Jimmy to kill him.

Crake's death is actually an assisted suicide. Crake has used Oryx as a pawn, knowing that Jimmy loves her and will avenge her murder. The climax is foreshadowed in Section 3, when the teenage Crake shows appreciation for the assisted suicide website nitee-nite.com, wherein participants present their life stories and then kill themselves with the aid of a doctor and loved ones. The site creeps Jimmy out, but Crake praises the participants for having the flair to know when they'd had enough.



Section 13 (pages 331-354)

Section 13 (pages 331-354) Summary

Snowman continues along the rampart, his foot now swollen and infected. At the eighth watchtower, he attaches his bed sheet to a pipe and climbs down it before landing, in great pain, on both feet. He enters the airlock and sees the remains of Oryx and Crake. In Crake's storeroom, he finds some antibiotics and gives himself a shot.

For several weeks, Jimmy remains holed up in Paradise, monitoring the Crakers via video cameras and watching news reports of sickness and chaos in the cities. According to the news, the virus has been named JUVE, for Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary. He watches in horror as his species dies out. Jimmy knows that it is only a matter of time before the bio-bubble's solar panels start to fail and the Crakers will be forced to leave Paradise.

Now in Paradise again, Jimmy visits his old office. He finds a note he started to write after the virus outbreak, addressed to whoever would survive and find it. The note explains that Crake was the mastermind behind JUVE. Snowman now crumples up the note and throws it onto the floor.

Jimmy decides to take the Crakers to an arboretum near the seashore. He visits the Crakers in the bubble and tells them he is Snowman, sent by Crake and Oryx to take them to a place where there is more food. As they leave the compound, they see dead bodies, which Snowman explains are part of the chaos that Oryx and Crake are clearing for the Crakers. Along the route to the seashore, Snowman shoots several people who are in the final stages of infection and asking for help. He explains to the Crakers that they are part of a bad dream that Crake is having. When they reach the shore, he tells the children of Crake that it is called *home*.

Section 13 (pages 331-354) Analysis

One of several serious social issues that Atwood tackles in *Oryx and Crake* is literacy. Oryx illustrates the importance of language capacity when she trades her body for English lessons. Jimmy also places a high value on literacy. During high school, he appropriates the word *corknut* to both judge and entertain his peers. Similarly, he later seeks out words that have gone out of fashion, adding them to his vocabulary. When Snowman destroys his written history in Section 13, this action is a powerful symbol that he has given up any hope that mankind will survive. He resigns himself to the notions that discourse has died and literacy has become useless.



Section 14 (pages 355-367)

Section 14 (pages 355-367) Summary

On Snowman's way back to the arboretum, he prepares what he will say to the Crakers. He will tell them that Crake has spoken to him in the form of a burning bush and has ordered Jimmy to eat three fish a week from now on. As he approaches the village, he hears a strange crooning. The people have built an effigy of him, and they are singing around it. He wonders where they got the idea of creating a symbol. They are happy that their efforts have brought Snowman home.

Abraham Lincoln tells Snowman that others like him have been there. It was a group that included a woman who smelled "blue," according to the Crakers. The men started to sing to her and expose their blue penises, but the people ran away. They say that the people went in the direction of the beach, and they describe a gun that one of the men was carrying. The Crakers attempt to heal Snowman's foot with purring.

Section 14 (pages 355-367) Analysis

In Section 14 it becomes apparent that Crake's experiment has failed. Crake believed that he had created a race of people who were perfect and would not need to evolve, physically or intellectually. The effigy of Snowman proves that the Crakers have begun to think in representational terms and have started creating a system of religious beliefs. To the Crakers, the effigy symbolizes Snowman. To Snowman and to the reader, the effigy represents a major shift in the Crakers' thinking. Perhaps the human impulse to find meaning in one's existence is something that cannot be erased genetically.



Section 15 (pages 369-376)

Section 15 (pages 369-376) Summary

Snowman wakes before dawn and climbs down his tree. He heads out along the beach to find the other survivors. He sees shoeprints in the sand, smells smoke and hears voices. He sneaks up on the people and finds them sitting around a fire with their spraygun lying on the ground nearby. The two men and one woman look wasted. Snowman wonders how he should make contact. Should he say he comes in peace, offer them his nonexistent treasure or threaten them off his turf? He looks at his blank watch and thinks that it is zero hour, time to go.

Section 15 (pages 369-376) Analysis

The author ends the book on an ambiguous note. Will Snowman attempt to befriend the other humans, or will he find himself shooting them dead? Either ending seems plausible, for although Snowman clearly hungers for human companionship, he has managed to mess up almost every previous attempt to connect with other people.



Characters

Snowman/ Jimmy

Snowman is the adopted name of Jimmy. After the fall of mankind, Jimmy is left alone and appears to be the sole survivor of his species. Without society to define him, he renames himself Snowman. His full adopted name, known only to himself, is Abominable Snowman. He believes it is apt since he has proven abominable in the face of plague. Later, however, he decides that he might be the other kind of snowman, the kind that is an unconvincing replica of a human being and will melt into nothingness.

Although Jimmy is not a genius, he does possess a knack for language and a love of word usage. After graduating from the Martha Graham Academy, Jimmy works as an ad man for self-help products. Later, Crake hires him to lead the ad campaign for BlyssPlus, a Viagra-like drug.

Jimmy finds it hard to form connections with other human beings. Aside from a pet rakunk, he has one real friend in his whole life, Crake. Yet Crake, who is far more cunning and less in touch with his emotional side than Jimmy, ultimately proves to be a poor friend. Jimmy engages in meaningless sexual relationships with women who are married or otherwise unavailable. After beginning an affair with Oryx, whom Crake and Jimmy have both obsessed over since they first spotted her in an online porn site in high school, Jimmy feels that he is really in love. Even after her death, he conjures Oryx in his mind and continues their love affair.

Jimmy's inability to relate to others presumably stems from his dysfunctional family background. Jimmy's father does not spend any time with him, even when it is Jimmy's birthday, and his mother abandons Jimmy to engage in subversive anti-compound activities when Jimmy is a young teenager.

Oryx

When Oryx first appears in the novel, she is a child of about eight years old. Crake and Jimmy spot her on an Internet sex site. Oryx wears a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon, and in the movie, she licks whipped cream off a grown man. She turns to the camera and smiles contemptuously at whomever will watch this pornography. Crake downloads and prints out the frozen image of that moment.

Oryx has a triangular face, like that of a Siamese cat. Jimmy thinks that her body is as delicate as filigree. She is approximately eight years younger than Jimmy. Oryx grows up so poor that she lives in a dwelling without floors. Her home is a hut in an impoverished village. Oryx lives with her siblings, her sick father and the mother who resents his sickness. After Oryx's father dies, her mother sells her to a well-dressed trader who frequently comes to the village in search of children.



The child-trader trains Oryx to sell flowers to tourists in the city, and eventually he involves her in a bribery scheme that involves luring men to their hotel rooms. Later, the trader dies, and Oryx is sold to a pornographer. As an eight-year-old, she trades sexual favors for English lessons from the cameraman.

When Oryx is a teenager, she appears on the news as a foreign girl who has been kept locked in a garage by a San Francisco pharmacist. She claims that he saved her from a life of pornography and locked her in his garage to keep her safe.

Oryx meets Crake when he orders her for sex from Student Services at Watson-Crick. Later, when he heads the Paradise initiatives, Crake hires Oryx to train the Crakers. In Paradise, she is given a new name, Oryx Beisa, which is the name of a gentle, water-conserving East African herbivore that has gone extinct.

Oryx appears to be used by Crake, unaware herself of his plan to kill all of humanity. In the final moments of her life, she wears pink ribbons, reminiscent of the innocent child she was when Jimmy and Crake first saw her photo online.

Crake

Crake's real name is Glenn. He acquires the nickname Crake, which is the name of an extinct red-necked Australian bird, while playing an online game called Extinctathon. Crake transfers to HelthWyzer High in the middle of the school year and quickly becomes friends with Jimmy. He impresses Jimmy with his ability to do impressions of teachers, and he impresses everyone else at school with his intelligence.

Crake graduates first in his high-school class and then attends the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute. He remains active in Extinctathon, an online game that is popular among genius subversives. When Crake gets a job to lead the Paradise genetic-engineering project for RejoovenEsence, he recruits Extinctathon's outlaws to be the project's scientists.

Crake masterminds a plan to kill all the human beings on Earth and replace them with a new species of man. He operates from logical theorems rather than human emotion. Crake chooses Jimmy to watch over the Crakers after his death, because he knows the Jimmy has compassion and tenderness. Crake's own lack of those characteristics is evidenced by his murder of Oryx, a woman that he claims to love.

Jimmy's Mother

Jimmy's mother, who is named Sharon, is a scientist. She quits working when Jimmy is six, ostensibly so that she can spend more time with him, but emotional instability leads her to ignore her son. When Jimmy's father takes a post at the HelthWyzer compound, Sharon feels that his work is unethical. Under the ruse of a dental appointment, she manages to slip beyond the compound's security and becomes an anti-compound revolutionary. Aside from nondescript postcards signed with a pseudonym, Jimmy does



not hear from his mother until CorpSeCorps agents show him a video of her execution. As she prepares to die for treason, Sharon gives Jimmy a message that she loves him and that he shouldn't let her down.

Jimmy's Father

Jimmy's father is a prominent scientist who leads the pigoon project at OrganInc. Later he takes a position at HelthWyzer, doing work that his wife thinks is unethical. Jimmy's father has a contentious relationship with Jimmy's mother. When she leaves the family, he quickly recovers and starts a new relationship with one of his lab assistants. After Jimmy leaves home for college, he hears from his father infrequently. Jimmy's father generally sends Jimmy a belated online birthday card.

Crake's Mother

Crake's mother works as a diagnostician at the hospital complex. She is intense and does not say much. She has dark hair, a square jaw and a slim chest. Crake's mother has a second husband called "Uncle Pete." She dies one month before Crake's high school graduation from a bioform infection.

Uncle En

Uncle En is a trader of young children. He purchases children from their parents in the village and then takes them to the city and trains them to sell flowers. He has several servants and wears a gold watch. He trains Oryx to lure men into hotel rooms, but at the last moment, he barges in and "saves" her from the men, taking large bribes to keep quiet. Later, Uncle En is rumored to have been murdered, and his body is said to be found floating on one of the city's canals.

Jack

Jack is a cameraman for the child pornography videos that feature young Oryx. He comes from an English-speaking country and looks down on the country in which he works as germy and backward. Oryx says that Jack has a penis like a shrivelled carrot. He asks her for sexual favors, and in return he teaches Oryx the English language. Jimmy hates Jack for abusing Oryx, but she feels sorry for him and is thankful for his English language lessons. Jack does a lot of illicit drugs and calls the movie studio "Pixieland."

Amanda Payne

Amanda, whose real name is Barb Jones, is Jimmy's girlfriend after he graduates from Martha Graham. She hails from an abusive pleebland family. She creates art



installations that involve shaping animal carcasses into four-letter words and having vultures eat the meat. Jimmy leaves Amanda soon after she brings up the subject of love.

Crakers

The Crakers, also known as the Children of Crake, are humans who have been genetically engineered by Crake and the Paradise scientists. Their skin comes in a wide range of colors, and their eyes are a glowing green. They are quite beautiful in appearance. The Crakers cannot distinguish skin color, so there is no chance of racism developing among them. Their bodies are immune to disease, and they have been engineered to eat plant material and then create fecal matters that can be redigested. They go into heat at regular intervals, so there is no sexual torment for the Crakers. They are neither hunters nor farmers, so they have no territorial drive. The Crakers do not need to wear clothes or build houses, because they are perfectly adjusted to their habitat. They grow from infants to adults rapidly and die when they reach the age of thirty.

Trio of Survivors

At the end of the novel, Jimmy has discovered three other human survivors - a woman and two men. The woman wears a uniform of some sort and appears to have been pretty at one time. All three of the survivors look "wasted." They carry a spraygun.



Objects/Places

The Picture of Oryx

When Oryx is a child, the teenage boys Crake and Jimmy see Oryx on a porn web site. Crake saves her picture, and he prints a copy for Jimmy. In the image, she seems contemptuous and violated.

Snowman's Model of Chaos

To explain the concept of chaos to the Crakers, Snowman stirs dirt and water in a plastic child's pail that has washed up on the beach.

The Child Trader's Gold Watch

The dealer who buys young Oryx from her family wears a gold watch. It is unclear whether it is made of actual gold, but nevertheless the watch is a badge of quality that convinces the villagers that the dealer is a legitimate businessman. Later, when the dealer imprisons the children in the city, he tells them that a voice in the watch can always tell him where each child is. Snowman later tells the Crakers that he can communicate with Crake through his broken wristwatch, reminiscent of this story.

Jungle Bird

When Oryx gets sold to Uncle En and taken on a long journey through the jungle, she hears a bird calling. It reminds her of birdcalls she has heard in her village, and she imagines that the bird has been sent by her mother as a message of love.

Snowman's Whistle

Snowman always whistles as he approaches the Children of Crake's encampment. He doesn't want to strain their politeness with a surprise visit. He thinks that his whistle is like a leper's bell.

The Snowman Fish Path

The path that connects the Crakers' encampment and Snowman's settlement at the edge of the woods is called the Snowman Fish Path. The people call it that because it is the path they use to bring Snowman the single fish that they catch and cook for him each week.



Neurotypical

Neurotypical is Watson-Crick slang for a person with a normal I.Q. Crake implies that Jimmy is a neurotypical, and Jimmy feels insulted.

Fridge Magnets

The science students at Watson-Crick usually collect refrigerator magnets. They bear such sayings as "Siliconsciousness" and "The proper study of Mankind is Everything." Later, when he heads Paradise, Crake's magnets say things like "I think, therefore" and "To stay human is to break a limitation."

Snats

Animals created by splicing the genes of snakes and rats, snats are believed to be extinct. Nevertheless, Snowman fears that he will encounter one of the dangerous creatures.

Jimmy's Mother's Dressing Gown

After Jimmy's mother flees the HelthWyzer compound, Jimmy puts on her magenta dressing gown. It smells like her, of jasmynes, and he wears it to comfort himself. Wearing the gown, however, makes Jimmy realize that he hates his mother.

The Cock Clock

One of Jimmy's married girlfriends gives him an alarm clock that looks like a penis. After he learns of his mother's death, the clock depresses him because it reminds him that his relationships with women are all purely sexual.

Themes

Corporate Power

In *Oryx and Crake*, corporations exist separately from the rest of the world. Characters who are lucky enough to work for a corporation can escape the lawlessness and filth of pleeblands and live in an idyllic corporate compound instead. Although *Oryx and Crake* takes place in America, the novel includes no reference to local, state or federal government. The corporations rule instead. Each compound is a distinct locale, but it appears that the corporations are somehow united because they share a legion of CorpSeCorps agents that work in tandem on such cases as that of Jimmy's mother.

The corporations featured in the novel employ science and marketing techniques that make the public powerless consumers. OrganInc specializes in manufacturing spare parts for organ replacement. HelthWyzer sells medicines that fight various diseases. AnooYoo creates pills and creams that promise to make people younger and more beautiful. RejoovenEsence use genetic modification in order to make humans immortal. All four corporations sell products that have been formulated with the expectation that people will grow dependent on them. AnooYoo and RejoovenEsence get users hooked on their lifestyle enhancing drugs, so that people begin to feel powerless without the products. According to Crake, HelthWyzer actually creates diseases in order to sell the drugs that will cure them. This high level of control over the masses results from unprecedented corporate greed.

Ironically, Crake becomes the most powerful person in the world by limiting the power of RejoovenEsence's top executives. Crake's bosses believe that he is creating prototypes for customers that will want to choose specific features in their offspring, but Crake has instead started a new humanoid species to replace mankind. If there were some oversight, RejoovenEsence's leaders would see Crake's floor models and know that their plan has gone off course. Surely nobody would choose a child with limited brainpower who eats his own feces, urinates to mark his territory and mates in an orgy. The society in *Oryx and Crake* has such strong faith in science, however, that even the most clever businessmen give a mad scientist free rein.

Hierarchy

Throughout the novel, Jimmy compares his status to that of people around him. Every time his father gets a new job, Jimmy notes how large his family's new home is in comparison with the homes of other compound employees. In school, he finds himself low on the social scale and tries to increase his status by becoming the class clown. At his high school graduation, Jimmy becomes keenly aware of his low desirability to colleges. Being a "word person" automatically places Jimmy lower on the hierarchy than Crake, who excels at math and science. Jimmy gets admitted to the Martha Graham Academy, a low-status school for the arts. He knows that studying at Martha Graham



will leave him permanently on the lower rungs of society's ladder. Crake, on the other hand, attends the top academy, Watson-Crick. The contacts and lessons he gets at Watson-Crick will enable Crake to become the most powerful person in the world. In this way, emotion and feeling gives way to emotionless and unethical logic and science.

Ironically, Crake gives up his position of power when he forces Jimmy to kill him. As the last man standing on Earth, Jimmy becomes the highest in status. He is needed to care for the Crakers and bring them to a safe environment. As Snowman wonders whether his brain has grown or shrunk since the JUVE catastrophe, he also considers how his importance has increased or grown smaller. Snowman has kept the Crakers alive, but soon he will be dead. Then, they will forget him. In a species where life ends at thirty, there can be no memory of important historical figures.

It seems odd that a man who has the power to gain supremacy over everyone else should choose to create a population in which there is no hierarchy. In the Crakers' society, everyone is equally fertile and attractive. No one desires to own land, and all members are equal in intelligence and talent. According to Crake, the absence of status levels means the Crakers will never need to resort to conflict to claim power.

Parental Responsibility

Parents play important roles in helping to define the characters of their offspring in *Oryx and Crake*. Jimmy's parents create a tense and dysfunctional childhood home for their son, punctuated by frequent arguments over matters both trivial and important. Sharon's shame for her husband's unethical work at HelthWyzer leads her to grow depressed and eventually run away from her home and her role as parent. Jimmy's father is equally irresponsible as a parent, forgetting Jimmy's birthday every year. Jimmy's father pays little attention to his son's pain after Sharon leaves; his focus is instead on his own happiness as his new girlfriend moves into the family home.

Jimmy's family relations seem to taint his dealings with other people. Until he meets Crake, Jimmy has no real friends, just classmates whom he entertains with funny skits about his parents' arguments. Later, Jimmy finds himself unable to commit to women. When a girlfriend starts talking about love, he feels that it is time to dump her. He prefers purely sexual relationships with women who are already married and unavailable. Curiously, Jimmy manages to look after the Crakers when the JUVE virus kills the rest of humanity. In crisis, he exhibits a compassionate responsibility toward others that surpasses the parenting he himself received.

Oryx, another character abandoned by her own parents, also shows great concern for the Crakers. Oryx has little contact with her father, who suffers from a deadly disease. Even though Oryx's mother betrays her familial bond by selling Oryx when she is a young child, Oryx praises her mother for doing what she had to do. After she is sold into child slavery, Oryx has three villainous father figures - Mr. En, who teaches her to entrap men in a prostitution scheme, Jack, who teaches eight-year-old Oryx English in exchange for sex and the American pharmacist who buys her freedom but keeps her



locked in a garage. Oryx feels no anger for the abuse she endured with these men, choosing instead to feel gratitude for how each one helped her. To the Crakers, Oryx is a patient and loving teacher. They consider her a maternal figure and an earth goddess who is responsible for giving life to the plants and the animals.



Style

Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person point of view, but the narrator only knows what is in Jimmy/Snowman's mind. The narrator guides the reader through the action of the story using Jimmy's thoughts as well as the bits of dialogue that Jimmy remembers from conversations with the other characters. Jimmy seems to have a reliable memory. He jumps between topics and time periods, which makes for a piecemeal narrative that keeps the reader wondering what exactly has happened in Jimmy's recent history.

After surviving an extremely traumatic set of experiences and living for a long time without any real humans to talk to, Jimmy experiences a great deal of confusion. He is, for instance, plagued by random quotes that pop up in his mind, and usually he cannot remember where he read or heard those words.

Setting

The first setting for the novel is a wildlife refuge near the seashore. This is the place where Jimmy has brought the Crakers so that they can have an endless supply of greens to eat and he can be sustained on fish. The area includes an arboretum, which provides shade for Jimmy during the overwhelming heat of the midday sun. Although this setting is removed from human dwellings, the remnants of civilization wash ashore with the tides to remind Jimmy of the way life used to be.

Much of the flashback action takes place in corporate compounds. In the OrganInc compound, Jimmy lives in a comfortable home and visits his father's lab building, which includes a room filled with pigoon cages. In the HelthWyzer compound, Jimmy's parents dwell in a posh house, and Jimmy attends a high school with high-teach science labs.

Two contrasting settings are the universities that Jimmy and Crake attend. At the Martha Graham Academy, Jimmy shares a decrepit dorm room with a roommate. The campus includes a rare library of paper books, relics of distant history. At Crake's school, the Watson-Crick Institute, there are many shiny labs where students invent products with financial backing from prominent corporations. Crake does not have to share his plush suite of rooms with another student.

The final setting for the novel is the RejoovenEsence compound, which includes an overgrown central park and the remains of a typical suburban family dwelling. The entire compound is surrounded by a rampart that has eight watchtowers built into its perimeter. As Jimmy approaches Crake's Paradise dome, he sees a vestibule that was once kept secure by a state-of-the-art airlock. Paradise has offices and a bio-bubble, which serves as a habitat for the Crakers. The bio-bubble houses many plants and animals, and it is protected by a curved window made of self-healing material. Solar panels light the bio-bubble environment.



Language and Meaning

Atwood writes in casual language, including many fragments and run-ons. This casual use of English helps create a realistic character who thinks in genuine human speech patterns. Atwood tells the story from Jimmy's cache of memories, creating a voice for the character that highlights his sarcasm and love of vocabulary. He frequently reminds himself of words that he once used when he had people to talk with - *sere*, for instance, and *incarnadine*. Sometimes he remembers the words but not the meanings.

One unique and noteworthy feature of Atwood's language is the invented words that serve as names, not only for Oryx and Crake and Snowman, but also for the many companies and products. Words like RejoovenEsence and pigoon are bastardized language, corrupted for the use of greedy corporations, as well as expressions of mankind's need to name things and create new language. Jimmy's career runs in parallel to this idea of language, since the only use for his literary ability is in advertising.

Structure

The novel comprises fifteen sections, and each section has several subsections. The subsections bear titles that identify important nouns from the passages that follow. The narration jumps between times and settings throughout the fifteen sections, realistically mimicking the way a man's brain would jump about as he tried to sort through a jumble of thoughts in the aftermath of great personal and world crisis.



Quotes

"Your friend is intellectually honourable,' Jimmy's mother would say. 'He doesn't lie to himself.'" Page 69

"Snowman, tell us please about the deeds of Crake." Page 102

"The little girls laughed about the germs, because they didn't believe in them; but they believed about the disease, because they'd seen that happen. Spirits caused it, everyone knew that. Spirits and bad luck. Jack had not said the right prayers." Pages 140-141

"He doesn't know which is worse, a past he can't regain or a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly. Then there's the future. Sheer vertigo." Page 147

"He feels like weeping. Then he hears a voice - his own! - saying *boohoo*; he sees it, as if it's a printed word in a comic-strip balloon. Water leaks down his face." Page 161

"I'm a lost cause,' he would tell them. 'I'm emotionally dyslexic.'" Page 190

"I don't believe in Nature either,' said Crake. 'Or not with a capital N.'" Page 206

"All it takes,' said Crake, 'is the elimination of one generation. One generation of anything. Beetles, trees, microbes, scientists, speakers of French, whatever. Break the link in time between one generation and the next, and it's game over forever.'" Page 223

"Strange, thinks Snowman, how in an emergency a lot of people would head for the bathroom. Bathrooms were the closest things to sanctuaries in these houses, places where you could be alone to meditate." Page 230

"He jumps out of reach, watches while the pigoon slithers back down, then launches itself again. Its eyes gleam in the half-light; he has the impression it's grinning." Page 271

"Herediseases Removed. Why Be Short? Go Goliath! Dreamkidlets. Heal Your Helix. Cribfillers Ltd. Weenie Weenie? Longfellow's the Fellow!" Page 288

"My unit is called Paradice,' said Crake, over the soy-banana flamby. 'What we're working on is immortality.'" Page 292

"I touched her, thought Jimmy like a ten-year-old. I actually touched her!" Page 311

"There are too many people and that makes the people bad. I know this from my own life, Jimmy. Crake is a very smart man!" Page 322



Topics for Discussion

Four corporate compounds - OrganInc, HelthWyzer, AnooYoo and RejoovenEsence - provide backdrops for the action in *Oryx and Crake*. What services does each corporation offer? Are the corporations evil, or do their services simply fall short of their intended goals?

At academies such as Watson-Crick and Martha Graham, number people get separated from word people. How does focusing on one intellectual aspect or the other affect how Crake and Jimmy's personalities develop after high school?

Margret Atwood says that *Oryx and Crake* is not science fiction. What are the elements of science fiction, and do you think that this novel *does* fit into that category of writing?

Crake has destroyed humankind but created a species that is superior to man in many ways. Is he a hero or a villain?

As the only known human survivor of JUVE, Jimmy has grown accustomed to life without clothes or shoes. Is his nakedness a symbol of Jimmy's return to innocence, or does it represent a regression to savage life?

Paradice, the bioengineering project, is clearly an allusion to Paradise, the first home of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. The name MaddAddam also refers to the Biblical Adam. However, Genesis tells the story of the creation of mankind, whereas *Oryx and Crake* is the story of mankind's demise. To which Biblical character is Crake most analogous - Adam, God or the serpent?

Crake's plan to kill humanity could not have succeeded without assistance from Oryx and Jimmy. Could either of them have acted differently to prevent the catastrophe? What signs in Crake's behavior ought to have led Oryx or Crake to pursue a different course of action?

Utopian fiction typically presents a futuristic society that has been modified to ease pain and unhappiness. Are the Crakers living in a true utopia, or are they liable to face future hardships?