

Pihkal: A Chemical Love Story Study Guide

Pihkal: A Chemical Love Story by Alexander Shulgin

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Plot Summary

This book is a slightly fictionalized account of how the two authors—Alexander and Ann Shulgin—begin their relationship, marry and continue to live with another. However, the love story in this book is not just between two people but also involves a class of psychedelic drugs known as phenethylamines. It is the fictionalized versions of Alexander and Ann—Shura Bordorin and Alice Parr, respectively—and their journeys on these drugs that give the book its name Pihkal, which is an acronym that stands for "Phenethylamines I have known and loved."

The book starts from the point of view of Shura. Shura describes growing up in Depression Era Berkeley. Shura graduates early from high school and earns a scholarship to Harvard. However, Shura quickly drops out of Harvard to join the navy and take part in World War II. Once out of the navy, Shura earns a PhD from University of California Berkeley and goes to work for the Dole Chemical Company. Once there, Shura begins to synthesize psychedelic drugs and is largely left to his own devices. Shura decides to leave Dole Chemical in the mid 1960s and quickly begins synthesizing the drugs on his own farm. In 1977, Shura's wife dies, which Shura sees as freeing in many ways as the marriage had become largely loveless.

The story switches to Alice's point of view at this point, and she explains her first experience with psychedelic drugs when she takes peyote in the late 1950s. Alice explains that she is twice divorced and has four children. Alice meets Shura at a meeting organized by her ex-boyfriend. Shura explains that he is in love with a married woman in Germany named Ursula. Alice decides to pursue Shura anyway, and the two make love at a party at Alice's house. Shura still wants to be with Ursula, and Ursula continues to promise to come to live with Shura in California, but Alice decides to stay with Shura until that time comes. Eventually, Alice writes a letter to Ursula asking her to either come to stay with Shura or set him free. Ursula sends a letter to Shura informing him that she will not be coming to California to live. Shura asks Alice to come live with him on the farm, and they are married on July 4, 1981.

At this point, the chapters alternate between Shura and Alice's voices. These chapters mainly chronicle different psychedelic experiences taken by either or both Shura and Alice. In the most powerful of these experiences, Alice experiences a spiritual crisis for almost an entire week brought on by an inert level of a drug. In another, Shura experiences feelings of near omnipotence. In the final chapter, Shura gives a lecture to his university class explaining why the war on drugs should be ended.



Chapters 1-11

Chapters 1-11 Summary and Analysis

The story begins with the early biography of the primary male character Shura, who is born in 1925. Shura is a somewhat fictionalized version of the male author, Alexander Shulgin.

At the beginning of chapter one, the male narrator Theodore Stevens Bordorin (known by his loved ones as Shura) describes growing up in Berkeley, California in the late 1920s and 1930s. Shura's father is a Russian immigrant, while his mother is from a small town in Illinois. Both are schoolteachers. As a child, Shura does not spend much time with children his own age. Shura plays marbles with the them for a while, but eventually builds his own marble run, so he can play alone. Shura becomes fascinated with basements, probably because he prefers isolation. Shura is extremely precocious and wins a scholarship to Harvard at the age of sixteen, but joins the Navy during World War II because of poor grades. There Shura learns the power of drugs when given morphine for a bone infection in his thumb. When the infection is operated upon, he is given what he believes to be a drug dissolved in orange juice, but which actually turns out to be sugar. This experience makes Shura determined to be a psychopharmacologist, and he enters the University of California at Berkeley.

In the second chapter, Shura quickly earns a PhD from the University of California. Shura also takes mescaline for the first time in 1960, which allows him to see the world as a child again and forces him in the direction of studying psychedelic drugs.

In the third chapter, Shura marries a woman named Helen and goes to work for Dole Chemical Company. While researching the effects of psychedelic drugs on fish there, his analytical chemist Burt accidentally ingests some LSD and has a fun trip.

Chapter four concerns Shura's experiments with TMA, an analogue of mescaline. Shura discovers that while it is similar in effects to mescaline, mescaline is more enjoyable. Furthermore, Shura wonders if TMA does not mimic some aspects of psychosis.

In chapter five, Shura discusses manufacturing an analogue of THC, the active psychoactive chemical in marijuana, with a nitrogen atom. Shura's work is disrupted by the sudden death of his mother and the cruise he takes his family on following it, but he does finish it on the cruise.

In chapter six, Shura details manufacturing the drug MMDA by combining an ammonia molecule to a substance called myristicin, which is found in Oil of Nutmeg. This process proves difficult as Shura has just arrived with his family in France and finds it difficult to secure a lab in which to work. Eventually, Shura does synthesize the drug, and he shares a description of the drug experience written by a friend of his. Shura's friend



describes it as a lighter version of a mescaline trip, but it makes him extremely paranoid for a large chunk of the experience.

Shura leaves his job at Dole Chemical Company in chapter seven. It is the mid 1960s and Shura believes the company is becoming less interested in his work on psychedelic drugs. Shura returns to school to study medicine, but is quickly offered a job by a Captain Pinkerton to continue his work at a lab in San Francisco. When Shura is asked to get government clearance to continue working for Pinkerton, he refuses and is let go.

In chapter eight, Shura synthesizes three different isomers of TMA, the most powerful of which is MEM. At the end of the chapter, Shura describes taking some MEM with a woman who confesses to him that she helped euthanize her mother as a teenager, which has made her suicidal ever since, but the MEM rids her of those feelings.

Shura synthesizes a drug called DOM in chapter nine, which is far more powerful than mescaline. DOM creates threshold effects at one milligram, but by 1967 people are selling it on the streets at twenty milligrams a pill and calling it STP.

In chapter ten, Shura is invited to a conference on marijuana analogues in Sweden. At this conference he meets Peter Mille, a chemist who heads the Swedish equivalent of the FBI crime lab.

In chapter eleven, Shura describes meeting Dr. Andrew Walker Scott through the Owl Club, which is almost certainly a reference to the Bohemian Club. Later, Shura is called to testify before Congress on the subject of psychedelic drugs. Andrew sees Shura in the paper and calls him after they have let their friendship lapse for several years. The experience causes Shura to decide to do his work with psychedelic drugs in the open, regardless of what people think of him.



Chapters 12-17

Chapters 12-17 Summary and Analysis

In chapter twelve, Shura describes his experiences with MDMA, now more commonly known by the street name ecstasy. Shura's interest in MDMA grows out of a discussion with one of his colleagues' graduate students. After taking the drug himself, Shura concludes that it is not psychedelic itself, but that it has several of the good qualities of a psychedelic drug. Shura witnesses the drug help several people with psychological issues, which leads him to believe that it is similar to snake-oil. In that it can be all things to all people. Shura believes that MDMA can be an effective therapeutic medicine.

In chapter thirteen, Shura describes taking marijuana after a combination of MDOH and MDA in an attempt to relieve stress. This backfires on Shura badly as the combination seems to make time slow down to one twentieth of its normal rate, terrifying Shura.

Chapter fourteen consists mostly of Shura's notes from taking a psychedelic drug containing sulfur, which Shura calls Aleph-1. Shura's notes mainly discuss the distinction between an act and a tale. A tale is a recounting of the act, but it is only in acts that power can be found. At one point, Shura hopes he will not be able to understand the notes later as he fears the drug may be too powerful.

At the beginning of chapter fifteen, Shura's wife Helen dies a few days after suffering a stroke. Shura also explains that for half a year before Helen's death, he had conducted an affair with Ursula, the wife of his friend Dolph. Helen never knew of the affair, but Shura wonders if it did not contribute to his decision to end Helen's life support even though he knows her death was inevitable. After Helen's death, Shura travels to Memphis for a conference where he experiments with 2C-E. The experience begins as a horrifying one, rife with thoughts of Helen's death and his own. However, the trip ends up inspiring Shura to continue experimenting with psychedelics and spreading that knowledge to others.

Chapter sixteen is the first one to be told from Alice Parr's point of view. In it, Alice describes a trance-like state that she would often enter into before falling asleep as a child. Alice refers to this state as the Spiral, and each time it only lasts twelve minutes, but it introduces her to an incredibly powerful and benevolent force and first interests her in exploring the psyche.

At the beginning of chapter seventeen, Alice is impregnated by Paul, a psychiatrist at the University of California Medical Center where she works. Alice miscarries two months into the pregnancy and almost dies because a capillary inside her uterus does not close off properly. Before the miscarriage, Alice a different psychiatrist, Samuel (Sam) Golding, to obtain some peyote for her to try. Sometime after the miscarriage, Sam tells Alice he has obtained the drug. The next Sunday, Sam and Alice take fourteen peyote buttons with orange juice. As the drug begins to take effect, Sam asks Alice to



look at herself in her bathroom mirror, and she believes she appears younger and feels better about herself. Alice and Sam venture out of Alice's apartment and take a walk to Golden Gate Park. When leaving the park, Alice and Sam witness a dog get hit by a car, which causes Sam to realize that death is not the problem but the pain that precedes it. Alice and Sam next head to the De Young Museum, where Alice determines that the energy of the trip is fueled by the presence of living things. Finally, Alice and Sam tour the Japanese Tea Garden before eating at a pizza parlor and returning to Alice's apartment. At Alice's apartment, Sam and Alice make love and Alice thanks him for the experience of the day.



Chapters 18-22

Chapters 18-22 Summary and Analysis

In chapter eighteen, Alice attends a seminar on how to think run by an ex-boyfriend named Kelly. At this meeting, she meets Shura, who tells her he is headed to Paris shortly to meet up with Ursula. Alice busies herself with the holidays for the next couple of months and shopping for her three teenaged children. At the end of January, Alice is invited to a house party with a spiritual teacher from India. Alice attends and again runs into Shura, who has recently returned from Paris without Ursula. Shura is unsure if Ursula actually ever has any intention of moving to the United States with him or has even informed Dolph of the affair. During the Indian music, Alice and Shura retreat to a back room of the house where Shura tells Alice about synthesizing psychedelic drugs. Before they both leave, Alice invites Shura to a Valentine's Day party at her house.

Chapter nineteen takes place on the night of Alice's Valentine's Day party. About forty people, mostly from Alice's Mensa group, arrive before Alice notices Shura. Alice introduces Shura to the other guests as well as her children and ex-husband Walter Parr. Alice invites Shura to stay after all the other guests have left so that they can finish their previous conversation. Shura accepts the invitation, and Alice asks him questions about his work, Ursula, and Helen while they sit in front of the fire. Shura pulls Alice's body on top of his forearm, and both of them strip off their clothes. They make love through mutual masturbation and fellatio because Shura is still reserving vaginal intercourse for Ursula. Shura promises to always tell Alice the truth, and Alice tells Shura she is in love with him.

Chapter twenty begins the next morning with Shura playing the piano while Alice prepares breakfast. As the two talk over coffee, Shura tells Alice that Ursula is coming to visit him for an indeterminate period of time. Alice requests that he not push her away until he knows Ursula is committed, and Shura promises to keep Alice informed of the situation.

In chapter twenty-one, Alice describes her regrets raising her two boys, Brian and Christopher. Alice writes that Brian was picked on in second grade, and she wishes she had taken him out of the school. Alice relates that Christopher lived with her in a housing project until his father remarried, moved to a better house, and took Christopher to live with him. Alice learns that Christopher's stepmother Irene physically abuses Christopher, and Alice regrets not doing more to stop the abuse. Alice tries to keep her mind on parenting with no news of Shura until he calls one day and tells Alice that Ursula has just returned to Germany. Alice invites Shura over to talk about Ursula and Shura accepts. Before Shura leaves, he invites Alice to visit his farm the next day.

In chapter twenty-two, Alice visits Shura's farm. Alice notes that Shura's study is a mess, indicating that he works a great deal in the room. Shura takes Alice into his lab, which is even messier than the study. Shura tells Alice that a good lab should be like an



artist's studio. The lab reminds Alice of a mad scientist. Shura shows Alice a picture of Ursula and tells Alice that he had never been in love before meeting Ursula. Alice asks Shura if she can sample one of the chemicals he creates, and Shura offers to let her try MDMA. Alice agrees, and they both consume one hundred milligrams. As the drug takes full effect, Alice walks outside the house by herself and begins to cry because of the love triangle she has become involved in. Despite being upset by this, Alice feels a serenity within herself that tells her everything will be alright. After crying, Alice returns inside and tells Shura about growing up in Italy as the daughter of the American Consul just before World War II. Alice realizes that there is always a core of anxiety in her life except now under the influence of MDMA. Shura then tells Alice about his marriage to Helen, which grew less loving over the years as Helen withdrew into her phobias. Shura regrets not being a warmer father to his son Theo. As the effects of the MDMA wear off, Shura takes Alice on a tour of the rest of the property, which he intends to repair in the future. Alice leaves for home knowing that her relationship with Shura is now dependent upon Ursula.



Chapters 23-28

Chapters 23-28 Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-three, Shura calls Alice the following Wednesday night and invites her to the farm for a gathering of some friends that Saturday. On the way, Alice realizes that she is terrified of what Shura's friends will think of her. Once there, Alice meets George and Ruth Close, Ben and Leah Cantrell, and John Sellars. Shura explains to the group that they will be sampling a new drug, Aleph-2. Even though Shura did not inform Alice that they would be taking psychedelic drugs, Shura invites Alice to take part, and Alice accepts. During the drug experience, Alice and Ben talk privately about Shura's relationship with Ursula. Ben is convinced that Ursula is manipulating Shura by taking on a role that he needs in his life but which Ursula is ultimately incapable of fulfilling permanently. Ben is glad that Alice is around to help Shura when Ursula will ultimately disappoint him, and Alice is grateful to Ben for explaining more about Ursula.

At the beginning of chapter twenty-four, Shura receives a letter from Ursula explaining that she is letting Dolph down easy but will be coming to America as soon as possible. Shura then invites Alice out to the farm for the weekend where they eat 2C-B, a drug that is similar to MDMA but which increases all physical senses. After taking it, Alice and Shura sleep together.

By chapter twenty-five, Alice is visiting the farm on the weekends on an almost regular basis. Usually they take one of Shura's chemicals and go to bed, listening to classical music on the radio. On one of these visits, Alice and Shura take DOM, the drug that had caused so many bad experiences when sold in high dosages as STP. Alice and Shura decide to make love by engaging in some light bondage and discuss how the experiences of helplessness before the other and completely power over the other builds trust between them.

In chapter twenty-six, Shura tells Alice that in Ursula's latest letter she reports that Dolph is in an extremely fragile state. However, when Shura calls and Dolph answers, he acts as if everything is perfectly fine. Later on in the evening, Alice and Shura take psilocybin, a psychedelic derived from a mushroom. Alice and Shura discuss whether taking the drug in its plant form or as the pure extract is the same thing. Alice contends the extract lacks the plant's soul, but Shura believes each chemical has its own soul as well. As Alice and Shura are going to sleep, Alice hallucinates three gods looking in upon and blessing them.

In chapter twenty-seven, Alice describes some of her and Shura's bad sides. Alice realizes that she has a perpetually low self-image, but Shura is not always reassuring. Once at a performance of the Berkeley Repertory Theater, Alice has a panic attack, but Shura reacts with cold indifference. In another instance, Alice is out at the farm, and Shura threatens to move away without telling anyone and criticizes Alice for not keeping



things clean when she visits. Alice names these bad moods of Shura's the Siberian Wastelands and discovers that they can be treated with a small dose of MDMA.

At the beginning of chapter twenty-eight, another letter from Ursula arrives. Ursula writes that Dolph is doing better and that her eventual leaving is drawing closer, and she has even shipped some of her books from Germany to America. This news upsets Alice somewhat, but she resolves to live in the present. Shura also informs Alice that the research group will be gathering again the next Saturday along with three new members: Dante and Ginger Sandeman and Shura's fellow chemist David Ladder. To celebrate these guests' presence, Shura proposes that everyone take a high dosage of mescaline. All members of the group seem excited about the prospect, and Alice and Shura end up taking the most at 500 milligrams a piece. As Alice's experience begins, she perceives the Earth as a living entity and feels sorry for people stuck in dead cities. As the experience goes on, Alice begins to wonder how long it has been since she consumed the mescaline but discovers that she cannot read her watch. Alice sits down on the floor like Buddha and begins to have an out of body experience, which she believes could be rude to the other guests. To keep Alice grounded in her body, Shura suggests that everyone join hands in a circle. Shura and Alice take a walk outside where Shura tells Alice that the first time he took mescaline it was as if he saw the world as he had as a child. Alice suggests that this phenomenon is the same for everyone, but Shura kept that childhood vision for longer than most people. Alice thinks briefly about Ursula but realizes that she does not get to decide the outcome of the situation. The day concludes with the group eating dinner and discussing the day and other psychedelic experiences before Alice and Shura go to bed and make love.



Chapters 29-34

Chapters 29-34 Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-nine, Shura receives a letter from Ursula that shakes his faith that she is coming. In the letter, Ursula describes going to Nuremberg to see a symphony and mentions frequently how she wishes Shura was there, but Ursula never mentions Dolph being depressed. Alice writes a letter for Ursula that details Alice's relationship with Shura and asks Ursula to either come to America or stop stringing Shura along. Alice leaves the decision to mail the letter to Shura. After Alice gives Shura the letter, the two take a new substance, 2C-T-2, that Shura derived from Aleph-2. At the end of the night, Shura and Alice make love, and Alice is confident that Shura will mail the letter to Ursula.

Ursula's reply to Alice's letter arrives at the beginning of chapter thirty, two weeks after the first letter was mailed. Ursula is angry with Alice but not with Shura. A week later, Ursula calls Shura and tells him she is coming to live with him for good in a little over a week. Shura invites Alice out to the farm one last weekend before Ursula arrives. Alice spends Friday night gathering the belongings she has left at the house over time. On Saturday, both Alice and Shura agree to take one last psychedelic journey together with DOB, which lasts almost a day in its effects. As Alice's DOB experience begins, she wonders about the nature of god and existence and where she can find love and conquer her fears. Alice learns that there is no such thing as safety, so fear is useless. Later in the trip, Shura explains to Alice his theory of how our nucleotide chains came to have three nucleotides. Shura contends that some alien species that only had two nucleotides per chain genetically engineered organisms that could have three allowing for the development of more complex life. Alice and Shura sleep together one last time. In the morning Shura tells Alice that she should become friends with Dolph, which would balance everything out, but Alice finds the idea incredibly insensitive. Alice leaves on Sunday and begins grieving for her relationship with Shura.

Chapter thirty-one begins with Alice informing her children of the situation between her and Shura. When Alice is supposed to return to work on Monday, she takes the day off by telling the hospital there is a family emergency and spends the day crying and writing her feelings in a journal. Alice is still very angry at Shura's suggestion that she befriend Dolph because it seems to her just a way for Shura to avoid guilt. On the way back from work on Tuesday, Alice is hit by the anger from the end of the relationship and takes some MDMA when she gets home. Before the MDMA takes effect, Alice fantasizes about mailing her notes from the previous day to Shura to make him feel her pain, but as the MDMA begins to work she becomes calmer. Eventually, a voice tells Alice that Shura is going to be hurt badly very soon and will need Alice to help repair the damage.

In chapter thirty-two, Shura calls Alice and tells her that Ursula did not arrive from Germany on Thursday as planned. Shura explains that he then called Germany and Dolph answered the phone in his usual voice and told Shura that Ursula had gone away



for a few days to sort some things out. Shura believes Ursula is not coming to live at the farm and may have even been in the room while he spoke to Dolph. Alice writes another letter to Ursula telling Ursula to either come to California immediately or set Shura free. Alice sends the letter without telling Shura about it. Shura calls Alice the next Sunday and tells her that he will never let himself be that vulnerable again and is quite sure Ursula was just playing games with him the entire time. The next night, Shura calls Alice again and reads her the full text of the letter he just received from Ursula. In the letter, Ursula writes that she believes Shura killed her in a previous life and this is why Ursula cannot be with Shura despite the fact that she loves him very much. Ursula further writes that she is leaving Dolph and going to live on her own. Shura and Alice discover much later that Ursula never left Dolph but instead gave birth to his daughter about a year later.

At the beginning of chapter thirty-three, Alice describes shutting herself off emotionally in the weeks after Shura's last call. After almost three weeks, Shura calls Alice and invites her to the farm for the weekend. Alice accepts but has reservations about whether or not Shura will ever love her completely. On Friday night, Shura suggests that he and Alice take LSD, which Alice has never taken before. Shura believes the LSD experience will help break down both of their walls. When the trip begins, Shura and Alice go to the bedroom and make love. Shura then tells Alice that he asked almost all his friends what they thought of the idea of Alice moving in with him at the farm, and they universally said it was a bad idea. This story upsets Alice a great deal and she blocks Shura out as he explains that he knew all his friends would say that because they feared it would distance them from Shura. Shura eventually asks Alice if she will quit her job and move in with him, and Alice accepts the offer.

In chapter thirty-four, Shura and Alice invite about eighty of their friends out to the farm for a July 4th barbecue in 1981. The barbecue is actual a surprise wedding for Alice and Shura. Shura prefers to keep the wedding a secret because he does not want people bringing gifts. Alice explains to Shura's friends that she will not be overly possessive of his time.



Chapters 35-38

Chapters 35-38 Summary and Analysis

In chapter thirty-five, Alice and Shura take a trip to Europe to attend a conference on nuclear medicine but also as a honeymoon. They first visit London but are very quickly off to Aachen, Germany where the conference is being held. When Alice and Shura first arrive in Aachen they cannot find anyone who speaks English to direct them to a hotel. Once Alice and Shura are settled into their hotel, they tour the city of Aachen, most notably the cathedral Dom. The next day after Shura delivers his lecture to the conference, Alice and Shura decide to take some 2C-I to deal with the culture shock of Germany. They begin to make love while on the drug, but Alice is overwhelmed by the feeling of an immensely powerful force outside the hotel window. Alice eventually concludes that this force is the city of Aachen itself.

In chapter thirty-six, the research group celebrates Shura's fifty-ninth birthday by meeting at George and Ruth's house and taking a new psychedelic named 5-TOM. Shura's son Theo and his girlfriend Emma recently have joined the research group and participate in this latest experiment. As the effects of the drug begin to manifest themselves, Alice feels slightly depressed with an ache in her back. A few of the others feel the same way, while the rest feel relaxed but not terribly impressed with the drug's power. George retreats upstairs to get under the electric blanket because he feels cold but soon becomes non-responsive. Shura and Ben attempt to walk George back downstairs but settle on placing George in his study where members of the group take turns observing him. When George finally becomes communicative again, he reports that it was a wonderful experience that took him to a beautiful beach. In their summations of the experience, most group members say that they would not take the drug again, but George would. No one ever takes 5-TOM again.

Shura describes a mental state he refers to as a fugue in chapter thirty-seven. Shura has only been struck by a fugue on three occasions in his life, each of shorter duration than the last. The first time Shura experiences a fugue, it appears to him that the world has been turned ninety degrees and he cannot understand abstract concepts or time. Shura's largest difficulty during the experience is that he is supposed to testify in court in San Francisco in four hours and is unsure if he will be able to comprehend the lawyers. By the time Shura arrives at the courthouse, the experience begins to pass. Shura denies that such a state could be caused by a drug flashback or brain damage brought on by consumption of psychedelics and instead argues that it is a rare state common to almost all people.

Chapter thirty-eight is a lengthy account of a major change in Alice's consciousness that occurs over a week in a November in the mid 1980s. One Sunday afternoon, Alice is busy doing housework when Shura asks if she would like to take forty milligrams of a DESOXY, which is a new drug that Shura believes will only be active at a threshold level at forty milligrams. Within an hour of consuming the drug, Alice realizes she is having a



much stronger reaction to it than expected, and the reaction is a somewhat unpleasant one with almost no emotions whatsoever. By late evening, the drug is wearing off and Alice is able to eat dinner and go to sleep at her normal time. When Alice awakes Monday morning, the drug experience has returned as strongly as ever. Alice tells Shura that the experience is still continuing but assures him she will be fine while he goes to work at a research lab that day. After Shura leaves, Alice recalls Shura's fugue experience and decides the state must be temporary. Alice is disturbed by a force she calls the White Mind, which merely observes and records all information it sees but is emotionless. Alice begins to identify the White Mind with God, and she rejects it. Alice is horrified by the idea that God might just be a huge information bank and all of human suffering is pointless. Alice calls the psychologist Adam Fisher to discuss the situation. Adam tells Alice that the White Mind is not God but a part of Alice herself. Adam reassures Alice that the experience is just a process that will be over by the weekend. Alice begins typing her notes of the experience and concludes that the White Mind is a necessary part of the human mind for survival but it has the potential for both good and evil. Before going to sleep, Alice tells Shura that the experience has temporarily shut down her sex drive. When Alice wakes up on Tuesday, she attempts to read the newspaper to test her state of mind and finds it is still too busy to easily process the news. Alice discusses the situation with Shura, who assures her that she is not going through psychosis and the experience was almost certainly not brought on by the DESOXY. Alice tells Shura that her thoughts have mostly been absorbed by the eternally repeating mistakes of history and the good that can come out of great historical evil. After Shura leaves to teach class, Alice encounters a feeling of overwhelming hatred and imagines herself as a maggot inside a well. Alice realizes she has to love this maggot and pulls it out of the well and it transforms into a baby that is dying, which Alice must save by putting it inside her stomach. To help work through this emotional crisis, Alice decides to take some MDMA, which allows her to relax. That night, Alice has a lucid dream with a stained glass window colored green and blue to represent yin and yang. On Wednesday, Alice is not completely back to normal but is able to drive to the store. On Thursday, Alice is once again back in the experience. After Shura leaves for class, Alice calls Adam again and carefully drives to his house in Berkeley. While driving, Alice believes she can read the thoughts of other motorists in the area. Once at Adam's house, Adam tells Alice that she is not experiencing psychosis but instead a spiritual crisis. Adam explains to Alice that he went through a similar process twenty years earlier that lasted for almost two years. Adam explains that Alice must get through the process herself. On Friday, Alice spends most of the day writing and grappling with the idea of human cruelty. When Shura gets home in the evening, he suggests that Alice take some 2C-B to reintegrate the mind and the body. Alice and Shura take the drug and make love and talk all night. Both Shura and Alice take forty milligrams of DESOXY in the future to test its strength, and each finds it to be completely inactive.



Chapters 39-42

Chapters 39-42 Summary and Analysis

Chapter thirty-nine consists mostly of a report written by Dante Sandeman after taking the drug 2C-T-7 at his desert home in Gold Tree, California. The night before Dante and his wife Ginger eat the 2C-T-7, their guests Glenn and Charles arrive, and the whole group discusses the nature of God. Dante is disappointed to learn that both Glenn and Charles believe God to be unknowable in this world. The next day when they are all under the influence of the 2C-T-7, Dante believes he is filled with the feminine spirit of God, and the others agree that God can be known. Both Dante and Ginger report improved mental clarity and physical stamina since taking the 2C-T-7.

In chapter forty, Shura goes to the Owl Club's annual retreat and goes on a hike with a fellow member named Luke. On the hike, both Shura and Luke take some 2C-E. The experience makes Shura reflect on his own mortality, and he realizes that although he is now in his sixties, he has long considered himself to be only in his forties. Shura becomes exhausted on the hike and has to rest. When both Shura and Luke decide to return to the camp, Shura injures himself and fears he has given himself a hernia. Shura is examined by a doctor at the lodge hospital which he finds embarrassing. The entire experience causes Shura to feel as if he has aged twenty years in a single day. Shura hopes that he can retain his sixty year old attitudes into his eighties.

Chapter forty-one consists of Shura's notes from one of his most intense psychedelic experiences using the drug 2C-T-4. By about three and a half hours into the experience, Shura feels that his body and mind are connected to everything in the outside world. Shura is convinced that these feelings are really available to people at any time, but for the most part we choose to shut ourselves off from them. Shura believes it is shameful that we are taught that such blissful experiences should not be part of our daily existences and that those who use drugs to achieve them are bad people. After the drug's effects wear off, Shura goes with Alice to eat dinner with her family in Marin County.

In chapter forty-two, Shura gives a lecture to his class at Berkeley on the war on drugs and how it destroys essential freedoms. Shura tells his students that many of Americans' traditional rights have been surrendered in the hope of winning the war on drugs. A couple of these are the right to a trial by jury and the presumption of innocence, which have both been circumvented by civil forfeiture laws. Furthermore, the war on drugs has eroded the longstanding distinction between the military and civilian law enforcement agencies. Shura also believes that searches executed in good faith allow the police to search anyone at anytime because it is nearly impossible to prove the search was made in bad faith. Shura asserts that urine tests are completely unjustifiable unless there is some reason to believe that a crime has been committed. Shura rails against a proposed law that would allow the execution of so-called major drug dealers as barbaric. Shura describes programs such as "Just Say No" as a form of propaganda



disguised as useful education about drugs. Shura compares the treatment of the Jews during Krystalnacht to the treatment of drug users in the United States as they both serve as scapegoats for bigger problems. Shura believes the war on drugs cannot be won and therefore advocates drug legalization for consenting adults. Shura asks his students to determine where the line between acceptable police actions in the war on drugs and a police state is and what action they will take if that line is crossed. Shura concludes that every person is sovereign over their own bodies provided they do not harm someone else.

The Chemical Story Part One

The Chemical Story Part One Summary and Analysis

The second half of the book consists of a list of most of the psychedelics Shura has manufactured over the years and directions for how to synthesize them. The Drug Enforcement Agency considers this section to be nothing more than a cookbook for illicit drugs, but Shura believes it will be of great use in a more enlightened time when people are more free to experiment with mind altering substances. While it is impossible to summarize the directions for synthesizing Shura's drugs, many are accompanied by some qualitative comments, the most important of which are summarized here.

On drug number three, Aleph, Shura is able to write nearly fourteen pages of notes at five milligrams, but at ten milligrams he is terrible at mechanical tasks and feels it would be impossible to drive.

With drug number four, Aleph-2, Shura finds some visual distortion with four milligrams and extraordinary visuals at five milligrams. However, at eight milligrams, even though Shura is incredibly intoxicated, there are almost no visual effects.

When Shura takes drug number five, Aleph-4, for the first time at seven milligrams, he begins to have a bad experience but comes out of it relatively quickly. On eight milligrams of the drug, Shura even manages to drive into San Francisco and walk through downtown and have a thoroughly enjoyable experience. However, when Shura takes twelve milligrams of the drug, he has an intensely frightening experience that forces him to abandon everyone around him for about twenty minutes.

Shura takes thirty milligrams of drug number six, Aleph-6, and has a pleasant but very low intensity experience. When Shura tries the drug again at forty milligrams, he uses it as a primer for sixty micrograms of LSD and finds the experience incredibly powerful.

Shura takes Aleph-7 once at six milligrams and again at seven milligrams, both times resolving never to take it again because they are both mainly unpleasant experiences. However, Shura does take it one last time at seven milligrams and finds it very boring.

The first time Shura takes 2C-B, drug number twenty, at sixteen milligrams he visits the Stanford museum. Shura finds the art there very interesting but also sees art in the ceiling and elsewhere. The next two times Shura takes 2C-B, he consumes twenty milligrams but again experiences many artistic visions despite not being at a museum either time. Shura also begins to discover that 2C-B is an incredibly erotic drug.



The Chemical Story Part Two

The Chemical Story Part Two Summary and Analysis

Taking 2C-T-4, drug number forty-one, at eight milligrams, Shura finds the experience to be visually stunning, but when Shura takes it again at fourteen milligrams the visuals are not nearly as present. Shura takes twenty-two milligrams, which he finds to be somewhat overwhelming at points, so he decides to only take eighteen milligrams next time.

Shura takes drug number sixty-eight, DOM, first at the level of one milligram, which produces only an "eerie feeling." When Shura takes four milligrams of the substance he finds it to be the most stunning visual experience of his life and writes that the experience as a whole ranks higher than LSD, mescaline, or peyote. Shura takes it at five milligrams and believes that it puts him on the brink of insanity. Shura takes it at the even higher level of twelve milligrams and finds that DOM has all things good and bad within it.

The first experience Shura has with MDMA, drug number one hundred and nine, is fairly inexplicable. Shura admits that nothing much happened, but he felt complete relaxation and that he could discuss topics intelligently. Taking the drug at one hundred and twenty milligrams, Shura describes the experience as pure joy and claims that it made him feel at one with the universe.

Shura takes drug number one hundred twenty-two, MEM, at a level of only twenty milligrams the first time and finds that it gives him energy the first day he takes it and leaves him with important insights the next day. Shura later takes another twenty milligrams of the MEM but this time accompanied with one hundred twenty milligrams of MDMA, which he finds expands the MDMA experience for hours and leaves pleasant after effects for days.

Shura initially finds that TMA, drug number one hundred fifty-seven, produces no nausea at one hundred thirty-five milligrams although it is a close relative of mescaline. However, when Shura raises the dosage to two hundred twenty-five milligrams, he finds that it produces nausea as well as some violent tendencies, which Shura finds disturbing.



Characters

Shura Bordorin

Shura Bordorin is the main character of the book and narrates roughly half of the text. Shura is born in 1925 in Berkeley, California, to a Russian immigrant father and a mother from Illinois, both of whom are teachers. Shura is a precocious child who graduates from high school early and earns a scholarship to Harvard. However, Shura quickly drops out of Harvard and signs up for the navy during World War II. It is in the navy that Shura learns the power of drugs when he develops an infection in his thumb and is given morphine to treat it. After the navy, Shura returns to school at the University of California Berkeley and receives his PhD in biochemistry. With this degree, Shura gets a job with Dole Chemical Company where he manufactures psychedelic drugs. Shura leaves this job in the mid 1960s to produce his drugs in the basement of his childhood home.

Shura is extremely brilliant but also incredibly distant. When discussing love with his eventual second wife Alice, Shura admits that he was never really in love with his first wife Helen. Shura credits Ursula, the wife of his German colleague and friend Dolph, with teaching him how to love and making his personality warmer. Shura later regrets not being a warmer father to his and Helen's son Theo. Both Theo and Alice notice that Shura has occasional bouts of extreme anger and depression. After the death of Helen, Shura attempts to bring Ursula to live with him in California, but Ursula seems to continuously placate him. During this period, Shura meets Alice and begins a relationship with her. When Ursula finally admits she is not coming to live in California, Shura asks Alice to live with him, and they are soon married.

Shura also is the longtime head of a research group that consumes his psychedelic drugs and records their findings. Shura believes that this creation and testing of mind altering chemicals is his life work. Unlike many scientists, Shura sees chemistry as an art more than a pure science.

Alice Parr (Bordorin)

Alice is the second main character and the narrator of roughly half the book. Alice is born in Mussolini Era Italy to the American consul. Alice's family fled from Italy in 1940 as her father was Jewish. When Alice was young, she frequently had a psychedelic experience that she called the Spiral that usually occurred just before falling asleep. At the end of the Spiral, Alice would meet an entity that would reassure her that all was right with the universe. Alice married a commercial artist named Dick at the age of nineteen and had her first son Christopher. Dick and Alice soon divorced, and Alice was forced to live in a housing project with Christopher. When Dick remarried, he took Christopher to live with him and his new wife Irene, and Alice later deeply regrets the decision to let Christopher leave despite their grinding poverty. In the late 1950s, Alice



takes a job working at the University of California Medical Center, where she works for most of the book. While there, Alice carries on a brief relationship with a young psychiatrist named Paul. The relationship leaves Alice pregnant, but she soon miscarries. Shortly after this trauma, Alice takes peyote with another young psychiatrist named Sam, which she finds to be an incredibly mind revealing experience. Alice marries yet another psychiatrist named Walter in the early 1960s with whom she has three children: Wendy, Ann, and Brian. This marriage also ends in divorce.

Alice meets Shura at a meeting organized by an ex-boyfriend in 1978 and falls in love with him almost instantly. Although Alice quickly learns Shura is in love with a married German woman named Ursula, she still pursues Shura. Quickly Alice is carrying on a relationship with Shura that involves spending weekends at his farm and taking his psychedelic drugs. When Ursula appears to be moving to California to be with Shura, Alice has an emotional breakdown that is only stopped by taking MDMA and being told that Shura will need her in the near future. When Ursula does not arrive in California, Alice writes a letter telling Ursula to either come to California to stay or let Shura go. When Ursula writes back that she will not come to California, Shura asks Alice to move in at the farm, which Alice accepts. Alice is soon married to Shura.

Alice is an extremely emotional and intuitive woman, who frequently feels guided by God-like forces in the universe.

Ursula Biehls

Ursula is the primary love interest of Shura for the middle part of the book, and although she is not directly portrayed in almost any of the book, much of the action revolves around her. Ursula is the wife of Shura's friend and colleague Dolph Biehls. Ursula and Shura's affair begins while Shura's first wife Helen is still alive. Ursula behaves the same around both Helen and Dolph after the affair begins as before. Shura credits Ursula with being his first love and teaching him how to be more affectionate. Shura visits Ursula in Paris, and after the death of Helen, Ursula visits Shura at his farm in Berkeley. Ursula promises to leave Dolph and come to live with Shura, but constantly puts off the actual act of leaving Dolph, claiming that he is too emotionally fragile at the time and may end up harming himself or others. When Alice becomes involved with Shura, Shura's psychologist friend Ben Cantrell tells Alice that he believes Ursula is manipulating Shura. Ben believes Ursula feels compelled to become whatever the man she is interested in needs or desires in his life, but Ursula is also incapable of fully giving herself to any one man and therefore must seek out multiple men to be fulfilled. Ben's theory is given some credence when Shura admits to Alice that there had been another married man Ursula carried on affair with before him. Ursula sets a date to arrive to live with Shura but never arrives. Ursula explains in a letter that she is going to make a life by herself away from Dolph, but Alice and Shura later find out that this too is a lie, and that Ursula had become the mother of Dolph's first child, a daughter.



Helen Bordorin

Helen is Shura's first wife whom he marries in the late 1940s. Helen is a fellow student at the University of California and also a member of a social group called California Hall. Helen is of Scottish descent and her parents disapprove of her marrying Shura because he is a Russian. Helen acts as an observer in Shura's drug experiments and supports them but never takes part in them herself. When Shura leaves Dole Chemical Company in the mid 1960s, Helen is supportive of the decision and goes to work as a librarian at the University of California. Shura believes that Helen enjoys the work and also the independent source of income. After Shura and Helen's son Theo is born, Helen becomes increasingly phobic. Helen tells Shura that she does not want to have another child due to the pain of childbirth, which disappoints Shura, but he does not protest. Helen also abandons the sailing trips that she had enjoyed earlier in her life. Finally, when Shura takes up flying, Helen does not even want to hear about the lessons because they terrify her so much. Helen does have a single psychedelic drug experience. A few months before Helen dies, she takes mescaline with Shura and a few other friends and finds it to be an amazingly enjoyable experience. Helen dies of a massive stroke in September, 1977, and her death sets Shura free in many ways because the marriage had largely grown loveless.

Sam Golding

Sam is a member of Shura's research group in the 1950s while Sam studies to become a psychiatrist. Somewhat later, Sam goes to work at the University of California Medical Center where he befriends Alice. Alice finds Sam to be incredibly interesting and intellectually stimulating, especially with his expansive knowledge of Native American tribes and rituals, but also socially awkward and incredibly absentminded. Sam obtains peyote for Alice and takes the drug with her one day. Sam guides Alice through the experience, which Alice finds transformative.

Dolph Biehls

Dolph is the husband of Ursula and resides in Germany. He is a good friend and colleague of Shura even after Shura begins having an affair with Ursula. After Helen's death, Ursula promises to move to California to live with Shura but continuously uses Dolph's supposedly fragile mental state as a reason to stay on in Germany. According to Ursula, Dolph is aware of the affair and her intention to move to California, but whenever Shura calls Germany and speaks to Dolph, he sounds as if he is in good spirits and nothing is wrong. Dolph and Ursula eventually have a daughter after Ursula refuses to come live with Shura.



Adam Fisher

Adam is an elderly psychologist who practices in Oakland and who uses psychedelic drugs in treating his patients. In 1977, Adam is preparing to retire, and Shura introduces Adam to MDMA. The experience with MDMA convinces Adam not to retire and instead spend his remaining years introducing other psychologists to the therapeutic powers of MDMA. Later, Alice is going through a spiritual crisis and discusses her problems with Adam. Adam relates a similar experience he had twenty years earlier to Alice and assures her that the experience will resolve itself but that she must allow herself to go through it.

George and Ruth Close

George and Ruth are friends of Shura, going back to his time in California Hall at the University of California. When Shura is married to Helen, the Closes take frequent trips with the Bordorins to Reno. Later, the Closes become part of Shura's research group and take a number of psychedelic drugs. George's reaction to these drugs is normally to withdraw from the group, but he usually enjoys himself. The extreme version of this was an experiment with 5-TOM at the Close's house where George becomes catatonic but claims to have been in an amazing place the entire time. Ruth trusts implicitly that there is nothing permanently wrong with George during this ordeal.

Ben and Leah Cantrell

Ben and Leah are both members of Shura's research group. Ben and Leah are both psychologists by the end of the book, but Leah does not earn her PhD until well after Ben. When Ben first meets Alice, he tells her that he believes Ursula is manipulating Shura because Ursula has a need to be loved by more than one man at any given time. Ben is Shura's right hand man when something goes wrong in any of the experiments.

Dante and Ginger Sandeman

Dante and Ginger are the two members of Shura's research group who live the farthest away in a small Death Valley town called Gold Tree. Shura presents Dante as a somewhat gullible but well meaning man who has been taken in by con men several times in his life. Ginger is a painter and very patient with Dante when he becomes depressed. Dante is a pioneer in using psychedelic drugs therapeutically as he founded the Institute for Consciousness Exploration in Berkeley in the 1950s. Near the end of the book, Dante and Ginger take 2C-T-7 and both have extremely spiritual experiences.

David Ladder

David is a chemist and a close associate of Shura's when it comes to producing new chemicals. David never marries or even seems to date, mostly because he is too obsessed with chemicals to think of almost anything else. David works with Shura twice a week at a research laboratory in San Francisco.



Objects/Places

The Farm

This is where Shura and (later) Alice live and is Shura's boyhood home. It is also where Shura has his laboratory and many of Shura's research group experiments are held.

University of California at Berkeley

This is where Shura receives his PhD in biochemistry and later teaches a class in toxicology.

University of California Medical Center

This is where Alice works most of her life until she marries Shura and moves to the farm.

Germany

Ursula and Dolph Biehls live in Germany, but Ursula is constantly telling Shura she plans to move to California.

Tennessee

Shura takes a large dose of 2C-E in Tennessee shortly after the death of his first wife Helen. The experience is powerful and somewhat frightening.

Dole Chemical Company

This is Shura's employer from the time he receives his PhD until the mid 1960s. It is also where Shura invents many psychedelics and conducts his first experiments.

Paris

After the death of his mother, Shura takes his family on a cruise to Paris and lives in the city for a time. Paris is also where Shura meets Ursula shortly after meeting Alice.



Aachen

Aachen is a city in Germany to which Shura and Alice travel for Shura to give a lecture on nuclear medicine and have a honeymoon. In Aachen, Shura and Alice take 2C-I, and Alice believes she can feel the power of the city.

Close's Apartment

This is the apartment where George and Ruth Close live in Berkeley. It is the site of the first experiment with 5-TOM.

Gold Tree

Gold Tree is a small Death Valley town where Dante and Ginger Sandeman live. It is the location of Dante and Ginger's incredible experiment with 2C-T-7.



Themes

Chemistry as Art

As a chemist, Shulgin denounces the idea that chemistry is a straightforward science and instead presents it as a form of spiritual art. This fact is most evident in the conversation Shura and Alice have in chapter twenty-six concerning the consumption of psychoactive mushrooms versus a pure extract of psilocybin, their active ingredient. Alice contends that the pure chemical would lack the soul of the living plant, but Shura argues that each chemical has its own personality and soul as well. Shura even goes so far as to ascribe emotional states and intentions to the chemicals he invents. However, Shura does admit that the chemical must interact with a human body before its nature can be known.

There are also several secondary indications of Shulgin's belief that chemistry is more art than science. Whenever Shura takes one of his psychedelic compounds, he does not mix it with juice as most of the other research subjects do. Shura does this so he can know all aspects of the chemical—what Shura refers to as its character or personality. Shura also frequently insists that a good laboratory should not be kept neat and sterile. Instead it should be kept like a artist's workshop. Shura's laboratory is filled with old files, leaves, and even has numerous spiders crawling over the bottles and beakers. Alice remarks that the laboratory looks like something a mad scientist would have in a horror film, but for Shura this seeming chaos is simply part of the creative process.

Drug Use as a Form of Personal Freedom

Both Shura and Alice use drugs as a method for better understanding and enhancing their lives. Neither character uses psychedelic drugs as a method to escape from their problems, and Shura is often quite adamant in the dangers inherent in using psychedelics as a purely recreational activity. Psychedelic drugs may be used to confront problems but as a method of escape, they are likely to cause a great deal of psychological damage. Both Shura and Alice see psychedelic drugs as agents of liberation as opposed to enslavement or brain washing as many popular representations of the drugs portray them.

Consequently, it makes no sense for the government to wage a war against such substances. Shulgin devotes the entire last chapter to a lecture Shura gives to his class at Berkeley on the subject of how the war on drugs is destroying freedom in the United States. Shura maintains that the drug war is stripping Americans of the right to a trial by jury, the presumption of innocence, and their Fourth Amendment right to no unauthorized searches and seizures. In short, Shura maintains that the drug war is turning—or possibly already has turned—the United States into a police state. Shura even compares the American government's treatment of drug users to the Nazis'



treatment of the Jews on Krystalnacht. The rest of the book makes clear that Shulgin does not advocate drug use without extensive knowledge of the drug and complete acceptance of it, but as Shura he makes clear that programs like "Just Say No" do not advance actual knowledge of drugs but a propaganda view. Ultimately, Shulgin advocates the legalization of drugs for adults because in his own body, each individual should be sovereign.

The Impossibility of Safety

Both Alice and Shura advocate the idea that complete safety is an illusion and can never be achieved. Shura first explains this idea in chapter nineteen when Alice begins to ask him if he tries the psychedelics out on the research group after he has made sure the drugs are safe. Shura replies sharply that not only is there no such thing as a safe drug but there is no such thing as a safe food or drink. Shura insists that all people can know is what is relatively safe for each individual based on their own unique body chemistry. Alice realizes the same lesson in a completely different context in chapter thirty. As Alice is preparing to be separated from Shura permanently, she asks herself how she can stop being afraid. Alice is met with the response that safety has never existed and it never will, so she must stop searching for it and live life with the intent to waste nothing.

Although this is a non-fiction book, this theme is illustrated within the plot. Shura's relationship with his first wife Helen suffers because she becomes obsessed with safety to the point that she shuts herself off from life. Furthermore, Alice knowingly rejects emotional safety the moment she becomes involved with Shura because she is always aware he may soon abandon her for Ursula. The overarching lesson is that it is foolish to seek safety, so one should instead live boldly.

Style

Perspective

This book has two distinct perspectives: that of Shura and that of Alice.

Shura's perspective is heavily influenced by his background as a chemist. Shura views chemicals as having their own characters and personalities, and he frequently spends more time discussing a chemical or its synthesis in a chapter than he will describing the actions of the human characters. Although Shura views the psychedelic drugs he creates in a semi-mystical way, he treats their actions in a surprisingly clinical fashion. In many ways, Shura prefers chemicals to people for much of the book and admits as much. Shura's first marriage is largely loveless, and he is frequently difficult with his friends. Shura believes it is the love of the married German woman Ursula that teaches him to be loving and sympathetic.

Alice's life has been filled with numerous disappointments, which shows through in her narration. Alice gives away her first child Christopher and deeply regrets the decision later. Alice is also twice divorced and once miscarries. When Alice first meets Shura she does become emotionally attached almost immediately, but her past experiences with love have taught her to guard her heart to a large degree. Alice is constantly ready to give her love but worries that it will not be returned. Alice is a far more transparently spiritual person than Shura and seems to hold a hodgepodge of religious beliefs mostly derived from Eastern religions like Buddhism and Taoism.

Tone

Shura's tone in the book is, for the most part, very clinical. Shura is frequently given to describing events and objects in medical or chemical terms. Some chapters even consist entirely of his notes composed in the midst of a psychedelic experience. These notes often reveal strong emotions but are still usually written with a very fact-of-the-matter tone. Most of Shura's descriptions of his past are equally dispassionate. They are certainly not completely without emotion, but Shura does not typically dwell on his emotional states. Shura's tone does change somewhat in this regard as the book advances with him exploring his emotions more frequently and intensely. Despite his protestation that his work as a chemist is comparable to that of an artist, Shura's tone is mostly befitting of a scientist.

Alice's tone is far more personal and emotional and compensates for Shura's lack of passion. In fact, it is mainly through Alice's portrayal of Shura that his emotions are revealed. Alice's tone is fairly inconsistent and highly dependent on the action of the story. When the plot is going in a direction Alice likes, her tone often becomes happy and joking. However, when things go badly for her character, Alice's tone frequently becomes sad and occasionally angry. The two major constants in Alice's tone are what

she calls her Observer and her spirituality. The Observer is simply Alice's method of seeing the world objectively without the influence of emotion, and it can simply record information. Alice's spirituality, on the other hand, frequently calms her when she is upset and returns her emotions and tone to normality.

Structure

The work is technically divided into two separate books. The first book, *The Love Story*, tells the story of Shura and Alice, their experiences with psychedelic drugs, and how they came to love one another and live their lives together. However, the second book, *The Chemical Story*, discusses one hundred seventy-nine psychedelic drugs synthesized by Shura. Each entry contains directions for how to synthesize the drug, a diagram of its chemical structure, and notes written by Shura and others on its effects.

The Love Story is further divided into three different sections. The first section is written from Shura's point of view. In it, Shura discusses his childhood, education, career, and drug experiments up until shortly after the death of his first wife, Helen. Most of Shura's chapters are short, with the longest being fourteen pages. The second section is written from Alice's point of view. Alice briefly discusses her childhood in this section along with her first experience with any psychedelic drug but quickly moves to her first encounter with Shura. This section then details how Alice and Shura come to be lovers and are eventually married. Alice's chapters are frequently much longer than Shura's. For example, one chapter in this section is twenty-eight pages in length, twice Shura's longest chapter. The final section features both Alice and Shura's voices in different chapters. This section is somewhat disjointed, with a chapter devoted to notes written by a different couple, Dante and Ginger Sandeman, about a psychedelic drug experience and another consisting entirely of a lecture given by Shura to his university class.



Quotes

"I understood that our entire universe is contained in the mind and the spirit. We may choose not to find access to it, we may even deny its existence, but it is indeed there inside us, and there are chemicals that can catalyze its availability."
(Chap. 2, Mescaline, p. 17)

"It has been said that wisdom is the ability to understand others; it is the understanding of yourself that is enlightenment."
(Chap. 2, Mescaline, p. 17)

"It was only after a great deal of introspection that I realized that mescaline no more produced beauty than TMA produced anger. Just as the beauty was always within me, so was the anger."
(Chap. 4, TMA, p. 24)

"Adam believed (as do I) that no therapist has the right to give a psychoactive drug to another person unless and until he is thoroughly familiar with its effects on his own body and mind."
(Chap. 12, MDMA, p. 74)

I realize that, for many people, pot—marijuana—is of value primarily as a drug that relieves stress and smooths out tensions. In general, I have regarded pot as a disappointment and a waste of time."
(Chap. 13, Time-Stop, p. 75)

"There were no words, but the message was clear and smiling: Hello, dear friend, I salute you with respect-humor-love. It is a pleasure-with-laughter-joy to encounter you again."
(Chap. 16, Spiral, p. 100)

"Shura was protesting, 'there is nothing terrible about the taste; it's all part of the personality of the drug, part of its identity, its soul. Think of what you're missing; think of what you'll never know—'"
(Chap. 23, The Group, p. 209)

"Food shared is life shared. Eating with others is a way of connecting our livingness with theirs."
(Chap. 28, A World of Light, p. 261)

"Turn fear around. Its other face is excitement."
(Chap. 30, Ending, p. 293)

"The ultimate rejection is having the person you love hope (and say) that you'll meet someone else and be loved by someone else."
(Chap. 31, Volcano, p. 301)



"It is said with psychedelics one can gain communication from the unconscious. That's only partly right. We have continuous access to these deep primitive things within us, the survival and instinctual things, with psychedelics or without."

(Chap. 41, 2C-T-4, p. 430)

"However, in the current madness involving drugs and violation of drug laws, it is no longer necessary to convene a jury or—for that matter—to even bring a charge, in order to hurt and punish someone suspected of having been involved in drug-related activity."

(Chap. 42, Lecture at the University, p. 436)

"If on this page I shall have expressed it to you then it is true that DOM has the glory and the doom sealed up in it. All that's needed to unseal it is to surround it with a warm living human for a few hours. For that human for those hours all the dark things are made clear."

(Chemical #68, DOM, p. 640)



Topics for Discussion

Do you agree with Shura that each chemical has its own personality or soul? Why or why not?

Do you agree that the drug war is transforming the United States into a police state? Why or why not?

Was Shura's relationship with Ursula good for him? Why or why not?

According to the Shulgins, is there such a thing as safety? Why or why not?

If there is no such thing as safety, how should a person live his or her life?

Given what you know of Shura's research group experiments, are his experiments even relatively safe? Why or why not?

What is the point of Alice and Shura's use of psychedelic drugs? Does this drug use enhance or diminish their lives?

Was Alice wise to pursue Shura even when she knew he was involved with Ursula? What if Ursula had eventually come to live with Shura, forcing Alice away from him? Does that change your original answer? Should it?

Do you believe that the use of psychedelic drugs in the book is an attempt by the characters to deal more directly with themselves and others, or is it just an attempt to escape from reality?