

The Park Service Study Guide

The Park Service by Ryan Winfield

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Plot Summary

The Park Service is the first novel in the Park Service Trilogy by Ryan Winfield. In this novel, Aubrey Van Houten lives in an underground compound where humankind has taken refuge after a nuclear war. Aubrey has just turned fifteen and is about to take a test that decides what job and on what level of the compound Aubrey will live. He is afraid that he will not do well, however, he is pleased when he discovers he has done so well that he is to be the first in generations to move up to the first level. On the trip to Level 1, Aubrey is in an accident which leads him to discover that the world he had been told was stuck under ice is really a beautiful, thriving place. The Park Service is a dystopian novel that makes the reader wonder if saving the world will require the ultimate sacrifice or if there truly is no hope.

Aubrey Van Houten is a fifteen year old kid who is on the threshold of manhood. In his society, children go to school and live with their parents until they are fifteen. The children then take a test that determines what their careers will be and on what level of their underground society they will live on. After the children move on, the parents retire at the age of thirty-five and are sent to Eden, a place where they can have anything they want and be with all the friends and family who retired before them.

Aubrey is nervous about his test, but he finishes it surprisingly fast. Soon afterward, Aubrey learns that he has gotten a perfect skill and will be the first in generations to move to the first level. Aubrey says an awkward goodbye to his father before taking the elevator up. On the second level, Aubrey boards a train that is to take him to the first level. However, during the ride, the train derails and throws Aubrey's car onto its side. Aubrey climbs out of the broken train car and finds himself out in the open for the first time in his life. Aubrey was raised with the idea that the surface world was enduring a second ice age because of the nuclear war that destroyed the former society. However, the world appears to be a rich, thriving place.

Holding on to the train tracks, Aubrey climbs down the trellis and into a lush meadow. Aubrey can see fire in the distance, so he begins walking in that direction. However, Aubrey's body is not prepared for the exposure to the sun or some of the bacteria and viruses that exist on the surface. Aubrey becomes very ill and collapses as he reaches the ocean. Someone picks up Aubrey and takes him to a cave where he is cared for by an unseen group of women.

When Aubrey recovers from his illness, he discovers that he has been abandoned by his rescuers. Aubrey begins to walk again and runs into a young man catching pigeons. Aubrey helps the young man catch and clean the pigeons. Later, Aubrey convinces the young man to take him back to his camp. There, Aubrey learns, the small clan had made the conscious choice to abandon Aubrey and do not want them with him now. However, the father of the young man, agrees to allow Aubrey to stay after he recites a poem for them. This man wants his children and grandchildren to learn to read.



Aubrey remains with the clan and becomes close friends with Jimmy, the young man. As Aubrey grows stronger he also becomes more comfortable with this clan and his new world. However, danger lurks in this world. Jimmy tells Aubrey about an entity he knows only as the Park Service. Jimmy, in fact, had once believed Aubrey was a part of the Park Service because of the badge on his clothing. Then, a ship attacks the clan, killing everyone except for Aubrey and Jimmy.

Aubrey treats Jimmy's wounds and cleans up the bodies left from the massacre. Aubrey then insists that he must go to find the Park Service so that he can stop them from hurting more people. It is a long journey over a treacherous mountain. When they arrive in a valley on the other side of the mountain, they find a compound that was once a ski lodge. At the compound, Aubrey spots a beautiful girl his own age. The girl, Hannah, invites Aubrey and Jimmy into the compound, but Jimmy soon leaves. Alone with Hannah, Aubrey learns that her father is Dr. Robert Radcliffe, the founder of Aubrey's underground society. This would make Dr. Radcliffe over nine hundred years old.

Aubrey learns that before the nuclear war that destroyed the world, Dr. Radcliffe and his team of scientists had perfected a way to stop aging. The group then began experiments in the underground bunkers just before the war began. Dr. Radcliffe and his people remained in the underground society for generations after the war, building the new society. When they discovered that the world had regenerated itself, they decided it was their responsibility to ensure that the world remain undamaged by mankind. For that reason, they have watched over the world, killing all survivors on the surface they could find. At the same time, they kept the people in the underground bunkers alive to create the equipment necessary in aiding in this mission. When all the people on the surface are dead, Dr. Radcliffe and his people agreed they would destroy the underground bunker and take their own lives. However, that has failed to happen and now they are all dying from an inability to regenerate brain cells. For this reason, Dr. Radcliffe has brought Aubrey to the surface to mate with his daughter and continue their mission.

After witnessing his father's death in Eden, Aubrey destroys Eden. Dr. Radcliffe becomes angry and decides to destroy Aubrey's underground society. Aubrey must make a decision, to stop Dr. Radcliffe but cause collateral damage or allow his childhood home and all the people in the underground bunker to die. The decision is taken out of Aubrey's hands when Mrs. Radcliffe blows a charge that causes a small tsunami that wipes out all of the immortal scientists and their dark operations. Now Aubrey, Hannah, and Jimmy must decide how to save the world and whether or not to use Dr. Radcliffe's discovery to live an abnormally long life.



Prologue and Part One: Chapters 1-5

Summary

Prologue and Part One: Chapters 1-5

Prologue: The End of the Holocene

A soldier has just returned home. She steps off the bus and looks around. Suddenly a fire ball spreads down the street, people begin to walk past with their bodies damaged and burned. The soldier dies lying in the middle of the street.

Chapter 1: Tomorrow's the Big Day

Aubrey Van Houten falls asleep on the beach and wakes buried in the sand. Aubrey knows that the local bully did it. Bill, the lifeguard, digs Aubrey out and hangs out until Aubrey has cleaned up and is ready to go. Bill turns everything off and the water disappears. Then they step out into the corridor of Level 3 of Holocene II. As Aubrey walks home he thinks of the things his father has told him of what the world above was like nine hundred years ago before the nuclear war.

Aubrey stops at his father's food engineering lab and gets some green food coloring before going home. At home, Aubrey finds a man called Mr. Zales waiting to take a sample of his blood before the test the following day. Aubrey submits to the needle while answering questions about the test. Everyone is excited. Aubrey's father is convinced that Aubrey will do better than everyone else, but Aubrey has his doubts. They also talk about Mr. Van Houten's impending retirement later that summer. Mr. Van Houten is excited to retire because it will mean going to Eden, a place where everyone is reunited with those they love. Mr. Van Houten's wife died of an infected appendix shortly after giving birth to their son who was named for his mother Aubrey.

As they talk, Mr. Van Houten smokes his pipe. Once again, Mr. Van Houten tells Aubrey the story of the pipe, how it came from generations of Van Houtens and is decorated with butterflies, a species that existed before the war but which the engineers could not get to survive underground. Mr. Van Houten promises Aubrey the pipe will be his when his father retires.

Aubrey goes into his bedroom, still thinking about the test. This test is given to all the fifteen year olds and will determine not only their jobs, but what level of Holocene II they will live on. Aubrey currently lives on Level 3, the highest possible except for Level 1. There are three levels below them, each one falling lower and lower in societal importance. Aubrey knows that it would be a terrible disgrace to the family name to move to Level 5 or below. For this reason, Aubrey is deeply concerned about his performance on the test.



Aubrey sneaks out of his bedroom window and places the bottle of green food dye carefully outside the window of Red, the boy who has bullied him since they were small. Aubrey knows that Red will soon sneak out of that window to go visit his girlfriend and the bottle of dye will spill on him, staining his fair skin.

Chapter 2: Good Thinking and Good Luck

The next morning, Aubrey has breakfast with his father. Aubrey's father, as usual, makes Aubrey eat his rations as well as his own. Afterward, Aubrey goes to the testing center and turns in the lesson slate that has been his constant companion since he was five. Aubrey takes a seat at a desk and watches as Red enters the room, his face covered with a green stain.

The lights dim and the video screens built into the desks come on. Aubrey, along with the other fifteen year olds, watches an old video featuring Dr. Robert Radcliffe, the founder of Holocene II. The video must have been recorded over nine hundred years ago shortly before Dr. Radcliffe became the first person to enter Eden upon his retirement. Dr. Radcliffe commends the students for making it to their fifteen year and wishes them luck on the test.

The teacher announces the rules of the test, telling students that they have eight hours to complete it, but that most will not. Aubrey begins the test. Aubrey sails through most of the early questions, only having to stop and think as he gets to the more advanced questions. After all the analytical questions, Aubrey is shocked to come across a moral question. Aubrey closes his eyes and guesses. When he opens his eyes, he discovers that the test has ended. The teacher dismisses Aubrey from the class.

Chapter 3: What Did I Do?

Aubrey goes home; but, when he finds his father is still at work, he decides to go for a walk. Aubrey eventually ends up at the movie theater where there is an educational film about to begin. Aubrey falls asleep in the theater and wakes after the film is over. Aubrey begins the walk home and notices that neighbors appear to be passing gossip, a rarity in recent years. When Aubrey arrives home, he discovers that he has gotten a perfect score on the test and will be moving up to Level 1, the first fifteen to achieve this in generations.

Chapter 4: I Love You, Son

A week passes and Aubrey feels overwhelmed by the number of people who stop to congratulate him on his success. On Sunday, Aubrey goes to the beach once more and hangs out with lifeguard, Bill. Afterward, Aubrey takes his time walking home, mentally saying his goodbyes to the familiar corridors and landmarks. At home, Aubrey wonders who will live in their house after he is gone and his father is retired. Before Aubrey goes to bed, his father comes in the room and sits with him, but does not say anything.

The following morning, Aubrey's dad is gone when he wakes. Aubrey leaves behind his few belongings which consist mostly of spare clothes. Aubrey walks to the elevators and



watches the other families saying their goodbyes to departing fifteen year olds. No one is there for Aubrey, except Red who offers an apology for the years of bullying. When the elevators open, Aubrey is the only to board the one going up. As the doors close, Aubrey's father arrives and hands him the pipe, saying what Aubrey thinks is I love you before the doors close completely.

Chapter 5: I've Died and Gone to Eden

When the elevator reaches its upper destination, it is filled with some sort of gas that Aubrey has no choice but to breathe in. Aubrey is freed from the elevator by Dorian, a worker at the Transfer Station on Level 2. Aubrey is then led to a train that travels to Level 1, taking new retirees to Eden. Aubrey is placed in a passenger car by himself. Aubrey soon falls asleep. When he wakes, Aubrey discovers the train has derailed and the car is now lying on its side. Aubrey climbs out of a hole in the side of the car and finds himself out in the open, looking down on a deep blue horizon.

Analysis

The prologue provides a vivid description of a nuclear blast, making it clear to the reader that it was a nuclear war that began the destruction that would ruin the world. It does not take much imagination for the reader to realize that this destruction is devastating and will render the world unlivable for hundreds of years to come.

The first chapter introduces an underground world where fifteen year old Aubrey Van Houten has grown up. This world is unusual in the fact that it not only exists underground, but that the people all willingly retire at thirty-five in order to be sent to some virtual reality place called Eden, a place where they can be with their loved ones and have anything they want. Not only this, but jobs are chosen for the people of this society and those jobs dictate where a person will live. In its way, this way of choosing people's living situation also chooses their mates because it is only possible to marry those who live on your level.

Holocene II is an underground bunker that has six levels. Each level has a specific purpose. Level 6 is the lowest level and is where the worst jobs are, such as waste management. Level 5 and Level 4 are slightly better, places where things are manufactured. Level 3 is where the scientists and food engineers live. Level 2 is the Transport Station, not a level where people live. Level 1 is supposed to be the level where scientists study the surface of the earth with drones designed on Level 3 and built on Level 4. It is to Level 1 Aubrey is to go after taking his test.

Aubrey is a book worm, a skinny young man who has been bullied by his fellow school mates and has few friends. Aubrey has read every book available to him, however, and is highly educated despite his living arrangement. Aubrey's mother died when he was born and he has been raised by his father. Aubrey's father deeply misses his wife. He is looking forward to his retirement in less than four months. It is clear that although Aubrey's father will miss his son when he goes to Level 1, events have transpired in the



most optimal way. There is honor in Aubrey's appointment to Level 1. Unfortunately, Aubrey does not quite make it there.

Discussion Question 1

What is nuclear war? What are some causes of such a war? What is the aftermath of such a war?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Aubrey and his father live underground? How long has their society lived underground? How do they survive?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Aubrey have to take a test? What will the test reveal for Aubrey? What is the result of Aubrey's testing?

Vocabulary

Horizon, ultraviolet, Holocene, emptiness, punctuated, luminescent, cavern, immense, illuminated, surface, direction, suspended, metallic, warble, engineers, prepare, pretend, immediately, projection, footage, educational, balance, nervously, anxious, taunted, scientists, algae, confused.



Part Two: Chapters 6-10

Summary

Part Two: Chapters 6-10

Chapter 6: What in the World Happened?

Aubrey finds himself looking down on a large pine forest. It is the first time Aubrey has ever had a real breeze on his face. At first Aubrey thought it might be another virtual scene like the beach, but then he sees smoke in the distance. Aubrey decides to climb down the trestle and find the source of the smoke. As he climbs out of the train, Aubrey can hear the mechanical clicks of machinery come to fix the derailment.

It takes time for Aubrey to climb down, but when he reaches the valley floor he is awed by all that he sees. Aubrey was always told that the world was suffering a second ice age because of the nuclear fallout. The reality of this lie bothers Aubrey as he struggles to understand all he is seeing.

Chapter 7: Aubrey Begins to Search for Water

Aubrey walks through a field of wild wheat, allowing his hands to run over it even though it cuts him. When Aubrey arrives at a small river, he finds a bear there. Aubrey watches the bear and it moves on. Aubrey then takes a long drink at the river's edge. Aubrey follows the river as he continues to walk. When he comes to a small waterfall, Aubrey carefully climbs down. Exhausted, Aubrey falls asleep and dreams of the day he took the test. The next morning, Aubrey is sick. Aubrey continues to walk, following the river despite his growing illness. By evening Aubrey is near to collapsing just as the ocean comes into view. Aubrey sees a young man sitting very still on a rock and thinks he must be a hallucination until the young man moves.

Chapter 8: Jimmy

Aubrey wakes in a cave but has no memory of getting there. For several days, Aubrey is in and out of consciousness. Aubrey is unsure who is caring for him, but he often hears female voices and many times recalls a woman sitting beside him and caring for him. When Aubrey is finally well enough to leave his bed, he discovers that he has been left alone in a cave. Aubrey waits a day for his rescuers to come back, but when they do not he decides to move on.

Aubrey moves south. On the second day he comes across a caldera where he stops to get fresh water. While there, Aubrey spots the same young man he saw at the ocean before he collapsed. The young man enlists Aubrey's help in capturing and field dressing pigeons. Afterward the young man, called Jimmy, offers Aubrey half the catch. Aubrey refuses. Jimmy walks away, leaving Aubrey behind. Aubrey quickly catches up and asks to go along, but Jimmy tells him the leaders of his group have already voted to



not allow Aubrey to join them, which is why Aubrey was abandoned at the caves. Aubrey has nowhere else to go, however, and continues to follow Jimmy.

Chapter 9: Thank You, Robert Frost

Jimmy takes Aubrey to the small camp where several men are waiting. These men are Jimmy's father, grandfather, and uncle. The men debate over whether they should overrule the group's decision and let Aubrey stay. When Aubrey recites a Robert Frost poem, the grandfather decides Aubrey should stay so that he might teach the younger ones to read. Later, when the men are asleep, Aubrey asks Jimmy about the Park Service, something Uncle John mentioned. All Jimmy tells him is that the Park Service kills people.

Chapter 10: Welcome to the Cove

Jimmy, his family, and Aubrey walk to a small cove where the rest of their group is camped. Aubrey learns that the group often spends their summers at this cove because it is close to the ocean but has good cover in case of trouble. When they arrive, Aubrey realizes it was Jimmy's mother who nursed Aubrey through his illness. Jimmy's mother declares that Aubrey is welcome to stay, effectively reversing the previous decision of the group.

Analysis

Aubrey finds himself on the surface of the world. No one in nine generations of Aubrey's family has seen the surface of the world. Aubrey is awed by what he sees and immediately descends to the surface in order to see more of it. Unfortunately, Aubrey's body and immune system are not prepared for the rigors of the surface and he quickly becomes sick. It is then that the reader realizes there are others on the surface of the earth.

Aubrey is saved by a young man who takes Aubrey to the women in his group. This shows the reader that there are many survivors on the Earth's surface. It causes the reader to wonder why Aubrey's society continues to struggle underground if the earth is so capable of sustaining life. Aubrey, however, is busy simply surviving to question this fact.

Aubrey is at first abandoned by his new saviors but he is later accepted into their village or clan. This gives the reader hope that Aubrey will be able to survive on the surface, leaving the underground bunker behind him. The reader must wonder, however, about Aubrey's father, left behind in Holocene II, and the dangers of the Park Service that Aubrey's new friend Jimmy mentions several times.



Discussion Question 1

How does Aubrey discover that the earth is regenerating and capable of sustaining life?
How does this contradict what Aubrey has been taught in Holocene II?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Aubrey become ill his first days on the surface? What does this say about the possible future of mankind, especially those stuck in Holocene II?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Jimmy? Why does he talk differently than Aubrey? How has he survived on the surface?

Vocabulary

Tides, lies, scrawling, communicating, permanent, concealed, mimic, skim board, perfect, hideaway, cove, bluff, protected, noisily, lessons, marveling, reclining, difference, sunken, rustling, solemn, distant, rustling, pelts, canyon, thrusts, buried, hunting, confused, spreading, unfolding, pebble, immunity.



Part Two: Chapters 11-19

Summary

Part Two: Chapters 11-19

Chapter 11: You'll See Soon Enough

Aubrey becomes Jimmy's constant companion, watching him go about his chores and gathering food. One day Uncle John gives Aubrey a knife and teaches him how to gut a fish so that he might become a productive member of the group. Jimmy teaches Aubrey how to swim. Aubrey helps Jimmy gather clams and fish. One day Aubrey spots an odd looking bird. Jimmy topples the boat they are in, hiding them from view. On the beach, Jimmy urges the women and children to hide. Later, Aubrey learns the bird was a drone. Uncle John is killed. The group burns his body and allows the wind to take his ashes.

Chapter 12: Idols from the Past

A few weeks later, Aubrey tells Jimmy his story. Jimmy listens closely. Jimmy then tells Aubrey about the Park Service, how they send these drones that often kill people with bombs and bullets. Jimmy says that his people thought that Aubrey was a part of the Park Service that had come to kill them more effectively. The patch on his uniform made them believe this. Later, Jimmy takes Aubrey deep into a cave to ask him to read the small plaque on a bust. Jimmy says that his family has always believed this bust is of a great politician. Aubrey lies to Jimmy, however, unable to tell him that he has been named after the actor James Dean.

Chapter 13: Rites of Passage

Jimmy and Aubrey take part in a coming of age ceremony. Jimmy is circumcised by his father during the ceremony, but it is discovered that Aubrey has already been circumcised. There is a great ceremony afterward.

Chapter 14: The Butterfly Waits

The cove is attacked by lice. Everyone has a job to do except for Aubrey, so Jimmy's mother sends him to collect poppies to make a paste to kill the lice. Aubrey becomes lost on the trek back to the cove, but he finds a massive field of melons. Aubrey eats his fill and then gathers dozens to take back to the cove.

When Aubrey arrives at the cove, he finds Jimmy's mother yelling at her son. The two come out of their tent and Jimmy reveals to Aubrey that he stole his father's pipe weeks before. Aubrey graciously accepts the pipe back as well as Jimmy's apology.

Chapter 15: Slaughter



A whale is spotted near the shore. The men, including Jimmy, rush out to trap and kill the animal. Aubrey watches from a cliff hanging over the cove. The men manage to harpoon the whale with Jimmy's help. However, a ship comes over the horizon and begins firing on the men. As Aubrey watches in horror, man after man is torn to pieces as he tries to dive out of the way. A drone then passes overhead and flies toward the beach.

Chapter 16: Horror in the Cove

Jimmy rushes to the cove where he dives into the water in search of Jimmy. Aubrey finds Jimmy still alive but badly injured. Aubrey carries Jimmy to a cave where he hastily stitches up a deep cut on Jimmy's thigh and one on his head. Aubrey then heats water and cleans the wounds.

Chapter 17: The Funeral Pyre

The following morning, Aubrey goes out onto the beach where there are piles and piles of human remains. The drone decimated the cove, killing everyone. Aubrey spends all day collecting the bodies, the broken toys, and the destroyed tents. Aubrey makes a huge fire and burns the bodies.

Chapter 18: The Storm Passes

Jimmy begins to run a fever. Aubrey cannot figure out how to help him. Jimmy finally remembers a science lesson about penicillin. Aubrey goes back to the melon patch and gathers rotten melons that have mold growing on them. At the cave, Aubrey harvests the mold and dries it, making a drink of it for Jimmy. Aubrey does this over and over until Jimmy's fever breaks. That night a massive storm hits the cove. By the next morning, everything is gone. Every trace that people were ever there has disappeared.

Chapter 19: There's Nowhere to Go

Aubrey and Jimmy leave the cove because the memories of their lost friends and family are too strong. Jimmy's leg continues to heal and he soon grows stronger. When they reach the caves where Aubrey recovered from his illness, Aubrey tells Jimmy that he wants to find the Park Service. Aubrey feels like he might be able to reason with the Park Service and make them stop killing people. Jimmy refuses to go, but Aubrey is determined.

Analysis

Aubrey becomes one of the group, learning to fish and swim with Jimmy. Jimmy's family is warm and welcoming, making Aubrey a member of their family despite their concerns about his origins. It is a carefree life with the only concern in everyday life was where the next meal was coming from. Aubrey begins to fill out, becoming bulkier and healthier since coming to the surface.



Jimmy tells Aubrey more about the Park Service, the entity that sends drones to kill the survivors. Aubrey does not believe Jimmy at first, especially when Jimmy tells him that the Park Service displays the symbol of the foundation that is on a patch sewn to Aubrey's jumpsuit. It was this reason the group initially wanted to leave Aubrey behind. However, Aubrey has no clue who the Park Service is until it is too late.

While trying to kill a whale for food and supplies, the group Aubrey has come to accept as his new family is attacked by a ship bearing the foundation symbol. Aubrey is shocked by the massacre he witnesses. The only person Aubrey is able to save is Jimmy. Aubrey is then left to clean up the broken bodies of the people he had grown to love and burn them.

Aubrey has grown a great deal in the short time since he left Holocene II. Aubrey has become more self-sufficient with the help of Jimmy and his people. Aubrey has also had to grow emotionally when he is forced to gather and burn the bodies of the people he cares for. It is a difficult time, but it helps Aubrey see that he can no longer sit back and allow things to go on as they have. Something is clearly wrong with the entities controlling Holocene II. For this reason, Aubrey decides to go search out the Park Service and explain to them the horrors they are committing. It is a brave thing for Aubrey to do, but could also lead to dangers.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Aubrey not know how to swim before meeting Jimmy? Why is it important for Aubrey to learn now? What else does Jimmy teach Aubrey?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jimmy's family want to catch and kill a whale? How do they do this? Who stops them?

Discussion Question 3

How is Jimmy injured in chapters 15-16? Who rescues him? How? What are Jimmy's injuries? Are they life threatening?

Vocabulary

Stammer, responsible, service, emotionally, infection, surprise, existence, cosmic, carving, pyre, funeral, hurling, caldera, retracing, pristine, retreated, cookware, intensifies, magnificent, silhouette, fashion, mold, horizon, seawater, antibiotics, image, rotten, forehead, solution, delirious, horror, charred, eternal, ethereal.



Part Three: Chapters 20-28

Summary

Part Three: Chapters 20-28

Chapter 20: Just Passing Through

The following morning, Jimmy wakes Aubrey and they head out. They make it to the train trestle quickly, but they discover that they cannot enter the mountain tunnel from there. They will have to climb over the mountain to find where the train ends up at the end of its journey. It is a difficult climb, but they begin with determination. That night Aubrey dreams of the slaughter at the cove. For days they climb. One day they come across a man with his son. The son is deformed and has a strange tumor on his neck. The man is interested to know if Aubrey and Jimmy have women with them. It seems the man will not allow them to pass, but Jimmy simply walks past him, so Aubrey follows.

Chapter 21: One Foot In Front of the Other, and Don't Slip

As Jimmy and Aubrey climb higher, they begin to come to snowy areas. They eventually have to cover their eyes with strips of cloth in order to prevent snow blindness. Jimmy spots a bear one day and it gives him hope that they will be able to get over the summit of the mountain. As they reach an ice field that goes straight up, they camp for the night. While resting, the boys discuss the stars and wonder if there are other boys on other planets watching them.

The following day they start up the dangerous summit. Jimmy ties them together with a thin rope that is more for comfort than safety. They walk up sheer ice all day. When the sun goes down, they know it would be more dangerous to stop than to continue. As they begin to slip on the ice, Aubrey cuts the rope and uses it to wrap around their feet for traction. A storm hits, making the trek even more complicated. Then, Aubrey slips and falls into a crevice.

Chapter 22: Who Lives Here?

Inside the crevice, Aubrey sees an unexploded nuclear warhead. It frightens him and reminds him why things are the way they are. Aubrey pulls himself out of the crevice and frightens Jimmy who was sitting at the edge of the crevice mourning his friend.

The boys finally reach the top of the mountain and begin down the other side. When they come to a small river, they decide to follow it. They hope that it will take them to their destination. Jimmy kills a fox, and they share the meat before resting. The following morning, Aubrey becomes aware of a baby fox following them. Jimmy wants to eat the orphaned animal, but Aubrey insists they keep it. Aubrey names the fox Junior.



Lights in the distance draw the boys' attention. They look over the bluff and see a building on the edge of a lake. It appears to be an old ski lodge that someone has taken over. The boys watch it for a short time and then decide to backtrack, making their camp hidden beside the river.

Chapter 23: The Lake House at Malthusai

Junior wakes Aubrey early the next morning. Aubrey can hear a sound in the distance and he goes to investigate. Beside the house is a tennis court. As Aubrey watches, a young girl practices with a pitching machine. When Aubrey returns to camp, he lies to Jimmy about what he saw.

The boys decide to go down to the wall around the house and investigate. When Jimmy lifts Aubrey up so he can see over the fence, Aubrey finds the girl watching them. The girl informs Aubrey that there is a gate and that they should simply walk through it. After they walk through the gate, a girl named Hannah has her servant Gloria serve them tea. The boys are starving from their long walk and eat more than their share.

Hannah is mysterious and tells the boys very little, saying that her father will explain everything when he gets back from his tour. Hannah then takes the boys inside and gives them each a room to rest in. Aubrey enjoys taking a hot bath and cleaning up, but Jimmy does not know what to do with the indoor plumbing, let alone the proper clothing Hannah has given him.

Chapter 24: My Sweet, Sweet Hannah

Aubrey wakes from his nap late in the evening. He rushes outside where Hannah told him they would have dinner at dusk. Aubrey finds Hannah sitting alone with Junior. Jimmy joins them but looks uncomfortable in his civilian clothing. They have dinner, and Hannah talks about tennis. Jimmy clearly feels left out as most of the conversation remains between Hannah and Aubrey. When Jimmy asks for fish and is told that they do not believe in killing animals for nourishment, Jimmy becomes annoyed. Finally, Jimmy goes inside, leaving Aubrey and Hannah alone. Hannah tells Aubrey that she has been expecting his arrival, that she is glad he is there, and that her father will explain everything soon. Then, she invites Aubrey to swim with her in the lake, causing him to miss the foreboding in her words.

Chapter 25: Dr. Radcliffe

The following morning Aubrey wakes to discover Jimmy and Junior have left. A boat arrives at the boat house. On board are Hannah's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Radcliffe. Aubrey is shocked to realize that Hannah's father is the same Dr. Robert Radcliffe who is the founder of Holocene II, a man who supposedly went to Eden nine hundred years ago.

Dr. Radcliffe takes Aubrey into the library and begins to explain. Dr. Radcliffe was a scientist in the days before the nuclear war. In the bunker that would eventually become Holocene II, Dr. Radcliffe and his team were researching lifespan in an attempt to make



it possible for humans to live longer. However, Dr. Radcliffe became weary of who would choose which humans would be able to benefit from his work and which ones would not. The world was overpopulated, and the natural resources were being depleted. Starvation and disease caused people to rise up against governments. Soon war began.

Dr. Radcliffe and his people hid in the bunkers under New Mexico where they had been doing their experiments. In the aftermath of the war, they built Holocene II. When they discovered years later that the earth had miraculously replenished them, they made a pact to remove the number one threat to the earth, humans. For this reason, they made a pact to never have children of their own and to remain on the surface until they were sure all survivors were gone. The people of Holocene II were allowed to continue living in part because they agreed to go to Eden at thirty-five and because they provided necessary supplies and equipment to the cause. Eventually, Dr. Radcliffe discovered that he and his people were dying despite their scientific discoveries because the brain is not meant to be alive for so long. For this reason, the Radcliffes were chosen to have a child who would carry on in their absence. Now that Hannah was of age, she needed someone with whom to have children. That is why Aubrey was brought to Level 1. His DNA will be a perfect companion to Hannah's to make strong, healthy children.

Chapter 26: The Foundation

Aubrey is deeply upset by what Dr. Radcliffe has told him. He rushes from the house only to be followed by Hannah. Aubrey finally understands that Dr. Radcliffe was behind the attack on the cove. Hannah, however, begs Aubrey to hear Dr. Radcliffe out and to go with them on a tour of the area. Aubrey agrees only for Hannah's sake.

Aubrey, Hannah, and Dr. Radcliffe board the boat. Dr. Radcliffe pilots the boat toward the dam. When they get close to the dam, a door opens. Dr. Radcliffe drives the boat into the dam. The chamber closes and the water is slowly sucked out, causing the boat to sink slowly under the dam and below the lake. At the bottom there is a facility that looks eerily similar to the levels in Holocene II. Dr. Radcliffe tells Aubrey that this is Level 1. Dr. Radcliffe walks them through corridors, introducing them to one of the other scientists, Dr. Taft, who works down there. Dr. Radcliffe then points out Eden, a large, round building that emits a red light. Dr. Radcliffe, Hannah, and Aubrey then board a drone.

Chapter 27: Touring the Park

The drone flies quickly over the mountains. They see valleys, canyons, and deserts. There are buffalo, mountain goats, and woolly mammoths. Some had come back on their own; some had been helped by science. The great lakes are frozen over, rare species of trees and plants once again flourishing. The drone lands in Florida, depositing the trio in a safe house there.

Chapter 28: Stories and Storms



As it begins to rain, Dr. Radcliffe tells Aubrey and Hannah how his love affair began with his wife during a similar rainstorm shortly before the war. Hannah finds the story romantic. The trio spends the night at the safe house and then returns to the lake house.

Analysis

Jimmy and Aubrey are trying to find the Park Service so that they might stop them from killing innocent people. Aubrey believes that the massacre at the cove was a mistake that occurred because they did not realize what they were doing. For this reason, Aubrey believes that he can make them stop. It has never occurred to Aubrey that the Park Service might have known exactly what they were doing and that they did it on purpose. Aubrey's naivety might get him into trouble.

When Jimmy and Aubrey cross the mountain range and arrive in a small valley north of the place where Aubrey's train derailed, they discover a lake house that is inhabited by a young woman and her servant. The boys go to investigate only to find the girl name Hannah to be hospitable and happy to have them there. Again it does not occur to Aubrey that something is not right about this girl's attitude. Although Aubrey found other survivors quickly after leaving the safety of the train, they have run into few other people. Therefore, one would expect Hannah to be surprised to be confronted by strangers in this world that has become so sparsely populated. Aubrey, however, is happy to have found some civilization in this new world and does not stop to think things through.

In the end, Aubrey is shocked when he discovers that Hannah's father is none other than the founder of Holocene II, Dr. Robert Radcliffe. Dr. Radcliffe has found a way to stop aging. He is actually nine hundred seventy-three years old. At the same time, Aubrey begins to realize that the condition of the surface of the earth is not the only thing he was lied to about. Dr. Radcliffe has decided that humans are the worst plague the earth has ever faced and that to save the earth from destruction he must rid it of humans. Dr. Radcliffe plans to eradicate all humans from earth and then kill himself. The problem is, Dr. Radcliffe is dying because his brain cells are no longer functioning properly. For this reason, Dr. Radcliffe and his wife had a child through a surrogate and plan to leave her in charge of their plan along with a mate picked from the people of Holocene II and their future children. Aubrey was meant to be this mate as his DNA is perfectly matched to Hannah's.

Aubrey now knows that Dr. Radcliffe has lied about just about everything his society is based on in Holocene II. Aubrey also knows that Dr. Radcliffe is responsible for the massacre at the cove. This leaves Aubrey angry and determined to get away. However, Aubrey has already developed a deep love for Hannah and does not want to leave her. Now Aubrey faces a moral dilemma that, for the time being, has his hands tied. The reader can only hope that Aubrey eventually makes the right choice.



Discussion Question 1

Who is Dr. Robert Radcliffe? How is it possible that he is still alive after so much time? What does his longevity suggest to Aubrey about his leadership?

Discussion Question 2

Who does Dr. Radcliffe feel is the worst plague against the earth? Why does Dr. Radcliffe feel it is his job to protect the earth? How does he plan to do so?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Aubrey not run away when he realizes that Dr. Radcliffe was behind the massacre at the cove? What stops Aubrey from running away after everything Dr. Radcliffe has told him?

Vocabulary

Fronds, electric, difference, tempest, disappears, massive, romance, creamery, marooned, exterminated, domestic, hurricane, excused, liquored, tourists, unofficially, celebrating, retreat, computer, visible, cancer, invisible, longevity, life span, constellation, lantern, lounge, magic, mouthful, massacre, intensity.



Part Four: Chapters 29-42

Summary

Part Four: Chapters 29-42

Chapter 29: Days of Rain

The following day it rains at the lake house. Aubrey spends the afternoon talking to Hannah. Hannah tells Aubrey she was unhappy with the thought that her parents had selected her future mate for her, but when she saw Aubrey she knew he was her soul mate.

Hannah tells Aubrey that her father, her mother, and the other scientists are dying because neurons do not regenerate and they were never able to fix this problem in their research. The symptoms already seem somewhat evident in Mrs. Radcliffe based on her frequent headaches and long afternoons in bed.

Chapter 30: Gloria

One afternoon while Aubrey is napping, the servant, Gloria, comes to his room. Gloria tells Aubrey that Jimmy has been living with Gloria and her brother in their small cottage. Gloria and her brother, Tom, were adopted by the Radcliffes years before when their family was killed by the machines. Gloria even acted as surrogate for Mrs. Radcliffe, carrying and giving birth to Hannah.

Chapter 31: Mrs. Radcliffe

Aubrey is sneaking a few breakfast bars on Gloria's day off when Mrs. Radcliffe surprises him. Mrs. Radcliffe insists on making breakfast for Aubrey. As he eats, Mrs. Radcliffe talks to him, surprising him by practically admitting she no longer loves her husband and longs for death. Mrs. Radcliffe tells Aubrey that many of the scientists who took the longevity serum with the Radcliffes have since died in accidents that were clearly acts of suicide. Mrs. Radcliffe also tells Aubrey that it was her discovery that made Dr. Radcliffe's longevity serum work in the first place, but she now believes that they were naive to want to live forever.

Chapter 32: One, Two, It's All Through

After playing tennis one afternoon, Aubrey sees Tom and Jimmy working on the lawn. Aubrey takes them tea. Tom is happy to accept, but Jimmy acts as though he never saw Aubrey. Aubrey and Hannah take the dishes inside and run into the Radcliffes. Dr. Radcliff has been down in the control center and has brought supplies. Dr. Radcliffe has failed to bring medicine for Mrs. Radcliffe, causing her to become annoyed with him. Dr. Radcliffe assures her the train will be there the following day.



Dr. Radcliffe takes Aubrey down into the basement where he shows Aubrey a hidden door beyond Hannah's laboratory that hides a panic room. Inside the panic room is a set of surveillance monitors that monitor not only the open ranges of North America, but also the control room and parts of Holocene II. Dr. Radcliffe then shows Aubrey two switches. Dr. Radcliffe says that his dream was always to eradicate the world of humans and then to destroy himself and the people of Holocene II. These switches will do exactly that by flooding Holocene II and causing a tsunami that will wipe out the control center and the lake house. However, there are still too many humans roaming free on the earth's surface. Dr. Radcliffe has come to the conclusion that he will not live long enough to see those humans eradicated, which is why he has brought Aubrey to the surface. Dr. Radcliffe hopes that Aubrey will take as much pleasure as he would have at the prospect of saving the earth from this final parasite.

Chapter 33: I Love You, Dad

Aubrey is having trouble sleeping when he realizes that his father will be on the train that is due in the control center in the morning. Aubrey gets out of bed and sneaks out of the house. Aubrey steals the boat and is pleased when he discovers that all the doors open automatically and he is able to get down to the control center without difficulty. Aubrey finds the train has already arrived, so he goes to Eden. Inside Aubrey finds his father smoking in the bathroom. They speak for a few minutes. Aubrey tries to tell his father that it was lies, but Aubrey's father is so excited to be reunited with his wife in Eden, that he decides to go through with the procedure anyway.

Chapter 34: But What about Eden?

Aubrey finds himself locked inside of Eden. Aubrey picks up a phone to ask for help and finds himself connected to Dr. Taft, the scientist he met the day he went on the tour with Hannah and Dr. Radcliffe. Dr. Taft takes Aubrey into the control room of Eden so that he can see how it works. Aubrey watches as a woman is led naked to an exam table, subdued with medication, and her skull cut open. The woman's brain is removed and her body is dumped into a basement depository. The brain is then placed in a freezing room and connected to a supercomputer. The scientists run tests on the brains. None of it is what the people of Holocene II were told. The people were not given anything they wanted and were not reunited with their loved ones. In fact, they all lost the substance of who they were once the brain was removed. Aubrey is still trying to grasp this truth when he turns and realizes that his father has just been killed.

Chapter 35: My Last Mistake

Aubrey is devastated by his father's death and considers leaving the lake house. Dr. Radcliffe is less than supportive, suggesting that he had no choice but to find a way to keep the human population down and tests subjects for important experiments that were meant to find a circumstance in which humans could remain on earth without endangering it. No solution was ever found. Dr. Radcliffe again stresses how important Aubrey is to the future. When Aubrey asks why they did not search for him after the train



accident, he learns they did. It is then that Aubrey realizes the attack on the cove was because they were searching for him.

Aubrey runs into the woods and goes to the place where he and Jimmy camped on their last night in the woods. Aubrey finds his pack with nothing but Uncle John's knife in it. Aubrey then walks into the river and tries to drown himself.

Chapter 36: You Don't Look Like an Angel

Jimmy pulls Aubrey out of the river and builds a fire to warm him. Jimmy tells Aubrey that Junior followed him and Jimmy just happened to be following Junior. Aubrey tells Jimmy all he has learned. Aubrey then tells Jimmy he wants to destroy Eden. Aubrey cannot stand the idea of his parents' brains being stuck in that machine. Jimmy agrees to help. Hannah comes to Aubrey in the night in an attempt to console him in his grief. Aubrey does not tell her about his plans.

Chapter 37: How Many Miles Down to Babylon?

Jimmy and Aubrey sneak into the boathouse the next morning only to discover that Dr. Radcliffe, who was supposed to leave early in the morning, has yet to leave. They hide in a cupboard onboard the boat when Dr. Radcliffe comes outside. In this way, Jimmy and Aubrey are able to get down to the control center without anyone being aware of their presence.

Aubrey finds a way to break into a room where he saw certain chemicals stored, knowing that one of them, potassium permanganate, will become explosive when mixed with the glycerin used to keep the liquid that holds the brains from freezing.

Chapter 38: You're Free Now

Jimmy and Aubrey go into Eden and make their way to the freezing room where the brains are kept. As they prepare to dump the chemicals in the liquid, someone enters the control room. Jimmy and Aubrey hide, waiting so long Aubrey begins to worry about frostbite. Jimmy is beginning to experience hypothermia when the lights finally go out in the control room. Aubrey springs into action. They dump their chemicals and turn to run, but find the door is locked. Aubrey and Jimmy pound on the window between the chamber and the control room, breaking through just in time to escape the explosion. They make it to Dr. Radcliffe's boat just in time to hide in the cupboard without being noticed.

Chapter 39: You got a Better Plan?

When they arrive back at the lake house, Hannah calls Dr. Radcliffe into the house to help her ill mother. Aubrey and Jimmy slip out of their hiding place. Aubrey is hesitant about his next step, but decides he must stop Dr. Radcliffe completely. Aubrey knows that he has to do something to keep Dr. Radcliffe from killing any more humans, especially the unsuspecting people of Holocene II.



Chapter 40: Why is Courage Wasted on the Young?

Aubrey walks into Mrs. Radcliffe's room and finds her very ill. When Dr. Radcliffe confronts Aubrey about his absence, clearly suspicious that he is behind the destruction of Eden, Hannah provides him with an alibi. When Dr. Radcliffe simplifies the experiments conducted with the brains at Eden, Aubrey becomes angry and confronts him. Dr. Radcliffe tries to end the discussion several times, but Aubrey will not allow him to avoid the truth. Aubrey even makes a point of telling Gloria, who is attending to Mrs. Radcliffe, that it was Dr. Radcliffe's orders that caused the deaths of her family.

As Aubrey and Dr. Radcliffe continue to argue, Aubrey announces that he wants the people of Holocene II freed. Dr. Radcliffe grabs a gun and turns it on Aubrey. In the struggle that ensues, Gloria grabs Dr. Radcliffe's belt to protect Hannah, causing Dr. Radcliffe to accidentally shoot her. Dr. Radcliffe runs from the room, quickly reaching the panic room. Aubrey catches up with him and stops him from shutting the door. Aubrey blocks the door and then fills the room with a fire extinguisher. Aubrey manages to pull Dr. Radcliffe from the room and lock himself inside. Dr. Radcliffe tells him there is more than one way to destroy Holocene II before leaving the house.

Chapter 41: The Wave

Aubrey can see Dr. Radcliffe sailing toward the dam in his boat, but he is not alone. He has Tom with him. Hannah comes to the panic room. Aubrey tells her to find Jimmy and then to get up on the high bluff where he first saw her. Aubrey then prepares to push the button that will set off a chain reaction that will flood the control center and wipe out the lake house. However, he hesitates, worried about injuring innocent people, such as Tom. Aubrey wants to find another way, so he rushes upstairs, but before he can leave the house he watches as the huge boulder beside the dam falls, telling him someone else pushed the button. Aubrey returns to the panic room and finds Mrs. Radcliffe there. Mrs. Radcliffe hands Aubrey the syringes that hold the longevity serum and tells him the future is in his and Hannah's hands. She then locks Aubrey inside the room. The panic room floods, but not enough to cause Aubrey to drown. When he gets the door open and leaves, he discovers that the lake house, the grounds, and the wall are gone.

Chapter 42: One Last Night

Aubrey climbs to the bluff and meets again with Hannah and Jimmy. Aubrey settles back to smoke his father's pipe while Jimmy builds a fire. Jimmy and Hannah begin to fight, bringing a smile to Aubrey's lips. Aubrey thinks of everything that has happened and Mrs. Radcliffe's parting words. However, he decides there will be time enough to make decisions later.

Analysis

Over the next few days, Aubrey seems to settle in with the Radcliffes. He begins to learn more and more about Dr. Radcliffe's motives and plans. Hannah tells Aubrey about the flaw in the longevity serum that is causing her parents to die slowly. Mrs.



Radcliffe tells Aubrey how lonely and unhappy life can be when you live more than nine hundred years. There are certainly drawbacks to a long life, many of them made clear to Aubrey in a short amount of time. The most dangerous one, however, is one that it takes Aubrey time to see because of his deep affection for Hannah and his desire to make his new situation work. Aubrey does not immediately notice just how obsessive Dr. Radcliffe is and how dangerous his ideas are.

When Dr. Radcliffe tells Aubrey more about his plan to eradicate every last parasite against the earth, Aubrey begins to realize the dangers of Dr. Radcliffe. Aubrey knows that he stands in an unenviable position to protect the people with whom he grew up, as well as survivors of the nuclear war who somehow have been able to survive hundreds of years in savage conditions with modern technology hunting them down.

The thing that finally pushes Aubrey over the threshold of indecision is the realization that his father was ready to retire. All his life Aubrey has heard about Eden, this magical place where adults in Holocene II go that allows them to have anything they can imagine and be with the people they love who have retired before them. Aubrey's father has looked forward to this moment all of Aubrey's life because his wife died shortly after giving birth. It is the foundation upon which the society in which Aubrey grew up in is based and it is something he has always taken for granted. Therefore, when he realizes that it is a lie, his indecision regarding Dr. Radcliffe's plans begins to crack.

Aubrey sees his father killed, his brain removed and placed in what was described to him as a large petri dish to be experimented on. It is an insult. Aubrey decides to free his parents and other people he has known in Holocene II by blowing up Eden. This act is a final act against Dr. Radcliffe that sends the ancient man over the edge. Dr. Radcliffe decides it is time to get rid of all humanity. Aubrey must stop him; yet, again, he hesitates. Mrs. Radcliffe comes to Aubrey's rescue, destroying her husband and the evil he had intended to do, but leaving behind the means for Aubrey, Hannah, and Jimmy to do it all again. Now the reader must wonder what Aubrey will decide to do in the next installment of the series.

Discussion Question 1

What is Eden? Why are the people of Holocene II sent to Eden upon their retirement? How does Aubrey feel about Eden before he arrives at the lake house? How does he feel after his father is taken to Eden?

Discussion Question 2

Why does someone describe Eden as a large petri dish to Aubrey? What does this mean? How does Aubrey respond to this information?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Dr. Radcliffe attempt to flood Holocene II at the end of the novel? Is it flooded? What happens to Dr. Radcliffe?

Vocabulary

Enemies, prevent, destroying, savage, involved, destruction, fighting, disappear, tsunami, excitement, strange, enormous, topsoil, craters, foundation, conversation, basement, concrete, remaining, encircling, punctuated, shrinking, functioning, electromagnetic, whirlpool, syringes, increased, transmissions.



Characters

Aubrey Van Houten

Aubrey Van Houten is a fifteen year old boy who has grown up in an underground society in the aftermath of the destruction of the world in a nuclear war. Aubrey is a weak, bookish boy who is often bullied throughout his childhood and has no friends. Aubrey's friends have always been the books in the Holocene II library.

At the age of fifteen, all Holocene II citizens are required to take a test that will assess their strengths and weaknesses, assigning them to jobs and a level in the compound where they will live. It is always preferable for the citizens to be assigned to Level 3 or higher. Aubrey worries when he takes the test that he will disappoint his father by being assigned to a lower level. Aubrey is surprised when he learns he got a perfect score and will be the first in generations to be moved to Level 1.

Aubrey has been told all his life that the earth is undergoing a second ice age brought on by the nuclear fallout. Therefore when Aubrey's train derails and he discovers the world is renewed, he is excited and wants to tell his people. Aubrey will learn, however, that the very man Holocene II has to thank for their survival is the same man who has kept them in the dark. That same man plans to eradicate all human life from earth, including the people of Holocene II. Aubrey is the only one who can stop this eradication, but he hesitates once too often in his decisions, leading the founder's wife to destroy her husband and his scientists, giving Aubrey, his friend Jimmy, and girlfriend Hannah the chance to begin anew, much like the earth.

Jon Van Houten

Jon Van Houten is Aubrey's father. Mr. Van Houten has raised Aubrey alone since his wife suffered an infected appendix in the aftermath of child birth. Mr. Van Houten's wife was sent to Eden where she was entered into the virtual world just before she died. For fifteen years, Mr. Van Houten has looked forward to going to Eden himself so that he can be with his wife again. This does not take away the love Mr. Van Houten has for his son, however. Mr. Van Houten is a very proud father, bragging on Aubrey every chance he gets. Mr. Van Houten also shows his affection for his son by sharing his already scarce food rations with him. In the end, however, Mr. Van Houten chooses to go to Eden rather than listen to Aubrey's warnings about the lies the Holocene II leaders have told them. Aubrey is devastated by the sight of his father's lifeless body and is inspired by it to destroy Eden and free the brains of his people.

Red

Red is a young man with whom Aubrey grew up. Where Aubrey is thin, weak, and bookish, Red is big, robust, and less scholarly. Red always picks on Aubrey, including



burying him in the sand at the virtual beach on Level 3 in the beginning chapter of the novel. For this reason, Aubrey leaves food coloring outside Red's window so it will spill on him when he sneaks out to visit his girlfriend. Aubrey expects to be beaten up for his actions. However, when he and Red finally meet again, Red apologizes for the years of abuse and congratulates Aubrey on his promotion to Level 1. This behavior says something about the humbleness and human nature of the people of Holocene II.

Jimmy

Jimmy is a young man who is about the same age as Aubrey. Aubrey first sees Jimmy by the sea, sitting very still on a rock until he finally jumps into the water. Aubrey thinks this is a hallucination because he is very sick. However, when Aubrey sees Jimmy again after he is well, he realizes that Jimmy saved his life that day. Jimmy does it again when he takes Aubrey back to his camp with him and allows him to convince his family to allow Aubrey to remain with the group.

Jimmy and Aubrey become close friends, almost like brothers. When the Park Service attacks, killing the entire clan, Aubrey manages to save Jimmy. Aubrey uses primitive antibiotics to treat an infection Jimmy acquires and performs a ceremonial burning to help Jimmy's family pass to the next world. Jimmy remains at Aubrey's side afterward, traveling with him to find the Park Service despite the dangers Jimmy suspects lie ahead. When Jimmy and Aubrey arrive at the lake house, Jimmy is uncomfortable with the house and the dangers he believes the people there hold for him and Aubrey, but he never goes far. In fact, Jimmy saves Aubrey's life when Aubrey tries to drown in the aftermath of his father's death and then promises to help Aubrey save the people of Holocene II.

Uncle John

Uncle John is one of the men who has made the decision not to allow Aubrey to join their clan. Uncle John is afraid that Aubrey will bring the Park Service down on the clan. However, after Aubrey is allowed to join the clan by Jimmy's mother, it is Uncle John who gives him a knife and shows him how to be a productive member of the group.

Jimmy's Mother

Jimmy's mother is a kind, maternal woman who cares for Aubrey almost as though he is her own when he first is ill and later when he joins their clan. Jimmy's mother is the first experience Aubrey has had with a maternal figure because his own mother died shortly after his birth. Aubrey becomes close to Jimmy's mother, close enough that Jimmy briefly experiences deep jealousy toward Aubrey. For this reason, Aubrey is devastated when Jimmy's mother and her entire clan are killed by the Park Service drones.



Hannah

Hannah is the sixteen year old daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Radcliffe. Hannah was born via a surrogate after the Radcliffes realized they were dying and would not be able to complete their mission to rid the world of humans. Hannah is to continue their mission, to protect the earth at all cost, along with a mate chosen for her by her parents. Hannah initially appears to be supportive of her father's crazy ideas, but the reader soon realizes that Hannah's mother has saner ideas and she has taught Hannah well. Hannah and Aubrey become close quickly. When Aubrey is placed in a position in which he must kill Dr. Radcliffe to save Holocene II, Hannah supports his decision.

Gloria

Gloria is a young woman the Radcliffe's adopted, along with her brother Tom, after the drones killed their family. Gloria has always been grateful to the Radcliffes. In fact, she has been so grateful that she even acted as a surrogate for their child Hannah. For this reason, Gloria is deeply shocked to discover that the Radcliffes are actually the power behind the drones, the ones who killed their family. Gloria is killed trying to protect Hannah when Dr. Radcliffe turns a gun on her and Aubrey.

Dr. Robert Radcliffe

Dr. Robert Radcliffe is the founder of Holocene II, the underground society where Aubrey was born and raised. The people of Holocene II believe that Dr. Radcliffe has been dead for more than nine hundred years and that he was actually the first to be admitted to Eden. However, when Aubrey finds himself in Dr. Radcliffe's lake side home, he learns that Radcliffe, his wife, and many scientists he worked with before the war have all taken a longevity serum that has allowed them to remain alive for nearly a thousand years.

Dr. Radcliffe explains to Aubrey that the war that destroyed the world was caused by overpopulation and the greed of humans. For this reason, when they discovered that the earth had begun to replenish itself and return to its non-human state, he and his fellow scientists decided to hide this fact from the people of Holocene II in the hopes of keeping humans from destroying it again. Dr. Radcliffe and his scientists have been searching the earth for hundreds of years, destroying small pockets of survivors who somehow lived through the nuclear holocaust and continue to thrive. At one time, they had the number of these survivors severely low, but in recent years the population has exploded. The scientists use drones to hunt these people down and destroy them.

Dr. Radcliffe has discovered that he is dying and will likely not be able to finish his mission to eradicate all human life from earth. For this reason, he has had a daughter and brought a young man from Holocene II who matches his daughter's DNA well enough to have healthy children. Dr. Radcliffe wants his daughter, her mate, and their children to finish his mission. When the mission is complete, Dr. Radcliffe expects his



descendants to destroy themselves and the people of Holocene II. Aubrey, however, does not see eye to eye with Dr. Radcliffe. There is a struggle and Dr. Radcliffe decides to destroy Holocene II as a punishment of sorts toward Aubrey. Instead, Dr. Radcliffe dies when Mrs. Radcliffe sets off a chain reaction that causes a small tsunami to wipe out the lake house and flood the control center below it.

Mrs. Radcliffe

Mrs. Radcliffe is Dr. Robert Radcliffe's wife. Mrs. Radcliffe was also a scientist before the nuclear war. Mrs. Radcliffe worked for Dr. Radcliffe's company and worked on his project to extend the longevity of human life. In fact, Mrs. Radcliffe came up with the solution to the cancers that destroyed the test subjects when they were injected with Dr. Radcliffe's longevity serum. Mrs. Radcliffe and her husband became involved shortly after the success of their serum was celebrated and remained married for more than nine hundred years. Mrs. Radcliffe has become disillusioned with her marriage and her longevity by the time Aubrey meets her. Mrs. Radcliffe is slowly dying from the lack of regeneration of neurons that is also killing the other scientist who have taken the longevity serum. The reader gets the impression that Mrs. Radcliffe, because of her deep unhappiness and the pain of her slow death, is anxious to die. Therefore, it is no surprise to the reader when Mrs. Radcliffe sacrifices herself to stop Dr. Radcliffe from killing everyone in Holocene II.



Symbols and Symbolism

Mr. Van Houten's Pipe

Aubrey's father has a pipe that has been handed down in the Van Houten family for many generations, beginning before the nuclear war. On the pipe is carved a set of butterflies, an insect no one has seen since the war because they failed to grow in Holocene II.

Uncle John's Knife

Uncle John gives Aubrey a knife for him to use in gutting fish. Uncle John feels that everyone should be helpful and this is how he imagines Aubrey can earn his keep in the clan.

Melons

While lost after picking poppies, Aubrey finds a huge field of melons. Aubrey eats some of the melons and then takes some back to the cove for the children. Later, Aubrey uses mold on the rotting melons to make an antibiotic to save Jimmy from an infection.

Bust

Jimmy proudly shows Aubrey a bust that he and his family have always believed represents some great politician. Jimmy asks Aubrey to read the plaque on the bust, but Aubrey lies to him because he does not want Jimmy to know that he and his paternal ancestors have been named for the actor James Dean.

Harpoon

Jimmy, his family, and clan members use a harpoon to catch and kill a whale. However, before they can bring the whale to shore they are attacked by the Park Service.

Lesson Slate

All the children of Holocene II are issued lesson slates that are like tablet computers. It is on these slates that the children get their lessons for class. Also, they can access the library of Holocene II.



Tents

The clan lives in tents in a cove by the beach when Aubrey joins them. The tents are largely destroyed in the Park Service's attack on the cove.

Holocene II Clothing

Everyone in Holocene II wears a drab, shapeless jumpsuit. These suits have a patch on them with the federation patch that indicates Holocene II. It is this patch that makes Jimmy's people frightened to keep Aubrey with them even when he is ill. It is also this symbol that later allows Aubrey to make the connection between the drones that attack the cove and his home in Holocene II.

Drones

The people of Holocene have designed and built drones for years, believing that these drones were used by Level 1 to search for viable locations on earth so that the people can eventually move above ground. However, the drones are actually used to hunt and destroy humans.

Eden

Aubrey and the people of Holocene II are taught that Eden is a virtual reality existence in which the people of Holocene II go into after their retirement. The people believe that those who retire to Eden are allowed to have anything they want. They are with the people they love who have also retired. Dr. Robert Radcliffe was supposedly the first person to enter Eden, but Aubrey soon learns that this was a lie. Aubrey also learns that Eden is not a pleasant place for the people of Holocene II. It is actually a scientific testing procedure that allowed them to search for scenarios in which humans would not destroy the earth and her resources, but one was never found.



Settings

Holocene II

Holocene II is an underground society that has flourished miles under the earth in the aftermath of a nuclear war. The society began from the ideas of founder Dr. Robert Radcliffe. The people in Holocene II manufacture their own food, provide their own textiles and other resources. Holocene II society is strictly governed by certain rules rather than a governing body. The people of Holocene II are given jobs and living arrangements based on how well they perform on a test administered to all people at the age of fifteen. The people then work until the age of thirty-five and then are sent to Eden, a virtual place where they can have anything they want and be with the people they love.

Earth's Surface

Aubrey was always taught that the earth's surface was under ice as it was experiencing a second ice age in the fallout of the nuclear war. However, Aubrey discovers that the earth has renewed itself and is now able to sustain all life forms. Aubrey flourishes here with his friend Jimmy and Jimmy's family for several months.

The Cove

Jimmy's family and clan live in a cove on the ocean where they have protection from the Park Service drones as well as access to the life in the ocean. Aubrey thrives here, learning how to swim and fish, as well as making good friends and experiencing a mother figure for the first time. However, the cove is devastated when the drones come and kill everyone except for Aubrey and Jimmy.

The Lake House

Jimmy and Aubrey go in search of the Park Service in hopes of convincing them to stop killing people. They find a lake house in the mountains that is the headquarters of Level 1, the topmost level of Holocene II and the place where Aubrey was traveling when his train derailed. It is here that Aubrey learns the truth of Holocene II and Dr. Radcliffe. It is also here where Dr. Radcliffe and all the scientists are killed, leaving the fate of Holocene II and the earth in Aubrey, Jimmy, and Hannah's hands.



Themes and Motifs

Environmental Conservation

In *The Park Service*, the world is destroyed in several ways. First, the overpopulation of the world causes a depletion of natural resources including coal, rainforests, and fresh water. There is also a mass extinction of many animals whose environments were ruined by this depletion of natural resources. Starvation and fear cause uprisings in many countries with people ousting the government and taking over on their own. Finally, there is nuclear war that devastates most of the world.

After the nuclear war, there are few humans left in the world. The world is able to replenish itself, coming back to life as new and abundant as if humans had never lived. Scientists help with this replenishing by bringing back certain animals and plant life that were extinct but for which DNA samples still existed. The world is renewed, much the same as it was when the cavemen were just discovering fire.

Humans have also survived. There are humans underground in the protected bunkers of Holocene II. These humans can be controlled and forced to remain underground. However, there are others who survived the nuclear war and roam ungoverned on this newly replenished world. There is an argument to be made that humans are to blame for the world's destruction. In this novel, several scientists decide that the worst parasite against the world is humans, therefore they should be eliminated. This is the ultimate in environment conservation.

Dystopian Society

A dystopian society is one that exists after a cataclysmic event destroys modern society. In this novel, a nuclear war has destroyed most of the world. Two new societies have built up in the ruins. One is Holocene II, a society that lives underground and is mostly self-contained. The other are survivors of the nuclear war who live on the surface and live a mostly ungoverned life.

Aubrey is born into Holocene II and never has any reason to doubt the things he is taught. However, when Aubrey is sent to live on the highest level of the underground complex, he accidentally discovers that most of what has been taught to him about the surface of earth and some of the basic traditions of his people are wrong. Aubrey discovers that the earth's surface can sustain life, that there are people who are thriving there. Aubrey also discovers that the utopia where his people go upon retirement is nothing more than an oversize petri dish.

As in most dystopian societies, there is disagreement about how the new society should be governed and the rules under which that society should exist. In *The Park Service*, Holocene II is created by a man who stopped believing in government and has controlled his new society with promises that turn out to be lies. A whole civilization is



reliant on these lies, living under the constant threat of total annihilation without even realizing it. It takes a child to save them, but then the reader is left with the question of whether that child is really prepared for what the future holds.

Longevity in Life

Dr. Robert Radcliffe is a character full of contrasts. He has lived more than nine hundred years. Before the nuclear war that ended modern society, Dr. Radcliffe was a scientist who was tasked with finding a way to stop the aging process. Dr. Radcliffe was researching this topic in a world that was overpopulated and suffering under the stress of feeding and providing for so many people. When Dr. Radcliffe perfected his experiments, creating longevity in humans, he began to fear what the government might do with his serum and who would choose the people who would be allowed to use it.

Dr. Radcliffe's experiments allowed for him to be underground at the time that the war began. For this reason, Dr. Radcliffe, his fellow scientists, and his human test subjects were all protected from the fall out of the nuclear weapons. Dr. Radcliffe began a new society, Holocene II, creating a society of people who would work for him for free, even sacrificing their lives at the age of thirty-five in order to keep population low. All of it was based on lies.

When Dr. Radcliffe and his fellow scientists discovered that the earth had replenished itself, that it could now support life again, they kept this information to themselves. The scientists moved to the surface and enjoyed this renewed world, but did not tell anyone else about it. Not only this, but when they realized that there were other survivors, people on the surface who somehow survived the nuclear holocaust and gave birth to new generations, they were angry. The scientists believed that humans were the one parasite that would always destroy the world and for this reason, they made the choice to use the people of Holocene II as work horses, developing machines to murder survivors on the surface. These people who had lived nine hundred years, using ten times as many resources in their lifespan as a person who lives a normal one hundred years, began killing other humans to protect the environment.



Styles

Point of View

The Park Service is written from first person point of view. The main character, Aubrey Van Houten, is the narrator. The point of view is very limited, keeping the reader inside of Aubrey's mind. The reader can only know and understand what Aubrey knows and understands. As he matures and discovers more about the lies that he has been told by his society and its founder, so does the reader.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The language does not contain any special language despite the genre of the novel being science fiction. The language also does not contain any foreign words or any words that might cause confusion for the reader.

The novel is written for young adults. For this reason, the language tends to be simple, using some slang that would be more familiar to young readers than older ones. The language is a little more educated than a teenager might use. However, the main character in the story is a well-educated teenager; therefore, the language does not seem out of place.

Structure

The novel is divided into four parts with a prologue. Most of the chapters of this novel are short, with some being only three or four pages, while others are much longer. The novel follows a linear time sequence, beginning in the underground community of Holocene II and moving to the newly replenished earth and finally to Level I of Holocene II, the main control center of the murderous drones.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Aubrey Van Houten as he discovers that the stories he was told growing up in a completely contained subterranean society are untrue. One subplot follows Aubrey's growing friendship with Jimmy, a young boy who is part of a group of descendants of the surface survivors of the nuclear war. Another subplot follows Aubrey's growing affections for Hannah Radcliffe, the daughter of the founder of Holocene II. All of the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

The world will never be the same.
-- Narrator (Prologue paragraph 23)

Importance: This quote is the last line in the prologue. The quote refers both to the fact that a nuclear war has just begun and to the dystopian societies that will spring out of the ashes.

After forty plus generations of international scientists mixing their DNA down here, most people look about the same: average height, dark hair, dark eyes. But not me.
-- Aubrey (Chapter 1 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote not only gives the reader an idea about the origins of Holocene II, but it also shows the reader that Aubrey is different. This will explain how his DNA stood out to the Radcliffe's when later in the plot the reader learns Aubrey was chosen to go to Level I not because of his perfect test score but because of his DNA.

My father's work has taken him up to the Transfer Station on Level 2, even once or twice down to the crops and algae refineries on Level 5, but nobody has ever been up to the Foundation headquarters on Level 1. Nobody. At least not from here. Everyone goes up that way to retire, of course, but nobody can come back from Eden.
-- Aubrey (Chapter 4 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote shows how mysterious the Level 1 of Holocene II is and how honorable it is that Aubrey is allowed to go there. It also suggests secrets and possibly lies.

Sunlight on my face...For the first time ever in my life.
-- Aubrey (Chapter 6 paragraph 1)

Importance: When Aubrey steps out of the derailed train, this is his first thought. It brings home to the reader what it was like living underground all his life.

In the quiet sunlight, I realize how totally alone I am, and just how ill-equipped my lesson slate reading made me for surviving here.
-- Aubrey (Chapter 8 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote shows the reader that Aubrey has lost the initial excitement that got him through this strange new world and is beginning to realize how dangerous his future might be.

And then it hits me, what I was thinking, why I asked -- two-thousand-year old trees right in front of me. The War that drove us underground was not even a thousand years ago, which means this tree must predate it. The lessons lied. Some things did survive.
-- Aubrey (Chapter 10 paragraph 14)



Importance: This is the first instance within the plot that Aubrey begins to realize that he has been lied to by the founder of his society.

The women reach across the path they've made and grip one another's arms, creating a tunnel, a human arch, writhing, waving, inviting us in.

-- Aubrey (Chapter 13 paragraph 9)

Importance: This is the beginning of a ceremony that allows Jimmy and Aubrey to be born again as adults. This type of ceremony has roots in many different cultures throughout the world, suggesting again that Jimmy and his people are descendants from people who survived the nuclear war.

Before me, a strange field of leafy vines everywhere with alien pods. A hundred, a thousand, a million glistening melons, golden in the stormy light of an enormous rainbow arching over the field with the retreating storm clouds piling up behind it.

-- Aubrey (Chapter 14 paragraph 20)

Importance: This shows some of Aubrey's continuing wonder when he sees something new. This is also another example of how the earth has renewed itself.

We pass another man also alive and moaning, but unrecognizable with half his face and all of his shoulder gone. He won't make it, and even if he might, I can't save them both.

-- Aubrey (Chapter 16 paragraph 8)

Importance: This quote illustrates the terrible damage of the drone attack on the cove and Aubrey's deep love for Jimmy that forces him to make an unenviable decision.

Protruding from the ice, hanging precariously above the lake, is an enormous intercontinental ballistic missile.

-- Aubrey (Chapter 22 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote shows that although the world has renewed itself, there are still remnants of the darkness that destroyed modern civilization.

You're the Park Service. you butchered Jimmy's family.

-- Aubrey (Chapter 26 paragraph 10)

Importance: Aubrey tells this to Hannah after meeting Dr. Radcliffe and hearing his story for the first time. It is a realization that almost drives Aubrey away from the Radcliffes.

For just one last night, I want to be a kid.

-- Aubrey (Chapter 42 paragraph 45)

Importance: This quote shows that Aubrey understands in the aftermath of the tsunami

and the Radcliffes' deaths that he has big decisions to make, but wants to put them off for a short time.