

# **The People of Sparks Study Guide**

## **The People of Sparks by Jeanne DuPrau**

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## Plot Summary

The People of Sparks is a sequel to *The City of Ember* and tells the continuing story of the citizens of the dead underground city of Ember as they emerge to the surface of a post-apocalyptic Earth and try to make their way with the help of the people of a village called Sparks.

Led by the young teenagers Doon Harrow and Lina Mayfleet, the 400 citizens of Ember walk several days after climbing from the cave where Ember was located. Tired and hungry, they come across an agricultural village called Sparks, which agrees to take in the Emberites for a time and provide them with food.

Lina, her guardian Mrs. Murdo, and her young sister, Poppy, who is ill, are sent to stay at the home of Dr. Hester and her young nephew, Torren, who resents the newcomers. Meanwhile Doon and his father go to stay with the bulk of the Emberites who have been put up in an large abandoned hotel building.

The Emberites learn from the people of Sparks that several generations before the world had been afflicted by widespread disease and war, leaving the largest cities abandoned in ruins. A few settlements existed like Sparks, with wanderers traveling from place to place scavenging abandoned buildings and trading items.

Lina believes that the people of Ember are perhaps destined to re-inhabit one of these abandoned cities and she secretly stows away with a traveler headed for one of the cities. She abandons her dream when she sees the extent of the ruination.

Lina is gone for several weeks. She returns to find that in the meantime tensions between the people of Sparks and Ember have come to a head. The people of Sparks grow resentful of having to share their food stores with the Emberites, and the Emberites, who provide work in exchange for the food, begin to feel they are being mistreated. When Doon is wrongly blamed for destroying some crates of tomatoes, he begins to sympathize with the growing group of Emberites following a young man named Tick, who advocates fighting the people of Sparks and taking over their food supply.

When a few anonymous pranks are played on the Emberites, the sore feelings explode and the two peoples confront one another in the village square. When the hostilities result in an accidental fire, Doon and Lina lead their fellow Emberites in helping the people of Sparks save their village and both sides learn that working together they can get along. Tick is exposed as the one who played the pranks against his own people in an effort to incite them to fight. The novel ends on an optimistic note as Doon, following the diagram in an old book and using materials scavenged by travelers, creates a simple generator that will power a light bulb.



# The Message, Chapters 1 and 2

## The Message, Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

"The Message" is a short prologue to the novel. It consists of a short note written by Doon Harrow and Lina Mayfleet to the people of the underground city of Ember explaining that they have found a way to escape their dying city and giving them the instructions.

Chapter 1 is called "What Torren Saw" and is the opening chapter in Part 1, entitled "The Arrival." While on an errand to fetch some cabbages from one of the fields surrounding the village of Sparks, a young boy named Torren climbs a windmill to look around. In the distance he sees a large group of people descending from a hill. Excited, he rushes to the village and raises the cry for the villagers to come see.

The people of Sparks summon their leaders, Mary Waters, Ben Barlow and Wilmer Dent, and gather to meet the arriving group. The visitors are pale and bedraggled and the people of Sparks look at them in puzzlement. They appear to be led by two young teenagers who step forward and introduce themselves as Doon Harrow and Lina Mayfleet. They explain that they have found their way out of Ember, an underground city, and are hungry and thirsty. There are about 400 of them, and they ask the leaders of Sparks for help.

The leaders of Sparks confer amongst themselves, doubtful that they have the resources to help such a large group of people. Finally, Mary Waters announces that they will do what they can and ask the Emberites to follow them into the village.

Torren watches the strange people who say they came from underground. He notices that they seem to be afraid of the chickens that wander through the cabbage field. He wonders where they will all stay and tells himself that he will not give up his own bed to any of the strangers.

Chapter 2 is called "Out from Below," and goes back in time to when the people of Ember emerged from their cave. Doon and Lina had discovered the route and escaped with Lina's young sister, Poppy. They had then written instructions on how to escape and throw the instructions back into the cave in the hope that others would find them. Soon, others began to emerge blinking into the outdoor sun until 417 had come out.

One of the escapees, Mrs. Murdo, acts as a kind of guardian to Lina and her sister. She tells Doon and Lina of the escape and how it was discovered that the Mayor of Ember had tried to abandon the city while taking as much loot as he could, but was washed away trying to cross an underground river. Lina listened in sadness about some of the people she had known in Ember who did not make the escape and wondered to herself about the fate of those who had chosen to stay behind. She looked ahead to the



possibility of creating a new city in this new world they had discovered, returning to a recurring vision of a shining city she had frequently had while living in Ember.

## **The Message, Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis**

After a brief foreword, Chapter 1 establishes the main characters of Doon Harrow and Lina Mayfleet, two young teenagers who have taken on a great responsibility of leading their people out of their dying city. Since *The People of Sparks* is a sequel, many readers will already be familiar with the background of these characters, but the author first presents them from the point of view of the people of Sparks, who have never seen them before, providing an opportunity to describe them to any readers who are not yet familiar with them. The second chapter, in a similar way, backtracks to provide crucial information to the reader about how the Emberites have come to be wandering across the countryside, hungry and thirsty.

Doon and Lina are shown to be responsible young people who have taken on a role beyond their years. Torren, another young person from Sparks, is introduced in the opening lines. He is established as a mischievous boy who is instantly skeptical and mistrustful of the strangers. His reaction foreshadows that of the village at large, which will become the central conflict of the story.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3 is called "Through the Village" and returns to the present as the Emberites are led by Mary Waters through the village of Sparks. They marvel at the strange plants so different than the ones they grew in their underground greenhouses in Ember. Lina is inquisitive about what things are called and learns the words for "pine tree" and "plaza."

Mary leads them to the village plaza, which has a large fountain in the center. She points out the fountain and the nearby river and invites the Emberites to drink. The thirsty travelers rush to drink as the people of Sparks continue to look on at the strangers in bafflement. Lina notices the three leaders moving among the villagers speaking to them in turn. She realizes the difficulty of the situation having some 400 new people arrive.

After a time, Mary Waters calls for the travelers to sit down in the plaza as she stands on the steps of the town hall with the other two leaders. She introduces herself and the other leaders and tells the visitors about the village. It is called Sparks, and has just over 300 residents. Some of the households have agreed to take in children or the ill for the night and the rest of the visitors can sleep in the plaza. Mary calls out the names of families, who step forward to say how many people they can take in. Lina, Mrs. Murdo and Poppy, who is ill, are assigned to the home of Dr. Hester. Lina is reluctant to leave Doon, who assures her he will be fine staying in the plaza with his father.

Chapter 4 is entitled "The Doctor's House." Lina walks with Dr. Hester, Mrs. Murdo and Poppy while Torren circles the group. Dr. Hester leads them into her cluttered house which is surrounded by a variety of plants. Lina is astonished when Dr. Hester lights a fire in the fireplace. In Ember, fire was a danger resulting from old electric wiring and Lina is afraid. Dr. Hester assures her it will stay in the fireplace, but Lina remains wary.

Dr. Hester feeds her guests, interrupted occasionally by villagers calling to pick up medicine. When Mrs. Murdo suggests they would like to sleep, to Torren's dismay Dr. Hester gives the guests his bed in the loft. Torren objects, warning Lina not to touch any of his things, or the things that belong to his brother Casper.

Lina wonders who Casper is as she drifts off to sleep. She reflects on the differences between Sparks and Ember and wonders to herself if she could ever feel at home in such a strange place.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Torren's resentment deepens as he thinks Lina and Mrs. Murdo are invading his home. His brother Caspar is mentioned for the first time, foreshadowing his appearance in the middle portion of the book and Torren's devotion to him.



The physical layout of the village is established as Lina walks through it. It has a large central plaza with a tall pine tree, fountain and town hall, which will be the scene of several developments in the story. Sparks is an orderly and prosperous place, apparently run by a three-person council with power to make decisions on behalf of the village.

Lina's first encounter with open fire takes place as Dr. Hester lights a fire in her fireplace. Lina's fear of fire is established here and will be further developed as she adventures outside of Sparks. She will eventually overcome her fear in the final dramatic scenes of the book.

Lina and Doon, who have worked together to bring their people safely out of Ember, split up in Chapter 3. Their friendship will be strained slightly, but will endure.



# The First Town Meeting, Chapters 5 and 6

## The First Town Meeting, Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

A short chapter called "The First Town Meeting" is inserted between Chapters 4 and 5. It describes the discussion between the three leaders of Sparks about what to do with the influx of people from Ember. They decide they can allow them to stay, putting them up in an abandoned hotel called The Pioneer that sits outside the village. In exchange for food and water, they will be expected to work. The leaders are concerned about the strain the visitors will put on their food supplies and one of them laments that the village should be so unlucky after finally beginning to show some prosperity. They decide to allow the Emberites to stay for six months, even though this means turning them out as the winter approaches.

Chapter 5 is called "The Pioneer." The leaders of Sparks and some of the villagers lead the Emberites out to a large, abandoned hotel building called The Pioneer, carrying blankets and some other items in wagons made from old gas-powered trucks that have had the engines removed and which are pulled by oxen. All the while, Doon is asking questions of Wilmer, one of the leaders of Sparks. Doon is surprised to learn from Wilmer that the landscape has no boundaries, as it had in Ember. He is astonished when Wilmer tells him the Earth is a sphere. Wilmer himself is struck by the apparent strangeness of the people who seem to know so little about the world.

The hotel is run down, and there is little furniture, most of it having been scavenged. The Emberites gather in front of the building as Wilmer stands on the steps and explains they will all be assigned to families in Sparks and will share the midday meal with them. The families will then give each person some food to take with them for dinner and breakfast the next day. In exchange the Emberites will work under the direction of the people from Sparks. As Wilmer explains, a tall boy from Ember named Tick Hassler calls out pointed questions. Doon takes notice of Tick and the confident way he speaks.

Doon finds a room in the hotel with his father. They share their room with Edward Pocket, a frail man who had been the librarian in Ember, and Sadge Merrall, a slightly disturbed man who had himself ventured outside the cave where Ember was built and was deeply frightened. Doon does not sleep well the first night. He lies awake wondering about Tick, the boy who had been so confident, and decides he will get to know him better.

Chapter 6 is called "Breakfast with Disaster." Because of Poppy's illness, Lina and Mrs. Murdo have stayed at Dr. Hester's house instead of moving to The Pioneer. On the first morning, Dr. Hester leads Lina out to her chicken coop to gather eggs for breakfast. Lina has never seen chickens before, or eaten an egg. Dr. Hester finds only one egg





and gives it to Lina to carry. Torren is upset that Lina is to be given the only egg for breakfast and he begins to shove her. In anger, Lina throws the eggs at Torren and is surprised when it breaks open and drips down his shirt.

Over breakfast, Dr. Hester speaks with her guests about Ember. She is puzzled why a city would be built underground, and Lina explains that all she knows is what she read in a notebook she had found. The notebook had explained that fifty families, each with two babies, had gone to live there many years before out of some kind of fear. Dr. Hester offers that it must have been before the "disaster." She does not explain the disaster fully, but tells Lina that it nearly killed off the human race. A small group of survivors had founded Sparks many years earlier.

Lina learns more about the disaster later, from Torren. There had been three plagues and four wars, he explained. Lina had never heard of plagues or wars and is puzzled by the thought of people fighting with one another. Torren adds that there are no wars any more because there is nobody to fight with. If there were a war, however, he adds, the people of Sparks would win because they have a "terrible weapon." Before Lina can learn more about this weapon, they are interrupted.

## **The First Town Meeting, Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis**

The author charts the changing reactions of the people of Sparks by describing the discussions of their leaders. She inserts four accounts of these town meetings among the regular chapters of the book. In the first of them, the leaders are practical about the sudden influx of people to their village, but at the same time they seem to ignore the fact that their plan involves turning the Emberites away as winter approaches. They recognize their responsibility, but at the same time hope that the problem will go away. They have worked hard to reach a point where they have started to prosper and see the arrival of the Emberites as a setback to that prosperity.

The new home of most of the Emberites is established at The Pioneer in Chapter 5. It is run down, but has potential. It will become a symbol of solidarity for some of the Emberites, led by Tick Hassler. Tick is a charismatic boy, and Doon is attracted to his confidence. Doon's discovery of Tick's true nature is one of the central themes of the story, which is established here.

Lina learns more about the disaster that has led to the sparse population and hardship. She is puzzled by the concept of war and cannot imagine the type of destruction that Torren describes to her. Her innocence about war will be an advantage as the two peoples move toward violence and she is able to find an opportunity to bring them together. She does not yet fully understand the relation of the disaster to the founding of Ember, but this will be revealed to her. Torren also mentions the Weapon for the first time in Chapter 6, which will play a crucial part of the final scenes.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Chapter 7 is called "A Day of New People." The people of Ember gather in the plaza and are assigned to work teams. Doon and his father are put on a team which begins digging toilet pits for the people living in The Pioneer. The work is hard, and the Emberites are not used to the heat and sun.

At noon, they break and go to the houses they have been assigned for eating. Doon, his father, Edward Pocket and some others go to the home of the Parton family. Martha Parton, the wife and mother of the family, is proud to put out a large spread of food, some of which is new to the Emberites, but some of which is familiar, although the greenhouse versions they know are smaller.

Doon meets Kenny Parton, a boy younger than he, who is fascinated by their story of leaving the cave city. Martha and her husband, Ordney, are skeptical of the story that Doon tells them of how they had originally come from the same place as the people of Sparks, but that the Emberites had gone to live in the cave generations earlier. He mentions the notebook that he had found which explained their history.

After eating, Doon and the others return to work. At the end of the day he goes to sit and rest by the river, where Tick Hassler comes to speak with him. Tick compliments Doon on his leadership and talks about the wonderful place they have come to. He tells Doon he and some others are making plans to fix up the hotel building and make some other improvements and asks if Doon would like to join them. Doon replies that he would like to help.

Chapter 8 is called "The Roamer and the Bike." Word comes to Dr. Hester's house that a roamer has come to the village. Torren explains to Lina that roamers are people who travel from place to place, scavenging things from abandoned cities and buildings and trading them with villagers. His brother, Caspar, is a roamer, he tells her.

The villagers gather around the roamer, a woman named Mackie. Mackie holds up items she has to trade and takes offers. She sees Dr. Hester and tells her that she has spoken with Caspar recently and that he is on his way to Sparks. Torren is excited at this news, as Caspar has been gone over a year. He rudely tells Lina he hopes she will be leaving soon.

Lina is intrigued by the bicycles she sees people riding. Dr. Hester tells her where she can find an old bike and after some practice she learns to ride it. She rides through the village toward the hotel to find Doon.

Doon is with a group of others listening to Tick Hassler. He is reluctant to leave the group, but goes off to one side with Lina to talk. He confides that he is worried they do not have any survival skills or the ability to be self-sufficient yet. Lina secretly returns to

her dream of finding a city where the people of Ember can live but does not share her vision with Doon.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

The people of Sparks are generous at first, and in the case of the Parton family apparently proud to show off their prosperity to the bedraggled strangers. The meal scenes at the Parton household continue through the book and provide a way for the author to show how the two groups interact directly. As tensions mount, the meal scenes become more confrontational. Kenny Parton, a member of the family with which Doon eats, is established in Chapter 7. He admires Doon, and will provide him with some crucial information in the latter part of the book. Kenny's admiration for Doon acts as a counterpoint to Doon's early admiration for Tick.

Mackie, the roamer, appears in Chapter 8, bringing news of Caspar. The author uses the trading scene to illustrate the ways the fictional future of the novel differs from the present familiar to readers. Small, practical things have great value in this fictional world, while things we consider valuable now, such as jewels, are useless.

Lina's vision of moving the Emberites into a grand city returns, but she keeps it to herself. She will learn that her dream is not immediately practical.



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Chapter 9 is called "Hard, Hungry Work." Doon does not mind the hard work. It is making him strong, but other Emberites are straining under the difficulty. The leader of his work team, a man named Chugger Frisk, is a brusque man with little patience.

After the noon meal one day Kenny Parton leads Doon to a building called the "ark" where the villagers store their food. In a room at the back of the building he shows Doon piles of dusty books that have been stacked there. Doon takes a few back to the hotel with him to read.

After a time, Doon notices that Martha Parton's elaborate meals become plainer and smaller. Other Emberites notice that the people of Sparks are not sharing as much food as they had before. They begin to complain among themselves and at a meeting at the hotel, Tick Hassler encourages them to make their gripes known.

The next day at the Parton house, one of the Emberites who eats there mentions that they feel they are not getting enough food. Ordney Parton is angry at this complaint. He firmly replies that the village cannot simply take on another 400 people. Doon is conflicted. He knows Ordney is right, but he also agrees that they are not receiving enough food.

Chapter 10 is entitled "Restless Weeks." Lina and Mrs. Murdo have been assigned to help Dr. Hester while Poppy continues to improve. One day she takes some paper and begins to draw the picture of the imaginary city she had so often thought about. She remembers the versions she had drawn while living in Ember, and updates them with things she has learned about since leaving, such as trees. Torren sees her drawing and takes out some of the things that Caspar has brought him from his travels. He shows her a model airplane and she is astonished to learn that the machines once carried people through the air.

Lina notices the people of Sparks growing impatient or angry over the innocent behavior of the people from Ember. She feels that they are not wanted in the village and worries about where they might go.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Some of the fundamental differences between the two groups are accentuated in Chapter 9. The people of Sparks are hard workers, but provide themselves with only a limited education. They pile their old books unused in a storehouse. The people of Ember, while willing to work, are not used to the outdoor conditions or heavy labor. They also appear to have a higher respect for learning, as is illustrated by the interest Doon

and Edward Pocket show in the abandoned books. These differences are a source of conflict at first, but in the end will be shown to compliment one another.

The meal scene in Chapter 9 shows the deteriorating relations between the two groups, furthering the central conflict of the story. Lina has an experience in Chapter 10 that is representative of the growing resentment by the people of Sparks.



# Chapters 11, 12 and 13

## Chapters 11, 12 and 13 Summary

Chapter 11 is called "Tick's Projects." Tick Hassler proves to be good at motivating people to join him in projects to improve their living conditions at the hotel, but Doon notices that as soon as one of his projects gets underway he loses interest and turns his attention to a new project, leaving the previous one unfinished.

It is summer and the Emberites are not used to the heat. Their enthusiasm begins to wane. Edward Pocket, who is too old for hard work, complains to Doon one day that he has nothing to do all day. Doon is struck with an idea and shows Edward the room full of old books. Edward, a former librarian, is overjoyed to take on the project of organizing the books. As he sorts through them he brings books he thinks Doon might like back to the hotel. One of these books is full of science experiments.

Chapter 12 is called "Caspar Arrives with a Surprise." Torren's brother, Caspar, returns to Dr. Hester's from his roaming. He does not have a present for Torren, but instead introduces a woman named Maddy, who he calls his partner. Torren is upset at this, crying that he is supposed to be Caspar's partner. Caspar replies that Torren is too young.

Lina is interested in hearing what a roamer might say, but Caspar spends his time boasting about the things he had found. He strikes Lina as being an odd person, spending time shuffling through a group of papers and telling the others he has calculations and plans to make. Maddy says very little, just sitting quietly with her arms folded.

One night Lina overhears Caspar telling Maddy his plan to leave the next day for the city. She is not sure what city he means and she knows it will be in ruins, but she wonders if it might be the city she has envisioned, that might be restored by the people of Ember. She thought she heard Caspar say it was a day's journey away and lay awake, making a plan.

Chapter 13 is called "Taking Action." Tick Hassler takes Doon aside and tells him it may soon be time to take action concerning the lack of food. He tells Doon that he knows about the storehouse of food kept by the villagers and asks Doon if he would support him if it came time to take action. Doon reluctantly agrees.

Lina formulates a plan to stow away in Caspar's wagon and go with him to the city. She leaves a note for Mrs. Murdo that she will return in a few days, and climbs into a large empty crate in the back of the wagon. She listens from the crate as Caspar and Maddy say goodbye to Torren and Dr. Hester and the wagon sets out down the road.



## Chapters 11, 12 and 13 Analysis

Tick Hassler continues to gain influence among the Emberites with his ambitious schemes to improve their living conditions. Doon continues to be drawn toward Tick, but also notices that his projects go unfinished as he loses interest and moves on to new ones. This small flaw in Tick's character provides Doon with a glimmer of a larger flaw that he will discover later.

Chapter 12 introduces Caspar and Maddy, who will play a central part of Lina's adventure. Caspar is a self-centered young man who does not seem to have very high intelligence. Torren is nonetheless full of admiration for him as an older brother and is devastated that Caspar has taken on Maddy as a partner.

Maddy seems at first to be as dull as Caspar, but she shows a hint of kindness to Lina suggesting that there is more to her than meets Lina's first impression. This will prove to be true.



# Chapters 14 and 15

## Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

Part 2, called "Travelers and Warriors," begins with Chapter 14, which is called "What Torren Did." Mrs. Murdo has not seen Lina for some time and goes looking for her. She is very worried by evening when she has not found her, then she discovers Lina's note. Dr. Hester tells her there is no use sending anyone after them, because they are already a day away.

When Torren finds out what Lina has done the following morning he storms out of the house in anger. He runs to a tomato field where he finds stacks of crates full of tomatoes. He is so angry that without thinking he begins throwing the tomatoes against the wall of a nearby shed. Afterward, he is horrified at what he has done, but decides what he will do about it. Later, when the tomatoes are discovered by Chugger Frisk, Torren falsely accuses Doon of having ruined them, telling everyone that he had seen Doon throwing them. Doon is shocked at the accusation and protests that he was working all morning and could not have done it. The villagers are suspicious, however.

Doon is upset when he learns from Mrs. Murdo that Lina has gone away, mostly because he wishes he was on the adventure with her.

Chapter 15 is called "A Long, Hot Ride." Lina stays hidden in the back of the wagon the entire day. When the wagon stops as it is growing dark, she listens to Caspar and Maddy speak about stopping for the night. Caspar says he will lead the animals to some nearby water, then it is quiet. She needs to stretch her legs and cautiously stands up. To her surprise, Maddy is sitting nearby, looking right at her.

Maddy is not angry, but wonders why Lina would hide away. Lina explains that she wants to see the city, and learns from Maddy that it is actually five days away, not one day. Maddy tells Lina to stay where she is and goes to get Caspar.

Caspar is angry, but Maddy convinces him that Lina might be helpful in looking through small places in the city. He begrudgingly agrees to take her along. As night falls, Maddy builds a small fire, but Lina is too frightened of it to sleep near it.

## Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

Lina embarks on her own adventure in Chapter 14, stowing away in Caspar's wagon. She is acting boldly, but she is also under the false impression that she will only be gone for a few days. She is discovered in Chapter 15, when she finds that Maddy is not the dull person she had first thought her to be. Maddy shows herself to be an ally to Lina, and she will prove to be a friend as well. Lina's fear of fire is reinforced as she is expected to camp out near an open flame.



Torren's temper tantrum that results in the ruination of two crates of tomatoes occurs in Chapter 14. This act will have repercussions through the rest of the story after Torren blames Doon for it. The false accusation reinforces one of the central themes of the book, which is the question of how to respond to unfairness.



# Chapters 16 and 17

## Chapters 16 and 17 Summary

Chapter 16 is called "The Starving Roamer." Lina, Caspar and Maddy set out the next morning, Lina riding in the bed of the wagon. After Caspar had fallen asleep one evening, she began talking with Maddy, who told her she had come from a small village that was struggling. She had agreed to go with Caspar, who she thought was a fool, just to escape her village. She would have stayed in Sparks, she told Lina, but she had agreed to help Caspar on his "quest."

After several days the group sees another wagon approaching driven by a strange looking man. When they are near one another, the strange man runs his wagon across the road and asks for some food. He has not eaten for days, he tells them. Caspar is angry at him and refuses to give him anything, even though Maddy tries to convince him to share some of their simple food. Caspar again refuses and threatens the man, who moves on his way. the following morning, they discover that someone, probably the starving roamer, has stolen some of their food and left dirt in its place. That day, they come to a large bay. Caspar tells them this means they are near the city.

Chapter 17 is called "Doon Accused." Despite his protests and the lack of any proof, the people of Sparks believe that Doon is guilty of ruining the crates of tomatoes. Lunch at the Parton household is tense, and tensions increase around the village between the people of Sparks and Ember. One day Doon comes across a group of people in the plaza looking at a message written in mud on the bricks. "They must go!" the message reads. While some of the villagers apparently think the message is mean, others glare accusingly at Doon.

While passing the Sparks school one day, Doon meets Kenny Parton who tells him he believes that Doon did not ruin the tomatoes. The boys continue talking and Doon learns for the first time about winter. There had been no seasons in Ember, and it was constantly cool. At first he was glad to hear that there would be a season when it was cool, but when Kenny told him about how it snows and that things do not grow, Doon gets a sinking feeling. The people of Sparks are planning to make them leave just as the weather is about to turn cold and they will have no shelter or food, and no way to survive.

One morning Doon awakens to a commotion at the hotel. As he rushes downstairs to see what is happening he runs into Tick Hassler, who appears unusually grubby. Tick says he does not know what is going on, but people are outside shouting.

Doon sees that someone has scrawled words in charcoal across the front of the hotel. "Go back to your cave!" the graffiti reads. Tick steps up and speaks to the angry crowd, asking them if they like being called cave people and if they are willing to do something



about the insult. Doon looks at the letters on the wall and senses that they were indeed written with hatred.

## Chapters 16 and 17 Analysis

Caspar is shown to be an unsympathetic character in Chapter 16 when he refuses to help the starving roamer. The incident serves as an illustration foreshadowing the larger situation in Sparks, where the villagers are reluctant to share their food with the Emberites. In the end, Caspar ends up with less food than he would have had if had shared some, and the food he does have left has been soiled by the roamer. Likewise, when the people of Sparks decide to stop sharing with the Emberites, some of the Emberites plot revenge.

Kenny Parton gives Doon some important information that makes him realize the people of Sparks are taking advantage of the relative ignorance of the Emberites. They have no experience living through winter conditions and are unaware that they are going to be sent out on their own during the hardest time of the year. Doon's impression of the people of Sparks is reinforced after the graffiti incident at the hotel, although he will later discover the truth about the hateful writing. A clue is provided by the author in the grubby appearance of Tick Hassler just after the graffiti is discovered. Doon notices it, but will not associate the two things until later in the story.



# The Second Town Meeting, Chapters 18 and 19

## The Second Town Meeting, Chapters 18 and 19 Summary

Between Chapters 17 and 18 is a chapter called "The Second Town Meeting." The leaders of Sparks come together to discuss the increasing hostility between the two groups. While Mary is more moderate, Ben and Wilmer are angry at the Emberites, believing that Doon is guilty of wasting their tomatoes. The leaders decide that the people of Sparks should not be expected to eat with the Emberites any longer. They will be told they can collect their food and eat by themselves.

Chapter 18 is called "Caspar's Quest." The travelers near the city and stop for the night to sleep in the ruins of a house. Caspar tells Lina a little about his quest. There is treasure buried somewhere in the city, he tells her. He has learned about it from old rhymes that have been passed down about treasure in the city. By analyzing the different versions of the rhyme, counting the numbers in different ways and looking for patterns he is convinced he knows where the treasure is. Maddy is skeptical, and points out that there are other large cities in the region, but Caspar is insistent he is on the right track. They next day they continue on toward the city. The chapter ends as they round a bend and Lina sees the city for the first time.

Chapter 19 is called "Unfairness, and What to Do About It." Doon continues to stew about the graffiti at the hotel and the false accusations against him. He stops enjoying working. One day Chugger gives him an unpleasant job of draining and cleaning the plaza fountain. Doon resents the way Chugger speaks to him, but goes about the job scraping the stinking green slime from the drained fountain, then turning the valve to fill it up again. He sits down to rest for a moment afterward and Chugger storms up and accuses him of slacking off. Doon tries to control his anger, but when Chugger grabs him by the arm he struggles back, accidentally sending a bucket of slime splashing onto a girl walking past.

Doon runs back to the hotel, angry. Tick speaks with him and reassures him that they will do something about it. Doon notices Tick has a rash on his arm that he is scratching. He tells Doon he has a plan to storm the storehouse of the villagers and take the food they need. This sounds like stealing to Doon, but Tick assures him it is only taking what they deserve. This makes sense to Doon.



## The Second Town Meeting, Chapters 18 and 19 Analysis

Relations worsen between the two groups after the tomato and graffiti incidents and the official response is described in "The Second Town Meeting." Mary Waters is shown to be the most moderate of the three leaders, but she goes along with the other two leaders.

Chapter 18 further illustrates Caspar's ridiculous obsession with his quest for treasure as well as Maddy's practical sensibility. It ends with a cliff-hanger as Lina sees the city for the first time. The author does not describe the city at this point in the story, leaving the reader to wonder if the reality measures up to Lina's imagination.

The fountain-cleaning episode in Chapter 19 deepens Doon's frustration at being treated unfairly. Tick takes advantage of Doon's frustration and uses it as an opportunity to enlist him in his plan to prepare for a raid on the food stores of Sparks. Doon is uncertain, but he is so angry he feels something must be done. The rash on Tick's arms provides another clue to his secret plots, but Doon does not yet see the full picture.



# Chapters 20 and 21

## Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

Chapter 20 is called "The City Destroyed." The travelers look out over the ruins of the city. It is worse than Lina could have imagined. Nothing is left standing. Buildings are fallen over and completely destroyed. Night is falling, but Caspar says they will continue into the city in the morning. Maddy points out that the road they are on falls away and it will be impossible to go any further with the wagon. Caspar is insistent, taking out his papers and muttering numbers to himself. Maddy grows angry with him. There is no treasure, she yells. The city is flattened.

Later, Maddy and Lina speak about the ruined city. Lina cannot imagine warfare that would cause such destruction, or understand why people would use such violence toward one another. Maddy tries to explain how one group might begin to resent another group for many different reasons, the resentment can grow into hatred and violence unless someone has the courage to stop the process by doing something good or at least stopping the descent toward violence. As she falls asleep that night, Lina wonders about her own courage if she were in such a situation. She misses Doon and wishes he were there with her.

Chapter 21 is entitled "Attack and Counterattack." Doon wakes again to a commotion outside the hotel. Someone has strewn a pile of leafy plants and vines across the front of the hotel, making a large mess. The Emberites angrily work to clear away the leaves. Later, while working, Doon notices he and several others have developed itchy rashes. The villagers recognize the rash and tell the Emberites it is from poison oak. The plants piled at the hotel had been poison oak.

This angers Doon and the others, who see it as another attack from the villagers. They gather in the plaza, and Tick calls out to them that they have been poisoned. Someone throws a rock through a window of the town hall. Emberites begin to storm into shops and take food, with Tick calling for them to fill their pockets and return to the hotel. That evening he calls them together and convinces them that they must fight back against the attacks they have suffered. They must arm themselves, Tick tells the willing crowd. He tells them to remove the metal towel bars from their rooms and keep them ready. Doon is uneasy. He agrees that they cannot let themselves be attacked, but wonders if fighting is the best way.

## Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

Lina's dream is apparently shattered at the beginning of Chapter 20. The city, which she had hoped might be a new home for the Emberites, is completely ruined. Caspar is not deterred, however, despite Maddy's protestation that nothing of any value could be left in the ruins.



Lina and Maddy have a conversation that will influence Lina's actions later in the story. Maddy tells her about war and violence, two concepts with which Lina has no experience. She plants the idea in Lina's head that conflict can be avoided if one side is willing to take a risk and do something good to counteract it, or to refuse to participate in the conflict.

Doon's internal conflict deepens as Tick makes plans for potential violence after the poison oak incident. Tick leads a small food riot in the plaza, provoking the leaders of Sparks to take action. While Doon feels something must be done in response to their mistreatment, he is not certain that Tick's solution is best.



# Chapter 22, The Third Town Meeting, and Chapter 23

## Chapter 22, The Third Town Meeting, and Chapter 23 Summary

Chapter 22 is called "Discoveries." Lina wakes up the following morning amidst a thick fog coming off the nearby bay. Maddy comes to her and tells her to pretend she is sick and moan a little. Meanwhile, Maddy goes to Caspar and tells him they cannot help him search the city because Lina is sick. Caspar is obsessed with searching for treasure and goes off by himself.

As soon as he is gone, Maddy tells Lina they are leaving. Caspar has never been stable, she says, and she thinks his obsession has gone too far. They pack up some food and blankets and take two bicycles from the wagon, cycling back down the road on which they came.

Lina enjoys the bike riding, although it is hard work. After a time they run across another roamer named Pelton Moss, who agrees to give them a ride back to Sparks if they will help him along the way. For five days, Lina becomes a roamer, sometimes finding interesting things among the ruins of houses, such as old board games, a magnifying glass, and a small magnet.

As the three sit talking one evening, Lina and Maddy tell Pelton about Caspar's obsession over the rhymes that tell of treasure hidden in a city. Pelton tells them he has heard the same rhymes all his life and repeats some of them to Lina. One of them begins "Remember the city, the city remember, where treasure is hidden under the ground." When Lina hears these lines, she is struck with a realization. She happily explains that she is sure the first line was once "remember the city, the city of Ember." The treasure under the ground was the people of Ember, she says, who went to live there during the disaster and thought they might be the only ones to survive. Maddy and Pelton are skeptical at first, but then agree that her explanation makes sense.

Between Chapters 22 and 23 is a chapter called "The Third Town Meeting." After the riot at the plaza, the town leaders meet to decide what is to be done. Ben insists that the Emberites must be made to leave. He brings up the Weapon that the village has in reserve to force them to leave if needed. Mary disagrees and votes against Ben's proposal. Wilmer casts the deciding vote to tell the Emberites to leave. They will be given three days.

Chapter 23 is called "Getting Ready for War." The announcement causes turmoil at The Pioneer. The people of Ember are angry, some at the people of Sparks, some at Tick Hassler for starting the fight. Doon speaks with his father about what it would mean to fight. His father says that if they fight, some people will be killed on both sides, but those





who survive may keep a place to live. If they do not fight, they will all surely die in the Unknown Lands without food or shelter. As Doon thinks over the complicated issue, Tick goes through the hotel calling people willing to fight to a meeting.

Doon goes to the meeting where Tick is speaking. Tick says the time has come to fight. Doon asks about the weapon that Sparks claims to have, to which Tick replies that while Sparks has one weapon, they have many. They will prevail because they are many, he cries, and brandishes a metal bar he has taken from the hotel. Tick begins to swing the bar into some nearby brush, yelling that they will knock down the people of Sparks in the same way.

The episode makes Doon realize that he no longer supports Tick, who seems to want war and is excited by the prospect. The thought of war makes Doon sick, and he wonders what will happen as he walks back to his room at the hotel.

## **Chapter 22, The Third Town Meeting, and Chapter 23 Analysis**

Maddy proves to be a strong and independent character after all, and she and Lina leave the obsessed Caspar to his ridiculous quest and make their way back toward Sparks. Their time spent with Pelton Moss, the roamer, illustrates the stark reality in the book's fictional future as Lina crawls through ruined buildings finding abandoned toys and school supplies. She also finds a magnet, which will figure into the final scene of the book.

Lina makes a startling realization in Chapter 22 about the legend of buried treasure. It is the people of Ember who are the treasure, and their city is the one mentioned in the various rhymes. The discovery deepens the sense of destiny that Lina feels about the people of Ember, that they are destined to play a large role in civilization.

The conflict between the groups comes to a crucial point in "The Third Town Meeting." Despite Mary's protest, the leaders vote to expel the Emberites, setting the stage for the final conflict.

Tick's reaction to the announcement is to prepare to fight back. This seems like a plausible option to Doon, but after Tick's violent outburst he rightly begins to question Tick's motives for resorting to violence.



# Chapters 24 and 25

## Chapters 24 and 25 Summary

Part 3 is called "The Decision" and opens with Chapter 24, entitled "What Torren Planned." One of Dr. Hester's patients brings the news about the order for the Emberites to leave. He tells her that some of them threatened to fight, and that Ben Barlow replied that he bring out the Weapon if they did. Dr. Hester is alarmed at the news. Torren, overhearing the talk, decides he wants to watch the war but is afraid of getting hurt. He makes a plan to get up early and climb up in the big pine tree on the village plaza where he can watch everything from safety.

Chapter 25 is called "Dread at the Last Minute." Pelton, Maddy and Lina return to Sparks. While Pelton and Maddy go into the village to trade, Lina goes to the hotel to find the Emberites. Pelton gives her the magnifying glass and magnet she found in thanks for her help.

The people of Ember are excited to see Lina. She has been gone for nearly a month and many feared she was dead. She finds Doon and tells him about the terrible devastation she saw in the city. Doon fills her in on the events in Sparks and returns with her to Dr. Hester's house, where Torren is upset that Caspar has not returned with her.

Doon and Lina talk together about whether war can be avoided. She tells Doon about what Maddy had said about avoiding violence by doing something good, but they see no opportunity to undo the hard feelings that have developed. There seem to be only two options, to leave or to fight. Lina does not like either one. She and Doon decide to keep their eyes open for an opportunity to avoid war.

## Chapters 24 and 25 Analysis

Part 3 is called "The Decision," referring possibly to the decision by both groups to turn to violence but also a reference to the decision made by Lina that ultimately defuses the conflict.

Chapters 24 and 25 set the stage for the final showdown. Torren's plan to climb the pine tree in the plaza and watch the war is established. Doon and Lina accept the reality of the situation but decide they will not give up on finding a way to avoid the conflict.



# Chapters 26 and 27

## Chapters 26 and 27 Summary

Chapter 26 is called "The Weapon." On the morning the Emberites are supposed to leave, Tick gathers about half of them who are willing to fight and leads them to the plaza. The others follow to see what will happen. Doon, who does not want to fight, also goes to watch. Ben Barlow and the other leaders go to the top of the town hall steps and call for the Emberites to leave the plaza. Tick Hassler yells out that they will not leave. He calls out that they have some demands, but Ben Barlow yells back that they are through listening. Frustrated, Doon cries out for Barlow to at least listen, but Chugger Frisk sees him and comes after him.

Doon runs from the crowd, circling behind the town hall and climbing the stairs into the tower above the plaza, where he can see and hear everything. Barlow and the other leaders try to push Tick and the others away from the steps and are surprised when Tick hits Barlow with a metal bar.

Barlow goes into the town hall and wheels out the Weapon. It is a black, ugly thing Doon thinks. Nobody seems to know how it works or what it will do. Mary Waters tries to stop Barlow, who is working at the back of the weapon to fire it off. She kicks the nose of it so it fires over the heads of the crowd, but then it explodes, sending a stream of fire toward the tall pine tree next to the tower. Doon sees that he is in danger, because the tree is likely to catch the tower on fire. He rushes to leave, but hears a cry from the tree. He sees Torren hanging from a branch above the window. Doon calls to him to climb closer and jump toward the window. Torren jumps, and Doon catches his hands, pulling him inside as the flames climb higher.

Chapter 27 is called "Firefight." Lina watches the crowd as Barlow fires the weapon and the fire starts. As the flames grow higher, she and most of the other Emberites stand in horror, afraid of the unfamiliar fire. The people of Sparks call out for the fire brigade, and quickly form lines, passing buckets of water from one to another to throw on the blaze. A few of the Emberites, led by Tick, cheer on the fire.

The flames intensify and the town hall tower collapses, sending the flames even higher. Lina is pulled in two directions. She is afraid of the fire, but she feels she must do something to help. Finally it becomes too much and she rushes to one of the bucket lines and begins to help. Other Emberites see her, and while Tick calls them traitors, they join in to help fight the fire.

Doon has escaped the tower with Torren just in time. He comes into the plaza to see most of the people of Ember helping, while Tick and a few others stand helplessly.



## Chapters 26 and 27 Analysis

Everything comes to a head in Chapters 26 and 27. Tick and his followers confront the town leaders, who make good on their threat to deploy the Weapon. Tick strikes the first actual blow, and the leaders try to respond with even greater force.

Mary Waters follows her conscious at the last moment and kicks the Weapon out of place, sending its bullets firing overhead. The plan literally backfires on the leaders, setting a devastating fire. Doon, who has removed himself from the conflict, does the right thing in helping save Torren from the flames. Lina also finds the opportunity she was looking for and makes the first move to help put out the fire. Tick and his weapons are shown to be worthless as the situation changes.



# Chapter 28, The Fourth Town Meeting and Chapter 29

## Chapter 28, The Fourth Town Meeting and Chapter 29 Summary

Chapter 28 is called "Surprising Truths." Doon, Lina and the other Emberites continue to help put out the fire, which destroys much of the plaza. Afterward, Lina and Mrs. Murdo return to Dr. Hester's house to clean up.

Doon speaks with Kenny, who saw him pull Torren from the burning tree. Kenny tells Doon he knew he was a good person, unlike the other boy, Tick. When Doon asks what he means, Kenny explains that he saw Tick cutting vines in the woods before the incident at the hotel. Doon suddenly remembers seeing Tick's rash just before the incident, and also seeing him grubby and smudged just after the charcoal graffiti appeared on the hotel walls. He tells Kenny he has helped him learn something important and leaves him.

At Dr. Hester's, Lina confronts Torren about his false accusation of Doon. Torren reluctantly admits that it had not been Doon who threw the tomatoes, but will not say who it was. Lina makes him write down that it was not Doon. That evening, Mrs. Murdo praises Lina for her courage. Many of them had wanted to help, she said, but it took Lina acting first for them to join in. They go to bed that evening still wondering if they will be asked to leave.

Between Chapters 28 and 29 is a chapter called "The Fourth Town Meeting." A message is sent to the hotel that the town leaders will be coming to speak to them. The Emberites gather in the ballroom of the building and listen to Mary Waters address to the crowd. She explains that the generous actions of the Emberites in fighting the fire has made them realize that they cannot be ungenerous by turning them out. She tells them that she has learned some important truths from Doon and asks him to explain to the crowd.

Doon tells the crowd how he discovered that it was Tick who had written the graffiti on the hotel wall and piled the poison oak in the front. He had done it to anger the Emberites in order to fight the people of Sparks. Doon had confronted Tick himself the night before, he tells them, and Tick had admitted it. He then packed up his things and left.

Mary and the other leaders explain that they will open their stores of food and help the Emberites build houses.

The final chapter, Chapter 29, is called "Three Amazing Visits." The first of the three visits to Dr. Hester's house is from Caspar, who returns with a case of light bulbs, which



are interesting but useless without electricity. The second visit is from Ben Barlow, who, as it turns out, is Torren's uncle. He makes a feeble apology to Torren for starting the fire that nearly killed them both.

The third visit is from Doon who, using the magnet that Lina had given him from her scavenging and following directions from a science project book, has made a hand-cranked electric motor. Discovering that Torren has a light bulb, Torren wires the bulb to his motor and they watch in wonder as the bulb begins to flicker and glow.

## **Chapter 28, The Fourth Town Meeting and Chapter 29 Analysis**

Doon's vague suspicions about Tick are confirmed by Kenny in Chapter 28 and he realizes that he and the other Emberites had been taken advantage of. Similarly, Lina learns the partial truth about Torren's false accusation of Doon.

Doon confronts Tick, who does not deny what he did, but leaves the group. Doon also explains what he knows to the leaders of Sparks, who change their plans after learning this information and after witnessing the actions of the Emberites during the firefight. The story is resolved in the "The Fourth Town Meeting," which, unlike the other three meetings in the story, is attended by the people of Ember. The suggestion is that the town is now taking in the Emberites and considering them to be citizens of Sparks. They announce they will help the Emberites build homes and share their food over the winter.

With the central conflict resolved, the final chapter points to the future. Ben Barlow, the estranged uncle of Torren, makes an effort to reconnect with the boy. Finally, Doon presents his simple electric motor that will light a bulb, suggesting that he and the other people of Ember have something to contribute to the prosperity of Sparks.



# Characters

## Doon Harrow

Doon Harrow is one of the main characters. He is a young teenaged boy who lives with his father. As the book begins, Doon is established as one of the two young people who have led the people of Ember safely out of their dying underground city. His partner in the rescue and good friend is Lina Mayfleet.

Doon is a curious boy who takes a deep interest in the new things he sees in the outside world. He is interested in science and treasures the magnifying glass that he is given by Lina. He is also technically talented, building a simple electric motor from instructions he finds in an old book.

Doon is a responsible boy and feels directly involved in the fate of the people of Ember. He is also very sensitive to injustice, and grapples with the unfair treatment he feels he receives at times. He sometimes allows himself to be influenced by people he admires, such as Tick Hassler. In the end, however, Doon is shown to have a strength of character that leads him to think independently and form his own opinions without being swayed by the motives of others.

## Lina Mayfleet

Lina Mayfleet, along with Doon Harrow, is the second major character in the story. She is a girl in her early teens who was once a messenger in the city of Ember. Lina is an independent girl who is drawn by a vision of helping her people establish a great city in the outside world. Her vision motivates her to take bold action, such as when she stows away in the wagon of a roamer who is headed toward the ruins of a city.

Lina is curious about the disaster that has led to the present situation but is genuinely puzzled about the causes of warfare. She is shown to be exceedingly courageous when she overcomes her fear of fire to help the people of Sparks put out the blaze in the town plaza. Her actions also show her to be an independent thinker and a leader who recognizes that sometimes someone must take the first step for others to follow.

## Torren Crane

Torren Crane is a boy who lives in Sparks with his aunt, Dr. Hester, and brother, Caspar. He is a resentful person, unwilling to share his room or things with the visitors from Ember. He has a bad temper and a scheming mind, and is only partly humbled when his plan to blame Doon for his own deeds is discovered.



## Tick Hassler

Tick Hassler is an older boy who comes from Ember. He is a charismatic and enthusiastic person who has a knack for getting people to join in his plans and projects. At first his projects are making improvements, but he then turns to organizing an armed response to the perceived unfair treatment of the Emberites. As it turns out, much of the conflict was actually manufactured by Tick. He leaves the group in disgrace after he is discovered.

## Maddy

Maddy is first described as a dull young woman who has little to say. As her character develops, however, she is shown to be intelligent and independent. She comes from a small, poor settlement which she left behind to join Caspar in his roaming. She decides to make her home in Sparks.

## Caspar

Caspar is the nephew of Dr. Hester and older brother of Torren Crane. He is a roamer, someone who travels from place to place scavenging items from ruined buildings and trading them in the towns. Caspar is obsessed with the legends of a treasure buried in a city, and has concocted an elaborate method by which he thinks he can find the treasure. His obsession leads to Maddy leaving him and returning to Sparks with Lina.

## Dr. Hester

Dr. Hester is the doctor in Sparks. She takes in Lina, her sister Poppy, and Mrs. Murdo when the Emberites arrive. She also cares for her nephew Torren. Dr. Hester is a busy person, constantly being called on to treat the illnesses and injuries of the villagers. She is self-taught, using herbs and plants she grows herself to make medicines. She is a distracted person, sometimes asking Lina to do several things at once.

## Mrs. Murdo

Mrs. Murdo is a woman from Ember who is like a mother to Lina and her sister, Poppy. She stays with the girls at Dr. Hester's and takes an interest in the medicines and treatments the doctor gives to the villagers. After it is decided that the people of Ember will stay in Sparks, Mrs. Murdo decides to become Dr. Hester's assistant.

## Doon's Father

Doon's father is not named in the story. He and Doon stay together in a room at The Pioneer hotel. Doon sometimes turns to him for advice.





## **Edward Pocket**

Edward Pocket is an older man from Ember who stays with Doon and his father at The Pioneer. In Ember, Edward was the librarian and he is delighted when Doon shows him the collection of old books abandoned by the people of Sparks.

## **Mary Waters**

Mary Waters is one of the three leaders of Sparks. She is a moderate voice among the three, voting against the idea of forcing the Emberites to leave. She is overruled; however she takes direct action when one of the leaders tries to fire the Weapon at the Emberites, kicking it out of the way as it fires.

## **Ben Barlow**

Ben Barlow is another of the three leaders of Sparks and the most outspoken about forcing the Emberites to leave. Barlow is also the estranged uncle of Torren Crane. He is badly injured when he tries to use the Weapon and it explodes.



# Objects/Places

## Sparks

Sparks is a small agricultural village where the people of Ember come to live. Much of the story takes place in Sparks

## Ember

Ember is a city that was built in a cave several generations before the time of the story. The city was dying when Doon and Lina discovered a route to escape, leading 400 Emberites to Sparks.

## The Pioneer

The Pioneer is an abandoned hotel building where the people of Ember are sheltered on the outskirts of Sparks.

## Dr. Hester's House

Dr. Hester lives in a large house with a courtyard where she grows medicinal plants and herbs. Lina stays with Dr. Hester in Sparks.

## The Plaza

The Plaza is a central part of Sparks. There are shops around it and a fountain in the center. The main conflict of the story takes place in the Plaza.

## The Ark

The "Ark" is the store house where the people of Sparks keep their surplus food. It is named after the remnant of a sign on the building that once read "supermarket."

## The City

The City is the destination of Caspar, Maddy and Lina when they go roaming. Lina has visions of a city that might be rebuilt to house the people of Ember, but finds it completely demolished.



## **The Unknown Lands**

The unknown lands are the areas outside the knowledge of the settlements. The people of Ember are faced with having to make their way in the unknown lands if they are forced to leave Sparks.

## **Trucks**

Trucks are wagons converted from former gas-powered trucks. They have their engines removed and are pulled by oxen.

## **The Disaster**

The Disaster was a series of plagues and wars that nearly obliterated all the living people of the world. The city of Ember was founded to protect a small number of people from the Disaster.

## **The Terrible Weapon**

The Terrible Weapon is owned by the town of Sparks and is brought out during the final conflict. It is not fully described, but appears to be some kind of machine gun.



# Themes

## First Impressions

Everything about the outside world is new to the Emberites, and they find themselves in a new and unfamiliar situation. The characters are frequently called on to assess their changing situation and to re-assess their opinions of people. Sometimes their first impressions turn out to be wrong, for better or worse.

Tick Hassler is an example of a character that makes a favorable first impression on Doon. He is a confident young man with charisma. He seems to have good ideas about improving the living conditions of the Emberites and an ability to encourage people to get involved. Doon's first impressions are soon challenged, however, when he notices that Tick does not seem to follow through on his grand schemes. When Tick begins to talk about standing up against their unfair treatment by the people of Sparks, he makes sense to Doon at first, but when his motives become more clear Doon finally changes his opinion about him.

Another character whose first impressions are challenged is Maddy, Caspar's roaming partner. Maddy says very little when she first arrives at Dr. Hester's house. Lina's first impression of Caspar is that he is somewhat "off" and this turns out to be the truth. By association, she wonders if Maddy is not as strange as Caspar.

After she is discovered by Maddy hiding in Caspar's wagon, Lina soon discovers that Maddy is a bright and independent person. She is loyal to Caspar because she has made a promise to help him, but when Caspar appears to lose touch with reality, she helps Lina make her way back to Sparks. Maddy also provides Lina with good advice that she follows in the dramatic confrontation at the end of the story.

## Violence

The People of Sparks addresses the issue of violence as one of its central themes. The people from Ember appear to have lived mostly without violence or war and are ignorant of the disastrous warfare that took place prior to the founding of their city. The characters of Lina and Doon are curious about the concept, and ask why any two groups of people would resort to warfare.

By using the innocent viewpoint of these characters, the author tries to present an objective viewpoint of violence and its ramifications. In the conversation between Doon and his father as Tick Hassler is raising a fighting force presents such an objective and practical view. Violence leads to the survival of some of the participants, but there is always the question of the cost in terms of destruction and death.

Doon appears to believe that violence may be the appropriate response in some cases, but he is revolted when he sees Tick Hassler appearing to enjoy violence for its own



sake. When he learns that the events that had driven him to consider violence were staged by Tick, he realizes that the violence Tick called for was even more senseless. Left open is the possibility that violence in self defense may be appropriate if the danger is real.

Doon and Lina consider a non-violent response to the people of Sparks, wondering what would happen if they simply sat down in front of the hotel and refused to leave. They dismiss this idea, since they recognize that Tick and his followers would provoke a fight in any case.

## Fairness

One of the chapter titles sums up the central theme of fairness with the phrase "Unfairness and what to do about it." Fairness is a complicated concept, and the author has the characters grapple with the unfairness they perceive and their own reactions to it.

A clear case of unfairness arises when Doon is deliberately and falsely accused of having ruined two crates of tomatoes. Despite his protests of innocence and the evidence that he was somewhere else at the time, many of the people of Sparks believe he is guilty and treat him like a criminal. This colors his attitude toward the villagers as he grows more and more frustrated at being treated unfairly. Things come to a head when he is cleaning the fountain and begins to struggle with Chugger Frisk, who has wrongly accused him of slacking on the job. When he accidentally knocks a bucket of slime on a Sparks girl, matters get even worse.

The question that arises is whether Doon's response is appropriate. Because of his anger and frustration, he is ready to agree with Tick Hassler, who takes advantage of Doon's state of mind to suggest that revenge is the appropriate response to unfairness. The people of Sparks have been depriving them unfairly, he tells Doon, and it would be fair to raid their storehouse and take their share of the food.

This response to unfairness might be summed up as saying that two wrongs make a right. The story suggests, however, that what can happen is that the situation does not end after one side thinks it has settled the unfairness. The other side sometimes responds out of proportion to the perceived attack and things grow steadily worse. For example, the village leaders respond to the angry crowd of Emberites by yelling at them to leave. The Emberites push forward and the village leaders push back. Tick Hassler responds with a blow and the village leaders respond by firing the Weapon, which backfires and starts the plaza ablaze. Tick and his followers see this as retribution, as the "fair" result of the villager's attack. Lina, however, breaks the cycle by running forward to help put out the fire. This ultimately stops the fighting over fairness.

# Style

## Point of View

The author employs a shifting point of view throughout the story, sometimes presenting the same events from the points of view of different characters. Much of the story is told from the perspective of the two main characters Doon and Lina; however, some portions are told from the point of view of Torren, a secondary character. The author also includes chapters that are told from a narrative perspective and do not reflect any one character's point of view.

The story opens from the point of view of Torren, a boy from Sparks, who is the first to see the stream of people walking down out of the hills toward the village. The next chapter then shifts to a narrative description of the group of Emberites as they walk wearily across the landscape. Once they have reached the village, the perspective shifts back and forth between the main characters Lina and Doon, as they embark on different paths that split the story into two main threads. Within each of these threads, the author uses an "omniscient" perspective that reveals the character's inner thoughts and motivations. When the two threads come together again at the time of the conflict and fire in the plaza, the author describes the events from each character's point of view, first Doon's then Lina's.

Overall the main perspective is from the point of view of the Emberites; however, the author inserts portions that present the Sparks perspective. Aside from the opening chapter, another chapter appears told from the point of view of Torren. The author also adds four sections describing the meetings of the leaders of Sparks. These sections are told in the third person without adopting a personal perspective. The thoughts and motivations of the characters must be inferred by the words and actions of the characters.

## Setting

The People of Sparks takes place in a fictional version of the future, after disease and war have killed many of the inhabitants of the world. A few settlements are scattered around the countryside, but the major cities have been ruined. Roamers wander the land scavenging items from abandoned and ruined buildings, trading them in the settlements. The author makes reference to a former city called "Sanazay" which suggests the real city of San Jose on the California coast, and the reference to the hilly landscape and proximity to a large bay suggests that the story takes place in what is now California.

The story is set more specifically in the small village of Sparks. The village has about 300 citizens and is supported by communal agriculture. There are some shops and a town hall on a brick plaza with a fountain in the center, which serves as a general



meeting place. The village is near a river and incorporates some abandoned buildings that existed before the disaster. A former supermarket is used for food storage, and an abandoned hotel building is used to house the visitors from Ember.

The hotel itself is a secondary setting. It is run down and most of the furniture and beds have been removed. Doon, one of the main characters, stays at the hotel, which is called The Pioneer. Another secondary setting is Dr. Hester's house, a large house built in a U shape with a courtyard full of plants and herbs. Lina, the second main character, stays with Dr. Hester when she is not traveling.

## Language and Meaning

The People of Sparks is a young adult novel and is written using intermediate language appropriate for its intended audience. The story centers on the interpersonal relations of people from different backgrounds and uses dialogue between characters extensively.

The story takes place in a fictional future, and the author employs unusual character names to invoke the difference between the present and this fictional future. Names like "Doon," "Lina," "Tick," and "Torren" suggest a setting that is similar to the modern world but also different. The author also uses word play to emphasize the newness of the situation to the main characters. Lina has never seen a tree before, for example, and the first one she sees she is told is called a "pinetree." She makes the assumption that all trees are called "pinetree" until she hears another one being called an "oak tree." The author also uses words like "gasleen," which is an interpretation of the word "gasoline" made by characters who have never encountered it.

## Structure

The People of Sparks is divided into 29 numbered chapters with 5 additional segments and a short foreword interspersed among the chapters. The book is divided into three parts, each named for a general theme in the story. Each chapter is given a title that refers to a character or event that appears in that chapter.

The first part is called "Arrival." This part describes the arrival of the Emberites in Sparks and the decision by the people of Sparks to feed and shelter them. The setting and main characters are established in this first part. Part 2 is called "Travelers and Warriors." The story splits into two treads each following one of the main characters in this part. Lina goes traveling as a stowaway in a roamer's wagon while Doon stays in Sparks as the tensions mount and the two groups consider taking violent action. Part 3 is called "The Decision," which is an ambiguous title that refers to some of the decisions made by the characters. The leaders of Sparks decide to make the Emberites leave, Doon decides he cannot support a violent resolution, Lina decides to take the first step in repairing relations between the two groups and finally the leaders of Sparks decide to incorporate the Emberites into their town.



## Quotes

"He realized very soon that he was seeing people, a few people at first and then more and more of them. They came up from the other side of the hill and gathered at the top and stood there, a long line of them against the sky, like a row of black teeth."

Chapter 1, p. 6

"In Ember, there was never fire unless there was danger - someone's electric wiring had frayed and ignited, or a pot holder had fallen on a stove's electric burner. The only fire Lina had seen that wasn't dangerous was the tiny flame of a candle. This fire scared her,"

Chapter 4, p. 39

"But the people of Ember had never done much digging or picking. They had to be shown how to put a foot on the shovel's edge to drive it into the dirt, and how to lift the pick over their shoulders and bring it down hard."

Chapter 7, p. 80

"Out of habit, she drew the city she had always drawn - she hardly knew how to draw anything else. But she thought that since she was here in the real world, she should be able to imagine the city much better than before."

Chapter 10, p. 119

"Lina made a plan. She'd hide among the boxes and crates on Caspar's truck, and she would ride that way to the city. It was only a day's journey away."

Chapter 13, p. 156

"On the second night, they pulled up beside the ruins of a town. Not much was left of it, but you could see that once there had been hundreds of houses. The concrete foundations, overgrown with weeds, lined up along curved streets."

Chapter 16, p. 186

"Doon thought about this. It did make sense. You had to act against injustice, didn't you? You couldn't just let it happen."

Chapter 19, p. 220

"'Maddy,' she said. 'Could there ever be another Disaster like the one that came before? Or even worse? What if every single person and every single animal was killed?'"

Chapter 22, p. 245

"Torren listened from his place on the window seat, shivering with excitement. there was going to be a war, right here in Sparks! And the Terrible Weapon would be used at last - on the cavepeople!"

Chapter 24, p. 268





"Lina stayed where she was, still thinking. She desperately wanted to find an answer, but no answer came to her. Her spirits sank and she suddenly felt tired."

Chapter 26, p. 284

"Lina stayed where she was. She felt as if she were being gripped by two huge hands. One pulled her backward, away from the fire, back toward the streets of the town, through which she could run to safety. The other pulled her forward into danger, urging her to do what she suddenly knew was right."

Chapter 27, p. 302

"At first nothing happened except that the magnet turned around. Doon cranked faster. And faster. And a glimmer appeared in the light bulb, first a glimmer and then a glow, and then the bulb shone with a faint but steady white light."

Chapter 29, p. 337



## Topics for Discussion

Who are "the People of Sparks"? Does the definition change by the story's end?

How does the author address the question of violence? Is violence ever justifiable?

How does Doon react to being treated unfairly? Does he act appropriately?

How does the author make the setting real to the reader?

Are the villagers in Sparks justified in their opinions of the Emberites? Why or why not?

Doon admires Tick Hassler at first, but changes his mind by the end of the story. What qualities does he decide he does not share with Tick?

Is Lina's vision of a grand city realistic? What does the ending of the story suggest?