

Replay Study Guide

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Plot Summary

In *Replay*, Jeff Winston repeatedly dies and wakes up earlier in his life, living out 25 years over and over. He struggles with the meaninglessness of this repetitive life without a future, sometimes taking respite in drugs and sex. Eventually he meets and falls in love with Pamela, a "replayer" like himself. Then they realize their replays are becoming shorter and shorter. Soon, they will die, and they search desperately for answers, only to cause more problems. Finally, Jeff finds himself replaying over and over the moment of his death, until he comes out the other side with a fresh, unknown future in front of him.

As the story begins, in October 1988, Jeff is dying. He wakes up in his college days, in 1963, at eighteen, and at first he can't believe it. He realizes that he knows the future, and he bets on horse races and the World Series. Jeff finds himself a millionaire, owner of a huge investment firm, but he alienates his wife from his previous life. He marries a woman he doesn't love and has a beautiful child he adores. Then, Jeff dies again. He wakes as a college student. His daughter is gone. Jeff marries his college girlfriend and settles down to a simple, quiet life, adopting two children. In October 1988, despite the best medical care, he dies again and finds himself in 1963.

Jeff is distressed with the never-ending loop he's apparently leading. During his next replay, he hooks up with a party girl and goes to Europe, drifting into a life of drug use and meaningless sex. A plane crash leads Jeff to leave his life, and he retires into a mountain cabin as a recluse. Then, one day, Jeff sees an ad for a blockbuster movie he's never heard of. He's sure it's never existed in any of his lives, and he sees the name Pamela Phillips in the credits. Jeff makes an appointment to meet Pamela, and they realize they're both replaying 25 years of their lives.

Pamela and Jeff fall in love, seeking each other out in their next lifetime and sharing with each other what they can share with no one else. However, the length of their loop-backs are growing shorter, and so their lives seem to be slowly looping to an end. At first, Pamela and Jeff try to find others like themselves, but the only one they locate is a serial killer. Horrified, they realize they have wasted one loop torturing themselves. Then, they decide to reveal themselves to the world in hopes of getting the scientific community to investigate their plight. Unfortunately, Pamela and Jeff only cause harm and find no answers. They fight, part, and die alone.

On Jeff's next incarnation, he believes Pamela is gone forever, but he looks her up and has a relationship with her, even though she doesn't recognize him. Then, shortly before her death, she reawakens, and they part bitterly again. Jeff returns to his life closer and closer to his death, until he is replaying his heart attack over and over. Then, finally, he passes through the moment of his death, and he is still. His life is ahead of him, and the future is unknown.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

In *Replay*, Jeff Winston repeatedly dies and wakes up earlier in his life, living out 25 years over and over. He struggles with the meaninglessness of this repetitive life without a future, sometimes taking respite in drugs and sex. Eventually he meets and falls in love with Pamela, a "replayer" like himself. Then they realize their replays are becoming shorter and shorter. Soon, they will die, and they search desperately for answers, only to cause more problems. Finally, Jeff finds himself replaying over and over the moment of his death, until he comes out the other side with a fresh, unknown future in front of him.

As Chapter 1 begins, Jeff dies while on the phone with his wife, just as she starts: "We need—" A week previously, she said something similar, about needing a new shower curtain, but Jeff knows they need more than that: a vacation, a better house, a way to share their feelings. They also need a child. A failed pregnancy thirteen years before left Linda unable to have children. Now, Jeff is dying, feeling a horrible pressure in his chest. He falls to his desk, and sees the time on his digital clock: 1:06 on October 18, 1988.

Jeff wakes in his college dorm room at Emory University on May 6, 1963. His body is a college student, but his mind is still the same as the moment before he died. Jeff's college roommate, Martin, who committed suicide in 1981, comes into the room, the youthful college friend he remembers. Martin reminds Jeff they've got a double-date that night to see Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Jeff panics. He can't believe it's really 1963 and takes a taxi to downtown Atlanta, to find that the Peachtree Plaza Hotel hasn't been built yet. He goes to a hotel bar and has a drink, trying to understand what's happening.

In Chapter 2, Jeff returns to his dorm room, where Martin chastises him for standing up Judy. The next day, Jeff calls his parents. His healthy father has not yet been house-bound by emphysema. His twice-divorced sister is a buoyant 9-year-old. Jeff finds his 1958 Chevy and starts driving, thinking about the implications of his situation. He's already changed his life slightly by standing up Judy. He won't meet his wife Linda until later. More than anything, he wants to talk to someone. He gets change to make a phone call.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The novel starts out at the beginning of a story, but it is also in the middle of Jeff Winston's story. The story of his life has begun, but it has not had a chance to play out. His conflict with his wife is the center of his life, and his heart attack cuts it short, just as it cuts short his wife's sentence. Her interrupted statement, "we need—," takes on a deep significance for Jeff, reminding him of all the things he really does need, all the



things that are wrong in his life. Jeff's journey begins with a lack, a need, but he's not clear exactly what really is needed.

The story gives Jeff the opportunity to replay his life and to make different choices. He gets to see the paths he didn't choose. Jeff can't truly take advantage of this opportunity at first. When he wakes up in his college dorm room, Jeff is more confused than anything else. He finds himself in a past from which he's long disassociated. He's not the same person he was in 1963, and he can't follow the same choices that he made before. In this way, the past is forever lost to Jeff. Though he replays his life, he can't truly "replay" days that are gone forever because the Jeff of the past is gone forever.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Jeff goes to Harris Hall at Emory to pick up Judy Gordon for a date. He apologizes for standing her up, and she soon forgives him. Jeff finds her youthful innocence appealing, and they go out for food. Judy is concerned when Jeff can't remember how to get to their hangouts. At the restaurant, they run into one of Jeff's professors, and Judy gossips that he's a dirty old man. Jeff knows the description could just as easily apply to him, and he laughs.

After Jeff and Judy eat, they go to a wooded area to park. They start making out, and Jeff is more excited than he's been in years. When Jeff starts to unbutton Judy's blouse, though, Judy moves his hand away. After a while, Judy begins to massage Jeff's penis. She asks for his handkerchief and unzips his pants. He doesn't want a hand job, though. He wants to have sex. Judy is horrified that he'd think she's that kind of girl. She tells Jeff to take her back to the dorm.

After dropping Judy off, Jeff goes to a bar. He's depressed with a life he's outgrown and unsure about his future. The sports news comes on the TV, talking about the upcoming Kentucky Derby. Jeff realizes that he can make a lot of money. He asks the bartender for the sports section of the paper to look up the horses running in the Derby, and the name "Chateaugay" rings a bell. He's running at eleven-to-one.

Jeff sells his Chevy, books, stereo, and records, takes out a loan from his parents, and withdraws all his savings. Then, he finds an upperclassman named Frank Maddock to place a bet for him of \$2,300, promising Frank 30% of the winnings. At the start of the race, Chateaugay is sixth. Then, almost unbelievably, the horse starts to gain on the backstretch. Jeff's horse comes in at \$20.80 to win. Jeff has made \$17,000.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Jeff is at first attracted to Judy, who now represents lost youth and innocence to him. She is everything that Jeff, even when he is transported back in time, can never regain. While he is only a pretender to youth, Judy is young. However, Jeff soon realizes that youth is not really what he desires. Judy is not yet an adult, and she hasn't yet discovered her own sexuality. Jeff has left youth behind, and he no longer fits with Judy and her attitudes. The experience is depressing to Jeff, who realizes that he's truly lost his past and cannot regain it.

The one thing that Jeff never has to worry about in his replayed lives is money. Because he knows the future, he can always bet on sports events, and he starts off his first replay with a successful and profitable bet. Jeff and his wife Linda always had problems with money and fights about money, and Jeff sees in his ability to make money a way to

overcome the problems of his former life. His financial circumstance is at least one concrete thing Jeff can change about his life. It is one thing that he has control over.



Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary

Frank and Jeff drive to Las Vegas in Jeff's new Studebaker Avanti. Jeff hadn't been able to remember which other race Chateaugay won, so he didn't bet on the Preakness, which Chateaugay lost. Jeff and Frank are in Vegas to bet on Chateaugay in the Belmont Stakes, a race Jeff knows the horse is sure to win. He's ducked Frank's questions about how Jeff knows the outcomes of races, and he's stopped worrying about what's happening to him. Jeff is flunking out of school, but it doesn't matter.

Out by the pool at Jeff's hotel, he picks up beautiful, sexy Sharla. Meanwhile, Frank has learned to count cards and has made \$9,000 more at blackjack. Frank and Jeff end up with \$25,000 to bet on the Belmont. Frank is stunned when they win, a total gain of \$137,000. With his winnings, Jeff goes off to France with Sharla. Their life is a sensual one. Jeff has taught Sharla some future dance styles, which are catching on in the clubs.

After the summer is over, Jeff rejoins Frank to convince him to bet on the underdog Dodgers not only winning but sweeping the World Series. Frank is appalled that Jeff wants to bet everything on this long shot. The odds are a hundred to one. Frank finally agrees to go in with Jeff as full partners, after Jeff's proven "hunches" with the horse races. Between them, they bet \$122,000, spread over 23 bookies. They win over twelve million dollars.

As Chapter 5 begins, no bookie will take Jeff and Frank's wagers anymore, and they go into business together, as an investment firm called Future, Inc. Frank handles the day-to-day business, and Jeff makes decisions about investments. Their partnership is overshadowed by Frank's fear of Jeff's impossible knowledge, but their business is hugely successful, based on Jeff's foreknowledge of trends. Jeff settles down to success and an empty but sensual relationship with Sharla.

Then, Jeff realizes that in three weeks, John F. Kennedy will be assassinated. Jeff feels an irresistible desire to try to stop the assassination and change the course of the world for the better. Jeff flies to Dallas, finds Lee Harvey Oswald's address, and buys a cheap typewriter. He types a threatening letter to the president, saying that he's planning to murder Kennedy. He mails it from near Oswald's house and gets rid of the typewriter. Oswald is arrested.

Then, days later, Kennedy is assassinated, on schedule. The assassination seems to have sent Frank over the edge, since he links it to Jeff's recent trip to Dallas. Frank dissolves their partnership. To Jeff's surprise, the assassin is someone named Nelson Bennett. Either the Kennedy assassination was a conspiracy, and Bennett merely replaced Oswald, or there are some things Jeff just cannot change. Jeff is filled with



unanswerable questions when the news comes that Jack Ruby has killed Bennett, just as he killed Oswald in Jeff's previous lifetime.

Chapters 4-5 Analysis

One of the main aspects of life that Jeff struggles with is control. In the beginning of the novel, he feels helpless in his relationship with Linda and in the way his life has turned out, and when he wins his first bet, he gains his first taste of control over his own destiny. Jeff knows the outcome of sports events and is able to place winning bets and make money. This leads Jeff on a binge of moneymaking. He has no restraint, betting all he has over and over, until he has millions of dollars.

Jeff also first meets Sharla in Las Vegas, during his unrestrained betting. Sharla is easy, sensual, and undemanding. She requires nothing but money, and money is easy for Jeff. Sharla, like the money, is something Jeff can control. She represents immediate pleasure with no strings attached. Also like the money, Sharla offers only superficial benefits and joys. She gives no lasting comfort.

Jeff's desire to control his destiny is foiled in his attempt to stop the Kennedy assassination. Jeff has been able to build a multi-million-dollar corporation and have a lifestyle he could never dream of in his previous existence. He tries to take his control one step further and control the path of world events. He is successful in getting Lee Harvey Oswald detained, so that Oswald is unable to assassinate Kennedy, but this "success" is a failure. It becomes emblematic to Jeff of his inability to make broad, sweeping changes to the world. The assassination of Kennedy remains a mystery, something unknowable, as many things remain unknowable.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Jeff spends most of his time after the Kennedy assassination making lots of money. One day, he brings Sharla to a fight, and he realizes that she's just an empty lay, not a woman with whom he wants to share his life. The next day, he gives her \$200,000 and a ticket to Rio, ending their relationship with no hard feelings. He goes back to New York to make more money. His life is empty, but he's waiting.

On the day when Jeff meets his wife Linda in his previous life, Jeff goes to Boca Raton, where they met before. Linda is just where he met her the first time, reading the novel *Airport*. At first, the conversation seems to go well, but then Jeff tries to tell her about his investment company. The story of his multi-million-dollar company on Park Avenue, built from nothing, is too impossible for her to believe. Jeff is only twenty-three, after all. When she blows him off, Jeff starts to panic, but his anxious pursuit only alienates her more. Jeff tries calling Linda at home to convince her that he really is a wealthy investor. She's appalled that he has her phone number and address. She tells him to stay away from her and threatens to call the police if he harasses her.

Jeff and his wife Diane are at a winery. She is annoyed that Jeff wants to invest in the two barefoot hippies they've just visited, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, founders of Apple. Jeff has bought 51% of Apple Computers at its start-up stage. Jeff's wife is a wealthy socialite, appropriate to his financial status, but he does not love her. She is seven months pregnant. Jeff has kept track of Linda, but he was unable to make contact with her and eventually stopped trying. She married an architect in 1970 and has two children by that marriage.

Years later, Jeff has a lovely daughter Gretchen and an orange cat named Chumley. Gretchen is playing with her Barbie dolls, and Ken is a newly-returned hostage from Iran. The Iran hostage crisis has just ended, and Gretchen has been watching it closely on television. Gretchen hasn't brought Jeff closer to Diane, but he loves Gretchen intensely. Jeff's been able to do one positive thing in this lifetime. He gave Martin, his old roommate, a lucrative job for life, preventing Martin's suicide.

As October 1988 approaches, Jeff has doctors checking his heart. They find no problems. He's taken care of his health, this time. Later, Diane and Jeff are at a restaurant arguing over Gretchen's schooling. Jeff does not want Gretchen to go away to a boarding school, but Diane does. They put the decision off. Later still, Jeff is listening to Gretchen playing the piano. When Gretchen goes to get a sandwich, Jeff contemplates the beautiful landscape surrounding his home, deciding definitely that he cannot send Gretchen away. Then, his heart begins to palpitate. He is dying, again.



Chapter 6 Analysis

The Kennedy assassination marks a shift in Jeff's life. He abandons Sharla, looking for something more meaningful for himself. Although Jeff has made a lot of money, the money is worse than useless. It cannot give him a connection to his wife Linda, who he lost touch with even while they were married. When he tries to reconnect with her, they are still separated by a void of many years and different experiences. His money works against him. He cannot even get her to talk with him.

Jeff doesn't find a true lover in his reclaimed lifetime. He marries Diane for convenience. However, Jeff finds something almost by accident that he longed for and never had in the past. He fathers Gretchen. Gretchen is perhaps Jeff's purest love. He takes fatherly pride in her and cares for her more than he has cared for Diane or Linda. He has been able to control one other thing in his life—preventing Martin's suicide. Now, he wants to control Gretchen, and he is willing to battle Diane for that control. He never gets the chance. Gretchen is beyond his control because Jeff dies again.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Jeff finds himself in a movie theater, watching *The Birds*. Judy Gordon sits next to him, clutching his arm. It's 1963 again. After the movie, Judy questions Jeff about his strange behavior. Jeff has just lost a whole lifetime, and worse than that, Gretchen has never even been born. Not really knowing why, Jeff goes to his old boarding school. The school is dim in his memory now. It's a place he's never replayed. He visits a bridge there that's a reminder of shame and guilt.

Jeff's first year at the school, he fell in love with his French teacher, Deirdre Rendell. Then, she became pregnant. Once the baby was born, Deirdre's love for her husband was palpable, seeing the young family together. Jeff's fantasies are dashed. Deirdre's husband built her a bridge over a small stream, so she could walk to and from school with the baby's stroller. One day, Jeff's jealousy and disappointment overwhelmed him, and he destroyed the bridge with rocks. Deirdre caught him in the act. She never spoke about it, to Jeff or anyone else, and Jeff got away without punishment. Jeff realizes that the bridge brought him here. He's just experienced the same horrible sense of loss he first felt when he realized his dreams of Deirdre were impossibilities.

Jeff bets all his money on the horse race again, and Judy is concerned. After his bets come in, Jeff buys a Jaguar and takes Judy out to dinner. He gives her a diamond ring and asks her to marry him. Judy loves him but can't accept. She knows he's been cutting classes and is worried about the future. She doesn't believe he can make money in the stock market. Jeff decides to buckle down and go back to school, and in 1968, he and Judy are married. Jeff has been conservative in his investments, so he doesn't spook Judy with wild success. He parts from Frank Maddock early, and he and Judy buy a house. He settles down to a simple, happy life.

Jeff and Judy are on vacation in Jamaica. Jeff has secretly had a vasectomy to prevent having and losing, another child. Judy brings up the possibility of adoption. Jeff thinks over the idea and agrees. They adopt April and Dwayne. Jeff takes his new family rafting and plans to show them as much of the world as he can. He's piling up his financial success to give them as much joy as possible. In October 1988, Jeff checks into a hospital and has doctors constantly monitoring his heart. The hospital staff and his own wife, think he's crazy. Then, suddenly, his heart goes wild. They can't save him. He wakes again in Martin's car, with Judy, in 1963. Jeff runs off, crazily, shouting obscenities at the sky.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The loss of Gretchen is the epitome of Jeff's loss. He is more completely separated from Gretchen than from anything in his past. He has no daughter in his original lifetime, and



Gretchen is the one thing of meaning that he achieves in his first replay. When he loses her, she is completely wiped away. She has never existed, and she never will exist, unless somewhere in an alternate dimension, that timeline moves forward without him. The loss of Gretchen is not something with which Jeff can come to terms. He goes and visits his boarding school, the site of another loss, his lost dreams of being with his French teacher. Jeff's childish reaction, tearing up the bridge, is pointless, but Jeff struggles to find some other way to process his loss.

Jeff tries to focus this lifetime on somehow recreating what he's lost. He does not try to have another daughter, but he does build another family. He works hard to build a good marriage and adopts two children. Gretchen has taught him that family is more important than money. Jeff still believes that he can hold on to what he has gained. The issue of control comes up again here. Jeff has controlled the course of his lifetime to achieve a marriage and a family. The one thing he has to exert control over at the end is his death. He takes every precaution to hold on to everything he's gained in this lifetime, but he can't. He loses everything again.



Chapters 8-9

Chapters 8-9 Summary

Jeff has gained and lost everything, and nothing seems to have meaning for him anymore. He makes money on the Derby, goes to Las Vegas to get Sharla, and takes her to Paris. Soon, they are living in the Jazz-club scene, drinking too much, taking opium and hashish, and having casual sex. Among Jeff's sexual partners is Mireille, the beautiful red-headed girlfriend of Jean-Claude, another member of the set. One night, under the influence of opium, Jeff tells Mireille what is happening to him, and she comforts him. They never mention it again, just as Jeff and Sharla never discuss the drugs and group sex.

As Chapter 9 begins, Jeff and Sharla are living in London. Jeff picks up a girl named Sylvia outside a Chelsea drug store. She gives him LSD for the first time. Once he starts experiencing an altered perception, Sylvia and he go downstairs to have sex. He hallucinates that she's his lost daughter Gretchen. Revolted, he pulls away. Sharla and another man come in, and the three all begin having sex, while Jeff is haunted of memories of his pasts.

Sharla and Jeff are waiting for a plane from San Francisco to Hawaii. They get into a fight. She tells Jeff that Mireille repeated his story about the multiple lives, and that everyone was ridiculing him for it behind his back. Mireille only slept with him because Sharla and Jean-Claude told her to. They get on the plane, and it takes off. Then, the wing catches fire. The plane turns back and lands at Travis Air Force Base. After they land, frightened but safe, Sharla throws her arms around Jeff. He pushes her away and leaves her on the runway.

Chapters 8-9 Analysis

The loss of Jeff's life again, on top of his loss of Gretchen, throws him into a fit, much like his destruction of the bridge at his old boarding school. Jeff has tried to accept loss and rebuild, but now he feels like he has no control over his life whatsoever. Whatever happens, it will eventually result in loss. Whatever he does will be undone. What can possibly have meaning, if eventually everything is undone? He grabs some easy money from betting and picks up Sharla, some easy companionship. Jeff does not try to create anything lasting because he can't come to terms with the idea that eventually it will be taken from him.

Jeff's life of sex and drugs is not satisfying to him. It does not help him heal from his losses, and it does not give him anything to truly love or hold on to in life. His relationship with Sharla, as always, is empty. After the plane crash, Jeff leaves the meaningless existence he's been living. Despite the fact that he now knows his world will be eventually destroyed and reset, Jeff must find some way to find meaning.



Chapters 10-11

Chapters 10-11 Summary

On a May morning, Jeff finishes up his breakfast. He bought a small California farm near Montgomery Creek nine years previously and planted it with corn and asparagus. He has been living in solitude, three miles from the nearest neighbor, in harmony with the land since giving up Sharla and his life of sex and drugs. He is lonely but unwilling to build a relationship that he knows will eventually be erased.

Jeff goes into Redding for supplies. He is perusing the advertisements at the local store when he sees a movie poster, for a film called *Starsea*. It's the blockbuster hit of the season, but Jeff has never heard of it before. He goes to see the film, an incredible epic ahead of its time, involving intelligent dolphins and extraterrestrial beings that created humankind and now have abandoned it. Jeff is amazed. The writer/director, Pamela Phillips, is someone he's never heard of before. Using the pull of his multi-million-dollar portfolio, Jeff makes an appointment with Pamela.

Pamela's office is decorated with a wheel motif. Pamela herself is all business, and she quickly makes it clear that she's not looking for investors. Jeff stops her cold, though, with mentions of films that haven't been imagined yet: *Close Encounters*, *E.T.*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. She demands to know who Jeff is.

In Chapter 11, Jeff and Pamela go to Pamela's Topanga Canyon home. Pamela has confirmed that she's another replayer, and she's heard Jeff's story. Pamela criticizes Jeff for getting himself in a plane crash, saying that she's memorized plane crashes and other disasters to avoid. Pamela has taken a spiritual view of their situation, considering that they may be prophets. Jeff is horrified, believing that she's on the verge of starting a cult.

Pamela was born in Connecticut, and during her first life she studied art, got involved in counter-culture movements, and then settled down to marry a lawyer and have two kids. Then, on October 18, 1988, on the same day as Jeff, she died and woke up as a fourteen-year-old. She panicked. She told a psychiatrist about her experience, but the psychiatrist refused to see her again, after Pamela predicted Kennedy's assassination, except for the name of the assassin. She couldn't know, at the time, that Jeff's interference caused Nelson Bennett instead of Oswald to pull the trigger. Pamela became withdrawn and studious, went to medical school, and became a doctor, working with children. Again, she died. Pamela was fourteen again.

Jeff and Pamela discuss Jeff's failure to stop the Kennedy assassination, wondering whether it means there really was a conspiracy or that there are limits to how the two of them can change history. Pamela continues her story. On her third replay, she became rebellious and antisocial. She didn't care about school, and was too young to go out on her own. She started painting again and went to art school. She became well-known as



an artist and met and married Dustin Hoffman. Around 1975, her art and marriage both ended, quietly. She moved around the world, carelessly, until her death. On this replay, she has vowed to do something important. She wants to make humanity aware of the cycles everyone's reliving. Through Dustin, she knew the movie industry, and with her foreknowledge, made enough money to finance her own film, a vehicle to enlighten the world.

Chapters 10-11 Analysis

From a life of transient encounters, Jeff passes to a life of solitude. The Montgomery Creek farm is a place where Jeff can be alone with himself and with nature to come to terms with what is happening to him. Jeff's consciousness itself is the only thing that carries on from cycle to cycle, and so it is on that consciousness that Jeff focuses. He builds up a sense of self instead of trying to find fulfillment outside himself. The peak of Mount Shasta, something that has stood solidly since long before Jeff existed and will continue to exist long after he's gone, becomes a symbol of the sublime, the unknowable, and the everlasting. In a way, it symbolizes Jeff's consciousness, or even his soul.

This time, Jeff's life is disturbed from outside. The movie *Starsea* breaks the pattern of Jeff's life, and he suddenly sees the possibility that he is not alone. Jeff has found another replayer in Pamela. Now that he has discovered how to be with himself, he must discover how to be with another person. Pamela has gone on her own journey to understand what is happening to her, and she's embraced the idea that she's been given a knowledge beyond that of other human beings in order to enlighten others. She and Jeff are on similar journeys, but because they've been separated, they've experienced them differently and reached different perspectives. Jeff looks inward, finding peace in himself. Pamela looks outward, trying to express what she knows to the world through her art.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

On the day of the Jonestown massacre, Jeff is back at his farm in Northern California. Pamela Phillips drives up to his place. Her second film, *Continuum*, was a flop. The special effects were ahead of their time, but the film's message was rejected by critics and viewers alike. Jeff brings her out to see Mount Shasta, the holy-seeming peak that overlooks his farm. He tells her that he's come to terms with the unknowable aspect of their situation and the value of what they do, which lives on in themselves even after its been erased from history.

Jeff and Pamela begin a romantic relationship. They revel in sex on a train to Montreal, with the wilderness passing the windows. Finally, they each have someone to talk to about their experiences. They discuss how terrible it would be to relive a quarter century of the Middle Ages again and again, or World War II. Jeff has been investing in small, uncapitalized inventions, without foreknowledge of whether they will succeed. Pamela has been working on romantic comedies, using her foreknowledge of successful actors and directors.

Pamela and Jeff are in New York, looking for locations for Pamela's new film. Jeff wonders whether reality branches off from their existences, so that each timeline they've lived is moving forward, into the future. In some alternate time, perhaps, the children they've lost are older than Pamela and Jeff have ever been. Unexpectedly, they run into Judy, Jeff's wife from a former existence. She knows him now only as a casual college boyfriend, and is married with a son. Only Pamela knows of Jeff's former life with Judy. For Judy, it's never existed.

Jeff and Pamela are having dinner at a quiet villa in Majorca. He plans on leaving in the morning. Pamela has come here to die. It's 1988 again. Jeff doesn't want to put her through the agony of watching him die, a few minutes before her scheduled death. He plans to go to his farm to pass away in solitude. Though they are parting, Jeff promises that they will be together again soon, in the next lifetime.

As Jeff leaves Majorca on a ferry, he tries to not regret leaving this lifetime and heading into the new one. He unwraps a present that Pamela has given him. It is a painting of the two of them, given wings, flying in the sky above Mount Shasta. They are soaring, together.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The writer begins this chapter with the Jonestown massacre to show the danger of Pamela's cult-like thinking. Pamela's idea of spreading a belief system through her experiences opens up the dark possibility of a dangerous cult. Pamela's attempt, however, has been a failure. The film she had hoped would spread enlightenment flops.



Her experience with her films is similar to Jeff's experience trying to stop Kennedy's assassination. Both of them have tried to change the world for the better. Both at first seem to succeed—Jeff by getting Lee Harvey Oswald arrested and Pamela by making the successful film *Starsea*. However, both successes lead to failures. Kennedy is assassinated, and no one is interested in listening to the message in Pamela's film *Continuum*. Jeff takes these events as a kind of sign that, at least on some grand level, the progress of the world is beyond their control.

Pamela and Jeff both find solace in each other, after their failed attempts to create something lasting in the world. They have each other, so now two consciousnesses will continue onward into the next loop. They both die in peace and solitude, on their own terms, looking forward to finding each other the next time around.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Jeff opens his eyes to find a Siamese cat asleep on the bed with him. Jeff looks around the room. It's not his college dorm this time. He's in his room at his parents' house. For a terrified moment, he thinks he's a young boy, but his body is that of a young adult. Jeff finds his mother having her morning coffee, and she teases him about being up so early. Jeff asks for the paper, and as his mother gets him breakfast, he looks at the date. It's July, 1963. He's at home for summer vacation, and he's worried that Pamela has been waiting for him for months, wondering what's happened to him.

Jeff explains to his mother that he has to go to Connecticut to see a girl; he tells his mom that he's broken up with Judy. His mother cross-examines him, but she finally gives him the money for the trip. Jeff gets his things together and leaves in his Chevy before his father wakes. He drives all night and reaches Connecticut in the early morning. Anxiously, he waits, passing the time at a diner. Finally, at eight o'clock, he heads to the house.

Pamela's parents greet the strange eighteen-year-old with suspicion. As Pamela's father questions him, Jeff tries to think of a reasonable-sounding story as to how he knows Pamela. Then, the young Pamela rushes in. Her eyes show no recognition. Pamela's father swiftly kicks Jeff out of the house, threatening to call the police if Jeff persists.

Jeff writes Pamela a letter, giving her his parents' phone number and telling her to hide it and that she'll want it in the future. Then, he goes home to spend a dreary summer with his family. Jeff registers for school but doesn't attend classes. Instead, he bets on the World Series to make some quick money and moves to Boston. In March, he tries calling Pamela, pretending to be a friend from school. Pamela still doesn't remember anything, and she thinks Jeff is weird. He tells her that he's in Boston and can get his number from information if she needs it.

As time goes on and Pamela doesn't contact Jeff, he begins to wonder if she's completed the cycles of her life and passed on to another existence. However, when Jeff returns to his apartment one day, he finds a telegram from her. Pamela has returned. He drives immediately to Connecticut. Pamela's father has been persuaded to let Jeff and Pamela talk, but he tells Jeff that after their conversation, Jeff will need to leave. He's ready to get a restraining order.

Pamela doesn't know what's happened or why she's appeared a year later than she had before. They debate what to do. Pamela's father is very concerned and angry, and Pamela is still a minor. Pamela plans to go to high school and be obedient, so that when she's sixteen, hopefully she can date Jeff. Jeff will go back to Boston and continue making money, so that when they're finally together, they won't have to worry.



Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 marks a change in the course of the story. Up to now, Jeff has been coming to terms with replaying his life, with repeatedly losing everything and somehow continuing on alone. Just when Jeff finds someone who can continue on with him, and with whom he can find happiness, the rules of the game seem to change. Jeff loses months off his life, and Pamela loses even more time. When Jeff first appears at Pamela's house and she doesn't recognize him, he's lost more than just a few months. He doesn't know when or if Pamela will reappear, and perhaps he's lost her permanently. Jeff's ability to control and predict life is again thrown into uncertainty.

As Jeff and Pamela have moved through their existences, they've come to rely on one thing in life as being stable: their own replaying of it. Everything else is changeable and is eventually lost. Their own consciousnesses go on, and their replays repeat themselves. The loss of this one factor threatens their existences and throws them, again, into uncertainty. Jeff must wait for Pamela to appear, and then they must struggle against Pamela's family and society until they can be together.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Pamela's graduation day comes, and Pamela graduates high school for the third time. Jeff is there along with Pamela's parents. Pamela's exemplary behavior has won them the privilege of dating two nights a week. They have been enjoying secret passion together, and Pamela's parents have slowly come to accept the unusual relationship. At least Jeff is stable and successful. Pamela's mother is unhappy that Pamela is not going to college, but her parents have little else to complain about. Jeff has even given Pamela's father some solid investment advice.

Jeff and Pamela rent a boat and go sailing in the Florida Keys. Pamela finally brings up the subject that's been troubling her. Why have they started their replays later this time? Pamela thinks that it's been a pattern. They've been starting each replay a little bit later, but the first few were close together. They're moving further apart. The next time, they might start their lives even later.

Jeff says that he and Pamela don't have enough information to predict the possible skew of a future replay. Pamela has thought of a way to perhaps find more information. They found each other, and perhaps they can find others like them as well. They place an ad in major newspapers, mentioning future events, people, and movies, hoping to attract the attention of another "replayer."

Jeff and Pamela receive a pile of replies, some even containing money. Jeff cautions that they should send the money back, so they don't get in trouble with the post office for running a scam through the mail. Most of the responses are meaningless, and one untraceable one said simply, "Not this time. Wait." Finally, they find a response that mentions future events they know are coming. Stuart McCowan tells them to come visit him any time, in Wisconsin.

Jeff and Pamela go to Wisconsin and are disconcerted to find out that the address is a mental hospital. At first, they think that Stuart has been committed to a mental hospital because he told others too much about his experiences. To an outsider, the story would easily sound insane. When Jeff, Pamela, and Stuart talk in private, though, the matter takes on a different appearance. Jeff and Pamela tell Stuart that they will try to get him out of the mental hospital as soon as possible. They're shocked, though, when Stuart seems to still be openly talking about having seen the future with the others in the mental hospital.

Stuart explains that the root of his trouble is not his "delusion" that he's been to the future and is replaying his life. It's his other beliefs that worry the doctors. Stuart has noticed the time skew, but the first three times he restarted his life, he was in a coma from a car accident. He goes on to explain that he believes aliens, called Antareans, are



responsible for the time anomaly. When Jeff and Pamela don't know what he's talking about, he realizes that he'll need to explain.

Chapter 14 Analysis

When Jeff works toward a particular lifestyle, he can achieve it. Although he often feels out of control, at the mercy of forces beyond himself, he can change his own life, effectively. When Jeff wants to marry Judy, he changes his own behaviors, settles into college for a second time around, and establishes a comfortable and happy home life. When Jeff wants to be with Pamela, he goes through a similar trial time, when he must act with restraint and play within the bounds of accepted society. He can choose to become a hermit farmer, or he can choose to be a playboy. The mere fact that Jeff's life is so different each time he replays it shows that he has control over what happens to him. This is the control that allows Jeff to finally be with Pamela.

However, Jeff has also learned through his experiences to let go of control. What is happening to them is something that they can't understand. There is no neat explanation to be uncovered. Pamela hasn't come that far in making peace with their situation, and the late start they had this time makes her uneasy. Pamela, who is less willing than Jeff to succumb to the instability of their situation, has the idea of trying to find other "replayers." While Jeff has come to grips with the idea that there are no answers, Pamela is still seeking them.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Stuart McCowan tells Pamela and Jeff the story of his life: His father, a construction worker and an alcoholic, loses a leg in an accident on the job while he's drunk. His father, embittered, harasses his puny son. At eighteen, Stuart leaves home and goes to Seattle. He gets married and begins working as a machinist. One night, he's driving home drunk and crashes into a tree, going into a coma for eight weeks. Stuart, permanently injured, becomes embittered and begins drinking more. His wife leaves him, and he loses his house and becomes homeless. Then, in 1988, he dies.

Stuart wakes up from his coma again and begins to realize what's going on. He bets money on the World Series, like Jeff. He gives up drinking and begins gambling, successfully. His wife stays with him, and they get a big house. Then, Stuart begins hearing from the Antareans, aliens replaying the world over and over again, so they can see the war and violence repeat itself, as entertainment. McCowan has been performing the "appeasement" by killing people to entertain the Antareans. He's a serial killer. He's sure he'll get out of the asylum soon, because he's good at fooling people. Then, he'll start killing again.

Pamela is horrified that Stuart is a serial killer and believes that they have to stop him from killing. Jeff points out that they can't influence whether Stuart gets released again and starts killing. If they try to stop him on the next replay, they'll just sound crazy. He says that they accept killings all the time: Manson, Berkowitz, and all the serial killers who they know about with their knowledge of the future. Jeff is resigned to a culture of violence, saying the human beings are the "Antareans," getting a thrill out of the bloodshed of society.

Jeff and Pamela get no other answers to their ads, and in 1979, McCowan is freed from the mental home, supposedly cured. At the end of their lifetimes, Jeff and Pamela inject heroine to knock themselves unconscious before their deaths. They've had a rough lifetime and are hoping to make up for it in the next, to do it right next time. Jeff wakes up, disconcerted, in the middle of a holiday celebration in Mexico City in 1964, during Christmas vacation. He is there with Martin. He wonders how long he'll need to wait for Pamela, and how much time they'll have together this time.

Pamela is stoned. She's in college, and she goes to a bar with her friends. There's a weird guy at the bar that she's seen hanging around. Sometimes she feels like he's watching her, but he never bothers her. Pamela is laughing and joking with her friends, when she regains her consciousness of her repeated lives. She is disoriented, but she realizes that it's 1968 or 1969. She sees Jeff and walks into his arms. Jeff has been waiting for her for months. He lost seventeen months this time, and she lost three and a half years from last time. Jeff has an idea, to get help from the scientific community to



find out what's happening to them. He proposes that they publically make predictions of the future. When the predictions come true, the scientists won't be able to ignore them.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Stuart, Pamela, and Jeff each has a unique experience of "replaying." Jeff and Pamela have been able to come together and find similarities in their experience of loss and isolation. However, Stuart's experience shows the darker side of how a human consciousness can interpret unknowable events. Stuart's first lifetime is full of misery. He ends up repeating his father's worst qualities, until he is injured, jobless, and alone. This repetition over generations reminds the reader that human existence is cyclical, reflecting through generations what Jeff and Pamela experience by repeating their own lives. Stuart is caught in a destructive cycle even before he begins to replay his life.

Although Stuart is able to take advantage of his foreknowledge and avoid losing his wife and his home, he is not able to defeat his own inner demons. Like Jeff and Pamela, Stuart seeks an answer for the unexplainable. Unlike them, he cannot come to terms with not knowing. He creates his own explanation, one that leads him only to death and destruction. The search for answers leads nowhere. Pamela and Jeff are horrified and depressed by Stuart, and his story brings home to both of them their helplessness in the face of the constant stream of time, which they cannot control. Jeff seems to lose sight of his insight that their situation is unknowable. He's caught up in Pamela's desire to find answers. Stuart's dark ideas about what's happening, coupled with Jeff and Pamela's fear of death, lead them on their own search for answers.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Jeff and Pamela take out a full-page ad in several major publications, making a series of predictions. After the predictions turn out to be true, they hold a press conference. They explain to the crowd of reporters what has been happening to them, and they are met with skepticism. Jeff and Pamela tell their stories, and they make sure the reporters have Stuart McCowan's name and address, so that he'll be closely watched, at least. Their only request at the press conference is that the scientific community investigate their claims.

Jeff and Pamela get a lot of reaction, but most of it is from people trying to take advantage of their "gifts." People treat them as if they're psychic, though Jeff and Pamela deny it adamantly. Jeff and Pamela have made another set of predictions, this time of plane crashes and other disasters. Airlines and tourist boards are threatening to sue them, but the threats drop off as the flights that aren't canceled crash as predicted.

A religious cult forms, using Jeff and Pamela as figures of worship, and Jeff finds himself powerless to sue or stop them. They also attract the attention of Russell Hedges, a U.S. government operative. He demands to know how they knew about a coup in Libya. Jeff and Pamela make a deal with Hedges to give him information about the world in exchange for getting government scientists to investigate their replays.

Jeff and Pamela advise Hedges that Vietnam is a lost cause and that the Middle East needs attention. Jeff also tells him that the leader of the Soviet Union will meet with China. Soon, Jeff and Pamela come to regret their entanglement with Hedges. Hedges has taken the information they've given him and used it to meddle covertly in international affairs, changing the outcome of world history. The U.S. has assassinated Qaddafi, though Hedges denies it. The assassination has led to even more aggressive anti-American sentiment among rising terrorist groups.

Jeff and Pamela come with Hedges to a government-owned facility in Maryland, but they're increasingly uncomfortable with the information Hedges keeps asking for, and they get little in return. They've had no useful information or theories from government scientists. They can't predict with any accuracy how big the skew will be next time. The range the scientists come up with covers over 5 years, as much a guess as anything else. When Jeff and Pamela decide to leave, fed up with the testing and inquisition, they find that they can't. The government is keeping them against their will.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Jeff and Pamela's second attempt to understand the unknowable and therefore control their destinies is even darker than their first. Though Jeff and Pamela don't want to do any harm, they create more sorrow and death than Stuart McCowan ever has. If there



were Antareans watching the course of history, hoping to see more violence and destruction, they would be pleased with Jeff and Pamela's appeasement. The negotiations with Russell Hedges are a deal with the devil.

Jeff long ago came to believe that he could not make any meaningful change in the course of history. He failed to prevent the assassination of Kennedy. Pamela, too, is unable to change the course of history through enlightening the world with her film *Continuum*. The film is a flop, and she enlightens no one. However, in this lifetime, Jeff and Pamela proceed to easily change the course of history. It appears far easier to destroy than to build up. The only things Pamela and Jeff ever succeed in making better are small, personal victories for themselves and their friends and families. The only grand changes they succeed in making to society are disastrous. In the search for answers and to make sweeping change for the better, there is only failure and personal misery.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The world situation has grown worse and worse. In trying to prevent the Iranians from taking over the U.S. Embassy, a situation that would eventually resolve peacefully, the U.S. initiated a battle that's killed almost 150 people, including 17 Americans. Terrorists have begun making attacks on U.S. soil. The world has changed so much that Jeff doesn't know what's going to happen in the future anymore. Reagan has been elected instead of Carter. Hedges believes that they're just keeping information from him, but Jeff and Pamela have no information to give. They're still kept in custody, against their will.

Pamela suggests that they begin lying to Hedges, but Jeff doesn't believe it will work. Pamela is embittered. She says she's sorry she ever made Starsea or met Jeff. She decides not to talk to Jeff or to Hedges anymore and shuts herself up in her room, locking herself away for the rest of this replay.

As Jeff's next replay begins, Jeff wakes up in his first adult apartment. The doorbell is ringing. It's Linda, young and beautiful. They're a new couple, still. She's brought him daisies, and he puts them in water. They go into the bedroom because the air conditioner is broken, and Linda begins to dance before the air conditioner in the summer heat. They're replaying an old memory for Jeff. He's still raw over the memories of his previous replay, where the U.S., under terrorist attack, became a militant police state on the verge of nuclear war. Jeff makes love to Linda, taking solace in her beauty and youth.

Jeff stays with Linda. This time, they have no money worries. They are traveling in Morocco years later, on a cruise ship. Jeff has become obsessed with men who have endured isolation. He's interviewed astronauts Michael Collins and Richard Gordon, as well as Thor Heyerdahl, who sailed across the ocean on a primitive boat. He quit his job immediately at the beginning of his replay, and after making a large bet on the World Series, he'd moved into an apartment near Linda.

Now, Jeff has become intrigued by men who are doing great things but in the process isolating themselves from humanity. He's begun to process his own experience of his replays through their isolation, and he's writing a book about them. After the book is published, Jeff and Linda move to a house in south Florida, where Jeff can see the ocean from his writing room. He's working on another book, about exile as a metaphor for losing the past, centered around an interview with Nobel-prize winning author Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The book is called Harps upon the Willows.

Jeff is taking a break from his writing, having a cup of coffee with Linda, when he receives a phone call. It's Pamela. He can't talk with her because Linda is listening, but



he makes a date to meet Pamela at a bar in New York. He lies to Linda, telling her the phone call was from Martin Bailey.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The Iranian hostage situation resulting from the takeover of a U.S. embassy is one of the events that Jeff marks in his recurring lifetimes. He allows his daughter Gretchen to watch the unfolding crisis from afar, even playing out the scenario with her Barbie dolls, knowing that the hostages are eventually released without incident. By trying to stop the crisis, Jeff and Linda spark a battle that kills almost 200 people, making the scenario a much darker and more troublesome one. Jeff and Pamela are both horrified as events unfold. They are prisoners, and the world is dissolving into a much worse place due to their interference. Their mutual attraction and sympathy can't survive the turn for the worse. The stress of their mistake leads to personal sorrow and distance from one another.

Jeff reenters his life from a gloomy, horrible world he's helped create. He sees his wife Linda again, the woman he once loved, in her youth and beauty before their relationship went bad. Instead of focusing on big, global problems, Jeff again focuses on small and personal issues. He embraces Linda, building up a life with her and taking a better path with their relationship. In addition to focusing on Linda, Jeff focuses inward, as he did on his Northern California farm. He processes his sense of isolation and loss through understanding and writing about the stories of others. He finds not only solace but also success in this new existence. His work and his relationship with Linda are both meaningful, although he has lost Pamela.



Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary

Pamela meets Jeff at the bar. She's been back for two months and awoke to find herself pregnant with her second child. Pamela has not seen her children since her original life, and now she's a mother again, at least for another eleven or twelve years. Jeff tells Pamela that he's with Linda. He's had a vasectomy so Linda won't have to go through an abortive pregnancy that will tear her apart emotionally. Pamela is jealous of Jeff's love, but she doesn't want to have contact with him. She doesn't want to jeopardize her marriage or her children's happiness. Still, she doesn't hold a grudge for all the mistakes of their last replay.

Years later, Jeff and Linda go to a gallery in New York for an exhibition opening of Pamela's artwork. Her work contains imagery of dolphins and undersea mountains. Jeff and Pamela tell their spouses that they met by chance. Jeff has one a Pulitzer prize for *Harp upon the Willows*, and Pamela is an admirer of his books. Linda expresses admiration for Pamela's art. Pamela shows Jeff a video exhibition she's made, clips from both their memories and places from their replayed lifetimes. Only Jeff can truly understand it. Their lives will be over in a month. Jeff promises, next time, to wait for her.

Jeff wakes in his next replay, in the midst of his first, failed marriage with Linda. They are having a bitter argument. The Linda he loved and married in the last lifetime is not the angry woman he's with now. Jeff leaves her, beginning his wait for Pamela.

Chapter 19 begins with Pamela, awaking in her kitchen in 1984. Her children are eight and eleven. Pamela calls Jeff's parents to find out where he is. Jeff is back at his farm in Montgomery Creek. Jeff has left her a note to bring the children if she comes, saying that he loves her. She takes the children to Montgomery Creek. She knows it won't be for long.

The children are bored up at the farm, and one night, Jeff tells them the story of Starsea. They also take the kids flying on sailplanes over Mount Shasta. In the fall of 1988, before their deaths, Jeff and Pamela send the children back to their father. Pamela can hardly keep back tears, knowing she won't see them again. She is scared, believing that this time, she is dying permanently. Jeff awakes into his next replay at his job at a New York radio station. The year is 1985.

Chapters 18-19 Analysis

When Pamela comes back into her next replay, she remains separated from Jeff. Their separation begins with the disastrous results of their mutual attempt to understand their situation, and both are still recovering from the experience by going back to elements of their original lives. They need to reclaim something for themselves in order to heal.



Pamela recaptures a life with her children and her work as an artist, just as Jeff has recaptured a life with Linda and his work as a journalist. At the end of this lifetime, however, Jeff loses what he's recaptured with Linda. He cannot stay with Linda as she was in the worst part of their original marriage. It is time for Jeff and Pamela to go back to each other.

As Jeff and Pamela come closer and closer to the end of their replays, they try to find happiness and peace together. They go to Montgomery Creek, a place of healing and looking inward. They enjoy some time together with the children, experiencing the sublime nature of Mount Shasta. Still, fear overshadows everything they have. The end of their time together is near, and Jeff knows that he'll experience one final, heartbreaking loss, the permanent loss of Pamela.



Chapters 20-21 and Epilogue

Chapters 20-21 and Epilogue Summary

Jeff quits his job and leaves his wife, making as much money as he can in the short term. He gets his own apartment in New York. He is in grief for losing Pamela finally this time. Jeff has a drink with a girl at the station who is concerned about him, and she winds up talking about her own life. She's unsure whether to marry her boyfriend or not, unsure of how to move forward with her life. Jeff sympathizes with her, seeing in her the eternal human story.

Jeff hires a private investigator to get information on Pamela. He follows her one day when she comes into New York. He follows her into a museum, and they end up talking. They have lunch together, talking about art. As they are about to part, he asks to see her again when she comes to the city. Pamela reminds him that she's married, but he doesn't care. Jeff seems to know details about her that puzzle her. She decides to meet him again.

Jeff and Pamela begin an affair. She's taking art classes in the city, and she's also painting a nude portrait of Jeff and herself. In October, 1988, Pamela has planned a free weekend, so she and Jeff can go away. Jeff knows, though, that they will both die on Tuesday, before the weekend can come. He kisses her, and suddenly Pamela comes into awareness. Pamela is horrified that Jeff would seek her out and have an affair with her while she was unaware of their shared pasts. She only has five days to live, and she breaks with Jeff.

As Chapter 21 begins, Jeff dies alone. He comes back into existence 9 minutes before his death. He dies again, and comes back 4 minutes before his death. He comes closer and closer, and then his death is repeating itself over and over. Finally, he passes out the other side, and Linda is on the phone telling him that they need to talk about their marriage. Jeff is unsure if the replays of his life are just an illusion. He calls Pamela. She's had the same experience, dying over and over and coming out the other side. They don't know what they will do, but they have the future ahead of them. In the Epilogue, Peter Skjøren wakes up in his home in Oslo, in 1988, after dying in 2017. He has a chance to replay his life over again.

Chapters 20-21 and Epilogue Analysis

Jeff believes he's finally lost Pamela but cannot accept that loss. Though he feels paternal and wise when he's talking to the young girl with so many questions about her future, Jeff doesn't have any answers for himself. He tracks down Pamela, unable to let her go, and he begins a relationship with the young, unaware Pamela. By seeking to hold on to what's been lost, Jeff makes another fatal error. When Pamela unexpectedly begins another replay a few days before their deaths, she is horrified at what Jeff has



done. Throughout the replays of their lives, Jeff and Pamela consistently manipulate those around them. They can control their lives only by using their foreknowledge unfairly. They manipulate Pamela's parents, and they lie to all those they love. They play a role that's expected of them to build the lives they want. Pamela doesn't enjoy seeing Jeff do this to her, while she is unaware of the truth.

When the end finally comes, it is as inexplicable as the replays themselves. Jeff and Pamela both replay their deaths over and over until they somehow come out the other end. They haven't truly "died" at all. Instead, they have been stuck in a strange time loop, bouncing back and forth in their lifetimes until they come out the other end. The pasts that the rest of the world remembers are the pasts of their first lifetimes. However, Jeff and Pamela have gained insight and experience. Their consciousnesses have changed, although they have not changed anything in the outside world. Everything they have gained is carried within themselves.

The Epilogue puts the story of Jeff and Pamela in a broader context. The replays of their existence seems to be something that simply happens in the normal course of time, perhaps something permanently bound to the nature of time or the nature of consciousness.



Characters

Jeff Winston

Jeff Winston is an average man with an unhappy marriage and an unsuccessful career when he is thrown into an extraordinary situation. Jeff is transported back in time into his own body twenty-five years previously. Jeff has the opportunity to live his life over and over to gain what wisdom and insight he can. Jeff struggles with unanswered questions about his situation, the nature of life, and how to find meaning. He only finds happiness when he looks inward and concentrates on finding peace and joy in himself.

Jeff gains material possessions, has several life-long relationships, and fathers a child, but all the things he gains are eventually lost in the end. At first, he becomes depressed with the meaninglessness of his existence, and he loses himself in drugs and sex. However, Jeff realizes that the lifestyle he's fallen into is bad for his own happiness, and instead, he focuses on finding inner peace. Jeff's loneliness is eventually countered when he finds that he's not the only person in his unique position. He discovers another replayer, Pamela Phillips.

Jeff's love affair with Pamela comes from their unique bond. Aside from the clinically insane Stuart McCowen, Jeff and Pamela are the only two people they know of who have replayed their lives. They both know the sorrow of loss and the isolation they experience from others, who can never know about their journeys. This common experience forms a bond between the two. Ultimately, Jeff is afraid of losing the one thing that remains for him, his consciousness. However, as he moves through his own death, Jeff finds that he has not lost his consciousness. He has regained the hope of an unknown future.

Pamela Phillips

Pamela Phillips is a replayer like Jeff. She lives her life over and over and thinks she is alone until she finds Jeff. Pamela is an artist, and her instinct is to create art that comes out of her repeating experiences. Through her art, Pamela processes what is happening to her. Her art is also what leads Jeff to Pamela when Pamela makes a blockbuster movie that hasn't existed in any of Jeff's previous lifetimes.

When Jeff and Pamela meet, Pamela believes that there is a higher purpose in their existence and that she can spread enlightenment from her unique position. However, Jeff has come to the conclusion that the meaning of their existence is essentially unknowable. The best that they can do is to try to be happy with each other and come to terms with the loss and uncertainty and isolation of life. As Jeff and Pamela move through their lives together, Pamela's desire for answers drives them into dark troubles.

Pamela suggests finding another replayer, in her search for answers about why their replays are becoming shorter and shorter. This leads Jeff and Pamela to Stuart



McCowen, and in the next lifetime, it leads them to go public with their stories and predictions for the future, which ends in disastrous changes for the world. Pamela and Jeff eventually part, Pamela finding solace in her art and her children. Though they are reunited once again, they part bitterly before their final replays. After they pass through the moments of their deaths, Pamela and Jeff share a common bond of past experiences but do not know what lies in store for their relationship in the future.

Linda

Linda is Jeff's wife during his original lifetime. Linda and Jeff are unable to share their feelings and struggle with money problems and the sadness of childlessness. In another lifetime, Jeff starts out on a positive path with Linda, and they develop the ability to connect. Without money problems, they live a truly fulfilling married life.

Martin Bailey

Martin is Jeff's college roommate. Later, Martin's marriage breaks up, and he's left on the verge of bankruptcy. Martin commits suicide. In most of the iterations of his life, Jeff stops Martin's suicide by giving him stock tips that make him financially stable.

Paula Hawkins

Paula is Martin's college girlfriend.

Judy Gordon

Judy is Jeff's college girlfriend during the time when he initially awakes to relive his life. Jeff stays with and marries Judy in one of the replays of his life.

Frank Maddock

Frank Maddock is a pre-law senior at Emory when Jeff first awakes in his initial replay. Jeff is too young to place bets, so he places bets through Frank. Frank initially is thrilled with their lucrative joint venture, but eventually Frank realizes there is something deeply wrong about Jeff's unnatural knowledge. He dissolves their partnership after he and Jeff have built a multi-million dollar company.

Sharla Baker

Sharla is an openly sexy party girl that Jeff meets in Las Vegas. In one of his iterations, he spends most of his time with Sharla, doing drugs and having meaningless sex.



John F. Kennedy

In Jeff's first replay, he realizes that President Kennedy will be assassinated and tries to stop it by arranging the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald. However, Kennedy is assassinated by a different assassin, leading Jeff to believe that perhaps some events are fixed and cannot be changed. Jeff's strange reaction to the Kennedy assassination leads Frank to dissolve their partnership.

Lee Harvey Oswald

Jeff forges a threatening letter from Lee Harvey Oswald so that he gets arrested, to try to stop Kennedy's assassination in his first replay. Another assassin kills the young president, so Jeff's efforts were for naught.

Nelson Bennett

When Jeff prevents Lee Harvey Oswald from killing Kennedy, Bennett kills Kennedy instead.

Jack Ruby

Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald in Jeff's original life. In his first replay, Jack Ruby kills Nelson Bennett, the assassin who takes Oswald's place.

Diane

Diane is Jeff's wife during his first replay. They share no love, but she moves in appropriate social circles for his financial position as the wealthy owner of Future, Inc. Diane and Jeff have a child together, Gretchen, whom Jeff truly and completely loves.

Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak

During Jeff's first replay, Jeff gets in on the ground floor of Apple Computers, buying 51% of the stock in exchange for financial backing of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak early on.

Gretchen

Gretchen is Jeff's daughter, by his wife Diane during his first replay of his life. When Jeff dies again and restarts his life, his greatest grief is the loss of his daughter, who has never existed in his new reality. Jeff never again has children, fearing losing them. However, he does adopt children in other replays.



Deirdre Rendell

During Jeff's first year in boarding school, he fell in love with his French teacher, Deirdre Rendell. Out of jealousy, he destroyed a bridge her husband built for her.

April and Dwayne

Jeff and Judy adopt two children, April and Dwayne, during Jeff's second replay. Jeff wants to give them all the great experiences he can before he dies and their time together is lost.

Mireille

Mireille is a beautiful French woman, Jean-Claude's girlfriend, who becomes involved with Jeff and Sharla sexually. Jeff tells Mireille what is happening to him while he is high one night, and afterward she laughs at him behind his back.

Jean-Claude

Jean-Claude is a part of the sex and drugs scene that Jeff and Sharla become involved with in Paris.

Sylvia

Sylvia is a girl that Jeff picks up for casual sex, who gives him LSD.

Stuart McCowan

Stuart is a sociopath. He is a replayer, like Jeff and Pamela, but he is also a serial killer, convinced that alien beings are forcing the world to replay itself over and over so that they can watch the violence and destruction unfold.

Russell Hedges

Russell Hedges is a mysterious figure who works for the covert agencies of the U.S. government. He takes information from Pamela and Jeff and uses it to try to manipulate world events, but his manipulation ends up doing more harm than good.

Peter Skjøren

In the Epilogue, Peter Skjøren begins replaying after his death in 2017.



Objects/Places

Emory University

Jeff wakes up in his college days at Emory University in his first few replays.

Peachtree Plaza Hotel

At the beginning of Jeff's first replay, he can't believe it's really 1963 until he goes to downtown Atlanta and sees that the Peachtree Plaza Hotel hasn't been built yet.

Jeff's Chevy

In college, Jeff drives a 1958 Chevy. In his replays, he soon sells the car and gambles the money on bets he knows he'll win.

Chateaugay

Chateaugay is the long-shot horse that wins the Kentucky Derby in 1963, starting Jeff's financial independence in most of his replays.

Paris

After winning \$137,000 on horse races in his first replay, Jeff takes Sharla off to spend a sensual summer in Paris. In another replay, Jeff and Sharla get involved in a drug and sex subculture in Paris.

Future, Inc.

On the first replay of Jeff's life, Jeff starts an investment firm called Future, Inc., which takes advantage of his foreknowledge of business and world trends.

Boca Raton

In Jeff's original life, Jeff first met his wife Linda on the beach at Boca Raton. During his first replay, Jeff goes to Boca Raton to try to meet her, but he can't make a connection with her. She turns him down.



Jeff's Boarding School

On Jeff's second replay, he goes back to his old boarding school, a part of his life that he's never replayed. He faces his guilt over destroying a bridge built by the husband of a teacher upon whom he had a crush.

The Farm near Montgomery Creek

After spending two years involved in drugs and sex following the loss of his daughter, Jeff buys a small farm near Montgomery Creek, in Northern California, where he lives in solitude.

Starsea

Jeff is astounded to see a movie poster for a blockbuster film he's never heard of before called Starsea. He realizes that the writer/producer, Pamela Phillips, must be a replayer, like he is.

Topanga Canyon

As a movie producer, Pamela owns a home in Topanga Canyon, where she lets the land grow wild.

Continuum

Pamela's second film, Continuum, which she hopes will bring enlightenment to the world, is a flop.

Mount Shasta

Jeff finds a spiritual comfort in the sublime and unchanging peak of Mount Shasta, which he can see from his farm.

Harps upon the Willows

Harps upon the Willows is Jeff's book about exile, as a metaphor for the complete separation of human beings from their own pasts.



Themes

Loss and Meaning

As Jeff moves through the reiterations of his life, he becomes keenly aware that nothing is permanent. Jeff gains money in his second replay, but he loses his wife Linda. Jeff gains a daughter but loses her with a horrible finality when he dies again in October, 1988. In his next replay, Jeff gains a new family, his college girlfriend Judy and two adopted children. However, he cannot keep them. When he dies again as 1988 rolls to a close, Jeff realizes that anything he gains in life—family, friends, money—is not permanent. Eventually, he will lose everything and cannot even take comfort in the idea that what he's worked for goes on without him after he's gone.

Jeff's experience of loss leads him to believe that everything he accomplishes is meaningless. It will all be erased. He goes on to hide in a life of drugs and sex, escaping from loss by not building anything meaningful in his life. However, the emptiness of this existence leaves Jeff lonely and hurt. Jeff turns to the only thing that goes on time after time, his own consciousness.

Jeff eventually comes to the conclusion that meaning can only be found inside the self, through reflection. Trying to understand the world or why he keeps replaying his life leads only to confusion. Jeff finds peace when he focuses on being happy in the moment and on his inner life. He finds turmoil and sorrow when he tries to find bigger answers or make bigger changes to the world around him.

Unknowability

The replays that Jeff and Pamela go through over and over throughout the book are never explained. Jeff and Pamela try to think of explanations for them. Pamela speculates that they are being given a special consciousness so that they can be prophets to the rest of the world. Jeff speculates that each timeline they live goes on without them, in a parallel dimension. Stuart speculates that unseen aliens are replaying the human world over and over to watch the violence and the horrors unfold. In all likelihood, none of these speculations is true. Even Jeff's conclusion, after he fails to stop Kennedy's assassination, that there are some things about the course of time that he cannot change, are probably untrue, since in a later replay, Jeff changes the course of world events significantly.

Jeff ultimately comes to grips with the unknowability of what is happening to him. He resigns himself to the idea that he can never understand the forces, larger than himself, at work. In a similar way, Jeff is isolated from other human beings and the past by a barrier of unknowability. No other human being can understand Jeff's consciousness. They are separated by a gulf of experience and knowledge. Only Pamela comes close to understanding Jeff's experience, and they are separated by being on different time



schedules in their different lives. Jeff and Pamela come together because of shared experience, but ultimately, each one's private experience is unknowable to the other, making them eternally separated.

Control

Jeff struggles to try to control his life and his destination. When Jeff realizes that he is replaying his life, he tries to change the course of events and control what happens to him. However, Jeff is never fully successful. He can never truly control what happens. Jeff is able to make money because of his knowledge of the future, but he cannot control his relationship with Linda. He cannot control his own death in 1988 or change the fact that whatever he does, he will lose what he has gained in the future.

Jeff's future is actually immutable. Because his replays become shorter and shorter until he passes through into the future, Jeff ultimately is left with the first set of choices he ever made, his first experience of his lifetime. All the changes that he tried to make for good or ill are undone before time marches forward. Jeff is left without any control over his destiny.

However, Jeff's choices do affect his life. In Jeff's original life, he made choices that shaped his relationship with Linda, his job, and his situation. Those choices still shape his life. During Jeff's replays, he makes choices that affect who he becomes and what he learns from his experience. Because Jeff takes his consciousness with him, he comes out of his replays with something tangible (his own experience) to help him in the future. However out of his control the outside world is, Jeff has control over himself and who he becomes as a person.



Style

Point of View

Replay is narrated in the third person, by a semi-omniscient narrator from the point of view of Jeff Winston. Only Jeff experiences the replays of his life, and the other characters are ignorant, so Jeff's point of view lets the reader into this private life (and repeated lives). The reader experiences Jeff's confusion, loss, loneliness, and lack of understanding and accompanies Jeff through his journey of self-discovery.

Jeff comes back into being before Pamela does on the replays when they are together, so the reader is able to see Pamela through Jeff's eyes, as she is before her conscious self jumps backward into her younger body. The reader never sees Jeff except during the span of his replays. The only glimpse the reader has into Jeff's younger self before the replays begin is in his flashbacks to his youth, including the incident at boarding school when Jeff has a crush on his French instructor.

The narrative point of view changes in a few instances toward the end of the novel. In the later replays, the narrator takes up Pamela's point of view. In one instance, the reader sees Pamela alone in her kitchen at the moment when her new consciousness takes over. In another, the reader experiences Pamela as she was in college, going out with her friends and taking notice of the weird man, Jeff, who has been quietly watching her. The reader is able to see Pamela's point of view even before her older consciousness reenters her body. These glimpses into Pamela's point of view give the reader a greater understanding of the changes that she's gone through in her life and how different her current self is from her past self.

Setting

Time is one of the most important aspects of setting in Replay. Through his replays, Jeff explores the years of 1963 through 1988, experiencing how society and culture changes over time. He goes through the sexual and cultural revolutions of the 1960s, as well as the civil rights movement. Because Jeff goes to college in Atlanta, Georgia, he sees segregation and racial violence in the early 1960s when he returns to his college years. The death of John F. Kennedy marks an important turning point for Jeff in the late 1960s, and the Iran hostage crisis marks another important point as time moves forward.

The setting of Jeff's Montgomery Creek farm with its view of the peak of Mount Shasta is an important place for Jeff. Mount Shasta becomes symbolic of the sublime and the unknowable, and Montgomery Creek, with its isolation, is a place of healing and self-examination. The farm is close to nature, and this closeness to nature helps Jeff find peace and contentment in himself. Other places share some of these traits, including



the secluded Majorcan island where Pamela goes to die, Pamela's overrun Topanga Canyon home, and Jeff's home on the coast of Florida, where he writes his books.

One of the aspects of setting is not place or time, but consciousness. Jeff moves through the same places and the same times over and over again, but each time they are different. Jeff's changing consciousness changes the place and time that he inhabits. His college years are different each time he replays them. Even the people around him change in reaction to him, as he sees when he replays his marriage to Linda.

Language and Meaning

Meaning itself is central to the themes of *Replay*. Jeff's experience of loss and unknowability is an experience of the meaninglessness of his existence, disconnected from other human beings. Pamela experiences a similar isolation, holding her experience as a secret that cannot be communicated. Both Pamela and Jeff attempt to communicate their experiences with others—Pamela through her films and art and Jeff through his books. Their experiences are veiled and disguised, created into metaphors, and filtered through the stories of others to be communicated. In a way, this is a metaphor for language itself. Each human being is isolated in his own mind, much as Jeff and Pamela are isolated from other consciousnesses. Language is a symbolic means of communication, translating our thought into signs that can be understood by others.

Because the consciousness of others' is brief and limited compared to Jeff and Pamela's, the communication they achieve is ultimately lost. Every time their replays reset, anything they have communicated is lost. The goal of language and communication changes subtly for them. Jeff and Pamela's goal in writing books or creating artwork becomes expression, the formulation and release of their thoughts and ideas, not true communication, which involves another absorbing, understanding, and perhaps responding.

Jeff and Pamela use cryptic language to try to communicate with others like themselves, sorting out other "replayers" by a linguistic puzzle, when they place an ad mentioning world events that haven't happened yet. The most cryptic of the replies they receive show how mysterious language can be. One postcard says, "Not this time. Wait." The response could be interpreted to apply to their situation or could be merely a prank, the wording chosen for its mysteriousness, reflecting the mysterious nature of the ad.

Structure

By the nature of the story, *Replay* follows a path of concentric circles from beginning to end. Jeff begins his life at the moment he perceives as death. His consciousness springs backward in time twenty-five years into the past, and he lives the previous twenty-five years of his life over again. When he reaches the end (or the beginning)



again, Jeff springs back another twenty-five years. Each cycle Jeff lives through represents a movement forward of his consciousness and self-awareness. He experiences great riches, fatherhood, and loss, and then he experiences the joy of a complete family and its loss again. Jeff lives through a life of ennui and hopelessness coming ultimately to find solace in isolation, nature and self-examination.

When Jeff finds Pamela, the story shifts. Jeff is not alone in his ever-expanding and contracting universe. He has found another. At the same time, the rules of his life begin to change. Jeff discovers that his replays are becoming shorter and shorter. After having found peace with himself, Jeff is thrown again into disarray. Urged on by Pamela, Jeff begins searching for answers to what he knows is unknowable. The only result is pain, suffering, and ultimately another isolation from Pamela.

Jeff rediscovers his relationship with his original wife and reaches inside himself to process his experiences of loss and isolation through his writing. Finally, Jeff comes closer and closer to what he believes is permanent death, and the chapters begin to shorten with Jeff's shorter replays, until at the end of the novel Jeff passes through the moment of his death and out the other side, into the future.



Quotes

"We need, we need . . . to talk, he thought. To look each other straight in the eye and just say: It didn't work. None of it, not the romance or the passion or the glorious plans. It all went flat, and there's nobody to blame. That's simply the way it happened." — Chapter 1, page 3

"Maybe he would have to go through it, all of it, again—year after painful, predictable year. This alternate reality was becoming more concrete by the moment, ever more entrenched. That other self of his was the falsehood now." —Chapter 3, page 31

"The fantasy was irresistible, outlandish and even clichéd though it might be. But this was no television drama, no science-fiction plot; Jeff was here, in this as-yet-unshattered world of 1963, with the greatest tragedy of the era about to unfold before his too-knowing eyes. Was it possible that he might intervene, and would it be proper?" —Chapter 5, page 59

"Now he knew what had drawn him back here to the school, to this quiet clearing in the woods of his youth. He must again face that emptiness of infinite loss, but this time on a more complex level. This time he knew he could not crack beneath the weight of the intolerable." —Chapter 7, page 92

"They were on the bed, all of them, Sharla stroking Sylla's hair, Gretchen's hair—or was it Linda doing that?—and then the stranger became Martin Bailey, blood from the self-inflicted gunshot wound to his head spewing across the sheets, soaking the naked bodies of Jeff's wife and daughter, they were dead all of them dead except for him and he couldn't die no matter how many times he died. He was the wheel; he was the cycle." —Chapter 9, page 117

"How could all this be? Spielberg's first big movie, Jaws, hadn't even begun shooting yet, and it would be two years before Lucas turned the industry on its ears with Star Wars. But most puzzling, most intriguing, of all—Who the hell was Pamela Phillips?" — Chapter 10, page 131

"'Now it's time to move on to the next step. It's time to alter the consciousness of the world, and I can do it.' She leaned forward, looked at him intently. 'We can do it . . . if you'll join me.'" —Chapter 11, page 150

"Three months. How the hell could he have lost three months this time? What did it mean? Well, there was no use worrying about it now; it was beyond his control. Pamela would be upset, with good reason, but at least he'd see her soon." —Chapter 13, page 175

"We are the "Antareans" of Stuart McCowan's demented fantasies. He and all the other subhuman butchers out there are indeed performers on a stage, but the gore-hungry audience is right here, not somewhere in outer space. And there's nothing you or I can



ever do to change that or to stem even the smallest trickle of that blood tide. We simply do what we've always done and always will: accept it, put it out of our minds as best we can, and go on with the rest of life. Get used to it, just as we do with all the other hopeless, inescapable pain." —Jeff, Chapter 15, pages 215-216

"Jeff started to tell him yet again that it wouldn't do any good, that the world was off on a strange and undefined new course now, about which neither he nor Pamela could offer any advice, but he knew the protestation would be pointless. Hedges still assumed that they had some sort of psychic ability, that they could predict future events based on any set of current circumstances." —Chapter 17, page 248

"Pamela flew in looping circles downwind of his position, searching. At last she caught the nebulous warm updraft, and the distance between them closed as her plane lifted swiftly and silently toward his . . . until, wing tip to wing tip, they soared together in the crisp, clean skies above Mount Shasta's ageless and enigmatic peak." —Chapter 19, page 286

"He wasn't sure of anything anymore, and that realization thrilled him with anticipation." —Chapter 21, page 310



Topics for Discussion

After Jeff's failed attempt to save President Kennedy from being assassinated, he begins to believe that perhaps there are some world events that cannot be changed. Still, in one of Jeff's replays, he and Pamela change world events by giving information to the U.S. government. Discuss how Jeff can and cannot change the world during his replays. Should he try to make changes for the better?

Why was Continuum a flop? Could it be for the same reasons that Jeff could not stop the Kennedy assassination?

Why does Jeff take Sharla with him to Paris when his life restarts after he loses his daughter Gretchen?

Why does Jeff finally leave Sharla after the plane crash?

After all the replays, when Jeff and Pamela find themselves moving on to the future, do they have anything lasting, to keep, from the replays? Can they now affect the future for the better?

Jeff finds peace in himself at the farm in Northern California, near Redding. Is this enough?

Does Jeff's special knowledge of the future give him any responsibilities to help change the world?

Should Jeff and Pamela try to stop Stuart McCowan from killing?

Where is Stuart McCowan at the end of the book, when the future begins moving forward?

Is the reason for the "replays" really unknowable?