

The Regulators Study Guide

The Regulators by Stephen King

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Contents

The Regulators Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapters 3-4.....	8
Chapters 5-6.....	11
Chapters 7-8.....	14
Chapters 9-10.....	17
Chapters 11-13.....	20
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	28
Themes.....	31
Style.....	33
Quotes.....	35
Topics for Discussion.....	37



Plot Summary

The Regulators is a novel by Stephen King alter ego Richard Bachman. In this novel, an entire neighborhood is terrorized by the mind of an eight year old autistic boy. This boy's mind has been hijacked by an ancient creature that is forced to take a human host in order to use its powers to control and torture those around it to gain energy. However, this creature has no idea that it has met its match in eight year old Seth. The Regulators is a classic novel of horror filled with the same twists and turns that King fans have come to expect from the horror master.

It is a normal summer day in an Ohio neighborhood. The paper boy is making his rounds, one neighbor is washing his car while another is watering his lawn. Suddenly a strange van with some kind of satellite dish on its roof pulls up behind the paper boy and shoots him with a double barreled shotgun. Seconds later, the gun is pointed at a couple of arguing children at the corner convenience store, but is distracted by a loving and curious dog. The dog too is shot.

The neighbors all come out onto their lawns to see what has happened. Collie Entragian, a disgraced cop, takes control of the situation and sends everyone to their respective homes in hopes of offering some protection should the van come back. At the same time, children's author Johnny Marinville attempts to call 911 from his house. However, instead of getting the calm voice of a 911 operator, Johnny hears the voice of a child who tells him a riddle and then warns him not to try to call out again.

Mary Jackson, unaware of the excitement on her quiet street, comes home from an afternoon tryst with her lover, worried more about her husband learning the truth than the strange van following closely behind as she approaches her house. Mary is rammed by the van twice, causing her car to crash on her front lawn. Stunned, Mary steps out of her car and is shot by a double barreled shotgun. A neighbor, David Carver, is also shot and killed on his own front lawn. The rest of the neighbors gather around, trying to figure out what to do when several more vans come along the street and begin to fire. The neighbors take refuge in the two houses where the previous shooting took place.

Another girl is killed in the rush to get to safety while another loses an arm. As the neighbors try to regroup and figure out what is happening to them, the vans return and open fire on the houses where they have taken refuge. Another woman is fatally wounded when a copper pot explodes over her head. In the aftermath of this destruction, a group of people in each house decide to go for help using a path that runs along the woods behind the neighborhood. However, neither team tells the other. When they meet in the woods, a panicked teenager shoots and kills Collie Entragian. This teen, so grieved by what he has done, takes his own life.

When the groups get back to the houses where they have taken refuge, they discover that another neighbor, Audrey Wyler, has joined them. Audrey has information that helps the neighbors understand what is taking place. Audrey's nephew, Seth, has been



possessed by some sort of ancient creature and it is this creature that has turned the neighborhood into some sort of child's western fantasy.

Audrey and Johnny Marinville go to Audrey's house in hopes of stealing Seth out of the house and away from the creature while they are temporarily separated. However, the creature has figured out their plan and tries to reenter the boy. This causes the boy to use his telepathy to encourage the grieving mother of a teenage boy to kill both Seth and Audrey. The creature then tries to enter the mind of the grieving mother, but she cannot handle his power and her head explodes. The creature disappears and the neighborhood returns to normal.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

This novel is written by Stephen King, but published under the name of his alter ego, Richard Bachman. The book begins with a note from the editor explaining how this novel was discovered among the belongings of the deceased Bachman by his widow soon after his death. The book has been updated, but otherwise unaltered.

Postcard. There is a postcard, dated July 24, 1994. This postcard was sent from Bill Garin to his sister, Audrey Wyler, telling her that there was a huge breakthrough with Bill's son, Seth, that Bill would explain to Audrey when the family reached their vacation destination of San Jose, California.

Chapter 1. July 15, 1996. Poplar Street. It is a hot summer afternoon and the entire neighborhood of Poplar Street in Wentworth, Ohio seem to be out enjoying it. A young girl named Ellie Carver is at the local convenience store on the corner of the block with her little brother, Ralphie. Ralphie is a bit of a brat, yelling at his sister and arguing over her use of her own money. The clerk at the convenience store feels sympathy for the girl.

Cary Ripton, the paperboy, makes his way down the hill delivering his paper. Cary passes the house of Brad and Brenda Josephson where he throws the paper directly into school teacher Mr. Josephson's hand, then the home of local alcoholic Gary Soderson and his unkind wife, Marielle. Across the street is children's author Johnny Marinville, out on his front porch playing his guitar, and the home of the Carver children and their mailman father, Dave and wife Pie. Dave is outside washing his car in his too tight bathing suit. Next to the Carvers is retired veterinarian Tom Billingsley, then college professor Peter Jackson and his wife Mary. Peter arrives home as Cary rides past on his bike, so he stops and chats with him for a minute about his prospects of being a starting pitcher next baseball season.

Across the street are twins Jim and Dave Reed, who are out playing Frisbee with their dog and the neighbor girl, Susi Geller. With them is a red headed girl Cary does not know, but would like to get to know. Next to the Gellers is the convenience store, the E-Z Stop, where the Carver children are arguing over whether Ellie should pull Ralphie up the hill in his wagon or not. Finally, there is the house of Collie Entragian across from the E-Z Stop. Cary hesitates to deliver the paper there, since he has heard rumors of the awful things Collie did to get himself kicked off the Columbus police force. In fact, Cary is so intent on delivering that one paper safely that he does not notice the strange van approaching behind him.

Newspaper article from the Columbus Dispatch, July 31, 1994. Four members of the Garin family have been shot in a drive by shooting while on vacation at the home of friends, Joseph and Roxanne Calabrese. The family was in the front yard playing



croquet when a strange van drove by and shot them all. The family leaves behind one surviving child, a six year old son Seth Garin who was in the backyard playing in the sand box at the time of the shooting.

Chapter 2. Steve Ames pulls his Ryder truck into the E-Z Stop. Steve was on the interstate when he began having engine trouble and somehow made his way to Poplar Street after some wrong turns. Steve saw the Carver children in the parking lot of the E-Z Stop because he was afraid he might hit them with his truck. Therefore, seconds after hearing the shotgun blast that killed Cary Ripton, Steve turns his attention to getting the Carver children to safety.

Cynthia Smith, the new clerk at the E-Z Stop, runs out of the store at the sound of the shotgun going off. As she rushes out the door, Hanibal, the Reed twins' dog, runs toward the body of Cary Ripton intent on stealing one of his newspapers. Up the street, Dave Carver, Johnny Marinville, and Brad Josephson wander into the street, trying to figure out what is happening in front of Estragian's house unaware that the van's assailant has turned his gun on the Carver children in front of the E-Z Stop.

Cynthia Smith places her body around the Carver children at the same moment Steve Ames calls to her from his truck, urging her to hide the children in the cab of the truck. Dave Carver and his wife, Pie, run up the street toward his children and Brad Josephson follows closely behind. On the street, the gun fires again, this time aiming at the Reeds' dog, before disappearing around the corner. Collie Entragian comes out of his house shirtless with shaving cream still on his face. As the Carvers gather and calm their children, Entragian tries to find out what has happened. Always a cop, Entragian tries to contain the scene, keeping the Reeds from touching the dog or Cary's body and encouraging the neighbors to go inside the store. The Carvers, however, insist on taking their children home and Brad politely insists he must go home and check on his wife. Finally Entragian agrees to allow everyone to go home as long as they go inside and stay put. This leaves Entragian at the E-Z Stop with Cynthia and Steve.

Excerpt from Movies on TV edited by Stephen H. Scheuer. The Regulators is a below average Western from 1958 that features Rory Calhoun as the leader of a group of what appear to be supernatural beings, but are only post-Civil War bullies, who terrorize a Colorado mining town.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The first chapter of the book introduces the neighborhood of Polar Street in Wentworth, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus. This neighborhood seems painfully normal. It is summertime and most of the inhabitants of the neighborhood are outside enjoying summer activities, such as barbecuing, washing cars, or playing Frisbee. That is, until a van comes along and shoots the paperboy and a local dog. This appears at first to be a random act of violence. However, the neighbors are already taking note of the strange, out of this world, appearance of the van that committed the crime and the lack of an immediate response from some sort of emergency responder.



The author has added little things at the end of the chapters that the reader does not understand at this point, but which will further explain what is happening in this neighborhood. The first is a postcard from Bill Garin to his sister, Audrey Wyler. If the reader pays close attention, they will notice that Audrey Wyler lives on Poplar Street. This postcard is dated almost exactly two years prior to the opening of the novel and describes a breakthrough with Bill Garin's son, Seth. This does not make a lot of sense to the reader at this point because the reader does not know what might be wrong with Seth. Then, after chapter 1, the reader sees an article from a Columbus paper announcing the deaths of Bill Garin and his entire family with the exception of Seth. They died in a drive by shooting in San Jose, California where witnesses saw an odd looking van. This makes the reader wonder if the deaths of Garin and his family are related to the deaths of Cary Ripton and Hannibal, the dog. Perhaps the killer of the Garin family has followed their son, Seth, to Poplar Street.

As the neighbors on Poplar Street react to the death of Cary Ripton and the near murder of two children, Ellie and Ralphie Carver, the reader is treated to a description of the movie *The Regulators*. Due to the fact that the book is called *The Regulators*, the reader knows this is important, but has no clue as to why at this point in the novel. *The Regulators* is a Western from the late fifties that has not held up well over the years and is described as below average. It will be a short time before the reader realizes what this mediocre movie has to do with the terror taking place on Poplar Street.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Chapter 3. Moments after Entragian takes Cynthia and Steve into the E-Z Stop, a metallic blue van pulls to a stop across the street. Down the street, Gary Soderson argues with his wife about whether or not she heard the gunshot from their upstairs bathroom. At the same time, the Carvers make their way down the street. Dave Carver stops and tells Peter Jackson what has happened. Inside his home, Johnny Marinville calls 911, but instead of the calm operator he gets the voice of a child who tells him a vulgar rhyme and then threatens him should he use the phone again. When Johnny does try the phone again, it is dead.

As the Carvers continue up the street, Tom Billingsley comes out of his house and asks what has happened. Dave tells him as he continues to walk under his wife's orders. As the Carvers pass, Peter Jackson talks Doc Billingsley into helping him place a tarp over Cary Ripton's body before the thunderstorm that is building above them lets go. At the Gellers, Susi Geller and her friend, Debbie Ross, wake Kim Geller from her nap and tell her what has happened. At his home, Brad Josephson tells his wife, Belinda, what has been going on. Johnny Marinville joins them on their front lawn and tells them the phone is not working. At the E-Z Stop, Collie Entragian tries to call the police, but discovers neither the payphone nor the landline is working there, either. Entragian catches sight of what Peter and Doc are trying to do. Although instinct tells him to stop them, Entragian gives them instructions on how to keep from disturbing evidence. Down the block, Mary Jackson returns home from an afternoon tryst with her lover. Mary barely notices the excitement on her block because she is so concerned with hiding her affair from her husband. In fact, Mary is so distracted she does not notice the yellow van that has followed her onto the block.

Excerpt from Playthings, The International Merchandising Magazine of the Toy Industry, January 1994. The article is about the manufacturing and successful sale of toys from the Saturday morning cartoon MotoKops 2200. The toy company, Good Palz, Inc., had some labor issues and was unable to get the toys out in December. This is normally death to any new toy, but for Palz, it has proven to be a blessing. The toys are selling extremely well, turning a small toy company into an overnight success.

Chapter 4. Mary Jackson's car is rear ended by the strange, yellow van. The yellow van hits Mary again, forcing her car up on her front lawn. Mary gets out of the car. Brad, Belinda, and Johnny watch, screaming a warning to Mary, as another van drives up, a window opens in the van and a shotgun appears. In seconds, Mary is shot in the head and killed. The gun fires twice more before disappearing up the street behind the other van. Johnny runs to Mary Jackson, carefully covering her exposed genitals before her husband can see her. At the same time, Johnny becomes aware that Dave Carver has been shot and killed in his front yard.



Johnny watches as the Carver children and Pie Carver grieve over the body of Dave Carver. Johnny tells Jim Reed to take Ralphie Carver inside the house. Collie Entragian, Steve Ames, and Cynthia Smith come down from the store and join the crowd around the body. Peter Jackson sees his wife's body for the first time and rushes to her side. It is about that time that two more vans come around the corner and slow as they approach the Carver and Billingsley houses where the neighbors have congregated. Moments later, the vans open fire on the unsuspecting neighbors.

Letter from Audrey Wyler to Janice Conroy, August 18, 1994. Audrey Wyler has just buried her brother, Bill, and his wife and two children. Audrey talks about the funeral and her nephew Seth, the sole survivor of the Garin family whom she and her husband have taken into their home. Seth has autism, a disorder that makes it difficult for him to communicate with those around him. However, Audrey received a postcard from her brother telling her they had made a breakthrough with Seth during their vacation just days before the shooting that killed her brother and his family. Audrey relates the call she made to her brother to ask about this breakthrough and his odd answers to her questions. Audrey remarks that that last conversation still bothers her all these weeks later, especially in light of her brother's violent death a short time later.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

The first thing the reader should take note of in these chapters is the weird response Johnny Marinville gets when he attempts to call 911. This phone call is as though some kind of sadistic child has taken over the telephone lines and is stopping Marinville from calling for help. Marinville is shaken by this phone call, refusing to tell anyone what really happened. At the same time, Collie Entragian tries to call for help and finds the phones dead. This causes a situation in which the neighbors quickly come to realize they are on their own even though help should be just yards away.

As Mary Jackson returns home, the rest of the neighbors continue to talk about Cary Ripton's death, discussing it as though what has happened is a tragedy, but not out of the realm of reality. However, when Mary gets home, things begin to explode once again. Mary and her neighbor, Dave Carver, are killed on their front lawns right in front of several of their neighbors. This event causes confusion and grief among the other neighbors. At the same time, it causes a distraction that allows the neighbors to let their guard down. In this moment, they are attacked again.

At the end of chapter 3, the reader reads about a toy company that produces toys for a television show called MotoKops 2200. This show is a futuristic cartoon that showcases good guys, bad guys, and their unique vehicles that look something like futuristic vans. As the reader reads the description of these vans, they recognize them as the odd vans that are terrorizing the neighborhood. Then, at the end of chapter 4, the reader reads a letter from Audrey Wyler, the only neighbor on Poplar Street who has failed to come out of her house, to a friend. In this letter, Audrey discusses the death of her brother and his family in a drive by shooting in San Jose, California. After these deaths, Audrey and her husband, Herb, take in the sole survivor of her brother's family, Seth Garin. Seth has



autism. Audrey notes that Herb and the family drove cross country to visit friends in San Jose and that during this trip something happened that made Bill feel they had made a breakthrough with Seth. However, Bill later downplayed this event to Audrey in a phone call that continues to bother her. Now the reader is beginning to get the distinct impression that Seth Garin is somehow behind the deaths of his family and the events taking place on Poplar Street.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Chapter 5. As the vans open fire on the neighbors, Johnny and Collie urge everyone to go inside. Peter Jackson refuses to let go of his wife, forcing several people to grab him and force him away from the body. As Collie and Doc promise Peter that his wife is being taken care of, Marielle Soderson rushes past them only to be shot in the shoulder as she reaches Doc's front door. About that same time, the empty house next door that once belonged to a family called Hobart is hit by lightning and begins to burn.

Audrey Wyler is unaware of what is happening in her neighborhood because when things go badly in her home, Audrey escapes into a secret place in her mind. In this place, Audrey goes to Mohonk in New York where she once spent a happy weekend with her friend, Janice. The bad things in her home center around Seth Garin, Audrey's nephew. However, it is not Seth, it is the thing inside him, an entity that calls itself Tak. Audrey learned that while on vacation driving through Nevada, her brother and his family stopped at a mine run by the Deep Earth Mining Corporation in Desperation, Nevada. A man named Allen Symes gave the family a brief tour of the mine and sent them away, Audrey learned in a letter from Mr. Symes. However, this goes against what Bill told her and makes Audrey wonder if Symes is lying, too.

When Audrey is in her special place, she believes that Tak cannot find her there. Audrey has come to believe that Tak can read her mind as well as control her, forcing her to abuse her own body. However, when Audrey is in her special place, Tak cannot find her. Occasionally when Audrey is in her special place a red Playskool phone appears. Audrey believes this is Tak and that when it rings it will mean that he has found her. Audrey dreads that day.

Audrey comes out of her special place and finds Tak watching television in the den, as he normally did. He is watching *The Regulators*, an old Western that was once one of Seth's favorites. Audrey is sore and realizes that Tak has been making her pinch herself. Audrey believes Tak does this out of punishment because he wants to have sex with Audrey, but he cannot because Seth's body is not mature enough. This does not stop Tak from forcing Audrey to dye her hair and dress like his favorite cartoon character, Cassie Styles from *MotoKop*.

Audrey thinks about running away, but is afraid Tak will know before she has even steps through the door. It is then that Audrey realizes what is happening across the street. Audrey looks out the window and sees Mary Jackson's car on her front lawn and Dave Carver's body on his lawn. Audrey rushes to the front door, intent on leaving despite the risks, but Tak immediately stops her, forcing her back into the house by controlling her mind.



Johnny Marinville is inside the Carver house. Johnny jumped over the body of Debbie Ross to save his own skin. Johnny feels guilty and decides to go back and make sure the teenager is dead. Brad Josephson tries to stop him, but Johnny insists, so Brad goes with him. Johnny speaks to the girl and checks for a pulse. Johnny thinks he can feel a pulse, so he lifts her head only to discover most of her face is missing.

Johnny and Brad leave the dead girl where she is and make their way back toward the kitchen where the rest of those who took refuge in the house are hiding. On the floor under a table, Johnny finds a large, unexploded piece of ammunition. Johnny picks it up and studies it. Belinda comes out of the kitchen and examines it as well. Belinda says it is nothing like any ammunition she has ever seen. It is not marked by the firing pin as it should be and it stopped on the floor instead of going through the wall as it should have. Belinda remarks that it looks like ammunition a child might have drawn. Johnny puts the ammunition in his pocket.

At Doc's house, Marielle Soderson is bleeding to death from her shoulder wound. The wound is so severe that Marielle's arm is only attached to her body by a single thread of tissue. Collie attempts to get a tourniquet on the arm, but Marielle fights him in her insistence that Doc give her a shot for the pain first. As Marielle fights Collie, he holds her arm and the resistance between them causes the arm to break free of her body. Soon afterward Marielle falls unconscious.

Excerpt from 'The Force Corridor,' Episode 55 of MotoKops 2200. In this excerpt from the script of the cartoon MotoKops, the good guys discuss a group of aliens infiltrating the force corridor with what looks like some kind of power generators. The MotoKops know that if these generators reach Earth it will spell disaster. For this reason, they rush to their vans to rid the Force Corridor of these alien objects. As they prepare to leave, No Face and Countess Lili, their sworn enemies, arrive and agree to work with them to save the world from this unique threat.

Chapter 6. Tak takes Audrey into the kitchen and makes her swallow nearly a whole bottle of honey for her attempted escape. Audrey nearly chokes to death before Seth surfaces and makes Tak stop. When Audrey can speak, she asks Seth where Tak has gone. Seth tells her he has gone to build something. Seth cannot fully communicate what he means, however. Seth then presses his head against Audrey's and uses some kind of telepathy to communicate with her. Seth tells her he does not blame her for trying to run. In fact, Seth tells her that more trouble is coming and he wants her to go to her special place when it happens.

At the Carver house, Johnny tells everyone that the power has gone out. They can hear screaming from Doc's house. Belinda goes to the window and calls out to the people hiding there. As Belinda tries to get an answer, Johnny asks Pie Carver if Dave had a gun. Steve Ames answers Belinda's calls, confirming who is at Doc's house and that the vans seem to have gone for the moment. As Belinda finishes her conversation with Steve, she notices something odd out in the yard. There is a tumbleweed in the backyard of the Carver house.



Johnny and Brad crawl upstairs and retrieve Dave's gun from his office. They go out into the hallway just as six vans appear on Poplar Street, creating what Johnny recognizes as a fire corridor. Johnny sees Peter Jackson out on Doc's front lawn trying to retrieve the body of his wife. Johnny calls a warning down to him, but Peter does not hear it.

Picture. There is a picture that was found in a notebook Audrey Wyler used as a journal that shows a van whose occupant is shooting at a house.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

The reader is introduced to Audrey Wyler and her nephew, Seth, in chapter 5. Audrey believes that a creature of some sort has come to live inside her nephew. Audrey believes this creature came into her nephew during her brother's vacation to San Jose in a mine where the family stopped in Desperation, Nevada. The creature seems to be sharing Seth's body and uses his mind to control others, including Audrey, making them do things against their will such as pinching and hitting themselves. This creature also seems to be involved in the chaos that has attacked Poplar Street somehow, but even Audrey is not clear on how this is happening.

Audrey has a place in her mind where she goes to hide from the horror of the creature that calls itself Tak. Audrey's nephew Seth seems to know about this place, might even have had something to do with its creation. Seth cannot communicate with Audrey because of his autism, but seems to have some mental powers that Tak utilizes from time to time. Seth uses one of these powers, telepathy, to talk to Audrey and warn her that more trouble is coming and she should be prepared to hide.

At the Carver house, Johnny and Brad try to come up with a plan. Johnny locates a gun, but he is not clear what he plans to do with it at this point. Belinda talks with Steve Ames in the house next door where the other neighbors have taken refuge. This is where Marielle Soderson is suffering from blood loss due to a traumatically amputated arm. So far sixteen people are still alive.

Johnny finds an odd bullet that is oversized, lacks markings, and is oddly shaped as though a bullet imagined by a child. This bullet causes Johnny and Brad some confusion as they try to figure out what is attacking them. The fact that it seems to be from the imagination of a child helps the reader connect what is happening to Seth even though Johnny has not made that connection yet.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Chapter 7. The six vans open fire on all the houses on the east side of Poplar Street. Two cars catch on fire when the gas tanks explode. Pie Carver suffers terrible wounds to her face and head when a copper pot explodes over her head. Upstairs, Johnny is crawling through the hallway when he comes across an action figure of a character who looks just like one of the men he saw in the vans downstairs. Johnny puts the character in his pocket. On Doc's lawn, Peter Jackson is oblivious to the bullets as he tries to pick up his dead wife. None of the bullets hit him. Then Jackson hears a voice in his head that tells him to cross the street and enter the Wyler house. Peter, whose thoughts are already scrambled by his grief, listens to the voice and enters the dirty house.

Back downstairs, Johnny and Brad drag Pie Carver out of the kitchen and away from her already traumatized children. As Pie begins to seize, Belinda holds her still. Next door, Doc Billingsley has finished sewing the wound in Marielle's shoulder, but she has already lost so much blood that he is sure she will die if they do not get her help soon. Gary, Marielle's husband, has searched Doc's kitchen for alcohol and has found a bottle of cooking sherry. Steve joins Cynthia in the doorway when the shooting has ended and looks for Peter Jackson. Steve thinks Peter has gone into the Wyler house because he has left items behind, including his dead wife and his eyeglasses. Collie joins them at the door and notices that the houses across the street have begun to change. The Wyler house looks like a bunk house and the bike rack at the E-Z Stop now looks like a hitching post. Collie suggests that they try to get help for Marielle by using the path through the greenbelt behind the houses on the east side of Poplar Street to reach the next street over, Hyacinth. Steve volunteers to go with Collie.

Excerpt from Audrey Wyler's journal. June 10, 1995. The Wylers arrive home from getting ice cream and Seth, or the other, becomes upset that Seth cannot explain. The other becomes frustrated and breaks Audrey's Waterford crystal glasses.

June 11, 1995. In the middle of the night, Herb wakes Audrey and shows her out in the backyard a full size version of the Dream Floater. Herb believes that Seth is doing this to show them what it is that is missing. Seth is asleep and the van disappears as he wakes. That morning Herb tells him that they will replace the toy if they cannot find it. Seth, or the other, causes bowls and glasses to fly around the room. Herb spends the weekend searching for the Dream Floater, but cannot find it anywhere. Audrey worries about keeping this journal, afraid the other inside Seth will hurt her if he finds it. Audrey also worries what will happen if they cannot find the Dream Floater.

Chapter 8. Johnny's mind has wandered when Belinda tells him of Pie Carver's death. Cammie Reed, the twins' mother, comes into the room and asks Johnny for the gun. Cammie wants to send her sons down the greenbelt to look for help. Johnny agrees this is a good idea, but insists on going with the boys. At the same time, Collie Entragian



and Steve Ames gather the two guns Doc Billingsley has in his house, a small .22 rifle and a .30-.06. When the men return to the living room, Cynthia shows Doc a bird that she had noticed earlier on Mary Jackson's body. The bird is something of a buzzard, but a buzzard like a child might imagine it. Doc points out that the wings are much too short for it to fly, but somehow it does anyway.

Before leaving, Johnny pulls Ralphie Carver aside and shows him the action figure he found upstairs. Johnny asks him what it is and where it is from. Ralphie tells him it is Major Pike from MotoKops 2200. Ralphie tells them that the van he saw shoot his dad belongs to another character from the show, Cassie Styles. At the Wyler house, Tak is watching *The Regulators* with Peter Jackson. Tak forces Peter to eat as he takes his energy from him, causing Peter's eyes to bulge from his face. Tak then tells Peter to go to the path in the greenbelt and sit beside a friend he will find at the fork in the path. As Tak concentrates on the movie, Seth moves away from his conscious mind and moves deeper into his mind.

Excerpt from screenplay for *The Regulators*. The sheriff and one of the Regulators, Candy, meet in the street. They argue and the sheriff arrests Candy. Murdock, another Regulator, comes into the street and confronts the sheriff. They argue and pull their guns. A saloon girl, Laura, comes out and confronts Murdock. Laura pulls the trigger, but her gun misfires. Murdock fires and hits Laura instead of the sheriff. The sheriff cries over Laura as she dies. Murdock slips out of town and threatens to come back and tear the town apart.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

In chapter 7, the vans come back and fire on the houses where the neighbors have taken refuge. Another woman dies. Simultaneously men from both houses decide to go out to the greenbelt to try and get help, but neither knows what the other is planning. This can only foreshadow trouble.

As the neighbors continue to struggle to understand what is going on, Collie and company realize that the street is changing. They can see that the Wyler house is transforming into a bunk house. They also notice a bird that is supposed to be a buzzard, but is ill proportioned and odd looking. They believe it looks like a child's idea of a buzzard. This again leads the reader back to Seth Garin. At the same time, Johnny learns that the men in the vans are characters from a show called *MotoKops 2200*, one of Seth's favorite shows.

In an excerpt from Audrey's journal, the reader learns that Seth showed signs of an other inside of him beginning shortly after he came to live with the Wylers. This other being is violent and cruel, and it has the power to make others around it do things they do not want to do. As an example of this, Audrey relates how the other inside Seth reacted to the loss of one of his favorite *MotoKops 2200* toys.

At the end of chapter 8, the author shares an excerpt from the script for the other, Tak's, favorite movie, *The Regulators*. This scene sows the death of the hero's love. This makes the reader wonder how the movie has influenced the other and how this will reflect on the future of the neighbors still hiding in houses across the street.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

Chapter 9. Collie and Steve uncover a gate at the back of Doc's yard that leads into the greenbelt. It takes some time, but they find the path Collie told Steve about and begin working their way toward Hyacinth. As they walk, they begin to notice unnatural looking cactus growing along the edge of the path. Collie touches one and it pricks his finger. When they reach a fork in the path, they find a homeless man impaled on a cactus. The two men turn and see that the path is transforming before their eyes, going from green to a desert landscape. They can also hear the howls of some sort of coyote.

Audrey is deep inside her mind at the place in Mohonk where she once spent a wonderful day with her friend Janice. While she is there, thinking of how trite the conversation is getting, the big red Playskool phone rings. Audrey is afraid to answer it, afraid it is Tak. However, when she does, it is Seth's voice on the other end. Seth tells Audrey she must run. Seth tells her to go across the street and join the others.

Johnny is thinking of the past as he walks into the woods with the Reed twins. If not for this, he thinks he might have prevented what happened. Jim Reed became aware of two figures walking toward them in the gathering dusk. Jim raises the gun and focuses on one of the figures. Before Johnny can do anything to stop him, Dave grabs Johnny and covers his mouth. Jim fires, unaware he has just shot Collie Entragian in the head. Johnny forces Dave off of him and stops Jim from shooting Steve. However, before they can react something comes out of the woods and attacks Steve.

Excerpt from Audrey Wyler's journal. June 12, 1995. The thing inside Seth forced Herb to hit himself in the face, causing a black eye. Audrey is concerned because it seems to be taking so much from Herb. Audrey has also begun to notice that when the thing is at its worst, she has begun to daydream in a deep and realistic way. Audrey believes these fantasies are a gift from Seth to help protect her from the other.

June 13, 1995. While Seth is sleeping, the neighbors, William and Hugh Hobart, come over and tell Audrey that Hugh stole the Dream Floater from their yard. Anxious to keep the other from knowing what happened, Audrey walks them out into the street before shaming Hugh to keep him from doing it again. Audrey lies to both Herb and Seth about where she found the Dream Floater to protect the Hobarts from the other's wrath. That night, Herb brings home an old movie called *The Regulators* for Seth.

June 19, 1995. Someone has vandalized William Hobart's car.

June 24, 1995. Every window in the Hobart house has been broken. Audrey finds Seth's slippers under his bed. They are wet.

June 26, 1995. Audrey speaks to Seth while the other appears to be gone. Seth tells Audrey the Hobarts should move before the other hurts them.



June 27, 1995. Audrey believes the other is stealing all of Herb's energy, causing him to become ill. Audrey believes that Herb cannot hide from the other likes she does with her daydream.

June 28, 1995. Mrs. Hobart is rushed to the hospital when her high blood pressure causes an uncontrolled nose bleed. Seth is near the house when all this happens.

June 29, 1995. Audrey wakes in the middle of the night and finds Herb gone. He is in the garage. Audrey wants to take him to the doctor, but Hugh insists it will not do any good.

July 1, 1995. William Hobart has fallen down the stairs in his house and broken his hip and leg.

July 3, 1995. The other speaks to Audrey and tells her its name is Tak.

July 6, 1995. Someone has shot the Hobart's cat. Mrs. Hobart thinks they are being targeted by someone jealous they will go to heaven when they die.

July 8, 1995. The Hobarts are moving.

July 16, 1995. Herb has shot himself.

October 19, 1995. Audrey has received an answering letter from the mining company in Desperation, Nevada.

Chapter 10. Johnny picks up the .22 and shoots the odd cat that is attacking Steve. Across the path, Dave holds Collie's hand as he dies. Collie swears to Dave that he never did anything wrong, but discovered some other Internal Affairs cops who were dirty. While everyone else is distracted, Jim Reed becomes overwhelmed with guilt for shooting Collie. Jim places the gun beside his head and shoots before Johnny can stop him. Cynthia rushes into the greenbelt when she hears the sound of shooting, convinced Steve is dead. Brad Josephson and Cammie Reed are also rushing out to the greenbelt to see what is happening. When they reach the other men, Cammie Reed is momentarily lost in grief for her son. Then Cammie hears Dave accuse Johnny of killing Jim. Cammie grabs a gun and turns on Johnny. However, Dave accuses her of killing Jim too, causing her to calm down.

The group makes their way back toward Doc Billingsley's house. At the same time, Audrey Wyler comes into Doc's house and frightens him when she sneaks up behind him. Audrey tells him that they all need to be together. At the same time, Peter Jackson sits into the cactus with the homeless man and dies. As the group led by Johnny Marinville makes their way back to Doc's house, they run into another of those odd cat-like animals. When they shoot it, they notice that it decays quickly and releases some kind of pink smoke. The group then gathers in Doc's backyard and begins to climb over the Carvers' fence one at a time. The landscape has begun to look more and more like a strange western movie set.



At the Wyler house, Tak has become aware that Audrey is gone. This does not bother Tak because he feels he can get to her anyway. Tak goes into the kitchen and fixes himself a baloney sandwich and several glasses of chocolate milk.

Document found by Allen Symes' daughter after his death. In this document, Symes describes how the Garin family found him at the trailer that serves as the headquarters for the China Pit mine in Desperation, Nevada. Symes was touched by the family and their story of Seth's autism and the breakthrough he appeared to be experiencing that day. Symes took the family into the mine and, while showing them one of the machines, realized that Seth had gone into Rattlesnake Number One, a mine that caved in back in 1858, but was recently uncovered during a controlled blast. Symes and Bill Garin had gone into the mine to find Seth, eventually finding him at the very back near a crack in the wall that was releasing a strange scent and heat into the mine. Symes later realized that Seth Garin seemed to know about Rattlesnake Number One before Symes told him about it even though this find was not public knowledge.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

The neighbors do the only thing they can think to do and use the greenbelt behind their houses to try to reach help. However, they do not communicate their intentions to one another, leading to tragedy. This tragedy is expounded when the teenager responsible for Collie Entragian's death kills himself. The reader will later learn that Jim did not do this completely on his own, but was helped by Tak. The group argues for a time, then makes their way back to the houses where they have taken refuge to regroup and decide what to do next. Audrey Wyler has joined them there.

The important part of these chapters, besides the tragedy as they try to get help, is the information revealed in the materials added at the end of the chapters. Audrey Wyler's journal is very informative, showing the reader how slowly Tak came to reveal himself and how he took revenge on the Hobart family, torturing them until they finally decided to move. This journal also explains how Audrey came to spend time in Mohonk in her mind and how her husband was used as energy by Tak and eventually killed himself. All of this helps the reader better understand Tak's methods and motivations.

The document at the end of chapter 10 tells how Seth came into contact with Tak in the first place. The Garin family was driving through Desperation, Nevada when Seth heard Tak call out to him and ask him to come to him. The Garins, so excited by this apparent breakthrough on Seth's part, took him to the mine. Seth slipped into an ancient mine he should not have even known about and apparently picked up Tak there from a crack at the back of the ancient mine. This seems to explain how Tak came to be in Seth and what happened to the Garin family just a short time later.



Chapters 11-13

Chapters 11-13 Summary

Chapter 11. One by one the group makes their way over the Carvers' fence, beginning with old Doc Billingsley, Dave, and Cammie. Susi Geller becomes overwhelmed with grief when she learns about Jim Reed, screaming in such a way that those who have been in the woods begin to worry that she will attract the odd cat-like creatures from the woods. As the men lift Jim's body over the fence, Susi's crying becomes worse, forcing the men to beg someone to make her be quiet. Finally everyone but Johnny and Brad are over the fence. Brad helps Johnny over by allowing him to stand on his back, creating such a racial farce that Brad cries himself to tears. Brad then struggles over the fence, making it just as one of those odd cats rushes him and attempts to make him dinner. At the same time, a gila monster like creature makes its way into Doc's house and kills Gary Soderson as he lies drunk beside his dead wife.

Johnny and Kim Geller argue over Kim's rude treatment of Belinda Josephson. Finally Belinda forces Kim into the living room. Audrey then begins to tell her story, explaining to everyone about Tak and how he is using what Seth loves to kill and draw energy from the neighbors. After everything her neighbors have seen and heard, none of them doubt her story. However, some of them want to kill Seth, including Cammie Reed. Audrey refuses to allow them to harm Seth. As they talk, they hear the odd electric sound that signals the approach of the MotoKop vans.

Excerpt from Audrey Wyler's journal. February 7, 1996. Audrey has noticed that Tak and Seth play with the Cassie Styles doll differently. Seth is almost gentle with the doll, treating it like his mother, while Tak is decidedly sexual with it. Audrey hopes this will help her tell when Tak is in control.

Chapter 12. The MotoKop vans return and station themselves in front of the houses on the east side of Poplar Street. The vans open fire, slowly destroying each of the houses, catching one on fire while moving another off its foundation. The group in the Carver house listens to the destruction, unable to do anything to protect themselves and aware that the house around them is about to be destroyed. When the vans reach the front of the Carver house, Kim Geller goes outside to confront them, hoping to make them stop. Instead they vaporize her with one of their weapons. As the vans open fire on the Carver house, they suddenly disappear.

Audrey has placed a laxative in the chocolate milk Tak likes to drink. Tak dislikes it when Seth has a bowel movement and Audrey knows that he will separate from Seth while the laxative is working. This is exactly what is happening. From deep in his mind, Seth calls Audrey on the Carvers' phone. Audrey picks it up and listens. Audrey then turns to Johnny Marinville and tells him that Seth wants only her and him to go to her house. On the way, Audrey explains about Tak's aversion to Seth's eliminations and tells Johnny that they must take Seth out of the house and away from Tak. Johnny asks Audrey if Tak



can take over anyone else's body, but Audrey insists it cannot because it tried to enter Herb and failed.

As Audrey and Johnny rush into the house and search for Seth, Belinda becomes aware that Cammie Reed is gone. Cammie has grabbed the .30-.06 and followed Audrey and Johnny into the Wyler house. Audrey finds Seth on the toilet and grabs him up in a hug. In his mind, Seth shuts down his body's senses. Tak tries to reenter Seth, but fails. Suddenly Cammie opens fires and kills both Seth and Audrey. Tak then enters Cammie's mind, telling Johnny that he knows all their names and will find them one day. Then Cammie's head explodes and reality suddenly returns.

Excerpt from Audrey Wyler's journal. October 31, 1995. During a period of time when Seth is himself, he asks Audrey to take him trick-or-treating. Seth does not want to be a cowboy or a MotoKop character, but a pirate.

March 16, 1996. Tak has grown stronger and makes Audrey spend weeks at a time with Jan at Mohonk. The house has become a mess and Audrey is unable to keep up. One day she makes an attempt to clean and accidentally breaks a plate that her mother left to her. Seth comes to comfort her, using whatever power Tak uses to make her feel bad and makes her feel at peace.

Chapter 13. Johnny sits in the aftermath of the ordeal, staring at the bodies of Audrey and Seth. Johnny thinks that Seth forced Cammie to kill him and Audrey. A short time later, the neighbors go outside and discover that the bad Western movie set has disappeared and daylight has returned to the neighborhood. However, their houses are still riddled with bullet holes, and the dead bodies still litter their lawns. The police have arrived, but they are unsure of how to deal with the chaos before them. When one cop confronts them, Johnny tells him they were attacked by outlaws. Then Johnny walks off to sing a song about Jesse James.

A letter from Mrs. Patricia Allen to Katherine Anne Goodlowe of Montpelier, Vermont dated June 19, 1986. Mrs. Allen is in Mohonk on her honeymoon. Mrs. Allen has heard some of the ghost stories of the area and one in particular fascinates her and she has decided to share it with her good friend. The story centers on a mother and son ghost who haunt a folly in a meadow three miles from the Mohonk Mountain House Hotel. Mrs. Allen has heard that some people investigating these ghosts have found items in the folly, including bowls of Chef Boyardee spaghetti. While investigating it herself, Mrs. Allen found an action figure she does not recognize of a redheaded woman and a picture drawn by a child that features a mother and son standing beside a folly. Mrs. Allen sends these to her friend and asks her to keep them safe until she can retrieve them and show them to her kindergarten class next fall.

Chapters 11-13 Analysis

The survivors of Poplar Street make their way back to the Carvers' house and learn about Tak from Audrey. There are some personality conflicts and these end in tragedy



for Kim Geller and later for Cammie Reed. At the same time, they come to an agreement on how to end this ordeal. Somehow it all comes to a head with Seth using Tak's tricks to convince Cammie Reed to kill him and Audrey while they are both lost in Audrey's fantasy in Mohonk. Although the story has centered around the destruction taking place on Poplar Street and the deaths of the neighbors, the story has really been about Audrey and her nephew fighting the entity that calls itself Tak.

Reality returns when Tak disappears. However, the reader doubts that Tak is completely gone when the neighbors see a cowboy in the sky. Johnny Marinville seems to have become their leader in some strange contest, but he also seems to have lost his sanity when he walks away from a cop to play a song about Jesse James on his guitar. The impact of the events of this day have taken their toll on all the neighbors, leaving them all forever altered.



Characters

Audrey Wyler

Audrey Wyler is a widow who lives on Poplar Street. Two summers ago Audrey's brother, Bill, and his family took a cross country trip to visit friends in California. The family was killed in a drive by shooting, leaving their sole surviving child, Seth, in Audrey's care. Audrey and her husband were thrilled at first to take custody of Seth, but soon came to realize that Seth had some entity living inside him that was cruel and could control them in ways that are supernatural.

Audrey's husband, Herb, kills himself after living with the odd thing inside of Seth for more than a year. This leaves Audrey alone with Seth and this other entity that calls itself Tak. Audrey learns to hide in her mind in a place that is built around the memories of a day she spent in Mohonk with a college friend years ago. However, on the day that Tak begins torturing her neighbors, Audrey becomes more aware of what is going on around her. At the same time, Seth helps her to realize that the time has come for them to fight Tak. Seth tells Audrey what to do and Audrey acts out Seth's commands.

Seth Garin

Seth Garin is an autistic young boy. While traveling by car through Nevada, Seth becomes fascinated with a copper mine in Desperation. Seth speaks clearly for the first time in his life and begs his family to stop. When they do, Seth shows interest in an old mine recently uncovered that no one knows about. Seth disappears into the mine and later it becomes clear that this experience has allowed some sort of supernatural entity to become embedded in Seth's body. Shortly afterward, Seth's entire family is killed while he safely plays in a sandbox.

When Seth comes to live with his aunt Audrey and her husband, he begins to exhibit supernatural abilities, such as the ability to make his toys fly. Later, Audrey becomes aware that Seth is not alone in his little body and that an entity exists inside him that can control the minds and bodies of other people. Soon this entity begins killing Audrey's neighbors and taking their energy from them. Seth plots to stop this entity and comes up with a plan that will end the horror that has left their neighbors terrorized for most of an afternoon.

Tak

Tak is an ancient entity that once lived under the ground, but has come to live in Seth Garin. It is thought that because of Seth's autism Tak is able to take over his body and control him, using his undiscovered psychic abilities to control others around him. Using Seth and his fantasies, Tak terrorizes first Tak's aunt and uncle, then later the neighbors.



This culminates in Tak using Seth's beloved cartoon figures to terrorize and kill the multiple people in the neighborhood.

Johnny Marinville

Johnny Marinville is a writer who was once hailed as the most promising young writer of the century who later turned to writing children's books in order to help him recover from drug and alcohol problems. Johnny becomes something of an unofficial leader of his neighbors as Tak terrorizes the neighborhood with MotoKop 2200 figures and weapons. It is Johnny who first realizes that the terror is connected to the autistic boy across the street and the only one Seth will allow into the Wyler house to help him and Audrey stop Tak.

Brad Josephson

Brad Josephson is the large, funny black man who lives on the western corner of Poplar Street with his wife, Belinda. During the crisis that Tak creates, Brad places himself beside Johnny Marinville every step of the way, often providing the comic relief needed to keep everyone from going insane during this unexplainable afternoon of terror.

Belinda Josephson

Belinda Josephson is Brad's wife and the more logical member of the leading group. Belinda has experience with weapons and recognizes that some of the ammunition being used against the neighborhood is odd and acting in an unrealistic fashion. Belinda works to keep the others calm during moments of extreme stress and is the first to speak with the other neighbors who ran into a separate house during the third assault by the unknown vans.

Collie Entragian

Collie Entragian is a cop who was unceremoniously fired from the Columbus police department. There are many rumors moving around town as to why Collie was fired, some as outrageous as the idea that he committed a murder and others as mundane as he was caught taking bribes. When Collie is shot by Jim Reed, he tells Dave Reed that he was fired because he was set up by some cops in the Internal Affairs office he had identified as corrupt. Collie dies when Jim Reed mistakes him for one of the bad guys on the path in the greenbelt and shoots him in the head.

Cynthia Smith

Cynthia Smith is the new clerk at the E-Z Stop. Cynthia's hair is dyed two pastel colors, a fact that might have kept her from getting the new job if the owner had not been



desperate. Cynthia becomes involved in the terror on Poplar Street when the first van that shot Cary Ripton turns its weapon on the Carver children. Cynthia rushes out of the store to protect the children. Later, Cynthia runs down the street when Mary Jackson is shot and finds herself hiding in Doc Billingsley's house when the vans return.

Steve Ames

Steve Ames is a hippie-appearing man who was driving from New York to California with a truckload of belongings for his boss. Steve has car trouble and stops at the E-Z Stop after becoming lost in the residential neighborhood. Steve helps protect the Carver children and Cynthia Smith when the first van turns its weapon on them. Later, Steve accompanies Collie Entragian into the greenbelt to try and find help. Steve is attacked by an odd looking cat-like animal and nearly killed. However, Steve survives and witnesses the murder of Audrey Wyler and Seth Garin by Cammie Reed.

Tom 'Doc' Billingsley

Tom Billingsley, known as Doc by his neighbors, is a retired veterinarian who lives on Poplar Street. Doc is an older man who finds himself hiding in his own home with a group of his neighbors and attempting to save the life of Marielle Soderson after her arm is shot from her body.

David and Kirsten 'Pie' Carver

David Carver is a postal worker who has the week off. When the novel begins, Dave is washing his car in a bathing suit that is much too tight. When Mary Jackson returns home from her afternoon tryst, Dave Carver is on his front lawn and is shot by Mary's killer.

Pie Carver is Dave Carver's wife. Pie is hysterical when her husband is killed and is nearly shot herself as she grieves over his body and the vans return. When the vans return a fifth time, Pie is killed by copper pots shredded into shrapnel by an odd bullet fired into her house by the vans.

Gary and Marielle Soderson

Gary is an unhappy, drunk man. Gary is married to Marielle, a nagging woman who is mean to all those around her. Gary briefly thinks that if he is to get sober, he will have to divorce Marielle first. Marielle is hit by a bullet in the shoulder the fourth time the vans appear that separates her arm from her body. Marielle eventually bleeds to death while her husband gets drunk on cooking sherry. Gary is killed by a child's idea of a gila monster while passed out drunk on the floor beside his wife's body.



Peter and Mary Jackson

Peter is a kind hearted, intelligent college professor. Peter stops to speak with Cary Ripton in the moments before his death. Later, it is Peter who decides they should cover Cary's body before the rain starts. It is not until the death of his wife, Mary, that Peter begins to lose his sense of reality. Peter refuses to leave his wife and later goes outside to gather up her body despite the return of the vans. This leaves Peter vulnerable to Tak, making him a pawn in Tak's control. Tak takes energy from Peter and sends him into the greenbelt to kill himself, similar to the way in which he used Herb Wyler and then disposed of him.

Peter's wife, Mary, works in an accountant's office. Mary's father always thought that Peter was not good enough for Mary. Ironically, it is Mary who strays from the marriage, having an affair. In fact, Mary is returning from an afternoon tryst with her lover when she is killed by the occupants of one of the Power Wagons.

Ellie and Ralphie Carver

Ellie Carver is the ten or twelve year old daughter of Dave and Pie Carver. Ellie is a gentle, kind young girl, a drastic contrast to her bratty, six year old brother Ralphie. Ellie is hysterical after the death of her father, but her mother is more concerned with her brother than with Ellie in the aftermath of Dave's death.

Cammie Reed

Cammie Reed is mother to Dave and Jim Reed. Cammie is an opinionated, angry woman. When it becomes clear that help is not going to come, Cammie gives her sons a gun and sends them for help in the hopes that this will get them out of harm's way. However, this only causes more death and destruction, ending in the suicide of one of the twins. Cammie blames everyone, most especially Seth Garin, for the death of her son. At the end of the novel, Cammie hears a voice in her head that tells her to go to the Wyler house and kill Seth. Cammie heeds this voice. Later, Cammie dies when Tak enters her mind and overwhelms her.

Jim and Dave Reed

Jim and Dave Reed are twin brothers who live on Poplar Street. Jim and Dave are devastated when their dog dies, but prove to be strong as more death and destruction comes to Poplar Street. However, when their mother sends them into the greenbelt, the boys become frightened and Jim shoots at Collie Entragian without verifying his identity. This causes Jim to be so overwhelmed with regret that Tak is able to enter his mind, amplify his guilt, and force him to commit suicide. Dave blames Johnny for this, nearly causing Cammie Reed to kill Johnny.



Susi Geller and Debbie Ross

Susi Geller is the young girl who lives next door to the Reeds. Susi is dating Jim Reed and is playing Frisbee with the boys as the book begins. Debbie Ross is a gorgeous red headed girl who is a friend of Susi's and garners the attention of Cary Ripton, giving him some happy thoughts in the moments before his death. Debbie is killed in the third wave of shooting from the vans. Susi survives the ordeal, but her mother and Jim are both killed, leaving her devastated.

Kim Geller

Kim Geller is Susi Geller's mother. Kim is a self-centered woman who refuses to help care for the Carver children or do anything productive during the crisis on Poplar Street. In the end, Kim gets into a fight with Johnny over her treatment of Belinda Josephson and is banished to the Carver's living room. When the vans come a final time, Kim goes outside to confront them in the hope that they will listen to reason. Kim is shot at such close range by the van occupants' odd ammunition that she is vaporized.

Herb Wyler

Herb Wyler is Audrey Wyler's husband. Herb is the target of Tak during his first few years inside of Seth, draining Herb of his energy slowly. Tak also tries to enter Herb's body in order to engage in sexual relations with Audrey, but is unable to maintain the connection. In the end, when Tak is done with him, Herb commits suicide.

The Hobarts

William Hobart is a very religious man, as is his wife. When William learns that his son Hugh has stolen a toy from the Wyler house, he forces his son to take it back and make a confession to Audrey Wyler. A short time later, the Hobarts find themselves victims of some sort of plot of revenge. Their car is vandalized, their house vandalized, their health placed in danger and their cat killed. Eventually the Hobarts decide to move away.

Cary Ripton

Cary Ripton is the paperboy for Poplar Street. Cary is delivering papers and talking with each of the neighbors in the moments before he is shot by someone inside an odd looking van with a funny satellite-like dish on its roof. Cary's death is the beginning of the crisis on Poplar Street.



Objects/Places

Chef Boyardee and Chocolate Milk

After Tak takes control of Seth's body, the only thing it likes to eat is Chef Boyardee with hamburger and chocolate milk. Seth tells Audrey toward the end of the book to put a laxative in the chocolate milk to force Tak out of Seth's body since Tak does not like to remain in Seth's body during elimination.

Johnny Marinville's Guitar

Johnny Marinville is seen playing his guitar on his front porch in the opening pages of the book. At the end of the book, Johnny walks off to get his guitar and play the Ballad of Jesse James.

Audrey Wyler's Journal

Audrey Wyler kept a journal that is presumably found in the aftermath of her death. This journal chronicles Audrey's growing awareness of and experiences with Tak.

Buster

Buster is Ralphie Carver's little red wagon.

Unexploded Bullet

Johnny Marinville finds an odd, unexploded bullet in the Carver house that has no manufacturer's markings or the telltale mark of the firing pin from the weapon that fired it into the house.

Changing Scenery

As the afternoon progresses, the neighbors of Poplar Street begin to see old Western buildings forming over the familiar houses on the block. Those neighbors who venture out into the greenbelt to try to get help notice the scenery changing right before them, turning from a green wooded area to a desert. There are cacti that are oddly shaped, but have deadly spines. There are also animals that are ill-proportioned, but deadly.



Action Figures

Johnny Marinville finds an action figure in the upstairs hall of the Carver house that is similar to one of the men he saw in one of the vans that killed Mary Jackson. This action figure is one of the characters from MotoKops 2200 and its discovery leads Johnny down the path of understanding what is happening to him and his neighbors.

MotoKops Power Wagons

The MotoKops' Power Wagons are van-like vehicles used by the characters on the Saturday morning cartoon MotoKops 2200. These vans somehow become real on Poplar Street and begin terrorizing the neighborhood, killing multiple people on the block with their odd shotgun style guns.

Hummel Figurines

Mrs. Carver collects Hummel figurines with the idea that she might someday design some of her own figurines. These figures fall and break in the multiple assaults on the Carver house by the strange vans.

Ponderosa

The Ponderosa is the name of the ranch owned by the Cartwright family on the television Western Bonanza.

Bonanza

Bonanza is a television Western that ran through the sixties and seventies. This show features the Cartwright family, including Pa, Little Joe, Hoss, and Adam. This is a favorite of Tak's and he often imitates the voices of these characters when interacting with Audrey Wyler.

MotoKops 2200

MotoKops 2200 is the name of a futuristic Saturday morning cartoon featuring a group of Army-like soldiers who fight to protect the Earth from evil. Their chief nemesis is No Face and his partner, Countess Lili. This show was a favorite of Seth's and becomes a favorite of Tak's, featuring prominently in Tak's crusade against the neighbors of Poplar Street.



The Regulators

The Regulators is a Western filmed in 1958 starring Rory Calhoun. This movie is about a group of post-Civil War bullies who terrorize a small mining town in Colorado. This movie is a favorite of Tak's and becomes interwoven in his fantasies that become reality on Poplar Street during an afternoon of terror.

Rattlesnake Number One

Rattlesnake Number One is an old mine shaft that was buried in a cave in 1858. This mine shaft is rumored to be the grave of a dozen Chinese miners. This mine is accidentally uncovered during copper mining in another mine. This is where it is assumed Seth Garin came in contact with Tak for the first time.

China Pit

China Pit is the name of the mine where the Deep Earth Mining Corporation is leeching copper from the earth.



Themes

Supernatural

The premise of this novel is that some sort of entity has come to live inside the mind and body of an autistic boy. This entity uses untapped paranormal powers inside the child's mind to control those around him. This entity grows stronger as time passes, stealing energy from those around him until finally he is strong enough to not only control those closest to the boy, but create a whole world in which he is able to trap the residents of Poplar Street and terrorize them for more than an hour.

The reader of this book must be able to accept several basic ideas about the supernatural world. First, the reader must be able to believe that an autistic boy is a highly intelligent child trapped within a mind that is malfunctioning and that this same boy has the power to speak telepathically to those around him and move objects with his mind. The reader must then believe that an evil entity such as Tak can exist and that it could call out to a boy passing on the highway and force him to come rescue him from his centuries old grave. Finally, the reader must be able to grasp the idea that this same entity can use the autistic boy's untapped supernatural powers to lock an entire community off from the rest of the world and terrorize them with imaginary toys brought into existence by the boy's imagination.

The supernatural elements of this novel are the overriding theme in the fact that without these elements there would be no conflict to propel the plot of the novel. For this reason, the supernatural is the main theme of the novel.

Family

Family is an important element in this novel in the fact that family, both biological and metaphorically, motivates many of the actions of the characters in this book. The idea of family begins with the death of Bill Garin and his wife and two children. Bill was a devoted father who chose to drive cross country with his three children and wife in the hopes that it would be a good experience for his youngest child, Seth. Seth is an autistic child and Bill hopes that this journey will help draw the child out of his own little world. This seems to have worked when Seth comes to life, communicating like never before when the family drives past the China Pit in Desperation, Nevada. However, the truth is that this side trip only allows an evil entity to take its place in Seth's body and mind, changing all their lives forever.

When Bill and his wife, as well as two of their children, are killed in a drive by shooting, Audrey Wyler takes in her brother's sole remaining child. Audrey believes that Seth is a normal, healthy child despite his autism. However, Audrey quickly comes to realize that Seth has some sort of entity inside of him that is evil and has the power to drain energy from her husband and to control them to force them to abuse themselves in dark and



disturbing ways. Soon this other entity, a thing that calls itself Tak, grows in power and decides to take over the entire neighborhood, killing the neighbors at will to grow even more powerful.

The neighbors have all lived close to one another for many years. These neighbors are caring, concerned people who get along well with one another. When the novel begins, most of the neighbors are outside enjoying a hot summer afternoon. As Tak begins to terrorize them, most of the neighbors band together and work side by side to try to defeat this entity. The neighbors act like a family, complete with parental-like leaders, squabbling siblings, and devoted grandparent figures. It is this that makes family an important theme to the novel.

Reality versus Fantasy

As the novel begins, the reader meets a neighborhood of happy, carefree people. There is the alcoholic, the school teacher, the writer. There are the good-looking kids with the perfect dog and the not-so-perfect paperboy. They are cookie cutter images of a perfect neighborhood, leaving the reader rooted in reality, but wondering if it is all too good to be true. Then, in the blink of an eye, things begin to change.

A van drives down the street and shoots the paperboy off his bike, then turns the gun on a couple of kids at the corner convenience store before killing the beloved dog of a set of perfect twins. Things escalate from here until the neighbors of this perfect neighborhood find themselves trapped in two houses, separate from one another as each group struggles to figure out what is happening and what to do about it.

As the neighbors struggle with their new reality, they look out the door and find it changing. The house across the street which was once covered in ordinary siding is now a log cabin with old fashioned windows out front. The store down the street that once had an ordinary bike rack out front now has a hitching post for customers riding horses. Reality has become something different, a world filled with a child's idea of an old West neighborhood.

When the neighbors begin to understand the truth of what is happening to them, they fight to maintain an idea of what is real and what is not. It is this struggle in part that leads to a struggle with sanity that will drive some of the neighbors to do things they might not have ordinarily done under different circumstances. For this reason, reality versus fantasy is an important theme to the novel.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in what appears to be a simple third person point of view from the beginning. However, as the reader moves deeper into the novel and the point of view begins shifting quickly from character to character, the reader comes to understand that the novel is being told in a modified authorial voice with third person omniscient elements. The point of view of this novel is from the point of view of an outside story teller telling a story through the eyes of many different characters.

The point of view of this novel can be confusing for the reader at times. The author moves so quickly from character to character that sometimes the reader has to skip ahead a few lines to figure out whose mind the reader is in at that point in the story. At other times, the point of view of the novel is straightforward and easy for the reader to follow. The point of view has the unique feature of this type of narration in which the author is able to tell a story through a character's eyes while also giving hints to the reader of what is about to happen to that particular character. For this reason, this point of view is an exciting one that works well in this novel.

Setting

The majority of the novel takes place on Poplar Street in Wentworth, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus, Ohio. This street is a normal, happy residential street of upper middle class people. The residents are mostly outside as the novel begins, enjoying a warm summer afternoon, in their own ways. As the novel progresses, however, the neighbors find themselves seeking shelter in two homes, fleeing from shotgun wielding characters of a child's Saturday morning cartoon.

The setting of this novel is fascinating in the fact that it is the complete antithesis to the events that take place as the plot begins to develop. In this book, the residents of a perfectly normal neighborhood find themselves suddenly and viciously under attack by six odd vans whose occupants are a mixture of cartoon characters from a children's Saturday morning cartoon and characters from a supernatural Western from the 1950s. As the novel progresses, this normal neighborhood takes on the images of a child's version of a Western town, transforming into something odd and surreal. The setting of this novel is fascinating both in its contrast to the violence taking place in the neighborhood and in its transformation to a child's Western drawing, making it a unique setting that could only exist inside this plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in a simple, basic English common to bestselling novels of its era. The language of this novel is simple enough for the youngest readers to understand, yet

not so simple that more mature readers feel spoken down to. The novel does not contain any foreign words or phrases with the exception of an unidentified language Tak speaks in the final climatic moments of his reign of terror.

The novel is written with readers of a wide range of age in mind. The book targets adults, but also younger readers who reveal in the type of horror that this author commonly produces. The language in this book is appropriate to this target audience, creating a well written novel that is filled with a language that even the youngest readers can comprehend without the use of a dictionary.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirteen chapters, each chapter divided again into separate scenes. The novel includes such a large cast of characters that the author is forced to divide his scenes sharply so that the reader will not get lost when the author moves from location to location or character to character. The book also includes multiple additions to the written text. These additions include excerpts from letters, books, magazines, and a journal. These additions are located at the end of each chapter and they provide information about the situation on Poplar Street that might not be readily available to the characters.

The novel has two simple plots that interact with one another. The main plot is about the entity that has come to live inside Seth Garin, an autistic child who has supernatural powers untapped due to his mental condition. This entity is evil and it uses Seth's mental powers to torture first his immediate family and later the entire neighborhood of Poplar Street. The other plot follows the actions of the neighbors as the entity begins to terrorize them with Seth's favorite cartoon and movie characters, killing people so that the entity might take their spiritual powers and grow stronger. These two plots interact with one another until they come to a climactic moment in which the entity is forced out of the neighborhood and away from those it has tortured.



Quotes

"Not just summer, either, not this year, but the apotheosis of summer, the avatar of summer, high green perfect central Ohio summer dead-smash in the middle of July, white sun glaring out of that fabled faded Levi's sky, the sound of kids hollering back and forth through the Bear Street Woods at the top of the hill, the tink! Of Little League bats from the ballfield on the other side of the woods, the sound of power-mowers, the sound of muscle-cars out on Highway 19, the sound of Rollerblades on the cement sidewalks and smooth macadam of Poplar Street, the sound of radios—Cleveland Indians baseball (the rare day game) competing with Tina Turner belting out 'Nutbush City Limits,' the one that goes 'Twenty-five is the speed limit, motorcycles not allowed in it'—and surrounding everything like an auditory edging of lace, the soothing, silky hiss of lawn sprinklers." Chapter 1, pgs. 20-21

"David Carver also began to run after his wife, his gut bouncing up and down above his ridiculously tiny bathing suit, his flipflops smacking the sidewalk and making a noise like cap-pistols. His shadow ran after him in the street, long and thinner than Postal Service employee David Carver had ever been in his adult life." Chapter 2, pg. 49

"Another click as the line went dead, but this time there was no open-line hum. This time there was just stillness." Chapter 3, pg. 67

"He sees everything. That has been both his blessing and his curse in all his years—the world still falls on his eye as it falls upon the eye of a child, evenly, unchosen, as impartial as the weight of light." Chapter 4, pg. 89

"She had a place to go. Sometimes that seemed like a blessing, sometimes (because it extended things, kept the hellish game going) like a curse, but either way, it was the only reason she was still herself, at least some of the time; the only reason she hadn't been eaten alive from the inside out." Chapter 5, pg. 119

"She looked for a flicker of humanity in the floating thing's eyes, the slightest sign of Seth, and saw nothing." Chapter 6, pg. 173

"In the Carver kitchen, the refugees lie on the floor with their hands laced over the backs of their heads and their faces pressed to the floor; around them the world seems to be tearing itself apart." Chapter 7, pg. 201

"At the moment of Kirsten Carver's death, Johnny was thinking of his literary agent, Bill Harris, and Bill's reaction to Poplar Street: pure, unadulterated horror." Chapter 8, pg. 233

"Things were starting to group together in his mind. Not fit together, at least not yet, but forming themselves naturally into what they had been taught to call a set back in Algebra I. The vans, which looked like props from a kids' Saturday matinee. The bird.



Now these violent green cactuses, like something you'd see in an energetic first-grader's picture." Chapter 9, pgs. 272-273

"The boy stood there with the pistol pressed against the side of his head just long enough for Steve Ames to hope that maybe he wasn't going to do it, that he'd had a change of heart at the penultimate moment, that last little vestibule of maybe not before the endless hallway of too late, and then Jim pulled the trigger." Chapter 10, pg. 329

"Audrey looked at her, still biting at her lips, then looked back at Johnny, appealing with her eyes for understanding. He didn't want to understand, not after all that had happened, especially not after seeing the terrible distortion in Jim Reed's face as the bullet slammed into his brain, but he thought maybe he did a little anyway. Like it or not." Chapter 11, pg. 400

"The storm is over. Johnny thinks that regulator time is over, too." Chapter 12, pg. 450



Topics for Discussion

Who is Seth Garin? What is his disability? How has he come to live on Poplar Street with Audrey Wyler? What lives inside Seth? What are some of Seth's favorite television shows? How do these shows begin to feature in the terrorization of the neighborhood? What does Audrey want to do about the evil think inside Seth? Why does Audrey not kill Seth? What happened to Audrey's husband? Why did she not try to rid Seth of the entity when this happened?

Who is Johnny Marinville? What does he do for a living? What does Johnny think of his career choice? Where did he get the idea? Why does Johnny blame himself when Jim Reed shoots Collie Entragian? What happens to Jim? Does Johnny blame himself for this as well? How does Johnny become the unofficial leader of the neighborhood? What does he do to rid the neighborhood of its torturer? What does Johnny say to the cops at the end of the novel? What does this mean? Has Johnny gone insane?

Who is Cary Ripton? What does Cary see at the Wyler house in the seconds it takes him to pass the house? What does Cary find himself thinking about when he stops to toss the Frisbee to the Reed twins? What is Cary's sport? What is his hope for the future? Why does Cary fear throwing the paper to Collie Entragian's house? What does he think will happen? What does happen? Does Cary see it coming?

Who is Cynthia Smith? How did she come to be on Poplar Street on this fateful afternoon? What does she do to try to protect the Carver children? Why does she put them in a truck? Why did Cynthia think she and the children were in danger? How does Cynthia later find herself in Doc Billingsley's house? What does Cynthia see on the street in front of the Billingsley house that causes her some fear and confusion? At whose death does Cynthia preside? How does Cynthia later end up in the Wyler house? What does she do there? What confession does Johnny Marinville make to Cynthia about his thoughts on how Audrey Wyler and Seth Garin met their deaths?

Who is Kim Geller? Why does she begin using racial slurs against Belinda Josephson? Are these slurs meant for Belinda specifically, or are they a way of acting out? What happens to Kim when she pushes it too far? Why is she banned to the living room of the Carver house? Why does Kim go outside when the vans appear again? What does Kim hope she will be able to achieve? Does she?

Who is Allen Symes? What is his role in the events on Poplar Street? What confession did Allen Symes leave behind when he died? Why did he lie to everyone about the Garin family's visit to China Pit? What really happened when the Garin's visited China Pit? What does this have to do with the events on Poplar Street two years later?

What is Mohonk? Why does Audrey go there often? How does she go there? What is the purpose of this exercise? How does Audrey feel when she returns from this place? What role does this place play at the end of the novel? How does this place play a role

in the final climactic moments of the novel? What might have happened to Audrey if she had not had this place to go to when Tak lived in her house?