

Sailor Song Study Guide

Sailor Song by Ken Kesey

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Plot Summary

Set in the near future, this novel follows the adventures of Ike Sallas, previously known as the Bakatcha Bandit. A famous social activist, Ike settles into a quiet life in a small Alaskan fishing village. The peace and quiet is upset by the arrival of a film crew led by Nick Levertov, an angry albino returned to seek revenge in his hometown. The production of the film brings out the worst in the town until all is made right again by the tirades of Mother Nature.

Ike Sallas came to public attention as the Bakatcha Bandit when he sprayed sewage over carnivals as a protest against the chemicals that gave fatal birth defects to his daughter. The stunts get him put in prison but also attract a large following of fans and supporters. After years in the social activist circuit, Ike retires to Alaska, where he seeks to carve out a simple life as a fisherman.

Ike's boss, Alice Levertov Carmody, has had a difficult life. Alice is a talented artist who is raped by her father while she is in high school. Her son, Nick, is an albino. Alice leaves him in foster care to pursue her art career. Her return to Alaska marks a change in her life. She sets up a hotel where she meets her husband, Mike Carmody. Mike leaves to buy a new boat and comes back with a new girlfriend, Willi. At first Carmody is upset, but eventually realizes her true feelings are for Ike.

Alice's son, Nick, arrives with the Foxcorp film crew to begin production of the film version of the children's book, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*. Nick is anxious to show the town how rich and powerful he has become. Ike recognizes Nick from his days in prison, when both of them served time together. Nick remembers Ike as well and marks him as one of many people that he wants to take revenge against for the problems he has had in his life.

Foxcorp, of course, has other plans for the small Alaskan seaside town. They want to turn it into amusement park. The townspeople squabble about how to divide the profits from the amusement park. Ike returns from a fishing trip to address the town and convince them not to sell out to the corporation. Ike's advice falls on deaf ears and the town pushes forward with its plans to turn itself into an amusement park. Ike leaves the meeting feeling defeated and rejected.

The plans for the amusement park are put on hold because of the strange weather patterns forming in Alaska and all over the world. Ike responds to the emergency call from his friends who are trapped in a strange storm. Though he is able to take them to safety, the storm sweeps Ike out to sea in his lifeboat. When he finds land again, he wanders in the fog until he sees the fireworks that have been set off in the town. He follows the lights to a reunion with Alice.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Ike Sallas wakes from a dream about his wife, Jeannie, many years ago. He hears a noise outside his home in Alaska. His roommate, Greer, is not there, so Ike goes out to investigate the sound. It turns out to be a cat with its head stuck in a mayonnaise jar. Ike frees the cat and gets scratched and bitten for his trouble. He hears a girl scream and thinks it is Louise Loop. He goes out and finds her being raped by a strange looking man. He pulls the man off of her. Her father and brother come out to see what is going on. The strange man claims to be Louise's husband. Louise's father tries to beat him up but Ike stops him. Louise sneaks up from behind and hits Ike on the head with a flashlight.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter introduces Ike Sallas as a man that always tries to do the right thing and is generally punished for it. At this point, the reader is not aware of Ike's past as a social activist, so Ike's behavior in rescuing first the cat and then Louise Loop foreshadows the revelation about Ike's past behavior. In many ways, both the cat and Louise Loop symbolize the ongoing problem in Ike's life. He wants to help, but his help is rejected, and he is often punished in some way for trying to help when he was not asked to. For the most part, this underlying life pattern is in contrast to Ike's stated worldview. On the surface, he claims that he wants to be left alone and does not want to get involved with other people's problems. In reality, however, he is always attracted to situations where he needs to rescue someone or something.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Many years earlier, a man named Paul Peterson builds an icehouse. When the icehouse goes out of business, he brings in pigs to breed. A tsunami in 1994 destroys the icehouse. The pigs run wild. Omar Loop arrives and creates a pig slaughterhouse and bowling alley on the property. He, his sons, and his daughter, Louise, live in the slaughterhouse.

Ike regains consciousness in this house where Louise attempts to nurse him and apologizes for hurting him. He leaves her, hoping to make a scheduled fishing trip with his boss, Alice Carmody. Arriving home, he sees his friend Greer's old dog, Marley. He goes out to the docks but Alice has already left on his boat. His friend, Greer, however, is waiting behind on a second, very old, boat. At several points, others refer to Ike as the Bakatcha Bandit.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The reader gets the first hints about Ike's past life as the Bakatcha Bandit. It is clear that this nickname refers to something that a wide range of people are familiar with. Along with this mystery, the reader also learns more about the small town of Kuinak. The introduction of the Loop family puts the town of Kuinak in an interesting light and sets the stage for introducing the other characters that choose to call this place home. The irony of the Loop family's prosperity from mountains of garbage foreshadows the irony of the other characters yet to be introduced, who have also come to Kuinak to make the best out of life's problems.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Ike and Greer work for Alice Carmody and her husband, Mike. Mike has gone south to buy a new boat and has been missing for several weeks. In order not to miss the fishing season, Alice, Ike, and Greer put in extra work to make up for Mike's absence. Alice takes Ike's boat, the Sue Z, and Ike and Greer take the old Columbine. Ike and Greer go out to an empty place and catch a lot of fish. While they are out, they drink scoot, a narcotic type of tea, and discuss the events of the last evening, including meeting the strange albino husband of Louise Loop.

Ike tells the story of another albino he met in prison, a man nicknamed St. Nick. He describes the brutal treatment that St. Nick receives in prison. When they come back to the dock, they see a fancy yacht that Greer identifies as the yacht of a famous movie director, Gerhardt Steubins. There are rumors that a movie will be filmed in the area. On the dock, Alice Carmody introduces them to her albino son, Nick Levertov.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The fictional drink, scoot, is an interesting symbol for the change in lifestyle that Kesey creates for his fictional future world. Kesey goes to great pains to show that the drugs present throughout the twentieth century have all been eliminated in the overarching social controls that he imagines have taken over the future. Scoot is also the combination of eastern and western cultures because it mixes green and black teas. At the same time, scoot is supposedly natural and organic, making it contrast with the overly technological world that Kesey's characters inhabit.

Ike's story about his albino prison mate turns out to be more ironic than he thinks. The connection between the albino he met the previous night, the albino he met in prison, and finally his introduction to Alice's albino son becomes ironic to the point of being hard to believe. All of these connections highlight the special qualities of Nick Levertov and provide him with a well-rounded introduction to the novel.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The history of Alaska, from its early explorations by sailors like Bering and Magellan, to its current appearance as illustrated in the description of Kuinak and the surrounding bay, are explained. Briefly thought to be an outlet from the mythical Northwest Passage, Kuinak is generally abandoned by everyone except for the native inhabitants and some adventurers looking for a new life. Ike lives in a red trailer on the edge of town and wishes to be left alone.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The historical descriptions of Kuinak continue on to show the development of the town, almost as a character itself. Kuinak and the surrounding area are explored with a possible promising future only to be shown time and time again that Kuinak does not live up to its promise. Kuinak's connection to the sought-out Northwest Passage is one of many attempts to link Kuinak with the rest of the world and the course of development that is taking place in the rest of the world. Kuinak's isolation and seeming lack of monetary value allow the locals to have some sense of freedom from the rest of the world. This makes it a perfect setting for those like Ike and Alice, who seek to escape from the world in order to escape from their past.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Alice Levertov is born in Kuinak, the daughter of a native woman and a Russian sailor. Raised Russian Orthodox, Alice is a talented artist. In high school, she gives birth to an albino son, Nicholas. After high school, she gets a scholarship and goes to art school in San Francisco, leaving her son in foster care. Eventually she returns to Kuinak to get her share of property from the tribe. She stays and opens a hotel, the Bear Flag Inn. During her time in Kuinak, she becomes a famously angry drunk. She marries Mike Carmody, a wealthy sailor who stays at her hotel. Her marriage settles down her drinking problem.

Nicholas and Foxcorp have arrived to film a version of a popular children's book, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*. At the party, Alice gets drunk off champagne and storms into town. After a drunken fight with one of the Loop brothers, she gets a ride home from Ike. She returns to her hotel and falls asleep drunk.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Alice's life story symbolizes the area that she comes from. Her attempts to carve out a different path for herself lead her to leave the area for a significant period of time. On her return, however, the personal attachments outweigh her need for self-fulfillment. Her decision to stay in Kuinak is not motivated by a love for her native land or for her tribal partners. Instead, she stays out of spite, showing that her attempts to separate herself from her past have failed. Alice is generally unhappy in Kuinak and shows this through her long bouts of drunken anger. Her marriage to Mike shows a temporary shift in this, allowing her to find some measure of contentment in her chosen role.

The reader learns of the existence of the children's book, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*, which will be an ongoing metaphor for life in the Far North. Alice, raised in Alaska of half tribal heritage, has a complicated relationship with this story and the way that it presents Native Alaskan life.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Residents of Kuinak form the Underdog Club after a trip to a football game where they were accompanied by their dogs. In Kuinak, they are an important social group, particularly involved in animal rights issues and staging parades and other community events. Foxcorp has started to take over the town in preparation for the movie. Alice is chosen to be Art Director for the film. When the members learn that the film crews are handing out invitations to a party, they turn to their acting president, Greer, to get them into the party. Greer tells them he has no control over that, and they are angry with him. At the last minute, Nick arrives with invitations for everyone in the club. He also tells Ike that the director, Gerhardt Steubins, has asked to see him personally.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Though the Underdog Club puts on the image of self-reliance and the recreation of social order, it wants to be part of the Foxcorp movie plans as much as everyone else in town. This is ironic, given the long-standing organization's history of independence and concentration on non-monetary issues. Ike's meeting with the town leaders on the Foxcorp yacht further demonstrates the change in Kuinak's priorities in light of their opportunity to make easy money.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Everyone is very excited about the Foxcorp movie party. Everyone who does not have an invitation comes down to the docks to hang around the ship. The Cherry Tarts, a female song-and-dance team, flies in to entertain the crowd. On the boat, Ike encounters Nick, his wife Louise, and his mother Alice. Ike goes to a special meeting with Gerhardt Steubins and all the town leaders. Steubins presents the plans for the film. He invites the town leaders to invest in the production in order to have a share of the profits after the film is finished. After the meeting, Steubins takes Ike aside for a private meeting. First, he tells Ike how he admires him for his heroism as the Bakatcha Bandit. He warns Ike not to invest in the project and warns him that Nick is not to be trusted.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The reaction of everyone in the town to the arrival of the Foxcorp yacht and the promise of revenue from the movie project, show how quickly the fancy trappings of the corporation have turned the small town's head. While everyone was content in their isolated town with its simple pleasures, everyone at the meeting is eager and greedy for the imagined financial rewards of selling their town and its unique culture to a corporate entity. This change in the outlook of the town has serious consequences for Ike, particularly given his past as the Bakatcha Bandit.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Ike and Greer go to Skagway to pick up their friend, Billy Bellisarius. During the flight there, Ike remembers the missions he used to fly for the CIA in Central America. He also remembers how the Bakatcha Bandit started. When he is a crop duster in California, his daughter dies of birth defects. His first act of revenge is spraying sewage over a carnival. He continues spraying sewage over carnivals until he is sent to prison. Others continue the same practice after Ike goes to jail.

When they arrive in Skagway, they find that Reverend Greener, a cult leader who leads a commune, took Billy. Ike and Greer go to rescue him. When they get there, they also find Archie Culligan, a traveling partner of Mike Carmody's. During an argument with Greener, Ike knocks him out with a special trick. Ike, Greer, Billy, and Archie escape in a railway car. The trip back to Skagway nearly kills them all, but on arrival, they learn that Reverend Greener is looking for them in the town.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The true nature of the Bakatcha Bandit nickname is finally explained. Ike's complicated relationship to authority, including his career in the Navy as well as his social protests, shows why he is avoiding the necessary confrontations with the Foxcorp film company and the plans it has for Kuinak. Ike's descriptions of his role as the Bakatcha Bandit, as well as other hints that the narrator drops about the change in social consciousness, show the perspective that Ike has on the involvement of the individual in society and how difficult it is to effect social change. At this point in his life, Ike has given up on many of the ideas that he once had, including his personal involvement in the fight for individual freedom.

Reverend Greener is an interesting and ironic figure because of Ike's past social activism. Greener has also cut himself off from society and is attempting to create a new world order on his rural commune. Unlike Ike, Greener has not given up on his dreams of changing the world, and he fights very hard in order to further his dream. The negative portrayal of Greener's social experiment contrasts to those that Ike has mentioned in his overall catalog of what he believes are positive forces for social change.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Alice clears out some of her hotel rooms to accommodate the cast of the movie. When she goes to Ike's house to feed his dog, she finds a copy of the book, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*. She reads the story, written by a schoolteacher in New Jersey, about the fictional Sea Cliff Clan.

Shoola is the daughter of the chief. Eemook is deformed and is raised by an old woman, Umlalagic. Eemook and Shoola are friends. One day, the two play a game, calling the spirits of the sea. When they return to the longhouse, a huge storm frightens everyone. A stranger knocks on the door. He has yellow hair and green eyes. All the women of the tribe are fascinated. He beats Umlalagic in a shadow puppet contest by creating scary dragon shapes. Later that night, Eemook wakes up to discover all the women naked on the beach and saves Shoola. The next day, Eemook exposes the stranger as a sea monster. The tribe pushes him off a cliff. The next spring, all the women except Shoola give birth to blonde children. They throw them into the sea where they become the Sea Lion People.

After returning to her home, Alice meets the cast, all of whom came from an isolated part of Alaska. Her son, Nick, reveals that he will play the Sea Lion King.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The story of *Shoola and the Sea Lion* stands in contrast to the life of the Native Alaskans who appear throughout the novel. Though this story is presented as a children's story, its subject matter does not seem to be particularly suited to children. The fictional tribe that is the basis for the story is presented in a very negative light with the supposed intention of being a truthful representation of native life. It is very clearly about the killing of the disabled, and female infants. This part of the story is made more ironic by Alice's own experience in evicting a Native Alaskan family from her hotel. The incest and drug abuse that she witnesses in that family are explained by comments that these practices were once common among Native Alaskan tribes.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Michael Carmody is born in England and sails the world before settling down in Alaska. When he goes to pick up his new boat, he meets Wilhelmina Hardesty, a fun-loving woman from Texas, and takes the longest route to return home so he can enjoy his time with her. They pick up Ike, Greer, Billy, and Archie and help carry them back to Kuinak. During the voyage, they stop and crash a Korean party, where Carmody wins a dance contest. On the last part of the journey, they stop and check their fish traps. They discover some strange sea creatures that they call the slime eels. When they finally approach Kuinak, they see the town transformed into a movie set.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Life on Mike Carmody's yacht is removed from real life and all the action that takes place on it symbolizes the liberty that the crew feels when they are cut off from the social and domestic responsibilities of life in the rest of the world. The journey is prolonged for as long as possible in order to avoid the responsibilities at home. For Carmody, this means the confrontation between his wife and his new girlfriend. For Ike, this means the confrontation with Nick and the changes that are quickly taking place in Kuinak.

This chapter makes many interesting hints about the state of the world in the imagined future. Often the United Nations plays a significant role in the criticism that the narrator makes about life in this future time. Similarly, the slime eels represent the large-scale environmental changes that the narrator mentions from time to time, usually with the implication that these changes have been caused by human intervention in the natural world.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The preparations for the film are stalled by two fighting sea lions. Alice goes out to meet her husband's boat. On her way out, she crashes her motorbike into the star of the movie, who is riding topless. This girl prefers to be called by her character's name, Shoola. Shoola and Alice go into town to have lunch together. Shoola describes her background in the Far North. Leaving the restaurant, they meet the group from the boat. Shoola falls in love with Ike at first site. Alice realizes that Carmody has returned with another woman, Willi.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The meeting between Alice and Shoola is the meeting between the modern woman and the tribal one. Alice's conflicting thoughts about her tribal heritage come to the forefront when she speaks with Shoola. The symbolic value of Shoola, who refuses to be called by her real name and instead seeks to be "Shoola" an imaginary girl, for Alice lies in her experiences living in isolation and the worldview that she presents based on her experience. While Alice has traveled away from Alaska and has often sought to distance herself from her tribal heritage, Shoola embraces her heritage and generally dismisses her individuality.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Alice and Willi have an awkward meeting. In order to get out of the place, Alice offers to drive Ike and Shoola home. When they reach the hotel, Ike falls asleep in the van. Alice, Shoola, and Shoola's little sisters wake him up. They drive Ike back to his trailer. Meanwhile, the movie crew has transformed the town. All the old buildings are changed and even Ike's old trailer has been marked by the film crew.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The transformation of the town into a movie set provides an interesting image of a unique place selling the trappings of culture that are imagined by outsiders. While the film seeks an authentic Native Alaskan setting, all the details correspond to an imagined Native Alaskan setting, such as that of the children's story, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*, instead of a real place. The town is eager to participate in this process. One of the symbols that emphasizes the irony of the project is the series of totem poles that are carved by local artists. The totem poles are not made from natural materials and the images that are carved in the totem poles do not represent traditional images for the tribe in the area. However, these fake totem poles are designed in this way so that they last longer and present the imagined image of Native Alaskan culture.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Mike Carmody sneaks out of the bar, trying to avoid a confrontation with Willi. When he returns to his boat, he is surprised to find Gerhardt Steubins on board. The two have a drink together until two of Steubins' film crew arrive. Mike and Steubins escape on a small boat and look for a place to hide. Steubins describes his own life, beginning as a professional sailor and ending as a failed film director. Mike takes them to a hidden bay and then up to his mansion on the hill. He is surprised to see a longhouse facade over his house but Steubins explains that Alice put it up for the filming of the movie. The two men go inside and bond over billiards and absinthe.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Mike Carmody and Gerhardt Steubins bond as independent men who seek an escape from their personal problems. Mike's escape from Alice and Willi follows the same logic as Steubins' escape from the film contacts. Both men try to put off the inevitable consequences of their actions and position in life. Carmody's home becomes a symbol for this threatened masculine independence. The sights and smells of the house are distinctly male, including the alcohol, the cigar smoke, and the billiards table. All of these reflect a very old fashioned, traditional view of masculinity and the separateness of a male-only society as opposed to one where men and women interact with each other.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

A big storm hits the Alaskan coast. After the storm finishes, no one can find Steubins and Carmody. There is a huge search involving international media. Alice goes to Ike for help in finding her husband. During this time, Alice realizes she has feelings for Ike. Alice and Ike find Steubins and Carmody at the house. They hold a press conference announcing the rescue. Nick and his assistant, Clark B Clark, drive Ike home, where they find Louise and Greer. The dog, Marley, attacks Nick. Nick hits the dog with his car as he drives away.

Clark B Clark describes Nick's rise to power in the entertainment industry. Beginning as a scoot dealer, Nick makes powerful friends in Hollywood. Nick personally ruined the lives of several people ahead of him in order to rise through the industry. Nick recalls an incident in jail in which Ike exposed a police warden for drinking the urine of the random drug testing.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The storm that hits Kuinak symbolizes the power of nature to destroy human endeavors. The fake town that the film crew created is swept away, leaving the town as it was before Foxcorp arrived. The reader gains new insights into Nick's character. His rise to power shows his ruthless nature and foreshadows the death and destruction that he will be accused of during his stay in Kuinak.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The Underdog Club has a funeral for Marley. Wayne, the newspaper reporter for the area, learns that Ike suspects Nick of plans of revenge, including the mysterious disappearance of Louise Loop's father. At the funeral, Shoola brings Ike a letter from Alice, asking him and Greer to meet her the next day to go out on Carmody's new boat. Shoola also offers Ike a new puppy. Ike misunderstands her offer and thinks she is offering herself. She gets very angry and expresses her wish to return home where she understands people.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The irony for the Underdog Club is also very interesting. The Underdog's role as security for Foxcorp is undermined by their inability to secure the town from the forces of nature. At the same time, their original social mission to serve and protect animals returns to the forefront. The dog cemetery is undamaged by the massive storm, and the Club is reminded of its true purpose. The funeral for Marley is one of the last occasions when the Underdog Club is united around a common idea.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Carmody, Greer, and Ike are out on the fishing boat for days. They do not know how to use the fancy new equipment and are unable to catch any fish. Finally, the computer tells them that there is a large school of fish. When they arrive, however, they find a collection of fish and slime eels feeding off a dead body. They identify the body as Omar Loop, the missing father of Louise Loop. They receive an urgent telephone message to return to the town for an emergency meeting of the Underdogs. Foxcorp has been trying to buy the Underdog property and the men are needed to keep the town from making a mistake in selling to Foxcorp.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The irony of the new fishing boat is that it is designed to make fishing effortless but that the experienced fishermen of the crew cannot figure out how to make it work. Like much of the technology presented in the novel, the new fishing boat's specialized equipment does not work and simply complicates what is otherwise a straightforward task.

Ike is given the opportunity to return to his role as a social activist. The urgent message asking him to return to Kuinak and speak to the Underdog Club represents a larger message for Ike to return to his previous ideals and to participate in society again, both of which he has been avoiding during his time in Kuinak.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Leonard Smalls is the animal trainer on the set. He is instructed to teach the cast to interact with the tame sea lion, Harry. Only Shoola arrives, saying the disabled boy, who was supposed to play Eemook, has been written out of the movie. Shoola is indifferent to the sea lion, and spends the time chewing gum. The next day, she brings more gum to entice Harry. After Harry succeeds in getting gum, he practices chewing it with Shoola. One day, Shoola and Harry have a strange connection through eye contact. Shoola leaves but Leonard sees something strange in her eyes before she goes. Harry the sea lion returns to his scared state and only wants the safety of his cage.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The connection between Shoola and the sea lion shows that she maintains a link to nature that the townspeople of Kuinak do not. The incidents with the sea lion reinforce her role as a representative of Native Alaska as well as nature in general. Unlike the townspeople of Kuinak, Shoola is not concerned about money or about how to profit from the transformation of the town into a showplace for fake Native Alaskan culture. She sees the events in Kuinak in terms of a much more important relationship with her own home and its strong connections of nature and traditions. To Shoola, the endeavors of the townspeople of Kuinak are interesting but unimportant, just as the tame sea lion is. Her confrontation with the tame sea lion shows that she is not fooled by the attempts to mimic and control nature.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Ike and his friends arrive at the Underdog Club where everyone in town has gathered to discuss the financial arrangements of turning the town into an amusement park. Ike makes a speech from Thomas Paine, but nobody listens to him. As he is sneaking out of the building, he discovers Bellisarius hiding in a storage closet. He urges Ike to let fate, which he calls Deuce, take over. As Ike walks home, Nick's limo pulls up and gives him a ride part way. When Ike finally arrives home, he meets Louise Loop wandering around, claiming that someone is trying to kill her. He takes Louise home with him. A group of young people, possibly led by Shoola, appears at Ike's trailer, telling him that they support him.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Ike is shocked by the reaction that he receives from the town meeting. He believed that all he had to do was go through the same routines that had once won him so much praise in the social activist circuit. However, he completely misreads his audience in Kuinak and is at a loss to communicate with them. Ike's speech is disappointing to many people in Kuinak, who expected something more meaningful to come from such a famous activist. Billy Bellisarius's position gives an ironic twist to how Ike feels. He urges Ike to stop trying to change things and allow fate to handle everything. This message does not comfort Ike as he begins to reevaluate his role in the world, his sense of personal power, and his sense of individuality.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Alice stays at the town meeting longer than she expected to. Her husband goes to the bar with Willi. Alice eventually goes home and gets drunk. Shoola finds her there and talks to her about her husband and about Ike. Alice realizes she should not have acted as she did toward Mike. She drives out to see Ike. They drink together. Ike describes his hatred for Nick. Ike's comments about Nick's absent father make Alice suddenly attack him. She confesses that Nick is the result of her rape by her drunken father. Ike and Alice have sex. After they have sex, Alice watches the Northern Lights. Suddenly, the peace is broken by Louise, who is screaming that her father's slaughterhouse has been burned.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Just as Ike has begun to reevaluate his life and purpose, Alice has also begun to rethink her own decisions. She recognizes that her reaction to Carmody's infidelity is based more on her need for social approval than her real feelings for her husband. Like Ike, she is unsure of how to change her life to reflect her real feelings. She goes out to see Ike, but has a hard time communicating her feelings to him. Once again, alcohol is the necessary truth serum to help her express her feelings. Her confessions about her father and her son show the depth of the anger within her and how long she has kept her true story a secret. The sex between Ike and Alice symbolizes the attempt of each of them to regain their true self by losing it in each other.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Shoola's little sister, Nell, discovers a mysterious object under the production building. The film crew stops because the sea lions have escaped. The Foxcorp yacht has been vandalized with sewage, similar to how Ike once vandalized carnivals. An urgent message comes from the crew of the Cobra. They have been caught in a freak storm that spins the boat in tight circles. Ike and the Foxcorp yacht go to rescue them. Ike takes a small boat out to get them. On the first trip, he takes most of the Cobra crew to the yacht. He goes back to get Greer, who describes the strange purple clouds that caused the storm. Another purple cloud appears. Greer manages to swim to the yacht but Ike is stranded on the lifeboat, where all the instruments have died. He drifts further away from the yacht.

Chapter 20 Analysis

The conflict between humans and nature that began when Foxcorp began changing the town has escalated to a new level. The strange purple cloud that disrupts the normal patterns of the sea comes after repeated hints of environmental destruction caused by people. The purple cloud does what Ike and others could not. It puts an immediate stop to the plans of Foxcorp to build an amusement park and tears down the dreams of the townspeople to profit from the sale of their heritage.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

The storm that destroyed the Cobra affects the whole world. Radio contact throughout the world goes out and everyone thinks that the world is ending. Ike's small boat continues to drift in the wild storm. In Kuinak, the electricity and water are out. Father Pribilof prays throughout the first night of the storm. He falls ill but is discovered by Shoola and her friends, who help him heal and protect him. Alice feels that Ike is probably dead. She curses the sea for taking everyone she has loved. On the Fourth of July, the town stages a fireworks display with the leftover fireworks that they have around. The fireworks guide Ike through the fog to Kuinak, where he is reunited with Alice.

Chapter 21 Analysis

The storm manages to do all the things that Ike was unable to. The storm represents Ike's frustration at his inability to change the world and takes Ike's cause to a worldwide level, wiping out human infrastructure on a global scale. Unlike Ike's personal stunts as the Bakatcha Bandit, the storm exercises complete and unrelenting natural justice on the human world. In this way, the storm shows the power of nature to take back what has been robbed from it while individual human endeavors pale in comparison.



Characters

Isaak Sallas

Ike Sallas is a former Navy pilot who spent much of his youth in jail due to his social activist protests. As a crop duster in California, he is angered by the birth defects that kill his small daughter. He takes his revenge by dropping sewage on children at carnivals. After finishing his jail time, he goes to Alaska to start over again. His fame follows him. He is known as the Bakatcha Bandit, and everyone believes that he is a freedom fighter of some kind.

In Alaska, Ike works on fishing boats and lives in a small trailer with his friend, Greer. His complicated relationship with his boss, Alice Levertov Carmody, slowly progresses from work-related to romantic. During the Foxcorp takeover of the town, Ike tries the same lines that he once used while he was the Bakatcha Bandit. These lines fail to win over the crowd, and he is left feeling rejected. Ike tries to redeem himself by rescuing his friends from the Cobra. While he manages to rescue his friends, he is left in the sea during the violent storm. He is guided by the fireworks for the Fourth of July celebration and is able to make it back to Kuinak.

Greer

Greer is Ike's roommate. Born in Jamaica, Greer works in the fishing industry with Ike, Alice, and Mike. Greer is very scared of drowning and always wears protective gear when he goes out on the boat. Greer thinks of himself as a ladies' man and often gets in trouble because of his sexual activities. He speaks with an exaggerated French accent.

Alice Levertov Carmody

Alice is the daughter of a native woman and a Russian sailor. She grows up in Kuinak and shows promise as an artist. While a teenager, she is raped by her father and gives birth to an albino son, Nick. Alice gets a scholarship to go to college and chooses to go to art school in San Francisco. She leaves Nick to be raised in foster care in Alaska. Many years later, she returns to Alaska to claim her share of tribal property. She decides to stay and opens a hotel. Alice develops a reputation as an angry drunk. This changes when she marries Mike Carmody, an English sailor.

When Nick returns to Alaska, he makes Alice the art director of the movie. Alice is shocked when her husband returns from a boat buying trip with another woman, but she forgives him when she realizes that she really loves Ike. After the storm, she is very upset that Ike appears to be dead, but is happy to be reunited with him on the fourth of July.



Mike Carmody

Mike Carmody is raised in England by his grandmother and great-grandmother. He chooses to become a sailor and travels all over the world. As an old man, he retires to Alaska, where he meets and marries Alice. He is unhappy in his marriage, so when he goes south to buy a new boat, he meets another woman, Willi, and brings her home with him. Mike tries to escape the situation he has created with his wife and girlfriend by going on long fishing trips.

Nick Levertov

Nick Levertov is born an albino. His mother, Alice, leaves him to be raised in foster care in Alaska. He marries Louise Loop, one of the women in Kuinak. As an adult, Nick spends some time in jail, where he is brutally raped by the guards and other inmates. He and Ike served in jail at the same time and remember each other very well. Nick works his way up in the entertainment industry, beginning as a scout dealer and eventually receiving a deciding role in Foxcorp. Nick brings the film company to Alaska to film a version of the children's book, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*. During the production of the film, Nick becomes a very important person in the community. He seeks his revenge on the town, and on some people in particular. He is rumored to be behind the death of Omar Loop, his father-in-law.

Louise Loop

Louise Loop's family owns the local bowling alley and slaughterhouse. She is raised among the pigs and filth of the slaughterhouse. At some point, she marries Nick Levertov. When Nick's film crew comes to town, Louise is very proud of her Hollywood connections. Over time, however, she begins to suspect that Nick killed her father and is trying to kill her.

Shoola

Shoola is the name of a fictional character in the book from which the film, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*, is being produced. The girl chosen to play the title character of Shoola prefers the name of her character to her real name. Shoola is from the Far North, where her contact with the world is limited to missionaries. She and her family are brought to Kuinak to star in the movie. She falls in love with Ike, and gathers a crowd of local teenagers around her.

Wilhelmina Hardesty

Willi is a waitress from Texas who meets Mike Carmody on his trip to buy a new boat. She and Mike enjoy each other's company so she joins him on his new boat. They sail



together to Mike's home in Kuinak, where Willi meets Mike's wife, Alice. Willi is very angry when she discovers that Mike has lied to her, but she eventually reconciles with him.

Reverend Greener

Reverend Greener has set up a religious cult in rural Alaska. He has many wives, one of which is the former wife of Billy Bellisarius. When Billy goes to Skagway to get more scoot, he runs into Reverend Greener, is kidnapped, and taken to the commune. With Ike's help, Billy manages to escape from the commune. Greene pursues the group all the way to Kuinak, where he tries to take over the local Russian Orthodox Church.

Clark B Clark

Clark B Clark is Nick Levertov's assistant. The two men have worked together in the entertainment industry for many years. Clark B Clark counts on Nick to have a plan for every situation.

Gerhardt Steubins

Gerhardt Steubins is the name assumed by a young American man. He begins by pretending to be a ship captain and eventually becomes a film director. After a long series of failed films, he becomes the figurehead of Foxcorp films, but no longer has any real influence over the entertainment industry.

Billy Bellisarius

Billy Bellisarius is the president of the Underdog Club. He goes to Skagway to buy more scoot and gets kidnapped by Reverend Greener. Though Ike rescues him from the Reverend, Billy is always worried the Greener will come and kidnap him again. Eventually he hides out in the storage room of the Underdog Club where he is found dead.



Objects/Places

Kuinak, Alaska

Kuinak is a seaside town populated mainly by fishermen and other people who make their living from the sea.

The Columbine

The Columbine is an older boat owned by Mike Carmody and his wife, Alice.

The Sue - Z

The Sue - Z is a small boat owned by Ike.

Ike's Trailer

Ike's trailer is painted bright red and located on the edge of town.

The Crabbe Potte

The Crabbe Potte is the bar and restaurant in Kuinak where Alice has had many drunken episodes.

The Bear Flag Inn

Alice owns The Bear Flag Inn. The cast of the movie stays here during their time in Kuinak.

Foxcorp

Foxcorp is the film company led by Gerhardt Steubins that comes to Kuinak to film a movie.

The Underdog Club

The Underdog Club is an organization formed by locals in Kuinak to celebrate their relationships with their dogs.



Skagway

Skagway is a city in Alaska.

The Cobra

The name given to Mike Carmody's new boat by a Korean fishing boat is The Cobra.

Scoot

Scoot is a type of narcotic developed by combining a special type of black tea with a special type of green tea.

DEAP

The acronym for Descendants of Early Aboriginal Peoples, which is used to refer to those people in Alaska who come from the indigenous Alaskan tribes.

Shoola and the Sea Lion

Shoola and the Sea Lion is a children's story written by a schoolteacher in New Jersey about life in an Alaskan tribe. This story is developed into a movie, which is filmed in Kuinak.

Social Sensitivity

"The End of the World is just around the corner . . . ," proclaims Ken Kesey in *Sailor Song*. From his opening description of a smoking, hog-filled garbage dump to his concluding depiction of an icy gale and a sun obscured by banks of blue-grey mist, Kesey portrays an environmental doomsday. Focusing upon the small community of Kuinak, Alaska approximately thirty years in the future, Kesey graphically presents the loss of vital fishing grounds, the effects of ozone depletion, the development of gigantic mutated sea creatures resulting from accidents with Trident missiles, and the shocking decline in the number of male high school students. He also suggests that Ike Sallas's participation in "the subversion of a natural process in the name of Bug-Free Drug-Free Thug-Free World" may have contributed to the death of his daughter. Humanity in Kesey's novel is paying for ecological abuse.

A second issue of concern for Kesey is exposing the artificiality of what he terms the "Hollywood Dream Machine." From the first appearance of the luxurious Silver Fox yacht owned by Foxcorp, Kesey portrays Hollywood's invasion of the sleepy town of Kuinak as ominous, despite the appeal of the scantily clad, red-headed singing group known as the Cherry Tarts, the free booze, and the promises of "big bucks, hot deals and high times." Kesey is clearly disturbed by the idea that the Alaskan frontier, which he considers "the Last Ditch of the Pioneer Dream," can be prettified by false fronts and scrubbed pavement and transformed into a Disney World theme park.

Techniques

Perhaps the cover art for *Sailor Song* best reveals Kesey's techniques in this novel. It is a red and yellow bull's eye splattered with black ink. There is some sense of a pattern, of the author's attempt to hit the center of the bull's eye, but splatters upon the narrative produce chaos. As a number of reviewers suggest, the novel is "crazily plotted"; they use such adjectives as "funky," "quirky," and "madcap" to describe the story—a story that includes a funeral service for the dog Marley conducted by a fraternal organization called The Loyal Order of the Underdogs, a sea lion trained by giving it bubblegum, a bawdy ditty about Polarpussy, a bare-breasted motorbike rider, and a bloated corpse with a bowling ball dangling from its crotch.

Moreover, Kesey's shifts in point of view can be dizzying. Most of the narrative is related in the third-person omniscient point of view, but Kesey does sometimes move to rendering the consciousness of particular characters, including Alice Carmody, Clark B. Clark, Father Pribilof, the dog Marley, and three crows.

At one point in portraying the indecision of a young Eskimo child, Kesey even abruptly shifts from third-person omniscient to first person within the same paragraph.

Further adding to the wildness of the presentation is Kesey's rendering of a number of dialects and speech patterns, including Greer's unique combination of French, English, and Bimini slang, Dr.

Julius Beck's stuttering, Ike's rendition of a Thomas Paine speech, Alice Carmody's alcoholic tirades, and Gerhardt Steubins' Southern drawl. The insertion of the text of his children's novel *The Sea Lion* (1991), songs, an Indian story told by Shook, and screenplay directions add to the chaos.



Themes

Themes

In the seventh chapter of *Sailor Song*, ninety-four-year-old Father Pribilof delivers an impassioned sermon based upon a text from Ecclesiastes: "For O, man knoweth not his time! And as fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of man snared in an evil time." Wisely, the priest aptly defines the plight of the residents of Kuinak, for they are most definitely ensnared in an evil time.

In his version of T. S. Eliot's poems "The Waste Land" (1922), Kesey presents a host of ills. Many people are drug-dependent; some choosing alcohol, others the latest trend in stimulants—scoot, made from 'brewing special black and herbal green teas. Physical and moral filth abounds, as symbolized by the hagfish, slimey predators who invade the body and feed off of decaying flesh. In a startling scene Kesey presents an Eskimo woman justifying her husband's act of incest with his three daughters by observing nonchalantly, "This is not no big thing. As a matter of historical fact you know, a lot of the old chieftains used to enjoy relationships" with their offspring.

In addition, Alice Carmody reveals that her son is the product of sexual violation by her "degenerate Russian son-of-abitch father." Some view murder as just a means of advancing land development, and even the ideal of democracy has devolved into the credo "The Dumb is Always Righter Than the Smart Because There's More of Us!" Quoting from Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Alice Carmody observes, "It's a wicked world in all meridians . . ." To her statement, Ken Kesey seems to murmur "Amen."

However, Kesey does not leave readers in an incurable state of despondency. Just as Father Pribilof's sermon reveals that a poor but wise man delivered a little town from the great king who besieged it, so Kesey suggests that Isaak Sallas, his "outof-shape savior," will deliver Kuinak from Nicholas Levertov's control. In a reenactment of Noah's and his family's salvation from the Flood complete with rainbow colors and an assortment of nature's creatures, Kesey implies that through love, individual acts of heroism, and unselfish community spirit, Kuinak—and perhaps the world itself—will thrive.

Social activism

In this tale of the near future, there are many hints scattered throughout the novel of the various social activist organizations and events that have shaped the world. Kesey's own role in the social activism of the 1960s and the accompanying disillusionment that he refers to as the "Nasty Nineties" takes a strong role in the development of the novel. By presenting a world that is beyond the help that social activism believes is possible, Kesey demonstrates the disenchantment of his own generation.



Ike Sallas' social activism takes an interesting and unique form. He has clear reasons for his disillusionment with society based on the death of his daughter and the break up of his marriage. His choice of social protest, accompanied by the comical nickname of Bakatcha Bandit, is difficult to understand in relation to promoting real social change. His decision to dump sewage on children at carnivals seems an odd choice and does not make a coherent statement. In the novel, however, the action is treated with great seriousness. It leads to Ike's role as a regular speaker at social activist meetings, such as the Old Green organization that is linked to environmental terrorism.

Ike receives overwhelming respect and fame based on his role as the Bakatcha Bandit. Even the figurehead of Foxcorp, Gerhardt Steubins, claims to have been inspired by him. Ike's reputation precedes him when he goes to address the Underdog Club about the sale of the town to Foxcorp. He approaches this meeting with the same routine that was so often successful in the past and that earned him such a positive reputation. The failure of this speech is the final blow to Ike's vision of social change. Throughout the novel, Ike's avoidance of such issues builds up to this final defeat, leaving him without anything left to believe in.

Technology

Technology is often presented in an offhand way throughout the novel as the narrator refers to various inventions that are supposed to be standard in the near future. Technology is often shown to be either the tool of unimaginative or bad people or to have no real relevance to the important things in life. Technology is often blamed for the changes that have taken place in society, including many of the social problems that are solved by technology in the novel.

Nick Levertov and his Foxcorp friends use technology to control their world. The complicated surveillance footage that Nick has access to, allows him to monitor various locations all over Kuinak from his control room on the yacht and in his limo. Nick shows these gadgets to Ike to try to impress him and show his power. Clark B Clark, Nick's assistant, uses sophisticated devices to send information to his boss and record the actions of those around him.

Mike Carmody's boat, the Cobra, is outfitted with a million new and fancy devices designed to make deep-sea fishing effortless. However, Mike and his crew can never figure out how to use these devices and are left to their own knowledge and experience to guide them. The technology of the boat seeks to devalue that knowledge and experience by making fishing so simple that an untrained child could do it. The technology on the boat is shown to be inadequate to carry out the actions that it claims it can do and it limited to the abilities of the human crew.

Technology plays an interesting role in the social problems of the world. The narrator describes the eradication of AIDS through a medical treatment that also wipes out the male sex drive. Similarly, special chemicals that destroy the ability of the plants to



reproduce wipe out marijuana and other drugs. The narrator presents a world in which technology makes humanity sterile and removes their sensual pleasures.

Nature

Nature is at the forefront of the negative changes that Kesey predicts for the near future. The defense of the natural environment is presented as one of the last causes supported by social activists throughout the world before being beaten down by corporate and individual greed. Nature, however, also triumphs over human endeavors to control and destroy it.

Many of the social activist activities in the novel center on the environment. Ike's own social protest results from the corporate control of agriculture that uses machines and chemicals to raise better crops but contaminates the air and water of the people who live nearby. Ike's daughter dies of birth defects because her exposure to these toxins is too much for her small body. Ike blames her death on the corporate system that pollutes the environment and attempts to show the effects of pollution by dumping sewage on the playgrounds of the rich.

The efforts of the United Nations to defend the environment is often mentioned in the novel, usually by detailing the failure or hypocrisy of the UN or any social organization to hold back developments that harm the natural world. In addition, the environmental terrorist group, the Old Green, is shown to have had a huge and well-connected following. The Old Green organization falls because of the violence of its members in trying to save the natural environment.

Nature triumphs over all human action, however. In the final chapters of the novel, a massive storm destroys the infrastructure of the world. The corporate takeover of Kuinak is defeated by the power of nature after the power of social activism has failed. The effects of this storm are shown all over the world as nature destroys many of the human communities and projects that attempted to control and destroy it.

Style

Points of View

For the most part, the story is told in the third person omniscient. The thoughts and feelings of the characters are crucial in providing the motivations for their actions and showing how they are affected by each other and by their own experiences. Often the inner thoughts of the characters show the development of other characters, as the reader glimpses a view of the same character from different perspectives. Often the inner thoughts provide details that would otherwise be lost to the narrative and allow the reader to form a well-rounded picture of each character and event.

The novel takes place in the future and the narrator often provides details about what has occurred in the world in the time between when the novel was written and when the story takes place. The significant events and technological advances help the reader to understand the condition of the world at the time of the novel and to gain insight into the various negative predictions that the author has for the world.

Setting

The novel takes place in the near future. There have been significant technological changes but these changes do not affect the lifestyle of the characters to any great degree. Many of these technological changes are mentioned only in passing, as though to set the stage for the narrative, without really being used by the characters themselves. Most of the characters have only minor contact with these fictional technological advances though the narrative presents them as significant.

Most of the novel takes place in Kuinak, Alaska, a seaside town populated mostly by people who make their living off the sea. There is a significant population of Native Alaskans in the town but for the most part the town is assimilated into modern life with only surface connections to their tribal heritage. Kuinak is presented as both a garbage dump overrun with semi-wild pigs and as a piece of wilderness with only a weak link to the rest of civilization.

Language and Meaning

The novel is presented in modern English with a sprinkling of fictional slang terms relating to the various changes the author predicts for the near future. All the fictional slang terms can be figured out from the context of the story and are often explained in detail at some point in the narrative. The average reader should not have any significant problem in understanding the language used in the novel.

The most significant language issues in the novel are the use of Native Alaskan words and technological devices. The Native Alaskan words are very general for Native



American culture, and will be easily recognizable for any reader with a basic knowledge of Native American cultures. Many of the technological devices presented in the story use a combination of modern day terms for technology, such as "chip" and "disc" but do so to describe a fictional device or product.

Structure

The novel is broken into twenty-one chapters. Many of the chapters focus on the background information of one character and bring that character's life story up to the present day. Often information from a character's past is withheld in order to build suspense and allow the reader to form a judgment about the character before being surprised by new information.

The novel is written in time order, although there are often flashbacks to previous events that had some significance for the character. At some points, the narrative splits into different storylines, allowing the reader to follow one character, and then go back and follow a different character during the same period of time. When the narrative splits in this way, it is usually building toward a meeting or confrontation of both storylines.

Quotes

"Without releasing the woman's throat, the man slowly turns his head, rotating into the light a face almost as shocking as the one hatched from the mayonnaise bottle. It is completely smooth and white. No brows or lashes. Lips and eyes the color of salmon egg. A bright porcelain brow framed by an even brighter mane of hair, like chrome, for all the world like flowing mother chrome." Chapter 1

"Freed of his chain Marley soon got over his limp and turned out to be a great watchdog - though his act was really more a welcome than a warning. He would hide beneath a big salal out at the edge of the road and made a sudden silent rush at any vehicle coming into the yard. He had once been able to leap all the way over the hood of the old LeBaron Ike used to drive, grinning with toothy glee as he sailed past the startled driver. That didn't seem so long ago, but Old Leader Marley had suddenly become just old. He couldn't have jumped over a wheelbarrow." Chapter 2

"Indeed, Greer was a spectacular bar dancer and frequent winner in the native kick games. He was also a surefooted dockhand when he actually set to a task; he could shinny up a mast or out along a fouled trawler pole with a nimble confidence that assured him employment in any sailing port on any sea. Nor did bay work bother him. But as soon as the vessel cleared the bar that confidence sank like an anchor and that erotic asset became a liability, especially out alone in a bucket like this." Chapter 3

" For one thing, Alaska is a field vast enough to still be relatively unpolluted, for all the oil spills and garbage dumps It has a land area of five hundred eighty-six thousand square miles, or three hundred seventy-five million acres. Even now, in the twenty-first century, most of this acreage is still utterly untrod by the foot of White Man, or Red or Black or Yellow Man; or any mammal's foot at all for that matter, when you get down to the inch-by-inch." Chapter 4

"Everyone naturally assumed it would be the University of Anchorage. The church maintained a dorm-and-daycare right on campus, for hapless young Deap mothers just such as she. The AAH told her the University of Anchorage would be perfect. Alice told them to go suck. She'd had her fill of the squalid mud hole called Kuinak, of defecting Deaps, of her drunk and clumsy father, of her especially special kid and her hometown sympathy and all the rest of the State of Alaska, thank you." Chapter 5

"The Loyal Order of the Underdogs was an organization of some considerable power in the region, for all its raunchy reputation. It was the Alaskan equivalent of the Friars Club, if you can imagine the Friars Club composed of an elite selection of fishermen, highwaymen, longshoremen, teamsters, bush pilots, Merchant Marines, hockey fans, party animals, recanted Jesus freaks and rejected Hell's Angels." Chapter 6

"They were thronged forth as though to celebrate the capture of a great whale. Maybe they didn't have an engraved card to the inner circle of the whale feast, but with a catch this big the blubber was going to be flying." Chapter 7



"Greer had raised marijuana in the days before genetic pollination, and loved it. Now, even though there was nothing left but the feeble little impotent males, he still tried to keep a little growing; for sentiment, not for smoke. The active ingredient has all but vanished, like the species." Chapter 8

" 'Now, Mrs. Carmody, sister,' the woman echoed her husband, 'don't be so upset. This is not no big thing. As a matter of historical fact, you know, a *lot* of the old chieftains used to enjoy relationships with their...' Chapter 9

"Brighter lads his age were already studying for careers with better futures than fishing could ever again provide. . . These bright lads would find better futures surely; they would be chipdish programmers and government barristers and drug counselors, and go home to the spouse and sprats when their day's work was done - exactly what young Carmody thought one went to work to avoid." Chapter 10

"For another, she was riding with nothing on but a beaded doeskin skirt and shower thongs. Even Alice's ridiculous high heels and silk-blouse-and-work-shirt combo was no match." Chapter 11

"Ike was rocked from his torpor by the force of the girl's gaze, then by the girl herself. She was wildly beautiful, like one of those implausible sprites that romped through those posters so popular at the turn of the century - kitschy pics of wanton innocence in sylvan woods primeval." Chapter 12

"Steubins pushed through a thick maroon curtain into a dark cavern redolent with manly scents - gun oil and cigar smoke and boot polish and bay rum. He found the switch and a trio of green lampshades poured light down into the aquamarine-green pool of a full sized snooker table." Chapter 13

"He was dreaming. His bare back twitched and his ribs heaved in and out in fitful whimpers. Some white knight, Alice observed with wicked pleasure; stripped of his shiny armor he looks like a little kid on the run from some nasty nightmare." Chapter 14

" 'Nobody up home would say no to a nice fat pup like this. If she don't work out for a life's companion we can always eat her or something. Nobody would say no. But you people . . . ' " Chapter 15

"One minute longer and a UN warden would be chopping his way to your coordinates. You could have you whole lash-up confiscated. It was another right idea being enforced on the wrong people; everybody knew that Chinese drift subs were still putting out miles of their lethal web illegally, but the United Nations wardens found it easier to hassle the smaller operations." Chapter 16

"Leonard had canceled his membership after watching the televised trial. And not a moment too soon. When the Hague declared the whole organization was guilty of 'flagrant societal infractions' and its members were 'nothing more than biological Bolsheviks,' all Hollywood turned against the Old Greens, and movie workers that had not already renounced their membership were blackballed for life." Chapter 17



"It wasn't really courage he was looking for in the Irish spirits, it was decisiveness. He wanted to get to it and do it, like with Greener. No more wordplay, no more show biz, no more fancy Bakatcha shots off the far-left cushion." Chapter 18

"In the privacy of her office above the laundry room she dropped the mask and took herself severely to task. What a hypocritical hussy she was under that carved nonchalance! What a clown! Why had she always been the puppet to this clumsy handful of hometown opinions?" Chapter 19

"Nicholas Levertov would not be able to resist strutting a little if he was the string-puller. There would be the hidden simpler, for a slamboy's benefit. The cleverly coded confession. And as soon as Judge Ike heard it the trial was going to be over and the sentence would be put into effort, then and there, Slam to Slam, with no circumspection - just the way he should have done with old Cog Weil." Chapter 20

"The sun was breaking clear of the Pyrites behind her, warming her back and shoulders to a sweat; but she was amused by the picture she knew she must be making: the seaside glyph of woman waiting, stark and somber and colorless - especially compared to that peacock rowing homeward home out there!" Chapter 21

Key Questions

Because of the diversity of topics Kesey addresses in *Sailor Song*, most readers should find at least one issue they will enjoy discussing. Those interested in ecology may debate how accurate is Kesey's vision of environmental devastation in the early twenty-first century. Those interested in contemporary culture may focus on community dynamics in the town meeting or bar scenes or on Kesey's depiction of drug use and technology. Followers of Hollywood may appreciate his satire of the power structure within the film industry or his portrayal of how Hollywood invades and changes a community. Animal rights activists might concentrate upon the treatment of dogs and sea lions in the novel. Fans of romance fiction may discuss the unusual relationship between Alice Carmody and Ike Sallas and perhaps compare Kesey's depiction of mature love to that in other novels, such as Robert James Waller's *The Bridges of Madison County* (1992; see separate entry). Serious students of literature may discuss the plot structure or Kesey's indebtedness to other works of literature, such as the Bible, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, or Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice."

1. In a highly negative review of *Sailor Song*, Roger Rosenblatt says that the novel is "plotless, idealess, and pointless in its overflow of parables, anecdotes, and caricatures." He also notes that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* have "authentic life," whereas *Sailor Song* does not. Do you agree with Rosenblatt's opinions?

2. Do you enjoy Kesey's eccentric characterizations in this novel? Do you view the novel as comic?

3. How successful is Kesey in portraying early twenty-first-century society?

What new technological developments does he present? Do his environmental concerns seem justified?

4. Is *Sailor Song* a brilliant work like *Moby-Dick* that expands our expectations of the novel form or does it represent serious narrative problems?

5. Do you find Ike Sallas to be an appealing frontier hero or is his character not well defined?

6. Does the love relationship between Alice Carmody and Ike Sallas seem plausible? Is that relationship developed sufficiently?

7. How effective is Kesey's characterization of Nicholas Levertov? Does the fact that he is the product of incest explain his behavior? Does Kesey give readers enough insight into the revenge motive?

8. How well does Kesey satirize Hollywood?

9. How does Kesey depict religion in the world of the near-future?

10. Is the inclusion of The Sea Lion narrative essential to the novel?



Topics for Discussion

How do Kesey's predictions for the future match reality?

What is the significance of Ike's "Bakatcha Bandit" social protests?

How are the racial issues of the DEAPs incorporated into the story?

Compare and contrast the children's story, *Shoola and the Sea Lion*, with the portrayals of Alaskan life give in the novel.

Consider the significance of narcotics and alcohol to the story.

Compare and contrast Alice's relationship with Mike Carmody and her relationship with Ike Sallas.

How does Ike's past experience with his wife and child show up in his present life?

Literary Precedents

In this sweeping saga, Kesey pays tribute to a number of writers. He alludes to the Bible, Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth, Part One* (c.1597), Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1931), and Bob Dylan's song lyrics. He even incorporates his own children's book *The Sea Lion* into the narrative. Particularly revealing are the book titles Alice Carmody discovers on Isaak Sallas's shelves: Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926; see separate entry), John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939; see separate entry), and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957; see separate entry). Kesey's *Sailor Song* shares with *Moby-Dick* and *The Grapes of Wrath* an epic sweep, uses the device of multiple points of view that he so admires in *As I Lay Dying*, depicts a wasteland world with affinities to the moral decadence Hemingway portrays in his first great novel, and reveals an absorption with drug culture reminiscent of Kerouac's book.

Perhaps most significant are the literary precedents for the apocalyptic vision at the end of the novel. Kesey echoes the last pages of Melville's masterpiece in describing Ike Sallas in the midst of a swirling vortex, and he cites two of the most disturbing apocalyptic poems of the twentieth century—Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice" and William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" in presenting his own vision of impending moral and environmental doom.

Related Titles

In its unsettling mixture of comic and nightmarish elements *Sailor Song* is most closely related to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962; see separate entry).

Kesey's experimentation with shifting points of view continues the narrative innovations found in *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964; see separate entry). The individualistic Ike Sallas fits the mold of the frontier hero that Kesey used in characterizing both Randle Patrick McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Hank Stamper in *Sometimes a Great Notion*.



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Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

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