

State of Wonder Study Guide

State of Wonder by Ann Patchett

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Contents

State of Wonder Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter One.....	4
Chapter Two.....	7
Chapter Three.....	10
Chapter Four.....	12
Chapter Five.....	15
Chapter Six.....	18
Chapter Seven.....	20
Chapter Eight.....	22
Chapter Nine.....	25
Chapter Ten.....	27
Chapter Eleven.....	30
Characters.....	33
Objects/Places.....	39
Themes.....	41
Style.....	44
Quotes.....	46
Topics for Discussion.....	48



Plot Summary

'State of Wonder' is an imaginative tale of mystery, morals, ethics, and the delicate balance that can exist within the world, both within a single ecosystem and within ourselves. Marina Singh, a doctor, is sent into the Amazon jungle to investigate the death of her coworker, and to check the progress of an ongoing research study, conducted by a mentor of hers, Dr. Swenson. However, Marina finds instead a puzzle in ethics, morality, and humanity that forces her to rethink her own positions in life and asks readers to do the same.

'State of Wonder' is the story of a woman, Marina Singh, on a journey to find a coworker, who through her efforts manages to find herself as well. Marina is a doctor, working as a pharmacologist in a lab for Vogel in Minnesota. Her coworker, sent months ago into the Brazilian jungle to check on a research project, is reported as being deceased. His wife, Karen, and Marina's boss and lover, Mr. Fox, ask that she travel to Brazil to check both on what happened and on the research grant of Dr. Swenson. Marina, formerly a student of Swenson's, agrees but reluctantly, as she and Swenson have not spoken since an accident. After the accident that occurred while Marina was in residency under Swenson, Marina abandoned her major.

Once in the jungle, Marina finds that things are never as they appear. Swenson, now in her seventies, is working not only on a fertility drug that can reactivate the woman's menstruation and eggs after menopause, allowing them to have children late in life, but also on a drug made from the same compounds that can inoculate against malaria. She is using funding from Vogel to finance her drug, unbeknown to Vogel executives. Further, Marina struggles with the ethical and moral questions that arise from doing research on native cultures. Swenson has also made herself a test subject and is now pregnant. The other doctors at the facility have agreed to work on the project and Marina must choose between her employer and lover and a drug that can save millions. Simultaneously, in working with Swenson, Marina must face her past mistakes and come to an understanding of her own failures. She learns that not all choices are black and white.

When Marina is forced to choose between a child she loves, who was stolen from his own tribe by Dr. Swenson, and her lost coworker Anders, Marina begins to understand that morality and ethical consideration are often difficult and that no decision is ever without consequence. Her time with the Lakashi women teaches her that sometimes medical science should not try to improve on nature, and that simply because something can be done, doesn't mean it should be. As she assists Swenson in a C section to remove Swenson's own dead child, she understands that nature holds a delicate balance and that to damage that balance can be dangerous. By the end of the novel, Marina has learned that sometimes, to act in the best interest of nature, one should merely allow nature to function without intervention. 'State of Wonder' shows readers the delicate balance between ecosystems, ethics, morality, and self preservation and asks readers to evaluate their own beliefs.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

'State of Wonder' is a novel about ethics, moral choices, and human relationships. Marina Singh is sent to the Brazilian jungle to investigate a coworker's death, only to discover that the fertility drug her company is funding is being used as a front for the development of an inoculation to malaria. As the story develops, Marina is forced to look at her own morals and ethics, and to face her mentor, Dr. Swenson. When Marina discovers her coworker is alive, she must overcome her own fears and doubts to save him.

In Chapter 1, Marina Singh learns about the death of her coworker, Anders Eckman. Marina and Anders, father of three, have shared an office space for over seven years. Looking at the letter sent from the Amazon, where Eckman was for the last several months, Marina realizes Anders has been dead for two weeks. The letter from Dr. Swenson says little, other than Anders died of a fever, and was buried in the jungle. Marina is comforted by Mr. Fox, who, in addition to being CEO of the pharmaceutical company Vogel in which Marina works, is also Marina's lover. Fox laments that he should not have sent Eckman to the jungle, and Marina reminds him he didn't realize the danger. She knows Anders wanted to go, as it was an adventure, and he was an avid bird watcher. He was sent to check on Dr. Swenson, and her research project, which is funded by Vogel. Swenson herself refuses to check in, and doesn't use a phone, nor answer inquiries. Her home is in Manaus, but her research is in an undisclosed village in the middle of the jungle. Dr. Swenson was at one point a professor of Marina and Marina recalls her former professor's coldness.

Mr. Fox and Marina travel to the home of Karen Eckman to give her the news. At first, Karen attempts to talk Mr. Fox into sending Anders home, but eventually, Marina finds the courage to explain about Anders' death. Mr. Fox, unable to deal with the emotional situation, says little, although he does comfort Karen. The two leave, and Marina, quite upset that she was forced to tell Karen instead of Fox, asks to be taken back to her car, but instead Fox drives to a local restaurant they both enjoy. Fox explains over drinks that Dr. Swenson has, for several months, avoided any contact. Fox admits they have heard nothing from Swenson for over two years. Marina reminds him he is over sixty, and the president of the company, so although he wants answers, he can't possibly go to Brazil. He agrees, only to tell her she is the person he will send. Marina is taken aback, but Fox explains that Swenson will listen to her, as a former student. She recalls a conversation with Anders where he explained that Swenson had located a tribe in the jungle who continued to be able to have children well into their seventies. Swenson's report, 'Reproductive Endocrinology of the Lakashi People', discussed in detail the concept that the Lakashi women's eggs did not age. At the time, Marina did not seem interested, but now realizes she should have paid more attention.



Fox and Marina leave before dinner and instead of spending the evening comforting one another, they each return to their own houses, alone, the conversation about who should go into the jungle left unfinished. Late that night, Karen calls, expressing several questions about the nature of Swenson's note about her husband's death. The fact that Swenson did not send home a body, nor his possessions, leads Karen to think Anders is not dead. Karen tells Marina she would go to Brazil, if she didn't have the boys to care for, but reminds Marina that she could go. After explaining she knows she is using Marina's emotions against her, she asks if Marina will go to Brazil to discover the truth.

Chapter One Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces several major concepts and themes, as well as characters, that are used throughout the novel. First, the death of Anders Eckman is immediately introduced, setting the stage for the mystery part of the storyline. It is clear from the letter of Dr. Swenson that something is awry, in that she sends no body nor possessions. This foreshadows both Karen Eckman's questions about her husband's death as well as the discoveries at the end of the novel that Anders is not, in fact, dead. Through the announcement of Anders' death, readers also begin to see the queer nature of the relationship between Fox and Marina. Clearly, they care for one another in a romantic way, but Fox already shows a lack of emotional capability in this chapter, setting the stage for his behavior throughout the novel. Marina, in this chapter is introduced as a logical, caring, determined woman who cares about those around her, and tries to please them. These traits, along with her own reaction to the death, foreshadow her role as the person to go to Brazil in search of the truth.

Karen Eckman is introduced in this chapter, as well. It is clear Karen, too, is a logical woman, although her concerns about the reality of her husband's death appear to be irrational. Her questions, however, do alert the reader to oddities in the story that certainly lead to questions about what really happened in Brazil. When this is combined with the character traits of Dr. Annick Swenson, also introduced in this chapter, the result is many questions that seem completely unanswerable. Swenson, a cold, calculating, self serving, brilliant woman, clearly works for no one but herself, and her loyalties and duties lie in her research, and not in answering questions produced by anyone, particularly her employer. It is quite apparent that someone will have to travel to Brazil, and find her in the jungle, in order to get any straight answer out of her. The fact that she was once a teacher of Marina foreshadows information later in the novel about their relationship, and about Marina's own mistakes in the past.

The research of Swenson, a major theme in the novel, is also mentioned at least briefly in this chapter. Swenson's work on the fertility in the Lakashi women, who give birth far into their lives, is clearly related to a fertility drug Vogel wishes to develop. The knowledge that she has not communicated in many years leads Marina to begin questioning whether there is, in fact, a drug, showing she herself is curious and concerned. This, combined with Fox's request that she travel to Brazil, and combined with Karen's request that she find out what happens to Anders, foreshadows her departure for Brazil in the following chapters. Further, there are several references to

Marina's relationship with Swenson, and these references all point to a secret Marina holds, in terms of her relations with her old teacher, which foreshadows information later in the book about an accident Marina had while working under Swenson.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

In Chapter 2, Marina agrees to go to Brazil. She begins taking Lariam, an antimalarial drug and soon realizes that, as a child, she had taken the same drug in order to go see her father in India and that the drugs had given her horrible nightmares. Her father was a foreign graduate student from India while her mother was a white woman from Minnesota. Marina recalls her parents being together briefly, but her father moved to India soon afterwards. Every few years, Marina would go to visit and would have to take Lariam. In India, Marina, who looks like her father, felt accepted and normal, whereas she always felt like an outsider in Minnesota. Her Lariam dreams always revolved around losing her father in a crowd.

Marina stops by Karen's home to say goodbye, and Karen reveals she still receives letters from Anders, as they take months, at times, to reach the states from the jungle. Karen reiterates that she believes Anders is alive. Marina returns home, only to find Fox in her driveway. In the doorway, Marina begins to cry, for herself, Anders, her relationship with Fox, and for her own reluctance to go to Brazil. She and Fox have discussed, in the past, the likely demise of their relationship, as he is nearly twenty years older than she, and Marina thinks of her possible death as she kisses Fox. The two make love and fall asleep, where Marina has her usual nightmare and awakens, screaming.

The following morning, Fox drives her to the airport, where he gives her a GPS phone, capable of calling from anywhere in the world. He expresses concern that she will stop taking Lariam as a result of the dreams, and she assures him she will keep taking it. Fox mimics putting a ring on her finger, and reminds her to come back as soon as she can. They say goodbye and, once in the airport, Marina throws away the Lariam pills, chastising herself for not thinking of it earlier. On the plane, Marina fights sleep, knowing the dream will occur as the Lariam is not yet out of her system. She thinks of Fox and his deceased wife, his three grown children, her own parents, and Karen and Anders Eckman, and realizes naivety is key to life, because one has to believe things will work out in order to continue on. Marina herself married while in college, but it lasted only a little over two years. At the same time, she quit her residency in the obstetrics and gynecological program, and changed to pharmacology. Marina knows she divorced more as a result of what had happened to cause her to quit the program than because of her relationship with Josh Su, her husband. She did not tell her mother what happened, nor, she thinks, about Dr. Swenson.

On the plane, Marina allows herself to nod off, only to dream about Anders and to be awoken by a concerned flight attendant. Now awake, she thinks of the accident that caused her to stop her gynecological program, and she had carried tremendous guilt about it since. She admits she distanced herself from anyone who knew the details, including her old mentor, Dr. Swenson, and her husband at the time. One evening while



she was chief resident under attending physician Dr. Swenson, an African American woman came in, having a difficult labor. She had called for Dr. Swenson, as the baby's heart rate was unstable, and Swenson had told her to wait an hour, and call back if there was not improvement. Marina called her back in forty five minutes, as the situation was not improving. As a result, Swenson never called back. Marina waited for hours, beginning to panic that Swenson was angry, that Swenson would lose respect for her. Marina knows she looked up to Swenson during her entire career in college, and in residency, that she admired her. Marina worked quickly on the patient during the C section, and in her speed, missed the fact that the baby was occiput posterior, and as a result, she sliced him through the head, blinding him in one eye. Although Marina was allowed to keep her residency, she never forgave herself. At the inquisition, Swenson said merely that the resident was instructed to wait. Marina falls asleep again, and dreams of her father.

Chapter Two Analysis

In Chapter 2, several pieces of information about Marina's life are revealed that help show motivations for her decisions. First, her experiences as a child allowed her to travel, and to experience different cultures. In addition, her parents were clearly both well educated, although they did not remain together. Her reactions to the Lariam, although severe, seem necessary, as she is aware Anders died of a fever in Brazil. However, when Fox presents to her the reminder to stay on the drugs, she realizes she does not want to cope with the dreams, and as a result, stops taking the Lariam. This alone suggests not only a deeper resentment toward Fox than what Marina is willing to admit, but also a slight concern that she, too, can develop malaria, like Anders.

This chapter also shows some of the issues in the relationship between Fox and Marina. While Fox cares for Marina, the fact that he is sending her to Brazil, where one of his employees has already died, shows that he cares perhaps a bit more for the future of his project. Further, his conversations about his own death, and Marina's likelihood of leaving him, show that their relationship is not particularly sound. However, this is made unclear by his gesture at the airport, as he almost seems to be wanting to marry her. Additionally, his gift of a GPS phone does show a concern, although whether for her or for news of his project, is unclear. This lack of consistency foreshadows their continued confusing relationship status throughout the book, and is the deciding factor later in the novel, when Marina is forced to choose between him and her own morals.

The final half of the chapter focuses on Marina's relationship with Swenson, as well as the accident early in her career that had a profoundly negative impact on the rest of her life. Her actions in the hospital on the night of the botched C section were primarily caused not by her lack of skill, as she was well trained, but instead simply by a carelessness brought about because of her concerns that she had fallen in the eyes of her mentor. Marina clearly thought of Swenson as a mentor, but also elevated her to almost hero status. When she failed her, she was distracted, and as a result, made a profound mistake. Although forgiven by the mother and father of the blinded child, and also by the board, who allowed her to keep her residency, Marina was never able to



forgive herself. She quit the program to avoid having to face Swenson and the others who knew of her mistake. She divorced her husband, in part, to distance herself from him and the friends who knew of the accident. Instead of learning to forgive herself, Marina chose to shove the incident inward, never really dealing with it. As a result, her journey into the jungle to find her old mentor, has brought about tremendous guilt stemming from the incident nearly twenty years ago. Marina's consistent reiteration that Swenson likely won't know her, combined with Marina's own guilt, foreshadow the tone of the two women's relationship later in the novel.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

In Chapter 3, Marina lands in Manaus to find her luggage has been lost. She is greeted by Milton, a driver hired by Vogel, who also drives Dr. Swenson when she is in town. Milton is influential, and within minutes has bribed the luggage clerk to watch for her luggage, and has her in a store run by his brother in law where she can pick up supplies. While in the store, she learns that Dr. Swenson shops there, as well, or one of her other doctors comes in for supplies. Marina wonders who the other doctors are as she learns that the Bovenders, a young bohemian couple, watches Dr. Swenson's apartment in the city while she is away in the jungle, sometimes for months. She is dropped off at her hotel, where she calls Mr. Fox and quickly falls asleep.

Over the next few days, Marina waits for Dr. Swenson to return to town. She also sends notes to the Bovenders, but they go unanswered. She has time to look about the city, and learns to bargain with the local vendors. While she waits, she reads about the Lakashi tribe and she realizes that Swenson has been studying these people for over thirty five years, meaning she was doing so even while she taught classes in the states. When Marina looks up the Lakashi, she also finds references to Dr. Rapp, who discovered the tribe in the 1960s as he researched fungi in the Amazon basin.

While Mr. Fox worries about getting Marina a new GPS phone, Marina admits she likes not being trackable. Mr. Fox explains, after prompting by Marina, that the Lakashi women eat the bark of a tree, which appears to be the secret of their lasting fertility. Walking the streets of Manaus, however, she does find she is accepted as she never was in Minnesota, as her skin color, hair, and eyes, match those around her.

She finds herself in Rodrigo's store and she meets the Bovenders. Barbara Bovender is tall, tan, and blond, whereas Jackie, her husband, is short and tan, with long limbs and a tattoo. Both are beautiful in their youth and in their looks. The Bovenders admit they have not received Marina's letters, since all correspondence is left in a box, which Annick received when she comes into town. The couple admit they have stayed too long in Manaus, but that they enjoy helping Swenson. Soon, Milton arrives, pleased to see the couple has met Marina, and he notes he has been telling them to go see Marina at her hotel, conflicting with the couple's reports that they did not know they were being sought. Milton apologizes, and Barbara explains to Marina that part of their position is to keep people away from Swenson, including other doctors and pharmaceutical representatives. Barbara also explains that Vogel, and the other person they had sent out, were particularly bothersome, but when Marina notes that Anders is dead, Barbara becomes visibly shaken. The Bovenders go to the street to get some air and Marina realizes that in her anger, she may have alienated the only people who could take her to Swenson.



Chapter Three Analysis

Chapter Three serves to introduce Manaus as well as several characters that are important to the progression of the novel. First, Marina is greeted by Milton, who proves throughout the novel, as he does in this chapter, to be a problem solver. It is Milton Marina comes to trust, and Milton who, on several occasions, helps Marina. Milton's association with the Bovenders, as well as with Dr. Swenson, signify his importance.

The Bovenders are also introduced in this chapter, first by name and description only, and then in person. The Bovenders represent the gate keepers of Annick Swenson, as they are employed primarily to keep people away from the doctor. The Bovenders are clear in their role, and they obviously approve of the doctors work, in that they show much sympathy for her. Their knowledge of Anders shows that they sized him up prior to his meeting with Dr. Swenson, implying that Marina will have to go through the same process. Only the Bovenders know where Swenson is, and thus, Marina knows she must impress them. However, her anger at the situation, and at their unknowing negative comments against her dead college, make her unpleasant, and her worries that her actions may alienate her are well founded. The Bovenders are charming, beautiful, and young, and seem to represent naivety in the novel, and their reaction to the death of Anders shows them as caring individuals.

Marina's relationship with Mr. Fox is again examined in this chapter, as Mr. Fox again shows two sides. On one hand, he is clearly concerned for Marina as he offers to send her a new phone, and more Lariam pills to keep her safe. On the other hand, his unwillingness to give Marina any information about the Lakashi, as he says it is confidential, shows that he places more emphasis on his position than on his relationship with Marina. As she points out, she is risking her life for him, and for the project, and if that does not qualify her to know confidential information, than she is unsure what would. While he does tell her in the end, it is clear the trip is having a drastically negative effect on their relationship.

The information Marina gathers about the Lakashi help to develop several points. First, it becomes clear that Swenson has been working on this project for over forty years, even when she was teaching in the United States. This shows a dedication to the project that is unrivaled, and suggests there is more to the project than meets the eye. This concept is further indicated as Marina learns of Dr. Rapp, and his studies about the fungi the Lakashi used in daily life. The link between Swenson and Rapp is merely hinted at during this chapter, but it does foreshadow information about their relationship later in the novel.

Finally, although Marina is clearly uncomfortable in her new surroundings, there is also a level of comfort in not being identifiably different. Her race and coloring allow her to blend into the area, unlike Anders, and there is a small comfort in this for Marina. While she may dislike her position, she does enjoy freedom from the badgering of locals that other tourists receive.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

In Chapter 4, Jackie, Barbara, Milton, and Marina travel to the beach, while Jackie gets car sick on the way. Over a week had passed before the Bovenders contacted Marina, asking about Anders' death. Marina explains the situation over dinner one night, and the Bovenders express sympathy, but point out that Annick is not responsible for his death, noting her brilliance, her important work, and her general greatness. The couple argues that Vogel has no right to intrude on the work of Swenson, even if they are paying the bill, because the work is so important and takes time. They decide to entertain Marina until Dr. Swenson can be reached.

At the beach, Milton notes, as Jackie and Barbara show off their youth and beauty, that they are like the parents, and thus, their role is to admire the young couple. Milton explains, as they watch the couple in the water from the scorching heat of the beach, that the Bovenders are beginning to like her, which means they will allow her to see Dr. Swenson, if she is patient enough. Marina, far too hot, begins to faint, and Milton gently takes her into the river, cooling her. Marina notes she cannot see into the murky water, and Milton points out she likely doesn't want to.

That night, Barbara phones her to come have drinks, and Marina realizes the Bovenders are extremely lonely. When Marina arrives at Swenson's apartment, she finds it to be elegant and beautiful, a change from the wasteland of the city. The Bovenders sit, smoking marijuana and discussing Swenson's desire for the apartment to be beautiful and nice, an oasis away from the jungle. They discuss again the issue of why the Bovenders ignored the letters from Marina, and they show her Swenson's mail box, which is merely a crate with an opening in the top. Barbara notes they do not go through her mail, but Marina begins to do just that, pulling out her own letters, as well as several from Vogel, other drug companies, and several more from Karen Eckman to Anders. When they run across a letter from Marina to Anders, Barbara gently asks if she were in love with him. With a start, Marina realizes that, after his death, Marina has thought of him constantly, so in a way, she does love her now deceased friend, although she didn't when he was alive. Although Barbara and Jackie ask her to stay the night, Marina refuses gently, taking the letters with her back to her room, where she calls Karen.

The following days, Marina is very ill with fever. When Barbara calls to invite her to the opera and learns of her illness, she comes over immediately with medicine from the shaman in the market. When Marina begins to whine about the foul smelling liquid, Barbara, exasperated, snaps at her to drink it, noting she is tired of trying to help her. Surprised, Marina does as she is told, only to find Barbara warning her that she will be violently ill for a few hours, but it will stop the fever. Marina believes she has been poisoned. Hours later, however, Marina wakes in the bathroom, feeling remarkably better. She finds Barbara still in her room, who reminds her to try on the dresses she has brought, so she can attend the opera the following night with she and Jackie.



Chapter Four Analysis

In Chapter 4, the reality of living in the jungle comes to light, as Marina fully experiences the heat and the disease of the tropics. Although the original meeting with the Bovenders was less than desirable, their contact with Marina, and Barbara's clear liking of her, foreshadow the blossoming of their relationship. Her first dinner at their apartment again shows the drastic impact Swenson has on people. Barbara worships Annick Swenson, even without having a clear understanding of her work. Like Marina once, Barbara thinks of Swenson as a hero, and therefore defends her actions, even when they might seem inappropriate. This theme of looking at mentors with tainted vision continues through the book.

The Bovenders, as shown by their actions on the beach as well as their actions throughout the chapter, are young, bold, in love, naive, and very bored and lonely. Although they enjoy Swenson, their reactions to Marina show they have little to do and enjoy the company of others who are intelligent and who speak their language. Swenson's apartment, a beautiful place in the midst of a dying city, again shows the Bovenders not only as keepers of the gate, but almost as the people who ensure Swenson returns to beauty after her time in the jungle. They designed the apartment and they are beautiful in all ways. They represent the high society life in Manaus.

Marina's experiences at dinner with the Bovenders leads to several enlightening pieces of information. Marina admits that she didn't love Anders prior to his death, but that in his death and in her search for information, she has perhaps come to love him, in that she thinks of him constantly. There is a feeling of guilt with this, but also of strong friendship. This moment of love foreshadows the moment between her and Anders later in the novel, as they make love following his rescue. Additionally, the knowledge that Vogel and other companies have been writing Swenson lead to the idea that perhaps Swenson is working on multiple research projects for multiple companies. She clearly cares little for those who employ her, but the knowledge that other companies are writing suggests she has some dealings that do not relate to Vogel, foreshadowing the knowledge of the malarial drug later in the novel. Finally, Marina's conversation with Karen after dinner show not only Marina's guilt about her feelings, but also show Karen's deep sense of loss about her husband.

Marina's experiences with weather and illness in this chapter show clearly the possible disasters that can happen in such a place as Manaus. First, she experiences heat as she never has done before. Again, it is Milton who rescues her, forcing her into the water. This also introduces the river, whose importance in the novel cannot be ignored, as it is the only travel mechanism that can take Marina to Swenson, and is the livelihood of all villages and tribes. Milton's point about not wanting to see what is in the water suggests that what lurks beneath may be frightening, which is seen later with an anaconda. Marina's experience with fever is even more frightening, as that is what Anders perished from. Although she does not want her assistance, without Barbara it is unclear what may have happened. The introduction of shaman medicine, which does seem to work, foreshadows Swenson's preference for the tribe, as she believes that, for



the natives, the shaman's medicine is more fitting than modern care. This, too, seems to be Barbara's belief, and Milton's, as they are both responsible for obtaining the medicinal liquid for Marina.

Barbara's insistence that Marina join them at the opera shows her own need for companionship, but also introduce the environment in which Marina will meet Swenson, although this is not known at this stage in the book. Her comments about the opera saving Swenson show Swenson's preference for high society, even as she works in the jungle.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

When Marina arrives at the opera house with the Bovenders in Chapter Five, she finds it to be an extravagant building, a place of beauty. Her dress, too, borrowed from Barbara, is extravagant. Barbara also pinned up her hair and applied eyeliner, and Marina is pleasantly surprised at the results. Once inside, the threesome is led to an opera box, where they select their seats, and as the opera begins, Marina can see the use in such a place, as she finds herself taken away. When Jackie asks Marina why a woman is playing the part of the lead man, a hand thumps them on the back, telling them to be quiet. When they turn, they realize Dr. Swenson is in the box behind them. Marina feels naked now beneath the gorgeous dress, and vulnerable. When the opera ends, Marina is introduced to Swenson outside, where a small Brazilian Indian boy walks through the crowd, and runs into Barbara's arms. Swenson explains that Easter, the boy, can never get enough of Barbara's long, silky blond hair, and that he is deaf. She, Swenson, and Easter begin to walk, as Swenson notes they have much to discuss, but Marina, in her heels, cannot keep up. She is quickly left behind, but Easter returns for her, and leads her to a small cafe, where Swenson is already ordering. Swenson quickly explains her position that Vogel is being too intrusive. When she learns Marina seeks information about Anders, she explains he died of fever, and surprises Marina by noting she liked Anders, although he was a great inconvenience. She notes that he took a liking to Easter immediately, and Marina reminds her he had three boys of his own. Swenson admits her sympathies for Anders were likely in part due to his love for Easter. She tells Marina of Anders' illness, of his stubbornness to leave until it was too late for him to travel. She notes that Easter was with him when he died, and that he died a painful, suffering death. She says this as a warning, she notes, for Marina to leave as quickly as possible. She tells her the progress of the work, and reminds her that she, too, would like to leave the jungle someday. Milton arrives to take Marina back to her hotel, and Swenson mentions that Barbara has told her she used to be a student of hers. Marina realizes Swenson has no recollection of her, despite the accident that ended her residency, and has plagued her. Back at the hotel, Marina calls Fox to tell him of her meeting with Swenson, and the progress she gave about the drug. She tells of her plans to come home, only to learn that Fox expects her to follow Swenson into the jungle to the research facility to personally check on things.

The following morning, Marina packs together all Barbara's things, as well as her own. She leaves Barbara's things with their lobby clerk, along with a short note, and heads to Rodrigo's store to be picking up supplies. Swenson shortly arrives with Milton and expresses her dislike at the concept that Marina will be joining her in the jungle, noting that she is not invited, and that she herself will not take responsibility for anything that may happen to her. She admits Dr. Rapp had the same philosophy, and that it was effective. Hours later, Milton arrives at the hotel with Easter to take Marina to the boat. Easter is happy to see Marina, and she in turn happy to see him as well, but she also knows Milton brought him along so Swenson could not merely leave Marina behind. At



the dock, Easter frees them from the lines and Marina says goodbye to Milton. Once on the river, she notes to Swenson the beauty of the giant waterway.

Chapter Five Analysis

Chapter Five introduces the live Dr. Annick Swenson, as well as introduces the character of Easter. When Marina arrives at the opera, it is clear that it symbolizes all thing civilized and tame and beautiful, and Marina notes it saves the soul. She is enjoying herself as Barbara's keep, in that she is being made to feel pampered and beautiful, in a place that is ugly and hot and miserable. It is not until Marina realizes Swenson is in the opera box that she feels highly uncomfortable, and again, this introduces the concept of what the presence of a mentor can do. Although Marina is uncomfortable before her arrival, Swenson makes Marina afraid and less self confident, showing her insecurities link directly to Swenson. The reaction from the Bovender's is similar, showing a similar hero worship on their part.

The introduction of Easter makes it unclear where he comes from, foreshadowing the story of his arrival with Swenson later in the novel. It is clear, however, that nearly everyone who meets Easter is enchanted with the boy. He is loving, caring, and although deaf, extremely helpful. He knows Swenson, and therefore helps Marina be able to deal effectively with her. Swenson's comments that Anders took a liking to Easter, and taught him table manners, shows that Anders was missing his own family.

Swenson shows in this chapter the traits that make her a legend and intimidating. She is clearly in control of all situations and has a presence that demands respect and attention. She is driven, determined, and clear in her opinions about the intrusiveness of Vogel, and in Ander's disruptions. However, it is also clear she is not without emotion, as she does seem to be genuinely sorry for Anders' death and for his wife and sons. She admits to liking Anders, showing she does have the capacity for caring about others. On the other hand, her reaction to Marina's decision to go with her to the facility shows she can also be cold, and that she will not take responsibility for others who may come to harm as a result of their own actions. She is selfish, in that she sees everything and judges everything by how it affects her, and her project. Her lack of memory for Marina, while somewhat surprising, is not unexpected, as the episode likely had little effect on her life directly. The fact that Marina has worried over this for her entire life, when faced with Swenson's complete lack of memory for the issue, shows the difference between these two strong women. Finally, Swenson's mention of her knowledge of Dr. Rapp implies a personal relationship that will be developed later in the novel.

The relationship between Marina and Fox again in this chapter proves to be awkward. Marina, believing she has done her job, is surprised and hurt by Fox's insistence that she stay on and go to the research facility. Although Marina knows Fox cares for her, she also cannot help but realize that he will never let her out of the jungle until she finds what he wants. The fact that she doesn't call him as she leaves shows her decreasing responsibility to him as a result of their personal relationship.



Finally, Milton's appearance in this chapter again shows him as a symbol for reason and logic, as well as for the problem solver in Marina's life. The knowledge that he will not be going with them into the jungle leaves Marina with only Easter as a companion, since it is clear Swenson is not a friend. Finally, her changing view of the river shows Marina is adapting to her environment.



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

In Chapter Six, Easter proves to be a handy person on deck, as he drives the boat through traffic. Swenson and Marina discuss the Lakashi, and as Swenson builds up Anders, Marina knows she is intentionally implying Marina is lower than Anders in her eyes. She explains that Easter is not Lakashi, but likely Hummocca, and that he is smaller than normal, but she estimates him to be twelve years old. Marina admits she has no children, and is not married, to which Swenson seems pleased. Swenson points out the Hummocca likely left Easter in her care with the Lakashi, as almost all tribes know she is a doctor. She admits this is her own fault, as she often helped to care for the injured in the beginning, when she was a member of Dr. Rapp's party. When questioned about her comments, Swenson notes that now, she understands that the best practice is not to disturb the world around her and instead to let things happen as they happen. There is a local shaman who can heal smaller wounds, and although Swenson admits she has no love for local medicine, she does recognize the need for it. She points out that morality isn't the question as much as sustainability. She also admits that Dr. Rapp would never have sewn up a patient in that he completely minimized his role in the lives of the tribe.

Swenson notes she was a student of Rapp's, as he allowed women on his expeditions, which many at the time did not. She recalls being on the trip that found the Lakashi, nearly fifty years ago, and Marina realizes she is nearly seventy. The tribes have changed, in that many are westernized as a result of industry, but some, like the Lakashi, are nearly untouched. When the boat stops for lunch, Marina is horrified when Easter leaps over the edge, and doesn't rise for several moments. Swenson assures her Easter is fine, but Marina erupts into tears, to Swenson's disapproval. Swenson is tough as she tells her to pull herself together, and reminds her she will dump her on the shore if she cannot toughen up. Following lunch, Swenson orders a siesta, which she fully believes does the body good. Marina falls asleep, only to dream again of her father. She wakes again on the floor of the boat, with Swenson asking her if there is a snake. She learns Swenson had unclipped her hammock to drop her to the deck of the boat, in fear she had been bitten, hence her screams. As Swenson hands her water, she notices writing on many of the crates on deck and Swenson notes that Anders was teaching Easter to write. Swenson knows immediately that Marina's dreams are related to the Lariam, and she advises that she stop taking it. She notes, to calm Marina's fears, that Anders did not die of malaria.

Chapter Six Analysis

Chapter Six helps to deepen an understanding of Swenson's character, as well as to at least partially explain Easter. Swenson proves to be a hard woman, whose life has been spent dedicated to intellectual development, and she has little time for sentimentality,



foolishness, or even moments of illogical thought. Swenson is direct, and she is always controlling. However, her tactics are minimally successful on Marina, as she knows Swenson's moves, due to her time with the doctor earlier in life. The knowledge that she was part of the original Lakashi finding party shows she knew Rapp for many years, and suggest a deeper relationship than merely coworkers, foreshadowing knowledge about their affair later in the novel. Her story of Easter, although later shown to be false, not only explains his arrival in the tribe, and her relation to him, but also introduces a major theme in the novel, that of the ethological considerations in such research as that Swenson participates in. As a doctor, she is able to cure many of the ailments of the tribe, but Swenson herself feels that to interfere is to disturb the delicate balance of nature, another theme in the novel. Marina finds it difficult to believe she could merely let someone die in order not to get involved, and Swenson believes this is the moral and ethical thing to do. Her points about the shaman, and his cures, shows that while she knows the medicinal ways of the tribe are primitive, she also knows it is what they will have when she leaves. This ethical consideration, whether to let nature take its course or whether to intervene, is present throughout the novel.

Swenson's physical state in this novel should also be noted. Although Marina does not catch it, there are several signs that Swenson is pregnant, which is discovered later in the novel. Her breathlessness at the slightest wave, her increased girth, her inability to rise on her own, and her constant complaints about age and the body all seem related to her age, but really, foreshadow the fact that Swenson, now seventy, is pregnant.

Finally, Swenson's assurances that Anders did not die of malaria combined with her recommendations that Marina stop taking Lariam combine to suggest Marina will in fact stop taking the pills. Her recurrent dream about her father shows again her own subconscious feelings of loss and abandonment.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

In Chapter 7, Marina is in awe at the jungle at night as they arrive at the Lakashi tribe, where the entire tribe meets the boat with torches. The tribe mob the boat, greeting the crew with slaps on the body. Swenson goes to bed, after nearly fainting on the trail, leaving Marina alone in the darkness. Easter soon comes to her rescue, and takes her to a storage room with a cot on a porch area. Easter, in a hammock nearby, falls asleep quickly, and Marina investigates the room. She finds Easter's small storage box, filled with feathers, and a note from Anders asking whomever reads the letter to take Easter back to his wife. Also in the box are Anders' passport and driver's license. As she goes to bed, she thinks of Anders, but is awoken by Easter's screams as he has a nightmare. Marina immediately soothes him, and takes him into her cot, where he falls quickly back asleep.

In the morning, Marina finds the tribe to be hard at work. She finds her way back to the boat to retrieve her suitcase, but finds it to be missing. When she meets Dr. Thomas Nkomo at the docks, she wonders about why Vogel failed to mention they were paying other doctors to work on the projects. Nkomo speaks of Anders with sorrow, clearly saddened by his loss. As a storm brews, he takes Marina into the jungle and into a hut located in the tops of the trees, where several Lakashi sit and work. A small baby moves about quickly, and Marina is urinated on. The other women in the hut remove her clothing and fashion her with a Lakashi dress. In the process, an older woman of sixty or seventy presses against her, and Marina realizes the woman is pregnant. As she discusses the situation with Nkomo, she realizes he is not employed by Vogel, and is instead working with mosquitoes. He mentions that he focuses on the fertility drug's off target beneficial effects. Easter suddenly appears in the hut, overjoyed to find Marina, as he clearly thought he had lost her. When they attempt to leave, Marina discovers the Lakashi have stolen her clothes.

Chapter Seven Analysis

In Chapter 7, two primary areas of focus are introduced, those of the additional studies being worked on in the research facility as well as the true nature of the fertility project. The Lakashi tribe are a hard working group, whose traditions are foreign to Marina, and yet she does find them fascinating from the start. Their form of greeting, their abundance of children, and their way of working draws her attention quickly. However, it is the pregnant older woman who catches Marina's full attention as she realizes the truth of Swenson's project. It is clear the Lakashi women reproduce far beyond what other woman are capable of. In one hut, Marina believes there are at least five generations, all of whom are under the age of seventy. Their clothing is designed to be perpetual maternity clothing and judging from their reactions to the child in the hut, the Lakashi are well versed in child rearing.



Thomas Nkomo's presence introduces the second area of focus in this chapter. From the beginning, Marina wonders about why Vogel forgot to mention other doctors, but it is clear from Nkomo's responses that he is not working on the same project as Swenson. Their work is related, however, as is signified by his presence and his own admission. The fact that he works with mosquitoes, and that he studies other ramifications of the fertility drug used by the Lakashi suggests that his work may be related to disease, which is proven in later chapters.

The discovery of Easter's treasure box reminds readers that, regardless of the other issues occurring in the jungle, there is still the matter of the fallen coworker. Nkomo's reactions show Anders was well liked, and that others believe him to be dead, as well. He even admits to being partially at fault, as he believed Anders would live through the illness. Easter's storage box, containing feathers Anders would have given him along with tokens such as his passport show Easter and Anders had a clear and close connection to one another. His letter of reward for anyone who can take Easter to Minnesota shows Anders loved the boy, and the boy's own nightmares, present since Anders' death according to Swenson, imply there may be more to the death than what meets the eye. This foreshadows knowledge later in the novel that Easter actually lost Anders. It is clear that, to Marina, Easter has become both a symbol of Anders as well as a soothing talisman, as his mere presence has the ability to calm her. His reaction to losing her shows he too cares for her, but more importantly, shows he feels personally responsible for her.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

In Chapter 8, Marina writes to Mr. Fox, as Dr. Alan Saturn, one of the other doctors in the group, announces he is taking letters to the trading post of the Jinta upstream. Easter has been giving her letters from Ander to Karen for a while, and she assumes these were all letters that never made it to the trading post. She has met other doctors in the week she has been in the facility, including Dr. Budi and Dr. Nancy Saturn. Marina occupies her off time exploring the jungle, swimming in the river, and reading old magazines and a collection of Dickens novels. The Lakashi are patient subjects, and Marina learns they were trained painstakingly by Swenson. Marina learns the tribe goes on trips deep into the jungle, where they intake hallucinogenic mushrooms. Swenson notes they have gone with them previously, when Rapp was alive, and she studied them, noting their blood pressure, after unconsciousness, barely registered above dead. She also admits that she participated and saw God, although the ritual causes severe nausea.

Marina joins Alan and Nancy Saturn, two of the other doctors, on the boat traveling to Java for the letter delivery. Benoit, one of the local boys interested in the tourism trade, is also on board, trying to find the birds listed in Anders' bird watching book, and Easter, who is permanently sleeping in Marina's bed at night, is driving the boat. On the way, the Saturns and Marina discuss Dr. Rapp. Alan was a student of Rapps, although Nancy, considerably younger than her husband, was not. Alan tells story after story of Rapp's genius and his talent, and shows a clear admiration for the man. Alan informs her that Swenson was coming with Rapp long before he was, and Nancy notes that it was actually Swenson who chose the young interns who came with the group. He explains that Rapp taught the boys how to be men, and how to be great scientists. He admits he stopped traveling with Rapp as a result of a bout of malaria, after his father refused to let him go, even after he had recovered.

Nancy points out that she is bothered by his references to his father as negative, considering the man was only trying to protect his son. She notes that what Alan is not telling Marina is that Dr. Rapp brought Swenson because she was his mistress, and that Rapp left Alan in the jungle when he contracted malaria. She vehemently points out that Rapp is not a perfect man and that he may have been a fine scientist, but his infidelity and coldness makes him an improper role model. Alan and Nancy agree to disagree, and Alan tells Marina of the Hummocca tribe, who are known to be cannibals during rituals.

At the trading post, Marina dances with locals in front of tourists, and finds herself marveling at the oddity of the situation. On the way back, the group stops in a vegetative area of the river, at the urging of Benoit. Reaching into the water, Benoit pulls out an eighteen-foot anaconda. He struggles to kill the creature, laughing at his fortune, and Easter helps him to secure the head. However, soon it is apparent Easter is in



danger, as the snake has wrapped tightly around his body and has begun to crush him. Marina, finding a knife, cuts the snake away from Easter, finally freeing him as Nancy gives him mouth to mouth.

Returning to camp, the Lakashi celebrate the killing of the snake and Easter is carried to Marina's bed. Swenson arrives, thanking Marina for saving the boy, but also noting that Anders wanted to save Easter too, by taking him to the States. She points out that Easter belongs in the jungle.

As Marina and Swenson discuss children, and what the fertility drug really means to women like Marina who may still want to bear children, Marina suddenly realizes Swenson is pregnant. Swenson admits that she is the test case to see if eating the tree bark will not only prolong menstruation and maintain the ova, as it does in the Lakashi, but if it will also reinvigorate the reproductive system of postmenopausal women. Marina chastises that Swenson plans to leave her child with the Lakashi, and Swenson reminds her Rapp's own children are living with the Lakashi. Swenson also mentions that, in examining the fertility drug, they have found a more ambitious project, as well as discovered that women of a certain age simply should not carry children. Marina leads Swenson back to her hut and then washes the snake blood from her body and that of Easter's.

Chapter Eight Analysis

Chapter 8 opens with additional information about the Lakashi tribe, in terms of their participation in the research, as well as in their customs and rituals. These pieces of information foreshadow the discussion later in the novel about both the ethical considerations of using the Lakashi, as well as the ecological discussions of the balance that exists between the mushrooms and the trees used for fertility.

The trip to Java serves to again discuss the theme of hero worship. From Alan's descriptions of Rapp, it is very clear he worshiped and idolized the man profusely. He cared little about the things Rapp may have done that were immoral, because he chose not to see those things. As he himself says, he chooses to cut away the bad parts of Rapp's life in an effort to show only the positive aspects. Nancy, on the other hand, sees Rapp in a different light. As a philanderer, and a cold hearted man who left dying boys in the jungle, Nancy can see little redeeming about him. While she does not question his genius, she does not think his hero status is deserved. The knowledge that Swenson participated in this as his lover shows that both she and Rapp may be geniuses but that they also may have aspects of them that are not worthy of the worship they receive.

Benoit's capture of the snake and the resulting injury of Easter serve to introduce yet another concept in the book. Marina clearly cares for Easter and she saves his life. When she returns to camp, however, it is Swenson who catches on to her desire to take him to the states with her. This introduces the moral issues again in the book. As Swenson points out, Easter is of the jungle. He would not fit elsewhere as the jungle is what he knows. Just as Anders wanted to save him by taking him to Karen, Marina has

unknowingly decided to save him by taking him, as well. Swenson is not angry, but does point out that Easter, by all rights, is her child. This foreshadows the argument later in the novel when it is revealed that Easter was not given freely to the Lakashi.

The revelation that Swenson is pregnant introduces another theme in the novel, that of medical advancements. Swenson points out that, as the human test, she can say that women over a certain age really should not be pregnant. What she has done by making herself the subject is to prove to herself what it was like to be pregnant late in life, and she now realizes this drug is not ideal. She believes that women her age should not have children, and that the Lakashi are made for it, whereas others are not. She points out that her body is old, and that her health is now failing. This foreshadows her decision not to market the drug later in the novel. Also, her references to the more ambitious project foreshadow information later about the antimalarial drug.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

Several days later, in Chapter 9, Marina accompanies Dr. Buni and Nancy to the trees that produce the fertility compound. In the clearing, there are groups of small trees growing near one another, with small mushrooms growing at the base. Marina watches as Lakashi women scrape their teeth along the trees, eating the soft bark. One small girl is led to the trees by older women, indicating she has begun menstruating. She learns that despite appearances, there is only one tree, where the root system replicates itself, resulting in the high numbers of visible trunks. The root system poisons the earth so that nothing else, except the hallucinogenic mushrooms called Rapps, can grow. The trees, Martins, are secondary to the scientists, although they carry the fertility factor. The doctors know that if the location is revealed, the area will be overrun by drug dealers, tourists, other tribes, and the government, and the Lakashi would perish in the war that would follow. The scientists are unable to reproduce the delicate balance in the lab. Nkomo arrives, and explains as he eats the bark that the Martins also hold the key to an inoculation against malaria. He notes that purple moths, called martinets, excretes moisture into the exposed bark of the tree and lays its eggs. The combination of bark, moth larvae, excrement, and Rapps, somehow not only allow for fertility, but also protect against malaria. This second drug is the drug many of the other doctors are working on, with Swenson's assistance.

Marina eats the bark, asking if Anders did as well, and suddenly, the doctors become vague. Marina learns, through questioning, that the doctors do not definitively know what happened to Anders, but suspect that he was taken for burial by the Lakashi. Back in camp, Swenson calls for her and informs her that a woman in camp is in labor, but having difficulty. Marina immediately questions her abilities, but Swenson notes she herself was adamant about helping the natives when they could be helped. At the hut, Swenson and Marina find the woman in painful labor. Marina finds she must work with unsterilized instruments and little drugs. The baby is breech, but instead of turning it, Swenson insists that they do a C section. Marina is terrified, but completes the surgery with the help of Swenson's instructions and a woman who assists. Once delivered, the Lakashi take over, and Marina finds the entire village is on the ground to congratulate her. Swenson informs her she is the person she wants to deliver her own baby, and although Marina insists she will be gone by the labor and that she is unqualified, Swenson does not back down. Swenson openly admits she is using the funding from Vogel to prolong the project, allowing the doctors to complete the malarial project. Swenson reminds Marina she has a place at the facility now, and that she can, in time, take over for Swenson. As Marina returns to her hut, she finds another of Anders' letters in which he has simply written Karen's name over and over.



Chapter Nine Analysis

In Chapter 9, Marina finally learns the secret of the off-target effects of the fertility compound, that of the inoculation against malaria. The highly intricate ecological and biological system in place with the Martins, matinets, and the Rapps, unable to be replicated in the lab, introduces the question of the delicate balance of nature. The scientists know that, regardless of the benefit of the drugs, the Rapps will be fought after for recreational use, and the resulting war will kill off the entire tribe, along with their entire way of life. The secrecy of the location was not so much to protect Swenson as it was to protect the very subjects on which the tests were being run.

Also in this chapter is the first real introduction of the idea that Anders may not be dead. Although vague, the answers given by the doctors when asked about Anders' burial site suggest they did not see the body. Their assumption that the Lakashi took the body is unsubstantiated, and although Marina thinks this means merely that she must find a way to soothe Karen, it actually foreshadows knowledge later of his existence in another part of the jungle. The letters Easter keeps giving to Marina serve as constant reminders as to the real reason she is there, and never let her forget him.

Marina's experience with the C section introduces several key points. First, Marina herself claimed to disagree with not intervening when needed, but what it comes time to perform, she hesitates. This hesitation is not sign of weak morals, however, but instead a sign of her own self-consciousness about her abilities. The last time Marina operated was under Swenson and she horribly disfigured and blinded a baby. As a result, Marina is understandingly frightened, but she does the surgery anyway. This allows her to prove herself, both to Swenson, as well as to the rest of the tribe. It is clear she has also proven something to herself. Swenson clearly wants Marina to replace her when she leaves, showing a vast amount of respect, but the fact that she also wants Marina to deliver her baby shows how much Swenson really does trust Marina. In light of Marina's own hero worship of Swenson, this is a twist.

Finally, this chapter shows Marina beginning to support Swenson and her team more than Vogel and Mr. Fox. Throughout the novel, Marina has struggled to act in accordance with her own morals, and with ethical considerations. When Swenson tells her she will not be developing the fertility drug, Marina tries to sound as though she may inform Vogel, but it is already clear to Swenson, and to readers, that Marina will always choose morality over fiscal or business responsibility. This implied choice foreshadows her break from Mr. Fox later in the novel.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

In Chapter 10, Marina finds herself going daily to the Martins to feed of the bark. She wonders if the bark is addictive, or if the body merely craves it, but she does recognize that she is ready to leave the jungle. She has been working on medical cases since the C section, and the other doctors praise her, but she wants to go home. Alan Saturn has shown her the mosquitoes, and she understands that the Lakashi are being used, without consent, but as Alan states, "research doesn't happen in a petri dish" (p. 295). She continues to write to Mr. Fox, although she says nothing specific. One day, waiting for boats to pass to send her letters, she is shocked to find, when the next boat stops, that it is filled with Barbara Bovender, Mr. Fox, and Milton. She is thrilled to see Barbara and Milton, but finds herself at odds with seeing Mr. Fox. The Lakashi board the boat for their ritual greeting, and Swenson arrives, angrily noting she will speak to Barbara about this later. She addresses Fox briefly, and leaves them to find their own accommodations. As Barbara and Marina walk to the storage room, Barbara explains that Mr. Fox threatened to take away the apartment, and then ordered her on the boat with Milton. She was to lead them to Swenson, but she had only been there once. Making a mistake, she led them to the Hummocca tribe, who shot at them with poisoned arrows. Barbara mentions she knew she was going to die, as she saw her dead father running toward her through the trees.

When Marina returns to the lab, Swenson and Fox are arguing about his presence. Swenson reminds him his actions are disruptive, and that he is constantly putting people in grave danger. Swenson is angry but Budi puts a stop to the argument, and Swenson agrees, finally noting her pregnancy to Fox. Fox is enormously pleased, and agrees to leave Marina there to deliver the child. Swenson asks Marina to walk her to her hut, where Marina immediately begins to protest to staying, but Swenson stops her. She reports the baby has died, and that Marina will only have to do a C section to remove the fetus. Swenson knows she has preclampsia and that she runs the risk of death herself, but she also knows they must wait until Fox leaves, as he believes the baby lives. This belief will allow her to continue for several more months to complete the malaria drug. Marina agrees, and Swenson points out that she may die, but that she does so with a clear conscience, knowing she has proven that women of her age should not have children, and that the real benefit is in the other drug.

Back in the lab, Marina finds Fox happily looking at the data, while she wants him to be tender and kind. When asked about Swenson, she mentions only that her blood pressure is high. She and Barbara return to the storage room, where Barbara and Easter sleep together, as Barbara admits she needs the talisman. Marina awakens from a dream and goes immediately to the trees, but is soon found by Alan and Mr. Fox. She realizes, as she walks with them, that she is lying not only to Fox, but to the others, as they know nothing of her real relationship with him. Once Fox has seen the trees, Marina takes him back to the lab, but he refuses her tender touches, afraid someone



will see them. She kisses him, and he relents, but not for long. He assures her she will be home soon, and everything will be fine. As he goes to step, Marina grabs him tightly, noting only that he nearly stepped on a large snake.

Back at camp, Marina sees Barbara and the others back to the boat, kissing each of them in turn, with only Fox showing discomfort. Returning to Swenson, she prepares for the C section when Swenson reminds her to take her time, as her rushing was what caused her accident in Baltimore. Marina, shocked to hear her mentor admit she remembers, questions Swenson, but she responds that Marina's accident was a common one, and had she known her better at the time, she would have talked her out of quitting her residency. Marina finds the guilt of that day suddenly released, and she knows she is ready to do the surgery.

Chapter Ten Analysis

Chapter 10 returns to the theme of the relationship between Marina and Mr. Fox, as well as back to the theme of ethical and moral dilemma. When Marina makes the first decision, when writing Fox letters, not to tell him of the malaria drug, she makes a decision that will doom her fate with him, and she seems aware of this. When he first arrives at the site, he seems genuinely concerned about Marina, although he feels he cannot openly show this concern. However, within a few hours, the revelation that the drug is nearly complete alters his perception, and he even refers to Marina as an employee, and notes his concern for his investment. He even consents to leasing out Marina to Swenson for child birth. It is clear to Marina that Fox cares more for the drug than for her. Her attempts to be near him, even in the trees, are met with reluctance, and a concern for what people will think, even the Lakashi. Marina, then, knows her fate with Fox is doomed and as a result, even when she knows of the death of the child, she continues the charade for Fox. This shows both that Marina understands her relationship with Fox is over, but also that Marina allows her ethical and moral considerations to again overcome even what may be best for herself.

Barbara Bovender's appearance in this chapter serves several functions. First, while her short story about seeing her father in the trees seems innocent at the time, it foreshadows the knowledge later that Anders is still alive. Additionally, Marina's reaction to her shows she considers her a friend at this juncture, and a welcome sight. Although Swenson seems annoyed and irritated at Barbara, it is clear from her story that Mr. Fox's threats were very real to her, prompting her actions. Finally, her admittance that she understands that women should not have children late, based on Swenson's health, is further proof that the drug should not be developed, even with the best intentions.

Swenson, in this chapter, also has several ethical issues. First, by asking Marina to lie to Fox, she is asking a lot, but Swenson, as she has shown in the past, cares little for others. That being said, it is becoming clear that Swenson does respect and care for Marina, in spite of Swenson's sharp comments and often berating words. She has faith in Marina, even after remembering the accident in Baltimore, and this faith prompts her to seek Marina as a replacement, as well as for a midwife. Marina, finally able to rid

herself of the guilt that has plagued her throughout life, continues to refused, foreshadowing her decision to leave in the final chapter.



Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven Summary

In Chapter 11, Swenson slowly recovers following her C section. The fetus is frozen for tests, and Marina notes the baby has a rare condition that causes the legs to fuse together. After several days, she and Swenson discuss whether Marina will stay on to take care of the Lakashi, and Marina at first refuses. Swenson, however, notes that she thinks often of Anders, and that Barbara's story of her father has led her to some conclusions. What Barbara saw, she notes, was a white man in the jungle who knew her name. Marina, in shock, realizes Anders may not be dead. Swenson explains that Anders wandered off during his fever, and Easter was to look out for him. One day, Easter lost him, and Swenson assumed he had wandered into the jungle and died. Swenson calmly notes that a rescue mission to the Hummocca tribe will likely end in her death. Marina thinks of Karen, and without even forming a plan, locates Easter, and begins to find items to trade for Anders. She realizes she doesn't have much, but she does locate oranges, peanut butter, and the Rapps. When she returns to the boat, the other doctors attempt to go with her, knowing they can help save Anders, but she pushes them off the boat after they teach her to ask the Hummocca for the white man, not wanting them harmed.

After several hours of traveling down the river, the boat is bombarded with arrows, none of which come close to their mark. Marina screams out the phrase, asking for a trade and the tribe members appear out of the jungle. She throws an orange to them only to find Anders picking it up. Anders translates for Marina, asking for a trade, but he refuses to tell them of the Rapps, noting that the Hummocca will kill the Lakashi if they discover the drug's origin. Marina explains she wants to trade for Anders, all the while shielding Easter from the tribe, wondering why she brought the child, afraid for him. As Easter brings the boat closer, Marina notices one of the tribe member's faces light up, seeing Easter. A woman from the tribe wails, and boards the boat, going immediately to Easter, who is frightened. Easter holds on to Marina fiercely as Anders boards the boat. Anders says painfully that the tribe wants to trade Easter for himself. Marina, heartbroken, refuses, but Anders points out they will simply keep the boat, and everyone in it. He painfully holds Easter out to the tribe, as Marina notes the look of pain, fear, and hurt confusion on Easter's face. Anders drives the boat away quickly, leaving Easter behind.

Marina continues to blame herself for the loss of Easter, and even in her joy of finding Anders, is near suicidal at the thought of what has happened. When they arrive back at camp, everyone is thrilled to see Anders, but confused as to why Easter is missing. When Marina tells Swenson, she immediately demands that Marina return to fetch him, but Marina demands to know how Easter came to the camp. Swenson finally admits that the Hummocca brought to her a small child with puss and blood running out of his ears. For days, she treated him, and when the men who brought him returned, Easter was not yet well. Rather than try to explain the situation in a language she did not know, she lied, and told them he had died. Marina, too tired to argue with the ethical



considerations of the issue in depth, reports that they are leaving in the morning. Swenson reminds her she is a part of things now, and that she might return to Minnesota, but that she will not be able to function in normal society anymore and will return.

Back in the storage room, Marina opens Easter's box to find not only Anders's photo and passport, but her own as well and her GPS phone. Returning to the room, Anders comes to bed with Marina, who assures him that things are better with Easter where he belongs. In a moment of confusion and clarity, Marina kisses Anders, and the two make love. The following morning, they leave for Manaus, where they explain everything to Barbara and Milton. They find themselves soon on a flight home, and within a day, are back in Minnesota. They take a taxi to Anders home, where he leaps from the car after seeing his young sons, who begin to scream in happiness. Marina looks away, but hears Karen's delighted scream as well and not wanting to intrude, she asks the taxi to drive away.

Chapter Eleven Analysis

The final chapter of the novel brings together all elements that have occurred in the novel. Dr. Swenson's child has a rare disease that Marina recalls hearing her lecture about in college. She told the class they would likely never see a subject with this disease, and the irony that Swenson's child has it is not lost on Marina. The illness, and the rarity of the disease, symbolize again the concept that women over a certain age outside the Lakashi are not meant to have children.

Swenson's final story of Anders' illness is a shock, but it is not all that surprising, when one looks back on the discussions thus far in the book. Had it not been for Barbara, however, Anders would likely have perished in the jungle. Swenson's own preoccupation with her own issues could have cost a man his life. Marina's decision to go after Anders is one made of responsibility and dedication, and although Marina knows she will likely perish, she also knows this is the entire reason she came to the jungle. Now clear on her ethical standards, she knows that to leave Anders behind would be impossible for her to live with. On the other hand, her decision to trade the secretive Rapps shows not only her desperation, but also a lack of care on her part for the Lakashi.

The scene with the Hummocca is perhaps one of the most difficult in the novel. The joy at Anders being alive is completely removed once it is clear the tribe knows and wants Easter. Marina's pain is obvious, as is Anders' but this time, Marina's ethical considerations cannot come into play. If they refuse, all of them will perish, and it is clear the Hummocca know and love Easter, based on the woman's response. One begins to piece together what really happened with Easter, and this is later confirmed by Swenson. The knowledge that Easter belonged to the Hummocca, however, in no way takes away the pain of his loss, and of knowing he does not understand what is happening. Although the decision to leave him may have been right, it was not morally acceptable by Marina. Swenson's reaction to the loss of Easter is expected, as she



loved him dearly, but again, it was her decision to act without ethical consideration that caused the issue in the first place.

The ending of the novel is somewhat bittersweet. Swenson's recovery means she can continue working, and although she assures Marina she will return, it is clear that Marina is not the same person as Swenson and she could not take over and be happy. Marina's own decision to make love to Anders is surprising, and although understandable, does lend discredit to her ethical and moral high horse. Throughout the novel, Marina has plagued herself with what is ethically and morally right, and in this case, she chooses immorally. That being said, it is clear that Marina and Anders make love out of the pain of losing Easter, the joy of saving Anders, and the overall relief that their journey is over. Anders' return home is a happy one and Marina's quiet departure from the scene shows she has learned that sometimes it is best to not interfere.



Characters

Marina Singh

Marina Singh is a doctor, working for a pharmaceutical company called Vogel in the lab. Marina is forty-two year old woman without any children and was married once, early in her life, but divorced two and a half years later. As a child, Singh's parents, a white mother and a foreign graduate student father, did not remain together and Marina spent some time in her father's native home of India, although her permanent residence was in Minnesota, where she experienced some sense of difference, due to the darker color of her skin. As a young woman, Marina was, at first, a student of obstetrics, and a student of Dr. Annick Swenson, considered to be a genius in the field. However, while in her residency, Marina made a mistake during a C section and blinded a baby. She quit the program and went into pharmacology instead. Marina is strong in her convictions, but also has a huge heart and cares deeply for those close to her. When her lab mate Anders goes missing in the jungle, Marina at first does not want to go to the Amazon in search for him, but over time, her love for Mr. Fox, her employer, and her concern for Karen Eckman, the wife of Anders, overcomes her rationality and she is sent to discover what is happening.

Throughout the novel, Marina grows as a character, becoming both stronger as a person both mentally and emotionally. Marina comes to realize the power that her mentor, Swenson, has had over her entire life and she learns to forgive herself for her mistakes. Marina also is forced to make several ethical decisions, between being honest with those she loves and saving the lives of thousands, and she chooses what is right for humanity. While in the jungle, she becomes close with a deaf child named Easter, whom she believes to have been left in the village. When forced to choose between leaving her friend behind and returning Easter to his rightful family, Marina again makes a choice that is against her own benefit, but one that is ethically appropriate. Marina shows she is of high moral conscience even when she wishes she were not.

Marina is not without fault, however. At the end of the novel, she and Eckman, in a moment of human tenderness, make love to one another, once he has been found, and rescued by Marina. There is no guilt for these characters, in that their act is more in friendship than in love, but even so, Marina clearly chooses, in this case, what she wants instead of what is best for everyone else. Although a rarity, this does show that Marina is beginning to learn to act on her own behalf, instead of through following others, and that by allowing herself to let go of her guilt about the accident, she is able to move forward and grow.



Dr. Annick Swenson

Dr. Annick Swenson is a doctor specializing in obstetrics and gynecology. Teaching at John Hopkins University earlier in her career, Swenson became known for her toughness, her quick, sharp tongue, and her power as a leader and mentor. Swenson began traveling with Dr. Rapp who studied the Lakashi tribe and their relationship to plants in the Amazonian jungle. As a byproduct, Swenson began to notice the high fertility rate of the Lakashi, and realized the potential for a fertility drug. She proposed the drug to Vogel, a pharmaceutical company in the US, and they began to fund her research. Unbeknownst to them, Swenson was simultaneously developing an inoculation against malaria.

Dr. Swenson is a hard woman. She is quick to judge others, has little time for sentimentality, and rules herself almost exclusively by her logic, instead of her emotions. She does whatever she chooses, and feels she has the exclusive right to do just that, regardless of who is hurt. She understands the gentle balance of the Lakashi people and she often chooses to let nature take its course in the village. When she realizes that the baby she carries at seventy is dead, she wastes no time, but simply looks at the process as a science project. When Anders is lost, she views it as a distraction, instead of a tragedy. It is clear Swenson has a lack of emotional capability. There is one person, however, that seems to have captured Swenson's heart, in a way. When Swenson "stole" Easter from his own tribe and chose to care for him, it is clear she did so out of a type of love. When Easter is lost at the end of the novel and returned back to his tribe, Swenson is upset, although her reaction feels more like the anger at the loss of an object than a person.

Swenson's lack of emotion is somewhat difficult to take, but paradoxically, is somewhat refreshing. Swenson is direct without the filter most people have on what they say and do. There is no question, when dealing with Swenson, what she is thinking, in that she tells you directly. Everyone in the story knows where they stand with Swenson, and a compliment from her is treasured, as it is genuine. She is neither kind nor gentle, but she is honest, brilliant, and dedicated.

Easter

Easter is a young boy who appears, at first, to somehow belong with Annick Swenson, the doctor at the research facility in the Amazonian jungle, working with the Lakashi tribe. When he is first introduced, it is with Swenson, and it is clear she is responsible for him. Easter is deaf, but is completely functional and necessary for many, as he is an excellent navigator on the river. Easter is, as Swenson guesses, twelve years of age. He clearly loves Swenson, but also grows to easily love those around him such as Anders, the Bovenders, and Marina herself. As the book progresses, Swenson explains that, when he was a baby, he was left by the Hummocca tribe, likely as a result of his deafness. However, when Marina goes to the Hummocca to save Anders, she discovers that the parents of Easter clearly want his return. Swenson is forced to admit that, as a



young child, Easter was brought to her very ill. Instead of returning him to the tribe when he was well, she told them he had died, and kidnapped him. Easter is traded at the end of the novel for Anders, returning him to his rightful home, although he clearly does not understand. Easter's story is tragic, in that it shows Swenson's decisions are almost always based on what makes her happy and what furthers her own life, instead of those around her.

Anders Eckman

Anders Eckman is a pharmacologist who works for Vogel labs. He is sent to the Amazon jungle to check on Dr. Annick Swenson's progress with a fertility drug. Anders is happily married with three children and an avid bird watcher. Once in the Amazon, however, Swenson reports that he contracted a fever and died. When the news reaches his wife and employer, they both wish Marina Singh, his lab partner, to go to the Amazon to check on progress. Marina learns that Anders was well liked among the scientists, as well as by a local young boy named Easter. He wrote letters home nearly every day and cared for his wife and family deeply.

It is revealed at the end of the novel, however, that Anders is not really dead, but merely wandered off in his fever haze and was taken by the local Hummocca tribe. When Marina learns of his possible life, she goes to rescue him. The tribe who hold him however, refuses to let him go unless Marina gives Easter to them. Anders explains to her that the Hummocca will kill them if they don't give up Easter, and that no matter what choice they make, Easter will be forced to stay with the tribe. Anders clearly thinks logically, as does Swenson, but he also has great emotional capacity. He and Marina make love after his rescue, but only as a proof of their life and their joy and not as a sexual encounter. Anders returns to his wife and family at the end of the novel.

Mr. Jim Fox

Mr. Fox is the CEO of Vogel, the pharmaceutical company in charge of financing the fertility research in the Amazon jungle. Fox is considerably older than Marina, but the two have been keeping a secret relationship for over a year, secret because of her employment at Vogel. Fox clearly cares for Marina, but his care and concern for the project of Dr. Swenson in the jungle also clearly overpowers his concern for her. Fox sends Marina to the jungle to find answers about Anders and to find out about Annick's research, and although he seems genuinely concerned for her well being, he also seems more concerned about the project. When Fox doesn't hear from Marina, he heads to the Amazon himself, proving he does, in fact, care for Marina, but upon discovering the fertility project, and how "well" it is going, Fox accepts Marina's position at the research facility, and seems not to care that she does not return with him. He is consistently embarrassed at her show of affection in front of others and always seems concerned about appearance and duty over love and care. In the end, Marina realizes she and Fox have no future and she sends him back to the States without her.



Karen Eckers

Karen Eckers is the wife of Anders Eckers. She and Anders have three children and Karen is a wonderful wife and mother. She and Marina know one another as a result of Marina's closeness to her husband, and it is therefore Marina who tells Karen of Anders' death. This small bond begins to bloom as Karen tells Marina of her thoughts about Anders, and her feelings that he is still alive. It is Karen who holds out hope that Anders is simply missing, and it is in part because of her pleading that Marina finds herself traveling to the Amazon to prove Anders is really dead. Karen trusts Marina, and knows that she herself cannot go, and that Marina is the only person capable of discovering the truth. Without Karen, Anders may never have been located.

Alan and Nancy Saturn

Alan and Nancy Saturn are two of the doctors working with Dr. Swenson in the Amazon jungle with the Lakashi tribe. From Minnesota, the husband and wife team are both working on the malaria portion of the drug. Alan Saturn was originally a student of Dr. Rapp's and it is he who reveals that Annick Swenson was actually Rapp's mistress, which is why she even began working with the fertility drug in the jungle. Alan Saturn worships Dr. Martin Rapp, but Nancy Saturn believes he was merely a selfish man who was unfaithful to his wife. There is a considerable age difference between the two doctors and Marian supposes they once had a student and teacher relationship.

Barbara and Jackie Bovender

Barbara and Jackie Bovender are gate keepers for Dr. Swenson. The couple is in their twenties and lead a Bohemian lifestyle. Marina finds them appealing in their beauty and grace, as they seem the peak of sophistication and beautiful brilliance. The couple lives in Dr. Swenson's home in the city while she is in the jungle, taking care of her affairs, and acting primarily as the people who keep others away from Dr. Swenson. When Marina arrives, she must first make friends with the couple and allow them to entertain her as they size her up. Barbara particularly begins to grow fond of Marina and the two become friends. Later in the novel, Barbara takes Mr. Fox to see Dr., Swenson in the field and it is her report of a white man in the jungle that alerts Swenson that Anders is still alive.

Milton

Milton is the man in Manaus responsible for taking care of Marina's needs while she is there. Milton is her driver and also the person who attends to her needs such as luggage and shopping. Several times in the novel Milton is Marina's savior, seeming to appear just when he is needed. Although a smaller character, Milton represents civility and safety to Marina throughout the novel.



Dr. Budi

Dr. Budi is in charge of clinical research organization for Dr. Swenson in the Amazon. In Indonesia as a young girl, Budi was a swimming star. It is Budi who explains to Marina about the bark's effect on Lakashi women and Budi also helps Marina when she has to do a C section on Dr. Swenson. Budi is a kind woman, but also somewhat of a workaholic.

Benoit

Benoit is a young man of the tribe who hopes for a career in tourism. As a young man, he was trained to read and write at a missionary school nearby and as a result, he is a contented member of the tribe. One day while on the boat with the Saturns, Marina, and Easter, Benoit reaches into the water to capture an anaconda, which he does successfully. However, the snake soon begins to wrap around him, and eventually, Easter, nearly killing them both before Marina and the Saturns free the men, killing the snake.

Lakashi Tribe

The Lakashi tribe are the tribe in the Amazon that have been studied by a variety of different scientists, including Dr. Rapp and Dr. Swenson. The women of the Lakashi tribe live long lives, and have continued fertility far beyond that of other woman, due to their chewing of a certain tree bark that helps the body continue menstruation. This same bark inoculates the women against malaria. The tribe uses hallucinogenic mushrooms in their rituals, which also grow near the trees whose bark helps maintain fertility.

Hummocca

The Hummocca tribe is a tribe that resides near the Lakashi tribe in the Amazonian jungle. Their head shape is different from that of the Lakashi, and they are smaller. They are believed to participate in cannibalism for ritualistic purposes. While Swenson tells Marina they Hummocca left Easter in her care, it is revealed that they instead brought him to her ill, asking her to heal him. Instead of returning him, she told the tribe he had died. The Hummocca are also the tribe who recover Anders from his canoe, and keep him hostage until Marina trades them, exchanging Easter for Anders.

Dr. Thomas Nkomo

Dr. Thomas Nkomo is a tall, black doctor who is a member of the scientific team Swenson supervises. He speaks fluent English, as well as other languages, but his primary function is to study the off target effects of the fertility compound Swenson is



researching. Although a minor part in the story, the presence of Nkomo shows that Swenson has been developing a drug to inoculate against malaria for quite some time, with expert assistance.

Dr. Martin Rapp

Dr. Martin Rapp was the original ethnobotanist who arrived in the Amazonian jungle to study the relationship between the Lakashi and the nearby plant life. His mistress, Annick Swenson, studied their fertility, which led to the eventual discovery of an inoculation drug for malaria. Rapp was a hero figure to many, but his infidelity made him questionable to others. Further, his dedication to science, even if it meant leaving the sick or injured behind, made some question his morality. His contributions to science, however, can not be questioned as he discovered the mushrooms used by the Lakashi in their rituals, which grew near the trees that produced the bark that allowed Lakashi women to have children very late in life, and the moth responsible for inoculating the women against malaria.



Objects/Places

Eden Prairie, Minnesota

Eden Prairie, Minnesota is the home of Anders Eckman and Marina Singh.

Amazon jungle

The Amazonian jungle is the location where Dr. Annick Swenson and her staff are developing fertility drugs and a drug to inoculate against malaria.

Vogel

Vogel is the pharmaceutical company that Marina Singh and Anders Eckman work for.

Malaria

Malaria is a disease common in the jungle and one which kills hundreds of thousands of children each year. Dr. Swenson and her staff have found an inoculation against malaria as they studied fertility among the Lakashi tribe.

Martins

The 'Martins' are the trees whose bark extends the fertility cycle of the Lakashi women.

Martinets

The 'Martinets' are the small purple moths that ingest the liquid from the Martins and secrete back onto the tree bark, laying its eggs once a year into the tree. These factors combine to seemingly create an inoculation against malaria for anyone who eats the bark of the tree.

Rapp

The 'Rapp' is a hallucinogenic mushroom that grows at the base of the Martin trees in the Amazon jungle. The Lakashi tribe use the Rapps in their ceremonies.



Ethnobotony

Ethnobotony is the study of the relationship between people and plants. In the book, Martin Rapp is an ethnobotonist, studying the relationship between the Lakashi tribe and a variety of plants.

Sirenomelia

Sirenomelia, also known as Mermaid Syndrome, is a disease where the legs of a fetus are fused together into a tail without any visible genitalia. The deceased child of Dr. Swenson had this disease.

Lariam

Lariam is the drug that Marina and others take in the jungle to prevent malaria.

Pharmacology

Pharmacology is the study of the interactions between living organisms and chemicals. After quitting the obstetrics course of study, Marina went into pharmacology.



Themes

Ecological Balance

The theme of a fragile ecological balance is a vital one to 'State of Wonder.' In the book, Dr. Annick Swenson has been working with the Lakashi tribe in the Amazon jungle for many years, claiming to work on a fertility drug, when in reality, she has been working on an drug to inoculate against malaria. The Lakashi eat the bark of a tree, called the Martins, which allows them to be extremely fertile, having children well into their 70s. A local moth, the martinet, in turn lays its larvae in the open tree bark and this appears to inoculate those who eat the bark against malaria. At the base of the trees are small, hallucinogenic mushrooms, called Rapps that are vital to the Lakashi and their customs, and way of life. The overproduction of babies in this tribe is vital because of the high death rate from malaria in the area. Only women who are of menstruation age are inoculated against malaria when they eat the bark of the trees. As a result, the high fertility rate helps to keep the tribe alive, when malaria threatens their existence. However, this delicate balance is only possible because of the trees which grow in a very small area, and are difficult to reproduce outside of the natural habitat.

The doctors working on the drugs know that if word gets out locally about the mushrooms, the tribe will be wiped out. Further, if the outside world, including parent pharmaceutical company Vogal, receives word of the miraculous drugs the trees contain, the tribe will also be wiped out, simply because the Western companies will over harvest the area, leaving the Lakashi without means to enhance their fertility. The fight to defend the Lakashi from destruction is a primary theme of the novel.

Moral/Ethical Choices

Another major theme in 'State of Wonder' is the moral and ethical choices that people are forced to make. From the beginning of the novel, Marina is forced to choose between the comforts of her own life and doing what is right by others and by her own conscience. When Anders is missing, thought to be deceased, his wife Karen asks Marina to throw concern for herself to the wind in order to find out what happened to her husband. Marina does so because her morals will not allow her to rest until she can, with firsthand knowledge, tell Karen that her husband is deceased.

Once in the Amazon jungle, Marina is again faced with a number of moral and ethical choices. When she discovers Dr. Swenson is working on a malaria drug outside of the knowledge of her employer, but in an honest effort to cure malaria in third world countries, Marina must choose to do what is right by her company, and what is right by humanity. She chooses to be moral, knowing that an inoculation for malaria is far more valuable than the fertility drug that her company is aiming to produce. When she learns Anders is still alive in another tribe, Marina must choose between her own safety and possibly rescue of her friend. She chooses to go after Anders as she knows this is the



ethical choice. When she joins the Hummocca tribe, Marina is forced to choose between Anders and Easter, her young friend. When she discerns that Easter was, in fact, stolen from his tribe, Marina chooses to leave him behind, even though he clearly does not understand why. Even Marina herself questions morality over humanity, as she wonders whether the natives should be helped if they are injured. Whereas Dr. Swenson understands there is a delicate balance at work with the tribe, Marina still chooses to tend their wounds because she chooses moral behavior.

Others in the novel face similar ethical and moral dilemmas. Mr. Fox is forced to choose between someone he cares for, Marina, and doing what is right by his company. Unlike Marina, however, Mr. Fox chooses to follow his own moral code as opposed to following ethical code and he sends Marina into the jungle. Dr. Swenson consistently chooses what is morally right to her, even when it conflicts with ethical codes, such as her choice to impregnate herself, lying to her employer, sending Marina to fetch Anders, and even in her treatment of the Lakashi. Swenson is not a bad person, but her choices are led not by ethics, but instead by her own concept of morality.

Medical Advances

The advances of medical science in contrast with the concept of what is best for humanity is another theme within the novel. Dr. Swenson and her team are simultaneously developing two drugs. The first, a fertility drug, would allow women into their seventies to carry and deliver children, thereby extending the fertility time line greatly. The second is a drug that will inoculate against malaria, a disease which kills eight hundred thousand children a year. Ironically, even Dr. Swenson realizes that these two drugs, if introduced simultaneously, would cause severe over population. Swenson herself, pregnant in her seventies, realizes as she goes through the pregnancy, that women are not meant to have children so late. When her own baby dies, Swenson realizes that her body is telling her that women simply need to accept when they are beyond child bearing age. Although the research has helped to fund a drug against malaria, this initial purpose of the study, the lengthened fertility of women, is an unsafe practice for normal, post menopausal women. While it is true that Swenson used a fertility study to fund a malaria drug, and that the pharmaceutical company will not make as much on the malaria drug, it is also true that a valuable drug to save lives was discovered. The author is firm in the statement that just because something can be done, medically, does not mean it is in the best interest of the human population to do so.

Along the same thematic line is the use of Lariam to fight against malaria. Marina takes Lariam, but trades off blissful nights of sleep for terrible, recurring nightmares. Dr. Swenson notes later in the chapter (p. 180) that the drug also causes suicidal thoughts and paranoia. Clearly, anyone taking Lariam is taking risks with their mental stability in exchange for physical health. This too shows that medical advances are not always the best option for mankind. It is an ironic twist, however, that Marina, so plagued by the dreams of Lariam, is sent to the Amazon jungle where a team of scientists is, without approval, working on an inoculation against the very disease Lariam protects against.



Dr. Swenson again brings this theme to the forefront in her discussions of Easter and his hearing loss. She points out that Anders wanted to take Easter back to the states, to see if a cochlear implant would improve his hearing. Swenson notes, however, that you cannot simply make a deaf person a hearing person (p. 245). Her point is that even if the technology exists to do so, the underlying emotional and psychological ramifications may outweigh the simple physical correction.

Hero Worship

One of the other themes in the novel is that of the power of hero or mentor worship. Throughout the novel, Marina is in awe of Dr. Swenson, both in terms of her skill as well as just in terms of her existence. Having been her student, Marina knows she is hard, unfair, and unyielding, but also a genius, and the type of person you want desperately to please, but are always unable to. To Marina, Swenson is a tough woman, but also one who turned her back on Marina when she needed her following an accident during residency. It is not until the end of the novel that Swenson explains to Marina that the mistake she has carried with her throughout her life was a simple mistake, and one that many people make. With this simple statement, Swenson is able to take away the self doubt and anguish Marina has carried with her through her entire life.

Alan Saturn, another doctor at the camp, had his own hero, Dr. Rapp. Rapp was a brilliant scientist and to Alan, he could do no wrong. Even though he was left by Rapp in Peru when he contracted malaria, Alan believes Rapp is infallible. His wife, Nancy, however, sees Rapp much differently, in that she is able to see beyond his genius, and can see him for who he really was. Keeping Dr. Swenson as a mistress while his wife raised their children, and bringing Swenson on his jungle trips is, to Nancy, completely inexcusable, but to Alan, this seems trivial. These two examples show clearly the impact that hero worship can have both on our own lives and on our ability to see others for what they are, instead of what we make them out to be.



Style

Point of View

'State of Wonder' is written in the limited and third-person point of view, where the narrator knows only the thoughts and actions of Marina Singh. This view is reliable, in revealing the feelings of Marina Singh, but also offers insight into the emotions of other characters by viewing them through the eyes of Marina herself. This point of view is important, since one major theme in the story is the growth of Marina, both in terms of her ethical boundaries but also in terms of her ability to put her past behind her. The impact of the past on Marina as well as the impact of Swenson's influence could not be as clear without the use of this limited third-person view. The story is told through description as well as dialogue, which helps to keep the reader focused on Marina while still being able to see and feel the world she lives in. Without being able to see inside Marina's head, her history with Swenson as well as her feelings for Anders and Mr. Fox, and her fears relating to her father, would not be comprehensible. It is the view of the world through Marina's eyes and using her moral and ethical code that makes this novel as successful as it is.

Setting

'State of Wonder' takes place primarily within the Amazonian jungle. Although the exact location of the Lakashi tribe is necessarily concealed, it is clearly somewhere in the Brazilian jungle. The story originates, however, in Minnesota, where Anders and Marina both work for a pharmaceutical company called Vogel. Minnesota is described in several ways, as the seasons change the landscape drastically. In the beginning, Minnesota is harsh since it is winter. By the time Marina leaves for Brazil, it is nearly spring and she can begin to see and smell life all around her.

She heads to Manaus in Brazil, which is where the next phase of the novel occurs. Manaus is a hot, humid, and tropical, where rains come suddenly and leave just as quickly. Manaus is a busy city, filled with local vendors and tourist trade. It is here that Marina finds the Bovenders, who stay in Swenson's well decorated apartment while she is away. The Bovenders show her that not all of Manaus is native as they take her to the opera and to the beaches.

From Manaus, however, Marina finds herself deep in the Brazilian jungle. The Lakashi tribe is primitive, with no phones, running water, electricity, or any other modern convenience, other than what little resides at the research facility, which is merely huts with generators and rigged up showers. She sleeps in a hammock in a small storage area with Easter, a local boy. The Lakashi live and work either on the ground, in huts, or in small stations high in the trees. The jungle is filled with insects, snakes, and birds, many of whom are poisonous or harmful. The contrast between the jungle and



Minnesota helps to underline the themes of the pros and cons of two worlds intermingling.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of the novel is personal and informal. The sentences are constructed properly, but without the formality sometimes seen in novels. This ease of language allows the reader to quickly identify with the characters and to become immersed in the story line. The vivid descriptions of the scenery help the reader to envision the world in which the characters live. Although some of the characters are not native English speakers, the somewhat more formal language of those individuals only enhances the notion of different worlds coming together. The use of a variety of speech patterns and verbal styles allows the different cultures in the novel to shine through. Additionally, the differences in language help to differentiate the characters, and their functions within the book. The non-verbal conversations between Easter and Marina and between the doctors and the tribe show their relationships in a way that cannot be expressed through verbal dialogue. This style helps to underline the tribal aspect of the native people, but also shows the skill in which the doctors have developed a working language with the locals. This language allows them to study the natives in way that would not be possible without the development of at least a crude method of communication.

Structure

The novel is comprised of eleven chapters, each of unequal length. Each chapter is named only by number, so does not reflect anything within the chapter, although the breaking points do happen between logical scenes in the story. The chapters are full of description, but also contain much dialogue. In the descriptive passages, time tends to pass quickly.

The plot of the novel is fairly complex. The main plot of the novel is the disappearance of Anders Eckman, and the research project of Dr. Annick Swenson. However, throughout the book, subplots emerge, such as Marina's inability to forgive herself for a mistake, the downfalls of mentors, the balance of ethics and morals, and the biological, social, and ethical considerations of any research study done with human subjects. Delicate ecological balances also become a subplot of the story.

The pace of the novel is steady where the use of long description is tempered with many passages of dialogue. This pace makes the novel easy to read and the plot is engrossing once the reader discovers the numerous plots and themes within the book. The story does contain some flashbacks, which help to show the motivations of the characters in the book. Overall, the novel is entertaining and a fairly fast and engrossing read.



Quotes

"The moment did not bring to mind her own losses. What rushed before Marina was the inherent cruelty of the telling. It didn't matter how gently the news was delivered, with how much sorrow and compassion, it was a blow to cut Karen Eckman in two." (Chapter 1, p. 15).

"The doors sealed them in with the music and sealed the world out and suddenly it was clear that building an opera house was a basic act of human survival. It kept them all from rotting in the unendurable heat. It saved their souls in ways those murdering Christian missionaries could never have envisioned." (Chapter 5, p. 124).

"It's difficult to trust yourself in the jungle...Some people gain their bearings over time but for others that adjustment never comes. It's simply too foreign. We can't find a common application for what we already know. I'm not just thinking of moral issues or rules of law, though both of those apply, but the simply concrete facts of existence aren't what we're used to." (Chapter 5, p. 139).

"Without the Bovenders there to remind her, she might have forgotten what it was like to be enthralled, to fall hard in love for principles and a singularly remarkable mind. They were little more than pretty children, feather-light, proven capable of no end of lies, and yet there was something in their shiny nature that made them indestructible." (Chapter 5, p. 149).

"If he had made them his responsibility, either by dissuading them from their ambitions or by bailing them out of their folly, the greatest botanist of our time would have been reduced to a babysitter. It would have been an incalculable blow to science, all in the name of saving the stupid." (Chapter 5, pg. 152).

"The question is whether or not you choose to disturb the world around you, or if you choose to let it go on as if you had never arrived. That is how one respects indigenous people. If you pay any attention at all, you'll realize that you could never convert them to your way of life anyway. They are an intractable race." (Chapter 6, p. 162).

"From what she could tell, the Lakashi children were constructed out of titanium. They ate random berries and were bitten by spiders and fell out of trees and swam with piranha and they were fine. She could hardly see how a regular dosing of hallucinogens could make a difference." (Chapter 8, p. 217).

"He used to say we all had a compass inside of us and what we needed to do was to find it and follow it. But we were undergraduates and for the most part we couldn't find our asses with our hands, and so we followed his compass instead. Until we knew how to be men by our own standards we tried to be men like Dr. Rapp." (Chapter 9, p. 229).

"I'm not saying people don't have affairs, even very decent people, let us be so lucky as to fall into that category. But we cannot unbraided the story of another person's life and



take out all the parts that don't suit our purposes and put forth only the ones that do. He was a great scientist, I will grant you that, and by all accounts a true charismatic, but he was also deeply unfaithful to two women, and frankly that bothers me." (Chapter 8, p. 232).

"In this group Marina danced with the people who were not white while the white people watched them. It would never have been her preference to be part of a tourist attraction...Still, she knew it was somehow less humiliating, less disrespectful, to dance with the natives than it was to simply stand there watching them." (Chapter 8, p. 237).

"It never was remarkable that Anders had died; the remarkable thing was that the rest of them were managing to live in a place for which they were so fundamentally unsuited. Karen had wanted to believe that knowing what Anders had died or and where he was buried would make a difference, but it wouldn't and it didn't." (Chapter 9, p. 270).

"If you had a clean blanket you would want a sterile one, and a sterile blanket makes you think you can't do anything without a table and a light, and from the table and the light it is a very short step to needing a fetal heart monitor. I know this." (Chapter 9, p. 278).

"Research doesn't happen in a Petri dish, you know, and mice only go so far. It's the human trials that make the difference. Sometimes you have to be the one to roll up your sleeve." (Chapter 10, p. 295).

"I've brought this on myself in the interest of science and I don't regret any of it. Do you understand that? This has all been to the positive. We are very close to securing a vaccine, and in addition to that we know what the body has told us all along, that postmenopausal women aren't meant to be pregnant. That is what we had to learn." (Chapter 10, p. 311).

"You would take Easter from me now. You never had any intention of leaving here without him and I never had any intention of letting him go. He was mine. He was my boy and you gave him away." (Chapter 11, p. 346).

"She didn't see Karen open her door but there she was, flying into his arms, her feet never touching the lawn. She was as small and golden as a child herself. It was as if they had waited for him every day he had been gone, holding their burning sticks above their heads, pouring their souls up to heaven in a single voice of ululation until he came back." (Chapter 11, p. 353).



Topics for Discussion

At the end of the novel, Marina agrees to trade Easter for Anders, to escape the Hummocca tribe, and to bring Anders to safety. Why does she choose this? Do you think Easter understands what is happening? Do you agree or disagree with her decision? Why? What would you have done?

Marina agrees to go to the Amazon jungle at the urging of Karen, in search of the truth about Anders, and at the urging of Mr. Fox, her lover and boss. Would you have gone? Why or why not? Why do you think Marina chose to go? Was she doing it for herself, for Karen, or for Mr. Fox? Do you think either of those people were right to ask her to go? Why or why not?

Consider Swenson's fertility research with the Lakashi women. What benefits does lasting fertility have for the Lakashi? Why do their bodies tolerate the pregnancy better than Swenson's? Do you think women of any age should be able to have children? Why or why not? What are the positives and negatives of having such a drug in modern culture? Do you think modern science can go too far in terms of improving on natural processes? Why or why not?

At one point in the novel, Swenson and Marina discuss their roles in the Lakashi tribe, in terms of their positions as doctors. Marina struggles with the concept of allowing the world around her to happen as though she is not there, whereas Swenson seems to understand the need not to intervene. Why does Marina have difficulty with this concept? Does Swenson always practice non-intervention? Why or why not? How does she choose which cases to assist? Do you agree or disagree with allowing the natural world to function without our intervention? Why or why not? What are some of the benefits of intervening in nature? What are some of the negative consequences?

Both Swenson and Dr. Rapp have a following where they are both highly regarded and looked up to by many individuals. Do you think either individual is worthy of such praise? Why or why not? Do you think heroes can have a negative impact on people as well as a positive effect? Why or why not? What power did Swenson have over Marina as a result of her mentor status? What was Alan Saturn able to overlook about Rapp that others were not as a result of his influence? What does this say about the position of role models in our lives?

In the novel, there is a very delicate ecological balance between the Martians, the moths, and the Rapp mushrooms. This delicate balance is vital to the survival of the Lakashi, but cannot be replicated in the lab. This balance, however, produces several huge advances in medicine, including an inoculation against malaria. If this area is introduced to the world, the Lakashi will likely die out. If it is not, it may be likely that the malaria drug is never produced. Would you choose to sacrifice the tribe for the hundreds of thousands saved by malaria? Why or why not? What do you think the moral thing to do is? What do you think is the ethical thing to do? Are morals and ethics the same thing?



Compare and contrast Marina with Dr. Swenson. What are their backgrounds? What are their philosophies in life? How are they similar? How are they different? What do you think contributes to these similarities and differences?

What do you think is the significance of the novel's title? How does 'State of Wonder' apply to the book?