

Swan Song Study Guide

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Plot Summary

"Swan Song" is the story of a post-apocalyptic United States of America and its inhabitants. The USA and the U.S.S.R have destroyed each other with nuclear weapons. On their way out of desolate Manhattan, Sister and Artie find a magical glass ring that allows them to dream walk. They also encounter an evil character, later known as Friend, who pursues them across the country. Roland and Macklin find their way out of Earth House and Swan and Josh follow a gopher hole to get out of their basement. Each group is led on an adventure that will eventually bring them together: Josh and Swan meet Leona Skelton who foretells Swan's importance in the future; Sister and Artie meet Paul Thorson who continues with Sister on her quest to find what her dream walks mean; and Roland and Macklin make their way across dirtwart land with Sheila to the Settlement, overcoming the leader there and forming the Army of Excellence.

All, seven years later, are encased in Job's Masks: tough growths that hide their heads as their faces are reshaped. Swan and Josh are joined by Rusty and together they trek across the landscape until Swan brings an apple tree back to life. She is hailed as having the secret of life and the trio continues to Mary's Rest. Macklin and Roland are the leaders of the Army of Excellence, a Nazi-esque army. They have no regard for human life. Sister and Paul are on the path set for them by Sister's dream walks. They are joined by Dr. Hugh Ryan who says he can lead them to Mary's Rest, but on the way they are overtaken by Robin Oakes and his group of boys. Sister and Paul move on and are later joined by Robin. Swan spends a night planting corn seeds and the seeds grow, as does her reputation as a miracle. Her job's mask comes off and reveals beauty: a direct physical representation of her soul. Josh and Sister also appear as the best versions of themselves after their masks come off, although Roland and Macklin appear as monsters. Friend has searched for years for Sister and finally finds everyone in Mary's Rest. Though Swan forgives him for the evils he has performed, he cannot accept her forgiveness and sets off to make other people do his dirty work.

Swan, Sister, Josh, and Robin are captured during the battle at Mary's Rest. They convince Sheila to retrieve the buried glass crown for them. The whole army, now led by Friend, moves to Warwick Mountain in search of God. After arriving they realize God is the ex-President of the USA who has been hiding out since the blasts. Swan stops the Doomsday satellites at the last moment though Macklin and Roland are dead and Sister has been gravely injured. She is buried at the top of the mountain where the sunlight can reach her. Swan, Josh, and Robin descend from the mountain and the remaining members of the Army of Excellence kill the evil man. Swan and Robin travel the country revitalizing fields while Josh makes his way back to Glory. Swan becomes legend and the world is green again.



Book One, Part One, Chapters 1-5

Book One, Part One, Chapters 1-5 Summary

This novel spans the scope of humanity before and after an apocalyptic nuclear war. It follows Swan, Josh, Sister, Roland, Macklin, and others as they choose sides in the epic battle between good and evil.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the bombings, which spur the action in the novel. The President of the United States of America is in the Situation Room with his council, who explain that the U.S.S.R. are mobilizing for an attack. The President observes that "once upon a time we had a love affair with fire," (p. 5), and he mentally recounts the events leading up to their current situation. His council urges him to set the armed forces at Defcon Three and push the Russians back from U.S. borders, and he reluctantly agrees.

In Chapter 2, Sister "Creep" is introduced: a homeless woman in New York City who is awaiting the Christian Rapture. She is in a fight with two homeless men who claim she is sleeping in their box, and she must fight her way through them with a knife. She decides to go to her magic place, a Steuben glass shop on Fifth Avenue, passing through a squalid Times Square, reflecting on the demons surrounding her. There has been a garbage collector's strike and she breaks down after discovering a dead baby in the garbage heap. She decides to hide in the unfinished subway tunnels.

Chapter 3 begins amidst a wrestling match between Johnny Lee Richwine and Black Frankenstein. Though the match is fixed, Johnny overexerts himself and hurts his leg. Black Frankenstein, or Josh Hutchins, gets the ref to disqualify him and returns to his hotel. He is an ex-New Orleans Saints linebacker, currently a traveling wrestler.

Chapter 4 takes the story to Wichita, KS, where Swan (Sue Wanda) is witnessing another fight between her mother (Darleen) and her "Uncle" Tommy. During the fight, hundreds of fireflies settle on her window and she thinks they are giving her a warning. As Darleen and Swan leave, Tommy stomps Swan's garden to bits and she hears the plants hurting. Darleen decides to take Swan home to Blakeman, KS to live with Darleen's father. Swan grips her Cookie Monster stuffed toy.

In Chapter 5, the Croninger family is taking a trip to Earth House, a membership-based, state-of-the-art, fallout shelter. Roland toys with his father's gun and gets in trouble. The family meets Hospitality Sergeant Schorr, who explains the air filtration system. On the way to their room, the family and Schorr come across a small collapse. The family's barracks are stark, and Roland crushes a butterfly he finds in his closet. Sgt. Schorr radios for the cleanup crew.



Book One, Part One, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The first five chapters introduce the main characters in the novel: Sister, Josh, Swan, Roland. There are other characters that play large parts in the story, but these four are the author's main focus.

Chapter 1 quickly outlines the problems: the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. are each planning to bluff the other into backing down, but the situation is volatile. The President does not want the beginning of World War III to rest on his shoulders, but his council convinces him the only way to fight is with fire—the very thing that has the President transfixed at the beginning of the novel. The reader gets the sense, even from this first chapter, that the events are irreversibly in motion.

Chapter 2 introduces Sister "Creep," a homeless alcoholic religious zealot who is convinced that Jesus will fly in on his spaceship from Jupiter. She preaches in Times Square, where the locals bestowed her nickname upon her. Her life is rough: sleeping in cardboard boxes in garbage, getting into knife fights, and aimlessly wandering around the city. The garbage is symbolic of a build-up of sin: Sister believes the Rapture is near because she is surrounded by demons and sinners. The baby she finds is horrifying, but gives the reader a glimpse into Sister's past as she hazily recalls her own memory of a baby.

Though at first the fight in Chapter 3 seems real, the reader learns it is choreographed. Though Josh at first appears fierce, he is actually a kind, albeit lost, man. He has lived through his glory days and is now trying to eke out a living as a pro wrestler. He has a family, but is divorced; clearly misses his family life but is afraid to resurrect it. Like the other characters, he seems to sense that the end is near. Everyone is very matter-of-fact about the possibility of a nuclear holocaust.

Chapter 4 is written from Swan's perspective. She is very spiritual and mature, and seems to have some extraordinary powers: she senses the life source of her plants, and seemingly speaks to the fireflies on her window. Tommy calls her a spooky child and, though Darleen is clearly not the best mother, she defends Swan. Instead of being angry at Tommy for destroying her flowerbed, Swan forgives him, showing a deep understanding for human behavior and a level of maturity far beyond that of a nine-year-old.

In Chapter 5, Earth House is clearly not all it is cracked up to be: Roland and his parents notice structural problems right away, though they do little to dampen Mr. Croninger's enthusiasm. Roland is a puny and bespectacled boy who lives inside his imagination. He is obsessed with the King's Knight game and imagines himself a ruthless soldier. He is a little reckless and inhuman, evident from playing with the gun in the car and killing the butterfly for no reason. He idolizes Colonel James Jimbo Macklin, a pilot and former POW, who is in charge of Earth House. Roland's physique does not match the person he perceives himself to be inside: strong, calculating, and smart.



Book One, Part Two, Chapters 6-11

Book One, Part Two, Chapters 6-11 Summary

Chapter 6 picks up in the Empire State Theatre on 42nd street. Two employees, Emiliano Sanchez and Cicely, are frightened by a man's laughter during the film, *The Face of Death, Part Four*. The man who likes movies emerges to get popcorn and requests to see the film again. He touches Emiliano, who goes into a trance and has apparently asked the projectionist to play the film again. The man is anxiously awaiting some major destructive event and has no specific appearance. He is anticipating the end of humanity.

In Chapter 7, Sister Creep has descended into the unused subway tunnels. She has the same dream of a man in a yellow raincoat who is taking something from her. She realizes there is a fireball shooting through the tunnel. At the last moment, she pulls the grate off a sewer drain and takes shelter in the small space.

Chapter 8 introduces Colonel Macklin, who is late for a speech to the new residents of Earth House. He is an aging soldier. Though he has warned the builders, the Ausley Brothers, that the Earth House is structurally unsound, they ignore his requests for a structural engineer. Macklin's mantra is discipline and control, and he is encouraged by his Shadow Soldier. While he speaks, Roland decides the whole place is a waste of money and time. Macklin is called away by Perimeter Control where he discovers the nuclear holocaust has begun. The Shadow Soldier is excited.

In Chapter 9, Josh Hutchins's Pontiac is overheated during his drive to Garden City. While trying to make it to PawPaw's rest stop, his car passes through a cloud of locusts. PawPaw's store is well stocked. Darleen and Swan drive up also to fill up on gas and use the restroom. PawPaw allows Swan to use his personal restroom in the basement that "his boys" helped him dig. Swan senses danger and suddenly missiles shoot out from under the cornfield. The gas tanks explode and PawPaw loses his eyes. Josh gets everyone into the shelter, though the floor cracks and the ceiling caves in.

Chapter 10 returns to Earth House, where Macklin and his men are watching the missiles. An RV drives up to the shelter, but Macklin, after an internal battle with the Shadow Soldier, denies them entrance. The team spots a friendly missile that has gone off course and will detonate dangerously close to Blue Dome Mountain. Though the team thinks they have escaped harm after a tremor, the plumbing problems that have plagued them for weeks rushes through the structure's cracks. Soldiers and civilians both are battered.

In Chapter 11 the President and his council are aboard Airborne Command witnessing the destruction. Reports are unclear as to which side fired first. The President's arms the weapons on the plane, but a flaming bus collides with them and the plane goes down.



Book One, Part Two, Chapters 6-11 Analysis

Chapters 6-11 provide different accounts of the disaster, though people everywhere are similarly affected: horrific injuries and survivals that seem completely accidental. The man who likes movies is a significant character: he is something other than human; some kind of evil that Emiliano can sense. His appearance keeps changing and he has no true face. Though the reader does not know exactly who or what this person is, the apocalyptic situation in the novel suggests he is something purely evil and is somehow responsible for the war.

In Chapter 7, Sister Creep wakes from her same nightmare: the man in the yellow rain jacket is trying to take something (or someone) from her. She is still struggling with something internally, perhaps a memory. Though her first thought about the disaster in the tunnel is that the Rapture has come, she realizes that it is something bad, and her survival instinct kicks in: as anxious as she thought she was to meet her Savior, she is not ready to die yet. This highlights a strength of character in Sister Creep, previously the crazy bag lady preaching in Times Square.

In Chapter 8 the reader glimpses inside Colonel Macklin's head. Though he knows Earth House is structurally unsound and he feels guilty, the Shadow Soldier orders him to stay disciplined and controlled. The Shadow Soldier is his alter-ego: the ultimate soldier who leaves all the "weaknesses" of humanity behind to do his job. In Chapter 10 the Shadow Soldier is the one who decides not to admit the RV to Earth House because they need to preserve their food supply. He is ruthlessly rational and has a mental and physical hold on the Colonel.

In Chapter 9, the locusts are symbolic of the plague of locusts in the Bible. Josh feels that his life has reached its lowest ebb when he arrives at PawPaw's—ironic, since he is about to live through a nuclear holocaust. The reader gets a sense of destiny here: Josh, Darlene, and Swan happen to meet at PawPaw's, where his underground boys have helped him build a fallout shelter. Swan sense the danger before it happens, solidifying her role as a special, somehow powerful person. Josh, in what may be his last act, saves the other three people by getting them into the basement, though he just met them all.

Chapter 11 marks the end of the United States government when the President and his plane go down in flames, ironic because the President has been obsessed with fire since Chapter 1. Also, reports are mixed as to who fired first: no one wants to take the blame.



Book One, Part Three, Chapters 12-18

Book One, Part Three, Chapters 12-18 Summary

Sister Creep's initial thought in Chapter 12 is that she is in Hell. When she climbs to the surface she suffers a mental breakdown, realizing that she has not lived through the Rapture but through something evil. She is standing amidst hundreds of dead bodies and she runs, leaving her bag behind. She comes to 42nd street where the Empire State Theater still stands. She senses danger, but enters the theater looking for food. She encounters the man who likes movies, unharmed, and he rips off her burned-on crucifix. Then he catches fire, his face shifting, and Sister Creep escapes just before the whole building burns down.

In Chapter 13, Josh, Swan, PawPaw, and Darleen are alive in the basement. Josh has been badly burned and lost one ear. The store has collapsed on top of them. Josh worries they will run out of air while Darleen insists someone will rescue them. PawPaw is babbling about his slippers and gophers in the hole.

Chapter 14 returns to Earth House, where Colonel Macklin is trapped at the bottom of a pit. He comes out of a Vietnam flashback to Teddybear Warner shining a flashlight above him. His hand is trapped between rocks and must be cut away. Warner goes up to Level One in search of someone small enough to get into the pit. Chapter 15 is still in Earth House. Roland has survived the disaster and begins to search for his parents, imagining the carnage before him a battlefield. Warner recruits him to help Macklin, and they take a meat cleaver from the kitchen. Roland thinks he is in a dream. He is lowered into the pit with the meat cleaver and a tourniquet to free Macklin's arm. He separates the arm from the rock and cauterizes it, mesmerized by the process. Roland decides since his parents are dead he will need Macklin's protection.

In Chapter 16 Sister Creep meets Artie Wisco who was visiting from Detroit before the blast. He takes her to a burst water main and a pile of luxury goods where she chooses a new bag. Where her special place once was she almost decides to quit, but discovers a strange donut-shaped ring of glass with jewels embedded in it. The ring has some sort of special power and responds to her heartbeat. Sister Creep and Artie decide to go to Detroit.

Chapter 17 returns to the basement. Darleen has taken a turn for the worse. Josh gathers cans and begins to hope that he will see the outside world again.

In Chapter 18, Sister Creep and Artie find some food and meet Beth Phelps, Jack Tomachek, and the Spanish woman. Beth and the others have encountered burned creatures they do not think are human. The Spanish woman cannot speak English and is holding a dead child. Sister Creep convinces the Spanish woman to give her the child and move out of the corner. She remembers her own little girl who died when Sister Creep was driving drunk. She comes to herself and asks to be called Sister.



Book One, Part Three, Chapters 12-18 Analysis

Chapter 12 is the reader's second encounter with the man who likes movies, and it is clear that he is some sort of evil creature. Sister's one step at a time philosophy helps her to climb out of the hole, and clings to it amid the horrors above ground. The man who likes movies seems to be playing with her, even ripping off her crucifix, which one would think could provide some protection against evil.

In Chapter 13 it is clear that Darleen cannot cope with the reality of their situation. Whether she insists they will be rescued for Swan or for herself is unclear, but she will not accept, like Josh, that the whole country has been decimated. Josh feels a connection with Swan and is angry that she should have to endure such horror at only nine years old.

Chapters 14 and 15 reveal more about Roland and Colonel Macklin. The Colonel has extraordinarily honed survival skills that he employed as a POW in Vietnam. His mental control is monitored by the Shadow Soldier who spurs him on, even when Roland dislodges his arm. He associates his manhood with discipline and control. Roland is in shock and turns to his King's Knight fantasy to keep himself going. He mentally transforms the cafeteria into a battlefield to justify his survival. Though at first convinced he is dreaming, Roland settles into his new role as King's Knight because he cannot bear to think of his parents and the terrible situation they are all in. Though physically puny, Roland has a streak of ruthlessness, evident first with the butterfly in his room and now with the cauterization of the Colonel's arm, in which he is uncomfortably fascinated.

In Chapter 16 Sister Creep meets Artie who constantly talks about his wife. He is counteracting the shock by talking, which annoys Sister Creep, though she realizes he is just trying to hang on. When Sister Creep finds her special place destroyed she is ready to give up, convinced that all beauty has been leached from the world. Just before she quits she finds the magical ring. It is something special and can pick up on human emotions, though the full extent of its powers are not yet known. After holding the ring Artie lets go of his illusions and truly begins to deal with his situation. Sister Creep still cannot deal with her buried memory.

In Chapter 17 a bond forms between Josh and Swan, who both realize Darleen does not have long to live. Swan knew that something bad was going to happen. She claims the fireflies told her, which causes Josh to think that perhaps the locusts knew something bad was coming as well.

Chapter 18 brings Sister back from the edge. When she must take the Spanish woman's dead child from her she finally remembers that her little girl died when she was drunk driving—the repressed memory that has been driving her crazy. Their traveling groups more than doubles with the addition of Beth, Jack, and the Spanish woman, who tell a tale of inhuman monsters that stole their food. These are perhaps henchman of the man who likes movies. Sister, no longer Sister Creep, has retained her sanity and unofficially become the leader of the small group.



Book One, Part Four, Chapters 19-26

Book One, Part Four, Chapters 19-26 Summary

In Chapter 19 Roland, Colonel Macklin, and Teddybear Warner hatch a plan to get into Earth House's emergency supply stash. Instead of digging themselves, they decide to employ civilians in case the ceiling caves in. The air circulation system in Earth House is no longer working and Macklin is concerned about their air supply.

In Chapter 20 Sister, Jack, Beth, Artie, and the Spanish woman cross through the flooded Holland tunnel. Jack's courage fails and he cannot continue, but the others continue through, though the ceiling is falling around them and there are corpses afloat everywhere. Though at the last moment their lighter is extinguished, they make it through to the Jersey shore.

Chapter 21 returns to the basement with Josh, Swan, PawPaw, and Darleen, whose condition is deteriorating. She relates a dream to Swan in which her mother and father have forgiven her and want her to come home, then dies. Josh comforts Swan and discovers a working flashlight.

In Chapter 22, Sister, Beth, Artie, and the Spanish woman make camp in New Jersey. Artie dream walks using the ring of glass and is transported to a picnic with his wife. In Beth's dream walk she is drinking water. Sister and Julia Castillo can speak different languages and understand each other while holding the ring. Doyle Halland emerges from the shadows of his wrecked church to join the group, asking about the glass ring.

Chapter 23 returns to Earth House where Macklin, Roland, and Teddybear Warner have set up a perimeter in the cafeteria. Though they were able to assemble a group of civilians to clear the corridor, the ceiling collapsed and killed them all. While foraging in the kitchen for food, Roland remembers how he killed a bully's hamsters once for revenge. He is attacked by Hospitality Sergeant Schorr in the kitchen who blames Macklin for their situation in Earth House. Roland fights Schorr off and returns with his bag of food.

In Chapter 24, Josh and Swan discover a gopher hole in the basement, explaining why PawPaw kept babbling about gophers. They decide to follow the gopher's hole to the surface. As Josh begins digging, PawPaw's corpse animates and orders him to "protect the child." The corpse bursts into flame and then collapses into white ash. Josh believes he has seen a miracle.

In Chapter 25, Sister and Doyle Halland talk about faith and the glass ring. Sister explains she wants to believe there can still be beauty in the world. She dream walks using the glass ring and is in a desolate landscape, picking up a cookie monster doll.

In Chapter 26, Roland, Teddybear, and Macklin have barricaded themselves in the gym. Macklin recalls how Shadow Soldier helped him kill the other two soldiers in the hole



with him in Vietnam. There is a firefight between Macklin, Teddybear, Roland, and the other survivors. Warner is killed by Schorr, and Roland kills his father. Roland's mother—seen in his eyes simply as a crazy woman—lunges at the food supply, but is caught by fire. Roland and Macklin find an air shaft through which they will escape.

Book One, Part Four, Chapters 19-26 Analysis

Roland's behavior in Chapter 19 hints at a much more complicated and devious person underneath. It is neither the Colonel or Teddybear's idea to use civilians to dig out the food, it is Roland's—a decision he makes knowing full well the ceiling may collapse and all the diggers may die. He is clinging to his fantasy of King's Knight in order to survive, but he is beginning to take on more ruthless aspects: if Macklin's Shadow Soldier approves of Roland, it means he is beginning to leave his humanity behind. Roland consciously suppresses images of his mother and father and decides to live for his new King.

In Chapter 19, Sister solidifies her leadership role and gains the trust of the group by leading them through the tunnel. Though Jack cannot bring himself to go through, Sister leads the others through the tunnel. She has completely regained control of herself: the bag lady who was Sister Creep is gone.

Chapter 21 is the end of Darleen's life, but her dream indicates she is going to a better place. She admits she has made mistakes in her life and though she longs for her parents' forgiveness she is not willing to cross the field to rejoin them without Swan. She asks Swan's permission to leave her and die, which Swan gives though she is afraid to be without her mother. After Darleen's death, the flashlight symbolizes hope: literally a ray of light in their dark basement.

Chapter 22 exhibits more of the glass ring's unusual powers: what Sister has coined dream walking. Somehow the ring is able to give each person the thing they really need in the moment they hold it. Artie needs his wife, so his dream walk is of a long-ago picnic with her. Beth is thirsty so the ring gives her the sensation of water. Julia Castillo needs absolution for her child's death and is mysteriously able to communicate with Sister. No one denies the ring has power, they simply do not know how or why it does. Doyle Halland emerges from the dark of the burnt-out church with a huge splinter through his thigh. Though Sister is immediately on the defensive, she feels guilty because of his injury and includes him in the circle.

In Chapter 23, neither Roland or Macklin show any remorse for the civilian deaths during the cave-in. Yet more of Roland's inner ruthlessness is revealed when he reminisces about the hamster incident at school. He has little regard for life and is attracted to power, including the power to kill. He gets an unexpected high from defeating Schorr in the kitchen and is unabashed in the pleasure he gets from shooting the gun.



Josh and Swan's vision of PawPaw in Chapter 24 echoes stories from the Bible. Josh believes he has seen a miracle, especially after finding the gopher hole and realizing what PawPaw had been trying to tell them. They are both shocked by the experience, but after the bombing, their threshold for shock has grown. Josh mentally commits to protect Swan, commanded to do so seemingly by something divine.

In Chapter 25, Sister leaves behind her zealot visions and adopts a simpler version of faith: she believes because she believes, though priest Doyle Halland confesses that he does not. He suspiciously steers the conversation toward the glass ring, in which he seems too interested. Sister's visions are of Swan and Josh's surroundings, foreshadowing that their paths will one day cross.

In Chapter 26, the reader learns the true character of Colonel Macklin: relying on Shadow Soldier to help him, he killed the other POW's with whom he was imprisoned in Vietnam in cold blood. His instinct for self-preservation will win over his humanity every time, and his Shadow Soldier will be with him to justify his behavior. Similarly, Roland's grand game of King's Knight allows him behavior that he has previously kept fairly isolated: instead of killing hamsters and butterflies he is powerful enough to kill people, and adults twice his size to boot.



Book One, Part Five, Chapters 27-33

Book One, Part Five, Chapters 27-33 Summary

In Chapter 27, Sister, Beth, Julia, Artie, and Doyle have taken shelter from the storm. Beth receives water from the glass ring. The group discusses their experiences with the ring and think perhaps the blast made it magic, though Doyle accuses them of suffering from mass hypnosis. Sister, Artie, and Doyle go into the storm in search of supplies. Sister and Artie return to find Doyle—actually the man Sister met at the movie theater—has killed the others. He demands that she give him the glass ring but the part he touches turns dark. They fight and Sister breaks off one of the ring's spikes in Doyle's black eye, giving them time to escape.

Chapters 28 and 29 return to Josh and Swan in the basement. Tiny shoots of corn have begun to sprout where Swan sleeps. She tells Josh about the hurting noise and how everything, even bugs, can feel. They begin to dig out the gopher hole. Josh's fist is the first thing out of the ground. Swan finds her Cookie Monster still intact and makes the decision on which direction to go.

In Chapter 30, Sister and Artie have crossed into Pennsylvania, survived radiation poisoning, and restocked their supplies. Sister has had another dream walk where she sees Swan and Josh, though she does not yet know who they are. While they walk, Sister and Artie are attacked by hungry wolves, but saved by a man who invites them to his cabin.

In Chapter 31, Josh and Swan meet Leona Skelton, who invites them in. She is a famous seer who can predict people's deaths. Though her husband Davy is ill, she is friendly and offers Swan and Josh food and a bath.

In Chapter 32, Sister and Artie arrive at Paul Thorson's cabin. They meet his other guests: Kevin and Mona Ramsey, Steve Buchanan, and a nameless older man. Paul uses blood from the wolf and some of Sister's vegetables to make a stew. The others have a ritual of turning on the short-wave radio at a certain time of day. They hear nothing. Though at first Sister thinks Paul is cruel, he explains they need something to look forward to or they will go crazy.

In Chapter 33, Leona reads Swan's fortune using tarot cards. Swan leaves some food outside for a terrier. Leona gives Swan her dowsing rod nicknamed Crybaby. Leona arranges the cards in a Grand Cross so they will tell Swan's story. Swan's cards are the Devil (her foe), the Ace of cups (her), the Sun (her mother), the Hermit, the Page of Swords, the Empress, and Death. Swan and Josh have formed a bond.



Book One, Part Five, Chapters 27-33 Analysis

Chapter 27 solidifies two pieces of the story. First, that the ring does in fact have some sort of special power that the characters can all experience individually. Second, the man who likes movies, Doyle Halland, is something other than human and definitely dangerous. Sister mentally compares the glass ring to a toy from her childhood, the Magic Eight Ball, thinking perhaps it is not magic exactly, but coincidentally it is giving people room to interpret what they like from it, similar to the Magic Eight Ball. Doyle calls himself the winner, indicating that he is playing some sort of grand game that Sister and Artie are not in on.

In Chapters 28 and 29, Swan and Josh become closer. Josh knows from PawPaw's warning that Swan is a special child, and the shoots of corn rising where she sleeps indicates she has a special connection with the earth. She is in tune with nature, even to the point of hearing a "hurting sound" when plants are plucked from the ground. Swan is a pure soul but must take control when they reach the surface and Josh thinks of giving up. She shows a maturity far beyond her age, and Josh compares her to a little queen who has lost her realm.

In Chapter 30, though he saves them from the wolves, Sister is not ready to trust Paul Thorson because of their run-in with Doyle. Her dream walk this time is of Josh's hand sticking out of the dirt as he and Swan dig out of the basement. She is definitely connected to the two of them somehow, though she does not yet know her visions are actually glimpses of other people's lives.

Chapter 31 introduces Leona Skelton who is a seer. She can see people's deaths, a skill that will probably come in handy in this new harsh world. Though she threatens to send them on their way, when she notices Swan she is overcome and invites them in. Something about Swan pulls at her and causes her to change her mind. Swan realizes that her power is stronger now than it was because she brought up the shoots in the basement with no sunlight or water.

In Chapter 32, Sister is still suspicious of Paul, and rightfully so. She is more cautious after the seemingly serendipitous meeting with Doyle turned into a bloodbath. Though at first she thinks the game they play with the radio is evil, he helps her realize that the others need hope. The radio is the only thing keeping them together and without that hope, they will despair. Paul not only keeps them alive by feeding and housing them, he is stimulating their minds. This is a major problem in the new burnt-out world. One can find ways to stay alive, but what is simply staying alive really worth without the other details that truly make up the human race?

In Chapter 33, Leona confesses to Swan that she hears a voice on the wind saying "all mine," possibly the man who likes movies, Doyle Halland. Crybaby is an appropriate gift for Swan since she is so in tune with the earth anyway. When Leona reads Swan's tarot cards some pieces begin falling into place. The Wheel of Fortune card that covers Swan means that her fate is ever changing and moving. According to the tarot cards Swan's foe is the Devil, a card representing complete and total destruction and inhumanity. The



Ace of Cups represents the peace and understanding that Swan truly desires, and the upside-down Sun represents Swan's loss of innocence and her mother. The Hermit card could be representing Josh, someone who is coming out of the cave after shirking their responsibilities for a long time. The Page of Swords, a card that represents a young boy or girl desirous of power, may represent Roland, though the two children have not yet met. Swan draws the next two cards after Leona leaves the room: the Empress and Death. The Empress may be Swan in the future and Death could apply to any of them, though directly after Swan draws the card, Davy enters his final hours.



Book One, Part Six, Chapters 34-40

Book One, Part Six, Chapters 34-40 Summary

In Chapter 34, Roland and Macklin ambush Sheila Fontana and Rudy just outside the Salt Lake settlement. Sheila has a stash of drugs. They explain they are known as "dirtwarts" by the people in the camp. Sheila decides staying with Roland and Macklin is the safest thing to do and agrees to have sex with them.

Chapter 35 returns to the cabin, where Sister is worried about Artie's injuries. She uses the ring to dream walk again and sees Swan's tarot card reading. She decides to tell Paul about all their experiences with the ring. Paul's plan after the batteries and food run out is to kill all of them. Sister tries to convince him they must move on because the kerosene is almost gone.

In Chapters 36 and 37, Swan, Leona, and Josh head for Matheson after burying Davy. Josh is dismayed by the black nodules on his forehead. They pack and head for Matheson, the terrier following behind. They stop at the Jaspin farm to rest, but the owners have been killed. The house is crawling with cockroaches and the message "All Shall Praise Lord Alvin" is written on the wall. Swan follows the terrier into the cornfield and finds a horse. They sleep in the barn and Josh decides against killing a bug, ruminating on everything's right to life.

In Chapter 38, Roland decides that, instead of the guns, Sheila's drugs will be their source of power. They march toward the Salt Lake camp to see the Fat Man. The Fat Man gives them a tent in exchange for a weekly drug supply, though the tent belonged to a family with a baby. Sheila feels guilty about the baby's death.

In Chapter 39, Josh, Swan, and Leona see the glow of light over the horizon. Leona thinks she sees a skull in Josh's face. She tells Swan about people's inside and outside faces. The town is deserted, though there was once an institute for the criminally insane here. The light is coming from a K-Mart, but when they rush inside there are human heads on the mannequins. They have found Lord Alvin and his gang.

In Chapter 40, Macklin goes to the lake to disinfect his arm. He mentally argues with his father, feeling guilty about Earth House. Judd Lawry takes Roland to the Fat Man's trailer where he is drugged and the Fat Man attempts to rape him. The drugs give Roland strength and he brutally kills Kempka. Macklin, Roland, and Sheila have taken control of the camp and plan to make it into an army.

Book One, Part Six, Chapters 34-40 Analysis

Chapter 34 is the first real glimpse in the novel of new civilization, but it is not pretty. People are still divided into haves and have-nots. Survival is key in dirtwart land, which Sheila quickly learns, and to survive she must stay with Macklin and Roland. Her drugs



represent the worst side of humanity, and after the disaster they know they will be able to control people using the drugs. Prostitution, immoral and illegal before the blasts, becomes currency for Sheila, in exchange for sex, she is kept safe. Macklin and Roland are using fear and power to get by in the new world, while the other groups in the novel are finding more humanitarian reasons for surviving.

In Chapters 36 and 37 Swan, Leona, and Josh become a team. Though Lord Alvin's mysterious following is ominous, they continue moving forward and adding members to their party. Swan seems to have power over animals as well when she is able to speak with the horse, and her connection may be with all living things. Josh is beginning to learn from her. This is evident when he decides against killing a cockroach in the barn: after the apocalypse, everything should have a right to life.

While technically he is still a child, Roland is getting more and more savvy, evident in his suggestion to use Sheila's drugs to get what they want. In Chapter 38, the group bargains with the horrible leader of the camp using drugs as currency. As a result, a family is kicked out and their baby killed so that Roland, Sheila, and Macklin can have a tent. Sheila is the only one who feels any remorse for the dead baby.

In Chapter 39, Josh is extremely uneasy when he is told there was an asylum in Matheson. However, when they see the brightly lit K-Mart they forget all caution and rush inside to its treasures. Leona's explanation of people's inside faces and outside faces makes sense to Swan. This theme of inward appearance versus outward appearances has already been seen through Doyle Halland, who appears normal, but is evil. This possibly foreshadows events to come, as well as Leona's vision of the skull on Josh's face.

Chapter 40 gives more insight into Macklin's character. He feels guilty about Earth House and the people who were killed. The Shadow Soldier pushes him to prove he is still a man and can still embody his mantra of discipline and control, drilled into him by his father. The Shadow Soldier may be a manifestation of Macklin's father. Right before his attempted rape of Roland, Kempka hears Macklin's scream from the Salt Lake and comments that someone has been reborn. This is doubly true: Macklin has returned to the tough military man he was, and Roland has truly moved beyond the person he was, aided by the drugs. They release something ruthless in him and he brutally kills Kempka, defending himself from rape but also truly enjoying the damage he is doing.



Book One, Part Seven, Chapters 41-47

Book One, Part Seven, Chapters 41-47 Summary

In Chapters 41 and 42, Josh, Leona, and Swan are trapped in K-Mart by Alvin Mangrim and his following. They paint Josh's face to resemble a skull and force him to play the game, Straightjacket. He chooses to have his legs free and must make it to the finish line in five minutes or Alvin will kill Swan and Leona. No one uses guns because Alvin says they are not fair. Josh pushes his way through many foes, finally facing off with a Neanderthal with a chainsaw. He wins, but not in time, and Killer the terrier bites Alvin's nose just before he attacks Swan. They escape, but Leona is gravely injured and sacrifices herself so they can have more time.

In Chapter 43, Paul, Sister, Artie, Steve, and the Ramseys are on the road and run out of gas. They spot a Shell gas station on an off-ramp and decide to walk, though they are surrounded by wolves and Paul has given up hope. Artie is very sick and the wolves remind sister of Halland. Just before they are overwhelmed, snipers on a snowplow save them. They have found a village called Homewood.

Chapter 44 returns to Macklin, who has donned a Nazi uniform he found. The Salt Lake sloughed off his old inhibitions. He worries about the small brown scabs on his face. He decides no one with keloids are to be admitted into his camp, and their army will be called the Army of Excellence. A raiding party returns with vehicles from some passersby. He rounds up 36 people with keloids and executes them.

In Chapter 45, Swan and Josh meet Rusty Weathers on the old circus train. He is the only one still alive from the original circus. He does a little magic show for Swan and shows her his mirror with the smoky glass. It once belonged to Fabrioso, a magician. In the mirror Swan sees a vision of Halland and Sister holding the ring of light. Rusty decides to travel with them and Swan wants to learn more.

In Chapter 46, Sister visits Artie at the Red Cross tent. The doctor informs her that 65% of people have the black scabs on their faces like she does. She acquires a map of the country and informs Artie she is going to Kansas. He plans to continue on to Detroit. Sister learns that Halland has been looking for her and came by a few days ago on a bike, followed by obedient wolves. Paul decides to go with her to Kansas.

In Chapter 47, Halland is still on his bike looking for Sister. He sends out ugly green flies to search as well.

Book One, Part Seven, Chapters 41-47 Analysis

In Chapters 41 and 42, Josh is put to the test physically. Alvin refers to him as Mighty Joshua, a biblical reference to the Battle of Jericho in the Bible. Leona's vision of the skull on Josh's face was not a warning of his imminent death, but a flash of the game he



would be forced to play and the skull painted on his face. Josh must use what he learned as a football player to survive this new game. There is a sense of destiny here, though before the blasts he was a washed up wrestler, now he is able to apply the seemingly useless skills to the all-important mission to protect Swan. Though Killer the terrier must come to the rescue, Josh won the fight. Their belongings have been scattered all over the parking lot and Leona, knowing her life is over, stays behind to distract the enemy and protect the child.

In Chapter 43, Sister is still having visions about Swan and Josh. She feels pulled to Matheson, Kansas, and even during the deadly wolf fight, she does not give up hope like the others. She truly believes she is on a mission, and is right about the settlement. The wolves are juxtaposed to Halland, and the reader later learns he can control them.

Chapter 44 is the beginning of a new Macklin. By donning the Nazi uniform, he leaves his humanity truly behind. He chooses something on the outside by which to judge people, arbitrarily decides that people with keloids are ugly, dirty, and diseased. He intends to use propaganda, like the Nazis, to brainwash his army and remain in control. He believes the opposite of Leona Skelton: outside ugliness equals inside corruption or danger.

In Chapter 45, Rusty Weathers joins Swan and Josh. The mysterious mirror with the dark glass has some sort of connection to the glass ring. When Swan peers into it and sees the Devil from the tarot card she is frightened, but later she sees Sister with the ring. She thinks Leona is right: the world is changing somehow in ways that are hard for people to understand, and Swan decides she will not let anyone or anything change who she is.

When Sister decides to continue to Kansas in Chapter 46 Paul thinks she is crazy, though actually longs to believe in something like she does. Sister is sad to leave Artie, but they both have places they have to go. She knows that she is being led toward something. Though the evil man is pursuing her, she presses on, and Paul goes with her, knowing he cannot remain in the settlement.

Chapter 47 takes the reader into the mind of the evil man. He is everything that is bad about human nature incarnate, and is on a search for Sister and the glass ring. The flies, symbolic of the ugliness inside of him, can swarm around relatively unnoticed and return to him with information.



Book Two, Part Eight, Chapters 48-54

Book Two, Part Eight, Chapters 48-54 Summary

Chapter 48 begins Book Two, set seven years after the end of Book One. Swan, Josh, Rusty, and the animals travel in a canvas wagon as entertainers. Josh's face is mostly obscured by a scab-like growth, as is Swan's. They stop at a farmhouse asking for shelter and meet Sylvester Moody and his wife, Carla. Swan touches the single remaining apple tree and feels life, carving her name in the tree. She must eat in the barn because the Moodys are horrified by her appearance.

In Chapter 49, Franklin Hayes and his small army battle at Broken Bow against the Army of Excellence. Macklin has convinced people that the keloids are the mark of Cain and must be exterminated. Hayes is killed by a man with an axe.

In Chapters 50 and 51, Sister and Paul arrive at the Bucket of Blood Tavern looking for gas for their Jeep. A man named Earl snatches Sister's bag and takes the glass ring. Sister shoots him to get it back. Sister's face is also obscured by the gray, scab-like growth. Dr. Hugh Ryan explains the growths are not contagious and calls them Job's Masks. Sister has been following her dream walks for the last seven years after finding the Empress tarot card and Cookie Monster doll in Matheson. She has also seen a face looking through a mirror. Hugh lost his leg and family when the Army of Excellence stormed through his town. He offers to lead them to Mary's Rest in exchange for a ride to the Gulf of Mexico. There are ugly green flies in the bar.

In Chapter 52, the evil man examines the images his flies return with, and finds Sister and the ring. He sets off for Mary's Rest with his red wagon.

Chapter 53 returns to Macklin, who wears a leather mask because of his Job's Mask. Roland, now Captain Croninger, wears bandages because of his Job's Mask. Alvin is waiting in Macklin's trailer to give him the head of Franklin Hayes and the right hand he fashioned with nails in the palm. Roland is the army's torturer. Macklin likes the hand because it symbolizes discipline and control. Alvin is made a corporal in the machine brigade. They decide to head east.

In Chapter 54, the Moody's old apple tree has come back to life. They say it is a miracle and Swan has the power of life. Swan, Josh, and Rusty continue to Mary's Rest.

Book Two, Part Eight, Chapters 48-54 Analysis

Book Two begins seven years later. The wart-like growths have almost completely engulfed Swan's face, and are apparent on Josh's face as well. Swan feels as if her bones are shifting. Though the feeling she once got from the earth seem distant dreams, she feels life in the apple tree and carves her name in the tree with the energy. This is the first sign of hope she has seen in a long time, but the session is cut short by



her physical appearance. She is horrifying to look at, though on the inside she is kind and good. She, Josh, Rusty, and the animals have become a family over the last seven years.

Chapter 49 indicates that the Army of Excellence has grown, both in size and in judgments. By choosing people with keloids, or "the Mark of Cain," they are boiling everything about a person down to physical appearance. This is unfair and smacks of Nazism.

Chapters 50 and 51 catch up with Sister and Paul, who have been traveling together the last seven years. Sister's dream walk visions were legitimized after their discovery of the tarot card and doll in Matheson, both belongings of Swan. Her Job's Mask, the name a Biblical reference, connects her to Swan and Josh. The Job's Masks do not affect children younger than seven or eight, indicating that kids born after the bombings are immune. Hugh informs them that the west has become a battlefield, with different armies vying for control of the limited resources. The green flies in the bar are the evil man's eyes in the sky.

In Chapter 52 the evil man is still around and looking for Sister and the ring, indicating they are important in the grand scheme of things. His disguise is formulating to maximize pity and exploit people's capacity for kindness.

It is telling in Chapter 53 that Macklin approves of Alvin, who previously played the Straightjacket game and is clearly insane. Macklin has let go of any humanity he had and is now thriving on power and fear. He and Roland are each afflicted with the Job's Masks, but must do their best to hide their conditions because of their own rules: those with the worst masks are usually shot. Macklin likes the hand because it is a symbol of discipline and control, which is basically his religion.

Chapter 54 is the first sign of hope. Despite her horrible disfigurement, Swan has brought the apple tree back to life by simply willing it to live. She has the gift of life, and Sly Moody's ideas of what she can do foreshadow upcoming events.



Book Two, Part Nine, Chapters 55-58

Book Two, Part Nine, Chapters 55-58 Summary

In Chapters 55 and 56, Sister, Josh, and Hugh are lost in the woods on the way to Mary's Rest. Sister's dream walk shows her the apple tree with SWAN written in the trunk. Paul and Sister argue about her mission. Their vehicle is overrun by bandit children who confiscate the glass ring. A boy named Bucky has been shot and the leader, Robin Oakes, demands Hugh take the bullet out. Though he does not want to and has no proper instruments, he agrees to try. He uses one of the spikes from the glass ring to dig the bullet out and it magically cauterizes the wound.

In Chapters 57 and 58, Rusty is attacked by a two-headed bobcat. Killer is killed in the fight. They arrive at Mary's Rest and are welcomed by an insane legless man in a child's wagon. There is no doctor in the town but Glory Bowen, a seamstress. She offers to help sew Rusty's wounds. Aaron, her child, takes Swan to see the putrid remains of their lake. She sees the remains of a child who has died searching for roots in the ground. Meanwhile, the residents of the town steal the contents of their wagon. Swan recovers the mirror and Josh feels as if he is being watched.

Book Two, Part Nine, Chapters 55-58 Analysis

Chapters 55 and 56 bring Sister closer still to Swan, though she does not know how close. Robin Oakes's name is symbolic of the legend of Robin Hood, the virtuous bandit. Though Hugh is terrified to operate on Bucky, the glass shard steadies his hand and helps him remember who he truly is: a doctor. The shard finds the bullet and disinfects the wound, saving the boy's life. When it crumbles, it suggests that the glass ring's magic is not infinite, and the piece is spent after saving Bucky's life. The incident brings Hugh back to his true self while at the same time gains Sister and Paul the bandits' trust.

Chapters 57 and 58 bring Swan, Josh, and Rusty to Mary's Rest. Right away they encounter the man in the wagon, who the reader knows is actually the evil man. Mary's Rest is a town devoid of care for human life except for Glory, the seamstress who takes them in. Josh cannot bear to tell Swan about Killer's death because he knows it will upset her. They have formed a family over the years. The child's corpse gripping for the roots bothers Swan because the way her hands are formed reminds Swan of something she knows is significant.



Book Two, Part Ten, Chapters 59-63

Book Two, Part Ten, Chapters 59-63 Summary

In Chapter 59, Swan and company learn that Glory's late husband was a preacher who died trying to put a fire out in his church. Swan wakes in the middle of the night hearing a dog bark and thinks it is Killer, who she does not know is dead. She follows the sound into the field and remembers that the way the dead child's hands have frozen is how she used to plant seeds. She opens the corpse's hands, finds seeds, and begins to plant them. Mule joins her to keep her awake and safe from the forest animals. Josh finds her next to Mule in the morning. Her hands are injured and she has gone blind in her remaining eye. Aaron takes Crybaby.

In Chapter 60, Sister catches Robin returning the glass ring to her bag. He has had a vision of Swan lying in the field next to Mule. Sister realizes for the first time they are searching for a girl. They think the vision was Mary's Rest because of the smell. Sister and Paul decide to walk there though it is seven miles away. Robin offers her his crucifix but she declines since she already has one.

In Chapter 61, Josh and Glory take Mule to a barn where he will be safe and warm. They discover an old printing press. Josh admits under his Job's Mask it feels as if his face is changing, though Swan has the worst mask of anyone. They move the press to the house and kill a fly buzzing around in the barn.

In Chapter 62, Sister and Paul struggle through the forest. She mentally chants her old mantra, one step then the next gets you where you're going. Sister's face is painful under her Job's Mask. They stop to camp and Sister falls asleep on her watch, but jolts awake to find Robin Oakes and some of the boys have joined them. Robin wants to help them get to Mary's Rest to pay the debt for Bucky's life.

In Chapter 63, Mule's barn catches fire. While Josh rushes out to save the horse, the evil man comes to destroy the printing press. He smashes the mirror because it reminds him of the glass ring. He threatens Swan with fire, but Rusty fights fire with fire and encircles the man when he himself is engulfed in flame. Swan knows that the man is the one from the tarot cards long ago. The community comes together to help bury Rusty. Meanwhile, Robin Oakes spots the light from the fire, without which they may have overshot their mark.

Book Two, Part Ten, Chapters 59-63 Analysis

In Chapter 59, Swan finally realizes when the dead child reminds her of: herself. When she was a child she used to work the soil with her hands before planting seeds. She continues the dead girl's work and goes into a trance, intent upon planting the seeds. She almost dies to plant the seeds, only saved by Mule's warmth and encouragement. She has a talent for life and gives her completely over to the seeds.



Chapter 60 is a turning point for Sister because she finally realizes they are looking for a human girl, a discovery that would not have been made without Robin's interference. Robin, like Robin Hood, exists outside of true law and order, but adheres to a personal code of honor. Out of respect he offers sister his crucifix, though he is slightly cowed when he sees her burn.

In Chapter 61, Josh and Glory discover the printing press: a symbol of human advancement and civilization. Glory shares her husband's dream with Josh and the two grow closer. The printing press is something important to Glory because such a thing can give people hope again, as it has given her hope for the future. The flies in the barn witness this spark of human spirit and presumably so does the evil man.

Sister has kept her mantra over the years: one step and then the next gets you where you're going. She, like Josh and Swan, feels her face changing under the Mask. When she wakes up to find Robin at their campsite he claims he is repaying a debt to them because of Hugh saving Bucky's life. Sister and Paul will be safer with the boys, and later when Robin sees the glow from the barn fire it seems he is meant to be with the group.

In Chapter 63, though the evil man enters Glory's cabin seeking to destroy the printing press, he finds the mirror. The mirror is a similar object to the glass ring, so the evil man destroys it. He is out to destroy all hope for the human race, even after these seven years. Rusty's mother's saying—fighting fire with fire—seems innocuous, but is part of his destiny. His last thought is the phrase, which gives him the presence of mind to wrap his burning arms around the evil man to save Swan. Though the evil man went into the shack to destroy humanity's hope, after the incident the whole town comes together to help bury Rusty, proving there is human spirit left in the dismal town.



Book Two, Part Eleven, Chapters 64-69

Book Two, Part Eleven, Chapters 64-69 Summary

In Chapter 64, the whole town attends Rusty's funeral. Glory reads the 39th Psalm in the service. While looking for Mule, Josh discovers the corn stalks that have grown from the seeds Swan planted. As he tells the town about Swan's power of life, she wakes up.

In Chapter 65, Sister, Paul, Robin, and the boys arrive in Mary's Rest. There is a party happening near the cornstalks. They meet Anna McClay who takes them to Glory's shack. Sister recognizes the Welcome man as the evil man, but does not shoot him because she is not 100% sure. Sister demands to see Josh and send him The Empress tarot card they found in Matheson. Aaron asks Anna to come look at his magic, but she is too busy.

In Chapter 66, Sister shows Josh the glass ring and explains how it led them to Swan. Swan and Sister talk about their Job's Masks and Sister hands Swan the ring. When she touches it a brilliant light fills the room. Swan sees the work she will do rebuilding the world using her gift. Josh tries to snatch the ring away but is repelled. Fire from the ring spreads up Swan's arms and is absorbed into the mask. Swan's hands have been healed.

In Chapter 67, Sheila Fontana, a Recreational Lady of the Army of Excellence, is summoned to Macklin. She still dislikes Judd Lawry from seven years before when he killed the baby. Macklin trusts Sheila and wants her to spy for him because some people think he is losing his grip. Roland enters with captives from the rival army, the American Allegiance, led by an ex-televangelist. Their army was headed for Warwick Mountain in West Virginia because they have heard that is where God lives. Roland lives for his new role as torturer, though he is haunted by dreams of his parents.

In Chapter 68, Swan's Job's Mask cracks open. Her face is covered with a whitish jelly, and underneath the jelly she has beautiful red-gold hair.

In Chapter 69, Robin Oakes demands to see Swan, figuring he has been guided to Mary's Rest as well and deserves to see her. He is given two minutes alone with Swan, and though she is sleeping, she is the most beautiful girl he has ever seen. He kills a fly in the room and kisses her. She wakes up confused but ecstatic that she can see again and calls for Josh. Aaron has used Crybaby to find a spot for a new well where there will be fresh water. Josh is overcome with joy that Swan is alive and well.

Book Two, Part Eleven, Chapters 64-69 Analysis

In Chapter 64, the town of Mary's Rest comes together for Rusty's funeral. This is significant because the people of the town were formerly out for only themselves, but since Swan arrived they have been helping each other and becoming a true community.



Glory's prayer at Rusty's grave speaks of the terribly glory of God and parallels their experiences with the bombs: they have been walking around in the shadow of tragedy and feel at the mercy of the higher power. Josh's inkling about Swan's talent is solidified when he sees the cornstalks, some still spattered with her blood. Josh's hope for the future has been restored.

Chapters 65 and 66 are significant because finally, after so many years of searching, Sister has found Swan. The Empress card is representative of what Swan is destined to become: a strong force of life to rebuild what has been broken. Swan has always felt that she is search for something, and when she holds the ring she understands her destiny. She sees the wonderful things she will do and the power of the ring heals her hands, which she will need in the journey ahead.

In Chapter 67, Sheila Fontana changes for the worse, but is kept around because Macklin only trusts she and Roland. The Army of Excellence is Nazi-esque and Macklin still uses substances to get what he wants from people, promising the broken Sheila cigarettes and liquor to help him. The reader sense he is losing his grip. Roland, though obsessed with torture and pain, is still haunted by dreams of his parents, whom he killed. Their Job's Masks are bad and their faces reforming under them, though no one knows into what.

In Chapter 68 and 69, Swan's true face is revealed as the mask cracks and falls off. The extent of her beauty reminds the reader of Leona's explanation of beauty so long ago, that everyone has one face on the inside and one on the outside. Now Swan's inner beauty is apparent in her physical appearance. When Robin sees her he instantly transforms from forest hoodlum to young man. Leona's predictions come true again when Aaron discovers fresh water with Crybaby, proving that the rod's work was not yet done. Josh has come to think of Swan as his daughter and is overjoyed by her wellbeing.



Book Two, Part Twelve, Chapters 70-74

Book Two, Part Twelve, Chapters 70-74 Summary

In Chapter 70, Mary's Rest has come alive. Sister and Josh muse that the evil man's downfall may be that he thinks he is smarter than humans. Swan thinks she is to the earth like Crybaby is to water. Mr. Caidin asks Swan to visit his son, Ben, whose Job's Mask has just fallen off. Before the mask, the boy had a birthmark across his face and a malformed jaw. After the mask Mr. Caidin thinks Ben looks as beautiful as his soul. Sly Moody visits with his friend Bill McHenry. They have a truck full of apples. While crowding around the apples the evil man approaches Swan. She tries to give him an apple but he cannot take it and runs into the woods.

In Chapter 71, Roland visits the Savior from the American Allegiance army. He is tested for disease by holding a crucifix in his mouth. The Savior's face is half normal and half scar tissue. Brother Timothy claims he lived with God in Warwick Mountain for seven days and recites a poem. Roland warns that his army will attack in six hours if they are not given supplies. When he returns Macklin has locked himself in his trailer. Alvin unlocks the door with a knife. Macklin's mask has come off and he appears as a living skull.

Sister is dreaming of the sun in Chapter 72, burning with Job's Mask fever. Most people in town have come out of their masks with better faces, except for DeLauren on the edge of town. He had resorted to cannibalism and his face looked like a reptile. They wonder what Sister will look like when her true soul shines through. Paul realizes he does not mind working if it is for Swan. She cannot sleep and goes to visit Mule, thinking how forgiveness cripples evil. She and Robin are attracted to each other but have no idea how to interact. Robin has fallen in love with her.

In Chapter 73, the Army of Excellence attacks American Allegiance. Macklin thinks his face is the face of the Shadow Soldier. Judd Lawry is killed in the battle. The Army of Excellence retreats and Roland and Macklin argue about their next move. Alvin Mangrim offers to build something to help them attack from the roof.

In Chapter 74, Glory and Josh decide to rebuild the church and further develop a personal relationship. He sees a piece of Gene Scully's coat on the ground and sends Glory back to town. He found the evil man's lair. The evil man drags him down and they fight. The evil man has been weakened by Swan and Josh escapes. The evil man wants to "make a human hand do the work," (p. 682).

Book Two, Part Twelve, Chapters 70-74 Analysis

In Chapter 70, the group realizes the Job's Masks will eventually come off. Just like Leona predicted many years ago, there is now a way to show someone's beautiful soul on the outside. Swan understands more about her powers and compares herself to



Crybaby: she feels the earth just as the rod can feel water. When the evil man approaches her Swan is afraid but knows she must remain calm, showing a depth and maturity in her character. She offers him forgiveness—something he has never thought would be offered. She truly sees him and understands that underneath all the ugliness there is pain, and he is like a hurt little boy. The evil man wavers because Swan awakes a spark of conscience in him, but ultimately cannot handle her kindness and retreats.

In Chapter 71, the reader sees the other side of the Job's Mask: while some people are able to show the shining beauty of their souls on their faces, others take the shape of hideous monsters to reflect their inner corruption. Roland gives the army a new mission by discovering the presence of God on Warwick Mountain.

In Mary's Rest also, people have learned there are two possibilities to what lies beneath a Job's Mask. DeLauren's cannibalism turns his face reptilian. Swan is a natural leader and people are happy to work for her, although she is uncomfortable with attention. She knows the evil man now for who he truly is, and knows that her forgiveness has truly weakened him in strength and resolve. In this strange new world they live in, Swan and Robin do not know how to channel their attraction, so they fight. Robin knows he is in love with her and is trying to leave his childish ways behind him.

Chapter 73, is the beginning of a turning point in the relationship between Macklin and Roland: for the first time, Roland stands up to the King. The army has been battered and Roland knows they will all die if they mount a second attack, as is Macklin's wish. Macklin has taken on the persona of his Shadow Soldier, physically and mentally embodying discipline and control. The insane Alvin Mangrim is given a chance to shine when he claims he can build a device to get them up on the roof.

In Chapter 74, Josh still feels guilty about Rose and the boys. He and Glory have fallen in love, but he is afraid that his old family is out there in need of him. She loves him even through his mask for the beautiful person he is inside. Josh's battle with the evil man serves two purposes: to show that the man has been weakened and confused by Swan, and to relay to Swan that the evil man is not yet giving up. His promise to make a human hand do his work is foreshadowing the future. Ironically, without his Job's mask, Josh would have surely died of a head injury after the fight.



Book Two, Part Thirteen, Chapters 75-84

Book Two, Part Thirteen, Chapters 75-84 Summary

In Chapter 75, Roland recalls a poem called "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot from his school days. Roland is fascinated with Brother Timothy's stories of God and the black box and silver key. His face is painful under the Job's Mask and he is afraid of what it will reveal. He apologizes to Macklin and requests to lead the assault to capture Brother Timothy. He gets angry and accuses Macklin of weakness. Roland is the real king and Macklin just wears the crown. They go to see Alvin's machine.

In Chapter 76, Operation Crucify is underway. Alvin has built a siege tower like medieval armies used. Roland pushes through the battle to the bookstore where the Savior has been killed by Brother Timothy, though he has no bullets left for himself, as was the plan.

In Chapter 77, the Junkman, Vulcevic, and his family arrive in Mary's Rest. They have heard rumors of Swan. They warn the people of Mary's Rest, not to go north because of the fighting armies. Sister's mask has come off and she is beautiful. She feels the evil man in the crowd. Josh comes back to trade some corn with Vulcevic, but in the confusion the evil man steals the truck and heads north with the corn toward the army.

In Chapter 78, the evil man reaches Roland and Macklin. He convinces Macklin to march south toward Mary's Rest, confiscate the food, and bring him Swan. Macklin realizes he and Roland have passed the point of no return. The evil man asks to be called "Friend."

In Chapter 79, there is a town meeting in Mary's Rest. They know the army will come. Some want to stay and fight, some want to leave, and Swan suggests they prevent the army from getting there at all. She suggests they build a wall and ice it over, giving an inspirational speech about their town's progress. They decide to prepare for battle. Paul offers to drive some of the forest boys north to start slashing the army's tires.

In Chapter 80, Swan is bothered by the hurting sounds she hears, but knows they are necessary. Swan is frustrated by being treated like a piece of glass and wants to work with everyone else. Robin offers her his gloves and accidentally confesses his love. Josh, before passing out from the pain of his Job's Mask, realizes Swan is the Empress tarot card and the glass ring is her crown.

In Chapter 81, the town is tense, preparing for battle. Glory is angry when Aaron wants to be a soldier, but he explains he wants to be a good soldier. Paul returns with two of the boys, but the others are dead. He still has his Magnum. In Chapter 82, the town is on the defensive. The army is staved off by some of their traps, but the army has a tank and Roland tries to intimidate them. Sister shoots at him. Sooner or later the soldiers will break through, but Swan must keep her calm to inspire the people. In Chapter 83,



the town is under siege, and the army begins throwing bombs at the wall. Swan rushes to help Robin, but Mule is shot and Swan's leg trapped under him. Robin distracts the guns until she can be freed. Paul Thorson is fatally shot. Josh, whose mask has come off, lifts the horse off Swan and they turn themselves in to avoid being shot.

In Chapter 84, Mary's Rest has been defeated. Swan is afraid of the hurting sounds, but demands to speak to the army's leader. Sister is alive and has hidden the glass ring. She has a feeling Paul is dead. Friend takes Swan and Sister to Colonel Macklin's trailer. Meanwhile, Paul Thorson kills Alvin Mangrim. Paul dies, but is not afraid.

Book Two, Part Thirteen, Chapters 75-84 Analysis

In Chapter 75, when Roland recalls the poem, it is familiar: it is the President's code from the very first chapters of the novel. It is a symbolic and appropriate poem, as everyone is now living in an actual waste land. Roland apologizes because he loves Macklin and does not want Alvin to take his place, though Macklin is getting weaker and Roland knows he is actually the powerful one. They care about each other in a twisted way because of all they have been through. Roland asserts himself in Chapter 76 when he demands to lead the first wave. When Friend comes in Chapter 77, Macklin has an awakening: he knows that, no matter what, he and Roland cannot go back to make up for all the things they have done. Macklin is afraid of Friend because he is reminded of his dark days in the hole in Vietnam.

When the Junkman comes through town in Chapter 77 it is clear the Swan's reputation has spread. She is becoming the stuff of legends and must adapt to her leader role quickly as Mary's Rest goes under siege in Chapters 80-83. She does not want to lead the people, but she has been chosen. She must put aside her personal fears and think of the good of the town, finally shining through as the adult she will be. Josh realizes that the ring is a crown meant for Swan, and is a beautiful man under his Job's Mask just like Glory said he would be. Paul Thorson is not afraid of dying alone because he so firmly believes in Swan and their mission—he has come a long way from doubting Sister's visions and keeping people sane with radios. As his final act he kills Alvin, whose twisted games tormented Josh, Swan, and Leona so long ago.

Events move very quickly in these chapters and finally all the characters in the novel are brought together.



Book Two, Part Fourteen, Chapters 85-95

Book Two, Part Fourteen, Chapters 85-95 Summary

In Chapter 85, Swan meets Macklin, who she knows is the skeletal rider on the tarot card. Friend tries to draw the crown's location out of Sister's head. Brother Timothy is brought in to threaten Swan and Sister for information—they are given until dawn to give Friend the crown. Friend is still afraid of Swan. Her presence clears Macklin's mind and he realizes Friend is evil.

Swan and Sister are taken to Sheila's trailer in Chapter 86. She is an RL who is haunted by a baby crying. Swan comforts her and they convince Sheila to retrieve the glass ring for them.

In Chapter 87, Friend searches for the glass ring buried in Rusty's grave. Though he cannot find it, he is comforted by the fact that it is buried deep underground.

Chapter 88 focuses on Josh and Robin who are locked in a trailer. Josh goads Robin into eating. He has promised Glory and Aaron he will return for them. Robin cannot calm down because he is worried about Swan, but Brother Timothy claims to have seen her in the Red Light district. He uses the word A-OK and explains God is waiting to see who wins the battle, good or evil, so the world can be reborn. Josh thinks about using the sharp metal edges of their cups.

Chapter 89 is back in Sheila's trailer. She retrieved the ring and relocated Rusty's grave marker. Sister snaps off the last spike and gives it to Sheila. She passes the crown onto Swan because her dream walking is done. When Swan wears the crown it weaves an armor of light around her body. She asks Sister to keep it for her. The crown has shown Swan images of the possible future. Meanwhile, Friend tortures Macklin with images of Vietnam. Roland is incapacitated by his mask and Macklin tries to rebel against Friend.

In Chapter 90, Roland wakes up to find his face has mask has fallen off. His face is hideous and he is comforted by Friend, who loves him like a mirror.

In Chapter 91, Josh and Robin catch a glimpse of Swan outside the door when the guards take Brother Timothy. Josh uses the razor-sharp cup for an old wrestling trick, cutting his skin to pretend like he has killed himself. They later yell for the guards and steal the truck, racing up the mountainside. Friend takes Swan, Sister, Roland, Macklin, Brother Timothy, and a few soldiers up the mountain to the Warwick Coal Mining operation. There is an electrified fence which Friend opens. Brother Timothy spots God on the roof and is shot by Friend. God descends and slaps Friend in the face.

In Chapter 92, Friend is still afraid of Swan and cannot forget about the apple. Macklin tries to appeal to Roland and convince him that Friend is evil, but Roland sees Macklin as weak. Macklin regains some of his old glory and makes Roland address him as "sir." The man is the former President and takes them deep into the mountain to show them



the Talons. His code is "A-OK" to get through the false rock wall. He traps them in the mainframe computer room where Roland marvels at the machines. The President activates a Doomsday machine that will melt the ice caps and destroy the earth.

In Chapter 93, Swan tries to convince the President to stop the machine but he will not. The complex is powered by a huge underground river. Friend shoots the President and he falls over into the river, extinguishing hope for stopping the prayer for the final hour. Josh and Robin are making their way up the mountain to help. Friend admits that hope hurts him and Swan inspires hope. Macklin sees his true soul and tries to destroy the machines, but Roland shoots him in the back. The countdown continues in Chapter 94 and Friend shows them his true face, though Swan and Sister look away. Roland asks to be taken with him but the King only walks alone. Sister fights Roland while Swan tries to stop the machine. Roland shoots at Swan but Macklin kills him with his hand of nails. At the last moment Swan stops the machine by typing "Amen." Josh and Robin rescue them from the room, but Sister is dying. They get outside and she sees her shadow. She is buried in a clearing where the sun will shine.

In Chapter 94, Friend tries to get the Army of Excellence to kill Swan but instead they kill him. On the way home Josh tells Swan to stay and help everyone on the way back to Mary's Rest field by field. They stay at Matt Taylor's farm and he gives Josh a crucifix to wear on his journey back to Mary's Rest. He returns to Glory and Aaron. Swan and her adventures become legends.

Book Two, Part Fourteen, Chapters 85-95 Analysis

In Chapter 85, Friend is still afraid of Swan because he knows she is more powerful than he is. Though he can manipulate people, she can make people really believe in something. The old tarot cards come into play again when Swan realizes Macklin is the skeletal rider, the harbinger of death. Though he has been following the Shadow Soldier for many years, Macklin feels the first hint of doubt about his mission when he is around Friend. In these last ten or fifteen chapters all the previous events begin to come together, as if everyone has a specific duty to perform in the grand scheme of the novel. For instance, Sheila started as Macklin's prostitute but performs the all-important duty of retrieving the crown for Swan in Chapter 86. She is obsessed with physical beauty but is blinded by Swan's inner beauty and the pure goodness of the crown. This small act causes Friend to think the crown is lost and spurs the action forward.

Brother Timothy's use of the word A-OK is another trigger, like the T.S. Eliot poem. It was the President's coined phrase at the beginning of the novel. There is great mystery surrounding the man calling himself "God" because, in this new world where there are magic rings and Job's Masks, could He really be on the earth?

In the eleventh hour Macklin realizes that Friend is true evil. It is telling when Roland's mask comes off because Friend loves him like a mirror, seeing and knowing all that Roland has done and is capable of. Roland chooses Friend over Macklin because he knows Friend is the more powerful of the two—just like when he was a child and chose



to go with Macklin instead of finding his parents. He is, and has always been, willing to do anything to survive.

The man at Warwick is not God, but the crazed ex-President of the United States. He still feels responsible for the holocaust and is resolved, almost as a personal vendetta, to destroy the earth so that everything will be wiped clean. Though he knows Swan is special he cannot stop the machine for her. Friend is rapidly gaining confidence that the world will end, his original plan, and any trace of the little boy Roland once was is gone when he kills Macklin in cold blood. Their twisted relationship is bizarre, but in the end they really only have each other, just like they did in the beginning. Sister sacrifices herself because she knows her work is done: her dream walks are over, Paul is dead, and Swan is safe. Her days as New York City bag lady are over and she is at peace with her life.

In the end, Swan truly defeats Friend by forgiving him. Without Macklin and Roland to control the army there is pandemonium and Friend is killed. Josh is able to complete his journey and comes to terms with his new family. Swan and Robin set out to make the world green again one field at a time, just like Sister would have wanted.



Characters

Swan, or Sue Wanda, Prescott

Swan is the central character in the story and also the novel's namesake. As a child she is timid and serious and has been lugged around to boyfriend after boyfriend by her mother, who calls them her "uncles." Swan has an affinity for growing things and feels life in the soil of the earth. She and her mother Darleen are trapped underground with Josh and PawPaw after the explosion, though Darleen and PawPaw both die in the basement. Through PawPaw, Josh is warned to protect the child, and during their time in the basement he notices mysterious green shoots where Swan usually sleeps. He knows she is special when she tells him she can hear "hurting sounds," and though she is just a child she puts on a brave face and travels with Josh. She learns her fortune from Leona Skelton, who knows Swan is special and gives her life to help Swan and Josh escape from the K-Mart. Swan has a way with animals as well and the group adds Killer the terrier and Mule the horse to their entourage. Rusty and Josh look after Swan for seven years.

Swan's face is slowly covered by the mysterious warts she noticed after the blasts. Called Job's Masks, the growths cover she and Josh's faces, though Swan's is so bad that it almost completely engulfs her head. She regains her power through an apple tree thought dead: after she touches it the tree bursts into flower. She remains timid even after she makes the tree grow, proving her power to herself and others, because she has gone so long without the tingle of power she feels from touching the earth. In Mary's Rest she truly finds herself again when she remembers how to plant corn, though she is almost killed by the cold during the process. Her Job's Mask eventually cracks open to reveal a beautiful young woman underneath: like Leona wished for so long ago, Swan's inner beauty finally shines through on the outside. Robin Oakes falls in love with her and she with him, and Josh is overcome by how beautiful she is after so long of being trapped in the mask.

Swan's confidence grows as people begin to believe in her, though she is uncomfortable being the center of attention and really only wants to grow her plants and help. People are coming to Mary's Rest from all around when the Army of Excellence comes for them. Swan has become the leader of the community, and uses her regal posture and natural charisma to give people hope and confidence. She finally understands that she is important to rebuilding the world, though she struggled with the idea that so much depends on her. Though she becomes a great leader and defeats the enemy, she remains pure of soul and heart. She forgives even the Devil itself and inspires the Army of Excellence to throw down their weapons and begin their lives anew. She knows she must go from field to field revitalizing the soil and helping the earth regain its former beauty. Though sometimes she must defend herself, she never willingly hurts another creature or living thing. She is the opposite of Friend's evil in every way.



Sister

Sister begins the novel as "Sister Creep," a crazed bag lady in New York City who thinks that Jesus is going to come down on a spaceship from Jupiter and save her during the Rapture. Sister Creep is obsessed with avoiding a buried memory of her past, and even hides in abandoned New York City subway tunnels in her attempt to escape. She survives the blasts because of the tunnels and encounters the man who likes movies when she emerges: her first brush with true evil. She escapes with the image of a crucifix burned onto her neck. Somehow the carnage of Manhattan helps her to come to herself: she clings to her mantra, one step at a time. Sister's mission begins when she and Artie find the mysterious glass ring in the ruins of the Steuben glass shop. She knows it is powerful and the dream walks keep her propelled forward, in search of something. The glass ring gradually replaces her dependence on her bag.

She begins to go simply by "Sister," leaving Sister Creep in the decimated streets of Manhattan. She and Artie encounter the evil man disguised as Doyle Halland and narrowly escape with their lives. After that, Sister is constantly on the move and on the lookout for him. She and Paul Thorson butt heads at first, but she is drawn to his logic and he is drawn to her faith. He is a survivalist and saves she and Artie from the wolves. She talks him into leaving their cabin with the group and they find a settlement. She believed they would find others in the gloom, but Paul did not. She is drawn to Swan by her dream walks but does not know exactly what is calling her for many years. She and Paul go to Matheson and find the Empress tarot card and the Cookie monster doll in the K-Mart parking lot. These finds fuel her faith for many years, though Paul grows tired of wandering.

Sister's face is covered by a Job's mask just like Swan and Josh. She and Paul continue to look for Swan for seven years until finally finding her in Mary's Rest. Sister keeps the glass ring safe for year after year until giving to Swan, once to enlighten her of her mission and once because she knows the ring is meant to be Swan's crown. The evil man finally finds Sister in Mary's Rest. She looks different because her Job's Mask has finally cracked, leaving her face smooth and new-looking. She fights with and for Swan to the very end of her life, surviving Doomsday just barely by taking one step, then the other to get where she is going.

She is excited just before her death to see her shadow for the first time in years. She asks to be buried at the top of the mountain where she can see the sunlight. She knows her purpose is fulfilled and the world will continue to heal.

Josh Hutchins

Before the blast Josh Hutchins is an ex-football player turned wrestler. He goes from town to town to fight in fixed wrestling matches, living only to go back to his hotel and eat doughnuts. He misses his wife and children, though he and his wife are separated. Though he appears menacing, he is a gentle giant with the capacity to care very deeply. He survives the blast by being trapped in PawPaw's basement with Swan and Darleen.



Though their situation seems hopeless, Josh has a strong instinct to survive. He is given a purpose again when the body of PawPaw miraculously comes to life and commands him to "protect the child." Swan becomes his charge and he is her guardian.

Throughout the years Josh protects Swan from danger, just as PawPaw told him, and they become something of a family. His love for Swan soothes the hurt and guilt he feels about losing his family, and he helps the pain she feels for losing her mother. He knows she is special and loves her even as the Job's Mask obscures her face. His own Job's Mask leaves him only eye holes and a mouth hole as it reshapes his face underneath. Josh truly starts to believe Swan has the gift of life after she revives the apple tree at Sly Moody's house. He does not have the heart to tell her of Killer's death, even though it saves Rusty's life for a time. He grows to love Swan as his own daughter. Their lives have been fused together by so many horrors that they have had to be everything beautiful left in the world to each other. When Swan's mask falls off Josh is overwhelmed with emotion because the beautiful girl before him—whom he thinks of as his daughter—is as beautiful as he knows her to be in the inside. He knows her soul is shining through her face.

Josh finds love again in the kindhearted frankness of Glory Bowen, who has lost what her family once was just as Josh has lost his. She falls in love with him even before his masks cracks off. She knows he is a good, true person with a warm heart. When his mask does come off he is like Swan. It has made him as handsome on the outside as he has always been on the inside, Black Frankenstein or not. Even when he and Robin are captured he does not give up hope. He knows that there is still beauty in the world and Swan can show people how to find it. He is a smart man who keeps his promises. He is ultimately healed by his relationships with Swan and Glory, despite all the horrors he has had to live through and his old guilt about losing his first family.

Roland Croninger

Roland is an average boy in the beginning of the novel. He is restless after a long car trip and plays a little too freely with his father's gun, carelessly tucked under the seat. He idolizes Colonel Macklin, war hero of Vietnam, and enjoys playing a game called King's Knight. However, Roland is different from the average child, apparent immediately when he crushes the butterfly in his room for no reason. He has a capacity for great evil, but perhaps if the future had gone differently he could have learned to lead his life in an a way that caused no harm. He is snatched at random by Teddybear Warner right after Earth House collapses to help Colonel Macklin, thus beginning the great game of King's Knight that will last the rest of his life. He has a strong instinct for self-preservation that causes him to stick to Macklin instead of searching for his parents, whom he subsequently kills, one actively and one passively.

Though he has nagging guilty thoughts about his family, Roland adapts very well to the kill-or-be-killed lifestyle he and Macklin lead. He is skilled at strategy and suggests, after meeting Sheila, that it is not her body of weapons they should use: it is her drug stash. He immediately appeals to the lowest of humanity in an attempt to control his



surroundings, which he knows the drugs will do. Though Roland is ultimately an evil character, there are sympathetic moments throughout the novel: his drugging and attempted rape by Kempka is one, though he brutally murders the rapist while he is high on the drugs he has been given.

Roland as an adult, like Sister, Swan, Josh, and Macklin, has been engulfed by his Job's Mask. His goggles still adorn his face, but he now occupies a black trailer and is adept at torturing techniques learned from Kempka's old Nazi books. He is a high-ranking official in Macklin's Army of Excellence, still playing King's Knight and relying on the game as a code to live his life. Roland still vaguely remembers his parents but has pushed the guilt deep down inside of him. He and Macklin have a strange, dependent relationship, though around the time Friend shows up Roland realizes he has the upper hand. He thinks Macklin is weak, but once his own Job's Mask cracks and reveals the monster underneath, Roland is horrified. He obeys Friend out of fear at first, then because he knows to side with the winner and thinks Friend will be it. He is horrifyingly ugly inside and out, ultimately killed by his King in the grand game of King's Knight, though Macklin holds him tenderly during his final breaths.

Colonel Jimbo Macklin

Colonel Macklin is a Vietnam war veteran who was a POW for a time. He was kept down in a hole with two other soldiers who he killed, as per the Shadow Soldier's instruction, so he could have more food to himself. He is paid to endorse Earth House as a secure state-of-the-art fallout shelter, though he knows the place has structural problems and it ultimately falls to pieces during the bombings. Roland cuts his hand free for him when it is still in rock in the bowels of Earth House, and they eventually take over a camp on the Great Salt Lake and form the Army of Excellence. His Shadow Soldier spurs him to do everything difficult, echoing his mantra of discipline and control in his ear.

The Colonel's face is covered by a Job's Mask as well. When it comes off he is absolutely hideous and looks as if his face has turned inside out. This reflects his inner self and his corrupted soul, although at the end of his life he turns around to stop Roland from ending the world. Though they have been partners in carnage Roland has been his constant companion for years, and he holds Roland in his arms as they both die in the control room.

The man who likes movies/Doyle Halland/the Welcome Man/Frien

This creature is evil incarnate. He embodies everything ruthless and ugly about mankind and possesses the power to control people, causing suicides and murders. Even though he is pure evil his resolve is wavered by Swan's pure goodness, and he briefly wishes he could be forgiven.



Darleen Prescott

She is Swan's mother and a burnout. She left home at a young age and became pregnant with Swan from a one-night stand. She dies from her wounds in the basement of PawPaw's grocery.

Paul Thorson

He is an antisocial man living in a cabin in the woods. He saves Sister and Artie from wolves on the highway and shelters them. He and Sister become extremely close and she restores his faith in humanity and beauty in the world with her faith.

Leona Skelter

She is a seer famous for predicting the death of JFK. She shelters Swan and Josh shortly after they emerge from the basement and she reads Swan's fortune, foreseeing great glory and hardship in her future. She gives Swan Crybaby the dowsing rod and sacrifices herself at the K-Mart to give Josh and Swan time to escape from Alvin and his group of insane people.

Steve Buchanan

He is the youngest member of the group at Paul's cabin.

PawPaw

His boys from underground helped him dig the shelter that keeps Swan and Josh safe from the radiation blasts. His body is possessed by some otherworldly force telling Josh to protect Swan.

Lord Alvin Mangrim

He is a former mental institution patient who is good with machines. He imposes a game of Straightjacket on Josh, Swan, and Leona. He also brings Franklin Hayes's head to Macklin to become part of the Army of Excellence and is eventually killed by Paul Thorson.

Kevin and Mona Ramsey

They are members of Paul's cabin group.



Beth Phelps

She is one of the first people Sister encounters in Manhattan after the blast, eventually killed by the evil man.

Jack Tomachek

He is one of the first people Sister encounters in Manhattan after the blast, but he cannot cross through the tunnel with the others.

The President of the United States

A former astronaut, the President is faced with the difficult choice of whether or not to strike the Russians first before the USA can be harmed. He later reappears as a crazed hermit who calls himself God and attempts to activate Doomsday.

The Fat Man, or Kempka

He is in charge of the survivors' camp at the Great Salt Lake, but is killed by Roland before an attempted rape.

Sheila Fontana

She is ambushed by Macklin and Roland in dirtwart land. They use her unblemished face and drug supply to gain entry to the camp.

Judd Lawry

The Fat Man's lackey and later corporal in the Army of Excellence.

Killer

A tenacious terrier who follows Swan, saving her from Alvin by biting his nose off.

Mule

A piebald horse who serves Swan and Josh faithfully for many years.



Rusty Weathers

He is a former circus performer who joins Josh and Swan after they happen upon his train car.

Dr. Hugh Ryan

He is a former doctor who begs Sister and Paul for a ride in exchange to direct them to Mary's Rest.

Robin Oakes

He is a young bandit who leads a group of boys in the woods. He later borrows Sister's ring and has a vision of Swan, destined to fall in love with her.

Sylvester Moody

He and his wife provide shelter for the traveling entertainers, though their opinion of Swan skyrockets after she brings their apple tree back to life.

Glory Bowen

She is the seamstress of Mary's Rest who later falls in love with Josh.

Aaron Bowen

He is Glory's son who finds the town well with Crybaby.

Bucky

He is a member of Robin's band whose bullet wound Dr. Hugh is able to heal using a shard from the glass ring.

Anna McClay

She is a resident of Mary's Rest who fight against the Army of Excellence to the very end.

Zachial Epstein

He is a resident of Mary's Rest.



Gene Scully

He is a resident of Mary's Rest.

Mr. Caidin and family

His sons Job's Mask cracked off just like Swan's, and underneath all of Ben's imperfections are evened out.

DeLauren

The crazy cannibal who lives in a shack at the edge of town.

Brother Timothy

A member of American Allegiance who leads them to Warwick Mountain.

Vulcevic

He drives through Mary's Rest with his Junkman's van.

Captain Bud Royce

An ex-Arkansas National Guardsman who helps fortify Mary's Rest for battle.



Objects/Places

The Glass Circle

This magical circle of glass is referred to as a ring during most of the novel, but turns out to be a crown for Swan. It is the melded remains of a Steuben glass shop and has been given special powers of sight after the blasts.

Sister's Bag

This object is part of Sister's identity in Manhattan.

Earth House/Blue Dome Mountain

This place is where Roland and his family have come to be safe from nuclear holocaust. Unfortunately, it is structurally unsound and collapses when a bomb falls too close.

Leona's House

This place provides Swan and Josh the first bit of real hospitality they have had since the basement, giving them hot baths and real meals.

The Tarot Cards

These objects are used to tell Swan's future. The Empress, The Devil, and Death cards reoccur throughout the story.

Crucifixes

These objects appear throughout the novel, one simply an image burned on to Sister's neck by the blasts.

K-Mart

This place is where Josh is forced to play a game of Straightjacket in an attempt to save Swan and Leona's lives.



The Mirror

This object belongs to Rusty, though formerly to a famous magician, and Swan can see hazy faces and the evil man in it.

Roland's Trailer

This is the place where Army of Excellence prisoners go to be tortured for information.

Warwick Mountain

This is the place where God, according to Brother Timothy, lives.

Mary's Rest

This town, formerly a group of strangers huddled around a poisoned hole in the ground, transforms after Swan plants corn and a well is built.

Job's Masks

These crusty coverings obscure the faces of 65% of the population after the nuclear holocaust.

Crybaby

This object can find water deep underground.

Paul's Magnum

This is the gun Paul originally thinks he will use to kill himself, but later carries him through his adventures with Sister.

Cookie Monster Doll

This doll belongs to Swan as a child. It survives the blast and is found by Sister and Paul in the K-Mart parking lot of Matheson.

The Silver Key and Black Box

These objects are the keys to the Doomsday machine hidden in Warwick Mountain.



Themes

Beauty on the Inside Versus Beauty on the Outside

After the blasts the world is an ugly, gray place. Sister finds beauty when she discovers the glass ring, Artie finds beauty in his memories of his wife, and Swan finds beauty in Leona's tarot cards. Leona's explanation to Swan of the inside face and outside face is one of the central themes in the novel. As a child, Swan does not understand why beautiful people would be mean and vice versa, and Leona says that God had not figured out how to show people's souls on the outside. Swan misses her long blond hair and can barely stand to look in the mirror after the blasts. Josh jokes that he was never attractive, but now looks downright monstrous. But, they are both beautiful people on the inside, with pure hearts and souls.

Later in the novel this theme is brought to light quite literally as people's Job's Masks begin to split open. Hidden inside the mask for so long, Swan's formerly blistered and battered face transforms into something beautiful. Her skin looks as if it was never burned and all her hair has grown back. The same beautification happens to Sister and Josh as well—the masks reveal the beauty of their souls and what lovely people they are on the inside, so their inside and outside people match. The opposite is true of Roland and Macklin: like DeLauren, the cannibal on the edge of Mary's Rest, they are uncaring people who are only concerned with survival. They do not make attempts to help others and only seek to gain power. When their Job's Masks come off they are truly hideous and frightening. Macklin's visage has taken the form of the Skeletal Rider tarot card that Swan remembers from long ago. Roland's goggles have grown into his face, and Friend says that he loves Roland like a mirror: though Friend can change his shape, he is truly ugly on the inside and cannot change. Macklin's army adapts Nazi-esque principals when he decides all people with keloids must be exterminated, and with this proclamation it is clear he is judging people by the outside and disregarding who they really are.

Swan's Job's Mask is the worst one anyone has ever seen, though she is humanity's only hope for the future. Her mask teaches her to look, like Leona told her, on the inside to find who people really are. She learns that people do not need judgment, they need understanding. Even the most evil creature can have some spark of life still within.

The Need for Power, or Discipline and Control

It is telling that, as soon as the apocalypse happens, people are vying for power in the new, broken world. In many places there is order, but it is built on fear and distrust instead of humanity banding together after tragedy. People have the instinct to survive, but very quickly descend into dark questions of what survival should be in the new world, and whether or not it is actually worth it. Amid this landscape of shellshocked and lost people, Macklin's mantra of discipline and control propels him through situations



that civilians could not weather: severing his own hand, for instance. He has been conditioned to survive, an instinct Roland has naturally, and automatically seeks a position of power. He knows he can organize people and command their respect, and controlling others is an excellent way for he and Roland to get by.

In a world where every small scrap of the old could mean the difference between life and death, for many it is all-important to guarantee they get their share by controlling the people around them. While Mary's Rest becomes a community centered around everyone working together, the Army of Excellence becomes a dictatorship and band of assassins focus not on the common good, but on their immediate needs only. For Roland and Macklin the need for power and control goes hand in hand with the instinct for survival. The same is true of Friend, he seeks to control everything and everyone around him and without that control he cannot exist. Control issues are what landed people in this situation in the first place: the USA and the USSR obliterated each other in an attempt to control one another and be the most powerful. Swan seeks a world where people are part of a community, an almost Utopian place which will not be dependent on who has the biggest stick.

Religious Imagery

The character, Friend, a.k.a. the man who likes movies, a.k.a. Doyle Halland, a.k.a. Lester, a.k.a. the Welcome man, embodies all that is evil about humanity. He is a manipulator. He gives a small push here or a suggestion there and suddenly the world has ended. He is, essentially, the Devil. The personification of Satan in the novel is important to the end of days scripture of Christianity. While this new world contains magic and miracles, there is a strong connection to faith, seen in Sister, and a connection to religion, seen in Glory. Swan is the "Savior" figure because she is completely pure of heart and soul. Her connection to the earth gives her a solid connection to people as well. While Friend constantly changes shape and is always on the move, Swan has been quietly cocooned in her Job's Mask. Though she does not know it, the whole world is waiting for her to emerge and lead them to glory.

Sister's name is representative of a nun, as is her bottomless well of faith to keep going with the crown, representative of Jesus of Nazareth's crown of thorns. Josh symbolizes Joshua at the battle of Jericho, which even Alvin recognizes. Robin, like Swan, is of the earth and woods. The book is stratified with images of "light" as good and "dark" as bad, similar to literary traditions. There are also multiple crucifixes in the novel, including one burned onto Sister by the Devil himself. Friend even takes the form of a priest to fool Sister and hides under the old church where he almost captures Josh.

Destiny

Each character has a strong sense of destiny wound throughout the novel. Though Swan begins timid, young, and terrified, she grows into a pure and strong leader who helps continue all that is good about the human race. Though Roland is a smart,



somewhat disturbed little boy, by throwing his lot in with Macklin, he promises his future will be dark. Josh feels guilt over losing communication with his family, but is destined to find Swan and Glory and make them his new family. Sister, who has completely lost her mind at the beginning of the story, survives the blast against all odds and finds the glass ring. It is not a coincidence that the Steuben glass shop has been her favorite place for so many years. She was meant to go there, find the ring, and find her way eventually to Swan.

Each character's seemingly individual decisions and roles eventually lead to the great showdown for the human race: the President, acting as God because of the Doomsday machine, chooses to end everything because of Friend. The whole story boils down to pure good and pure evil in a room with a ticking time bomb, and good prevails. In this story there are no coincidences, everything happens for a reason as if there truly is some divine hand involved. One event leads to another which leads to another. For example, a seemingly chance meeting at a bar between Sister and Hugh lead them to Robin and the boys, who in turn lead them to Swan, who Sister is destined to give the ring to and Robin is destined to fall in love with.

The story is woven together very carefully, and every piece is there for a reason.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from a third-person omniscient point of view. There are lots of different characters to hear from and about, and this point of view is the most effective way to weave the story together. There are over 40 characters who appear in the novel, but the focus is on a few main characters: Swan, Sister, Josh, Macklin, Roland, and Friend. Secondary characters include Sheila, Leona, Alvin, Paul, and Robin. The author is able to freely move between characters to examine their inner thoughts, and at the same time give commentary and behind-the-scenes information for the reader.

The point of view aids the storytelling because it is easy for the reader to move between the dramas of the characters, though they may be hundreds of miles apart. Being able to hear character's thoughts also aids the reader in putting the big picture together. The novel is very long and complicated, and it is helpful to have more than one guide to remind the reader where they have been thus far. The point of view is important because the novel focuses on the journeys of so many characters. If it were in first person told through one character's eyes, it would not be possible to know what the other characters were thinking. Transitions between chapters would be hindered if the story was told from the point of view of just one character. The third-person omniscient point of view contributes to the reader's understanding of each character's personal growth, and the novel as a whole work.

Setting

The novel spans a time period of seven or eight years. It encompasses many different geographic locations within the post-apocalyptic United States of America. Sister's story begins in Manhattan, but she journeys out of the destroyed city through New Jersey and Pennsylvania to discover the town of Homewood. She and Paul go to Matheson, Kansas, where they discover Swan's tarot card. They spend many years wandering around the country before arriving at Mary's Rest in Missouri with the other characters. Swan and Josh meet at PawPaw's grocery store in Kansas, from which they journey out and into Nebraska. After adding Rusty to their entourage, they head for Mary's Rest also. Roland and Macklin meet on Blue Dome Mountain in the collapsed Earth House. They move out from the wreckage of the mountain to the Great Salt Lake, eventually forming an army that marches all over the north.

All the characters meet at Mary's Rest in Missouri for the battle. While they are captured, they are taken to the West Virginia coal-mining mountain town of Warwick, where the President of the United States of America has been hiding out. The characters move through time the same way, though sometimes things in different chapters are meant to be happening at the same time. Book One is seven years before



the events of Book Two. At the very end of Book Two the sun begins to shine again and some of the landscape begins to resemble the currently familiar iconography of the American Midwest farming landscapes.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is not particularly difficult to understand. The author does use some military and scientific terminology when referring to the armies and the equipment. There are many repeated phrases in the novel, which are significant and meant to be remembered by the reader. Sister's mantra "one foot forward and then the other" is the idea that gets her through much of the horror of the novel. Macklin motto "discipline and control" helps him survive, but he loses his humanity in the process. The evil man known as Friend repeats the same eerie song about a mulberry bush and is fond of telling Swan it is too late to save him. By using repeated phrases the author embeds the central idea about his characters to the reader.

The character's names are also significant: Sister echos an old world nun with her name and faith. Josh is compared to Joshua of the Battle of Jericho. Roland's name is old-fashioned and befits his lifelong obsession with the game King's Knight. Swan's name is representative of what she will become: beautiful, regal, and strong. The town name, Matheson, could be an homage to fellow horror and science fiction author, Richard Matheson, who wrote such classics as "I Am Legend," "Hell House," and "What Dreams May Come." Mule the horse is symbolic of the donkey that carried Mary in the Bible, and the town name Mary's Rest is a biblical reference as well. Robin Oakes calls to mind the ancient Briton legend Robin Hood and at the same time the children's story of Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up. He is the oldest boy living in the woods with a band of thieves.

The novel is generally easy to read and goes very quickly. There is a lot of dialogue and description of action, and not a lot of time is spend on exposition. The reader is sucked into the story right away.

Structure

The novel is hefty, divided into two books, fourteen parts, and ninety-five chapters. Each part has an overall name that includes the names of the chapters underneath. The chapters are generally short, the longest just over ten pages and the shortest as brief as two pages. The paragraphs tend to be on the short side, and may include snappy back and forth dialogue or one character's monologue. The descriptions in the novel are visceral and sometimes disturbing, as the author seeks to accurately describe what a post-apocalyptic United States of America would be.

The novel is full of characters and subplot. Book One takes place seven years before Book Two and is a lot of introduction to characters. Book One spends the first ten or twenty chapters setting the scene and introducing the people before the plot begins moving toward its eventual conclusion. The chapters quickly take the reader back and



forth between people and places, so one is always up to date on the situations. There are so many characters in the novel that the author often refers to characters by their full names upon a chapter change, as if to remind the reader whose life and experience is being discussed. The author does not shy away from horrifying descriptions or foul language, since in a post-apocalyptic world there are no censors to complain.

The novel is easy to read despite its sometimes overly descriptive horrors and its 856-page bulk. The action scenes read very quickly and are formulated on a very visual level, making the scenes easy to picture in the reader's mind. The author makes use of dream sequences and the idea of destiny to further the plot and reveal more about the characters.



Quotes

"Once upon a time we had a love affair with fire." (p. 5). The President of the USA opens the novel with this line, contemplating the decisions he must soon make.

"And deep inside him, in the pit where no light had shone for a very long time, the Shadow Soldier cried out with joy." (p. 74). Colonel Macklin is reacting to the nuclear fallout, and the Shadow Soldier is ready for action.

"The entire ring of glass glowed like a multicolored circle of fire, yet there was no heat under Sister Creep's fingers. It was pulsating rapidly now, as was her heartbeat, and the vibrant, stunning colors grew still brighter." (p.146). Sister's discovery of the magical glass ring, shortly after meeting Artie.

"Josh thought she looked like the little queen of a realm that had been stolen from her, a tragic and determined figure." (p. 250). Josh and Swan have just emerged from the basement and begin walking toward the seemingly empty horizon.

"Everything's changed now. Maybe the whole world's just like Sullivan: blowin' away, changin', turnin' into somethin' different than it was before." (p. 419). Swan recalls what Leona said to her back in Sullivan as she tries to put the mysterious pieces together surrounding the mirror, the ring, the devil tarot card, and the new world.

"For now we see in a glass darkly, but then face to face." (p. 535). After arriving in Mary's Rest, Swan recovers only their mirror from the wagon, reminding Josh of the Bible verse his mother used to like.

"Mama said fight fire with fire." (p. 574). Rusty's final thought is his mother's favorite saying as he fights off the evil man who has taken an interest in Swan.

"One step and then the next gets you where you're going." (p. 561). This phrase is Sister's mantra. She reminds herself of it on the way through the woods to Mary's Rest.

"The images poured forth as if from a cornucopia, so vivid that Swan smelled the aromas of barley, apples, plums and cherry trees in full bloom." (p. 600). These images flood Swan's mind after her first touch with the glass ring.

"She looked like the daughter of a marriage between ice and fire." (p. 626). This is Robin's first impression of Swan as she is sleeping shortly after her Job's Mask cracks off.

"Everybody's got two faces, child—the outside face and the inside face. A face under the face, y'see. It's your true face, and if it was flipped to the outside, you'd show the world what kind of person you are." (p. 640). Swan recalls Leona's explanation from long ago after viewing Ben Caidin, whose malformed face has been reshaped by the Job's Mask.



"She saw what he was made of, and she knew him very well." (p. 645). Swan understands the evil man after offering him an apple from Sly Moody's truck.

"He was afraid. But he'd learned long before how to push the child Roland away and summon forth the Sir Roland in himself: the adventurer in service to the King, the King's will be done, amen." (p. 648). Roland just before visiting the Savior in the American Allegiance army.

"And she'd seen that he hated her and hated himself for wanting to take a step beyond what he was; but he'd been afraid of her, too, and as she's watched him stagger away Swan has realized that forgiveness crippled evil, drew the poison from it like lancing a boil." (p. 664). Swan thinks back on the apple encounter with the evil man, realizing she has power over him.

"Because, after his madness had passed, Colonel Macklin had realized he now wore the face of the Shadow Solider. They were one and the same now. It was a miracle that told Macklin God was on the side of the Army of Excellence." (p. 670). Macklin is sure his new, horrible face is the true face of the Shadow Soldier who has been by his side for so many years.

"Tell her I'll make a human hand do the work." (p. 682). The evil man sends a message for Swan after Josh escapes his lair.

"Roland had taken one look at the stranger and realized that he was an extraordinary man; but the stranger had refused to answer any questions, saying he'd speak only to the army's leader." (p. 708). This is Roland's first impression of the evil man, or "Friend."

"She knows me, he thought; that fact made him afraid, just as he'd feared the glass ring when it went black in his grip." (p. 812). Friend is still afraid of Swan though he has every apparent advantage at Warwick Mountain.

"On it was a very recognizable blue, white, and gold emblem, and the much-polished lettering said: Seal of the President of the United States of America." (p. 818). Sister sees "God's" cufflinks and realize he is the former President.

"Maybe not today or tomorrow, maybe not even next year or the year after that—but someday, somewhere, he would slip from the shadows wearing a new face and a new name, and on that day she would have to be very careful and very strong." (p. 845). Swan has finally defeated the evil man, but knows she must always be on her guard.



Topics for Discussion

This is a major problem in the new burnt-out world: one can find ways to stay alive, but what is simply staying alive really worth? Paul Thorson's radio gives people hope, though at first the ritual seems very cruel to Sister. Is it enough to have the basic necessities? Does simply being alive mean the human race is still around or does there need to be more?

Discuss Leona's explanation of the inside self versus the outside self. How does the author use this idea literally later in the text? Who does this affect and how?

Though the reader meets Roland as a child, it is clear there is some darkness in him. Is he naturally inclined to evil, a product of his environment, or both?

Sister begins as a crazy bag lady in New York City. What spurs her return to sanity? What helps her slough off her old life and become the strong woman she is at the end of the novel?

"The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot plays a large part in the novel. When is the poem first introduced, and by whom? What is the poem's importance by the end of the novel?

What is a Job's Mask? What is the significance of the people who have Job's Masks? Where, presumably, have these masks come from?

The evil man, or "Friend," terrorizes characters throughout the novel but is cowed by Swan. Why is he afraid of her? How does she fulfill her role as his exact opposite? What emotion from her is almost his undoing? Which characters are he able to manipulate?

Describe Josh's journey throughout the novel. Who is he before the bombs hit? Who does he become near the end of the novel? How is Swan a significant part of his path?

Describe Swan's journey throughout the novel. Who is she before the bombs hit? Who does she become at the end of the novel? What people impact her the most on her journey?

Discuss the idea of faith as portrayed in the novel. What is faith? Who makes the most use of it? Why is it so important?