The Stories of Ray Bradbury Study Guide

The Stories of Ray Bradbury by Ray Bradbury

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BOOKRAGS

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Stories 1 - 10 Summary

In "The Night" the protagonist, a child nicknamed Shorts, spends an evening with his mother. His father is at a social function, and his older brother Skipper fails to return home. Shorts' mother takes him outside through a dark area of town to search for Skipper. Shorts develops a sense of foreboding that intensifies when his mother approaches an overgrown gully. Shorts fears Skipper is dead, fears the dark, and becomes certain that if his mother enters the gully she too will die. Shorts' mother calls out, Skipper replies, and comes running through the gully.

Stories 2-4 are tangentially related and feature recurring characters. In "Homecoming" the protagonist, Timothy Elliot, is a fourteen-year-old child who is deemed sick by his family. The Elliot family, living in Mellin Town, Illinois, has members who are an oddball collection of humanoid monsters and appear to mostly be vampires. Timothy feels isolated from his family because he does not drink blood and does not sleep in a coffin. He spends his time with an apparently semi-sentient pet spider named Spid while the Elliot family hosts a worldwide family reunion which includes mummies, flying bat-men, and other creatures. In "Uncle Einar", the flying bat-man Einar returns to Europe from the Elliot family reunion but accidentally flies into a power line. He crashes and is found by a woman who falls in love with him. Einar's accident has ruined his night vision and he fears to fly during the day. Instead he falls in love with the woman, they marry and settle in an isolated house, and raise a family of apparently normal children. As the children grow up Einer realizes he can enjoy the freedom of flying by pretending to be one of his children's kites. In "The Traveler," Ceci Elliot sleeps nearly always and in a dreaming state her consciousness flies around the world. Ceci's consciousness enters other beings as a form of possession. One day Uncle Jonn appears, states he is becoming increasingly deranged and demands that Ceci somehow fix him. Uncle Jonn makes threatening statements and thereafter he goes entirely insane. Ceci awakes and confesses that her malevolent mental presence was the seminal feature in Uncle Jonn's insanity.

In "The Lake", the protagonist is a thirteen-year-old boy named Harold who visits Lake Bluff beach on family vacation and thinks of his late friend, a girl named Tally, who drowned in the lake the previous year. He builds one-half of a sandcastle and remembers how Tally would have completed the other half. He returns ten years later and as he visits the beach a lifeguard brings ashore a bag in which is wrapped Tally's decomposing remains. Harold looks to the beach and sees a one-half-finished sandcastle; he completes it. In "The Coffin" two antagonistic brothers live together as one approaches the end of his life. The older brother, Charles Braling, spends his last week of life building a complex mechanical coffin and states his desire to be buried in the coffin. His younger brother Richard resents Charles' successful life and instead has Charles buried in a cheap pine box. Drawn to the coffin, Richard climbs inside whereupon it seals shut, straps him in, embalms him, delivers a funeral oration, and

then buries him by robotic action. In "The Crowd" the protagonist Spallner is involved in an automobile accident and is surprised at the speed with which a crowd gathers at the scene. During his stay in the hospital he becomes convinced that accident-crowds in specific locales always consist of the same individuals and that they are somehow responsible for determining whether the accident victims live or die. Spallner compiles what he believes to be credible evidence and intents to go to the police whereupon he is involved in another severe accident and dies when members of the gathered crowd move his injured body before proper medical care arrives.

In "The Scythe", the protagonist Drew Erickson and his family are homeless and traveling toward California. They get lost and look for beds and food at an isolated farmhouse. They find the owner recently dead with a last will and testament conveying the house to the next man who enters. The Ericksons move in and Drew begins to use an inscribed scythe to harvest the wheat fields surrounding the house. He eventually realizes that the wheat represents people and his scything causes their deaths—Drew is the grim reaper. He comes to wheat stalks that represent his wife and children and refuses to cut them, leaving them in a state somewhere between life and death. In his later grief he cuts them down but then begins randomly slashing through the wheat fields instead of harvesting according to any plan. In "There Was an Old Woman" the protagonist is an ancient woman who refuses to die. She is nearly tricked into it one day during a nap but quickly goes to the mortuary and insists they give up her body—partially autopsied—into which she slips like old clothes and proceeds to live forever. In "There Will Come Soft Rains" a metropolitan area has been destroyed by thermonuclear war and only a single house remains. It is a fully automated house and goes about its daily routine of preparing breakfast, disposing of breakfast, ringing alarms, and opening the garage door—unaware that the inhabitants are long dead. The house then burns down.

Stories 1 - 10 Analysis

"The Night" is a piece of traditional fiction and focuses on the themes of aloneness, fear, and death. Within the story the sense of foreboding is developed through the narrative structure until the anticlimactic conclusion. The wooded gully through which Skipper emerges is a symbol of death.

The extended Elliot family is featured in three stories, "Homecoming", "Uncle Einar", and "The Traveler". The family consists of legendary humanoid monsters and other atypical individuals. Timothy is apparently a normal human child without any special or monstrous abilities and without a taste for drinking blood or sleeping in a coffin. His sister Ceci sleeps nearly constantly and projects her mind through space. Ceci can enter any type of animal or simply hover as a disembodied observer. Uncle Einar is a winged man, apparently some type of a bat-man, with leathery green wings and unusually well-developed night vision prior to an accident that partially blinds him. Another family member is an Egyptian mummy, and so forth. "Homecoming" focuses on the themes of death, isolation, and sadness; "Uncle Einar" investigates the themes of isolation and happiness through children; "The Traveler" considers the theme of

domination. In "Uncle Einar" Einar suffers a physical debilitation that robs his life of much pleasure—his night flying as a bachelor is symbolic of a young man's passion. Later, he regains his passion for life by flying during the day, which he can do "disguised" as his children's kite—symbolic of regaining vital passion through procreation. Einar makes the transition from a satisfied young bachelor to a satisfied father though he suffers a period of sadness.

"The Lake" features many elements of a traditional ghost story—Harold's young friend Tally drowns and he spends the next year searching for her in the belief that their friendship will somehow transcend mortality. He is there a decade later when her remains are recovered. The inference that she has finally returned is strengthened by the symbolic one-half-finished sandcastle. Note Harold's emotional detachment throughout the story and specifically his detachment from his new wife Margaret. The story focuses on isolation and death. "The Coffin" features two brothers who live together in an antagonistic situation. Charles is successful, wealthy, and older. Richard is a failure, a moocher, and resentful. Charles knows Richard well enough to con him into accidental suicide while Richard knows Charles so little that he is oblivious to the situation until it is too late. The mechanical aspects of the coffin are somewhat dated; at the time of publication the story was probably considered science fiction but read today it is somewhat anachronistic. The story focuses on familial isolation and death. "The Crowd" can be viewed as either a horror story or as a traditional piece featuring a paranoid protagonist. Spallner's death is caused by members of the crowd—whom he believes he recognizes—moving his injured body—he believes purposefully—in a manner that causes death. The story's themes are alienation, aloneness, and death. "The Scythe" uses a wheat field and scythe as a traditional metaphor for life and death. The protagonist unwittingly becomes the grim reaper and in his bereavement scythes down wheat erratically. Note the date of his personal loss, May 30, 1938, was Memorial Day in the United States of America and is also immediately before the beginning of World War II: Drew's subsequent hack-and-slash equates with "Bombs shattered London, Moscow, Tokyo" (p. 65)—this equates with the random deaths involved in mass warfare. Like the following story, "There Was an Old Woman", the theme of the tale is death and isolation. Tildy's figure of death is a young man who does not speak but yet makes his intentions known. In "There Will Come Soft Rain" the automated house symbolizes death and meaningless; the title is derived from the quoted poem's title There Will Come Soft Rains by Sara Teasdale. The parallel symbolism of the poem is obvious. The date the house burns down, August 5, 2026, was given as April 29, 1985, in the original publication. The story has been adapted to various media presentation by a variety of artists.

Stories 11 - 20

Stories 11 - 20 Summary

In "Mars Is Heaven" an Earth exploration vessel lands on Mars and discovers an Earth-like village. The town is inhabited by the apparently normal humans, including the close relatives of the Earth ship crew. The crew is overjoyed to see their relatives, including many who have died. Only Captain Black is suspicious of the apparent heaven on Mars but eventually he is won over by the appearance of his deceased parents. He follows his brother home to his childhood house and after dinner climbs into bed where he becomes suspicious, and attempts to flee. He is captured by Martians who explain they have used telepathy to project the Earth-like images. Black and the other men are then killed. In "The Silent Towns" Walter Gripp believes himself to be the last person left on a formerly-colonized Mars. Gripp grows lonely and eventually locates, via random telephone dialing, Genevieve Selsor in a distant city. After several comical mishaps they meet. Gripp has anticipated Selsor to be beautiful and acquiescent—instead she is obese and domineering. He flees from her and lives his remaining days in isolation. In "The Earth Men" an Earth exploration vessel lands on Mars and discovers an established civilization of Martians who are nonplussed at the Earthlings' visit. The Earth men are shuttled around until they are eventually locked into an insane asylum. There it develops that the telepathic Martians believe the Earthmen to be a psychotic telepathic projection of a single deranged Martian. After some time, a Martian psychologist concludes that he is incurable and euthanizes the Earthmen. When the rocket ship itself persists, the Martian psychologist commits suicide. In "The Off Season" Sam and Elma open a food store on Mars and await an influx of immigrants. Native Martian culture has been wiped out by humans. Some remaining Martians visit Sam and deed to him huge swaths of land; later, Sam looks toward Earth and sees it being consumed in a fiery cataclysm. In "The Million-Year Picnic" an Earth family surreptitiously escapes from Earth to avoid an impending global war—they hope another family will join them.

In "The Fox and the Forest" William and Susan Travis come from the year 2155 where global warfare is institutionalized. Sickened by the endless destruction, the couple escapes to the past. They use time travel to return to 1938 where they live in Mexico. However, their work is so important to the war effort that they are tracked down by time-traveling police and forced to return. In "Kaleidoscope" a rocket ship is ripped open by a meteorite, spilling all of the crew into space. They are wearing their spacesuits but have no propulsion and thus drift their separate ways to a slow but certain death. Some of the men go insane, some are silent, and some engage in conversation about the past, death, and interpersonal issues. One of the men, Hollis, is right next to another man who continues to scream hysterically. Hollis smashes the man's head visor, killing him. Later, Hollis is repeatedly injured by micrometeorites and then plunges to Earth. In "The Rocket Man" a family is happy to receive their father home after another space travel excursion. The man returns home only three or four times a year, and stays only a few days each time. The man's child wonders when he will stay and the man promises his next trip will be his last. Shortly after liftoff the man dies as his rocket plunges into the

sun. In "Marionettes, Inc." Braling confides to his friend Smith information about a new company that constructs "Marionettes" (lifelike androids). Braling is trapped in a loveless marriage while Smith feels burdened by his wife's constant doting. Braling and Smith have long yearned to escape on vacation alone. Braling has purchased a Marionette to stand in for him while away on vacation. Smith finds the idea delightful and plans to purchase his own Marionette. Smith rushes home to his wife and discover she is a Marionette. Meanwhile Braling is confronted by his Marionette who declares an honest love for Braling's wife and plans to kill Braling and permanently assume his position in life. The story concludes with the reader uncertain as to whether or not Braling or his Marionette has emerged triumphant. In "No Particular Night or Morning" two spacemen, Hitchcock and Clemens, discuss the nature of space travel while Hitchcock goes through a complete mental breakdown. Hitchcock questions the nature of memory, experience, and existence before putting himself through the airlock. His demise leaves Clemens shaken.

Stories 11 - 20 Analysis

Several of these stories mention dates: many of the dates are now in the past. The grouped Mars stories have some interrelated elements—Mars is home to an advanced Martian civilization which appears largely pacifistic and unprepared for a human invasion. Humans make tentative visits and then at some point wipe out the Martian civilization, intending to colonize the planet. The colonization never really works and Earth destroys itself in global warfare—leaving both planets essentially deserted. Mars is portrayed as having a thin but breathable atmosphere, canals full of water, and vast expanses of red sand deserts. Martians are not particularly well described but appear diaphanous and light; they communicate by telepathy and can project images into others' minds; they wear ornate masks and colorful clothing; they appear unsuspicious and intelligent. It is tempting to conclude that the stories are chapters in a larger narrative; they should be approached as atomic short stories. In "Mars Is Heaven" the Martians are immediately hostile but engage in an elaborate ruse to gain the upper hand. In "The Silent Towns" Mars has been nearly completely unpopulated—the Martians are all dead and all but two humans have returned to Earth to participate in warfare. The story takes an ironic twist when Gripp discovers the only other inhabitant is a grotesque woman; the story focuses on isolation and loneliness. "The Earth Men" is similar to "Mars Is Heaven" except the Martians are not hostile—instead they are oblivious. Here the humans are mistaken for a mental aberration—a projection of an insane Martian. After the humorous and ironic euthanasia of the crewmen and the suicide of the Martian psychologist, the human rocket becomes a bizarre object of wonder to the remaining Martians. The story provides a curious insight into perceived reality and the notion of insanity. The story's theme is one of isolation and miscommunication. "The Off Season" is a simple morality tale of gaining what one hopes for and realizing it is worthless; the story features themes of greed and isolation. "The Million-Year Picnic" presents a family of survivors from a destroyed Earth colonizing the wilds of Mars. In this story the Martians appear to have been already completely destroyed—their abandoned cities litter the landscape. The family becomes the "new" Martian race—at least in theory. The story is one of isolation but hope.

"The Fox and the Forest" puts a science-fiction spin on a traditional escape story—the couple has escaped a hostile and apparently Fascist military civilization by traveling through time. There is a logical inconsistency in the story—at one point the characters note they will, if captured, be returned to a time only moments after their initial escape; at another point in the story the characters believe that killing one pursuer has gained them a few days' respite from pursuit. There is also a belief that simply not talking about the future prevents one from changing the future—in the story the time-stream remains infinitely mutable but apparently quite robust. The story features elements of control, hatred, and domination. The story "Kaleidoscope" takes place in deep space but is focused on interpersonal relationships more than science fiction or technology. The men are cast into space and realize they will soon die, that there is no hope of rescue, and that before they die they will be isolated by their rapid dispersion and limited radio communications. The story focuses on Hollis who is a spiteful and in fact murderous man. Yet Hollis gains some measure of redemption when his fiery demise is witnessed from Earth by at least one young man. The discussion between Applegate and Hollis and, later, between Lespere and Hollis are essentially damaging to Hollis—this is physically echoed by his loss of a hand and a foot. The final discussion between Stone and Hollis is essentially healing. The story features the theme of isolation. The story "The Rocket Man" is a metaphorical examination of a father-son relationship. The man's employment in rocket ships takes him away from the family most of the time. The employment is apparently quite lucrative and voluntary but the man explains the nature of desire—when in space he yearns for home; while home he yearns for space. Unable to come to terms with loss, the man pursues both courses and in the end gains neither. The rocket man's form-fitting space suit is symbolic of the emptiness of space. The story promotes the theme of isolation and loneliness. "Marionettes, Inc." is one of the best-known stories in the collection. The essential plot element involves humanity being replaced by mechanization. Note that in the final paragraph of the story the man is referred to only as "someone" (p. 165). This leaves the reader unsure as to whether Braling has had a change of heart or his Marionette has assumed his place. Perhaps, for Braling's wife, the difference is insubstantial. This is mirrored by Smith's experience—his wife's status of a Marionette only becomes significant to him once he realizes his role in the situation; prior to this point his life had appeared stable if frustrating. The story presents the themes of isolation, selfishness, and the breakdown of communication. "No Particular Night or Morning" is a very strong piece that examines fundamental notions of memory, experience, and reality. Hitchcock goes insane while questioning his own memory and refusing to believe in the reality of anything that he is not directly and immediately experiencing. In essence, he refuses his most humanizing ability and then puts himself in an environment of near-total sensory deprivation. While one can dismiss Hitchcock as simply insane, the questions he poses are exceptionally difficult to answer.

Stories 21 - 30

Stories 21 - 30 Summary

"The City" is a mechanized city built by an alien civilization as a trap for Earth explorers. In the story a group of Earth explorers lands, begins exploring the city, and is wiped out as an automated act of revenge. The dead men's brains are replaced with mechanical objects and they are animated by a fusion of advanced robotics. The automated crew boards their rocket for the return trip, loaded down with disease bombs. In "The Fire Balloons," a group of Christian missionaries travels to Mars to bring religion to the newly-colonized planet. Upon arrival they learn that there are two races of intelligent Martians—one is apparently very much like humans but nearly extinct; the second is a type of brilliant floating light. The missionaries, led by Father Peregrine, contact the floating lights and discover them to be nearly-perfected moral intelligences. Realizing the Martians hardly need priests, Father Peregrine redirects the missionaries' efforts to the human colonizers of Mars. In "The Last Night of the World" numerous people share a common dream letting them know that the following evening the end of the world will come about. They are strangely relieved and comforted by the knowledge.

"The Veldt" is a story about the Hadley family. The family has recently fully mechanized their home and their showpiece modification is a nursery that has display walls and sensory projecting devices that allow the room to mirror the occupants' mental processes. Mrs. Hadley becomes concerned when the room consistently displays an African Veldt, complete with background menacing lions eating something that screams. George Hadley inspects the nursery and finds the imagery disturbing. He consults a child psychologist who agrees the nursery display suggests something is wrong with the Hadley children's development. George determines to turn the nursery off and de-automate the entire house. The children disagree and the story ends suggesting the Hadley children cause the Hadley parents to be eaten by lions.

In "The Long Rain" a group of astronauts survive a crash landing while transiting Venus. They then walk through perpetual rain in a fungus landscape seeking a shelter known as a Sun Dome. After days of trekking, the men find an abandoned Sun Dome that has been wrecked by Venusians. After more days one of the men becomes catatonic, another runs off into the fungus forest, and a third sits down and refuses to continue. Only one man pushes on and reaches safety. In "The Great Fire" a family hosts their niece who dates several men, angering her uncle who hopes she will quickly be married. In "The Wilderness" two women friends plan to travel to Mars and join their boyfriends in matrimony; at the time living on Mars is considered difficult and without many of the refinements of earth. In "A Sound of Thunder" three hunters and two professional guides travel back in time through millions of years to hunt a Tyrannosaurus rex. The company offering such time-traveling hunts is opposed by elements of the future government and takes numerous steps to insure that clients do not accidentally change the past, thus rendering the future different. During the hunt,

one of the clients violates the rules and upon returning to the future the men discover that it is slightly altered in numerous ways.

In "The Murderer" the protagonist, Albert Brock, is under psychiatric observation for acts of violence directed against machines and computers. Brock explains his mental process of becoming fed up with constant electronic communication and his decision to start smashing electronic devices. His activities have caused others to consider him criminally insane. In "The April Witch" the protagonist, Cecy, is presumably the same person as Ceci Elliot, appearing in previous stories in the collection. Here, she decides it would be nice to fall in love and travels the world until she locates a suitable host. She possesses the host and reverses a recent lovers' breakup.

Stories 21 - 30 Analysis

"The City" features themes of revenge and destruction. "The Fire Balloons" is deeply concerned with the nature of sin; Father Peregrine's insistence that sin on Mars may vary markedly from sin on Earth suggests that sin is situational. Given this approach it is somewhat confusing when Father Peregrine concludes the Martians are incapable of sin because they lack physicality; their own discussion of sin seems to indicate that sin without physical existence is impossible. The story thus limits sin to, essentially, physical reality. Father Peregrine also conflates the Martians with fire balloons of his youth which is interesting visual imagery and also makes the Martians symbolic of a youthful experience. "The Veldt" is one of the best-known stories in the collection and has been adapted to other media, notably a stage production by the author. The story features a theme of technology-gone-bad, patricide, and mental aberration. The room's description suggests that it only projects images and cannot directly interact with the real world. However, George's gnawed wallet suggests this is not the case and Mrs. Hadley's contention that their son is a technology wizard implies he has somehow modified the room's capabilities. In any event the story's concluding scenes suggest the Hadley parents are consumed by the lions. The story's tone and texture are remarkable and it is one of the strongest pieces in the collection. "The Long Rain" was adapted to radio and features the themes of humanity-against-nature, survival, and isolation. In the story the Venusian environment is difficult primarily for psychological reasons—only one of four men survive the voyage. "The Wilderness" is easily read as an allegory for the settling of the American West during the late 1800s—here the women fret about leaving the trappings of civilization and regret not playing a larger part in the pioneering effort. The story focuses entirely on the emotional build-up prior to beginning the journey—it is one of a relative handful of stories that focus on female characters.

"A Sound of Thunder" examines the nature of the time stream and suggests that time travel could alter the future by disrupting the past. Much of the story's dialogue is about the nature of time and the various safeguards the time-traveling company has put in place to insure time-traveling clients do not inadvertently change the past and hence disrupt the future. One client is frightened by a dinosaur and steps on a butterfly, killing it. This minor accident disrupts the past and thus the future—when the men return to their present they find it similar but different in various ways. The story suggests a result

similar to that proposed by the popular conceptualization of chaos theory known as "the butterfly effect." "A Sound of Thunder" is reportedly the most re-published science fiction story of all time; it has been adapted to film and radio. Albert Brock, "The Murderer," is considered dangerously insane because he destroys electronic communications devices. Although the story's world of electronic connectedness, originally published in 1953, was probably intended to be an absurd rendition of a science-fiction type future it is by today's standards prescient. The story features themes of alienation and isolation and has been adapted to other media. "The April Witch" features presumably the same character appearing in other stories in the collection as Ceci Elliot; the story, with others, was included in an altered form in the author's fix-up novel From the Dust Returned.

Stories 31 - 40

Stories 31 - 40 Summary

In "Invisible Boy" a reclusive woman hosts a local boy named Charlie for several days. She grows very fond of him and wants him to stay with her forever so she uses her putative magic to put a spell on him but the spell does not work. She then convinces him to stay by making him invisible; he drinks a worthless potion and she pretends not to see him. Over the next few days the boy is mischievous and the old woman realizes he must return to his parents so she claims the invisibility has worn off. "The Golden Kite, the Silver Wind" is about two competing towns that continually rebuild their town walls to symbolically defeat the other town—for example, when one town is shaped like an orange the other town re-shapes its walls like unto a pig to devour the orange. After much pointless work the towns agree to rebuild in complementary shapes—a kite and the wind—and work toward the common weal. In "The Fog Horn" an older and more experienced lighthouse keeper named McDunn instructs Johnny, the narrator, on the operation of the lighthouse and fog horn. Eventually McDunn reveals that the fog horn sometimes summons a vast sea monster. As the narrator watches in horror, the sea monster comes out of the deeps and eventually attacks the lighthouse, destroying it. The narrator abandons his planned career as a lighthouse tenant.

"The Big Black and White Game" recounts the story of a baseball game which is part of an annual event in a small town. The game is played between the town's African American and white citizens. The narrator is a younger boy who does not share his parents' prejudices. He realizes the black players are excellent athletes in prime shape while the white players are aging and obese businessmen. The black team easily dominates the game. During one inning late in the game an obnoxious white player slides cleats first into first base injuring the black player's ankle. The umpire attempts to eject the white player and relieve the black player but both object. The game continues and a few pitches later the white player attempts to steal first base—the pitcher throws to first and the injured first baseman throws a beeline ball directly into the back of the running white player's head, knocking him down and stunning him. The white portion of the town is angry. In "Embroidery" several women embroider on a porch and wait for an unspecified event at five o'clock: some feel that the event might be the end of the world, others feel it is nothing significant. In "The Golden Apples of the Sun" a spaceship descends to near the solar surface and uses a mechanical hand to scoop up a glob of solar material. The ship is prevented from melting by an internal refrigeration unit that makes the inside into a frozen wasteland.

"Powerhouse" is about a married couple. The woman's husband has long been religious but she has forsaken religion. Then she learned that her mother had died and she felt at a loss to explain the world. Traveling to her mother's funeral the couple spend the night in the extemporized shelter of a functional powerhouse. During the night the woman has a sort of religious experience which she conflates with the experience of spending the sleepless night in the powerhouse's humming field. "Hail and Farewell" tells the story of

William, a twelve-year-old boy who does not age. In fact, William is forty-three years old and has spent thirty-one years moving from family to family and posing as an adopted child with the families' consent. William has learned to give up growing up and live eternally in a child's world. He finds childless couples and convinces them to "raise" him for three or four years. When the locals start wondering about his small stature and apparent immortality, he moves on to another town and another family.

In "The Great Wide World over There" the protagonist's nephew, Benjy, comes to stay for a summer. Benjy is supposed to teach his aunt Cora how to write and read. Cora, egged on by her neighbor Mrs. Brabbam, wants to receive mail. Throughout the summer Benjy writes numerous letters for Cora, all of them inquiring about products or services, and Cora begins to receive catalogs, business offers, and other types of commercial mail. She also discovers that Brabbam is not really receiving mail but is only pretending to get letters in order to feel superior. When Benjy departs, Cora still cannot write or read but she asks him to write a few letters in secret so that Brabbam can receive at least some mail. In "The Playground" the widower Charles Underhill lives with his unmarried sister Carol who raises Charles' three-year-old son Jim. Carol wants to start taking Jim to a playground; Charles objects. His own upbringing apparently very unhappy, Charles determines to shield Jim from other children. Throughout the story Charles repeatedly visits a playground and is recognized by a child. The child turns out to be Tom Marshall, one of Charles' business associates. Tom tells Charles that he has switched places with his own son Tommy—to spare Tommy from having to grow up. Charles decides to make the same "deal" with the mystical playground even though he recalls his own childhood with dread. At the end of the story Charles switches places with Jim—Jim and Carol go off together as two adults and Charles remains on the playground as a child. He finds the playground a living hell, but his son has been spared.

Stories 31 - 40 Analysis

"The Invisible Boy" is told as traditional narrative—the old woman's dabbling in magic is ineffectual and Charlie's invisibility is not real, though Charlie thinks it is. The story features themes of isolation and loss. "The Golden Kite, the Silver Wind" is an unusually optimistic story for the collection—after senseless battling, two towns agree to cooperate to their mutual benefit. The idea is presented by a woman but championed by a man. The story, published in 1953, is widely viewed as an allegory for the Cold War. "The Fog Horn" has been widely republished and is the basis of a film adaptation. The symbols of the lighthouse and foghorn combined convince the sea monster that it has found another of its kind. The story is atypical of the collection it is related in the first-person point of view. The story features themes of isolation and natural destruction.

"The Big Black and White Game" is an obvious commentary on race relations; here the black athletes are competent and professional while the white athletes are bungling and vindictive. The two players who injure each other—Jimmy Cosner and Big Poe—are discussed in considerable detail. After Cosner deliberately injures Big Poe the black baseball team retaliates. The tit-for-tat arrangement, familiar in any professional sport,

angers the white citizens who reply by leaving the game early. The story is atypical of the collection as it is related in the first-person point of view. The story features themes of racial tension and is written as traditional fiction. In "Embroidery" the setting is somewhere in rural America. Though quite short, the story has an obvious focus on time. The story features themes of apocalyptic vision and helplessness. "Golden Apples of the Sun" has many elements of traditional mythology—the adventurers are stealing the essence of the sun. The captain's vague directions are obviously allegorical as magnetic direction has no meaning in space. The story has themes of adventure, success, and man's conquest of nature.

"Powerhouse" is one of the better stories in the collection and features unusually deep characterization. The story is related as traditional fiction and features themes of religious awakening, marital relationships, and personal loss and grief. In the story religion is made synonymous with electrical power. "Hail and Farewell" features a similar theme of personal loss and grief. Here, the protagonist is a non-aging young boy who drifts from family to family to engage in transient relationships. The story is a nearly traditional narrative. In "The Great Wide World over There" the protagonist, Cora, feels limited by illiteracy. It is rather amusing that Cora feels so fulfilled by a constant flow of junk mail. Being a considerate person, Cora arranges for Brabbam to receive some junk mail of her own. The story features themes of isolation and friendship. "The Playground" is a brooding and introspective story focused on one man's unhappy childhood and his desire to spare his son from a similar experience. Although the story features a central fantasy element it is related with a traditional narrative.

Stories 41 - 50

Stories 41 - 50 Summary

In "Skeleton" the protagonist, Mr. Harris, is a hypochondriac who so irritates his doctor that future visits are refused. Harris turns to an alternative medicine practitioner, Munigant, who convinces Harris that his internal skeleton is to blame for all his health problems. Harris commits to Munigant's treatment whereupon the monstrous Munigant uses his specially modified tongue to suck Harris' skeleton from his body. Harris survives the procedure though he looks somewhat like a jellyfish. In "The Man Upstairs" the protagonist, Douglas, is an eleven-year-old boy who lives at his grandmother's boardinghouse. The house accepts a new resident, Koberman, who keeps odd hours and has strange behaviors. Douglas discovers Koberman is a vampire and murders the man in his sleep. "Touched With Fire" is the story of two sociologists who develop a theory on the causes of murder. They attempt to interview a potential murder victim they have identified with disastrous results. "The Emissary" tells the story of young Martin, kept indoors through a prolonged illness, and his dog named Dog. Dog brings back various things to keep Martin entertained and Dog's actions finally capture the attention of the beautiful local school teacher Miss Haight who begins to visit Martin. Sadly, Haight then dies. Dog locates Haight's grave and exhumes her corpse which animates and shambles back to once again call upon Martin.

In "The Jar" the protagonist, Charlie, has a difficult marriage to a selfish woman and lacks any kind of social graces with which he may make friends. One night he purchases a jar of preservative with a strange thing in it—the object is never fully described but is apparently like a tiny humanoid—from a traveling carnival. Thereafter Charlie's neighbors gather at his house to contemplate the jar. Meanwhile Charlie's wife grows increasingly estranged and her adulterous lover, Tom Carmody, grows increasingly hostile to Charlie. Finally Carmody becomes openly vituperative and Charlie's wife threatens to expose the thing in the jar as fake. Charlie then probably kills his wife and puts pieces of her body into the jar. In "The Small Assassin" Alice and David Leiber have a baby. Alice is convinced the baby is malicious and says so, but everyone considers her unstable. Later the baby kills Alice and then David. Now convinced that the baby is malicious, the family physician, Dr. Jeffers, approaches the baby with a scalpel.

"The Next In Line" begins when the American protagonist, Marie, and her husband, Joseph, visit a graveyard and underground chamber full of mummies in a Mexican town. The graveyard rents burial plots and when the rent becomes delinquent the corpses are exhumed and stored upright in an underground chamber. Joseph finds the tour compelling but Marie is frightened and repulsed. Marie immediately wants to leave the town but Joseph wants to remain. They have automobile difficulties and Marie becomes increasingly frightened and agitated. One night she remains awake in a panic while Joseph sleeps. The story closes with Joseph driving home alone. In "Jack-in-the-Box" a child grows up in a large sealed castle with only his mother and a school teacher—they

are probably the same person—as his companions. He finally escapes into a more normal world. "The Leave-Taking" is about an old woman dying. "Exorcism" is about two women who compete for an elected office in a local women's organization. One woman is popular and the other is a recluse. An accident brings them together.

Stories 41 - 50 Analysis

"Skeleton" could be viewed as a descent into insanity except for the presence of the skeleton-sucking monster. The nature of Koberman in "The Man Upstairs" is unspecified—he is said to be a vampire and a monster. Note that Koberman's vampire status is heavily foreshadowed. The theory of murder developed by Foxe and Shaw in "Touched With Fire" essentially blames the victim for the crime. It is ironic that Foxe himself attempts to murder the woman they have putatively warned about being a future murder victim. Note the contents of the jar in "The Jar" are never fully described, though some town residents consider the thing's likeness to be similar to their own. Later in the story Charlie probably adds his dead wife's hair and eyes to the thing in the jar and this excites no particular comment from the town residents, further suggesting the thing appears at least something like a human fetus. There is no direct narrative evidence that Charlie has murdered his wife—she could, in fact, be on an extended vacation as he suggests. These stories all feature themes of isolation, death, and loneliness.

"The Next In Line" is the third-longest story in the collection. Note Marie's early appearances are in the nude and she is strongly sexually charged in her presentation. The town also features sexual overtones—for example, the orchids "looking horridly sexual" (p. 390). During this early presentation Marie is also compared to clay "impregnated" (p. 388) with water; this image is later contrasted to the mummies which are desiccated—"the watery humors had evaporated from them" (p. 392). Throughout, Joseph is nonplussed by Marie's sexuality and nudity and she slowly transforms, at least in his opinion, into the mummy next-in-line for interment. While her descent into panic is psychological, Joseph's non-involvement indicates a deteriorated relationship. As Marie grasps for the familiarity of culture presented in American magazines, Joseph embraces the local culture. As the couple becomes fully alienated Marie desires to escape being the next in line. Joseph's empty car during his drive home suggests that Marie is dead, her sexuality and vitality evaporated, and her corpse entombed in the frightening crypt. An alternative interpretation is that Marie made good on her threat to flee home alone. It features themes of alienation, fear of death, and isolation. Marie is afraid of death, afraid of premature burial, aware of the many symbols of death presented in the narrative, and saddened by the disintegration—death—of her marriage. She does not fear the skeletons of the deceased—they are not changing—but she fears death and the desiccation of the mummies because they symbolize the changes of age and death. Marie is vulnerable, isolated, and lonely. She is often nude and exposed.

"Jack-in-the-Box" compares Edwin, the protagonist, to a broken jack-in-the-box that will not emerge from the box. The story features themes of isolation and family dysfunction. "The Leave-Taking" features themes of death and family ties. "Exorcism" is a light-

hearted narrative and the characters are often presented in a comic method. The story features themes of isolation, friendship, and community.

Stories 51 - 60

Stories 51 - 60 Summary

In "The Happiness Machine" Leo Auffmann invents a happiness machine. The machine is large and bright orange. It displays images of distant places such as Paris and emits pleasant smells and vibrations. Auffmann's wife thinks the machine is horrible even though many people use it. Eventually Auffmann's wife tells him that the machine yields only false happiness; true happiness lies in reality. Auffmann vacillates but when the machine catches fire and burns up he finally realizes that his wife and family offer him the only true happiness. In "Calling Mexico" the aged and ill Colonel Freeleigh is bedridden somewhere in the United States. He reconnects with his joyful past by calling old friends in Mexico and having them put their telephone receivers outside their window—Freeleigh relives his past through the sounds of the distant town. The nurses object that Freeleigh's habit is not only prohibitively expensive but also deleterious to his health. He continues, eventually dying while listening to distant Mexico City via the telephone. In "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" six poor Mexican friends of the same build pool their resources to purchase a single glorious suit. They take turns wearing the suit and through their various experiences realize that their shared youthful identity is a temporary but happy state. "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed" tells the story of an earth family named Bittering who emigrates to Mars. There they grow homesick until Earth is destroyed by cataclysmic atomic warfare. The human outpost gradually adapts Martian ways and evolves in a vague pattern. Years later earthlings return and believe the Bitterings and other settlers to be native Martians. In "The Strawberry Window" Carrie, the wife, grows homesick and yearns to return to earth. To placate Carrie's homesickness Bob imports major portions of their old earth house. In "A Scent of Sarsaparilla" William Finch explores his home's attic and finds it a sort of time-machine of memories. He attempts to engage his wife Cora in the exploration of their long past together but she refuses. William eventually abandons Cora by entering the attic and using a ladder to exit the house. In "The Picasso Summer" George Smith vacations through France and attempts to absorb the countryside of his favorite artist, Pablo Picasso. George eventually runs into a man—perhaps Picasso—who doodles with a stick in the sand on a beach. George realizes the sand-drawings are ephemeral and attempts to commit them to memory.

In "The Day It Rained Forever" a rundown hotel owned by Terle is inhabited only by two long-time freeloaders. The three men are friends and spend their time complaining about the severe heat. They await January 29th, a day on which it always rains. On January 29th the hotel receives a visitor—the first in ages—Miss Hillgood, an aged harpist. Hillgood exchanges personal information with the hotel's residents and then plays a song for them on the harp; while she plays it rains and she considers staying at the hotel. In "A Medicine for Melancholy (The Sovereign Remedy Revealed!)" the Wilkes family is increasingly concerned about the faltering health of their young daughter Camillia. Having spent most of their funds on various doctors and patent cures the family devises a rather novel plan—they put sick Camillia on display on the street

and charge passers-by to render their personal diagnosis. The reversal proves successful—Wilkes recoups a substantial amount of money and Camillia falls in love with a young man and the couple elopes. In "The Shoreline at Sunset" two ne'er-do-wells sift beach sand looking for lost coins after season's end. They discover a beautiful mermaid washed up on the shore, apparently dead. The more ruthless man runs off to bring ice to preserve the body, sure that it will bring him fame. The more introspective of the two men instead allows the incoming tide to reclaim the body.

Stories 51 - 60 Analysis

"The Happiness Machine" contrasts artificial happiness with real happiness—the machine is much like a virtual reality environment but it proves transient and artificial. The story's theme of family ties varies markedly from many other stories in the collection which present dysfunctional families and isolated individuals. In "Calling Mexico" the telephone is the height of technology and international calls are prohibitively expensive. The story features a traditional narrative construction; Freeleigh is sympathetic and his motivation is easily understood. The story features themes of dying, senescence, and isolation. "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" features six friends who share a suit—symbolic of their friendship and common bonds. The story ends as they realize their future lives will draw them apart; they will be richer and independent, but impoverished by their separation. The story features strong comic elements and a particularly large cast of characters for its length. The story features traditional narrative development and focuses on themes of friendship and youthful exuberance.

"Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed" is essentially a story of immigration—the earth families travel to Mars and adapt so completely that they eventually become Martians. Bittering's early objection and attempts to return to earth become irrelevant over time. The story symbolically parallels early American history. "The Strawberry Window" is another story set on Mars. Here the family has emigrated but is unable to adapt because of the extreme foreignness of the Martian world. The father reacts by surrounding his family with familiar objects. "A Scent of Sarsaparilla" focuses on similar themes of isolation and loneliness. Finch finds happiness by mining his own past experiences. It is unclear within the narrative whether he somehow actually travels through time or simply imagines he does—either interpretation can be supported by the deliberately ambiguous narrative.

"The Picasso Summer" is essentially a comment upon art and conservation—Smith is unable to collect or even preserve a masterpiece and instead simply enjoys it for a few minutes; instead of paying thousands of dollars for it he receives it for free. Note that the artist is unnamed—presumably Pablo Picasso, though the narrative is intentionally ambiguous. "The Day It Rained Forever" features three men who are basically prisoners in a place like a Christian Hell—hot, desiccated, and monotonous. The men argue about leaving for greener pastures but it is obvious none of them ever will. Their routine is disrupted by the advent of Hillgood who visits the town only by accident. Hillgood transforms the place into something acceptable and good because of her art. Hillgood's music is ephemeral, but it promises to repeat every evening; her name is risible.

In "A Medicine for Melancholy (The Sovereign Remedy Revealed!)" the sovereign remedy is obviously young love. Camillia's situation appears hopeless but in fact she is suffering only from melancholy. The family's solution is to seek hundreds or thousands of street remedies and average them out into a new cure; instead Camillia runs away with a dustman who correctly diagnoses her ailment. "The Shoreline at Sunset" is essentially about Tom's decision to leave Chico behind. Within the narrative, the beautiful mermaid could just as easily be replaced by any object with intrinsic beauty and value.

Stories 61 - 70

Stories 61 - 70 Summary

In "Fever Dream" a boy contracts a debilitating fever and becomes convinced the infection is an alien life form that is slowly replacing the cells in his body with its own. The boy makes a recovery and his touch thereafter appears to infect living organisms with a virulent disease. In "The Town Where No One Got Off" the protagonist acts as narrator. The narrator apparently randomly detrains in a tiny town. There he is followed by an aged man. The two men finally confront each other and the aged man informs the narrator that he intends to murder him. The narrator responds by clarifying he has come to the town in search of a random murder victim. The two men have a tense standoff. "All Summer in a Day" tells the story of a group of schoolchildren living in an earth colony on Venus. Only one of the schoolchildren, Margot, can remember seeing the sun—the Venusian weather is constant rain and thick perpetual cloud cover. Scientists have predicted a rare break in the cloud cover. The schoolchildren prepare to see the sun. Jealous of Margot's memories, they lock her in a closet during the sunlight.

"Frost and Fire" tells the story of Sim, the protagonist, and his mate Lyte. They live on a planet near the sun where intense solar radiation has caused their metabolism to speed up an amazing rate—they are born, mature, reproduce, and die within an eight-day period. They also all share a sort of shared racial memory. Sim grows up in a few days as his parents age and die. He meets Lyte and their brief courtship bonds them together. Sim knows that his people crash-landed on the planet and used to live much longer; a distant spaceship is all that remains. Some people believe that anyone reaching the spaceship would revert to a longer span of life. However, the planet's exceptionally harsh environment allows onto two brief periods of existence on the surface and the spaceship is deemed unreachable. Sim engages in a fight with an enemy, then engages in an inter-tribal combat, and then finally takes Lyte on a desperate run to the spaceship. They arrive just as the sun rises. Inside the ship their metabolism slows down and they rest for days while everyone they know ages and dies. Sim then returns and recruits others. As a group they again reach the spaceship and launch into space seeking a better world.

In "The Anthem Sprinters" an American newspaperman learns of the Irish competitive pastime of "Anthem Sprinting," or the attempt to quickly leave a theater after the movie ends but before the orchestra strikes up the national anthem. "And So Died Riabouchinska" tells the story of the murder of one Mr. Ockham, found dead in a theater. The theater's star performer, Mr. Fabian, is a ventriloquist with a severe personality disorder that forces him to present himself as a dual personality—the man, and then the marionette named Riabouchinska. It develops that Fabian has been estranged from his adulterous wife for quite some time; that the marionette was based on an earlier love whom Fabian had probably killed; and that Ockham had threatened to expose Fabian's involvement in an earlier putative murder. Fabian therefore killed Ockham and his marionette "confesses" to the crime. In "Boys! Raise Giant Mushrooms

in Your Cellar!" the teenage boys of a town start receiving mail-order packages of mushroom fungus starts and begin growing mushrooms. Some of the boys' fathers become convinced that the mushrooms are a malevolent alien life form that is taking over humans one body at a time. "The Vacation" tells the story of a family who wish that every other human on the planet would simply disappear. The next morning, the family members are the sole humans on the planet. They travel far and wide on a prolonged vacation and come to realize they are very lonely. "The Illustrated Woman" presents an initial interview between a psychiatrist and Emma Fleet. Emma is enormously fat and is employed as a carnival fat woman; her husband is a midget who works for the carnival guessing people's weight. Emma and her husband believe her husband to be a gifted tattoo artist who has covered her entire body with tattoos. Having no space remaining to continue his seven-years' work, her husband loses interest in her and casts a wandering eye at other fat women. In actual fact, Emma is not tattooed and the psychiatrist comments on this, whereupon the unlikely couple's problems are solved. In "Some Live Like Lazarus", the narrator, Anna Marie, has known Roger Harrison since they were five years old. Anna Marie apparently works at a resort and Roger, with his mother, usually visits each year. During their teenage years Roger falls in love with Anna Marie but Roger's domineering mother refuses to acknowledge her because she is a serving girl. Over the next sixty-five years Anna Marie pursues a normal life while observing Roger's annual return with his horrible mother. Finally Mrs. Harrison dies—possibly murdered by the obsequious Roger, now seventy-years old—and Roger plans to travel the world on vacation.

Stories 61 - 70 Analysis

"Fever Dream" is a familiar trope in science fiction—the "other" taking over, one person at a time. The story features themes of conquest and isolation. "The Town Where No One Got Off" is a chilling murder attempt; each man decides to commit an anonymous murder—one plans it and waits for it, the other spontaneously decides to do it. Both men have strong elements of psychosis in their personalities and appear to base their morality on whether or not they will be caught. The story is traditional narrative and features themes of isolation, hatred, and criminality. "All Summer in a Day" has been adapted as a television story. The story features a protagonist who is isolated, vulnerable, and emotionally fragile. "Frost and Fire" is the longest story in the collection and it is sometimes referred to as a novella. It has been adapted to other media and was the basis for a short film. In most respects the characters' short lives are significant only inasmuch as they highlight the ephemeral nature of life. If Sim lived eight decades instead of eight days, his life's proportions would be nearly identical. The story can thus be interpreted as an extended allegory and Sim's race to the spaceship becomes equivalent to humanity's quest for immortality. Ironically, Sim's vastly extended life at the end of the story comes with a correspondingly immense slowdown in metabolism such that instead of healing from grievous wounds in moments he takes days to recover from exhaustion. In this correlated way, Sim's life has not been meaningfully extended. The story features themes of death and desire.

"The Anthem Sprinters" is a farcical tale that comments on the interplay of art and sport. "And So Died Riabouchinska" is a typical "detective" story except the perpetrator and the witness are the same person. The narrative never establishes absolute facts about the disappearance of Riamonova but the inference is that Fabian murdered her. The story's themes are isolation, insanity, hatred, and criminality. Like "Fever Dream", "Boys! Raise Giant Mushrooms in Your Cellar!" features an alien life form taking over. In this story there is narrative ambiguity and the story can be interpreted as the mental derangement of the protagonist. The title mimics the advertising copy familiar to any reader of boys' magazines and the story features themes of alienation, terror, and isolation. "The Vacation" can be interpreted as an allegory for an actual vacation—the psychological isolation that comes with travel away from familiar places. The story features themes of isolation and misanthropy. "The Illustrated Woman" page 611 reference to "Edward Hillary, he of Everest" is a mis-attribution to Edmund Hillary; the story symbolizes Emma's size by comparing her to a mountain. Note also the interesting narrative technique of telling part of the story from the first-person point of view as Emma relates some of her life story to the psychologist in an extended monologue. The story has tragic-comic overtones but clearly the woman and her husband are mentally deranged. The story features themes of isolation and comments upon social mores. In contrast to this brief narrative chronology, the narrative of "Some Live Like Lazarus" spans sixty-five years. In the story Roger is mentally and socially dominated by his tyrant mother and does not escape her while she lives. There is substantial narrative ambiguity surrounding her death. The title is a reference to the Biblical Lazarus. The narrative is atypical inasmuch as it features a narrator who is female and is rendered from the first-person point of view.

Stories 71 - 80

Stories 71 - 80 Summary

In "The Best of All Possible Worlds" two men converse on a commuter train and their discussion focuses on the sexual pleasures of men. They each tell a story about a putative friend who enjoys complete sexual satisfaction while remaining married. In "The One Who Waits" space travelers discover an ancient Martian well wherein a malevolent and incorporeal intelligence lives. The alien life form possesses the men and murders them. In "Tyrannosaurus Rex" a movie producer hires a modeler to fabricate a stop-motion dinosaur. The producer insists on numerous changes and eventually the constructed dinosaur's face inadvertently comes to resemble the grating producer. An insightful lawyer convinces the producer the likeness is a purposeful homage. "The Screaming Woman" tells the story of a young girl who hears the screaming of a woman buried alive. The girl attempts to summon help but is dismissed as a daydreamer. She finally convinces her father that she is telling the truth, and he helps her dig up the woman.

"The Terrible Conflagration up at the Place" is set in Ireland during a time of political upheaval. The men at the local pub determine to extend the general revolution to their own town and plan to burn the local lord's home. They arrive in the dead of night only to be greeted by the polite lord resident who invites them in for drinks, schedules the burning for a more convenient time, and then discusses the tragic loss of national art treasures that will accompany the burning. He arranges for the members of the mob to transport various paintings home prior to burning. The men are frustrated by various things—the paintings are too heavy, too big to fit into houses or hang on walls, or too full of nude subjects to be accepted by the local wives. The men finally return the paintings and beg the local lord to cancel the burning. "Night Call, Collect" is set on Mars where Barton is the sole inhabitant of the entire planet. He has been the sole inhabitant for sixty years, being left behind when the other inhabitants rushed back to earth to participate in a global atomic war of destruction. For many years the young Barton created robotic mechanisms to interface with the telephone system. During the story the aged Barton constantly receives irritating and persecuting telephone calls from his younger, now dead, self. In "The Tombling Day" a town agrees to move an old cemetery for a new road project. The exhumations are performed by the town residents, and one resident insists that a particular coffin be transported to her home and opened. The deceased was the woman's youthful love. She contemplates his body—initially preserved to a remarkable degree—during the night while the exposure causes the corpse to disintegrate.

In "The Haunting of the New" the wealthy Dora Gryndon holds lavish parties of sexual debauchery at her vast and ancient Irish estate Grynwood until it burns down. She rebuilds the house and then hosts another party which falters and dissipates within hours. Nora contacts an old associate who visits; together they decide the new house is haunted with resentment of the various wickedness and evils perpetrated in the old

house. "Tomorrow's Child" is set in late 1988. The Horn family has a baby. During the delivery advanced medical devices short circuit and the child partially is propelled into another dimension, thus appearing as a blue pyramid. Scientists attempt to design a way to recover the baby but cannot—instead the Horns choose to go through the same accident and be themselves projected into the other dimension.

Stories 71 - 80 Analysis

"The Best of All Possible Worlds" is essentially a compare-and-contrast between two methodologies for men to sustain sexual excitement through prolonged marriage. The sexist bias of the story is overt and obvious. At the end of the story both men conclude each other's tale has been auto-biographical. "The One Who Waits" is a traditional monster tale of horror—men are slaughtered by an evil thing. The story features themes of danger, murder, and exploration. The primary theme of "Tyrannosaurus Rex" is vanity; the producer is offended but his ego is stroked by his attorney. The story is ironic and funny. "The Screaming Woman" features a very strong voice crafted to support the narrator, a young girl. The story's first-person point of view and female narrator are atypical of the collection. In construction the story is a type of reverse play on Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf", a familiar trope in Western literature. The story features themes of family dysfunction, murder, and rescue.

"The Terrible Conflagration up at the Place" is a comedy wherein the presumed victim averts the crime by tricking the perpetrators into believing the crime is a mistake. Lord Kilgotten is presented as a typical Irish lord, appears to be benevolent, and is certainly insightful into the local psyche. The story is a broad commentary on social classes, political upheaval, and the established order. Like the earlier "The Anthem Sprinters," the Irish locals are presented as country bumpkins fond of drink. Both "Night Call, Collect" and "The Tombling" day focus on the protagonists' relationship with their earlier life. In "Night Call, Collect" the character is persecuted by his earlier life's work. Although the story is set on Mars, this is merely a plot device to explain why he is alone. In "The Tombling Day" the protagonist is distraught by the appearance of her youthful lover's corpse which has been preserved to a remarkable degree. Her fear is that he will reject her because she is old, as if in some metaphysical way the corpse is courting her. When the exposure causes the corpse to crumble, the protagonist's dilemma is solved. Both stories are introspective and provide material to spark numerous discussions about youth, age, aging, and senescence.

While not explicit, most of the imagery in "The Haunting of the New" is sexual in nature and many sexual deviancies are hinted at while various sexual situations are presented. The story features themes of alienation, sin, and isolation. "Tomorrow's Child" presents the world in 1988 and today contains numerous humorous anachronisms, particularly surrounding childbirth. The story can be viewed as an allegory for any couple raising a peculiar child. The story's themes are alienation and isolation.

Stories 81 - 90

Stories 81 - 90 Summary

In "The Women" a couple spends a last afternoon at a beach; the vacation season has ended. In the water a malevolent being decides to take the man. Somehow the woman knows and uses various ploys to keep the man out of the water but he eventually succumbs to an undeniable urge whereupon he is seized, pulled under, and drowns. In "The Inspired Chicken Motel" a destitute family stops at a rundown motel near a huge chicken farm. The proprietor shows them a few eggs that have bizarre writing on them—one egg has an inscription: "REST IN PEACE. PROSPERITY IS NEAR" (p. 748). The message reassures the father that the family's troubles will soon end. "Yes, We'll Gather at the River" is a story about a small town whose primarily livelihood is servicing travelers on the busy road through town. The government develops a new freeway system, placing the road several hundred yards from the town and the locals worry that their economy will collapse and the town will fail. In "Have I Got a Chocolate Bar for You!" a young Jewish boy is heavily addicted to chocolate and freely admits his eating habits have led to being fat and socially awkward. Finally he seeks solace in a Catholic confessional and over the course of several weeks he visits with the bewildered father—not about sin, per se, but about over indulgence. "A Story of Love," set in a small town, tells the tale of Bob Spaulding and Ann Taylor. Bob, a boy of thirteen, develops a serious crush on his new school teacher Ann, who is twenty-four. He spends much time helping her with various chores. His devoted feelings continue for many months and eventually Ann reciprocates, though their relationship remains platonic and appropriate. Ann finally calls off the relationship and a few weeks later the Spaulding family relocates.

"The Parrot Who Met Papa" is about a nondescript parrot named El Córdoba. The parrot lived in a bar frequented by Ernest Hemingway. The parrot is kidnapped and then stolen from the kidnappers. "The October Game" is about the Wilder family—Mich and Louise are unhappily married; Louise's only happiness in life comes from their eight-year-old daughter, Marion, whom Mich suspects not even to be his child. Mich develops a great and repulsive hatred for Louise and decides to ruin her life. To this end he participates in Marion's birthday party and causes Louise to believe he has murdered Marion. In "Punishment Without Crime" George Hill is an older man married to a younger woman, Katherine, who is pursuing a torrid extramarital affair. George decides the best way to deal with his emotions is to murder a surrogate Katherine and he contracts with a company that builds marionettes—android doubles—to fashion a marionette of Katherine. He then murders the marionette; however, the government takes a dim view of the proceedings and arrests George, convicts him of murder, and sentences him to death. George, feeling guilty about the murder, agrees that his sentence is just. The day before his execution, George refuses to receive Katherine as a visitor and instead sees her walking away from the prison with her new husband, whereupon George cries out that he has been unjustly condemned. In "A Piece of Wood" the world is at constant war. A young man talks to a superior officer and confides

in him that he has invented a tiny machine that will rust and ruin all steel objects in a vast area—the young man plans to use the invention to end war. "The Blue Bottle" is set on Mars after it has been exploited and abandoned by humans. Various adventurers search the planet's surface for a mysterious artifact known as the blue bottle. Beck, the protagonist, finally locates the blue bottle and realizes that it contains a man's deepest desire—for nearly all men, that desire is death. Beck opens the bottle and feels his body dissolving into ashes.

Stories 81 - 90 Analysis

"The Women" is a fusion of a traditional monster tale and an allegory of an extramarital affair. The story features themes of death, desire, and isolation. "The Inspired Chicken Motel" presents a tongue-in-cheek texture and the chicken eggs with writing are like a type of fortune cookie. The phrase "rest in peace" is loaded with connotation. The story erroneously refers to the Biblical book Revelations; it should be Revelation. The story features themes of poverty, despair, and alienation. "Yes, We'll Gather at the River" is about a small town that loses hope when a major cross-country thoroughfare is built a few hundred yards away. The story features themes of despair and alienation. The confessional scenes in "Have I Got a Chocolate Bar for You!" are humorous but border on the pathetic—the chocolate addiction can be seen as a metaphor for any sin, such as fornication or masturbation. The fact that the young Jewish boy successfully seeks solace in Catholic confession is of course humorous. The story is remarkably upbeat in tone.

"A Story of Love" focuses on the question of age disparity in relationships. Bob and Ann fall in love, but he is thirteen and she is twenty-four. She is also in a position of power over him. Ann calls off the relationship long after she should have and Bob thereafter departs. Although Bob is clearly mature for his age, the relationship is undeniably abusive. The story features themes of control and isolation. "The Parrot Who Met Papa" is a curious tale with many oblique references to literature. Shelley Capon is generally understood to be Truman Capote. "The October Game" is about a birthday party where the angry father arranges to punish the mother. The narrative is ambiguous though and there is little credible evidence to support the mother's frightful conclusion.

The unattributed italicized quotes in "Punishment Without Crime" are taken from the Bible's Song of Solomon. The story focuses on the nature of criminality—George is punished for committing a crime even though the crime had no victim. The central psychological theme in the story concerns George's admission of guilt and feelings of guilt, until he sees his wife alive and well. The story poses interesting questions about social concepts of crime and appropriate punishment. The story features themes of isolation, alienation, hatred, and murderous intent. "A Piece of Wood" is a brief story with unnamed characters holding differing views on the value of global warfare. "The Blue Bottle" features themes of death, alienation, and isolation.

Stories 91 - 100

Stories 91 - 100 Summary

In "Long After Midnight" three ambulance drivers pick up a suicide during the night. Two of the drivers are jaded but the third is impressed by the suicide. On the drive back to the city the three men discuss love, life, and death, and conclude the suicide to be a young woman forlorn over a callous lover. Then the new employee discovers the corpse is that of a young man dressed in drag. In "The Utterly Perfect Murder" the protagonist, Doug, is a middle-aged man who suddenly decides he must avenge wrongs done him as a twelve-year-old boy. He leaves his family and travels cross-country to his childhood home. During the trip he reflects on Ralph Underhill, a one-time boyhood friend, and thinks of several minor wrongs Underhill committed. For this, Doug plans to murder Underhill. Arriving in town Doug calls on Underhill and finds him short, thin, prematurely aged, and apparently sick. In a flash Doug realizes he need not kill Underhill—time has done it for him. In "The Better Part of Wisdom" an Irish grandfather learns he will shortly die and decides to tour the British Isles, calling on his relatives to say goodbye. He calls upon his grandson only to discover he is living a homosexual lifestyle.

"Interval in Sunlight" is set in Mexico and concerns the relationship between the protagonist, Marie Elliott, and her husband, Joseph. They have been married for five years; after an initial year of joy their relationship has decayed into a bitter rivalry and each partner takes steps to insure the other is miserable. Each partner keeps their own money and they keep a running tab of who-owes-who-what. Joseph is controlling to an exceptional degree and has managed to reduce their entire relationship to a series of petty charges for various infractions. Marie is a writer verging on success and Joseph finds her career intimidating.

"The Black Ferris" features a magical Ferris wheel that can alter the age of a rider one year per rotation, making them either younger or older. The protagonist is a teenage boy who discovers the carnival proprietor is posing as a young orphan to win the heart of a wealthy local widow. In "Farewell Summer" a young boy has a dream of what it might mean to die. In "McGillahee's Brat" the narrator discovers an Irish beggar child who has not physically aged for forty years. The narrator and the middle-aged "child" have a lengthy metaphysical discourse. "The Aqueduct" briefly tells the story of an aqueduct that carries blood from two warring nations to a distant uninvolved nation that greatly prospers from the bloodshed. In "Gotcha!" a young couple in the first blush of love plays a game of hide-and-seek that causes one partner to fall out of love with the other partner. In "The End of the Beginning" a couple goes about their normal daily routine while thinking and talking about their son.

Stories 91 - 100 Analysis

"Long After Midnight" plays on gender stereotypes. An interesting subtext in the narrative deals with the various reactions of the men who have spent between decades and weeks on the job. The story investigates the ideas of assumption, gender, and motivation. "The Utterly Perfect Murder" has thematic elements similar to the earlier "Punishment Without Crime"; except here the crime is perpetrated without punishment. Doug's sudden desire to avenge childhood wrongs is bizarre. Doug's perception of Underhill's crimes initially is limited to that of a child's understanding. The story features themes of alienation, isolation, and criminality. "The Better Part of Wisdom" is, according to the protagonist, that which is left unsaid. In this case what is left unsaid concerns Tom's overt homosexual lifestyle. The story is atypical of the collection in its forthright portrayal of a homosexual character.

"Interval in Sunlight" is one of the most complex characterizations in the collection. Both primary characters, Marie and Joseph Elliott, are presented in substantive detail and Marie's interior monologue is presented extensively. The early portion of the story focuses on establishing a hurtful relationship. While the husband is less sympathetic than the wife, he is also simpler in motivation. Joseph has reduced their relationship to terms of money. He never misses a chance to criticize Marie. Marie is obviously a competent writer but fails to communicate with Joseph in any meaningful way. She is withdrawn and insulates herself with a wrapper of money. Late in the story Marie abandons Joseph but is unable to complete the separation—she becomes hysterical, physically sick, and mentally disoriented during her brief bus ride. The story is similar to the earlier "The Next in Line"; it features similar characters of the same name, and features much of the same setting. "Interval in Sunlight" is the fourth-longest story in the collection; during the period the couple is in Mexico, a dollar is worth about five pesos.

The central symbol in "The Black Ferris" is the magical Ferris wheel. The carnival proprietor appears well-versed in this particular scam. The narrative has ambiguous sexual overtones as the narrator and protagonist runs through the town naked and his friend ends up dressed as a stereotypical flasher. "Farewell Summer," predominantly a dream sequence, is best understood as a vignette and not a short story—it is a metafictional portrayal of death. "McGillahee's Brat" is an interesting story with complex construction. Set in Ireland, the story's central figure is Brat McGillahee, a man who does not physically age. The lengthy narrative, nearly a monologue, between McGillahee and the narrator serves as the moral of the story and it verges on the heavy-handed. "The Aqueduct" is little more than a sketch.

"Gotcha!" presents one of the more-interesting psychological characterizations in the collection. The young couple's new love is beginning to peak when the woman plays a funny little game of sexualized hide-and-seek. The man is terrorized by the woman's apparent transformation and he falls out of love with her. The concluding story in the collection, "The End of the Beginning," is thematically appropriate for its position but is weak in construction.

Characters

The Elliot Familyappears in Several Stories

The extended Elliot family is featured in three stories, "Homecoming," "Uncle Einar," and "The Traveler"; a fourth story "The April Witch," features one member of the family. The family consists of legendary humanoid monsters and some other atypical individuals, said to be magical. The family contains several named individuals. Timothy is apparently a normal human child without any special or monstrous abilities and without a taste for drinking blood, sleeping during the day, or sleeping in a coffin. The family believes that interbreeding with normal humans will remove their magical character—Timothy's strange "normal" origin is not explained as such, though his parents are obviously disappointed and also embarrassed by it. The kindly Uncle Einar is a winged man, apparently some type of a bat-man, with leathery green wings and an unusually well-developed night vision prior to an accident that leaves him partially blinded. Timothy's sister Ceci sleeps nearly constantly and projects her mind through space to observe others or possess them. Ceci can enter any type of animal or simply hover as a disembodied observer. Cecy, her named spelled differently, appears again in the story "The April Witch." Another family member is an Egyptian mummy, and so forth. Timothy and, later, Uncle Einar, feel isolated because of their lack of monstrous traits or abilities. On the other hand Ceci is isolated because of her ability. The family lives in the fictional Mellin Town, Illinois, at 12 Willow Street.

The Rocket Manappears in Rocket Man

In "Rocket Man" the protagonist is a fourteen-year-old boy named Doug. Doug lives with his mother and father; his father is usually away from home flying space rockets for a living. When the rocket man returns home he is very happy and mows the law, fixes appliances, takes the family on outings, and enjoys himself. As the days pass, however, he begins to stare at the stars and yearn for a return to space. Doug's mother tolerates the prolonged and frequent absences by mentally imagining the rocket man has already died—thus his visits are an unexpected event. The rocket man never contacts the family while he is away because he does not want to feel a yearning to return to them. The rocket man charges Doug to avoid being a rocket man. He explains that his desire is always elsewhere and frustrated—when in space he longs for home, but when at home he longs for space. The rocket man is unable to have both desires fulfilled and ends up dying in space as his rocket plunges into the sun. The rocket man is a keen insight into the nature of human desire; and his desire is contrasted by his wife's desire to have a reliable husband. The rocket man's space suit—form-fitting and black—symbolizes the gulf of desire that cannot be filled. The dust Doug extracts from the spacesuit is itself symbolic of the father's miniscule physical presence yielded only grudgingly. Like many of the space-faring characters in the collection, the rocket man is isolated, lonely, and incapable of close communication.

The Very Reverend Father Joseph Daniel Peregrineappears in The Fire Balloons

Father Peregrine is an Episcopal priest. He has written a pamphlet on planetary sin, in which he considers that Christian sin may be situational—that is, what is sinful on Earth may not be sinful on Mars or, more significantly, what is practiced on Mars might be sin unknown to Earth. Peregrine leads a delegation of missionaries to Mars and is selected to be in charge for "deplorably obscure" (p. 181) reasons but it is undoubtedly at least partially because of his agile definition of sin based on local circumstances. Upon arriving on Mars, Peregrine immediately determines to locate Martians and investigate their sinful practices; his fellow missionaries prefer to preach among the Earth settlers on Mars. Peregrine finds the Martians and eventually discovers they are intelligent, moral, and proactively involved in preventing acts they consider sinful. After Peregrine engages them a few times, the Martians speak to him and disclose they are the disembodied intelligences of once-physical Martians. They now live immortally and, because they are incorporeal, without any sin or tendency or desire to sin. Curiously, Peregrine accepts their situational definition of sin as being inextricably linked to physicality. Thereafter, the missionaries leave the Martians alone because they are deemed incapable of sin. Peregrine returns to the human colonies and begins to preach abstinence from drink and abstinence from sexual promiscuity; his focus being, of course, on the prevention of physical sin.

The Underhill Familyappears in The Playground

"The Playground" features members of the Underhill Family. Charles Underhill is an established businessman who is well-to-do but somewhat neurotic. His upbringing was apparently very painful and he recalls his childhood days with horror. Charles' late wife Ann died of unspecified causes. He has a young son Jim, on whom he lavishes much care. Jim, three years old, appears as a normal child in all aspects. Charles' sister Carol is unmarried and lives with Charles and Jim, acting as a sort of ward for Jim. During the story, Carol decides to start taking Jim to a local public playground. Charles visits the playground and finds it abhorrent. Full of noisy and mean children, it reminds Charles of his own unhappy childhood. He refuses to allow Carol to take Jim to the playground and begins to plan a way completely to shelter Jim from having to grow up. In the end, Charles voluntarily switches places with Jim. It is unclear whether Carol or Jim understands what has happened because as the story ends they wave and walk away together. Charles, on the other hand, has become an infant child on the playground and knows that he will have to "grow up again" (p. 321) as the price for what he sees as Jim's liberation. The story suggests Charles will remain on the playground for the next twelve years. While Charles' paternal sacrifice is certainly a magnanimous gesture, one wonders what type of person Jim will become devoid of any childhood experience.

Marie and Joseph Elliottappears in The Next in Line

Marie is the protagonist in "The Next in Line." She is a Caucasian woman probably in her late thirties or early forties. Marie is from the United States of America and is married to Joseph. They appear to be a normal married couple in many respects though they are taking an extended vacation, traveling through Mexico by automobile. Marie's relationship to Joseph has disintegrated to the point that he is no longer interested in her; he views her with a critical eye and in general disregards her feelings and judges her fears to be insignificant. Joseph feels at home in Mexico but Marie finds it disorienting and mildly frightening—she appears to be suffering from a mild case of "culture shock" and is unable to readily adapt to her surroundings. While Joseph explores the town and interacts with the locals, Marie hides in her hotel room and reads old American magazines. When she does venture into the town it is only to search for and buy new American magazines. Marie finds the Mexican vacation isolating, lonely, and distressing. Her vulnerability is heightened by her reliance on Joseph and is symbolized by her frequent nudity. The couple visits a Mexican graveyard which rents—rather than sells—burial plots. Corpses with insufficient rent are disinterred and placed in a crypt of mummies. Marie finds the experience very distressing; Joseph finds it intriguing—she experiences it emotionally; he experiences it intellectually. Marie considers her own aging body and likens it to clay impregnated with water and worked by Joseph as a sculptor, and she compares it to the drying and decomposing bodies of the mummies. Marie is afraid of death, afraid of premature burial, aware of the many symbols of death presented in the narrative, and saddened by the disintegration—death—of her marriage. She does not fear the skeletons of the deceased—the skeletons are not changing—but she fears death and the desiccation of the mummies because they symbolize the changes of age and death. Marie is vulnerable, isolated, and lonely. Marie wants to leave the town with the graveyard but is prevented by automobile troubles. Joseph enjoys the delay and Marie descends into panic. The story concludes with an ambivalent ending—Joseph drives back to the United States alone. One can infer that Marie is dead and buried in the abhorrent graveyard but there is no direct narrative evidence for this. Instead, Marie could have been simply abandoned or she could have made good on her threat to leave by alternative transportation. Note that similar characters of the same name appear later in the collection in "Interval in Sunlight," also set in Mexico.

Robert Prentiss Familyappears in The Strawberry Window

"The Strawberry Window" features Robert Prentiss, his wife Carrie, and their two sons. The family has left earth and colonized Mars as one of the first pioneering families. Carrie quickly grows homesick and strongly desires to return to earth. Robert explains his personal philosophy at some length—he feels that, ultimately, earth is doomed because of over-exploitation. In order to survive, he reasons, humanity must expand beyond earth to, first, Mars, and then beyond to other worlds and other solar systems (in Robert's understanding, most of the known planets in our solar system, including

Pluto, are fully capable of supporting human life). While Carrie agrees with him philosophically, she finds Mars so utterly alien that she does not feel she will ever be able to adapt. Robert responds by spending the family's considerable savings to have their old earth home divided into pieces and shipped via rocket to Mars. On Mars he reassembles the pieces, effectively bringing the family's old earth home to their new home on Mars. Carrie looks through one stained-glass window, the strawberry window, and sees Mars from a different point of view. The family lives in a Martian town known as New Toledo.

Emma Fleet nee Gertzappears in The Illustrated Woman

The story "The Illustrated Woman" presents an initial interview between a psychologist and Emma Fleet. The interview is apparently impromptu but occurs at the psychologist's office. Emma is enormously fat but insists that this is not her complaint—in fact she would gain weight if she could. She gives her present weight as 402.5 pounds and notes she weighed 185 pounds in high school and weighed 250 pounds at age twenty-one. Emma currently is employed as a carnival fat woman; her husband, Willy Fleet, is a midget who works for the carnival guessing people's weight. Emma met Willy at the carnival where he was immediately smitten with her, mostly because of her girth. On their wedding night he asked her to strip nude and then examined her huge body with delight. Emma and Willy believe Willy to be an exceptionally gifted tattoo artist, and further believe that over the past seven years he has covered her entire vast body with artistic tattoos. Having no space remaining to continue his work, Willy loses interest in Emma and begins to cast a wandering eye at other fat women. Emma partially disrobes to show the psychologist her immense collection of tattoos whereupon the psychologist realizes she has not a single tattoo anywhere on her entire body. The psychologist then recommends Emma have the tattoos removed and broadly hints that even this step is not truly necessary, whereupon the unlikely couple's problems are solved—at least for another seven years. Emma and Willy exit the psychologist's office happily reunited in purpose.

Beck and Craigappears in The Blue Bottle

Beck and Craig are two men who are exploring an abandoned Mars in search of an ancient Martian artifact known as the blue bottle. Beck is highly motivated to find the blue bottle and has been searching for it for decades. He has come to realize that the pursuit of the object is his life's meaning and to this end he fears actually finding it. His desire is the motivating factor for the two men's companionship and journey. Craig, on the other hand, is uninterested in the artifact and only searches because Beck searches. The two men are only two of hundreds of men searching for the artifact on a Mars that has been exploited and abandoned by the rest of humanity. Beck and Craig finally find the blue bottle only to have it stolen from them at gunpoint. Craig abandons the pursuit as too dangerous, but Beck presses on. He pursues the thief, finds him dying, and pursues men who stole the artifact from the thief. Beck finally regains the

blue bottle and realizes it contains man's greatest desire—he knows his own desire is death, and opens the bottle whereupon he happily disintegrates into ash. Later, Craig stumbles on the blue bottle and opens it to find it is full of bourbon.

The Wilder Familyappears in The October Game

The Wilder family, appearing in "The October Game," consists of Mich, the father, and Louise, the mother. They have one daughter, Marion, who is eight years old. Mich is dark complexioned and Louise is light complexioned. Their daughter is very light complexioned and looks like Louise but not like Mich. For at least a decade, Mich and Louise have been unhappy in their marriage and have routinely engaged in various forms of mental abuse of each other. Mich suspects Marion is not his daughter—the narrative suggests Mich knows this to be factual but refuses consciously to acknowledge it. Marion's conception and birth is insinuated to be the root cause of the couple's ongoing marital problems. Louise dotes on Marion; Mich finds her uninteresting but does feel guilty about his insufficient relationship with his daughter. Prior to Marion's birthday party, Mich contemplates murdering Louise but decides he would rather force her to suffer greatly than to kill her outright. During the birthday party Mich socially ostracizes Louise. The party ends as the twenty-odd guests descend to a dark basement to play a party game called 'the witch is dead' in which Mich passes around various slimy and strange objects which are handled and passed on in the dark. Mich announces each object as a body part of the slain fictional witch. The narrative describes how the game is played. As the game continues it is discovered that Marion is missing, whereupon Louise comes to believe, to her horror, that the objects being passed around in the dark basement are in fact body parts of her daughter, recently murdered and dismembered by her husband. Whether or not this is indeed the case is not established in the narrative.

Brat McGillaheeappears in McGillahee's Brat

In "McGillahee's Brat" the narrator discovers a man, ironically named Brat McGillahee, who is forty years old but appears, physically, as a newborn babe. McGillahee spends his days with his sister, a middle-aged woman, posing as a homeless mother and infant child who beg on the streets of Dublin. While begging, McGillahee acts like an infant and wails and shrieks. When his sister is ill, McGillahee "rents" himself out to other beggars. Several characters in the story mention McGillahee's doleful appearance, masterful acting ability, and particularly his abrasive but compelling voice which secures a good stream of income. McGillahee fears official discovery for undisclosed reasons, though the local populace appears aware of his strange nature. During the story the narrator manages to locate McGillahee and a lengthy discussion ensues. During their discussion, which forms the moral narrative of the story, McGillahee delivers what amounts to a monologue in which he explains his genesis, life, and philosophy. He claims he has never physically matured because his well-meaning but beaten-down father used to repetitively state that infancy was vastly preferable to growing up.

Objects/Places

Charles Braling's Coffinappears in The Coffin

In "The Coffin" Charles Braling builds an automated coffin. When a body is placed inside, the coffin robotically embalms the body, displays flowers, plays music, eulogizes the deceased, and then drives to the final resting spot where it self-buries using mechanical arms. Charles' last wish had been to be entombed in the coffin. Instead, as Charles surely anticipated, his cheapskate younger brother Richard had Charles buried in a pine box. Richard's curiosity then leads him to climb into the coffin whereupon he is embalmed, eulogized, and buried.

Marsappears in Several stories

Mars is the fourth planet in the solar system—in Bradbury's stories Mars has a thin but breathable atmosphere, a generally earth-like climate, an extensive network of water-filled canals, and is home to an advanced Martian civilization. It is usually described as red and dusty, though in "The Strawberry Window" it is described as predominantly blue and white. The Martians' buildings are usually constructed of very delicate glass and crystal; they use telepathy and image projection to communicate, and they wear elaborate masks and colorful clothing. The Martians appear wispy and somewhat insubstantial. In many of the stories the Martians have been nearly eliminated by human incursion while in others, such as "Dark They Were, And Golden-Eyes" humans actually transform into the Martians. In other stories the Martians are disembodied malevolent spirits who take possession of humans, such as in "The One Who Waits." In all of the stories, Mars is thinly populated—an extreme example being "Night Call, Collect," where the entire planet has only a single inhabitant. In "The Blue Bottle," Mars has been fully exploited and abandoned by humans, with only vagrant adventurers remaining.

Venusappears in Several stories

Venus is the third planet in the solar system—in Bradbury's stories Venus has a breathable atmosphere and a generally earth-like climate save only that it is perpetually overcast with thick clouds and rains nearly nonstop, year-round. As a result of this Venus has huge seas and nearly endless swamplands. In some stories Venus was once home to native intelligent life forms; in others, such as "The Long Rain" the native intelligent life forms are hostile but live only in the vast Venusian seas; in other stories, such as "All Summer in a Day", Venus has never had inhabitants. In all the stories, Venus is covered with a thick rioting jungle that grows so rapidly it can be observed. The jungle is composed of plants that are grayish in color, having never or rarely been exposed to direct sunlight. In most respects, the plants appear to be a cross of a plant with a fungus. Venus is presented as lightly populated and not particularly industrialized.

Time Travelappears in Several stories

Several of the stories in the collection deal with time travel—generally developed in the 21st or 22nd century AD. In the time-travel stories, the past is mutable and actions taken in the past can alter the future. Various methods are used to safeguard the past. In "The Fox and the Forest" visitors to the past have various mental blocks put in place so they cannot divulge the future. In "A Sound of Thunder" a time-traveling company monitors the trip extensively and prevents, or at least attempts to prevent, meaningful interaction with the past. The various techniques used work with differing levels of efficacy.

The Powerhouseappears in The Powerhouse

In "The Powerhouse" a couple spends the night inside a powerhouse, or power substation, as an extemporized shelter during travel. The story's protagonist has just lost her mother and feels as if her life has come adrift. Her husband has always been religious though she has not. During the sleepless night she comes to conflate the humming powerhouse atmosphere with the excitement of religiosity and feels that in some measure she has been awakened to deep religious feelings. The story's symbolic link between powerful electricity and religious experience is compelling.

Mexican Graveyardappears in The Next in Line

In "The Next in Line" Marie and Joseph visit a Mexican graveyard that has atypical practices. The graveyard sells burial plots, as usual, but it also will rent burial plots for a small price per annum. When a family falls behind on their annual plot rental the corpse is disinterred and placed in an underground crypt, wired to the wall in an upright posture. If the family later pays rent, the corpse is re-interred. The graveyard analyzes the family's ability to pay and buries the corpses associated with poor families in shallow graves. The crypt holds over one hundred mummies during Marie's and Joseph's visit. The sextant comments on the bizarre practice of plot rental, and points out distinct mummies including one which accidentally had been buried alive. The spectacle and practice weigh heavily on Marie's mind and cause her to gradually become terrorized by the thought of death, premature burial, and isolation.

The Wonderful Ice Cream Suitappears in The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit

"The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" features a new suit cut in the latest fashion and made from perfectly white material. The suit is well-made, as is demonstrated by its surviving an automobile-pedestrian accident without damage. The suit's high price causes six friends to pool their resources to buy the suit—the friends select each other because of their common build and height. They then take turns wearing the suit. The poor friends

find new respect, new love, and new experiences while wearing the wonderful suit. The suit is symbolic of their common friendship and their enhanced lives can thus be viewed as a result of friends coming together in common purpose and support.

The Finch Family Atticappears in A Scent of Sarsaparilla

In "A Scent of Sarsaparilla," William Finch in later life ascends to the family attic and spends many hours, then many days, reminiscing about his previous life. On some occasions he pokes about the attic, though he usually simply visits the place and ponders his past. His wife, Cora, refuses to enter the attic with him and believes that he is organizing it and cleaning out the contents. In fact, the attic functions as a sort of time-machine for William and the narrative suggests he is able physically to travel through time within the attic. At the end of the story William leaves Cora behind and leaves the attic by climbing down a ladder instead of leaving through the house.

Lord Kilgotten's Placeappears in The Terrible Conflagration Up at the Place

The setting in "The Terrible Conflagration Up at the Place" is one of the best-developed in the entire collection. The lord's home is a sprawling mansion-like structure which is deemed flammable by the locals. It has a library, a large kitchen, and an extensive great hall which features dozens of large-format paintings by many known masters. In the story the locals decide to burn the place but Lord Kilgotten convinces them—or rather lets them convince themselves—that the planned arson would be very inconvenient.

El Córdobaappears in The Parrot Who Met Papa

El Córdoba is a fairly nondescript parrot who has lived at a particular bar in Cuba for many decades. The parrot is said to have been the confidant of Ernest Hemingway during countless nights of bar drinking. In fact, the parrot is like an animal computer, able to conjure up obscure baseball facts and unusual opinions of various writers. It speaks in Hemingway's voice and uses his inflections. It is rumored that the parrot even has memorized—and can repeat—the entire text of Hemingway's last, great, unwritten novel. The parrot remains at the bar for a few years past Hemingway's death and is then kidnapped by Shelley Capon (generally assumed to be a fictionalization of Truman Capote). The narrator of the story, Ray (presumably a meta-fictionalization of Ray Bradbury, the author), pursues Capon, retrieves the parrot, and then attempts to abscond with the invaluable literary bird. The parrot itself is symbolic of literary elements in Hemingway's body of work, including his enduring legacy.

Themes

Technological Advances are Inherently Dangerous

Many of the stories feature the overt theme that technological advances are dangerous. In many of the stories set on Mars the characters are fleeing a technologically depraved earth; in others they are fleeing wars brought about by unrestrained technology; and in others they are attempting to colonize Mars when earth is destroyed by some technological calamity. In many stories, the technological advances allow humans to explore alien and subtly hostile environments without simultaneously providing the explorers with adequate defenses. For example, in "The Long Rain" humans have reached and colonized Venus through technological advances but when their technology fails they are unable to survive for more than a few hours in the hostile Venusian environment—some of the men are killed, but mostly they go crazy. Likewise in "The One Who Waits," humans have reached and colonized Mars through technological advances but they are unable to detect the presence of a malevolent immaterial being who proceeds to kill them all because they have no defense. Another variation on this common theme is found in "The City," a vastly advanced technological innovation that exists solely to lure and murder human explorers. The theme is also presented as an improper use of existing technology, such as presented in "Night Call, Collect" where the protagonist is harried to death by incessant telephone calls, or as an error in helpful technology, as presented in "Tomorrow's Child." The stories frequently feature the theme that technological advances are dualistic—they open new possibilities, but they are simultaneously inherently dangerous.

Isolation

Most of the characters in the collection of stories feel isolated and alone, and often are isolated. The opening stories focus on a family of monstrous humanoids, all of whom are isolated because of their peculiarities or, in one case, more-fully isolated because of his lack of monstrous traits. A familiar variation on the theme of isolation is found within stories focusing family relations which are dysfunctional. For example, "The Coffin" is about a pair of brothers—when one dies the other exults shortly before being in turn killed by the deceased brother's intricate plans. In other stories, such as "The Silent Towns" and "The Vacation" very few characters wander in an otherwise wholly depopulated world. Even in functioning families, members usually feel isolated by long absences—such as discussed in "The Rocket Man." In other stories people are literally replaced by robots, as happens in "Marionettes, Inc." or are deliberately replaced with a reliance on technological innovation, as happens in "The Veldt." In other stories, such as "Fever Dream" the isolation is so complete that characters transform into alien life forms. The recurring theme of isolation is not limited solely to human characters; in "The Fog Horn" the huge monster is entirely isolated and alone, and realizes it. Some stories, such as "A Medicine for Melancholy" suggest the solution to isolation is love while in other stories, such as "The Illustrated Woman," a type of love provides a bizarre

alternative to isolation. Isolation runs throughout the collection as a dominant and recurring theme.

Alienation

Many of the stories feature a predominant theme of alienation. Whenever stories are set on Mars, Venus, or another non-earth planet, such as "Fire and Frost," the characters feel alienated and out of place. In "Fire and Frost," for example, Sim has lived on his planet for hundreds of generations but still feels alienated and desires to return "home," wherever that is. His alienation is entrenched in the generational memory shared by his species in such a way that everyone feels alienated. The alienation felt by humans on Mars is usually focused on the absolute lack of anything earth-like in the environment. For example, in "The Strawberry Window" the characters attempt to colonize Mars but grow alienated and homesick because of its utterly alien landscape. The characters solve their problem by importing major portions of their old earth home. The alienation felt by humans on Venus focuses on the harsh climate of constant rain. For example, in "The Long Rain" the planet is so alien and hostile that special sun domes are constructed that offer a more earth-like environment. When placed directly in the Venusian climate earthmen are so alienated and distressed that they suffer mental collapse and breakdown after only a few days. Even when stories are set in traditional, or non-fantastic, settings, alienation is a common theme. For example, in "The Big Black and White Game" the town is divided by race and gathers together only once a year—and even that occasion is marred by alienation and racism. In "The Playground" a character is so alienated from everything that he refuses to allow his son to interact with the world. In "Tomorrow's Child" a family is alienated through a technological mistake. The theme of alienation, closely tied to the theme of isolation, runs through most of the stories in the collection.

Style

Point of View

The one hundred short stories included in the volume feature a variety of narrative points of view, though the most common is that of the limited third-person, an entirely effaced narrator common to much short fiction. The scope of the collection, however, includes a variety of points of view, including unlimited third-person and first-person. In general, the point of view selected for a story fits the narrative structure and is used to drive characterization and plot development. When the story focuses nearly entirely on a single character's immediate experiences and development, the point of view selected is usually first-person. For example, "The Rocket Man" is ostensibly narrated by the protagonist who views his parents' relationship and life experiences as he promulgates his own worldview. For this type of story first-person is appropriate and materially advances the narrative structure. On the other hand, "The Small Assassin" could hardly be a successful story if related from the first-person point of view. Instead, the third-person point of view is selected to allow the creation of suspense, the introduction of multiple characters with disparate interpretations of events and the final conclusion of the story. Often, the third-person point of view focuses on the activities of the protagonist such as in "The Next in Line"; here the narrator frequently divulges the interior thoughts and feelings of Marie but not of other characters. In other stories, such as "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" the narrative presents several characters' point of view in a balanced fashion.

Setting

The one hundred short stories in the volume feature a variety of settings ranging from the mundane to the exotic. Stories are often set in a traditional setting of modern North America, often in small towns or rural areas, but are just as likely to be set on Mars, in Mexico, in Ireland, or in the distant future or past. Indeed, the rich imagination of setting presented in the collection is a hallmark of the author and allows for a variety of atypical plots to be presented. For example, "A Sound of Thunder" is set in the future at a time when time-travel is developed and exploited for commercial purposes. The characters travel to earth's distant past and one of them unwittingly changes the future by altering the past. When they return to their own time-frame they discover a future slightly altered in many ways. This is an example of an obvious science-fiction setting while other stories feature settings more akin to traditional fiction. For example, "The Fog Horn" takes place on the shore in a lighthouse that appears entirely mundane—except for a visiting monster. Arguably the story could be interpreted largely along traditional lines. One common theme among settings is that of technological development having poisoned or destroyed natural environments. The rich and diverse settings presented in the collection are one of its fictional highlights.

Language and Meaning

The one hundred short stories in the volume feature a wide variety of language and meaning; they are all originally written in standard English and most are written for a broad audience with no specialized education. Most of the stories feature fairly limited vocabulary but some—for example, "The Next in Line"—are full of complex terms and seldom-used words. While most of the stories are fairly basic in interpretation this is not always the case. For example, "The Next in Line" features a multi-layered reality, advanced character development, an intricate plot, and a variety of methodologies rarely found so successfully executed in short stories. Many of the stories share a commonly-derived meaning from repetitive narrative elements. For example, the stories taken collectively suggest that technological advances almost always lead to degradation of the natural environment while simultaneously being harmful to humanity's collective charity. Many stories, for example, feature a world destroyed by nuclear war or an environment seriously compromised by technological waste products. Most of the stories feature themes of isolation and alienation, whether this alienation is from the environment or simply from other characters. Many of the stories end with ambiguous narrative structures that allow the reader to infer a multiplicity of meanings. For example, in "The Jar" the contents of the jar seemingly change—but perhaps not—and the protagonist's wife seemingly disappears—but again, perhaps not. The story can be interpreted with a malevolent ending of murder and dismemberment, but it can also be interpreted at face value. Meaning is thus intangible and often difficult. Other stories, such as "The Small Assassin" feature concrete endings and decisive meaning.

Structure

The 884-page book features one hundred short stories written from 1943 to 1980. The stories included were selected by the author; the compilation was first published in 1980. The book should not be confused with a 2003 collection of similar name but distinct content. Nearly all of the stories in the collection had been previously published; many have been subsequently republished. The collection includes both well-known and lesser-known stories and for example features "A Sound of Thunder" "The Fog Horn," "The Veldt," "The Day It Rained Forever," "The Small Assassin," "The Next in Line," and "I Sing the Body Electric!" The book features a relatively lengthy introduction by the author in which he describes his artistic genesis and makes several statements about the process of writing and the science-fiction genre in which the author is generally categorized. The collection has an overarching feel of science fiction but also includes fantasy, horror, and traditional stories. The stories vary in length but in general are concise. The stories are not organized in chronological publication fashion and are not grouped according to genre, length, or any other obvious factor. The stories were published as follows: three in 1943; three in 1944; two in 1945; six in 1946 and 1947; nine in 1948; seven in 1949; nine in 1950; seven in 1951; six in 1952 and 1953; three in 1954; one in 1956; five in 1957; two in 1958, 1959, and 1960; one in 1961; two in 1962 and 1963; four in 1969; one in 1970, 1971, 1972; three in 1976; one in 1978 and 1979;

and four in 1980. The longest story is thirty-two pages in length; the shortest is only one page.

Quotes

Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, "Who goes there? What's the password?" and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.
It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house!
The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly. (p. 77)

The dinner was fine that night. Mom had run about the kitchen with handfuls of cinnamon and dough and pots and pans tinkling, and now a great turkey fumed on the table, with dressing, cranberry sauce, peas, and pumpkin pie.
"In the middle of August?" said Dad, amazed.
"You won't be here for Thanksgiving."
"So I won't."
He sniffed it. He lifted each lid from each tureen and let the flavor steam over his sunburned face. He said "Ah" to each. He looked at the room and his hands. He gazed at the pictures on the wall, the chairs, the table, me, and Mom. He cleared his throat. I saw him make up his mind. "Lilly?"
"Yes?" Mom looked across her table which she had set like a wonderful silver trap, a miraculous gravy pit in which, like a struggling beast of the past caught in a tar pool, her husband might at last be caught and held, gazing out through a jail of wishbones, safe forever. Her eyes sparkled.
"Lilly," said Dad.
Go on, I thought crazily. Say it quick: say you'll stay home this time, for good, and never go away; say it!
Just then a passing helicopter jarred the room and the windowpane shook with a crystal sound. Dad glanced at the window.
The blue stars of evening were there, and the red planet Mars was rising in the East.
Dad looked at Mars a full minute. Then he put his hand out blindly toward me. "May I have some peas," he said.
"Excuse me," said Mother. "I'm going to get some bread."
She rushed out into the kitchen.
"But there's bread on the table," I said.
Dad didn't look at me as he began his meal. (pp. 156-157)

The rain continued. It was a hard rain, a perpetual rain, a sweating and steaming rain; it was a mizzle, a downpour, a fountain, a whipping at the eyes, an undertow at the ankles; it was a rain to drown all rains and the memory of rains. It came by the pound and the ton, it hacked at the jungle and cut the trees like scissors and shaved the grass

and tunneled the soil and molted the bushes. It shrank men's hands into the hands of wrinkled apes; it rained a solid glassy rain, and it never stopped. (p. 208)

It came on great oiled, resilient, striding legs. It towered thirty feet above half of the trees, a great evil god, folding its delicate watchmaker's claws close to its oily reptilian chest. Each lower leg was a piston, a thousand pounds of white bone, sunk in thick ropes of muscle, sheathed over in a gleam of pebbled skin like the mail of a terrible warrior. Each thigh was a ton of meat, ivory, and steel mesh. And from the great breathing cage of the upper body, those two delicate arms dangled out front, arms with hands which might pick up and examine men like toys, while the snake neck coiled. And the head itself, a ton of sculptured stone, lifted easily upon the sky. Its mouth gaped, exposing a fence of teeth like daggers. Its eyes rolled, ostrich eggs, empty of all expression save hunger. It closed its mouth in a death grin. It ran, its pelvic bones crushing aside trees and bushes, its taloned feet clawing damp earth, leaving prints six inches deep wherever it settled its weight. It ran with a gliding ballet step, far too poised and balanced for its ten tons. It moved into a sunlit area wrily, its beautifully reptile hands feeling the air.
"My God!" Eckels twitched his mouth. "It could reach up and grab the Moon."
"Shh!" Travis jerked angrily. "He hasn't seen us yet."
"It can't be killed," Eckles pronounced this verdict quietly, as if there could be no argument. He had weighed the evidence and this was his considered opinion. The rifle in his hands seemed a cap gun. "We were fools to come. This is impossible." (pp. 236-237)

She shuddered, a convulsive motion, like a fish trying to free itself from a deep-swallowed hook. She lay back and he looked at her as one examines a poor sculpture; all criticism, all quiet and easy and uncaring. She wondered idly just how much his hands had had to do with the broadening and flattening and changement of her body. Certainly this was not the body he'd started with. It was past saving now. Like clay which the sculptor has carelessly impregnated with water, it was impossible to shape again. In order to shape clay you warm it with your hands, evaporate the moisture with heat. But there was no more of that fine summer weather between them. There was no warmth to bake away the aging moisture that collected and made pendant now her breasts and body. When the heat is gone, it is marvelous and unsettling to see how quickly a vessel stores self-destroying water in its cells.
"I don't feel well," she said. She lay there, thinking it over. "I don't feel well," she said again, when he made no response. After another minute or two she lifted herself. "Let's not stay here another night, Joe." (p. 388)

"He's smoking!" said Martínez.
"He's drinking!" said Domínguez.
"He's eating a taco!" reported Villanazul.
"A juicy taco," added Manulo.
"No," said Gómez. "No, no, no..."
"Ruby Escuadrillo's with him!"
"Let me see that!" Gómez pushed Martínez aside.

Yes, there was Ruby! Two hundred pounds of glittering sequins and tight black satin on the hoof, her scarlet fingernails clutching Vamenos' shoulder. Her cowlike face, floured with powder, greasy with lipstick, hung over him!
"That hippo!" said Domínguez. "She's crushing the shoulder pads. Look, she's going to sit on his lap!"
"No, no, not with all that powder and lipstick!" said Gómez. "Manulo, inside! Grab that drink! Villanazul, the cigar, the taco! Domínguez, date Ruby Escuadrillo, get her away. Ándale, men!" (p. 462).

The lower half of her body changed itself from white to very pale blue, from very pale blue to pale green, from pale green to emerald green, to moss and lime green to scintillas and sequins all dark green, all flowing away in a found, a curve, a rush of light and dark, to end in a lacy fan, a spread of foam and jewel on the same. The two halves of this creature were so joined as to reveal no point of fusion where pearl woman, woman of a whiteness made of cream-water and clear sky, merged with that half which belonged to the amphibious slide and rush of current that came up on the shore and shelved down the shore, tugging its half toward its proper home. The woman was the sea, the sea was woman. There was no flaw or seam, no wrinkle or stitch; the illusion, if illusion it was, held perfectly together and the blood from one moved into and through and mingled with what must have been the ice waters of the other. (pp. 516-517)

"About myself," I said. I had to stop, I could hardly breathe. I forced myself to go on. "It's funny. I've often thought the same way as you. Sure, just today, going cross-country, I thought, How perfect, how perfect, how really perfect it could be. Business has been bad for me, lately. Wife sick. Good friend died last week. War in the world. Full of boils, myself. It would do me a world of good—"
"What?" the old man said, his hand on my arm.
"To get off this train in a small town," I said, "where nobody knows me, with this gun under my arm, and find someone and kill them and bury them and go back down to the station and get on and go home and nobody the wiser and nobody ever to know who did it, ever. Perfect, I thought, a perfect crime. And I got off the train."
We stood there in the dark for another minute, staring at each other. Perhaps we were listening to each other's hearts beating very fast, very fast indeed.
The world turned under me. I clenched my fists. I wanted to fall. I wanted to scream like the train.
For suddenly I saw that all the things I had just said were not lies put forth to save my life.
All the things I had just said to this man were true.
And now I knew why I had stepped from the train and walked up through this town. I knew what I had been looking for. (p. 531)

"'Emma,' he said, 'are you married?'
"'Are you kidding?' I said
"'Emma, do you like to travel?'
"'I've never traveled.'
"'Emma,' he said, 'this old carnival's going to be in your town one more week. Come down every night, every day, why not? Talk to me, know me. At the end of the week,

who can tell, maybe you'll travel with me.'
"'What are you suggesting?' I said, not really angry or irritated or anything, but fascinated and intrigued that anyone would offer anything to Moby Dick's daughter.
"'I mean marriage!' Willy Fleet looked at me, breathing hard, and I had the feeling that he was dressed in a mountaineer's rig, alpine hat, climbing boots, spikes, and a rope slung over his baby shoulder. And if I should ask him, 'Why are you saying this?' he might well answer, 'Because you're there.'
"But I didn't ask, so he didn't answer. We stood there in the night, at the center of the carnival, until at last I started off down the midway, swaying, 'I'm drunk!' I cried. Oh, so very drunk, and I've had nothing to drink."
"'Now that I've found you,' called Willy Fleet after me, 'you'll never escape me, remember!'
"Stunned and reeling, blinded by his large man's words sung out in his soprano voice, I somehow blundered from the carnival grounds and trekked home.
"The next week we were married."
Emma Fleet paused and looked at her hands. (p. 611)

"Well, your Lordship, there is no silence like a woman's silence, do you agree? And no standing there like a woman's standing there like a monument out of Stonehenge. The mean temperature dropped in the room so quick I suffered from the polar concussions, as we call it in our house. I did not dare turn to confront the Beast, or the daughter of the Beast, as I call her in deference to her mom. But finally I heard her suck in a great breath and let it out very cool and calm like a Prussian general. 'That woman is naked as a jay bird,' and 'That other woman is raw as the inside of a clam at low tide.'
"'But,' said I, 'these are studies of natural physique by a famous French artist.'
"'Jesus-come-after-me-French,' she cried; 'the-skirts-half-up-to-your-bum-French. The-dress-half-down-to-your-navel-French. And the-gulping-and-smothering-they-do-with-their-mouths-in-their-dirty-novels-French, and now you come home and nail "French" on the walls, why don't you while you're at it, pull the crucifix down and nail one fat naked lady there?'" (pp. 667-668)

"You shall love Nora's menagerie zoo and horticultural garden! Her friends are beasts and keepers, tigers and pussies, rhododendrons and flytraps. Her streams run cold fish, hot trout. Hers is a great greenhouse where brutes grow outside, force-fed by unnatural airs; enter Nora's on Friday with clean linen, so out with the wet-wash-soiled bedclothes Monday, feeling as if you had meantime inspired, painted, and lived through all Bosch's Temptations, Hells, Judgments, and Dooms! Live at Nora's and you reside in a great warm giant's cheek, deliciously gummed and morseled hourly. You will pass, like victuals, through her mansion. When it has crushed forth your last sweet-sour sauce and dismarrowed your youth-candied bones, you will be discarded in a cold iron-country train station lonely with rain."
"I'm coated with enzymes?" I cried above the engine roar. "No house can break down my elements, or take nourishment from my Original Sin."
"Fool!" laughed the Duchess. "We shall see most of your skeleton by sunrise Sunday!" (p. 686)

It was obvious she was hiding out.
I did not for a moment believe she or the child was sick.
Our collision in front of the hotel, the baby's eyes and mine striking flint, had startled her like a fox and shunted her off God-knows-where, to some other alley, some other road, some other town.
I smelled her evasion. She was a vixen, yes, but I felt myself, day by day, a better hound.
I took to walking earlier, later, in the strangest locales. I would leap off busses in Ballsbridge and prowl the fog or taxi half out to Kilcock and hid in pubs. I even knelt in Dean Swift's church to hear the echoes of his Houyhnhnm voice, but stiffened alert at the merest whimper of a child carried through.
It was all madness, to pursue such a brute idea. Yet on I went, itching where the damned thing scratched.
And then by sheer and wondrous accident in a dousing downpour that smoked the gutters and fringed my hat with a million raindrops per second, while taking my nightly swim, it happened.... (p. 866)

Topics for Discussion

Several stories feature characters from the Elliott family—a distributed family of monsters. Is it critically permissible to conclude that these characters are the same characters in each of the short stories? To wit, is Einar Elliott the self-same character in the stories "Homecoming" and "Uncle Einar," or should each story be considered an atomic piece of fiction with distinct characters? Discuss.

In "The October Game," to what game does the title refer? The story's narrative is ambiguous—it is possible that the father murdered and dismembered the daughter; but it is equally possible, and perhaps more plausible, that the mother only imagines this to be the case. Which interpretation do you favor? Which interpretation makes the story more interesting?

"Marionettes, Inc." ends ambiguously—Mrs. Braling awakens to find "someone" (p. 165) kissing her hand and speaking to her; she appears to recognize her husband. Do you think the "someone" is Mr. Braling or his Marionette?

"The Veldt" features a nursery with advanced technological features; the room is capable of recreating visual, olfactory, and limited sensory paradigms such that it can represent deep space or an African veldt. The owner explains that the room has numerous safeguards and further cannot directly, physically, interact with the world. The story suggests this is not at all true—what elements of the narrative suggest the room is fully capable of interacting with the world in a direct and physical way?

Does the title "The Next in Line" simply refer to the next person who dies in that particular Mexican town (review Joseph's comments on p. 396)? Or does the title refer to a specific character in the story? If it refers to a specific character, to whom does it refer? Discuss your opinion.

In "The Town Where No One Got Off" two men consider themselves to be potential murderers and they size each other up as potential murder victims. Of the two men in the story, which would you consider the more-credible threat? Why?

In "The Terrible Conflagration up at the Place," is the title metaphorical or literal? To which conflagration does the title refer?