

Thursday Next in Something Rotten: A Novel Study Guide

Thursday Next in Something Rotten: A Novel by Jasper Fforde

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Plot Summary

Something Rotten is a humorous fiction about a reality that shifts among absurdities in real life, fiction, and the space between the living and dead. The fictional reality known as Book World contains both characters from stories and living human beings from real life. The fictional characters can also enter real life and interact with humans. Crazy time travel plays another important role in the story.

Thursday Next narrates most of her story in which she has returned to real life from a mission she had to accomplish in Book World. Her husband, Landen, has been eradicated via a time travel trick that involved interrupting his moment of conception. In this timeline, Landen had never been born. Thursday visits her mother and brother, Joffy, and her two-year-old son, Friday. Upon learning that an evil dictator from fiction, Yorrick Kaine, is trying to take over England, Thursday determines that he must be put back into fiction by reading the story in which he appears to him. The trouble is that nobody knows what story that might be. However, Thursday has other problems. Her bank account is seriously overdrawn, and she needs to get her old job back as SpecOps operative. She also has an assassin trying to kill her and a father who keeps stopping time when he shows up. He is with SpecOps as a ChronoGuard, a man who tries to keep time travel from getting too insane.

Her father tells Thursday that she must somehow win the SuperHoop croquet game, but the Swindon Mallets play badly. If she does not manage to win the game, nuclear war will destroy the earth. A key to all this is a St. Zvlkx from the Thirteenth Century who makes predictions called revealments. He becomes reincarnated and has his Book of Revealments with him. Meanwhile, the Goliath Corporation is trying to become a world religion in order to control all politics, commerce, and thought. Thursday's plate becomes full as she must do the impossible in order to save the world. She has to win the SuperHoop croquet game.

The Goliath Corporation and Kaine work against her. She has recruited some cloned Neanderthals to help win the game, but the rules disallow them. The Swindon Mallets are losing badly when a lawyer for the team discovers that the Neanderthals can play after all. By the end of the last third of the game, the teams are tied and must go into sudden death overtime. Thursday is shot in the head and almost dies but she comes back to life from working a deal with her assassin. The Swindon Mallets win the game, thereby saving the world. The Book of Revealments turns out to be a record of bets that St. Zvlkx had made in the Thirteenth Century, and now are worth enough to buy out the Goliath Corporation. By the end of the story, the world is saved. The Goliath Corporation is reformed and Yorrick Kaine becomes a real human being but entirely harmless. Thursday learns a great deal about her future life.

Chapter 1, A Cretan Minotaur in Nebraska; Chapter 2, No Place Like Home

Chapter 1, A Cretan Minotaur in Nebraska; Chapter 2, No Place Like Home Summary

Thursday Next, the main character and narrator of the story, searches for an escaped Minotaur in Nebraska. The Minotaur had come from its genre story and has hidden in a pulp fiction western. The world in which Thursday works is a land of fiction known as Book World, and she serves as a Prose Resource Operative within the policing agency, Jurisfiction, and for Text Grand Central, the intelligence-gathering branch. Her mission is to bring the Minotaur out of the frontier town of Providence. Accompanying her is Commander Bradshaw and his rifle that shoots eraser bullets, capable of reducing any character they encounter to a pile of disjointed letters.

Thursday and Bradshaw walk into Providence in clothing that is not appropriate for the western genre and talk to the sheriff. A slapstick comedic scene follows, which is an indication that the Minotaur is close. The Minotaur had been injected with slapstick juice via a dart before this story began. In a trite western scene, a young man challenges the sheriff and is accompanied by a group of men with rifles. One of the rifle men shoots the sheriff dead. Bradshaw shoots the killer, who becomes a pile of disjointed letters. Thursday becomes upset that this will cause her a lot of paperwork, but then the two realize that they are horribly outnumbered. Bradshaw shoots a TextMarker flare that calls for help. Emporer Zhark from the Twenty-sixth Century arrives in his battle space ship, squashes an approaching storyline, and wrecks havoc with his marines and their advanced weaponry. Meanwhile, Mrs. Tiggy-winkle, a six-foot talking hedgehog from Text Grand Central, appears. She calms down the thoroughly upset Thursday and reminds her that after substituting for Joan of Arc while that character takes a martyrs' refresher course, Thursday can leave the world of fiction and return to her quite real son and her nonexistent husband, whom she loves.

In Chapter 2, Thursday returns to her home in Swindon, where she reacquaints herself with the neighborhood. Hamlet has accompanied her, and they talk about how complex his character is. Each reader seems to have come up with a different interpretation of how Hamlet ticked, and he is also confused about exactly who he is. While visiting Thursday's family with her, he meets her seemingly older brother, Joffy, her two-year-old son, Friday, and her mother.

Missing her husband, Thursday brings out the time-travel part of the story. He had been married to her, but through time travel, he had also been stopped from being conceived via a strategically placed knock on the bedroom door. A similar time-travel death had

been delivered to Thursday's father, but unlike the husband who never shows up again, the father has the ability to sometimes appear.

Thursday meets her official stalker from the Entertainments Facilitation Department's Amalgamated Union of Stalkers, who may become an ally. She also learns about an upcoming political television talk show named *Evade the Question Time*.

Chapter 1, A Cretan Minotaur in Nebraska; Chapter 2, No Place Like Home Analysis

The story wastes no time in defining itself as a farcical literary work. This opens the door wide for all kinds of comedic techniques, from puns to illogical transpositions.

Thursday's nonexistent husband, whom she loves and is eager to see again in Swindon, a small English city, is an example of a transposition and a setup for future gags. How can she love somebody who does not exist? Perhaps in the same way that readers fall in love with fictional characters?

Much of the humor is leveled at the literary world that nags authors about irrelevant issues. The story takes the idea of genres and shows that most stories of this type are trashy pulp fiction with a few remarkable classics interspersed, and yet literary agents want to know what genre any submitted story falls into. This pressure leads inevitably to stock characters of only two dimensions and meaningless trite descriptions. By mixing up the genres, Fforde makes fun of them while creating an engaging narrative about a woman with an unusual profession.

Further comedic setups are put into place in Chapter 2. Time travel explains how Thursday could love a nonexistent husband. Her two-year-old son, Friday, does not speak much, but when he does, he talks in a gibberish resembling Latin, but is actually a fake language made up for training typesetters. Her grandmother, who is one hundred and ten years old, can also live in fictional stories. Bradshaw is married but to a female mountain gorilla that had taken a liking to Friday and nurtured the boy, who was caught trying to peel a banana with his feet. A strange religion, the Global Standard Deity, is introduced. Thursday's mother may be having or about to have an affair with Prussian Chancellor, Otto Bismark, who is in the story due to time travel. A family friend, Emma Hamilton—a formerly beautiful young woman gone to seed quickly through alcoholism—puts her moves on Hamlet, who does not seem to mind a bit. He thinks anyone would be better than Ophelia.

Chapter 3, Evade the Question Time; Chapter 4, A Town Like Swindon

Chapter 3, Evade the Question Time; Chapter 4, A Town Like Swindon Summary

In Chapter 3, Thursday and Joffy join the live audience at the political show, Evade the Question Time. The two guests are Yorrick Kaine, who is the chancellor but openly wants to be a dictator, and Redmond van de Poste of the Commonsense Party. Thursday learned earlier that President Formby opposes Kaine and will keep him from becoming dictator as long as Formby is alive. However, he is in his eighties and not expected to live much longer.

The political show becomes a sham as the moderator clearly favors Kaine over Poste. Thursday, not believing how much garbage the audience is sucking up, decides that she should take Kaine to Book World and deposit him in an unpublished story's prison. She attempts to do this by reading a passage from the unpublished book while Kaine is shaking hands with the crowd, but she grasps the wrong hand and takes an elderly gentleman to Book World instead. Realizing her mistake, she tells the man that he is experiencing a near-death episode and takes him back to reality by muttering a password.

In Chapter 4, Thursday wakes up in her mother's house and takes Friday down to have breakfast. While retrieving the milk from the front stoop, a bullet whizzes by Thursday's head and lodges in the door frame. While she looks around for the shooter, she notices that time has stopped. This is a sure sign that her father is nearby. She finds him, and they talk about the assassin who had shot at her. Her father knows through time travel that the assassin, a small woman, would try to kill Thursday two more times before the end of the week. He starts time rolling again, and she goes back to her mother's house for breakfast.

Hamlet and Emma come down to breakfast, trying to hide the fact that they had slept together, but their acts are entirely transparent. After breakfast, Thursday's mother shows her something in the shed, Thursday's old Porsche 356 Speedster. Thursday and Hamlet go for a drive, during which Hamlet spots a WillSpeak machine on the sidewalk. The WillSpeak machine has a mannequin in it that looks exactly like Hamlet and the machine gives quotes from Shakespeare for two shillings. Thursday pays the machine, and it does Hamlet's soliloquy. The real Hamlet decides that he has to see one version or another of his story done for the movies.

Chapter 3, Evade the Question Time; Chapter 4, A Town Like Swindon Analysis

The mission that Thursday must perform involves getting rid of the man who wants to become England's dictator, Yorrick Kaine. He is a formidable foe because he can conjure up evil monsters from fiction somehow. She determines that Kaine must go during the political show that makes fun of political discourse as it has developed in modern times. Adding to the lampoon is the moderator's obvious prejudice toward Kaine and how the moderator explains his method for assigning points. Evading the question and redirecting the subject to party lines receive the highest scores.

The plot follows a common heroic novel form. The hero, Thursday, identifies her main foe, Kaine. She must get rid of Kaine and has the ability to do so, but her first attempt fails. This failure happens because Kaine has enough charisma to distract Thursday from doing her Book World entrapment properly. Taking the wrong person opens the door for a side joke about the general gullibility of people. The man actually believes he had a near-death experience and tries to tell anyone who will listen, which turns out to be nobody in the crowd. They are busy worshipping Yorrick Kaine.

Thursday meeting her father, who seems younger than she this time, confirms the time-travel element in the narrative. Time travel often becomes messy, and her father has a job with the ChronoGuard to set the messes straight. Every time that Thursday encounters her father, he is of a different age due to the numerous time jumps he does routinely. The absurdity of the situation comes from what would probably happen if time travel were ever to exist, and what most time-travel fiction ignores.

The author sets up Hamlet to see some version of his story done for the movies. Since Hamlet does not have a clear sense of self but does know the plot of his story, he should be in for either a joyous ride or a disappointing experience. This is a bit of foreshadowing that builds anticipation for an entertaining part of the story. The added mystery of an assassin complicates Thursday's mission to take down Yorrick Kaine.

Chapter 5, Ham(let) and Cheese; Chapter 6, SpecOps; Chapter 7, The Literary Detectives

Chapter 5, Ham(let) and Cheese; Chapter 6, SpecOps; Chapter 7, The Literary Detectives Summary

After learning in Chapter 5 that her bank account had become severely overdrawn during her absence, Thursday and Hamlet almost get hit by a runaway steamroller. Thursday explains to Hamlet that uncertainty is a part of real life, a concept that he has a hard time understanding. They then go to a coffee shop run by the Goliath Corporation, a once evil entity that had become a faith-based organization that guarantees full employment from cradle to grave. The catch is that everyone is paid with corporate coupons, not actual money. Because the currently hated group are Danes, Thursday passes off Hamlet as her insane cousin Eddie from Wolverhampton.

In Chapter 6, Thursday walks into the central office of SpecOps with the intention of regaining her job. She had been let go during her long absence while she took care of business in Book World. Once the other employees discover her identity, they enthusiastically welcome her. The problem person is Braxton Hicks, head of SpecOps in Swindon. He starts to grill Thursday, and she apologizes for never trying to play golf, a sport that Hicks loves and wants her to learn. While they are discussing the situation, in walks a greater problem person, Colonel Flanker of the police. Flanker tries to arrest Thursday for having smuggled cheese, an incident that had occurred before this story. Hicks claims that Thursday is under his command and cannot be arrested because she had merely been doing her duty as he had directed. The cheese was not smuggled but part of a sting operation, or so Hicks claims. This confuses Flanker enough that he leaves Thursday alone. Hicks then makes a golf date with Thursday, convinced that once she tries the sport, she will become as hooked as he is.

In Chapter 7, Thursday starts her work as a literary detective. She visits the office and talks with Victor Analogy, her old boss, an elderly, well-dressed English gentleman with big sideburns. He tells her about various problems in the literary world, including writers using performance-enhancing drugs, Yorrick Kaine's ban on all Danish literature, Analogy's plan to smuggle four truckloads of banned books across the border to Wales, and the possibility of someone cloning Shakespeare. Thursday insists that she be put on the problems, even though she needs to find daycare for Friday.



Chapter 5, Ham(let) and Cheese; Chapter 6, SpecOps; Chapter 7, The Literary Detectives Analysis

The illogic of financial institutions is the target of the gags in the first part of Chapter 5. This target changes to corporations that remake or rebrand their images, yet work similarly as before but with different buzz terms. Thursday had met the man at the counter of the coffee shop, and he had been a ruthless thug. Now his job is to serve various kinds of coffee beverages, and he has entirely changed into a mild-mannered corporate slug, encouraging all whom he meets to apply for a job at Goliath. The overall message is that real life is stranger than fiction because none of it has to make sense.

Besides the absurdities recounted while Thursday speaks with the other SpecOps employees and Hicks, the big joke in Chapter 6 has to do with golf. Thursday is not at all attracted to the sport, but Hicks cannot let her get away with not even trying the addictive pastime. This reflects how many golf enthusiasts treat others who have no interest, especially if they are subordinate employees. Rather than becoming upset with Hicks and his constant urging, Thursday realizes that going along with him would serve her purpose of regaining her old job. She accepts the invitation and thinks about how help can come from the most unanticipated sources in real life.

Chapter 7 is full of literary puns, which is appropriate for a story based somewhat on Shakespeare, who is known to have often used puns in his comedies. At this point it appears that Thursday will have her hands full, since she knows how to smuggle cheese into England, but not how to smuggle anything out. A point that had been mentioned earlier in the book is emphasized in this chapter: the fact that Yorrick Kaine is actually a character from fiction who was somehow brought into the real world. The difficulty is that nobody knows what story he came from, and this information is required to put him back into Book World. The conclusion is that Kaine's character must have been a minor one in some obscure story.



Chapter 8, Time Waits for No Man; Chapter 9, Eradications Anonymous; Chapter 10, Mrs. Tiggy-winkle

Chapter 8, Time Waits for No Man; Chapter 9, Eradications Anonymous; Chapter 10, Mrs. Tiggy- winkle Summary

In search of her father, Thursday goes to the ChronoGuard in Chapter 8. She observes as the room changes rapidly as if a time-lapse video and notices that one detail remains constant: a desk with an old-fashioned stick telephone on it. She lifts the receiver and hears a recorded message with multiple choices. She selects the last one that puts her in contact with an operative, and her father immediately appears in the room. They have a conversation about what he had been doing that is very confused due to all the time travel. He then tells her that to avoid Armageddon, she must make sure that Swindon wins the SuperHoop croquet championship. This will not be easy because the Swindon team is not very good.

In Chapter 9, Thursday attends an Eradications Anonymous meeting at her mother's house. Since Thursday's husband, Landen, had been eradicated through time travel and a knock on the bedchamber door, she was allowed to attend. The idea of the support group was to accept that loved ones lost to time travel only existed in memory but had never lived in reality. Thursday thinks that the group's philosophy merely ignores the reality of time travel and the confusion that results.

Chapter 10 is a short episode in which the six-foot tall hedgehog, Mrs. Tiggy-winkle, shows up in Thursday's mother's house. She is wearing a dress and bonnet and is very upset with many of the things happening in Book World. The worst has to do with the rewriting of Hamlet. Other characters are revising and putting themselves as the main character. Mrs. Tiggy-winkle asks Thursday to keep Hamlet occupied until all the rewriting calms down.

Chapter 8, Time Waits for No Man; Chapter 9, Eradications Anonymous; Chapter 10, Mrs. Tiggy- winkle Analysis

Thursday's mission changes in Chapter 8 to ensuring that a very minor event happens, and if it does not, the world will be destroyed in a global thermonuclear war. The lightness of her father's mood contrasts with the news that he gives her and adds to the humor of the absurd: The world will be saved, but only if an underdog croquet team

wins the SuperHoop. However, that will somehow get rid of Yorrick Kaine, so she might be able to accomplish her primary mission while saving the world.

Chapter 9 explores what reality is and how it is perceived. Thursday knows that she had once been married to Landen and that time travel happens often in this world from her experiences with her father. Still, the support group partakes in mutual confirmation of a wrong take on reality. The humor lifts off when a former member of the group shows up with her husband who had been lost in time travel. The group does not remember the woman, but a comment is made that this sort of thing has been happening quite often.

When characters in Hamlet take on lives of their own, an implied but not stated trite character description, their egos wreck havoc on the original work. Everybody wants their points of view to predominate. However, rather than having characters enter and leave the stage through various doors as in an actual theatrical comedy, the action is given through the words of a ridiculously-dressed giant hedgehog that can speak and shed tears.

Chapter 11, The Greatness of St. Zvlkx; Chapter 12, Spike and Cindy

Chapter 11, The Greatness of St. Zvlkx; Chapter 12, Spike and Cindy Summary

In Chapter 11, Thursday and her brother, Joffey, go to the site where the Great Cathedral of Swindon once stood. Only a single arched doorway remains. The rest has been torn down and replaced by a shopping area. The big attraction is the reincarnation of St. Zvlkx from the Thirteenth Century. St. Zvlkx had made several predictions that came true, and he is supposed to be bringing another.

At first it seems that the saint will not be showing up, but then he does and gives the revelation. He says that if Swindon wins the croquet championship, the Goliath Corporation will be lost.

In Chapter 12, Thursday drives to Crickdale in her Speedster to visit Spike, an old friend who had married Cindy, the assassin who is trying to kill her. She talks with Cindy about possibly giving up the assignment, but she insists on completing it and advises Thursday to hide somewhere. Meanwhile, Spike has no idea that Cindy is a professional assassin. After having tea with the couple, Thursday takes a Gravitube to Liverpool and a shuttle to Goliathopolis. Her intention is to get her husband back from the corporation that had thwarted his ever being born via time travel.

Although the book has a Chapter 13 in its table of contents, it does not exist among the actual chapters. Chapter 14 immediately follows Chapter 12. In the table of contents, Chapter 13 is entitled Milton. The author skips Chapter 13 in all of his novels.

Chapter 11, The Greatness of St. Zvlkx; Chapter 12, Spike and Cindy Analysis

Chapter 11 adds more ironic humor to the story. St. Zvlkx is anything but saintly, making comments about an attractive woman and describing the Thirteenth Century in crude terms. His revelation, called a revealment in the story, causes Thursday to wonder just what significance a croquet game could possibly have for stopping a tyrant and taking down the huge Goliath Corporation that controls most people's lives. However, the primary comedic thrust has to do with what some modern religions have become: irreverent, corporate structures with little connection to faith or spirituality. While the Goliath Corporation takes some terminology from religion in its faith-based approach to creating a population entirely within its control, the Global Standard Deity (GSD) acts like a public relations branch of the business.



The scene of the meeting with Cindy, Thursday's assassin, is an example of ironic intrigue. Spike has no clue as to what his wife is really like, since she puts on a show of being not very bright and entirely harmless as his wife. The couple has a one-year-old daughter, and that adds to the sense of unreality that Thursday has encountered. While she and Cindy discuss business, they are hanging up laundry, a serious conversation wrapped in a domestic chore.

The skipping of Chapter 13 is the author's consistent practice. Many office buildings also skip the thirteenth floor, since having one would be inviting bad luck. He may be thinking along the same lines or showing how silly the superstition is.

Chapter 14, The Goliath Apologarium; Chapter 15, Meeting the CEO

Chapter 14, The Goliath Apologarium; Chapter 15, Meeting the CEO Summary

The Goliath Corporation's headquarters is located on the Isle of Man, and this is where Thursday goes next in Chapter 14. She locates the Goliath Apologarium and takes a number. She has a very long wait, but an employee named Jack Schitt, an old enemy of hers, offers to expedite her request to get her husband back. They go to his office, but Thursday refuses to sign the offered paperwork. She does not trust the Goliath Corporation at all due to her past experiences with it. The CEO of the corporation calls Schitt and offers him a promotion if he can persuade Thursday to sign the paperwork. She still refuses, and the CEO invites her to visit him in his office. She agrees to do that.

In Chapter 15, Thursday is escorted into the boardroom of the Goliath Corporation. She had to give up her gun and loaded magazines beforehand, and since the board meeting is still underway, the CEO bids her to sit and observe. His name is John Henry Goliath V, the great-great grandson of the founder. The boardroom is located at the top of a very tall building, and Thursday imagines that it must feel godly to be conducting business from this height.

The board discusses the proposed purchase of Antarctica. The main intent is to sell penguin meat, and the problem is the meat is inedible, it tastes so terrible. Ideas are offered on how to market the product, among them fake scientific findings that the meat is very good for health and an advertising pitch that people should eat penguin before the species goes extinct.

After the meeting ends and most of the members leave, Thursday listens to Goliath's persuasive arguments on why she should trust the corporation to bring her husband back. She agrees to sign the required papers and heads back to her mother's house. By the time she gets there, she realizes that the Goliath Corporation had once again fooled her into trusting it and she is furious.

Chapter 14, The Goliath Apologarium; Chapter 15, Meeting the CEO Analysis

The humor in Jack Schitt's name is obvious, and his behavior confirms that he knows next to nothing other than what he is told by the corporation. Thursday's belligerence frustrates the weak man who at one time posed a big threat to her, but only because he had led a small army of thugs. As an apologist for the corporation, he has very little

power. The next chapter involves the CEO, and the question left hanging is whether Thursday's belligerence will survive the encounter.

John Henry Goliath's persuasion has to do with the Goliath Corporation becoming a religion, one that will eventually replace all other religions. The vision sounds very good to Thursday, and the quality of Goliath's voice impresses her for its almost godly strength. As with other utopian dreams, the devil is in the details. Everyone will be required to work for Goliath and believe only what the corporation promotes. The proposal is, at its core, not anything more than world domination and tyranny of the body, mind, and soul. Thursday realizes this and becomes angry, perhaps more with herself for having fallen for the old line than with the corporation itself.

The tallness of the Goliath corporate headquarters pokes through clouds the day that Thursday visits. It is probably the tallest building in the world, and that the corporate goal is to become a religion follows logically the way that the CEO describes it. This part of the book carries undertones of menace along with the humor. Goliath is serious about becoming the architect of a world religion, inventing mythology as he sees fit and being the unquestioned mastermind behind it all. An expectation is that his absolute power will severely corrupt the world unless Thursday takes action. She now has two possible dictators, Kaine, who only wants England, and Goliath, who wants the entire world.

Chapter 16, The Evening; Chapter 17, Emperor Zhark; Chapter 18, Emperor Zhark Again

Chapter 16, The Evening; Chapter 17, Emperor Zhark; Chapter 18, Emperor Zhark Again Summary

In Chapter 16 Hamlet enters Thursday's mother's house with Emma. They had taken in a theater's presentation of the play, Hamlet, and the living Hamlet seems to not have liked it. When he settles down and stops spouting off Shakespearean lines that require footnote translations from Fforde, the truth comes out. He was not angry over the performance but with the competition afterward in a bar, in which twelve other Hamlet-types and he recited the same soliloquy, and he came in last place. The drinkers in the bar had served as judges.

Thursday retreats to the kitchen. While there, in a dramatic show of electrical energy, Emperor Zhark shows up with two of his ruthless soldiers. The author emphasizes that among tyrants, Zhark was the worst.

Chapters 17 and 18 both feature Emperor Zhark. He is a character from a series of bad science fiction novels. In the books he is a merciless tyrant who enjoys destroying entire worlds in various ways. While talking with Thursday, he acts differently. He tells her that he has a new agent, and that agent has negotiated a better contract: His character must appear in at least two chapters of the book. He relays a message to Thursday that Shakespearean plays are being melded together, and she takes this news as a serious threat to literature. She decides that, since original manuscripts do not exist, she will bring William Shakespeare in to write the originals, and thereby stop the plot melding in its tracks. Zhark thinks this is insanity. He does not know about time travel.

In Chapter 18, Zhark reappears briefly to tell Thursday that his author will be killing off his character in the next book. This has upset Zhark very much and he pleads for her help. She tells him that she can do nothing and Zhark leaves without any hope for surviving in Book World.

Chapter 16, The Evening; Chapter 17, Emperor Zhark; Chapter 18, Emperor Zhark Again Analysis

The Hamlet scene fulfills the humor that had been foreshadowed in an earlier chapter. While Hamlet had some criticism for the performance, he is mostly insulted that nobody understands what the Hamlet character is supposed to be like. Then he loses a competition judged by a bar full of, very probably, drunks, and the humor comes to a

close. A parallel exists in how Fforde puts the action off-stage, which is typical for Shakespearean tragedies. As for Emperor Zhark, the action is brought front and center through a dramatic entrance.

Fforde makes fun of Shakespeare in Chapter 17, and then of the seemingly frightful Zhark in Chapter 18. Fforde also meets the requirements of Zhark's new contract by having him appear in two chapters. A few comedic jabs are directed at the science fiction genre and its clichés. The handling of Zhark goes along the lines of people confusing the characters that actors play with the actors themselves. Zhark is not as mean as he is while in character. Thursday actually likes the man outside his character. He seems vulnerable due to, perhaps, a strict upbringing.

Chapter 19, Cloned Will Hunting; Chapter 20, Chimeras and Neanderthals

Chapter 19, Cloned Will Hunting; Chapter 20, Chimeras and Neanderthals Summary

Joffy brings St. Zvlkx to Thursday's mother's house in Chapter 19. The reincarnated saint acts anything but saintly, more of a lecherous old man, and Joffy in his translations from Old English covers for the dubious saint. They have breakfast and St. Zvlkx eats his eggs and bacon with his hands.

Thursday drives into town to the SpecOps building where she meets with Bowden who is just finishing packing up a box full of banned Danish literature. Bowden tells her that Shakespeare clones have been showing up in the morgue. Cloning of humans had always been banned, but genetic sequencing kits had also been available to the general public for a period of time. There is not any technical reason preventing humans from being cloned, and so they are. Thursday and Bowden decide to solicit the help of Agent Stiggins of SO-13, the general policing division to investigate further.

In Chapter 20 Thursday and Bowden go to Brunel Centre, a shopping area, on their way to Agent Stiggins' office. They see a chimera eating out of a trash bin. Chimeras are the results of amateur scientists playing around with genetic engineering with their now banned cloning kits. This one has hind goat legs, a lizard tail and forelegs, a feline head, and a single human arm about the size of a child's. The horrible creature has panicked the shoppers, and as Thursday and Bowden look on, Agent Stiggins, a cloned neanderthal, shows up to kill the chimera. He does this out of pity for the beast, a kindness that he shares with other Neanderthals who had been cloned to serve as soldiers. That idea had not worked out because the Neanderthals are surprisingly gentle, honest, and have high ethical values, unlike human beings. After he does what, by his ethics, needed to be done, he agrees to help Thursday and Bowden investigate the Shakespeare clones. The Swindon morgue has three dead specimens, and that becomes Stiggins', Bowden's, and Thursday's destination.

Chapter 19, Cloned Will Hunting; Chapter 20, Chimeras and Neanderthals Analysis

The episode with the chimera carries the most dramatic weight so far in the story. People create ghastly creatures with their banned cloning kits, and some of the monstrosities get loose. The creatures are almost always ugly and suffering an unimaginable existence due to the irresponsible ways in which they were put together. Only Stiggins, the neanderthal clone, understands how deeply this goes because he suffers an existence that never should have been reintroduced into the world of human

beings. His species died out for a reason, and the implication is that the gentle Neanderthals had been slaughtered by the early humans.

Interspersed with the serious side of the story are many jokes, gags, and puns that have to do with literature and science gone crazy. The liberal amount of humor reduces the horror of the chimera and its maker, a pathetic man who cries over his dead monster, and leads directly into the problem of cloned Shakespeare bodies showing up at the morgue.

Chapter 21, Victory on the Victory; Chapter 22, Roger Kapok; Chapter 23, Granny Next; Chapter 24, Home Again

Chapter 21, Victory on the Victory; Chapter 22, Roger Kapok; Chapter 23, Granny Next; Chapter 24, Home Again Summary

In Chapter 21, Thursday is taken back in time by her father. They experience a battle between Admiral Nelson and the French, in which her father saves Nelson's life by using a slingshot to hit him with a musket ball in the knee. This causes Nelson to bend over just as a sniper shoots and misses him. They travel quickly forward into time, and he leaves her with Bowden. Before doing so, he warns her that she must keep the Goliath Corporation from stopping Roger Kapok from playing croquet. He is the star player for the Swindon Mallots.

In Chapter 22, Thursday warns Kapok about the Goliath Corporation, but shortly afterward, two men from the corporation convince Kapok not to play. He had either been bribed or threatened. The team manager also quits, leaving Thursday as acting manager for the team. She asks one of the players what the chances were that Swindon would win the SuperHoop match, and he says that the chances were very bad. In Chapter 23 Thursday talks with her grandmother before returning to her mother's house. Granny Next has little to say about Thursday's troubles with the Swindon Mallets. In Chapter 24 Thursday hears about Daisy Mutlar, and since this was a woman whom her eradicated husband had almost married, she realized that he had been brought back from eradication. In Chapter 25 she goes to Landen's house and receives a cold reception. He had indeed come back from eradication, but due to the dynamics of time and history changes, he had also married Daisy because Thursday had been gone for two years without sending him any word on her whereabouts.

Chapter 21, Victory on the Victory; Chapter 22, Roger Kapok; Chapter 23, Granny Next; Chapter 24, Home Again Analysis

This set of chapters bring Thursday closer to a big climax. Her father shows up to give her advice about winning the SuperHoop match, but her attempts at keeping the Swindon Mallets together fail. She cannot compete with the Goliath Corporation and its money or muscle leverage. Her grandmother is no help, and then she discovers that her eradicated husband is back. This could have been good news had he not married Daisy Mutlar during Thursday's two-year absence. The convolutions of time travel and working

in Book World have put Thursday into an extremely bad set of circumstances. If she cannot manage to win the SuperHoop, the world will end. If she does manage this, she will go on living but not with her husband and father to her son, Friday.

Chapter 25, Practical Difficulties Regarding Uneradications; Chapter 26, Breakfast with Mycroft; Chapter 27, Weird Shit on the M4

Chapter 25, Practical Difficulties Regarding Uneradications; Chapter 26, Breakfast with Mycroft; Chapter 27, Weird Shit on the M4 Summary

In Chapter 25, Landen reveals that he had been joking about marrying Daisy. Thursday and he talk about his eradication, and they prepare to reestablish their sexual relationship. Thursday takes off her clothes and enters the bedroom, expecting Landen to be there, but instead she finds his father and mother. Surprised, shocked, and embarrassed, she leaves quickly, claiming she had walked into the wrong house. What had happened was that Landen's uneradication had not taken hold.

In Chapter 26, Thursday and her uncle Mycroft talk at her mother's house about his mad scientist work. Mycroft had attended MadCon-88 with his wife, Polly, where he presented his findings on a new kind of mathematics he calls Nextian Number Theory. The point is to determine how a result had been calculated, for example whether 9 was the result of $8+1$, 3×3 , or any other variation. Thursday does not grasp how this math could possibly work, but Mycroft is convinced that entire novels can be compressed to simple equations using his new math. Hamlet comes into the house, and he is terribly upset over losing Emma to her now saved husband, Admiral Nelson. Thursday discovers that Friday has picked up Old English words from St. Zvlkx, and her mother admits to having an affair with Bismark.

The strange thing that happens on M4, a highway, in Chapter 27 is the disappearance of President Formby. His entire vehicle melted away into nothingness while in a three-car motorcade. The agents assigned to travel with Formby saw this happen and assumed that the car had gone over the edge of the highway, but they found no sign of that happening. Thursday and Spike, who works with the undead (ghouls, zombies, vampires and the occasional werewolf), discuss the event with the agents. Spike theorizes that Formby had asked the driver to pull over at the next service station, and that station had been a gateway to the world of the undead. The agents express their skepticism, after which Spike takes Thursday for a drive. He finds a portal into the undead world, and they enter it.



Chapter 25, Practical Difficulties Regarding Uneradications; Chapter 26, Breakfast with Mycroft; Chapter 27, Weird Shit on the M4 Analysis

The real world that Thursday inhabits becomes ever more absurd as her eradicated husband returns but disappears at a very embarrassing moment for her. What had started as a playful and erotic scene turns into a disaster of an unexpected twist and a belly laugh for the reader. The humor continues with Hamlet's endless soliloquy regarding his misery after losing Emma to her husband, who had been saved by Thursday's father and his slingshot. This kind of gag is termed a callback in comedy, which the author uses in other contexts. Other examples are the advice that Thursday receives about her croquet team and the continual assumption by other characters in the book that her two-year absence involved her being in prison.

The author sets up future jokes with Thursday's uncle Mycroft, who is a mad scientist, but apparently in this world, mad scientists are accepted and actually have a yearly convention called MadCon, a play on the names of actual conventions such as ComicCon. The joke setup has to do with his new mathematics and how that will impact literature by saving a great deal of space via compression. The source of this concept is likely the compression algorithms used in computers to save disk space, but in Thursday's real world, the math compresses the literature itself, not its electronic representation.

The disappearance of President Formby is a plot twist that brings Spike, an expert on the undead, and Thursday into the land of the undead. She will need Spike's help because she has never been here before, and it is a very dangerous place. Shortly before this twist, Thursday had tried to expose the true profession of Spike's wife, Cindy, who is the assassin trying to kill Thursday. Spike thinks that his wife is a librarian. When Thursday asks how much money she makes at being a librarian, Spike says that she brings home suitcases full of cash from special librarian assignments. He does not realize that the money was payment for assassinations and not straightening out card catalogs, but since he works in the crazy world of the undead, he sees nothing wrong.

Chapter 28, Dauntsey Services; Chapter 29, The Cat Formerly Known as Cheshire; Chapter 30, Neanderthal Nation

Chapter 28, Dauntsey Services; Chapter 29, The Cat Formerly Known as Cheshire; Chapter 30, Neanderthal Nation Summary

In Chapter 28, Thursday and Spike attempt to rescue President Formby from an early death. He is due to die from natural causes in six days, but due to a shady scheme of the undead to sell souls that still have life in them, he is in danger. This part of the undead world is a portal from which people who have died in car accidents are staged before they are sent across a bridge into an absolute death state. The living and the undead can interact here, and since Spike has taken a sawed-off shotgun from a car, and Thursday has one gun on her and another she had stashed during a previous visit via time travel, a shootout occurs between them and the shady underworld characters who are undead. In a hostage exchange ruse, Spike trades Thursday for Formby, but then tricks one of the undead to release his hold on his head, which had been chopped off in real life. The head rolls off; Thursday kicks it into the basketball net of an arcade game; Spike fires his shotgun and destroys the other undead character, and they escape with Formby back into the real world.

In Chapter 29, Thursday learns from the Cat formerly known as Cheshire that the Yorrick Kaine character originated in a self-published novel by a now famous romance novelist. If Thursday can locate a copy, she will be able to send Kaine back to Book World. She realizes that the novelist is Danish, and this explains why Kaine is burning all Danish literature. He wants to get rid of all copies of the book that could lead to his undoing.

In Chapter 30, Thursday and Bowden visit the Neanderthal Nation and the investigator, Bartholomew Stiggins. Stiggins introduces his wife, Felicity, who is also Neanderthal. The couple have prepared rabbit for dinner, much to the relief of Thursday and Bowden. They had worried that they would be served live beetles, a favorite neanderthal food. Thursday learns that the origination of the Shakespeare clones is Wales, and she cuts a deal with Stiggins that she will take him along in her investigation if five of the best neanderthal croquet players compete for her in the SuperHoop championship. The Neanderthals are interested in the Welsh genetics laboratory because that is where they had originated and they may be able to undo the genetic engineering that had made all the males sterile. They want to have children.



Chapter 28, Dauntsey Services; Chapter 29, The Cat Formerly Known as Cheshire; Chapter 30, Neanderthal Nation Analysis

The antics in Chapter 29 are pure slapstick. One of the bad guys has a head that will fall off if he doesn't keep it in place with one hand. The shotgun blasts and bullets from Thursday's guns are lethal, even though the place is populated by the undead and those soon to become very dead. Running, leaping, rolling and hiding along a passageway with arcade games lining it add to the action. Thursday finds out that Spike has no idea what he is doing, which brings in a classic dialog regarding her reaction to the revelation. In the end the heroes leave with their mission having been accomplished through trickery and fast reflexes.

Chapter 30 moves the plot forward by revealing Kaine's motive for destroying all Danish literature. The elaborate scheme, which includes political propaganda against everything Danish, is meant to get rid of about a hundred copies of a self-published novel that has him appearing twice, an indication that this terrible dictator is a very minor character in the story. The Cat formerly known as Cheshire is called this due to a rezoning that put his origination outside of Cheshire and into the Unitary Authority of Warrington.

Neanderthals differ from humans in several striking ways. They do not compete with each other; they never lie to anyone; they can tell whenever a human lies and what emotions are seething within; they use all materials to their utmost efficiency, and they always travel by foot. The implication is that Neanderthals are better suited to living harmoniously within nature and would have thrived had it not been for human competitiveness. They only exist in the real world due to the efforts of the Goliath Corporation. Stiggins accepts the deal to provide five croquet players, which leaves the reader wondering how the uncompetitive players will manage to win the SuperHoop competition.

Chapter 31, Planning Meeting; Chapter 32, Area 21: The Elan; Chapter 33, Shgakespeafe

Chapter 31, Planning Meeting; Chapter 32, Area 21: The Elan; Chapter 33, Shgakespeafe Summary

When Thursday returns to her mother's house in Chapter 31, she finds that Landen has been uneradicated again. He pops in and out of eradication irregularly, and this time he stays around for longer than the others. She spots her stalker, Millon, hiding in the bushes and goes outside to talk with him. She wants him to gather as much information about the old Goliath BioE facility in Wales because she knows he is deeply into conspiracy theories. He agrees to do this if she will make him her official biographer. She and Landen finally have some bed time, but before they begin, she complains about all the people watching. What she means are all the people reading her story in this book.

In Chapter 32, Thursday and Bowden discover that an invention by her uncle Mycroft, the Ovinator, is being used by Kaine to control those people around him. The Ovinator sends out mind control waves that make people docile and obedient. The two leave for Wales, along with Millon and Stiggins, followed by a caravan of trucks containing banned Danish literature. They have no problem getting through the border guards by using the Ovinator to gain their cooperation. While inside the BioE grounds, they feel apprehensive because everything is too quiet and they had found evidence of violent deaths. The BioE facility is dilapidated and falling down, and someone speaks to them.

The someone who spoke is a Shakespeare clone named Shgakespeafe, as Chapter 33 is named. He explains that many clones had been created by the Goliath Corporation in the hope that one of them would be as talented as the original Shakespeare. The experiment failed, and most of the clones were killed and put into mass graves. Stiggins finds the documentation he needs to attempt reversing the sterility engineering imposed upon the Neanderthals, and because the Shakespeare clone mystery is solved, everyone packs into the car and attempt to leave. A group of chimeras block their way, but then another group of cloned Napoleons scare them away. The Napoleons attack the car, and then a group of cloned Wellingtons distract them with a canon shot. This allows Thursday and the others to escape the BioE facility unharmed.



Chapter 31, Planning Meeting; Chapter 32, Area 21: The Elan; Chapter 33, Shakespeafe Analysis

The BioE facility visit ties up some mysteries. Kaine seems to have an inordinate amount of charisma, and this is not due to his people skills but a machine, the Ovinator, invented by Thursday's uncle Mycroft. However, Mycroft could not have suspected this because his and his wife's brains had been purged of memories while he was working on a machine designed to do this for people living with crippling traumatic shock memories. Part of the confusion was that Thursday and others were thinking ovum, the Latin term for an egg, but Mycroft had been thinking ovis, the Latin term for a sheep. Rather than cooking eggs, the machine turns people into obedient sheep.

The project of cloning Shakespeare fails for the Goliath Corporation, as did the other experiments with the one possible exception of the Neanderthals. The underlying problem with cloning a famous writer and expecting the clone to have the same talent could be that talent and genetics have little or no relationship. Other traits are directly connected with genetics, such as the Neanderthals' ability to tell when humans are lying and their other natural tendencies toward efficiency and socializing. On the other hand, humans are very good at deceiving both others and themselves. The author seems to be addressing an old question of what makes a person, nurture (experience) or nature (genetics).

The Neanderthals think highly of Thursday because she does not hide anything, does not have a habit of lying, and she dispenses with human prattle because she knows they have no patience for it. The point is that humans and Neanderthals could coexist just fine if they tried to understand each other and cooperate. The unfortunate truth is that the Goliath Corporation owns the Neanderthals and has offered a deal where they can buy themselves back, similar to how slaves have been able to buy their freedom at various times in history. The author is mocking how some humans have considered others to be property, even in a country that considers all to have been born free.

Chapter 34, St. Zvlkx and Cindy; Chapter 35, What Thursday Did Next; Chapter 36, Kaine v. Next; Chapter 37, Before the Match

Chapter 34, St. Zvlkx and Cindy; Chapter 35, What Thursday Did Next; Chapter 36, Kaine v. Next; Chapter 37, Before the Match Summary

In Chapter 34, Thursday calls Cindy the day before the SuperHoop competition and tries to negotiate out of the third assassination attempt. Cindy tells her that this is highly unethical and refuses, after which Mrs. Tiggy-winkle appears to pick up Shakespeare to help straighten out the confusion of the play, Hamlet, with another of Shakespeare's works in Book World. After this Thursday makes breakfast for her family, and then she and Joffy go to the room where St. Zvlkx is staying. They find the room empty and look for his Book of Revelments, but it is not in the room. The two then go to Swindon in search of St. Zvlkx and find him, but then he is hit by a bus. Before dying, he hands his Book of Revelments to Joffy. Shortly after, Cindy shows up with Spike, but before she can shoot Thursday, a piano falls, and the bench hits Cindy square on the head, knocking her out and saving Thursday's life.

In Chapter 35, Cindy is in critical condition at the hospital. Spike realizes that his wife is the notorious assassin, the Windowmaker, called such due to a typo on her business cards. She visits her grandmother, who tells her, "the facts are all in front of us—we just have to get them in the right order" (p. 309). She then checks in on her croquet team at the stadium where the SuperHoop championship will be played on the next day. The human team members express concern about having a neanderthal defense. She then receives a written invitation at her mother's house to meet Kaine in a hanger at the Swindon Airpark.

In Chapter 36, Thursday goes to the Airpark to meet Kaine. She loads her gun with eraserhead cartridges as a defense against the fictional character, because only the eraserhead bullets can kill him. An evil beast from fiction comes at her, and she destroys it with a shot from her pistol, after which Kaine confronts her. She tries to shoot him, but he keeps conjuring fictional characters to take the shots. He then conjures Medusa who almost turns Thursday into stone, but the Cheshire Cat shows up just in time and conjures up the hero warrior, Beowulf. He slices the head off Medusa neatly with a single swing of his great broadsword. Kaine brings in a Tyrannosaurus Rex from a boy's book on dinosaurs, and Beowulf becomes the monster's lunch. This kind of fighting goes on until Kaine cheats and brings in the kraken, a monster so horrible that nothing the Cheshire Cat can think of would defeat it. Instead, the cat thinks quickly and



conjures the Blue Fairy that had made Pinocchio a real boy. The fairy turns Kaine into a real human, which causes the kraken to disappear. Kaine quickly escapes as a now weak and faulted human being.

In Chapter 37, the SuperHoop game is about to begin. Kaine arrives with a lackey who carries the Ovinator in a red briefcase. His intention is to make Thursday conceded the game, but Hamlet arrives and thrusts his sword into the briefcase, destroying the mind-control machine. He then threatens Kaine that a massive amount of people will be very upset if the game does not go on, and these are the fans of Kaine's author, Ms. Daphne Farquitt. The game starts, but arguments about the rules delay it. As it turns out, Neanderthals are not allowed to play because they are not human. This puts Swindon at a great disadvantage that nearly costs them the game to forfeiture because they no longer have enough players to start. Thursday agrees to play, since she had been a croquet player before but not at the professional level, and the game starts.

Chapter 34, St. Zvlkx and Cindy; Chapter 35, What Thursday Did Next; Chapter 36, Kaine v. Next; Chapter 37, Before the Match Analysis

Thursday's grandmother gives her a mysterious hint at what is going on that foreshadows the stories climactic ending. For now she must do the best she can with what she has, and that turns out to be not enough without help. The Cheshire Cat appearing saves the day for her in the Airpark hanger, a rather handy way to bring the hero out of a near death situation. In this story the weak plot line works due to the proximity of Book World to reality. While in a crazy place like this, anything can happen, and this is a part of the overall theme. The point is that humans do not have the capacity to understand exactly how crazy real life actually is, a point that physics has brought out with multiple dimensions, parallel worlds, string theory, and the so-called God particle. If we live largely in an illusion, why cannot a thing like Book World or a waiting room for passing from one plane, reality, to another, death, exist? The author's story takes the impossible and makes it possible via fiction, placing such things as a kraken into a deadly reality for Thursday.

The legal wrangling before the SuperHoop game makes fun of our legal systems. The arguments only make sense within the context of convoluted legal logic based on precedence, and important decisions are made on dubious authority. While frustrated beyond anyone's imagination in the story because she knows the fate of the world is in her hands, Thursday steps up to play the now brutal sport of professional croquet. She has no choice. Losing the game would mean global thermonuclear war. This kind of plotline is hidden to the characters, but the reader shares in Thursday's concern. The similarity to some of Shakespeare's plays would be obvious to readers familiar with his work, but Fforde does not point this out in any obvious way because doing so would reduce the comedic impact.

Cindy's injury by piano is a surprise taken straight out of the cartoon world. When Thursday again found herself in a hopeless situation, something unexpected and completely unbelievable in either fiction or reality happened to save her. This is likely the author making fun of stories that solve difficult problems for the protagonist by acts of the gods, known as *deus ex machina* among literary techniques. This is usually a sign of bad fiction, but in this context the author gets away with it.



Chapter 38, WCL SuperHoop-88; Chapter 39, Sudden Death; Chapter 40, Second First Person

Chapter 38, WCL SuperHoop-88; Chapter 39, Sudden Death; Chapter 40, Second First Person Summary

In Chapter 38, the Swindon Mallets take to the field against the Reading Whackers. The game is separated into thirds, and during the first third, the Whackers run up a high score. Things are looking hopeless for the Mallets, and then another ruling eliminates one of their star players because she had been born in Denmark while her parents were on vacation. This goes against the Danish Economic (Scapegoat) Act that Kaine had enacted five minutes before. With only five players against eleven, the Mallets play nothing but defense for the second third, which keeps the Whackers from gaining too many points. Before the last third begins, the Neanderthals are allowed to play because part of their genetic engineering included a human voice box, making them 1.03 percent human. Since they could not be categorized as nonhuman, they are declared human enough to play croquet. The game ends in a tie.

In Chapter 39, the sudden death play begins. All goes well at first, but then penalties start to hurt the Mallets. Rain comes down in sheets as the last shot of the game for each team is performed. The referees need to measure the distances from pegs in order to declare a winner, and as this happens, the Minotaur, dressed in a trench coat and hat, runs up to Thursday and shoots her in the head.

The narrator changes from Thursday to her husband, Landen, in Chapter 40. He runs up to her prone body and checks for an exit wound, which he does not find. The medics arrive and determine that she is still alive, and later the ambulance takes her and Landen to the hospital. Thursday goes into surgery, but her condition is still critical when she comes out.

Chapter 38, WCL SuperHoop-88; Chapter 39, Sudden Death; Chapter 40, Second First Person Analysis

The author swings comedic jabs at sports, lawyers and politicians in these chapters. The odds are against Swindon to begin with and change from bad to worse as the game proceeds. When all looks lost, the team receives a lucky break on a technicality regarding the Neanderthals. When they join in, the game ends in a draw, leading to the complex and somewhat illogical sudden death overtime. Chapter 39 ends with a cliffhanger in which Thursday is shot in the head. She is not expected to survive and cannot speak for herself, so the narration of the story switches from Thursday's first

person voice to Landen's first person voice. Normally this would be a very bad thing to do without the use of multiple plot lines, but the author makes it into a side joke via the title of Chapter 40, and it fits into the overall ridiculousness of time travel and the parallel Book World reality that is actually fiction but still dangerous.

Chapter 41, Death Becomes Her; Chapter 42, Explanations; Chapter 43, Recovery; Chapter 44, Final Curtain

Chapter 41, Death Becomes Her; Chapter 42, Explanations; Chapter 43, Recovery; Chapter 44, Final Curtain Summary

In Chapter 41, the narrator switches back to Thursday, but she is in the waiting area for death. One of the henchmen she had dealt with earlier confirms her condition. Spike shows up and offers her escape in his car, which she starts to take but then changes her mind. There ensues an argument with a skeleton security guard who is trying to sort things out. President Fromby has died and is in line to cross the river with the ferryman, and as Thursday starts handing her coin to the ferryman, Cindy shows up. She argues that she should take Thursday's place in the boat because Cindy would otherwise be facing life in prison. She has nothing to live for, but Thursday does, and this would be a small atonement for the many people that Cindy had assassinated during her career. Thursday finally agrees with her.

Thursday learns that Swindon had won the SuperHoop championship once she awakes from her surgery in Chapter 42. The bullet had not penetrated into her brain, having come from a small caliber pistol that had also issued a cloth sign that read BANG! St. Zvlkx's Book of Revelments turns out to be a record of bets he had placed in the Thirteenth Century, and once the value is calculated, the amount is enough to buy out fifty-eight percent of the Goliath Corporation. The money belongs to the Toast Marketing Board. Without all his support, Kaine fades away into obscurity.

In Chapter 43, Thursday returns home and is visited by Hamlet. He was successful at straightening out the confused Shakespearean plays in Book World and has taken a permanent assignment to keep them in order. He has also learned why Hamlet had been portrayed in so many different ways, and he has accepted this situation. Her father then appears and tells her the truth about St. Zvlkx. His name was actually Steve Shultz, an illegal time traveler and a member of the Toast Marketing Board.

Chapter 44 adds an anticlimax that carries a greater impact than the actual climax of Swindon winning the SuperHoop and Thursday living through her attack. She learns that her grandmother is actually herself at one hundred and ten years old. A parade of people and characters from Book World come to visit old Thursday as she dies and young Thursday looks on.



Chapter 41, Death Becomes Her; Chapter 42, Explanations; Chapter 43, Recovery; Chapter 44, Final Curtain Analysis

The Toast Marketing Board appears throughout the book as the weak opposition to the Goliath Corporation. The irony of the riches that St. Zvlkx had earned over the centuries going to this organization, enabling it to buy up the controlling interest of the Goliath Corporation, puts a happy ending on the story. This also kills any ambition of the Goliath Corporation becoming a religion.

The climax ends the main story, and the anticlimax ties up many loose ends. Thursday learns the truth about St. Zvlkx and her grandmother, which puts young Thursday into the strange position of witnessing her own death and meeting people and characters from her own future. An added drama is that young Thursday must read the last chapter of a very dull book, and upon doing so, old Thursday will die. Old Thursday is finishing a sentence for a crime she had committed that required twenty years of wearing gingham dresses and reading the ten most boring books in literature. Young Thursday had just been given this sentence. The coexistence of the same person in the same time period usually does not fit the rules of time travel in other stories, but in this one, rules are merely illusions that humans superimpose on a reality that we can never fully comprehend.

Characters

Thursday Next

Thursday Next is the protagonist in the story. She has arrived home from her assignments in Book World, where fiction is like real life. Her job is to keep the stories straight. What she finds in Swindon is a dictator from fiction, a giant corporation trying to take over the world, an assassin attempting to shoot her, her formerly eradicated husband and the responsibility to save the world by making the Swindon Mallets win the SuperHoop championship.

Thursday is a heroic character who has strength, honesty and a sense of duty. She fights against the odds but also has important allies. Among them are the neanderthals who help her win the SuperHoop game. They admire her because she does not behave like most humans, which they consider too dishonest with others and themselves. Her narrative voice is the vehicle for much of the humor in the story as she makes wry observations and expresses the absurdity of various situations. She is also a mother, and her dealings with her two-year-old son, Friday, carry with them humor that many parents can understand.

Despite all the obstacles set in her path, Thursday manages to win the SuperHoop game and save the world. While doing so she must keep Hamlet out of trouble, Friday cared for, and deal with the gigantic Goliath Corporation. She is shot in the head toward the end of the story, but through a deal with her assassin, she survives and discovers the rich life ahead of her as Granny Next dies.

Yorrick Kaine

Yorrick Kaine is a fictional character who had somehow entered the real world. He has ambitions to become the dictator of England. Thursday spends some of her energy chasing down the book from which he had come because if she can obtain it, she can read him back to Book World. Meanwhile, Kaine has banned all Danish literature because his author is a famous Danish romance novelist. He hopes that the general ban will capture the remaining copies of the self-published novel.

Kaine is a primary antagonist, but he is also supported by the Goliath Corporation that has ambitions to take over the entire world. Regardless of his personal ambitions being somewhat askew of the Goliath Corporation's, he fights against Thursday with all he has at the Swindon Airport. Both he and Thursday can summon monsters from fiction, but it takes the Cat formerly known as Cheshire to defeat Kaine by turning him into a real human being via the use of the Blue Fairy from the Pinocchio story. Without his fictional powers, Kaine can no longer summon monsters.

Later on Kaine loses the Ovinator because Hamlet skewers it with his sword, and at the end of the story, Kaine becomes an obscure human being when the Goliath Corporation



is bought out by its rival. The irony is that Thursday had little to do with defeating Kaine other than being a threat to his existence in the real world.

Friday Next

Friday Next is Thursday's two-year-old son. He talks but in a Latin-like language that had been invented for training typesetters. The story sometimes features his linguistic abilities, including him picking up some Old English from St. Zvlkx.

Granny Next

Granny Next is actually Thursday at one hundred and ten years of age. Thursday occasionally visits her, and Granny sometimes gives important advice. Most of the time she acts as if nothing is odd about talking with her young self.

Landen Parke-Laine

Landen Parke-Laine is Thursday's husband. He had been eradicated but starts to show up in this story. His is a supportive role for Thursday but seldom is involved with the action.

Mycroft Next

Mycroft Next is Thursday's uncle. He invented the Ovinator, a device that turns people into docile and obedient sheep.

Cat formerly known as Cheshire

The Cat formerly known as Cheshire appears at just the right time when Thursday is fighting with Yorrick Kaine. The Cat cleverly defeats the evil Kaine, a character from obscure fiction.

Bowden Cable

Bowden Cable is one of Thursday's colleagues who accompanies her while she tries to unearth the facts about certain events.

Daphne Farquitt

Daphne Farquitt is the romance novelist who had self-published a story in which Yorrick Kaine appeared twice. Her book is important because if Thursday obtains it, she could

read Kaine back into Book World, thereby thwarting his plans to become the dictator of England.

Mrs. Tiggy-winkle

Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is a fictional giant hedgehog who works with Thursday sometimes in Book World and sometimes in the real world.

Emperor Zhark

Emperor Zhark is a character from bad science fiction who likes to destroy whole worlds while in character. Out of character, he behaves as any insecure actor afraid of being written out of his story.

Hamlet

Hamlet accompanies Thursday to the real world. He is confused about who he is, but by the time the story ends, he has come to accept his multifaceted character. He also destroys Kaine's Ovinator at a critical moment.

Bartholomew Stiggins

Bartholomew Stiggins is a Neanderthal who befriends Thursday and helps her discover why so many Shakespeare clones have shown up in the Swindon morgue.

St. Zvlkx

St. Zvlkx is a fraudulent saint from the Thirteenth Century. He had done illegal time travel and made bets on future events that he recorded in his Book of Revelments.

Minotaur

The Minotaur is a rogue character that Thursday tries to capture or destroy in the first part of the book. Toward the end, the Minotaur shoots Thursday in the head.

Chimeras

Chimeras are illegally produced creatures that are generally monstrosities concocted by amateurs with their genetic sequencing machines.

Objects/Places

Swindon

Swindon is where Thursday's mother lives and where most of the story takes place.

Book World

Book World is a parallel universe occupied by fictional characters and a few humans that know how to enter it.

Service Station

The service station is where the souls of dead people are staged before crossing a river into absolute death.

Neanderthal Nation

The Neanderthal Nation is a village of cloned Neanderthals that the Goliath Corporation had made in the hope of creating soldiers.

Goliath Corporation Headquarters

The Goliath Corporate Headquarters is an extremely tall building where the corporation oversees its vast operations.

Goliath Corporation Apologarium

The Goliath Corporation Apologarium is where citizens go to receive formal apologies from the corporation for its brutal activities before it became a faith-based organization.

Nebraska

Nebraska is the setting of the opening chapter in which Thursday seeks a rogue Minotaur that attacks her with slapstick comedy clichés.

Danish Literature

Yorrick Kaine bans Danish literature and burns all he can in order to destroy all copies of the book in which he appears.

Book of Revelments

The Book of Revelments is owned by St. Zvlkx and is actually a list of bets he had made in the Thirteenth Century.

Eraser Head Bullets

Eraser head bullets are the only projectiles that can destroy fictional characters by turning them into piles of random letters.

Evade the Question Television Show

The Evade the Question Television show rewards guests if they evade the questions and push their party lines instead.

The Ovinator

The Ovinator is an invention by Thursday's uncle Mycroft that turns people into docile and obedient sheep.

Themes

Incomprehensible Reality

A primary theme of the story involves the incomprehensibility of reality for human beings. We are capable of making up stories to explain our experiences, but if we were to see how intricately the concepts of time, matter, energy, and dimensions are intertwined, nothing would make sense. The author created the Book World and a place between life and death, but some theories in physics predict that many dimensions might exist, and we are unable to detect them at this time.

The story has some straight science fiction in it and plenty of fanciful creations, such as the six-foot hedgehog who can talk and give Thursday guidance and even orders. The chimeras are monstrosities thrown together by foolish humans with powerful genetic sequencing machines. This is an exaggeration of what actual genetic engineering does, but the fantasy nightmare could happen someday. It is a warning to us not to play God with genetics because many of us are foolish creatures. If we cannot understand nature, we should not be playing with it.

Literary Humor

The author is famous for injecting humor about literature into his stories. His Book World is full of all the known and many of the unknown works of fiction, including all of Shakespeare's plays. The Hamlet character plays an important comedic role in the real world and goes back to Book World to straighten out his play that has been intermingled with another Shakespearean play. Hamlet is also prone to long soliloquies about his suffering, most of which are entirely incomprehensible without footnotes. This in itself is poking fun at modern editions of Shakespearean plays that require extensive footnotes that explain the language.

The title of the book comes from Shakespeare, as do some of the plot elements. Hamlet does not want Ophelia to find out about his affair with Emma in the real world, for if she did, he would be in deep trouble. However, the literary humor is spread among many classic works of fiction and some that are considered trashy pulp fiction, such as romance and western novels. The comedic theme lends itself to many tongue-in-cheek gags and puns that may be missed by readers not familiar with the references, yet most stand on their own within the context of the story.

Corporate Inhumanity

The Goliath Corporation represents the inhumanity of corporations. Corporations exist only to expand their influences and make money for their stockholders, many of which are officers within the corporation. At one time a ruthless tyranny, the Goliath Corporation decides that a gentler approach would work better for the bottom line, and

this means taking over the entire world and controlling what everyone on earth thinks. The corporation plans to do this by establishing the dominant religion in the world.

The author sets the corporate headquarters on an island, and it is an extremely tall building. From this vantage point, John Henry Goliath V can control all that goes on below him, as if he were a god. The direct implication is that corporations have become more powerful than God, and that the tall steeples of churches and other religious buildings have been overshadowed by huge skyscrapers. Religion and the corporation have become one. The clear fault with this is that corporations have no intrinsic need to care about human beings, whereas most religions came into existence because so many people needed care.

Religious Mythology

The author lampoons religious mythology as hardly ever being in line with actual reality via the St. Zvlkx character and the designs of the Goliath Corporation to become a religion. St. Zvlkx is a fraud, a time traveler, an old lecher, a drunk, and a gambler. The Goliath Corporation cares nothing for spirituality and has as its primary focus power and profits. Together they paint a grim picture of what modern religious mythology is really about: greed and control.

This is not to say that all religious mythology falls into these two categories. The scene at the end of the book when Granny Next is dying and Thursday Next sees into her future carries with it an acknowledgement that, given the nature of the universe, many religious mythologies were likely attempts at explaining an incomprehensible reality. Thursday is given a vision that could be explained with time travel and parallel worlds, but this only makes sense in the light of modern physics. The ancient storytellers had to have cast the mythologies into terms that ancient people could understand, otherwise there would have been no stories to tell. Another point the author makes is that virtually all human experience shares the same fault of not being at all what reality really is because we are all incapable of comprehending it.

Style

Point of View

Most of the book is written from Thursday's point of view. She is the first-person narrator of the story, except for one chapter in which the first-person narrative shifts to her husband. This is necessary because Thursday is unconscious and busy negotiating for her life in the place between life and death. Thursday is a professional who keeps fiction straight in Book World, a mother, and a wife. Most of her observations are what most people would see and think given the same absurd circumstances. Her advantage is that she is accustomed to moving in and out of Book World and, although the concepts make her head swim, time travel. She accepts the strange things that happen and the odd characters she meets because that is just the way her realities are.

In several scenes Thursday detects human behavior that seems out of whack. She cannot understand Kaine's influence over people before she discovers that the Ovinator enables the impossible charisma that really does not exist. Kaine is nothing without this machine, merely a minor fictional character in a bad book. The influence that John Henry Goliath V has over her works, but she has no idea how the man pulls it off. He could really be some sort of god.

Setting

The story takes place in three realities: the Book World, the real world, and the place between life and death. The real world is Swindon, a small city in England. The Book World contains fictional settings, characters, and plots. The place between life and death is a service station with a fake cafeteria that never serves food but stages souls to move from here to actual death.

The story starts in Book World, and the setting is in Nebraska during the old western timeframe. Thursday moves from this setting to Swindon, where most of the story happens. She travels to the Goliath Corporation headquarters on an island once. Her primary residence in Swindon is her mother's house, and the important SuperHoop game takes place in the Swindon stadium. Thursday negotiates for her life in the service station between life and death. The story ends in Swindon as Granny Next, who is actually an older version of Thursday, dies.

Language and Meaning

The language is distinctly British but without British spellings. Several British slang terms are used, and they are understandable enough within context. Thursday tells her story using a great deal of dialog and directive narratives around the dialog parts. The relaxed style helps promote the humor in the story, especially when a pithy statement is made.

By necessity, some terms are constructs that do not exist in any dictionary, which is a common practice in science fiction. There is no such thing as an Ovinator, for example, and no corporations have an apologarium. However, a small city does exist in England named Swindon.

Implied meanings are promoted in the names of characters, places, and concepts. The name Thursday Next is a play on the common expression, next Thursday. St. Zvlkx has no vowels in his name, and it is nearly unpronounceable, which reflects his enigmatic existence. The Goliath Corporation is named after the founder, but it is also gigantic and powerful.

Structure

The book consists of 44 chapters set into a straight timeline. Since this is a first-person narration, the plot contains no subplots from the viewpoints of other characters, other than in Chapter 40 where Thursday's husband narrates. Time travel brings in an odd twist to the timeline, but since time travel is commonplace in Thursday's experiences, the overall sequence remains linear. The author always includes a Chapter 13 in the table of contents since such a chapter does not exist in the book.

Quotes

"One blast from the eraserhead [sic] in Bradshaw's rifle and the Minotaur would be reduced to the building blocks of his fictional existence: text and a bluish mist - all that is left when the bonds that link text to meaning are severed" (Chapter 1, p. 3-4).

"Good evening and welcome to Evade the Question Time, the nation's premier topical talk show. Tonight, as every night, a panel of distinguished public figures generally evade answering the audience's questions and instead toe the party line" (Chapter 3, p. 47).

"If the real world were a book, it would never find a publisher. Overlong, detailed to the point of distraction—ultimately, without a major resolution" (Chapter 5, p. 76).

"Sometimes help arrives from the last place you expect it" (Chapter 6, p. 89).

"Quite simply, we deny everything,' said Mr. Toedee, the Goliath head PR operative, 'including any story that you might have heard now or in the future'" (Chapter 7, p. 90).

"With Goliath and Kaine both having a vested interest in making sure the Swindon Mallets lost, chances of our victory had dropped from 'highly unlikely' to 'nigh impossible'" (Chapter 12, p. 126).

"By the time I had reached Tarbuck, the inane grin had subsided from my face; by the time I had arrived at Saknussum, I was confused; on the drive back to Swindon, I was suspicious that something wasn't quite right; by the time I had reached Mum's home, I was furious. I had been duped by Goliath - again" (Chapter 17, p. 150).

"If it's a chimera alert, we just follow the screams" (Chapter 19, p. 175).

"I stared at him, speechless. I think my mouth might even have dropped open at that point, and I was just wondering whether I should burst into tears, kill him with my bare hands, slam the door, scream, swear or all of the above at the same time when I noticed that Landen was doing that thing he does when he's trying not to laugh" (Chapter 25, p. 215).

"In the pursuit of great art, Goliath had perpetrated a crime that far outstripped anything I had seen so far" (Chapter 33, p. 291).

"She was good. She was the best. She was the Windowmaker. A contract with her and you're deader than corduroy" (Chapter 34, p. 305).

"Penelope was a large and powerful woman who looked as though she could crack walnuts with her eyelids" (Chapter 37, p. 326).

Topics for Discussion

Describe two of the comedic techniques that Fforde uses in his writing.

What will happen if the Swindon Mallets lose the SuperHoop game?

What is special about the way Friday Next speaks?

What is the Book of Revelments actually about?

How does the Goliath Corporation plan to gain control over the world?

Why do the neanderthals admire Thursday Next?

What does Spike do for a living?

What does Cindy do for a living?

Who is Granny Next?