

The Troop Study Guide

The Troop by Nick Cutter

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Plot Summary

"The Troop" is a horror novel by Nick Cutter which follows the efforts of Scoutmaster and doctor Tim Riggs and his scout troop to survive a viral infestation of genetically engineered intestinal hydatid worms. When the novel begins, Tim brings the five boys of Troop 52, all from the nearby town of Lower Montague, Prince Edward Island, Canada, to Falstaff Island for a weekend camping trip. The five 14 year-old boys include Kent, one of the most popular boys at school; Ephraim and Max, easy-going and well-liked kids; Newton, a nerdy kid; and Shelley, described as an odd duck. They settle down into the lone cabin on the island.

On the first night of the trip, Tim hears a motorboat arrive on shore. A short time later, he sees a very thin, very pale man approach the cabin. The man says he is starving. No matter how much he eats, he can't eat enough. Tim fears for the safety of the boys but also knows he has a duty as a doctor to help the thin man. He brings the thin man inside and sets him up on the couch, but tells the boys to stay in their bunkroom. The thin man coughs up slime on Tim, who wipes it away. He knows the man needs serious medical help, but his attempts to radio the mainland are stopped by the thin man who smashes the radio. This unnerves Tim, who orders the thin man to the couch. Tim stays up most of the night to keep an eye on the thin man.

In the morning, the boys are all curious and unnerved. Kent thinks the thin man poses a threat. Tim sends the boys out on a nature hike while he remains behind to deal with the situation. When they return hours later, the thin man's situation has not improved. Tim discovers the source of the man's problem seems to be his stomach, so he decides to perform surgery using tools in the cabin to try to help the man. He has Max assist him since Max knows taxidermy, but gives Max a mask of gauze and rubbing alcohol to breathe through. Tim cuts the man's stomach open to discover a massive worm come slithering out. It attempts to attack Tim, but Tim cuts it in half as he and Max run outside. Kent insists on seeing the worm, and rushes into the cabin with the other boys. Only Shelley is not shocked by the bloody scene. Tim begins feeling hungry and dizzy, leading Kent to realize Tim is infected. He and the other boys grab Tim and lock him in the closet. Shelley finds this hysterical.

The boys camp out around a fire outside. The next morning, they learn their cooler is gone. Shelley reveals that Kent went off with it and consumed everything inside. They all realize that Kent has become infected as a storm comes on. At first, the boys refuse to let Kent into the cellar where they have taken shelter, but then relent, making him sleep in the corner. A tree collapses on the cabin during the storm, killing Tim. While the other three boys head out for food, Shelley decides to have fun. He has long enjoyed torturing and killing small creatures, including his own pet cat, and now decides to kill Kent. As he prepares for this, he radios in to Ephraim, telling Ephraim he must be infected. He gets into Ephraim's mind, convinced Ephraim the only way to save himself is to use his knife to cut his body open to find the worm before it is too late. Shelley drowns Kent, but as Kent dies, thousands of tiny worms flood out from his body and attack Shelley. Shelley now realizes he is infected. When Max and Newt return with a

nearly-dead Ephraim, Shelley lights him on fire. Max and Newt chase Shelley into the woods.

Max and Newt realize that Shelley has the spark plugs for the boat. They track him down to a cave where Shelley attacks Newt, with Shelley's stomach contents of half-rotted organs, slime, and worms explode on Newt's lower half. Newt realizes he is now infested as well. Max refuses to let Newt give up. The two of them motor out from the island, only to be stopped by the Canadian Navy. Newt admits to being starving, and is shot in the head. Max is kept in isolation for months until he is judged to be clean and safe, and released to his parents.

Max learns that the thin man was a test subject for Dr. Edgerton, who under funding from a Canadian military contractor, was developing a biological weapon using the worms. It is revealed the thin man's escape to Falstaff Island was planned and covered by the Canadian Navy as a controlled test. Edgerton is jailed for his part in things, but the fate of others involved in the experiment is unknown. As the novel ends, Max realizes he will never again be treated the same by even his own parents, all of whom keep their distance from him. Max heads out by boat at night to return to the island, feeling an emptiness, an "unnamed hunger" within him.

Part 1, Chapter 1 – Part 1, Chapter 10

Summary

Part 1, The Hungry Man

Chapter 1 – An article from The Weird News Network's online edition from October 19 brings word that an eerily thin man with an unending appetite stole the truck of Diplomat Diner waitress Sadie Akins in Lower Montague on Prince Edward Island, Canada. In the present on the same day, the man later steals a boat from North Point. He is still starving even though he knows he has eaten. Unknown to him, he has ruptured his stomach. He knows he is not an evil man, but had no choice but to escape from Edgerton. In the distance, he sees a campfire on an island.

Chapter 2 – Scoutmaster Tim Riggs has taken his scouts of Troop 52 to camp out for the weekend on Falstaff Island. The only building on the island is a winterized, government-owned cabin where the kids are staying in one of the bunk rooms. As the kids settle down for the night to tell ghost stories, Tim has a drink of scotch and keeps track of a potential storm. There are five kids, all about the age of 14: Kent, one of the most popular boys at school; Ephraim and Max, easy-going and well-liked kids; Newton, a nerdy kid; and Shelley, described as an odd duck. Still, the five are close friends having come up through the ranks as Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, and now Venturers. Tim stands in the screened-in porch of the building, and feels wary and uneasy for no known reason.

Chapter 3 – The thin man eats a sand crab as he makes landfall. He sees light from a window up ahead.

Chapter 4 – Ephraim Elliot tells stories of Gurkhas, little crazy elite soldiers from Nepal designed to kill. He tells his friends a story of a plane of Gurkhas going down off the coast. Newton Thornton, Shelley Longpre, Maximillian Kirkwood, and Kent Jenks are unimpressed. Newt is a little scared, however. Tim comes in to tell them to get to sleep, and turns the lights out.

Chapter 5 – Tim hears a boat pull up on shore. He wonders who it could be and knows he and the boys have only small knives to protect themselves. He hears a man in the woods outside, and with a Buck knife in hand, goes to investigate. The man he finds is very thin, pale. The man asks for food and begins eating dirt. Tim says he is alone on the island to protect the boys. As a doctor, Tim realizes something is seriously wrong with the man. As Tim helps the man to the cabin, he thinks he feels something moving under the man's skin. The man asks for food and to spend the night. Tim wrestles with the idea but decides as a doctor he cannot tell the man no. He tells the man he must do exactly as told or he can't come in. Tim is very bothered by the man, sensing something unclean about him.

Chapter 6 – Tim goes into the boys' bunk room to tell them to stay inside, explaining the situation. Kent suggests calling the mainland. Tim explains he has already decided to do that. Heading back into the main part of the cabin, Tim goes to use the radio only to have the man smash it to pieces. Tim and the man grapple, but the man coughs up algae and relents. The boys try to rush out, but Tim tells them to stay in their room. He moves the man to an old couch. Tim administers doxylamine to normalize the man's breathing, and realizes he has done something very wrong by bringing the man into the cabin. Tim stays up most of the night.

Chapter 7 – It is October 21. The Canadian military descends on the town of North Point. Meanwhile, the boys wake up in the cabin. They get dressed and head out to the main room of where Tim is keeping watch over the man. Newt notices the busted radio. The boys ask about the man's identity, but Tim says he already checked. The man has nothing on him, including a wallet. Tim has tied the man's arms and legs. Shelley says it was a good idea. Tim also reveals that the man apparently stole Oliver McCanty's boat, but removed the spark plugs upon reaching the island. Kent's dad, Jeff, is the police chief in Lower Montague. Kent believes some of them could paddle the small boat over. Tim tells the boys they are to go on their solo nature trek as planned. Kent thinks they should neutralize the threat of the man. Tim tells the boys to get moving, that everything will be okay. Tim wonders what kind of a man would cut off his own transportation method, and begins to think that perhaps the thin man is wanted, hunted, or on an extinction vector. Tim also realizes he himself is coming down with a fever.

Chapter 8 – A future article from GQ Magazine notes that the Hungry Man, formerly known as Thomas Henry Padgett, a chubby man from St. Catharine's, Ontario, has been condemned and hated by the media and the public for running away from Dr. Clive Edgerton and for not being able to control the monster inside him. The article also notes that Tom Padgett was referred to as a runaway biological weapon by Dr. David Hatcher of the Centre for Contagious Disease.

In the present, Max and Ephraim, friends since the age of two, head out on the hike. While different in many ways, they also have many things in common, such as believing in God, talking about which girls have the biggest boobs at school, and talking about things like whether a zombie or a shark would win a fight. On the hike, Kent takes control of the walkie-talkie from Max. Newt thinks Max shouldn't have given up the walkie-talkie since Tim gave it to Max. Max tells Newt to shut up. All Max can think about is the thin man.

Chapter 9 – Ephraim lights up a cigarette. He is the only boy in their grade who smokes. They begin to ascend the shale-strewn rocky high point of the island, but Kent realizes they must be going the wrong way. He blames it on Tim for not coming on the hike. As they climb, a military helicopter passes overhead. Out on the water, they can see a number of naval ships which they believe must all be a routine drill. A page from the counseling diary of Ephraim Elliot for Dr. Harley is presented at the end of the chapter in which Ephraim recounts Kent's dad killing a tiger that got loose from the circus. Ephraim notes he has severe mood swings of anger and sadness.



Chapter 10 – Tim checks in by radio and reminds the boys he gave the walkie-talkie to Max. Tim tells them they are a bit off-track, but to stick to the path and they will be fine. The boys can sense a storm is coming. Newt points out how the water appears red as the electricity in the air causes plankton protozoans to rise to the surface, inflate with oxygen, and turn red. They follow the trail to a pebbly beach where they decide to relax a while. They discover a ball of snakes having sex. Shelley explores a tidal pool where he finds a crayfish. He wonders how the crayfish would feel to be pulled apart. He pops the eyes of the crayfish, then puts it back in the water. The boys start a fire. Ephraim reveals his grandmother died of cancer, and the thin man reminded him of the way his grandmother looked. The boys have all been thinking about the thin man. More pages from Newt's diary are presented in which Newt admits to taking photos of his dead cousin Sherwood and creating a fake Facebook profile. Because Sherwood is attractive, people like the nerdy things Newt has the profile say, whereas no one gives Newt himself the time of day. Newt has only 10 friends on Facebook, and the fake profile is not one of them.

Analysis

"The Troop" is a horror novel by Nick Cutter which follows the efforts of Scoutmaster and doctor Tim Riggs and his scout troop to survive a viral infestation of genetically engineered intestinal hydatid worms. As the novel begins, Tim and his troop—Max, Newt, Kent, Ephraim, and Shelley—have come to a nearby but uninhabited island for a normal weekend camping trip. The theme of horror, however, is immediately apparent in the appearance of the thin man in Lower Montague, where his insatiable appetite, from diner food to sand crabs, is chilling. The reader clearly and easily realizes there is something wrong with the man, Tom Padgett, and he is to be avoided. He zeroes in on Falstaff Island, and on the island's sole cabin.

Tim immediately recognizes that something is wrong with the man but because Tim is a doctor, Tim knows he must do what he can to help. In this section of the novel, horror appears in primarily a psychological sense. The reader understands the inherent danger in Padgett's presence, but Tim is utterly unaware of just how dangerous Padgett is. Likewise, that Tim is responsible for five young teenagers also weighs on his mind, but does not prove to be the primary concern Tim has. Even after the man smashes the radio, Tim is not moved to jettison the man from the cabin. As the reader learns from documents written at some point in the future—magazine articles, transcribed testimony, etc.—Padgett is a test subject for Dr. Edgerton.

Elements of psychological horror appear in describing a monster inside Padgett, and the description of Padgett as a runaway biological weapon, all while Padgett is on the island with the boys. The phrase "biological weapon" should be noted by the reader, for here appears the theme of science and ethics. Objects—and people—do not become biological weapons by themselves. They are turned into biological weapons by someone else. At the same time, the Canadian Armed Forces suddenly descend upon Lower Montague, raising the reader's suspicions.

As Tim begins to fall ill, the boys are sent out on a nature hike. Tim wants to give the appearance that everything is alright, and wants to keep the boys away from the cabin. As the boys head about the island, their personalities and friendship begin to shine through. Kent is a tough kid, a natural leader, and a little rough around the edges, while Newt is a nerd and often endures teasing. Nevertheless, as Tim notes early in the novel, these five boys have grown up together and have a bond of friendship because of this. Max and Ephraim are especially good friends, noted by their many common interest from God to girls. However, the only boy among them to be something less than friends is Shelley. Shelley is written off as an odd duck, but quickly becomes apparent that there is something psychologically wrong with Shelley. This is apparent when he pops the eyeballs of a crayfish.

Newt, despite his friendship with the others, realizes that without Scouts, he probably wouldn't be friends with any of them. A brief allusion is given to Newt creating a fake Facebook profile using photos of his dead cousin. Because his dead cousin is attractive, the fake profile's nerdy comments are liked and commented on, while Newt's own Facebook profile is ignored. Ironically, Newt doesn't even like himself, and so hasn't even sent a friend request to his real profile from his fake profile. The importance of Newt's fake profile will not be revealed until the very end of the novel, and the reader should keep this in mind.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Tim decide to take in the thin man on the island despite being in charge of the safety and security of the boys? Do you believe he was right or wrong in taking the man in? Why?

Discussion Question 2

If you were in Tim's position, and without knowing what you as the reader know from the magazine articles and testimony presented in the chapters, would you have taken in the thin man? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Although Tim is feeling ill, and though the thin man presents a serious problem, Tim still sends the boys out on a nature hike. Why?

Vocabulary

devilry, emaciated, hardscrabble, serene, vaporous, ineffable, merciless, mordant, unflappable, unalloyed, berserk, felonious, enumerated, affectation, unsubstantiated

Part 1, Chapter 11 – Part 2, Chapter 20

Summary

Chapter 11 – When the boys return to the cabin, Tim tells them not to go inside, that the man is sick with something he's never seen before. Tim doesn't tell the boys the man had previously woken only to claw and bite the old chesterfield couch on which he has been sleeping. Tim tells the boys to stay away from the man, that whatever he has might be contagious. However, Tim does bring Max inside due to Max's taxidermy skills and his father being the county coroner.

Chapter 12 – Max is given a makeshift face mask made of gauze and rubbing alcohol. Tim reveals that since being coughed up on, he has lost 20 pounds. Tim is going to perform a gastrostomy on the man with whatever tools in the cabin he has been able to scrounge up. The man is thin all over except for his stomach. Tim intends to find out way. The man's insides have all turned whitish. As he cuts into the man's stomach, a horrible stench rises up. Tim begins to realize how hungry he feels. Max begins to panic when it appears as if Tim's eyes are beginning to bulge out of their sockets. Tim looks down when something touches his hand. He screams.

Chapter 13 – Some sort of soft white tube is in the man's stomach. It begins to expand, pushing through the slit in the stomach. It reminds Max of the ball of snakes having sex on the beach. Appendages appear from the tube. From the end of each appendage Tim and Max can see teeth. It is over three feet long. It begins to move toward Tim. Tim tells Max to get out as he tries to fight the worm-like thing off. The worm begins to constrict the thin man on the couch like a snake. Tim considers it must be some sort of massive, carnivorous worm or leech. Tim thinks he can see manmade objects still inside the thin man. He cuts the worm in half. He and Max then thoroughly wash up and rush out into the night, telling the others to get far, far away.

Chapter 14 – Tim explains to everyone what happened. He tries to rationalize things, imagining the creature might be a tape worm, but knows better. Tim also knows he must keep the boys safe. He realizes no mosquitoes are landing on him and that he is quickly losing patience with the boys. He promises them he will bring them home in the morning. Kent wants to see the worm. Tim tells him no, but Kent goes anyway. The chapter ends with pages from the lab journal of Dr. Clive Edgerton from Summerside, Prince Edward Island. The entries recount the delivery of the modified hydatid to a guinea pig through a liposome vehicle. Within four hours, the subject begins to exhibit irrational, hungry behavior as it loses weight and dies while the growing hydatid worms burst through its body.

Chapter 15 – Kent has been more and more rebellious as he has gotten older. Kent heads to the cabin, followed by the other boys. Tim follows angrily, splashing rubbing alcohol on their shirts and telling them to cover their noses and mouths. Kent is chilled by the scene of the dead man and the severed worm. All the boys appear shocked



except Shelley. Tim angrily tells Kent that now he has exposed all the boys to infection. Shelley asks why Tim would drag Max into things in the first place, then. He thinks the cabin should be burned down. Tim becomes dizzy and disoriented, leading Kent to realize Tim is sick. Kent says Tim must be quarantined. They attack Tim and lock him in the closet. They will not let him out until the boat comes to get them.

The chapter ends with printed testimony from Nathan Erikson before the Federal Investigation Board in which Erikson recounts his work with Edgerton and admits to being blinded by the possibilities of science. Erikson explains he did his dissertation on the *C. elegans* roundworm, which ages similarly to humans. It is what attracted Edgerton's attention, though the roundworm is nothing like the thing Edgerton bred. Erikson calls Edgerton a crazy genius originally intending to provide a system for weight loss.

Chapter 16 – Newt worries about locking Tim up. Max says it is necessary because Tim is sick. Newt still wants to let Tim out. Max says Kent is the only one who knows the lock combination.

Part 2, Infestation

Chapter 17 – CCN.com carries a headline on October 22 in which it notes that Falstaff Island has been quarantined due to a biological incident. The military says the island is currently unoccupied. In the closet, Tim is enraged at what his scouts have done to him even though he knows he is sick. Tim is so hungry he begins eating the closet wallpaper. Tim begins to cry as he hears the boys make the closet airtight by duct-taping it.

Chapter 18 – Shelley finds it funny that Tim is crying. Shelley is responsible for making the closet airtight more out of desire rather than safety. Outside, he sets fire to a spiderweb, and watches the spider run under the cabin as he tries to burn it. Shelley doesn't believe the boat is coming. He realizes he will be able to play his games and might be the only one left when the boat does come. The other boys are still asleep.

Chapter 19 – When the other boys awaken, they find their cooler is gone. As Shelley returns, he claims he went off to relieve himself and has no idea where the cooler is. Ephraim has the urge to punch Shelley but stops, knowing his mother worries about his temper. He knows animals could not have dragged the cooler off. He tries to keep calm, but knows he is scared. He has never seen a dead man before. Ephraim notes that Kent looks pretty pale. Ephraim has a cigarette to relax, but it doesn't help. The chapter ends with printed testimony from Nathan Erikson before the Federal Investigation Board in which Erikson recounts Edgerton moving on to human test subjects by bringing back Tom Padgett one night, who reeked of alcohol. Erikson says that Tom did it for the money because he was down on his luck.

Chapter 20 – The cooler is found by the water with no evidence of being dragged. It is overturned, and the food is all spilled out and ruined. Kent drifts away from the group, sits on a rock, and eats some moss. He can't understand why he would do this. Newt



asks Kent if he is alright, but Kent tells Newt to screw off. Kent remembers being the one to bring away the cooler and tear through the food, and remembers Shelley watching him. Kent also remembers later threatening Shelley to keep his mouth shut. In the present, the boys are dismayed that Stanley Watters has not arrived yet to pick them up. The storm that has been coming then arrives with a cyclone. The boys have no choice but to return to the cabin though they do not go inside. It is then that Shelley reveals the truth about Kent, the cooler, and being sick. Kent slaps Shelley, causing him to bleed. Kent blocks the door to the cabin, but Ephraim barrels through him. The boys follow. Tim tells them through the door to get to the cellar. Kent denies being sick. It is then the boys see blood pooling out from under the closet door. Some of the worms begin exploding, sending little ribbons trailing through the air.

The chapter ends with pages from the lab journal of Dr. Clive Edgerton from Summerside, Prince Edward Island in which a chimpanzee is given with the modified hydatid. The chimpanzee begins behaving erratically, eating anything it can. A ten-foot worm exits through the anus of the chimpanzee, causing severe blood loss. The chimpanzee begins pulling at its own fur as lesions appear all over its body. The chimpanzee then eats the worm, then begins tearing itself apart as hundreds of tiny worms exit through the body. Within minutes, the chimpanzee is dead. The worms die not long after.

Analysis

Elements of horror expand dramatically in this section of the novel. The thin man's seemingly uncontrollable outbursts, such as eating part of the couch, still do not convince Tim to keep away. Stunningly, he invites Max into the cabin to assist with surgery on the thin man. Tim is less concerned with infection at this point than he is with trying to find out what is wrong with the thin man, especially if he and all the boys have all been infected. It is a poor choice Tim makes to bring Max into the room, potentially exposing him to the thin man's condition. Horror becomes dominant as a massive worm comes out of the thin man, and is sliced in half by Tim.

Tim's illness and lack of real leadership in this situation means that Kent, naturally coming into an age of rebellion, ignores Tim and runs into the cabin to see the aftermath of the attack. Unknowingly, Kent has been exposed to the virus. The boys later confront him with this fact, but Kent vehemently denies this. He does so knowing what has happened to the thin man, and knowing what is happening to Tim, and desperately seeks to avoid the same fate.

However, the situation of horror has rapidly become a situation of survival. Without clear knowledge of how the virus worm is spread, Max, Newt, Kent, Shelley, and Ephraim can only guess and keep a lookout for signs of infection. As soon as Tim began to exhibit strong symptoms, the boys threw him into the closet as a matter of survival. They have long admired Tim and been friends with him, but their lives are on the line now. Kent realizes that the revolt he led against Tim has now turned against him. His friendship with the boys will be nothing compared to a desire to survive.



Through this section of the novel, more future documents are presented to the reader which helps to contextualize unfolding events on the island. These documents bring into question the theme of science and ethics. Written pages from Edgerton's lab journal, and transcribed testimony from Erikson reveal that the original purpose of the modified hydatid worm was supposedly weight loss. Erikson notes that he was blinded by the possibilities of science, not caring about the ethical concerns in the situation he found himself in working for Edgerton. Edgerton himself was unconcerned—even careless—when it came to ethics. The cruel experimentation performed on the chimpanzee, for example, reveal this.

In a mixture of horror and the lack of scientific ethics, Tom Padgett was brought into the situation by Edgerton. Edgerton, having seen the results of the chimpanzee test, and knowing full well what will happen, brings Tom into the situation through a combination of alcohol and cash. Animal test subjects are a vital part of science, but testing must be humane. The testing done on the chimpanzee was outright twisted, but to perform such an experiment on a human being with full knowledge of what will happen is disgusting and terrifying. What has happened to Padgett is now happening to Tim and Kent, and stands to happen to the rest of the boys as well.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Kent lead a revolt against Tim? How does Kent react when the tables are turned on him? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Edgerton bring Tom Padgett into the experiment? Why does Tom agree to testing?

Discussion Question 3

What does Erikson claim Edgerton's experiments were initially designed to create? Do you believe him? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

mindlessness, viral, visceral, premortification, cauterized, ichor, occlusion, elongated, obligation, derision, insectile, liquefy, torpor, quarantined, maliciously, feral, profoundly, aperture, smug, elation, vocalizations

Part 2, Chapter 21 – Part 2, Chapter 30

Summary

Chapter 21 – The boys rush to gather supplies and enter the cellar. Ephraim refuses Kent entry, punching him to keep him away and busting his own fists in the process. The boys all acknowledge that Kent has reaped what he has sown. Max and Kent, however, want to find some place safe for Kent. Kent will not go into the cabin, so they bring him to the woodpile which offers some respite from the wind. Kent begins eating the bugs crawling around him and on him.

Chapter 22 – Ephraim waits in the cellar with Shelley. Shelley tells Ephraim was right to refuse Kent entry, that Kent brought it on himself. He then jumps up, saying he saw something moving under Ephraim's fingernails. He then says he was mistaken. Max and Newt arrive a moment later, just as a massive tree is knocked over onto the cabin by the storm. Kent arrives and begs to come in. Ephraim reluctantly lets him in. Max looks at Ephraim who is looking at his own bloody knuckles. Max knows that Ephraim is worried he has contracted the illness. The chapter ends with printed testimony from Nathan Erikson before the Federal Investigation Board in which Erikson recounts how worms are often used as a way to bring about weight loss, mainly in countries other than those in North America. The method would consist of two pills: one to give the person worms until a target weight had been reached, and the second pill to kill them and wash them out.

Chapter 23 – As the storm passes, Ephraim and the other boys go to check on Tim, leaving Kent in the cellar. Kent looks worse. They discover that Tim has been crushed by the tree. It is then that Tim's body breaks apart as hundreds of tiny white worms come pouring out of the skin. Ephraim realizes his bloodied knuckles are highways for the worms. The chapter ends with an excerpt from a future speech given by Dr. Cynthia Preston, MD, on modified hydatids and Edgerton. She recounts how Edgerton played fast and loose with ethics by genetically manipulating an hydatid to adapt immediately to new circumstances. She reveals it is the opening of a genetic Pandora's box. The only real weakness of the worm is that it will collapse under the weight of its own insatiable hunger, because it lives only to eat and reproduce.

Chapter 24 – Kent dreams of being at the ocean with a worm for his father. Meanwhile, Kent, Max, Newt, and Shelley determine they will need to find a way to survive on the island. It is Shelley who points out the island must be under quarantine by the military following the thin man's arrival. Even if they could build a raft to leave, the military wouldn't let them. Ephraim looks at his bloody knuckles, terrified, and says he doesn't know what to do. They watch as Calvin Walmack's cigarette boat is stopped by black military boats, the passengers removed, and the cigarette boat exploded.

Chapter 25 – Newt enters what remains of the cabin to get his field book and rope. Newt knows it is a dangerous but necessary thing to do. He realizes some of the worms

are still alive, but shouldn't be because their host is dead. Max calls in after Newt to make sure he is okay. Newt says she's fine, and tells Max to stay out. The worms begin exploding, sending little ribbons sailing through the air. Newt grabs his things and checks to make sure none of the worm ribbons has landed on him. A news story from the Island Courier carries the story of Reginald Kirkwood and Jeffrey Jenks stealing the boat of Calvin Walmack, ignoring a State Emergency Order to stay away from the island, and being arrested for it. The boat is revealed as having been scuttled due to closeness to an infested island. It is also revealed that Troop 52 is on the island.

Chapter 26 – Kent remains in the cellar while Max, Ephraim, and Newton head out to find food. They eat strips of sea kelp. Ephraim admits to not feeling like himself. The boys try grubs, but do not like them.

Chapter 27 – Shelley decides to begin his games when the other three are out of sight. He decides to have fun with Kent. Shelley has killed many creatures before without remorse, and experimented on them. This includes beetles, mice, and the family's pet cat, Trixie, whom he drowned and burned. It made him feel alive. He now imagines what killing something larger might do. He feeds Kent some dead bugs. Shelley asks him how it feels. Kent says there is an empty hungry hole that wants him and Shelley, too. Shelley is a little unnerved by this. He brings back part of the giant dead worm from the thin man's body to feed Kent. Shelley knows he will play with Ephraim next, having already laid seeds of fear in his mind with the fingernails comment.

Chapter 28 – In the afternoon, Ephraim decides to sit down and stop moving. He is losing hope. Max challenges him, asking him whether he'd rather find food or sit around and put. Ephraim leaps to his feet and lightly punches Max. Ephraim immediately apologizes, saying he didn't mean it. Max says he knows. Ephraim still refuses to leave, so Max and Newt go on ahead.

Chapter 29 – Ephraim stares at his bloody knuckles, wondering if he is infected. He stares at his fingernails. He imagines the worms crawling through him even now. Shelley calls Ephraim on the walkie-talkie, and tells Ephraim he doesn't sound too good. Shelley tells Ephraim he can be helped if he only cuts open his flesh to grab the worm. Ephraim begins cutting up his hands with his Swiss Army knife. He then considers putting the corkscrew from the knife into his ear.

Chapter 30 – Max and Newt continue seeking out food sources. Both boys wonder if they are only just hungry, or diseased worm hungry. They come upon a turtle. It bites Max's foot. Max struggles with the thought of having to kill the turtle, for he has never killed anything before. He stabs the turtle over and over again, begging it to die. It takes a long time for the turtle to bleed to death. Max and Newt are no longer hungry. They both feel horrible.

The chapter ends with an excerpt from a future speech given by Dr. Cynthia Preston, MD, on modified hydatids and Edgerton. She reveals that when a colony of Edgerton's worms rake root in the intestines, a conqueror worm rises among them which lays conqueror worm eggs along the host's spine. The worm then injects the host's brain

with a neurotransmitter which compels the host to have an enormous appetite. It also propagates a positive mindset in the host, leading the host to survive longer to feed the colony longer. She notes that the single survivor of the island stated his troopmates seemed stronger and happier as they neared death.

Analysis

Survival becomes paramount in this section of the novel as a storm breaks on the island. The reader should note that the storm itself is symbolic of the trials that the boys are going to be facing in the coming hours. The storm will leave wreckage and death on the island (including Tim), while the psychological storm of survival that occurs among the boys will lead to wreckage and death as well. The boys at first decide that Kent will not be allowed to come down into the cellar for the storm, but they end up relenting because they have compassion towards their friend. They know full well they risk exposure, and so order Kent into the corner by himself.

Meanwhile, Shelley begins to sow the seeds of doubt in Ephraim's mind that Ephraim's mind. Shelley is a seriously disturbed kid, and his insistence at psychologically terrifying Ephraim and tormenting Kent reveal Shelley's true nature. Here, the theme of horror especially becomes disturbing not due to the worm infestation, but to Shelley's cruelty. He tells Ephraim he saw something crawling under one of his fingernails. This startles Ephraim. He goads Ephraim into cutting himself up with a knife to try to find the worm. Ephraim, who is psychologically undone by the entire experience so far, and who seeks to survive, begins carving up his own body to find the parasitic worm. Equally as disgusting is Shelley's feeding the severed worm to Kent.

More information on the worm itself is revealed to readers, once again drawing into question the theme of Ethics as they relate to science. In a speech, Edgerton is noted as playing "fast and loose" with ethics, more concerned with the result and the conduction of science than the moral implications of his research and experiments. Likewise, the hydatid worm genetically modified by Edgerton was incredibly versatile and adaptable to any situation. Unable to reach their next victim by crawling, the reader will remember how the worms exploded to transmit through the air. However, the worm's only weakness is itself: it lives to eat and reproduce. It will continue to eat and reproduce until it is no longer possible. There is no shortage of living organisms on Falstaff Island for the worms to get into, including the boys.

A survival mindset is rising among the boys, and order among them is breaking down. While Shelley plays sick games with Kent and Ephraim, Max and Ephraim come to odds over survival itself. Ephraim is slowly losing hope. Max, in an effort to goad Ephraim on to continue, ends up being punched instead. Considering that they are best friends, this is an especially startling moment. Though Ephraim immediately apologizes, and though Max immediately accepts, the nature of their friendship has been irrevocably altered. If Ephraim will punch his best friend over a few words, what the boys will resort to in an effort to survive can only be imagined. Friendship may prove to count for nothing in the struggle to survive.



The struggle to survive can be seen in the killing of the turtle as well. It is an act which, though necessary, horrifies Max and Newt. The event becomes symbolic of the struggle to survive. A living creature, including human beings, will do whatever it must to survive. It is both a note of hope in the idea that life is always the goal, but also an omen in that people will do anything to live.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Shelley seek to torment Ephraim and Kent? What are the unfolding results of his tormenting? What does he hope to accomplish?

Discussion Question 2

Despite the friendship that exists between the boys, order appears to be breaking down as the struggle to survive becomes paramount. Explain why using examples from the novel.

Discussion Question 3

Explain the symbolic importance of the storm and when Max and Newt kill the turtle. What do these symbolic events mean with respect to issues of life and death?

Vocabulary

Pallid, dengue fever, vitreous, repercussions, contravention, precipitous, petulant, mesmerized, zephyr, indeterminate, transgression, roe, abet

Part 2, Chapter 31 – Part 3, Chapter 40

Summary

Chapter 31 – Ephraim continues cutting himself all over his body to find the worm he believes is inside him. Shelley continues to egg him on. Ephraim grows weak and weary. The chapter ends with a future article from GQ Magazine which relates how powerless Jeff Jenks felt waiting for word on his son and the boys. Jenks still has scars from where the military police beat him after his attempt to get to the island. Jenks reveals the authorities said his son's body was not found. Jenks contends his son did not go down without a fight.

Chapter 32 – Kent remains in the cellar. Shelley decides to kill him as darkness falls and the other boys have not yet returned. Shelley lures Kent near the water and drowns Kent. Worms begin writhing from his body, surrounding and attacking Shelley. Kent's body floats out to sea while Shelley tries in vain to swat the worms away. Back on shore, Shelley knows he has gotten carried away, has lost sight of the danger, and begins eating dirt. As the night gets darker, Shelley begins to feed more.

Chapter 33 – Max and Newt huddle around a fire. They wonder if Tim and the turtle are in Heaven. They then realize that baby turtles are hatching in the sand all around them. They help the babies to the water. Max wades out with them to chase away bats and seagulls looking for an easy meal. The chapter ends with a future article from GQ Magazine which relates an interview conducted with Dr. Clive Edgerton, nicknamed Dr. Mengele 2.0, and Dr. Death. Edgerton is viciously intelligent. Edgerton notes that the best and most effective way to spread a contagion is the human weakness of love. Giving comfort and aid to the sick allows the transmission of diseases.

Part 3, Contagion

Chapter 34 – An unpublished ad for Thestomax is presented, advertising a two-pill solution for weight loss as the chapter begins. Shelley withdraws into the cabin, aware his body is being taken over. He reflects on touching the hair of girls at school and being reprimanded for it. He reflects on how being good does nothing to profit people. He falls asleep as he feels a worm enter his cranial vault.

Chapter 35 – Max and Newt arise at dawn. Neither has slept well. They find Ephraim bloodied up and near death. He has enough energy to say he is trying to get the worms out of him. He says a little birdie told him there were worms inside him. Max and Newt tell Ephraim they will bring him back to camp. Max notes how Ephraim's veins look like worms.

Chapter 36 – Back at camp, Max and Newt cannot find Kent anywhere. They go looking for him. Max does his best to keep calm, but fear is eating away at him. He knows everyone has a breaking point. He then hears screaming. The chapter ends with printed

testimony from Nathan Erikson before the Federal Investigation Board in which Erikson learns that TNO Printz Mauritz, a military research firm, paid Edgerton more than \$3.5-million, and that Edgerton was receiving competing grants from a biopharmaceutical firm. Erikson claims he did not know this, that he had no idea the worm could be weaponized.

Chapter 37 – When Max and Newt head off, Shelley comes out of the cabin cellar to see Ephraim lying on the picnic table. Ephraim begs Shelley to cut the worm out of him. Shelley gleefully agrees. It sexually excites him as he cuts up Ephraim. He then tells Ephraim he will need gasoline and a lighter to burn the worm out.

Chapter 38 – Max and Newt return to find Ephraim on fire. Max at once knows Shelley is to blame. Max and Newt then see Shelley coming around the cabin, and both see he is sick. But Max is enraged. They have tolerated and tried to be friendly to Shelley, but his true nature has shone through. Max goes to strangle Shelley, but Shelley stabs Max in the abdomen with a knife. As Shelley goes to kill Max, Newt knocks Shelley out with a stick of wood.

Chapter 39 – Shelley struggles to his feet, laughing and vowing to kill Max and Newt. Max hurls a rock at Shelley and chases him into the woods. He and Newt then bury Ephraim so that his soul may ascend to Heaven. They say a prayer. Max feels like crying, but his body won't let him.

Chapter 40 – Shelley leaves the save he has taken refuge in and hunts by night for food. He no longer believes he is sick, but morphing into a better, more dangerous creature. He begins to think of himself as a mother to the worms inside him. He seeks to kill Newt and Max and goes to the cabin. He is ordered back into the woods by Newt, who holds up a knife. Shelley returns to the forest to eat. He vows to be a good daddy. The chapter ends with sworn testimony of Stonewall Brewer, admiral in the Canadian navy, given before the Federal Investigatory Board in which Brewer recounts putting the island under quarantine at once. Even birds taking flight from the island were killed, their bodies fished out of the water, the water treated and the body burned. Brewer also says he had four million gallons of Anotec Blue into the water. Known as "Blue Death," it killed everything it encountered. For good measure, Brewer had the island firebombed with napalm four times.

Analysis

Psychological horror and gore continue unabated thematically in this section of the novel. Shelley disgustingly continues to coax Ephraim into cutting himself apart by manipulating and twisting Ephraim's mind and thoughts. The psychological horror that he could be infected leads to a physical manifestation of horror through slicing up his body and drilling his ear with a corkscrew. Likewise, Shelley continues to taunt and torment Kent, even though Kent is fading fast. Shelley's history with his fellow troops means nothing to him.



Shelley himself becomes an object of horror and revulsion equal to the hydatid worm. While the worm does what it does because it's programmed into its DNA, Shelley's actions are all a choice. He emerges as a sinister figure, especially in regards to his past bearing down on the present. His drowning of a helpless cat portends his drowning of Kent. Shelley receives a sick, sexual pleasure from killing, denoting that his future appears grim at best. However, in Shelley's sick rush to kill Kent, he leaves himself exposed for infection. However, Shelley is not bothered at all by being infected. He comes to relish it. When Ephraim is brought back to camp and laid out on a picnic table, Shelley seizes the mantle of horror again by burning Ephraim alive.

Survival becomes critical at this stage in the novel as Max and Newt come to realize that they now not only need to escape the menace of the worm, but the terror that is Shelley as well. The worm and Shelley have brought wreckage and destruction to the island as was signaled in symbolic omen by the actual storm that previously occurred. Ironically, the storm Max and Newt now face is one of man's making, not nature's making. Shelley arguably poses a greater threat to Max and Newt than the hydatid worm does. Now that Shelley is infected, Shelley is more than merely dangerous. He is deadly.

Contextual information to the reader brings about the theme of Science and Ethics once more. Erikson claims to have no knowledge that Edgerton was secretly trying to weaponize the worm, and likewise claims to have no knowledge that Edgerton was being paid by a military contracting firm.

At the same time, an interview with Edgerton himself reveals that he has no compunction or concerns for ethics at all beyond their usefulness in spreading a contagion. He notes that the human desire to help and extend compassion (the pursuit of doing ethical things) is key in spreading diseases and biologically-weaponized materials and creatures like the hydatid. The Canadian Navy, in the effort to destroy the contagion, used fire and chemicals to halt its spread.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that Shelley or the hydatid worms pose a greater threat to Max and Newt's survival? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What is the true purpose of the hydatid worm research that Edgerton was carrying on? What motivated Edgerton? Was he concerned with ethics in his research? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Erikson claims not to have known about the military aspect of Edgerton's research. Do you believe him? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

carbolic, charitably, utilitarian, grotesquerie, puling, beatific, vaporous, preternaturally, minute, indiscriminate, inexpressible, menacingly, psychosis, ephemeral, predatory, premonition

Part 3, Chapter 41 – Part 3, Chapter 50

Summary

Chapter 41 – Max dreams of his father as a worm working in the mortuary. Newton wakes Max up, telling Max he was screaming in his sleep. They then head to shore to try to start the boat, but it won't start. Newt begins crying. Max realizes the thin man must have eaten the spark plugs, which would explain the manmade objects he and Tim saw in the man's stomach. With gloves covered by bread bags taped to his shirt, Max roots around in the dead thin man and finds the spark plugs. He and Newt suddenly feel hopeful.

Chapter 42 – Max and Newt wash the spark plugs in the water, then leave them on the dock to dry. They go for gasoline from the cabin cellar. When they return, the spark plugs are missing. The boys accuse each other of losing the spark plugs, and begin physically attacking each other and bloodying each other up. They both stop and apologize to each other. They both know they need to spend their energy looking for the spark plugs.

Chapter 43 – They know Shelley is responsible for taking the spark plugs and set off to find him. Newt comments how he wishes his mother wouldn't fuss over him so much, noting that when people sometimes the more someone cares for something, the more damage is done, that people end up hurting the things they love because they try so hard. Max and Newt follow a disgusting scent to a cave and go in.

Chapter 44 – Shelley hears Max and Newt coming, and knows they can all be daddies. Max and Newt can hear horrible sounds as they move into the cave. Shelley moves toward them, smelly, thin, and hideously pale. Shelley lunges at Newt. Shelley's stomach bursts open, covering Newt's legs in slime and worms. The chapter ends with sworn testimony of Stonewall Brewer, admiral in the Canadian navy, given before the Federal Investigatory Board in which Brewer defends his refusal to make contact with the boys on the island, saying they may have gone crazy if they knew what they were up against. Brewer contends that he does what he must to ensure limited fatalities and maximum security and safety. He argues that actions by men like him make second-guessing in retrospect possible. He denies allegations that the boys were test subjects, that he had any prior knowledge of the worm, and denies that he knows a man named Charles Lafleur who was given leave under Brewer's signature the day before Padgett escaped, and whose fingerprints were found on the rear access door of Edgerton's lab.

Chapter 45 – Newt tells Max to stay away from him. Newt feels deadly hunger setting in quickly. Newt eats mushrooms that cause him to throw up worms all night. The next morning, a helicopter hovers in overhead. The boys shout and wave for help, but the helicopter flies away. Max then notices there is a worm in Newt's eyeball.



Chapter 46 – Max returns to the cave for the spark plugs and sees that Shelley's body has moved. He figures a tidal flood into underground caverns must be responsible. The cavern is full of tens of thousands of white worms. Shelley's spine splits open as a giant worm crawls out of the body. Max feels something fall on his back. He freaks out, grabs the spark plugs, and rushes out.

Chapter 47 – Max returns with the spark plugs. Newt admits to being very hungry. Max sets about preparing the boat's engine and adds gasoline. Newt tells Max that if the boat starts, he should leave alone. Newt knows he is sick and does not want to leave the island. Max convinces Newt to come along when the engine starts, telling him to simply sit on the far side of the boat.

Chapter 48 – Max drives the boat across the water. Newt says he had a strange dream where hundreds of people were fighting each other, as though violence were a disease. They are stopped by navy boats. Newt admits to being very, very hungry, and is shot dead. In sworn testimony, Lance Corporal Frank Ellis admits to being the one to kill Newt because of the way Newt said he was hungry. Ellis admits he is haunted by having to kill Newt. A future article from GQ Magazine notes that Max is now 15, and is being kept in quarantine in isolation in an unidentified clinical facility. It is not known whether he is contaminated or not. The chapter ends with a message from Trudy Dennison to Alex Markson, the online alter-ego of Newt, saying she hopes Alex is only taking a break from Facebook, and that he'll be back. She notes crazy-scary things have been going on in her town.

Chapter 49 – After a long period of tests and procedures, Max is deemed clean and released to go home. Back in town, many people avoid him. Government agents show up from time to time to take samples and run tests. Max's mom no longer kisses him on the lips. He no longer has any friends. He must do schoolwork by e-mail. Max begins seeing Dr. Harley, and says he wishes for just one more day with his friends. Harley wears a mask during their sessions. Sometimes, Max feels the need to rip off the mask and cough in Harley's face.

Chapter 50 – One night, Max takes his uncle's boat and heads to Falstaff Island. He feels an emptiness growing inside him, what he considers to be a nameless hunger.

Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, the struggle for survival becomes paramount. To preserve their lives, Max and Newt must risk their lives to chase down Shelley and take back the spark plugs. Unfortunately, Newt falls victim to the infestation as Shelley's stomach explodes all over Newt's legs. Max must return to the cave for the spark plugs, knowing the lives of both himself and Newt are now at stake.

As Edgerton noted, human compassion proves to be the easiest way to spread a contagion. Max brings Newt along with him as he leaves the island. However, the military, needing to do its job, cannot harbor such mercy. They kill Newt on sight and put



Max into a clinic for months and months while experiments are carried out. This is all done under the veil of public safety, but there is more to the story than first meets the eye.

The real horror of the novel comes out through the final chapters. The reader learns that the escape of Tom Padgett was all a part of a plan to do a controlled experiment on unknowing victims, those of Troop 52. The Canadian Navy acted in conjunction with the military contractor to get Tom Padgett out of Edgerton's facility. Knowing that the boys were present on the island, the Navy sat back and allowed events to unfold for the sake of study. Science and Ethics again emerge as a theme here as no one questions the ethical nature of scientific endeavors relating to the hydatid. All involved in the operation are results-oriented, rather than concerned about the process.

As the novel ends, the theme of an open ending comes into play. Much of what occurs is left unknown to the reader. The fate that Erikson, the Admiral, and the military contractors face remains unnoted. As the reader will remember from earlier in the novel, Newt created a fake profile to experience life as someone popular and attractive. A girl messages the fake profile with word that strange things are going on in her town. This means one of two possible things. First, that the experiment conducted on Troop 52 was only one of numerous experiments being undertaken. Second, it might mean that the hydatid somehow managed to make it off the island, and has now begun to spread an infection.

In the final chapter of the novel, Max returns to the island. It is noted that he feels an emptiness inside him, an unnamed hunger which compels him to go back. There are a handful of possible conclusions. First is that Max is infected and so returns to the island because of this. As noted, the hydatid adapts to circumstances as it must to survive. It may have simply bided its time in the present. Second, it could be that Max misses the absolute freedom he had on the island as he fought to survive. The hunger and emptiness he has inside is a yearning for that same freedom again. Third, it is possible that Max has tired of living under a microscope, seeing people, even his parents, treating him differently, and so yearns for normality. The hunger Max has could indeed be a desire to return to normalcy, and the last time things were normal for Max was on the island.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think is the truth behind the strange things happening in the town of the girl who message the fake profile? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Max returns to the island at the end of the novel with a growing, unnamed hunger inside him. What do you believe is intended with the ending?



Discussion Question 3

Why does the Navy kill Newt? Why does the Admiral go through such elaborate measures to keep the Island isolated and quarantined? Do you believe this speaks to doing a job well, or to complicitness in the experiment?

Vocabulary

bewildered, interlude, coagulated, pendulous, sibilance, tribunal, languor, parabolic, impermeable

Characters

Tim

Tim Riggs is the scoutmaster of Troop 52. A gay resident of Lower Montague, Tim is a well-respected local who works as a doctor. He leads Troop 52 to Falstaff Island for a weekend camping trip. When confronted with the mysterious thin man on the island, Tim is torn between his duty to the boys and his duty as a doctor. Tim ultimately decides to take the man in. Tim becomes infected when he is coughed on by the man, and he urges the boys to stay away from the cabin. As he grows more and more ill, the boys mutiny against him and lock him in the closet. Tim is ultimately killed when a tree crashes onto the cabin during the storm.

Max

Maximillian “Max” Kirkwood is a 14 year-old member of Scout Troop 52 and a resident of Lower Montague. Patient and kind, Max is well-liked by his friends at school and is well-liked in Troop 52. Max has been best friends with Ephraim since the age of two. Max is scared and disturbed by the events that unfold on Falstaff Island, but retains his compassion for the other boys even though he risks his own health by tending to them. For example, Max believes the infected Kent should still be let into the cellar during the storm. Max becomes the island’s only survivor, fixing the boat’s motor to allow both himself and Newt to make it off the island. Max is kept in isolation to ensure he is not infected upon return home. When the novel ends, Max returns to the island, but why is left uncertain.

Newt

Newton “Newt” Thornton is a fourteen year-old member of Scout Troop 52 and a resident of Lower Montague. An overweight nerd, Newt, though accepted among the members of the troop, still receives much teasing. As a method of escape, he creates a fake Facebook profile using his dead cousin’s photos. Newt dislikes even himself so much that he will not befriend himself with the fake profile. Newt is terrified by the events that unfold on the island, but resolves to stay by Max’s side even through the very end. In an attempt to help Max retrieve spark plugs from Shelley, Newt ends up infected. As he leaves the island with Max, Newt is killed by a sniper because he is infected.

Shelley

Shelley Longpre is a 14 year-old member of Scout Troop 52 and a resident of Lower Montague. Described as an “odd duck,” Shelley is actually a psychologically disturbed sociopath who has grown up torturing small animals, culminating with the drowning of

his own cat. Rather than being scared by the thin man's infection, Shelley is excited. He uses the breakdown of order and the chaos on the island to his advantage to torture and torment the other boys. He harasses Kent and drowns him and later sets Ephraim on fire. Shelley ends up infected himself, but rather than being afraid, he is delighted. He is killed in a struggle with Newt in the cave when he stomach explodes.

Kent

Kent Jenks is a 14 year-old member of Scout Troop 52 and a resident of Lower Montague. The son of the town's police chief, Kent is a well-liked, popular guy at school and in the Troop. He has a natural sense of leadership, and is just becoming to be rebellious against authority figures. When the thin man arrives on the island, Kent is the first to speak out openly in favor of getting rid of the man. When the worm attacks, Kent insists on getting a glimpse and becomes infected. Kent becomes the one to lead the revolt against the infected Tim by locking Tim in the closet. As Kent breaks down under the infestation, Shelley torments Kent and finally drowns him.

Ephraim

Ephraim Elliot is a 14 year-old member of Scout Troop 52 and a resident of Lower Montague. Best friends with Max, Ephraim is a well-liked kid who worries about having anger issues. Ephraim is ordinarily tough and calm, but the infection on the island quickly shatters his confidence. Shelley insists he has seen a worm crawling under Ephraim's fingernails. Shelley later goads Ephraim into hacking apart his own body with a knife in order to catch the worm Shelley insists is inside him. When Ephraim is returned to camp by Max and Newt, Shelley lights Ephraim on fire and burns him to death. Tragically, Ephraim is the only member of the troop who is conclusively not infected.

Tom Padgett, aka "The Thin Man"

Tom Padgett is the first human test subject that Edgerton and Erikson experiment on with the modified hydatid. Edgerton gets Tom to agree to the tests with alcohol and plenty of cash. Tom, down on his luck at the time, accepts. Under the influence of the hydatid, Tom is released from the labs where he finds his way to Lower Montague, at which point he steals a boat and motors to Falstaff Island. There, he is taken in by Tim. When he learns that Tim is attempting to contact the mainland, Tom smashes the radio apart. He later dies when Tim operates on him and the hydatid inside him pours out of his stomach.

Clive Edgerton

Clive Edgerton is a twisted scientist concerned only about results. Described as being bald and with thick glasses, Edgerton will do whatever he must to achieve results.

Under the guise of a weight loss pill, Edgerton genetically modifies hydatids for use as a biological weapon. Edgerton is ultimately arrested and imprisoned for what he has done.

Nathan Erikson

Nathan Erikson is the assistant of Edgerton hired on for his dissertation on worms. Erikson's testimony against Edgerton is used throughout the novel to contextualize the situation Max and his friends are confronted with on the island. Erikson displays disgust at Edgerton's work but hung around to see the results. Erikson denies any knowledge of Edgerton working with a military contractor, and denies any knowledge that Edgerton sought to find a way to weaponized the modified hydatid.

Admiral Brewer

Stonewall Brewer is an admiral in the Canadian Navy. His testimony is included at various points throughout the novel to contextualize the situation Max and his friends are facing. It is revealed that Brewer was part of an elaborate conspiracy to run a controlled test on a small group of individuals (Max and his friends) and to cover it up. Brewer's role is found out, but his fate is never revealed.

Symbols and Symbolism

Modified hydatids

Modified hydatids are genetically engineered worms that are the creation of Edgerton and serve as the source of the infestation and contagion in the novel. The modified hydatids were supposedly originally intended to be ingested and flushed out as weight loss pills, but were later re-engineered for the purposes of weaponization. The modified hydatid infects its host with two purposes: to feed and reproduce. Infestation occurs within hours. The hydatid survives only as long as it has a food source. It has the ability to adapt to any situation it finds itself in. For example, it can become airborne if ground travel is impossible. As the hydatid invades a host, it takes over everything from the host's nervous system to its bodily functions, fighting for control of the host. The hydatid has only one weakness, and that is itself. It eats and colonizes until the host can no longer support it, at which time the host collapses and the worms must quickly find another host.

Storm

A bad storm hits Falstaff Island during the novel. The storm literally and symbolically represents the arrival of wreckage, death, and destruction. The storm itself sends a tree crashing into the cabin, killing Tim instantly. Symbolically, the storm serves as an ill-omen for the boys as chaos is about to erupt as they battle to survive. The storm between the boys will come to cost the lives everyone but Max.

Turtle

While foraging for food, a turtle is discovered by Max and Newt. Knowing they need to eat, they decide to kill the turtle. However, the turtle tries to get away, and even when being stabbed, does not want to give up without a fight. This becomes reflective and symbolic of the boys' own struggle to survive and has both good and bad implications. There is hope in fighting to survive on the one hand, but on the other, there is the knowledge that people will do anything they must to survive. This includes friends turning against one another.

Spark plugs

Spark plugs are pulled from the engine of the boat that the thin man takes to Falstaff Island and consumed in his insatiable hunger. Max must later extract the spark plugs from the thin man's stomach after death. The spark plugs are stolen by Shelley, who uses them to lure Max and Newt into the cave.

Radio

The Falstaff Island cabin has a single marine radio for contact with the outside world. Tim uses the radio for weather reports, important information, and to be in touch with people on the mainland. When Tim attempts to use the radio to call in about the thin man, the thin man smashes the radio into pieces. This means the boys will effectively be on their own and will have no way of calling for help.

Lighter

A lighter is carried by Shelley through the course of the novel. Shelley does not use the lighter to light campfires, but to torture others. He uses the lighter to burn a spider web and singe a spider. He later uses the lighter and gasoline to set Ephraim on fire, burning Ephraim to death. Shelley's use of the lighter is ironic. In a situation of survival, a lighter is used to generate a fire and help one to survive. In the novel, Shelley uses the lighter to kill others.

Boat

A boat is stolen from North Point in Lower Montague by Tom Padgett as he heads toward Falstaff Island. He motors the boat to the island, where he removes the spark plugs from the motor and eats them. The boat is later repaired by Max and Newt, who use the boat to flee the island. The boat, intended to save the life of Newt, leads to Newt's death as Newt is shot by a sniper for carrying the infection.

Buck knife

A Buck knife is wielded by Tim on the Falstaff Island camping expedition. The Buck knife is used for everything from preparing food to helping to cut up small kindling for fire. However, Tim uses the Buck knife for self-defense on the first night of the expedition against the worm that emerges from the thin man. Tim uses the knife to cut the worm in half.

Napalm

Napalm is a highly dangerous incendiary weapon which burns and sets on fire everything it touches. First extensively used in the Vietnam War, napalm strikes are later leveled at Falstaff Island to eradicate the worm infection. Four napalm strikes are taken against the island, burning it to a crisp.

Anotec Blue

Anotec Blue, also known as “Blue Death,” is a highly chemical liquid compound which is used to kill off dangerous aquatic or waterborne life forms. It is also deadly to all life forms in the water as well. Four million gallons of Anotec are dumped into the water by the Canadian Navy to kill any worms or creatures that may have become infected by worms in the water.

Settings

Falstaff Island

Falstaff Island is a large, rocky island off the coast of Lower Montague, North Point, and Prince Edward Island. There is one building on the island, a cabin, overseen and maintained by the Canadian government. The island is rocky, largely forested, has a number of pebbly beaches, tidal pools, underground caverns, and has one dock. The island serves as the main setting for the novel, and is where Tim brings Troop 52 for a weekend camping expedition. It is later where the thin man arrives with the infection. The island becomes a place of horror and a scene for a fight to survive among the boys as the infection spreads. The island is quarantined by the Canadian Navy. Following the escape of Max, the island is firebombed with napalm, and the surrounded waters are flooded with Anotec Blue.

Lower Montague

Lower Montague is a small, friendly town near North Point on Prince Edward Island in Canada. The town is home to Tim, Max, Ephriam, Shelley, Newt, Kent, and their families. Kent's father is the town's police chief, while Max's father is the town's mortician. The town is visited by the thin man on his way through to Falstaff Island, where he eats at the Diplomat Diner before heading to Falstaff Island. As the novel begins, the Canadian Armed Forces descend on the small town to set up operations to monitor and quarantine Falstaff Island.

The cabin

The cabin is a government-owned and maintained structure on Falstaff Island. The cabin is the only manmade structure on the island. It is used by everyone from researchers and campers to government employees. The cabin has a bathroom, a main room, and at least two bunkrooms in addition to a cellar. The cabin is where Tim and Troop 52 spend the night during their weekend camping expedition. The cabin is where Tim brings the thin man on the first night of the trip and where Tim and Max first confront the hydatid infection. When Tim contracts the hydatid, the boys rebel against him and lock him in the closet. During the storm, a tree crashes down onto the cabin, killing Tim instantly.

The cave

The cave is located in the rocky, forested terrain of Falstaff Island. The caves themselves go through the island into the ocean, and are affected by the ebb and flow of tides. The caves are sought out by Shelley when Shelley is driven away from the ruins of the cabin by Max and Newt. Max and Newt later seek out Shelley to recover

stolen spark plugs, and must enter the caves to retrieve them. There, Shelley attacks and infects Newt as he dies. Max must return to the caves later after pulling Newt out in order to retrieve the spark plugs.

Edgerton's home

Edgerton's lab is located somewhere near Summerside, Prince Edward Island, Canada. It is where Edgerton carries out his research on modified hydatids using test subjects ranging from guinea pigs to chimpanzees to at least one known human subject, Tom Padgett. The experiments performed in the lab are so cruel and bloody that Erikson cannot stand to observe and transcribe them. It is from Edgerton's lab that Padgett escapes and heads to Lower Montague.

Themes and Motifs

Horror

Horror is an important theme in the novel “The Troop” by Nick Cutter. There are the primary kinds of horror presented in the novel, all of which are designed to unnerve, unsettle, and frighten the reader. The three particular forms of horror woven into the novel include psychological horror, physical horror, and gore.

Psychological horror is terror of the mind, of things that are known, or of things that are believed. Psychological horror exists in many places in the novel. As the reader becomes aware of Shelley’s history—mutilating animals, drowning cats, and wanting to kill a person—the reader recognizes that the other four boys are in danger not just from the hydatid worms, but from Shelley as well. When the boys learn that the hydatid worm is spread like a contagion, they are terrified and fearful. They have knowledge of something known but not understood. Their fear prompts them to lock up Tim, and later cast out Kent. Likewise, Shelley propagates psychological horror by convincing Ephraim that he has been infected, and goading Ephraim into cutting apart his own body with a knife.

Physical horror, by way of a monster, comes in the form of the hydatids. There is sheer horror in the thin man’s appearance on the island, and in his behavior, from smashing the radio to eating the couch. The horror increases when a massive worm uncoils itself from the thin man’s stomach, and tries to attack Tim. Only Tim’s severing with a knife stops and kills the worm. Likewise, seeing the toll the hydatids exact on their hosts—gnawing hunger, emaciation, going pale, insides turning to slime, and the host being eaten from the inside out—cause a substantial amount of horror among Tim and the boys.

Gore—the spilling of blood—is also a kind of horror present in the novel. Gore is copious throughout the story, from the disgusting physical toll the hydatids take on their victims to Shelley’s murderous tendencies. There is significant gore when a host dies, or is in the process of dying, such as the chimpanzee who rips off its own flesh. There is significant gore in the slicing open of the thin man to see what illness he has. There is tremendously descriptive gore as Ephraim literally cuts himself apart to root out a worm that doesn’t exist at Shelley’s urging. There is also gore as Shelley drowns Kent, watches his body come apart from the hydatids, and when Shelley sets Ephraim on fire.

Science and Ethics

Science and ethics form an important theme in the novel “The Troop” by Nick Cutter. Science and what is scientifically possible is meant to be kept in check by ethics. Science determines what can or can’t be done. Ethics—essentially what is morally right or wrong—determines whether something should or should not be done. In the novel,

Edgerton and Erikson push scientific boundaries under the guise of a weight loss pill to modify and test hydatids.

The cover is that the hydatids will be formed into a pill which will be taken by a consumer, causing weight loss to a desired point. Then, a second pill will be taken which will kill and flush out the hydatids that have taken up residence in the human body. Currently illegal in all countries in North America, the use of hydatids in other countries for weight loss is common. But in keeping with the theme of science and ethics, just because something is possible doesn't make it right. The willing consumption of a parasitic, colonizing worm is only an invitation for trouble.

As Erikson and others note, Edgerton plays fast and loose with ethics. He does not care about the moral implications of his work, but merely wants to achieve results and do whatever he can. This includes not only modifying hydatids, but weaponizing them for a military contractor for the Canadian military. Edgerton has no qualms or concerns about watching a chimpanzee literally rip itself apart as hydatids invade its body; and Edgerton has no moral issue with a controlled test on Troop 52 on Falstaff Island.

Just because something is possible with science doesn't mean it should be done. The Canadian military doesn't understand this ethical standpoint either. It funnels millions of dollars through the contractor to Edgerton to weaponize the hydatid. The military becomes the way by which the test on Troop 52 is controlled on the island. There is no moral concern for the safety or the lives of the boys, but only concern with how the experiment will unfold.

Survival

Survival is an important theme in the novel "The Troop" by Nick Cutter. Survival, thematically, has to do with endurance and perseverance, of overcoming great odds. In the novel, Tim, Max, and the other boys must struggle to survive against the hydatid infestation. They must also struggle for survival against Shelley.

From the arrival of the thin man on the island, Tim and Troop 52 are engaged in a struggle for their lives as the hydatid infestation spreads to Tim. At first, Tim is infected. Knowing that the infestation is contagious, Kent leads a rebellion against Tim, locking him in a closet. When Kent becomes infected, the boys do their best to separate themselves from Kent, but are unable to do so for long. Their compassion gets the better of them as they allow Kent into the cellar of the cabin during the storm. Ephraim's own desire to survive becomes paramount to the point that he slices up his own body to root out an imagined worm inside him.

The struggle for survival is demonstrated by the symbolic killing of a turtle. While they are foraging for food, a turtle is discovered by Max and Newt. Knowing they need to eat, they decide to kill the turtle for food. However, the turtle attempts to get away. Even when being stabbed repeatedly, the turtle does not want to give up without a fight. This becomes reflective and symbolic of the boys' own struggle to survive. There is good and

bad in this symbolism. There is hope in fighting to survive on the good side, but on the other, there is the knowledge that people will do anything they must or can in order to survive. This includes friends turning against one another. At various points, the boys themselves come to blows over survival. For example, Max attacks Newt when he suspects Newt of stealing the spark plugs.

Shelley takes advantage of the breakdown in order to brutalize and murder his fellow troopmates. Shelley arguably becomes more dangerous than the hydatid because he is a thinking, intelligent being determined to kill purely for the sport and pleasure of it. When Shelley is infected, he becomes all the more dangerous. He murders Kent and Ephraim before turning his focus on Newt and Max. Max and Newt risk their own lives by going after the spark plugs. Without risking their lives, they will not have a chance for survival. The attempt pays off, but Newt is killed by sniper when they are stopped by naval vessels. In the end, only Max survives. However, his survival is questionable because everyone, including his own parents, now keep him at arm's length and treat him differently. He has survived, but his life will never again be the same.

Friendship

Friendship is an important theme in the novel "The Troop" by Nick Cutter. In the novel, friendship between Tim and his scouts, and between the scouts themselves (Max, Newt, Ephraim, Kent, and Shelley) proves incredibly important to unfolding events in some instances, and matters nothing in other instances. Both ways help to drive the plot.

When the novel begins, Tim acknowledges that the five boys have been lifelong friends because of the scouts. While they may not have been friends without scouts, the fact that they are friends in scouts matters a great deal to them. Indeed, Max and Ephraim are even best friends. They share many common interests from God to girls. All of the scouts consider Tim to be a friend in addition to their scoutmaster. Friendship is among the reasons the boys are all looking forward to and are enjoying their weekend on the island.

However, friendship does not stop Kent from leading a revolt against Tim when Tim becomes infected. Kent believes that some things defy friendship, such as a deadly contagion. With the assistance of the other boys, who consider their friendship with each other in addition to their survival paramount to their friendship with Tim, Kent locks Tim in the closet. There, Tim will remain until he dies.

When order begins breaking down, friendship does not make things better. Max tries to instigate Ephraim into not giving up by challenging Ephraim's manhood, leading to Ephraim punching Max in the face. Immediately, Ephraim apologizes and Max accepts, but this small incident notes that friendship means nothing anymore. Likewise, when Max believes Newt has stolen or lost the spark plugs, he begins fighting Newt. Shelley, despite his history of friendliness with the other boys, has no concerns about drowning

Kent, manipulating Ephraim into carving up his own body with a knife, or burning Ephraim alive.

Open Endings

An Open Ending serves as an important theme in the novel “The Troop” by Nick Cutter. An open ending essentially involves a conclusion that is intentionally vague or ill-defined. This adds to the horror of the novel because readers simply do not know what happens next as the ending is left open to interpretation.

The ultimate fate of Erikson, Brewer, and all those associated with the hydatid experiment is left uncertain beyond Edgerton. It is known that Edgerton is in jail, but his fellow conspirators may still be at large. Likewise, an ominous Facebook message sent to Newt's fake profile reveals strange goings-on in other towns, leading the reader to wonder if perhaps there were more than just one experiment, or if the viral worm has somehow managed to get off the island.

The final scene in the book is of Max returning to the island under cover of darkness with an unnamed hunger inside him. This begs at least three possible endings. First is that Max does indeed have the viral worm inside him. As noted, the hydatid worm can adapt to any circumstance it needs to. It could very easily have lain dormant, hidden, or found a way to minimize its effects on Max until the proper time. But again, this is unknown.

The second plausible ending to the novel is that the hunger inside Max is not a physical hunger, but an emotional and mental hunger for the freedom Max enjoyed on the island despite fighting for his life. Without civilization, Max was free to do as he pleased, including risking his own life to save his life. Max was truly in his own element as he fought to save Newt, and sought to escape the island.

The third plausible ending to the novel is that the hunger Max experiences is one of an emotional loss. Though Max has survived the island, he has not truly survived. He has his life, but not his old life. Everyone, including his parents, treats him differently now. They avoid him whenever possible. It is possible the hunger Max experiences is a yearning for his lost friends, for the way things were before the events of that one weekend. In that case, Max is returning to visit the scene where everything was and then stopped being normal: the island.

Styles

Point of View

Nick Cutter writes his novel “The Troop” from the third-person omniscient perspective. This is done for at least three reasons, all relating to the atmosphere of horror. The first is to provide contextual information for the reader in order to add to the horror. For example, Cutter explains what is happening to the thin man’s stomach—unknown to himself or to the boys on the island—as the novel gets underway. This chills the reader, and allows the reader to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that something is very wrong with the man. The second is to provide contextual information on the situation to increase terror. While the boys do not understand what is happening, the reader comes to understand what is happening through the insertion of articles, testimonies, and excerpts from speeches. This increases the horror and suspense because the reader knows what is coming for the boys because they understand the extent of the threat. The third reason is to allow the reader to know everything going on, from Shelley plotting to kill the other boys to the thin man’s original approach to the island. This increases terror on the part of the reader since the reader has been given knowledge of what is going on in all places on and off the island, whereas the boys have no idea.

Language and Meaning

Nick Cutter writes “The Troop” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. The first is that the novel falls into the genre of horror. The simple and straightforward language cuts down to the base level of emotions and experiences of the boys on the island, and the simple and straightforward language allows great descriptive detail in very fundamental terms of the horror the boys are facing. Likewise, the simple and straightforward language lends an air of urgency and desperation to the novel, as the language itself is brief and the events in the novel are fast-paced. Secondly, the age of the kids featured in the novel hovers around 14. The language used is also in keeping with their age range and level of education. This adds an element of realism and believability to the novel.

Structure

Nick Cutter divides his novel “The Troop” into 50 numbered chapters from 1 to 50. The chapters themselves are usually only a few pages in length, reinforcing the simple and straightforward language by keeping things short. This lends a sense of speed and urgency to events. The chapters themselves are broken up here and there by articles, transcribed testimony, speech excerpts, and an ad graphic for weight loss pills. These documents add important contextual information to the novel, such as detailing the origin of the hydatid threat, thereby increasing the scope of horror in the novel.

Quotes

EAT EAT EAT EAT

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: As the novel begins, the thin man later identified as Tom Padgett is driven on by an insatiable hunger. No matter how much he eats, he cannot seem to shake his hunger. As the reader later learns, this is because the man has a colony of killer worms inside him. Nevertheless, the crushing desire for food—and the desperation to get away from Edgerton—lead the thin man on to Falstaff Island and Troop 52.

Could Tim possibly leave him alone and starving a few feet outside the cabin? Could he live with that stain on his soul? No.

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 5 paragraph 43)

Importance: The arrival of the thin man presents Tim with a startling and difficult choice. As a scoutmaster and a human being, Tim is sworn to protect the scouts in his care. As a doctor and a human being, Tim feels a need to try to help the thin man, even though everything about the situation tells Tim not to try. Ultimately, Tim comes to believe that he will not be able to live with himself if he does not try to help the man. This in turn serves to be the catalyst for the events of the novel.

The water always turns red before a storm.

-- Newt (Part 1, Chapter 10 paragraph 43)

Importance: As Newt, Max, and the other boys hike around the island, they see a storm is coming. The storm is an ill-omen of wreckage and death. The water turns red due to plankton protozoans floating to the surface due to electricity in the air, but the red water also has a symbolic meaning as well in conjunction with the storm: blood is going to be spilled.

The man inside is sick. Sick in a way I've never seen before, at least not that I can diagnose here.

-- Tim (Part 1, Chapter 11 paragraph 1)

Importance: Tim reveals to his boys that there is a serious situation unfolding in the cabin with the man. He explains the man is sick in an unknown way, and that the man needs help. While Kent argues that the man should be done away with, Tim still wants to try to level out the situation however he can. However, this ends up putting the boys in danger once again because simply by talking to the boys, the now-infected Tim is in danger of catching the infection. Tim also reveals through this quote the terrifying truth that they have no idea what they are truly up against.

Tim understood his obligation to these boys and to their parents. He must keep them safe. Scout's honor.

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 14 paragraph 16)



Importance: There is great irony in Tim's thought pattern here. Tim's obligation has always been to protect the boys, but by inviting the stranger into their midst, Tim has compromised the boys' safety and set in motion a chain of events which cannot be undone. If Tim had ordered the man away, locked the cabin up, and kept the man out, the situation may have resolved itself. However, Tim's sudden recognition that he needs to protect the boys has come too late. Nothing he does now can help them.

That meant he could play his games. And if he played them patiently enough, carefully enough, he might be the only one left to greet a boat when –if? –it did show up.

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 19 paragraph 30)

Importance: Here, Shelley emerges as a rival threat to the hydatid contagions. Shelley has long desired to kill people, and he now has a perfect opportunity to do so. While the hydatid worm acts according to its nature and instincts, Shelley can plot, scheme, and think as a rational being. This makes him especially dangerous, perhaps even more so than the hydatid. The boys will now have to survive Shelley in addition to the hydatids.

The hardest-hearted part of the boys realized that Kent had earned this. If you call the tune, you also have to pay the piper when he begs his due.

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 21 paragraph 32)

Importance: It is Kent who leads the revolt against Tim that puts Tim in a locked closet. However, Kent himself has been exposed to the virus by his incessant need to know and his desire to rebel against authority. When the storm comes to the island, Kent is denied entry to the cellar at first because he is infected. None of the boys are very troubled by this, because their own survival is at stake and because they know Kent's exposure was Kent's own fault.

Shelley had a method of probing, of opening doors in people that was uncanny. He rarely used this gift –it could get him in trouble. But he was able to spy the weak spots the way a sculptor saw the seams in a block of granite; one tap in the right spot and it'd split right open.

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 27 paragraph 107)

Importance: Inspiring psychological horror, the narrator reveals that Ephraim has a knack for manipulation. He uses this against Ephraim to break Ephraim down mentally. He begins by telling Ephraim he has seen a worm under Ephraim's fingernail. He then goes on to break Ephraim down, and is able to convince Ephraim to carve himself up with a knife in the attempt to kill an imagined worm.

But most living things don't want to die. It took a lot to kill them.

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 30 paragraph 95)

Importance: In a scene of great symbolic importance, Max and Newt kill a turtle in the need of food. However, the experience discourages them and stops their hunger pains. This demonstrates much more than their moral sensitivity at having to kill a living thing,



no matter how desperate. It indicates that a living being will do anything it must to survive, including other people. Nothing, not even friendship, will be enough to stop the murderous impulses of Shelley, or the need of the boys to survive the torments of the island.

When the other boys didn't return by nightfall, Shelley decided to kill Kent.

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 32 paragraph 35)

Importance: Here, Shelley's true, sick nature comes through. Without the other boys around, he moves on to kill Kent by drowning Kent. However, this serves to be his undoing. As he drowns Kent, worms escape from Kent's body and attack Shelley. Shelley himself becomes infected. But rather than panic, Shelley comes to glorify in the infection, knowing he is now more dangerous than ever before. Shelley will prove to be a dangerous challenge for Max and Newt.

You hold onto life until it gets ripped away from you. Even if it gets ripped away in pieces. You just hold on.

-- Max (Chapter 48 paragraph 72)

Importance: Here, Max reflects on the death of the turtle and the need for survival in an interview. He says that people must always fight to live, no matter the cost. Even when pieces of life are taken away, people must fight for survival. It is what kept the turtle going, and it is what kept Max going through the island ordeal. The advice Max gives isn't just for horrific circumstances, but for any sad or tragic situation as well.

A nameless hunger was building inside of him. It gnawed at his guts with teeth that called his name.

-- Narrator (chapter 50 paragraph 5)

Importance: Here, the author leaves the book with an open ending. There are at least three potential reasons why Max ultimately returns to the island. The first is that Max is infected with the hydatid, which has lain dormant until now when he feels a hunger. Second, it could be that Max misses the absolute freedom he had on the island as he fought to survive. The hunger is for that freedom once more. Third, it is possible that Max has a desire to return to normalcy, and the last time things were normal for Max was on the island before the arrival of the thin man. That hunger may be for better times.