

Travels Study Guide

Travels by Michael Crichton

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Plot Summary

Travels by Michael Crichton is a work of non-fiction, depicting the years 1965-1986 in the life of the physician turned writer and world traveler.

John Michael Crichton (1942 - 2008) was a Harvard Medical School Alumnus, American author, screenwriter, director, producer, and world traveler. Crichton is best known for writing novels in the areas of science and medical fiction as well as more mainstream thrillers. Crichton's books include: Airframe, The Andromeda Strain, Congo, Disclosure, Jurassic Park, The Lost World, Prey, Rising Sun, Sphere, Timeline, and Travels.

Crichton learned fairly early on that a life in medicine was not for him. Crichton struggled with the required detachment from patients and their conditions. As Crichton's education continued, the more the would-be author began to dislike the way many people handled themselves in the profession. Crichton turned his full focus on writing.

In general, the book is written in chronological order, beginning with "Medical Days (1965-1969)." This part details Crichton's early years as well as his experiences at Harvard Medical School. Crichton also details information about personal relationships, experiences in medical school as well as in various hospitals. It also discusses briefly Crichton's early days as a writer and the final decision to quit medicine.

Crichton's issues with medicine were many. The author did not agree that abortion should be illegal; that patients should not ask questions; that the terminally ill should not be forced to take treatments they did not want. In other words, Crichton did not want to become the kind of doctor that he himself would not consult.

Throughout medical school, Crichton had supported himself by writing thrillers. It became clearer than ever that Crichton was cut out to be a writer. The author wrote extensively. The thrillers paid for medical school. Crichton wrote about thinly veiled experiences at Harvard and won the Edgar for Best Mystery of the Year award. Crichton realized that everyone would find out what he had done. In the end, Crichton need not have worried since no one found out. However, Crichton's success as a writer caused other conflicts, such as an invitation to fly out to Hollywood regarding a movie deal while on rounds. Crichton decided to go.

Part 2, "Travels (1971-1986)" gives an in-depth look at Crichton's travel experiences throughout the world. These, too, are mostly chronological although there are some cases in which Crichton refers to previous experiences to illustrate a point or to give a more current experience deeper significance.

It was after Crichton moved to California that he began to get the traveling bug again. The book details Crichton's travels around the world, which typically included remote places and interesting cultures far removed from the life of a westerner living in California. The trips almost always involved diving and visiting ancient and mysterious structures.

Along with outward travels, Crichton also travels inward. The author departs from his former life as a scientist and begins to delve into his inner being, becoming intensely interested in various areas of metaphysics. The two areas of the author's life mesh in many ways to provide Crichton, and the reader, with an interesting journey.



Part 1, Medical Days: Chapters 1-9

Part 1, Medical Days: Chapters 1-9 Summary and Analysis

In chapter one, Michael Crichton starts out by talking about his days at Harvard Medical School. The first tale Crichton tells is about dissecting the skull of a cadaver. It was a difficult job and not one Crichton was eager to perform.

Crichton says that he never really set out to be a doctor. Crichton grew up in a suburb of New York City. Crichton's father was a journalist. There were no doctors in the family and Crichton had initially gone to college to study English, hoping to become a writer. Crichton was constantly being tested by his father, who was a stickler for proper grammar and word usage.

Crichton did not have a good college experience. Crichton started out as a student in Harvard's English Department, which turned out to be too difficult for him. The author maintained a C average, despite his best efforts. To prove that the department was too difficult, Crichton decided to plagiarize a paper on Gulliver's Travels. Crichton took an essay written by George Orwell, retyped it and submitted it under his own name. The penalty for plagiarism was expulsion but Crichton was at the end of his rope. The result of the experiment was that Orwell's essay received a B-. It was time to shift gears.

Crichton switched to anthropology and eventually to pre-med. The hardest course, according to Crichton, was Organic Chemistry, a course which the students often referred to as a "screw your buddy" course. If a student had to ask a question of another student, the wrong answer was invariably given. No one wanted anyone else to succeed, hoping that the errors on the other students' parts would make the first student look better. Crichton was discouraged by the nasty and competitive nature of the class. Additionally, Crichton was well known for setting lab fires. "In my year, I had the dubious distinction of starting more lab fires than anyone else, including a spectacular ether fire that set the ceiling aflame and left large scorch marks, a stigmata of ineptitude hanging over my head for the rest of the year" (p. 4).

Crichton had mixed opinions about the medical profession. The author referred to it as a caring profession with a scientific bent. After graduating from college, Crichton took a year off to spend time in Europe before entering Harvard to begin training in the field of medicine.

The author returns to the tale of dissecting the cadaver. The experiences of the first time in the dissection room are detailed. It is obvious that it was not what Crichton or the other students expected. The excitement quickly wore away when the cadavers had to be cut open for the first time. The second year students just laughed at the first years' reactions, remembering all too well what it was like to be in their shoes.



The first year program was extremely difficult. The professor suggested that the students use mnemonics and to quiz each other endlessly. It worked. After a while, the students began to joke and give the cadavers names, one way they were able to shut off emotionally and achieve some balance in their lives and studies.

In chapter two, Crichton details his experience with diagnostics. The resident would often refer to patients as having a good story, meaning that the case was interesting and often had hidden components. Crichton talks about a patient suffering from alleged physical abuse by her husband, only to find out that she had been divorced for several years and that the cuts on her body were self-inflicted. The second story involves a man who was convinced he had cancer. He did not. The man could not be convinced, even though every doctor and technician assured the man he was not dying. The man had overhead interns talking about the patient in the next bed, misunderstood the conversation and believed he was dying.

In chapter three, Crichton began his first medical rounds in the neurological department of Boston City Hospital. Crichton says the hospital looked like a prison; something straight out of the eighteenth century. On his way to check in on the first day, Crichton was stopped by a man in the hallway. The man was intensely delusional and insisted that Crichton remove his shoes, which did not exist. The man also saw spiders. Crichton would later learn that the man was a severe alcoholic and was suffering from the DTs. Because of the experience, Crichton was three minutes late and sufficiently berated by Dr. Rogers, a sadistic man serving as visiting chief resident from Duke University.

Dr. Rogers was nearly intolerable. Crichton and some of the other interns found him hard to put up with; one intern in particular loathed the doctor, a feeling that Crichton would soon share.

One day, Crichton realized that the interns were getting stoned before rounds. The author was horrified. It turned out that the dope was being supplied by the elevator operator, a former patient. Crichton's fellow intern said that most of the nurses were stoned, too. In a place where few, if any, would be cured, it didn't seem to matter.

Crichton's biggest problem during this rotation was the fact that he could not stand the sight of blood. Drawing blood from patients was a major ordeal for Crichton. Eventually, interns, techs, and even patients helped draw blood. Crichton was relieved when the rotation was over and he could move on to psychiatrics.

In chapter four, Crichton began his six week psychiatric rotation at Massachusetts General Hospital. The patients lived on a communal ward. Crichton's job would be to interview several patients, to focus on one in particular, and write a paper on diagnostics. Crichton ends up with Karen, aka "The Girl Who Seduced Everybody."

Dr. Geller was the chief resident and gave Crichton advice about the girl. Karen had, in fact, seduced every man she had ever come in contact with and Geller questioned if Crichton would be able to keep from having sex with her. Crichton was shocked. Karen



was a patient. Besides, Crichton had been married for two years. There was no way he would have sex with Karen.

Crichton discusses Karen with his wife, a child psychology graduate student at Brandeis University. Supposedly Karen had gone to the hospital after a bad trip on LSD. Of course, it was not true. Karen also talks about being molested by her father and pregnancies at fourteen and sixteen. Geller continues to question Crichton about his interest in Karen. Crichton is wavering on the subject and begins to dream about the girl. Geller also wants to know why Crichton had neglected to ask Karen about her mother. Crichton meets the mother who insists Karen is lying about everything. Although sorely tempted, Crichton manages to avoid sexual contact with Karen.

At the end of the rotation, Crichton was instructed to write a five page paper diagnosing Karen's mental illness. Crichton writes twenty-four pages but still misses information that Geller feels is crucial. The new information shows that Karen has a 50-50 chance of committing suicide. Geller believes she will do it. When asked what could be done for Karen, Geller and others simply say that that's just the way it is.

In chapter five, Crichton discusses his experiences in obstetrics at the Boston Lying In Hospital. The entire scene is surreal to Crichton. There were many well-to-do women suffering and screaming from pain. Crichton quickly learns that the women have refused pain killers in exchange for Scopolamine, an amnesiac drug. Crichton is amazed that the women would choose to suffer through the experience but were content as long as they could not remember it.

The girls from the home for unwed mothers did take the drugs when needed. It seemed to Crichton that the wealthy were being punished by choice and the indigent were indulged. It made no sense.

Crichton connected with a young red-headed sophomore named Debbie. Debbie was upbeat and nice to talk to. One day, Crichton stopped into see Debbie and the girl was gone. The nurse did not know where Debbie had gone and in fact was unable to recognize the girl's description because she never looked at their faces. Crichton stopped showing up for rounds.

In chapter six, Crichton tells a story about Emily, a seemingly demented old woman who was all alone in the world and quite hostile. All kinds of unnecessary tests were being run. In the end, Emily's attitude had nothing to do with an illness, she was a Bohemian and enjoyed being quirky and outraged.

In chapter seven, there is a disaster at Beth Israel Hospital. Two-thirds of the patients on the same ward had a heart attack. No common thread could be found. Crichton recalls a study in which a doctor hypothesized that people caused their own illnesses. Crichton took stock in that. However, if people created their own illnesses, they should be able to cure themselves as well. Crichton says, "We cause our diseases. We are directly responsible for any illness that happens to us" (p. 60)



Crichton discovers a connecting thread between the heart attacks and individual personalities. Questioning shows that Crichton's theory is correct. The new concept in medicine is exciting to Crichton. However, because heart attacks are not interesting, almost no one paid attention. The doctors, including Crichton, back away.

Chapter eight deals with major blunders on behalf of Drs. W, X, Y, and Z. In the case of Dr. W, a fifty-two-year-old patient is informed that there is a node on his lung. The man waffles about surgery. The x-ray that was taken was never questioned and the man never asked. Convinced that the node is cancerous, the man assumes the worst and commits suicide. It turns out that the "node" was in fact a piece of beef that had been aspirated - a problem easily fixed.

Dr. X causes an amputation through negligence after mistakenly tying off the femoral artery of a female patient. It is later learned that this incident has happened before. Dr. X is allowed to maintain his license, only the privilege to operate has been revoked.

Dr. Y earned Crichton's disdain when allowing a diehard alcoholic traveling salesman to return to being on the road, despite the sure knowledge that the man would continue to drink and drive.

The case of Dr. Z included a father and son who were both doctors. The father was a seventy-eight-year-old man who was in end stage renal and cardiac failure. The man had specifically left instructions not to be resuscitated. When the time came, the man slipped into a coma. The staff tried to revive him, despite objections. The man came out of a coma, vehemently protested the therapy but was held down and the therapy was administered anyway.

In chapter nine, at least once a year during medical school and internship, Crichton attempted to quit. Each time he was dissuaded. As time went on, Crichton became more and more disillusioned about the way medicine was practiced. It was discovered that the lecturers at Harvard were giving extremely poor instruction to students. Crichton could not decide between being a surgeon or psychiatrist. At this point, Crichton decides to get his degree and then quit. Corman attempts to talk Crichton out of it yet again. This time, Corman would not succeed. "'I thought you would quit in the end,' he said. 'Your fantasies are too strong'" (p. 68).

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Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 1-5

Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 1-5 Summary and Analysis

In chapter one, Crichton begins his stories about sex and death in Los Angeles. By this time, Crichton and his wife were both living in California and were separated. LA was not really like anything Crichton expected. The author had rented an apartment in a place where people often went when they were getting divorced. Crichton was in a strange city, and he was lonely.

Crichton describes people at the pool in his apartment complex. Life in Los Angeles was not nearly as exciting as Crichton had hoped. Although there were some movie stars in the area, they tended to wear dark sunglasses and avoid all of the common people.

Crichton's tales of goings-on in the apartment complex are quite funny and bizarre. One story deals with Miss Jenkins, a young lesbian who ODs in her apartment. Because the people in the building know that Crichton is a doctor, he is the first person to be called when there is some kind of tragedy. No one seems to care about the fact that Crichton is not licensed in Los Angeles and cannot practice. The story usually ends up with someone asking Crichton just to take a look to assess the situation. In the case of Miss Jenkins, it had been reported that the woman fell off the commode. Right away, Crichton could see that the woman had ODeD. There were drugs and beer throughout the apartment. The woman's roommate and lover had found the body and then decided to take the dog for a walk. No one had called the police. After lot of confusion, Crichton was informed that he needed to call the fire department. When the fire department arrived, they informed Crichton that he should have called paramedics. The woman was not dead and it seemed that she would be fine. During all of the chaos the roommate returned and began to scream and become hysterical. The woman claimed that there were no drugs or beer in the apartment. When she laughed, she kicked Crichton and the firefighters, the dog bit someone, and the woman screamed, accusing Crichton of robbing her. Crichton remained, and the doorman that he was not licensed in California and was unable to practice medicine. Apparently, the management had put the distinction of M.D. after Crichton's name in the lobby, and so everyone is soon that he was on call 24/7.

The next case involves someone named Billy falling from an apartment window and into the shrubs in front of the complex. Once again Crichton is called. Crichton's objections fall on deaf ears once again. Crichton agrees to go and look at the victim, who turns out to be a cat.

In chapter two, Crichton and his wife were still going through the process of separation. Crichton's wife suggested that he go to see Arthur Norton at UCLA, a noted psychiatrist. Crichton does not believe in psychiatry. Finally, Crichton agrees to go to see Norton. Crichton decides to perform for Dr. Norton, trying to be as interesting and strange as



possible. Norton calmly asks Crichton many questions, and although the doctor rarely took on new patients, he agrees to see Crichton as a patient. Crichton decides to give the doctor a chance, while lamenting the cost of the sessions.

After few sessions, Norton gets to the root of some of Crichton's problems. According to Norton, Crichton is a people pleaser who never received enough positive reinforcement while growing up. Therefore, Crichton is insecure. Although Crichton was still disturbed by some of Norton's platitudes, he decided to continue the sessions. Crichton had been sheltered in many ways, especially because he devoted so much time to his medical studies that he was in some ways naïve. Crichton was also confused about women, and Norton suggested that the problem was that Crichton was not being honest with them.

Crichton and his wife divorced. Crichton buys a house and continues to move away from academia.

Crichton quickly learns the people in the movie industry lie. There is no sense of normal communication which makes it difficult to understand or trust anyone.

Crichton writes about dating a sex symbol who was not interested in sex.

Crichton is persuaded to go and see a psychic even though he does not believe in such things. The psychic tells Crichton many things that turn out to be true several months later, which sparks Crichton's interest in spirituality even more than it has been by the writings of people like Ram Dass, aka Richard Alpert, former Harvard alum and faculty member thrown out of the institution along with Timothy Leary. Although Crichton is the sort to place more stock in reality than spirituality, the author begins to find himself trolling bookstores and devouring every possible tome on various spiritual topics. Crichton also regains the urge to travel.

In chapter three, Crichton details his first trip to Bangkok. Traveling is not new to Crichton. The Crichton family traveled extensively throughout the author's youth. By the time Crichton was ready to graduate from high school, he had already visited forty-eight states and five European countries.

Arriving in Hong Kong was a thrill for Crichton. One of the first places Crichton goes is to one of the local markets, which is not nearly as nice as some he has seen. The thing that disturbs Crichton most is that the fish are killed and displayed with their hearts still beating inside, exposed for all to see.

Crichton details various customs about foods and his experiences with maintaining proper adherence to the four major rules, one of which is to never stand higher than a statue of Buddha. This proves to be particularly difficult for Crichton, who stands 6'9". There are some accommodations made, but the task is still daunting at times. The natives are also fascinated by the tall American and enjoy pointing, laughing and staring at the author.

Crichton also details a dinner party he attended with a friend. During the night, Crichton decides that he can have some drinks and partake in some Thai grass. After all, when it



Rome... Crichton ignored warnings about the strength of the drugs and went blind for a time.

One local also encourages Crichton and another friend to stop in at a whorehouse where children are often featured. The two friends refused and stepped outside while the third stayed inside.

Crichton begins to think about other places he wants to go.

In chapter four, in 1974, Crichton and his sister, Kim, a second year law student, decided to go to Bonaire, a small island off the coast of Venezuela. The first activity on the agenda was night diving. Both Crichtons are experienced divers. Crichton details the scenery below the surface. At one point, Kim wanted to use the camera that was around Crichton's neck. Somehow the air hose was pulled and the author lost his mouthpiece. The water was much too deep to be without oxygen. Still, Crichton remained calm. Through minutes, which seemed like hours, Crichton used logic to try and find the mouthpiece, to no avail. Suddenly, Crichton is no longer able to remain calm. He manages to get Kim's attention and she manages to find the mouthpiece.

Back at the hotel, Crichton has a strong need for sex. The author realizes that what people say about sex and death must be true.

Crichton wants to see a local shipwreck, against the advice of the local divemaster. The wreckage is very deep and it would be extremely dangerous for the Crichtons to go down to see it. Crichton pushes and cajoles until the divemaster gives one last warning, instructions, and vague directions meant to confuse. Crichton and Kim find the wreckage. They go underwater and are amazed at the size of the ship. Along the way, Crichton loses track of how much air is left in his tank and panics. There is no way to make it back to the surface with so little oxygen. Kim offers to share her tank, something they had done before, but Crichton could not do it. In the end, the brother and sister made it out of the water, but the experience had taken its toll on Crichton's body.

Crichton realizes that some part of him put himself in danger. This is not a new pattern and it is apparent that it is one to be broken.

In chapter five, Crichton's experiences in Pahang were like nothing he'd confronted before. The jungle was massive and confusing to one who had not grown up there. Still, there was a fascination for Crichton in the culture and he was particularly interested in the Sultan of Pahang, the richest state in Maylasia. Crichton plans a trip to coincide with the Sultan's birthday and managed to find a way to crash the birthday celebration. Unfortunately, Crichton made the trip on the old Sultan's birthday in May. The current Sultan's birthday was not until October.

Before going into the jungle, Crichton gets valuable advice from a friend on always carrying a compass, avoiding leeches and what to do if confronted by guerillas. Crichton discusses Kuala Lumpur and surrounding areas. Part of the trip was so that Crichton could see animals in the wild. A British couple ruins the first attempt because they cannot keep quiet. Crichton is amazed because the natives can walk for hundreds of



miles through the confusing jungle and never get lost. Crichton meets some of the Orang Asli of Semai tribe. Crichton wants nothing more than to see a tiger. It does not happen. One lesson Crichton learns in the jungle is that one must not hold on to any one thing too long.



Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 6-10

Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 6-10 Summary and Analysis

In chapter six, in 1975, Crichton and his girlfriend Loren travel to Kenya to stay at Craig Farm, a private nature reserve. Crichton wants to walk among the animals, something that is prohibited on government operated preserves. Crichton fancies himself as being a primitive hunter and wants to know how that feels. Animals have an invisible perimeter around themselves and always seem to know when humans are near.

Crichton and Loren camp for the night. Loren is an experienced camper while Crichton is not. Crichton's imagination runs wild while Loren sleeps. Crichton is especially distressed when he realizes that he has to pee. There is no way around going outside. Crichton hears noises and quickly becomes convinced that there is an elephant just outside the tent, ready to attack. Loren hears nothing. Neither sees an elephant at first, either. Suddenly, the couple comes face to face with an elephant but nothing else happens.

In Bora Bora, the couple is lectured on protecting oneself from sharks while going on a dive.

Chapter seven begins with Crichton talking to a guide who says the odds of Crichton making it to the top of Kilimanjaro are 7-1. Even the guide is against Crichton. Naturally, Crichton is not daunted and is determined to climb the 18,000 feet to the top.

The author details the entire grueling and physically exhausting trip. The altitude is extremely difficult to take, and while the couple had planned for the trip, there was really no way to know what to expect. At 17,000 feet, they are faced with the choice of going back or forging ahead. They decide to climb for one more hour. "The hikers above me are moving like that. And so am I. I have become a character in a television special" (p. 165). The trip continues on and Crichton and Loren finally make it to the 18,700 foot mark. Crichton's feet are bloody and discolored.

The trip has taught Crichton to redefine himself. "What I learned is this: that I had defined myself as a person who didn't like heights or cold, a person who didn't like to be dirty, a person who didn't like physical exertion or discomfort" (p. 168).

In chapter eight, Crichton talks about the trip to Uxmal, home of the Pyramid of the Magician, also known as Pyramid of the Dwarf although no one seems to know why. Uxmal is a great mystery. Crichton describes various scenes, structures and their origins, many of which are also unknown.



In chapter nine, Crichton receives a phone call while aboard a ship in the British Virgin Islands. The only instruction is to call home. The divemaster has no details but tells Crichton that he has to wait until they return to shore to make the call.

Crichton learns that his father had died. The man was only fifty-seven but had died of a heart attack in his office. Crichton's first reaction was to be extremely angry. After all, his father had ruined a wonderful Christmas vacation. Crichton continues to be angry, referring to his father as a son of a bitch. The man had a nasty streak and father and son did not have the classic close relationship. Crichton says he felt no remorse, no sadness. In fact, he didn't feel anything at all.

Much of the next few days made no sense to Crichton, from the hangers-on to the funeral service. The day after the funeral Crichton returns to California.

In chapter ten, Crichton goes to England and Ireland to film "The Great Train Robbery." Crichton finds that working in the UK is very different from working in California. This would be Crichton's third film and he was still inexperienced. The terminology and behaviors were a lot different and there was some stress on set. Crichton details working with Sean Connery on the film, a man that impressed Crichton. After viewing "Coma," the cast and crew held more respect for Crichton. The experience was exhausting but worthwhile.



Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 11-16

Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 11-16 Summary and Analysis

In chapter eleven, as time goes on, Crichton becomes more interested in the world of psychics. The author discusses the "psychic smorgasbord" that is the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain. The psychics there practice everything from tarot to palmistry to psychometry. Crichton discusses the various skills of the psychics and how he has become interested in psychic phenomena. The traveling has opened Crichton's eyes to different cultures, experiences, and ideas. This is a long way from the purely scientific student at Harvard just a few years earlier.

The most famous member of the Spiritualist Association is Arthur Conan Doyle. Like Crichton, Conan Doyle was a physician. Unlike Crichton, Conan Doyle had been interested in metaphysics even in medical school. The subject would eventually show up in many of his later works, including "The Hounds of the Baskervilles."

Crichton discusses Conan Doyle's involvement in the Society of Psychical Research, which the author joined in 1893. There was a scandal that surrounded the Society involving physicist William Crookes and a medium named Florrie Cook. The incident dealt with various episodes in which Cook would go into a trance, typically during a séance. After living in Crookes' home for a time, it turned out that Cook was in fact a fraud.

Conan Doyle was also involved in an episode in 1920 where two girls allegedly took pictures of fairies in their garden.

Crichton decided that it would be important to take a page from Conan Doyle's book and not to become as deeply involved in metaphysics as to be blinded by it. Still, the fascination grew. Crichton went to see many psychics in London. Some were frighteningly accurate. Some were vague. Some were just wrong. It was yet another learning experience for Crichton and one that would further his interest in metaphysical topics.

In chapter twelve, Baltistan was on the trail to Masherbrum Peak, a major climbing site in Pakistan. Crichton knew little about the Karakoram Mountains, which range from Afghanistan to Burma. The range is often mistakenly called the Himalaya although that name only refers to part of the mountain range. Additionally, the Himalaya is not the highest range in the world as Crichton thought. Although Mt. Everest is there, the highest range is actually the Karakoram. Many people visit the range to climb the world's second highest peak, K-2.



Crichton describes the scenery in the area and a trek throughout sparsely inhabited lands. The course was questionable at best and no one seemed to know exactly where they were going.

The trip was to be a deferred honeymoon for Crichton and Loren. Loren seemed to get the worst treatment from the villagers, from being scorned to being stoned while bathing in the river.

There were many unpleasant and scary incidents along the way. At the end of the trip, when the couple was back in Skardu, Crichton discovers that Loren was as upset as he about several incidents but chose to keep quiet as to not make the situation worse. Suddenly, Crichton feels isolated from his wife.

In chapter thirteen, Crichton is thrilled to be going to Hunza, the original Shangri-La. The trip is grueling and long with many delays. Once the group is finally on a bus to cross over the Karakoram Mountains, more problems arise. The bus driver is smoking hash and falling asleep at the wheel. After ten hours on the road, the group learns that there has been a landslide and the road is impassable. One of the other travelers informs Crichton that they have entered Tribal Territory, which is not safe at night. Crichton begins to panic. Major Shan, a fellow traveler, recommends staying at a military barracks which ends up being one hundred kilometers back in the direction from which they came. Although the base was overflowing with people, the group was accepted and spent the night.

The landslide had not been cleared and the group was going to have to go back or cross it on foot. The trip was perilous and daunting but the group somehow made it. The arrival at Hunza was extremely disappointing in that there were none of the 140-year-old people reputed to live there and the children were ugly mongrels, filthy and begging for money. Other areas did not seem to be any better. On a walk, it became clear to Loren and Crichton that their marriage was over.

In chapter fourteen, in Tahiti on Christmas vacation, Crichton, family and friends decided to go diving. The area they had chosen was Rangiroa, which was among the Tuamotu chain of atolls. The remnants of volcanoes had become coral reef. The divemaster insisted that the group go diving in the pass as it was the best place to go. The group was worried about sharks, which were supposedly plentiful.

The group ended up going on a terrifying and exhilarating dive, and most were carried by the current so they would have to swim right through the middle of a school of at least one hundred sharks. At the end of the day, one by one, the group decided to do it again...and again.

Crichton learned that if the animals did not frighten people so much, many would be inclined to spend more time with them than other people. Yet, it may be nature's way of furthering the human race and society as a whole. Still, how can man benefit from being afraid? Crichton ties it up nicely by stating, "Here I am, sitting in a traffic jam, breathing carbon monoxide and pollutants, staring at a hideous manmade landscape, but I really



am better off because, if all this were gone, lions and bears would attack and eat me" (p. 230).

In chapter fifteen, Crichton discusses a trip to Virunga to study gorillas. A conversation with a zoologist gives Crichton a different perspective when she says that she has no desire to study gorillas because they are too much like her. Crichton does not understand until he makes the trip himself. Eventually he understands what the zoologist means. There is also the fact that the gorilla population is dying off rather quickly, making it too sad a scene.



Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 16-19

Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 16-19 Summary and Analysis

Crichton begins chapter sixteen by stating, "It didn't seem like much of an adventure: walking past the McDonald's stand in the Singapore airport, going to the Hertz counter to pick up my rented Datsun for the drive north to a resort hotel in Kuantan, on the east coast of Malaysia" (p. 239).

Crichton laments the changes he sees in Singapore. Ten years earlier the place had been magical. During the last decade it seemed to have systematically destroyed itself. While the city is thoroughly modern, it has all but eliminated all signs of its former glory and uniqueness. The trip did not get better immediately. The roads were poorly marked and Crichton kept missing the hotel, which turned out to be a huge disappointment. However, the author had made the trip to see the season egg laying of the giant leatherback turtle.

The author's attempts to find the turtles were exhausting and took a long time. Finally, he found someone who knew about the turtles. After driving up the coast, Crichton got to see what he had come to see. Unfortunately, so did many other people, who ruined the experience by shining bright lights on the turtle, interrupting this beautiful experience and taunting it. Crichton went back to the hotel.

In chapter seventeen, Crichton tells of a trip to the Lucerne Valley desert in California where he made plans to attend a conference held by another doctor turned spiritualist. Crichton decides that studying spiritualism for nearly ten years was fine but no substitute for practice. The conference is detailed from lectures to lessons to daily meditations. The old adage of "when the student is ready, the teacher will appear," is introduced.

Crichton is discouraged that he seems to have no teacher. Yet every day, he walks by a particular cactus. The cactus catches his eye every time. Crichton begins to wonder if the cactus could be his teacher. Of course it is ridiculous but Crichton cannot ignore the fact that the cactus seems to have a personality. Crichton asks the cactus if it is the teacher. The cactus did not answer. Crichton says, "It was just a cactus, sitting there. Of course it didn't answer - it was a cactus. I thought, I am talking out loud to a cactus, which is bad enough. But, worse, I am feeling annoyed that it won't answer. This is definitely crazy behavior. They lock people up for this" (p. 248).

Crichton's conversation with and feelings about the cactus are quite funny. Crichton says he had the feeling that the cactus' feelings were hurt, that it was sulking, or it was



just being ornery. Still, Crichton continues to visit the cactus and becomes thoroughly convinced that it is his teacher.

The relationship with the cactus continues. The conference also continues and Crichton learns a lot about various forms of spirituality, from the tarot to chakras and kundalini. The one-sided conversations with the cactus continue and Crichton tries desperately to get it to speak. The author spends many hours involved in cactus fantasy, from the history and genealogy of the cactus to cactus cartoons to cactus fashion. At last, Crichton must say goodbye to the cactus and cries. From then on Crichton always has cactus wherever he lives.



Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 19-23

Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 19-23 Summary and Analysis

In chapter nineteen, Crichton goes along with a friend to meet a woman who is often referred to as "A Human Light Show." The woman is powerful and often exudes brilliant colors when she meditates. It is rumored that the woman also tends to fade and change into people of various ages. Naturally Crichton is skeptical but agrees to see the woman. It turns out that all of the rumors were true and Crichton was able to see it with his own eyes.

In chapter twenty, while everyone talks about "they" in a sense of the faceless villains or the ones who know everything or are screwing up the world, no one actually knows who "they" are. Crichton gives a speech at a dinner party about the mysterious "they" and how everyone does the world a disservice by removing themselves from the equation.

Crichton also talks a lot about dating in the 1980s and how it has all changed. Women are much more aggressive and more practical than ever. Crichton finds himself on the unpleasant side of the one night stands. Crichton is angry and feels used while the women seem to be perfectly fine with it. The women seem to have switched roles with the men. Crichton's friend David believes that the stereotypes about men and women and how they perceive things is completely inaccurate. Each sex tends to project themselves onto the other.

Chapter twenty-one talks about the Dyaks, indigenous headhunters in Borneo. Once in Borneo, Crichton visits a Dyak village. Crichton is forced to wait until morning to see the Dyaks and is restless. After walking around the island for a while, Crichton suddenly realizes that he is standing in a market surrounded by the headhunters. He hadn't even noticed.

In chapter twenty-two, Crichton discusses the astral plane and how a medium can access it. The author talks about the history of mediumship and how it has changed over the centuries. Crichton goes on to detail some unconvincing experiences, including one with Dr. Killarney, an Irish physician who was channeled through a dumpy American woman. Crichton had spent enough time in Ireland to know a fake accent when he heard one. Another was somewhat more convincing and a third was the most enlightening. Eventually, Crichton learns to channel and finds it to be easy.

In chapter twenty-three, Crichton travels to New Guinea to sit among the natives and explore an unusual, exotic and romantic culture. The people are quite primitive. New Guinea is the second largest island in the world and its people speak over seven thousand languages.



The experiences among the natives are interesting to Crichton, although the romantic vision does not last very long. It is interesting to Crichton that the natives can live so far apart yet know what is happening in a village one hundred miles away. A woman cuts off her finger in protest of her husband's impending marriage. There is a great deal of natural beauty, and Crichton is also very aware of the large gap between the culture of New Guinea and the westerners.



Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 24-27; Postscript: Skeptics at Cal-Tech

Part 2, Travels 1971-1986: Chapters 24-27; Postscript: Skeptics at Cal-Tech Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-four, the Israeli magician Uri Geller is known for spoon bending, something that is often thought of as being a trick. Crichton attends a spoon bending demonstration with friends. After experiencing disappointment at not being able to do it, the spoon bends easily. Crichton quickly becomes more interested in the cookies being served as refreshments. A year later, Crichton tells an MIT professor about the experience. The man is skeptical and even shocked when he learns that Crichton never tried to figure out why it happened.

In chapter twenty-five, as a child, Crichton learned that the only things that could not be discussed at home were religious matters. Religious postulates, parables and tales were not to be questioned. As an adult, Crichton began to learn about the darker and conflicting side of religion. In Crichton's search for furthering experiences in the metaphysical world, religious matters overlapped in the form of auras. Auras are often seen in religious paintings, usually in the form of a halo. This fascinates Crichton. Through yet another conference, Crichton learns to see auras and has fun with it.

In chapter twenty-six, Gary, the man who taught Crichton how to channel, one day announces the presence of a dark entity around the author. According to Gary, the entity is interfering with the work. Crichton begins to freak out because he feels that he has been possessed. There is an exorcism performed during which Crichton learns that the entities were self created as a kind of protection, mainly from his father. After the entities are gone, Crichton notices marked changes all around him.

In chapter twenty-seven, Crichton wraps up his direct experiences in the metaphysical world. Grateful for the chance to grow and travel inward, Crichton has also formulated a list of things to guard against when traveling. Long gone is the analytical mind of a scientist in this regard. It is all about being open and having the experience.

In Postscript: Skeptics at Cal-Tech, Crichton talks about meeting Paul MacCready, an aeronautical engineer. MacCready did not believe in psychics and took pride in debunking many so-called paranormal events. MacCready suggests that Crichton speak in front of The Committee for the Scientific Investigations of Claims of the Paranormal.

Crichton details the preparatory work that goes into preparing a speech for a group of hard scientists. In the end, the speech was never delivered.



Characters

John Michael Crichton

John Michael Crichton (1942 - 2008) was a Harvard Medical School Alumnus, American author, screenwriter, director, producer, and world traveler. Crichton is best known for writing novels in the areas of science and medical fiction as well as more mainstream thrillers. Crichton's books include: Airframe, The Andromeda Strain, Congo, Disclosure, Jurassic Park, The Lost World, Prey, Rising Sun, Sphere, Timeline, and Travels.

Crichton learned fairly early on that a life in medicine was not for him. Crichton struggled with the required detachment from patients and their conditions. As Crichton's education continued, the more the would-be author began to dislike the way many people handled themselves in the profession. Crichton turned his full focus on writing.

Crichton's first big seller was The Andromeda Strain. After graduating from Harvard, Crichton moved to California to start a career in movies. Crichton also spent a great deal of time traveling around the world, always seeking to see and learn new things.

Crichton was married numerous times. The author also received a great number of awards, including the 1969 Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Mystery of the Year for "A Case in Need;" the 1980 Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Motion Picture for "The Great Train Robbery;" and the 1994 George Foster Peabody Award for his work on the television show "ER."

Michael Crichton died from throat cancer in 2008.

Psychics

Crichton addresses psychics throughout the entire book. Interested in exploring spiritualism, Crichton leaves no stone unturned. Psychics are little more than a curiosity for Crichton at first. However, the first psychic Crichton sees is frighteningly accurate on upcoming events. Some psychics are obvious fakes but it is easy to tell the difference. The same can be said of mediums that will later be encountered by the author.

Still, psychics come in all forms and their supposed gifts fascinate Crichton. In the beginning, Crichton had never explored anything in this vein as he was a devoted scientist. After moving to California and giving up medicine, Crichton begins to realize that there is much more to the world and universe than the eye can see.

A frequent comment made by psychics to Crichton is that he has psychic ability. At first Crichton is a disbeliever but eventually he begins to see the truth. The experiences with psychics lead into many other areas of the metaphysical world and by the end of the book Crichton is not only a true believer but also a practitioner.



Dr. Donald Rogers

Dr. Donald Rogers was Crichton's adviser at Boston City Hospital. Rogers was a sadist who enjoyed sticking pins into people to gauge their reactions. Rogers was the visiting chief neurologist who served as chief resident at Duke. Rogers was also a perfectionist and neat freak.

Joan Radam Crichton

Joan Radam Crichton is Michael Crichton's wife, a fellow graduate student.

Karen

Karen is "The Girl Who Seduced Everybody," a psychiatric patient of Crichton's while he was still in medical school.

Dr. Geller

Dr. Geller was Crichton's adviser in the psychiatric rotation where he met Karen.

Kimberly Crichton

Kimberly Crichton is Michael Crichton's sister and frequent traveling companion.

Douglas Crichton

Douglas Crichton is Michael Crichton's younger brother and sometime collaborator.

Loren

Loren is one of Crichton's girlfriends and traveling companions. Together the couple climbed Kilimanjaro. They eventually married and divorced.

Gary

Gary is the man who teaches Crichton how to practice mediumship and also arranges for the exorcism.

Douglas Crichton

Douglas Crichton is Michael Crichton's brother and frequent travel companion.



Objects/Places

Writing

Writing is something that Michel Crichton was born to do. First published by the New York Times at the age of thirteen, Crichton seemed to have a natural ability to write and create. This was in spite of the fact that Crichton's father, Nick, was a journalist and an extremely harsh critic who did little if anything to encourage his son.

Crichton continued to write throughout college, publishing his first book while still in school. Although the writing bug had obviously bitten Crichton, it seemed to take a back seat to school work, travel, and eventually, the quest to become a doctor. However, Crichton did write throughout medical school and the success of his paperback thrillers largely paid for his Harvard education.

Crichton's decision to leave Harvard was not only guided for the love of writing but it certainly was a factor. During Crichton's last year, he flew to Hollywood to cut a movie deal on his first major sale. Not long after, Crichton was living in California and realizing great success with his work.

Travel

The main theme of the book is travel. Crichton began to travel as a young child. The Crichton family traveled frequently while the children were growing up, giving the family a sense of adventure and openness to the world. Therefore, traveling is not new to Crichton. The Crichton family traveled extensively throughout the author's youth. By the time Crichton was ready to graduate from high school, he had already visited forty-eight states and five European countries. Crichton also took a year off between college and medical school to spend more time in Europe.

It was after Crichton moved to California that he began to get the traveling bug again. The book details Crichton's travels around the world, which typically included remote places and interesting cultures far removed from the life of a westerner living in California. The trips almost always involved diving and visiting ancient and mysterious structures.

Along with outward travels, Crichton also travels inward. The author departs from his former life as a scientist and begins to delve into his inner being, becoming intensely interested in various areas of metaphysics. The two areas of the author's life mesh in many ways to provide Crichton, and the reader, with an interesting journey.



Harvard Medical School

Harvard Medical School is where Michael Crichton went to learn medicine and to become a doctor. Crichton was very fond of Harvard, although he eventually decided to leave medicine.

Boston

Boston is home to Harvard, Crichton's alma mater, as well as several hospitals where he practiced as a medical student and doctor. Crichton lived in Boston for several years with his wife, a fellow graduate student.

Boston Lying In Hospital

Boston Lying In Hospital is one of the institutions in which Crichton made rounds and learned about obstetrics.

Hollywood

Crichton was introduced to Hollywood when he was offered a movie deal while still in medical school.

Shangri-la

Shangri-la is the mystical land of beautiful people and mystery. When Crichton finally gets there, the scenery is disappointing and not at all what he expected.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is the shooting location of Crichton's third film, "The Great Train Robbery." During this time Crichton works in England and Ireland.

Kilimanjaro

Kilimanjaro is the mountain that Crichton and Loren climbed despite a grueling and difficult trip.

New Guinea

New Guinea is the second largest island in the world and the site of one of Crichton's many travel experiences.

Malibu

Malibu is where Michael Crichton lived in California.

Themes

Travel

One of the main themes in "Travels" by Michael Crichton is travel. The theme covers many different types of travel, physical and metaphysical as well as emotional and spiritual.

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The Writing Life

Michael Crichton is a famous American author and screenwriter. It is quickly apparent in the book that writing is something that Michel Crichton was born to do. First published by the New York Times at the age of thirteen, Crichton seemed to have a natural ability to write and create. This was in spite of the fact that Crichton's father, Nick, was a journalist and an extremely harsh critic that did little if anything to encourage his son.

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to travel more than he ever had before, an act which only improved his scope for material.

Foreign Cultures

From a young age, Crichton seemed to be highly fascinated with foreign cultures. In some cases, the more removed the culture was from the life of an American, the better. Crichton traveled around the world, to some of the remotest parts, to find these cultures and to experience the differences in traditions and ways of living. Sometimes the experiences were pleasant, other times they were not.

One of the best experiences involving a foreign culture took place in Pahang where Crichton had the opportunity to meet members of the Orang Asli of Semai peoples. The worst experience was in Shangri-La, also known as Hunza. Crichton had looked forward for so long to visiting the mystical land of beautiful scenery and people, to take in the culture and visit with natives that were reputed to live as long as 140 years. The experience was much different from the expectation. The people in Hunza were not beautiful; they were a mixture of races and cultures which left them small and unattractive. The children were also scraggly and dirty. The people were desperately poor. The outlying areas were no different.

As much as Crichton liked foreign cultures, the author found that it was also nice to return home to his house in Malibu. Undoubtedly, the experience made Crichton appreciate California and enabled him to quench the thirst for traveling until it was time for the next adventure.

Style

Perspective

Travels by Michael Crichton is a work of non-fiction and therefore relies on the perspective of the author to relay pertinent information relative to the author's journey. Although this book is in many ways a memoir, Crichton is able to present many facts objectively.

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Crichton was married numerous times. The author also received a great number of awards, including the 1969 Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Mystery of the Year for "A Case in Need;" the 1980 Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Motion Picture for "The Great Train Robbery;" and the 1994 George Foster Peabody Award for his work on the television show "ER."

Tone

Travels by Michael Crichton has a unique tone for a memoir. Crichton is well known for being outspoken, straightforward and unapologetic. This book reflects that same tone without being overpowering or biased to the point of being viewed as the work of a zealot who has converted from the scientific community to one that has stronger roots in the metaphysical realm.

Since this is a work of non-fiction and therefore relies on the perspective of the author, Crichton is able to present many facts objectively. The overall tone is one of a man who lost focus and passionate for the medical field and who chose to branch out into the world of books and movies. There is little about the actual writing and instead focuses on Crichton's travels and spiritual growth.

In the beginning of the book, Crichton often comes off as being somewhat lost. As the book progresses, the reader can see how Crichton progresses as well and begins to develop the voice which has served to inspire several generations.

Part of the tone and effectiveness of Crichton's work undoubtedly comes from years of education, independent study, childhood experiences, hard work and critique. In the early years of Crichton's metamorphosis the reader can grasp the man's points of view and go along on the journey that allows him to become an enlightened and open person.

Structure

Travels by Michael Crichton is a work of non-fiction. It is comprised of 374 pages broken down into two parts. The first part, Medical Days, is comprised of nine chapters. The shortest chapter is comprised of four pages; the longest chapter is comprised of sixteen pages; the average number of pages per chapter is nine. The second part, Travels, is comprised of twenty-nine chapters. The shortest chapter is comprised of two pages; the longest chapter is comprised of twenty-three pages; the average number of pages per chapter is nine.

In general, the book is written in chronological order, beginning with "Medical Days (1965-1969)." This part details Crichton's early years as well as his experiences at Harvard Medical School. Crichton also details information about personal relationships, experiences in medical school as well as in various hospitals. It also discusses briefly Crichton's early days as a writer and the final decision to quit medicine.

Part two, "Travels (1971-1986)" gives an in depth look at Crichton's travel experiences throughout the world. These, too, are mostly chronological although there are some cases in which Crichton refers to previous experiences to illustrate a point or to give a more current experience deeper significance.



Quotes

"In general, I found Harvard an exciting place, where people were genuinely focused on study and learning, and with no special emphasis on grades." Part 1, Chap. 1, p. 4

"In my year, I had the dubious distinction of starting more lab fires than anyone else, including a spectacular ether fire that set the ceiling aflame and left large scorch marks, a stigmata of ineptitude hanging over my head for the rest of the year." Part 1, Chap. 1, p. 4

"In retrospect, it seems inconceivable to me that in four years of medical education, nobody ever talked to us, formally or informally, about dying patients." Part 1, Chap. 2, p. 20

"We cause our diseases. We are directly responsible for any illness that happens to us." Part 1, Chap. 7, p. 60

"'I thought you would quit in the end,' he said. 'Your fantasies are too strong.'" Part 1, Chap. 9, p. 68

"The difficulties I experienced adjusting to my new position barely hinted at the kinds of experiences I would later have." Part 1, Chap. 9, p. 80

"By now, I saw the point of these homilies. Dr. Norton was trying to get me to understand that certain rules of life had been around for a long time and that life probably wasn't going to make an exception for me." Part 2, Chap. 1, p. 94

"The hikers above me are moving like that. And so am I. I have become a character in a television special." Part 2, Chap. 7, p. 165

"What I learned is this: that I had defined myself as a person who didn't like heights or cold, a person who didn't like to be dirty, a person who didn't like physical exertion or discomfort." Part 2, Chap. 7, p. 168

"Here I am, sitting in a traffic jam, breathing carbon monoxide and pollutants, staring at a hideous manmade landscape, but I really am better off because, if all this were gone, lions and bears would attack and eat me." Part 2, Chap. 12, p. 230

"It didn't seem like much of an adventure: walking past the McDonald's stand in the Singapore airport, going to the Hertz counter to pick up my rented Datsun for the drive



north to a resort hotel in Kuantan, on the east coast of Malaysia." Part 2, Chap. 16, p. 239

"It was just a cactus, sitting there. Of course it didn't answer - it was a cactus. I thought, I am talking out loud to a cactus, which is bad enough. But, worse, I am feeling annoyed that it won't answer. This is definitely crazy behavior. They lock people up for this." Chap. 17, p. 248

"I tried not to judge what was happening, but simply to accept everything as an experience." Part 2, Chap. 26, p. 335



Topics for Discussion

Do you agree or disagree that many doctors have completely detached from their patients? How does your opinion compare with Crichton's opinion?

How would you have handled the situation with Karen, the girl who seduced everybody? Did Crichton do the right thing for him at the time? Explain.

How do you think Crichton's parents and family felt when he announced that he was quitting medicine? How might you react in that same situation? Was it a wise choice?

Examine Crichton's opinion of the general public's attitude toward celebrities. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

Discuss Crichton's initial views on metaphysical and paranormal matters from the point of view of a scientist.

Which paranormal situation stood out the most to you? Why? What paranormal experiences have you had?

Discuss the theory of "when the student is ready the teacher will appear." Also discuss Crichton's interaction with the cactus.

Do you agree or disagree with the author's take on "they?" Do you agree or disagree regarding the stereotypes "they" put on the attitudes of the sexes? Explain.