

Tunnel in the Sky Study Guide

Tunnel in the Sky by Robert A. Heinlein

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Plot Summary

Tunnel in the Sky is a novel by science fiction writer Robert A. Heinlein. In this novel, Rod Walker is taking a survival course required for his ambition to be an Outlands professional. The final exam has arrived, requiring Rod to be placed on an unknown planet and forced to survive either alone or with one team member for four to ten days. Rod is apprehensive, especially in light of some turmoil at home, but is eager to prove he can survive. However, four to ten days quickly turns into weeks, then months, then years. Tunnel in the Sky is an exciting look at what happens to young people when all modern convenience disappears overnight, making man the greatest danger, as well as the greatest asset, a young man can face.

Rod Walker arrives at his survival class to discover a bulletin announcing the rules for the final exam. Rod is shocked by the lack of guidelines in the rules and suddenly frightened of a prospect that has seems miles away until this moment. Rod decides to team up with someone, thinking two heads are better than one, but his one friend in the course announces he is considering dropping the course rather than face the final exam. Rod goes home that night, weary of the battle ahead, to find his sister home from the Amazon army for a rare visit. That night, however, Rod discovers the reason for his sister's visit. Rod's father is dying and has elected to have himself and Rod's mother frozen until a cure can be found.

Rod elects to continue with the survival course's final exam, taking his sister's advice by carrying with him two knives, but no guns. Jimmy, Rod's friend, surprises him by arriving moments before the test is to begin. Again they decide to team up, but when Rod arrives through the gate, Jimmy is nowhere to be found. Rod spends the first night on the unknown planet frightened and very aware of the dangers the planet poses to his life. The following day, Rod begins to explore despite a sleepless night and his hit over the head, waking to find that all his supplies, minus one knife hidden under a bandage, have been stolen, including the clothing he had been wearing.

Rod manages to survive for several weeks on his own, slowly coming to realize that the rendezvous that was supposed to take place in four to ten days was long overdue. Rod wonders if perhaps something catastrophic happened on Earth, leaving him and his surviving classmates forever abandoned on this strange planet. While hunting, Rod runs into a young student named Jack. Rod and Jack decide to team up and Rod moves into Jack's cave. The following day, Rod and Jack find Jimmy, half dead, lying in a tree. Rod and Jack take Jimmy back to the cave and nurse him back to life. It is at this point Rod learns Jack is a girl.

Rod, Jack, and Jimmy decide to build a signal fire and lure more survivors out of the woods. The next day, Bob and Carmen, classmates of Rod and Jimmy, arrive at the cave. Their arrival is followed by several others until the group has grown into a large colony that has outgrown the small cave. Rod is the unspoken leader of this group, but a confrontation with a couple of boys protesting Rod's leadership causes one of the



college boys to suggest an elected leader should be chosen. At a meeting that night, Rod loses an election to this college boy.

The new mayor, Grant Cowper, appoints committees to begin making laws and addressing the needs of the colony. Fairly quickly, the younger students begin to notice that Cowper is making laws that benefit himself and his fellow college friends, but making rules against the younger students. When Rod points this out, Grant agrees and asks Rod to join his government. Rod reluctantly agrees and takes on the role of leader of the guard. Soon after, Rod talks Grant into allowing him to search the areas around their settlement for a more defensible location.

Rod and another boy, Roy, explore the areas outside the settlement and find a dead sea where the beach is covered in bones. Roy and Rod also find a network of caves that would be large enough to the whole colony and easy to defend from predators. However, when Roy and Rod return from their journey they discover the settlement has grown to include many houses and that no one wants to move. A strange migration begins soon after that highlights the vulnerability of the settlement. Grant dies during this migration, making Rod leader once more. Despite new support for a move to the caves, Rod decides to honor Grant's memory and remain at the settlement.

Under Rod's direction, the settlement is surrounded by a large fence that will protect the settlement much better during the migration season. Rod also directs the building of a farm and an iron works, bringing progress to the settlement. They also begin having dances in the evenings. One day, however, the people from Earth reappear, eager to bring the students home. Despite their outspoken desire to remain only a few days before, all of the colonist but Rod elects to return to Earth. Rod is alone when his teacher, Deacon Matson, and his sister come to see him. They tell Rod that his father has been cured and returned home and that he could fulfill his dream of an Outlander profession if he would come home. Rod decides to go home and becomes the captain of a team of pioneers prepared to settle a new world.



Chapter 1, The Marching Hordes

Chapter 1, The Marching Hordes Summary

Rod Walker is a high school student who is taking a survival course required of all people who want an Outlander career, a career that will take them to uncharted planets. The course is normally taken in college, but Rod has elected to take it in high school.

Rod arrives at school to find that a notice has been placed in the hallway outside his survival course announcing the final exam. The final exam will place each student, with a few supplies of their own choosing, on a planet where they are expected to survive on their own or with one team member for four to ten days. The notice does not tell the students where they will be going or what they might expect on this planet. Rod turns to Jimmy Throxtton, his lone friend in the class, and suggests they team up. Jimmy says that he is thinking about dropping the course rather than face the final exam. This leaves Rod with no one else to team up with. Rod goes into the classroom where the teacher, Deacon Matson, is discussing the test with students, assuring them all that everything he has taught them over the past semester should well prepare them for the test, but giving them no other information.

Rod begins the trip home from his school in New York to a suburb of the city on the Grand Canyon. The trip requires Rod to go through the terminal at Emigrants Gap. Rod aspires to travel to the Outlands and to be a part of a pioneer group that will settle some unknown planet. Rod decides to stop and watch the new emigrants as they prepare to step through the tunnels at Emigrants Gap and go to their new homes. Rod watches one group in particular, headed up by a captain on horseback, and finds himself imagining living that life. It is his whole purpose in life and why it is important that he do well on the final exam for his survival course. After the group goes through their tunnel, Rod realizes he will be late for dinner and rushes through the appropriate gate for home.

Chapter 1, The Marching Hordes Analysis

This chapter introduces the main character Rod Walker. Rod is a young man, a high school student, who deeply desires to lead a group of pioneers to a new settlement on an unknown planet. To achieve this goal, Rod must first pass a survival course. This course has been simple up to this point, but now it is time for the final exam. Rod is to be placed on an unknown planet, essentially alone, and left to survive against unknown perils. This test could be a matter of life or death, but it is the only way for Rod to achieve his ultimate goal, therefore he is determined to pass. This shows Rod's strength, his deep desires, and his determination.

The setting of the novel is also introduced in these early chapters. The setting is somewhat unusual, an Earth that has made many advances, including a mode of travel



that simply consists of walking through a gate or tunnel and arriving in a new place, perhaps hundreds of miles away, perhaps thousands or even millions of miles away. This mode of travel is essential to the plot of the novel as it explains to the reader how Rod and his classmates will be able to travel to an unknown planet in a short amount of time in order to take part in the final exam for their survival course. It is also this mode of travel that allows this novel to reside in the science fiction genre.



Chapter 2, The Fifth Way

Chapter 2, The Fifth Way Summary

Dr. Jesse Evelyn Romsbotham invented what is now known as the Romsbotham Gate while trying to invite a time machine during a time when the Earth was suffering from overcrowding. Romsbotham's discovery, though not allowing a person to travel in time, allowed living beings to be transported thousands of miles in a matter of seconds by simply stepping through a gate. This discovery made it possible for millions of emigrants to move to other planets, thus reducing the numbers of people on Earth and easing the overcrowding.

Rod returns home and discovers his sister has come home from the Amazon army for a rare visit. The family has dinner together, a meeting that is made tense by Rod's announcement of the final exam taking place over the next couple of days. Rod's father does not want him to go, but Helen talks him into it. Later, while talking with Helen in his bedroom, Rod learns that his father is dying and that he has decided to have himself and Rod's mother frozen for twenty years to await a cure. This is why Rod's father does not want Rod to leave. However, Helen, who has been given temporary custody of her brother, believes it is best for Rod to continue on with his life normally. Rod agrees. Brother and sister discuss the test and Rod asks Helen her opinion on his chosen supplies. Helen advises Rod to only take a knife, as a gun would leave him vulnerable to accidents and it would run out of ammo eventually. Helen then gives Rod her own knife to take along as a backup to his own.

Chapter 2, The Fifth Way Analysis

The explanation of how travel through gates is achieved is given in this chapter, giving the idea of this type of transportation a more realistic quality for the reader. It does seem as though it might be possible with the explanation given, allowing the reader to accept the plot and to continue reading, focusing on more important aspects of the plot. At the same time, the reader learns along with Rod that his father is dying and that his parents are to freeze themselves in order to wait for a cure. This means that Rod's parents will not be around when he returns from his trip. This weighs heavy on Rod's mind as he begins preparing for the test, but he continues to prepare, showing the reader how deep his desire to achieve what he wants goes. Rod's sister, a captain in the Amazon army, knows a great deal about combat and survival. Helen advises Rod to only take a knife, even giving him her own for backup. This shows the reader that Rod has a little advantage over the other students and stands a good chance of surviving the test.



Chapter 3, Through the Tunnel

Chapter 3, Through the Tunnel Summary

Rod has trouble sleeping the night before the test because he is concerned about his parents. Therefore, Rod is late leaving for the test the following morning. Rod arrives just moments before the test is to begin, carrying a backpack with his supplies and a heavy winter suit in case the test is to be on a cold planet. Deacon Matson welcomes Rod and praises him for bringing the winter suit, but assuring him it is unnecessary. Rod then goes into the warehouse where the gate is located, first passing the gun stand and again considering going against his sister's advice. Rod again decides Helen is correct about the gun and continues into the warehouse. Only about half the class is present, including a young man who has brought a dog as part of his supplies. Jimmy shows up as well, promising to team with Rod. However, when Rod goes through the gate, Jimmy is nowhere to be found. Rod recalls the instructions he was given as he went through the gate, telling him to watch for stobor and the direction of the recall location. Rod begins to walk in that direction when he hears a strange noise. Rod sees the boy with his dog, both dead and strange animal feeding on the dog. Rod wonders if that animal is the stobor he was warned about.

Rod wanders into a dense forest and decides to sleep in the tree. It takes Rod quite a while to set up his hammock and to figure out how to get into it without falling, but he finally succeeds. Rod eats a quick meal and then attempts to fall asleep. However, the sounds of the night are so unusual and frightening that Rod only sleeps in starts and fits all night, finally convincing himself that nights on this planet are much longer than nights on Earth. The next morning, Rod has a quick meal and then stows his gear before setting out again. Rod attempts to find the position of the sun so that he might begin walking in the direction of the recall location, but has difficulty seeing through the trees. Eventually Rod orients himself and begins walking toward a river. Rod carefully approaches the water and begins studying it, attempting to establish the dangers that lurk there. Rod forgets to watch his back and is hit over the head. When Rod awakes from this blow, he finds that he is naked save for a pair of underwear and that all his supplies have been stolen. Rod becomes angry, convinced one of his own classmates is behind this and sure he will die without supplies. It is then that Rod realizes that his sister's knife, Lady Macbeth, is still secured to his leg, hidden under a bandage. Rod is relieved that the thief at least left him that much.

Chapter 3, Through the Tunnel Analysis

The reader's opinion of Rod continues to grow as he struggles to sleep with the knowledge that his father is dying. The reader feels a certain amount of sympathy for Rod's situation and begins to better understand not only his relationship to his family, but his determination to be seen as a man who is capable of survival on an unknown



planet, something that is essential should Rod ever be allowed to achieve his desired occupation. Therefore, Rod worries, but decides to go on the test anyway.

Rod takes his sister's advice, and does not take a gun, but relies on his knife and the one she gave to him. Rod does decide to team with another classmate, a young man who initially thought of dropping out of the class, but arrives just in time to participate. This young man disappears after going through the gate, however, leaving Rod alone. The reader is reminded of just how young Rod is when he becomes frightened at every little noise in the night while attempting to sleep after his arrival. Not only this, but the danger of the test is apparent when Rod sees one of his classmates has been killed only minutes after going through the gate. This illustrates the dangers Rod faces and perhaps excuses his deep fear to the reader. However, it seems Rod's largest enemy at this point is other human beings, because it is a human who attacks him first and leaves him nearly defenseless. If not for Helen, Rod would be defenseless and would most likely not make it through the next few days.



Chapter 4, Savage and Chapter 5, The Nova

Chapter 4, Savage and Chapter 5, The Nova Summary

In chapter 4, several weeks have passed and Rod is hunting for his afternoon meal. The animal manages to escape and as Rod chases after it, another person grabs the animal and takes it down. Rod and the other person decide to share the kill. This other person, Jack, is a student from another school that also was running a survival exam on this planet. Jack shares some salt with Rod, a treat for Rod who has survived on rare meat for several weeks. Jack then suggests they take the meat out of the area since they are attracting predators. Rod suggests they become teammates and Jack readily agrees, taking Rod back to a cave Jack has been living in for several weeks.

In chapter 5, Rod is a little weary of going into a cave where an animal might hide, but is grateful not to have to sleep in a tree. Jack begins to cook the rest of the animal over a fire. Rod decides to share his opinion of their situation with Jack. Rod believes that since the recall did not take place when it was supposed to that that meant that they had not been put on a strange planet, but in a remote section of Africa on Earth. Rod believes that part of their test was to find a way out of the remote area into a more populated area. However, Jack points to the sky and tells Rod that the stars are like nothing ever seen on Earth. Rod, who has not seen the sky yet because of the trees and a constant overcast sky, is reluctantly forced to agree.

Chapter 4, Savage and Chapter 5, The Nova Analysis

Rod has been stuck on the planet, alone with only a knife, for several weeks. Already the reader knows something is wrong because he was supposed to go home after only four to ten days. When Rod runs into another student, it is clear to the reader what being alone for so long has done to Rod. Rod has lost some of his manners and has become gruff, with only survival on his mind. This other person appears to be changed in a similar manner, though not quite as badly as Rod. This other person still has manners and is more polite, more thoughtful than Rod. Despite Rod's rough behavior, these two decide to team up, already changing the dynamics of Rod's situation.

Rod is convinced that the reason the people of Earth have not come for them is because they are still on Earth and it is part of the test to find a way back to civilization. This explanation is easy for Rod to accept because he does not want to believe that his professor and the officials at his school have abandoned them. However, Jack is able to prove that this is not the case by pointing out the stars and a newly apparent supernova in the sky that could not possibly be a part of the Earth's sky. This realization takes what little hope Rod had away, leaving him forced to face the idea that he might never return home and see his family again.



Chapter 6, 'I Think He's Dead' and Chapter 7, 'I Should Have Baked a Cake'

Chapter 6, 'I Think He's Dead' and Chapter 7, 'I Should Have Baked a Cake' Summary

In chapter 6, Rod wakes to the smell of freshly roasting meat. Rod is happy until he sees the knife Jack is using to cut the meat. The knife is Colonel Bowie, the knife that was stolen from Rod. Rod accuses Jack of stealing it, but Jack insists that the knife was on the body of a dead student in the bush. Rod relents, apologizing for the accusation and kindly allowing Jack to continue using the knife. After breakfast, Jack and Rod discuss what they might spend the day doing. They both agree that they should look for other surviving students. Rod insists, however, that they not allow girls on their team because it would lead to jealousy and fighting. Jack neither agrees nor disagrees. Jack then tells Rod about a person that is living in a tree, but Jack is unsure if this person is alive or dead. Jack takes Rod to the tree where he discovers the person is a very ill Jimmy. Jack and Rod take Jimmy back to the cave where they both see to his care. When Jimmy is well enough, he tells Rod that Jack is a girl.

In chapter 7, Rod is shocked to learn Jack is a girl, but is gracious enough to apologize for his behavior and anything he might have said to offend her. The next day, Jack and Rod go hunting together, continuing to use the knives even though Jimmy had a gun. Soon the small group settles into a routine, hunting every few days and attending to other housekeeping needs on the other days. One day they have a discussion about finding more survivors and decide to start a signal fire. This is a good idea, but they are concerned about hiding from possible danger. They decide they will also raise a flag. The following day, Bob Baxter and Carmen Garcia arrive, drawn by the flag, and ask to join their group.

Chapter 6, 'I Think He's Dead' and Chapter 7, 'I Should Have Baked a Cake' Analysis

Rod continues to act like a savage, attacking Jack when he believes the knife Jack is using was stolen from him. It turns out the knife is his, but Jack took it from a dead body, most likely the person who stole it in the first place. Rod finds himself forced to apologize. Later, Jack and Rod discuss the possibility of adding more survivors to their group and Jack tells Rod about a person she has seen in a tree, but whom she believes is dead. This person turns out to be Jimmy, Rod's only friend in the class and the boy who was supposed to be his teammate. They take Jimmy back to the cave, ironically making him the second team member when he should have been Rod's only team member and nurse him back to health. Rod is embarrassed to learn that Jimmy knows Jack is a girl and Rod overlooked this possibility, even going as far as to suggest they



not allow girls in their group. Again Rod is forced to apologize. This situation shows the reader how narrow Rod's view can be at times and how undiplomatic he can be, suggesting there is a great amount of room for growth in Rod's personality.

The team becomes a small family quite quickly and begin to fall into a routine that is closer to that of the cavemen than the savages they all were forced to be on their own. It is almost like watching the development of mankind in an accelerated rate. At this time, the group also decides to begin a signal fire to attract other survivors. Almost immediately this brings in Bob Baxter and Carmen Garcia, a couple from Jimmy and Rod's class. Their arrival brings another girl to the group to be a companion to Jack, as well as bringing into the group the idea of pairing and reproduction. Once again the development of civilization has made another large step forward.



Chapter 8, 'Fish, or Cut Bait'

Chapter 8, 'Fish, or Cut Bait' Summary

The signal fire is left burning and more survivors begin to join the group, including Caroline Myshiyeni, an Amazon type girl from Rod and Jimmy's class. When Jack is injured, Caroline takes her place on Rod's hunting team while Bob, an aspiring medical student, sees to her injury. Rod and Caroline hunt and Caroline kills without Rod's help, leaving him angry that she disobeyed his orders. Rod sets her straight and she agrees to follow his rule next time. Back at camp, the survivors keep coming in, increasing the size of the camp to such an extent that Rod suggests they begin building a stone wall to protect the perimeter of the camp from predators. One day, Rod tells a group of survivors headed by a young man named Jock McGowan to get to work on the wall. Jock refuses, insisting that Rod is not his boss. Rod stands up to Jock and a fight ensues. The fight ends quickly, however, when Caroline and Jack pull guns on the McGowan group. Rod tells Jock and his group to leave, banishing them from the colony.

After the fight, Grant Cowper, one of the members of a class from Teller University and therefore older than most of the other survivors by a number of years, approaches Rod. Grant tells Rod that the trouble began because Rod was not an elected official and therefore had no power over the survivors. Grant suggests that they have a town meeting and form an elected government. Rod agrees. At the meeting that night, one boy is chosen to lead the meeting. A discussion begins that leads to the nomination of several people to run for mayor of the colony. Rod is nominated despite his protest that he does not want the job, as well as Grant and another young man. Grant is elected by an overwhelming majority, leaving Rod with wounded pride. The next day, the original five members of Rod's group discuss the possibility of leaving and forming their own colony. However, Bob and Carmen want to wait until they can get married. When Rod hears this, he suggests that they all wait and see how Grant runs things before making any big decisions.

Chapter 8, 'Fish, or Cut Bait' Analysis

The colony that Rod and Jack began with Jimmy and then with a signal fire to attract others becomes so large that it is difficult to house them all in the cave. Rod is the unofficial leader and he begins making plans to fortify the settlement and protect the survivors. While doing this, Rod comes head to head with a group of young men who do not feel the need to work even though the settlement is providing them with food and a place to sleep. A fight ensues and Rod banishes the young men from the settlement. However, the incident makes it clear that a strong government needs to be formed. Once again, the development of civilization has taken another large leap forward.

Rod is tricked, however, out of his position as leader and left to watch his settlement continue to develop under the leadership of an older boy. Four schools came to this



planet, three of them high schools and one a college. Although the college boys are in the minority, they become the leaders, mirroring racism and discrimination in modern America. It is suggested that Rod begin his own colony somewhere else, but Rod, who has lost his savage behaviors, decides to give the college boy the benefit of the doubt and sit back to watch what happens. Rod also does this to protect his friends, Bob and Carmen, who want to get married. This once again shows the reader what a strong man Rod is becoming, as well as beginning an illustration of the theme of power struggles.



Chapter 9, 'A Joyful Omen' and Chapter 10, 'I So Move'

Chapter 9, 'A Joyful Omen' and Chapter 10, 'I So Move' Summary

In chapter 9, Grant orders that rocks set aside to build the wall be used to build a house for Carmen and Bob. Rod questions the delay to building the wall, but agrees that Bob and Carmen need privacy. Rod also learns that Grant has restricted the members of the government committees to only his classmates at Teller, further infuriating his friends and increasing their desire to start a new colony. Once again Rod refuses to leave, suggesting they give Grant more time. That night, Bob and Carmen are married in a short ceremony that gives all the survivors reasons to hope for a good future.

In chapter 10, time continues to go on, with town meetings held every night. However, after several weeks there is still no constitution. There have been lots of appointments, including Caroline as historian because she is the only one with writing paper, but no progress seems to be made. The wall is also ignored as more homes are built for other survivors hoping to marry. At a meeting one night, the younger students have grown impatient and demand that Grant be replaced as mayor by Rod. Rod refuses the job and insists that everyone continue to back Grant. Later, however, when Grant takes Rod aside to thank him, Rod insists that changes need to be made. Grant asks Rod to take over as guard leader. Rod refuses, listing a group of reasons why he does not want the job, including answering to one of Grant's friends. Grant fires his friend and again asks Rod to take the job. Rod reluctantly agrees, but only after Grant agrees that he will be allowed to run the guard his way. Rod makes a great many changes, including adding a man to guard every night, forcing Grant to take a turn, and allowing women to join the guard. Rod also argues that the wall must be finished, despite the lack of rock due to another couple's wedding. Finally, Rod insists that he be allowed to go in search of a more defensible place to move the colony.

Chapter 9, 'A Joyful Omen' and Chapter 10, 'I So Move' Analysis

Bob and Carmen get married, bringing something like normalcy to the colony. At the same time, people are becoming disgruntled with Grant's leadership. Grant is attempting to create a whole society using few supplies and principles that are not easily applied to their current situation. Grant is in over his head and this becomes clear when at a town meeting someone insists that Grant be replaced and most of the colony agree. Grant turns to Rod, aware that he needs Rod support to continue wielding control over the colony. Rod is reluctant because Grant stole the leadership from him, but sees that changes do need to be made for the safety of the colony. Grant's main



concern is law and order, but Rod's concerns are more basic, more concerned with the safety of the people. The two men differ so much that they continue to argue until finally Rod packs up and leaves in an attempt to find a better place to live. Not only does this illustrate the theme of power struggles, but it illustrates two separate aspects of survival that need to be dealt with but in different way and with different techniques. Both these young men want only what is best for the colony, they simply do not know how to work together to make it work.



Chapter 11, The Beach of Bones

Chapter 11, The Beach of Bones Summary

The first part of the chapter is written in diary form as Caroline writes about Rod leaving with Roy to find a better defensible place for the colony to live. Caroline writes about things that happen in the settlement during Rod's absence, including a few marriages, the news that one of the married girls is possibly pregnant, and the fact that the settlement has come to the realization that Rod and Roy have died on their mission.

As the colony continues to grow and move toward modern civilization, Rod and Roy begin following the river downstream. They find a set of small caves where several girls are living, but nothing big enough to support the whole colony. When it is time to turn around, they decide to continue on in hopes of finding something better. Eventually they come to a beach of a dead sea. The beach is covered with bleached bones from a variety of animals, but their cause of death is not clear. Rod and Roy turn back and stop at a set of caves they passed a day or so before reaching the beach. Here they find a large network of caves that will be a perfect place to move the colony. Before they can return, however, Roy breaks his leg and they are forced to wait while the leg heals and then Roy is able to regain his ability to walk. When they finally arrive back at the settlement, they are welcomed with lots of enthusiasm.

Chapter 11, The Beach of Bones Analysis

The colony continues to thrive despite many hardships, becoming something of a small city. This continuing development is presented to the reader in diary entries that change the point of view narration from Rod to Caroline in such a way that the reader is still aware that Rod is the main character. At the same time, Rod and Roy leave to find a better place to house the settlement, a place that can be easily defended and large enough to hold everyone. Rod finds this place, but not before happening across a beach filled with bleached bones. This suggests to Rod some kind of danger, perhaps an animal in the water or an animal that drives the animals to the dead sea where they drown. No matter what the danger is, it is clear to Rod that they need to move the settlement as soon as possible to the network of caves he has discovered. Rod is deeply concerned that their lack of knowledge of the animals of this planet could be of great danger to them and the caves are their best answer. However, the reader wonders if Grant will be willing to listen when the settlement has expanded so well and become such a settled city.



Chapter 12, 'It Won't Work, Rod' and Chapter 13, Unkillable

Chapter 12, 'It Won't Work, Rod' and Chapter 13, Unkillable Summary

In chapter 12, Rod and Roy discover that more houses have been built and the rock wall has been replaced with a thornbush barricade. Rod is dismayed by this, but feels as though it does not matter since they are leaving soon. However, Grant refuses to entertain the idea of leaving all they have accomplished to move to the caves. When Rod suggests to Caroline that they go alone with the original group, she tells him of Carmen's condition and says they cannot move now.

In chapter 13, Rod continues to argue for the move when a strange migration begins propelled by a rabbit-like animal the colonist have begun calling Dopey Joe. This animal never before showed any sort of aggression, but suddenly it begins chasing other animals and attacking everything in their way. This migration leads the animals right into the settlement. Rod and Grant set up a ring of fire around the camp and send everyone up to the cave except for the bachelors. Carmen is in labor and is forced to remain in her home until giving birth to a baby girl. Finally the fire goes out and Grant orders everyone up to the cave. Grant and Rod are the last to leave. As they begin going up the path, a Dopey Joe grabs Grant. Before Rod can help, several more grab at Grant's limbs. Rod is attacked as well, causing him to lose consciousness. When Rod awakes, he discovers that Grant has died and the colony have elected Rod mayor. Everyone is ready to move to the caves now, but Rod insists they must stay in order to honor Grant's wishes.

Chapter 12, 'It Won't Work, Rod' and Chapter 13, Unkillable Analysis

Rod returns all set to move the settlement to the caves, but Grant has made so many improvements to the settlement that he refuses to move. Not only this, but Rod learns that Carmen Baxter is pregnant and unable to move. Rod continues to argue for the move, sure something will happen to place the colony in danger, but no one will support him. However, the bad event that Rod has predicted finally comes into play. A migration led by an animal the colonist have, up to this point, believed were harmless, begin attacking other animals as well as humans, forcing a migration downstream.

Rod and Grant team together at last to protect the settlement, but it seems it might be too little too late. They are able to hold off these Dopey Joes most of the night, but eventually run out of fuel for the fire. The cave is much too small to hold all the members of the colony, but they are all forced inside anyway in order to protect them



from danger. In an attempt to be the last in the cave, and therefore maintaining their honor, Rod and Grant are attacked. Grant dies. In a complete change of heart, Rod decides to keep the settlement where it is in order to honor Grant. It is a decision that could lead to sure death, or could prove Rod's maturity and strength in leadership. At the same time, Carmen has given birth to the first child born on the planet, showing the reader that no matter what happens next, the colonist's are sure to survive.



Chapter 14, Civilization, Chapter 15, In Achilles' Tent, and Chapter 16, The Endless Road

Chapter 14, Civilization, Chapter 15, In Achilles' Tent, and Chapter 16, The Endless Road Summary

In chapter 14, sixteen months have passed and many improvements have taken place in Cowpertown, including a newer, stronger wall, a farm, and an iron works. Bruce McGowan has returned, having come to Rod begging to be taken in after his brother was killed. However, Bruce has continued to be lazy and defiant. Rod arranges for Bruce to go to work at the iron works with the hope that he will have little time on his hands to be so defiant. The settlement has begun throwing square dances once a week. At one dance, the question of what each person would do should rescue finally come arises. Most everyone decides they would rather stay, except Bob Baxter who continues to want to go to medical school. The following day, Cliff asks Rod to come see the farm. On the way there, they run into Bruce McGowan. Rod tells Bruce to go to work, but he refuses. Words are exchanged and Rod agrees to fight Bruce. Bruce beats Rod badly, but is then attacked by Rod's friends. When Rod awakes in the infirmary, he insists that Bruce either go to work or leave, injured or not. Bruce goes to work.

Finally Rod is able to go out and see the farm a few days later. While in the fields, Rod and his companions watch as a gate to Earth opens in the middle of the field. In chapter 15, an official comes out of the gate and begins ordering the colonists to prepare for their return to Earth. Rod refuses to accept this man's authority and to return. Rod hides out in his quarters where he is visited first by Jimmy and then Caroline, both of whom have decided to return to Earth with everyone else. Soon Rod finds himself alone, feeling betrayed by his friends. A camera crew comes into the village and takes pictures of Rod that make him appear to be some sort of savage. Rod becomes angry and chases them away. Rod again hides in his quarters. Deacon Matson suddenly appears with Rod's sister, Helen. Rod is glad to see them until he realizes they are there to talk him into returning to Earth. Deacon Matson tells Rod that he has married Helen and that they are about to become settlers on a newly discovered planet. They want to help Rod get his degree and go with them, but Rod continues to insist that he wants to remain on his planet. Rod finally changes his mind when he learns that his parents have been awoken out of their frozen state because a cure for his father's illness has already been discovered.

In chapter 16, Rod goes through the process of returning home. At home, Rod's father encourages Rod to remain at home for a time, to rest and return to something like normal. Helen would rather see Rod finish his education and pursue his dreams. Rod is confused by all this talk and turns to Deacon Matson. Finally, a few years have passed



and Rod has fulfilled his dream. Like the captain on horseback he once admired, Rod is preparing to lead a group of colonists, including Jimmy and Jack, as well as their son, to a newly discovered planet.

Chapter 14, Civilization, Chapter 15, In Achilles' Tent, and Chapter 16, The Endless Road Analysis

Many changes have taken place in Cowpertown, including the creation of an iron works and a farm. It is clear that the town has flourished under Rod. Everyone seems to be getting along, the laws are being followed, and everyone's needs are being met. The only thorn in Rod's side is Bruce McGowan, but Rod is able to deal with the in his own way, getting himself hurt but forcing Bruce to work.

Now that Cowpertown is a success and life has returned to something like normal, the rescuers come. Even though everyone has decided they would stay forever, they all decide to return, some for their newly born babies, some for career prospects. Rod refuses to go, deciding he has given too much of himself to Cowpertown to return to his life as it was on Earth. However, seeing his sister changes Rod's mind. The change is almost overwhelming, leaving Rod feeling like a stranger in his own home. Deacon Matson, his new brother-in-law, is there to help him through it and Rod is finally able to achieve the dream he has aspired to since childhood.



Characters

Rod Walker

Rod Walker is a teenage boy who has elected to take a strenuous survival course normally offered only in college. Rod enjoys the class, but he did not pay as close of a attention as he should have to some of the advice offered by the instructor and does not realize this until the final exam has begun. The final exam consists of walking these students through a tunnel, or gate, that opens onto a world that they know nothing about. The students are then expected to survive alone or in pairs for four to ten days.

On the day the final exam is announced, Rod learns that his father is terminally ill and is planning to have himself and his wife frozen until a cure can be found for his illness. Rather than stay home and spend a last few days with his parents, Rod and his sister discuss the situation and decide it would be best if Rod continue with his exam. Rod picks the few supplies he is allowed to take and arrives at the gate just moments before departures begin. Rod teams up with another classmate, but somehow the two boys are separated after going through the gate and Rod is left on his own.

The first night his terrifying for Rod, the situation made worse when a classmate, or student from one of the other schools also running a final exam, attacks him and steals all his supplies. Rod is left with nothing but a knife his sister allowed him to borrow and his underwear. Rod manages to survive alone for a few weeks, slowly coming to the realization that for unknown reasons, he will not be rescued from the planet. Eventually Rod meets another student from a different school and they partner up. Rod and his partner then decide to begin searching for other survivors, first scouring the jungle alone, then lighting a signal fire that brings students to them. In time, all most of the known survivors make their way to Rod's camp. Rod, a strong willed young man with aspirations to become a pilgrimage captain, becomes the leader of this group until his authority is questioned and a group of older students force Rod out with a group vote.

Grant Cowper

Grant Cowper was a college student before landing on this unknown planet and therefore is older than most of the students by several years. Grant studied government in college, so when it becomes apparent that it is time to begin developing a government to rule over the new colony, it is Grant who suggests it and a procedure by which to achieve it. Grant is a soft-spoken, intelligent young man who instantly wins the favor of everyone in the colony. As a result, Grant wins the election to become the mayor of the colony. Grant immediately begins appointing people to committees to write out the laws of the colony and procedures by which everyone will be expected to live. Grant also appoints colonist to various jobs, including a historian, a leader of the guard, and cooks.



Grant is well liked at first, but soon the young students, who happen to be the majority, begin to feel pushed out by Grant's decision to appoint only the college students to his committees and to make rules that ban the younger students from participating in key government decisions. Rod confronts Grant on these choices and discovers that Grant did not do this out of malice, but out of an attempt to protect the younger students. Rod agrees to become a part of Grant's government in order to help soothe the anger of the young students. However, when Rod finds a set of caves to move the colony to that will be easier to defend from predators, Grant refuses to move. This happens at the same time a strange migration of the local animals begins, placing the entire colony in danger. Grant is killed. Rather than leave the settlement, however, Rod preserves it in Grant's memory.

Caroline Mshiyeni

Caroline Mshiyeni is a girl from Rod's class. Caroline is an Amazon type woman who often walks around without shoes on and is large enough to imply strength and an ability to care for herself. Rod does not particularly like or dislike Caroline before the final exam of the survival class, but feels she is the type who is independent and would not want to team up with anyone. After it becomes clear that the classes are not going to be rescued, Caroline joins the colony that is quickly forming around Rod and Jack's partnership. Caroline is an early member of the group, therefore she is a solid part of the friendship that develops between Rod and his closest friends.

When Grant takes over the government of the new colony, Caroline is immediately ready to leave the colony with Rod. However, when Rod refuses to leave, Caroline accepts the role of historian, based in part because she is the only one who brought writing paper on the survival test. Caroline brought a diary in which to record her impressions during the test and it is in this that Caroline begins recording the knowledge of the students in the colony and the development of the new government.

Caroline is a tough person, but she is also feminine. When Caroline watches her girlfriends pair off, get married and have babies, she begins to desire that life for herself. However, Caroline's main interest is Rod. Rod, on the other hand, feels that governing and caring for the entire colony is the most important thing for him to do, so he has put his personal feelings aside for the time being. While Caroline is one of the most popular girls in the colony, she remains unattached. When the people of Earth finally are able to relocate the unknown planet, Caroline elects to return in order to join the Amazon army.

Jacqueline Daudet

Jacqueline Daudet, or Jack, is a young woman whom Rod meets when she helps him take down a kill for his lunch. Jack and Rod share the meal. Later, it is suggested that they partner up in order to survive, as it appears to be clear that they have been abandoned on the planet. Jack agrees and takes Rod to a cave where she has been living for several weeks. The next day, they decide it would be good to increase their



partnership by looking for other survivors. Jack immediately takes Rod to a person who has been sleeping in a tree nearby whom Jack suspects might be dead. The young man turns out to be Jimmy Throxton, the young man Rod was supposed to team with when they first came to the planet. Rod and Jack take Jimmy back to the cave where they nurse him back to health with Jack's meager supply of medications. It is at this point that Rod discovers Jack, whom he had assumed was a boy, is in fact a girl.

Rod, Jack, and Jimmy decide to light a signal fire to attract other survivors to their camp. Over time, most of the known survivors from the four classes that came to the planet make their way to the camp. A colony forms under the leadership of Rod, only to turn on him and elect another man mayor. Jack wants to leave the colony with Rod and a handful of others to start over, but Rod decides they would be better off remaining where they are. Jack settles into a life in the new colony and eventually marries Jimmy, providing him with a young son before they are rescued.

James Throxton

James 'Jimmy' Throxton is a member of Rod's class and one of the few classmates Rod has befriended before the final exam. Rod suggests they team up when the exam is first announced, but Jimmy decides he would rather drop the course than to risk his life on a strange planet. However, the morning of the test, Jimmy arrives moments before the test is to begin. Again he and Rod plan to team up, but when Rod arrives on the planet, Jimmy is nowhere to be found.

Jimmy barely survives on his own, becoming ill and having to be rescued by Rod and Jack. When the colony forms, Jimmy supports Rod in everything he wants to do, including forming their own colony away from the new government of the first. When the new government begins to form and homes begin being built, Jimmy becomes comfortable in his role there. However, Jimmy continues to support Rod in all he wants to do, even admitting that if rescue were to come, he would prefer to stay. Eventually Jimmy marries Jack and they have a son together. When rescue does come, Jimmy elects to return to Earth for the benefit of his infant son.

Bob Baxter and Carmen Garcia Baxter

Bob Baxter and Carmen Garcia are members of Rod's class. Bob and Carmen are the third and fourth people to join Rod and Jack in Jack's cave. Bob and Carmen were dating before the test and they elected to team up once the test began. As the colony forms, Bob takes on a role as medical provider because he had wanted to be a doctor and knew how to treat most minor injuries. When Grant becomes mayor, Bob and Carmen support the idea of forming a new colony with Rod as their leader, but ask that the move be put off until they can be legally married by Grant. This causes Rod to decide it would be best to remain with the original colony. Bob and Carmen are the first to be married among the colonists and the first to have a baby, with Carmen giving birth to a little girl almost a year after the students came to the unknown colony.



Deacon B.P. Matson

Deacon B.P. Matson is the instructor of the survival course Rod is taking that leads to the final exam on an unknown planet. Matson instructs his students on all they need to know to survive in almost any situation, but cannot tell the students where they are going, what supplies to take, or what to expect. All Matson can do is warn them to look out for stobor. When the students are not returned due to a black hole that distorts the gate, Matson gets to know Helen Walker, Rod's sister. Eventually they are married. When Rod and his fellow colonists are finally rescued, but Rod chooses to stay behind, Matson comes to visit him and talk him into returning. Afterward, Matson supports Rod emotionally and helps him finish his education quickly so he can reach his dream of becoming a pioneer captain, leading pioneers to colonize new planets.

Helen Walker Matson

Helen Walker Matson is Rod's sister. Helen is a leader in the Amazon army. Helen completed a similar survival course like the one Rod is taking and gives him advice on how to pack for and survive the final exam. Helen also gives Rod a knife she used on her own final exam, a knife that saves Rod's life on many occasions. Due to the fact that their father is dying and therefore is freezing himself and his wife until a cure can be found, Helen is appointed Rod's guardian. This position leaves Helen to lead the fight to have the students found and returned to Earth. In the course of this struggle, Helen meets and marries Deacon Matson, Rod's instructor. Later, when Rod is returned home, Helen refuses to return guardianship to her parents in order to help Rod achieve his desire to be an Outlander, to lead pioneers to colonize new planets.

Mr. and Mrs. Walker

Mr. and Mrs. Walker are Rod's parents. Mr. and Mrs. Walker are highly religious, calm people who do not understand their son's desire to be an Outlander. Mr. Walker becomes ill with a disease that causes him to be unable to eat or absorb nutrients. Due to this illness, Mr. Walker decides to have himself and his wife frozen to wait for a time when a cure is found. This cure is expected to be twenty years in the future. The decision to be frozen comes at the same time Rod is to begin his survival exam. Rod considers delaying the test, but decides there is nothing he can do so he will continue living his life normally. The cure only takes two years, however, and the Walkers are back home by the time Rod is rescued from the unknown planet where the test and a black hole left him stranded.

Jock and Bruce McGowan

Jock and Bruce McGowan are brothers who are among the students abandoned on the unknown planet. Jock and Bruce are lazy, unkind people who test authority every chance they are given and refuse to take orders from anyone. Rod comes up against



Jock and Bruce, as well as two of their friends, when the colony is still new. Rod wants these young men to do their part, but Jock refuses, forcing a fight. Rod wins the fight and has the four young men banished from the colony. This episode leads Grant to suggest a permanent government is needed.

Later, Jock McGowan is killed and Bruce returns to the colony, begging Rod to allow him back in because he would surely die alone. Rod agrees, but quickly discovers Bruce had not changed. Rod confronts Bruce time and again, finally forced into a physical confrontation. Bruce beats Rod badly, but Rod's friends return the favor. Rod tells Bruce he either goes to work, or leaves the colony immediately. Bruce backs down and returns to work.



Objects/Places

Playing Cards

Jimmy Throxtton brings a pack of playing cards with him on his survival test and it becomes the only source of entertainment when the students find themselves abandoned on an unfamiliar planet. When the Baxters get married, Jimmy gives the cards to them as a wedding gift.

Colonel Bowie

Colonel Bowie is Rod Walker's knife. Colonel Bowie is stolen early in the survival test. When Rod teams up with Jackie, he discovers that she now has his knife. Jackie claims she took the knife off of a dead body she found in the woods.

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is Helen Walker's knife. Helen used Lady Macbeth in her own survival test and gives it to Rod as a backup knife. When Rod is knocked unconscious and all his supplies are stolen, he still has Lady Macbeth because it was hidden under a bandage taped to his leg.

Spear

Rod creates a spear by tying his knife to the end of a stick. Later, when they discover a metal ore on the planet, Rod creates a permanent tip for his spear.

Climbing Rope

Rod takes climbing rope with him on his survival test. When the students begin to gather together, all the climbing rope is put in a shared inventory to be used for the good of the community.

Caroline's Diary

Caroline brought a diary on the test with her to use to chronicle her experiences. After the students form a community, Cowper attempts to force Caroline to hand over half the pages left in her diary because there is no other source of paper. Caroline refuses, but does agree to use the diary to keep notes on town meetings.



Dopey Joes

Dopey Joes are small animals living on the unknown planet that are about the size of a tom cat and appear somewhat dopey, stupid, until time for migration when they become aggressive. These animals cause Cowpertown a great deal of trouble during their first experience with the migration season, attacking the settlement and chasing large animals through the settlement.

Ramsbotham Gates

Ramsbotham Gates are gates between places that a scientist named Ramsbotham invented in an attempt to create a time traveling machine. These gates come into common use in Rod's time to travel not only from place to place on earth, but to travel between planets. It is through one of these gates that Rod and his classmates travel to the unknown planet for their survival test.

Cave

Jackie has a cave where she is living alone when Rod comes across her and decides to join together. As the community begins to gather and grow, the cave becomes too small to house everyone. However, when trouble threatens the community, Cowper orders everyone to the cave for protection.

Honeymoon House

When the Baxters get married, Cowper orders a house built so that they can have some privacy. It is the first house built in Cowpertown.

Mayor's Palace

The mayor's palace is the home built for the mayor to live in and to conduct business.

Cowpertown

Cowpertown is the name the students give their community after Grant Cowper is killed during the crazy migration known as catastrophic adjustment. Cowper was attacked by Dopey Joes.

Outlands

Outlands is what the people call the planets that are capable of sustaining human life off of Earth.

Themes

Survival

In order to get a job in the Outlands, a person in Rod's time has to take a survival course. Rod chooses to take the course in high school. The course teaches him what he should do to survive in an unfamiliar environment with unknown dangers. At the end of the course, Rod is expected to take a test during which he will be delivered to an unknown planet and left to survive for anywhere from four to ten days. More than half the class decides to drop the course rather than tempt fate at this early juncture of their education. Rod, despite drama taking place in his family, decides to go forward with the test.

Rod speaks to his sister, an officer in the Amazon army, about what he should take on the test. Rod's sister, Helen, advises him not to take a gun because it will make him too jumpy, too willing to shoot before thinking. Instead, Helen gives Rod her knife as a back up to his own. The following day, Rod arrives for the test and is tempted by the weapons, but elects to stick with the knives as his sister suggested. Helen's knife is hidden on a bandage taped to Rod's leg. Rod is transported to the strange planet and finds himself alone despite the fact that he had intended to team up with another classmate, Jimmy. Almost immediately Rod discovers the dead body of one of his classmates, a warning to the dangers lurking on this planet.

Rod's first night is a restless one as he becomes accustomed to the odd sounds the strange animals make in the night. The following day, Rod begins to make his way on his own, weary of the animals, but forgetting one of the biggest predators a planet might harbor, humans. Rod is attacked and left with nothing but the knife hidden under a bandage on his leg. Rod manages to survive for almost a month on his own with only a knife for protection as well as a means to capture and prepare food. Finally Rod comes across a young person whom he partners up with and together they begin to return to a more civilized way of life, adding more and more survivors to their group as time goes on.

A Return to Civilization

It is human nature to seek out others and to live in a structured society. As Rod and his new partner, Jack, begin adding to their small group, they soon discover that a need for rules and discipline has arisen. Nearly all the surviving students from several different schools have all come to this one place in response to Rod, Jimmy, and Jack's signal fire. However, there is a group of four young men who are unruly and difficult, facing off with Rod as their leader every chance they get. Eventually this leads to a confrontation in which Rod is forced to expel the young men from the newly formed colony. As a result, a student from the only college class on the planet suggests they form some sort of government.



A meeting is called and Rod finds himself forced out of the leadership role. Rod is hurt and feels as though he was pushed out intentionally, especially when the new leader places his own people in control of the new government and begins making laws that benefit only the older students of the colony. Rod and his friends consider leaving, but instead Rod decides it would be to everyone's benefit to remain and wait for the new government to repair their mistakes. The new government, however, is pompous and struggling under the stress of creating a whole new civilization from scratch with little to no modern conveniences that everyone is used to having. Eventually, just as Rod had hoped, the new leader begins to see his own mistakes and turns to Rod for advice.

The new leader fails to take some of Rod's advice, including the idea of moving to an extensive group of caves Rod found that would be safer and easier to defend. Instead, the colony remains out in the open and is caught off guard by a strange migration of the animals they have begun calling Dopey Joes. The new leader is killed, leaving Rod the newly elected mayor of this new civilization. Rod does the best he can to bring his colony together and to preserve a semblance of normal life among his group of refugees. Within time, the colony begins to resemble a real town, a town out of the history books, but a new civilization none the less.

Power Struggles

The students abandoned on this strange, unidentified planet are all brought together in one central location because of Rod and his friends. Rod has been appointed leader by his friends and he attempts to govern the quickly multiplying group of students without benefit of laws, structure, or a way to enforce his edicts. This all leads to a situation in which Rod is physically threatened by a disgruntled member of the new colony who does not like being told what to do by a younger boy. Rod handles the situation admirably, but it causes some to begin to wonder if they too should follow the rules of this young man whom they have not chosen as their leader. A meeting is called and votes are taken for an elected leader. Rod fails to win the vote.

The new leader begins appointing his own friends and classmates to committees that will form the new government of this abandoned group of children. This leader, Grant Cowper, fails to take into consideration that the government should represent everyone. Soon the younger students, who are the majority, begin to raise questions about the fairness of this new government. Rod is among those who does not like the changes being made, especially those changes that are too slow in coming. As a result, Rod and his friends begin to contemplate leaving. Instead, Grant confides to Rod that he is over his head and needs Rod's help.

The power struggles in this book are mostly between Grant and Rod as the need for a governing body arises and the people chose Grant as their leader. Rod is hurt, but does not fight it until it is clear that Grant is not creating a government that is in the best interest of everyone in the new colony. Rod then begins to make a move to create his own colony when Grant includes him in the new government. Rod continues to reject many of Grant's ideas and rules, until finally the power struggle between these two

young men ends in Grant's death after he made the decision to not move out of the way of a strange and deadly migration, but to remain in the open and to fight. Rod is so saddened by Grant's death that he adopts many of Grant's ideas and helps to create a colony that flourishes.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person omniscient. The narrating character is Rod Walker, a high school student who is taking a survival course in high school in order to get a leg up on his desire to lead new colonies onto new planets. As the main character of the novel, it is important that Rod be the narrator. The choice of third person omniscient allows the reader to develop a strong relationship with Rod, resulting in the reader's concern for what might happen to Rod. However, the third person point of view, as opposed to the first person point of view, allows some degree of separation between the reader and the narrator, allowing for the author to occasionally move away from the main character and inject information or comments that help the reader understand the plot of the novel more clearly.

The point of view of this book works well because it allows the reader a close relationship with the main character, Rod Walker, as he goes through the final exam for his survival course and fights not only to survive the test, but to create a whole new life for himself when a black hole causes the test to last years instead of days. This point of view also utilizes that authorial voice to allow the writer to inject some information that the reader needs, but would not have had access to if the point of view had been first person. The reader is given information such as the creation of the gates that allow travel from place to place and planet to planet in the time in which Rod lives, an explanation that is essential to the plot of the novel, but more technical than a high school boy might have wanted to express in his own thoughts as the plot developed. It is for these reasons that the point of view of this novel works.

Setting

The novel begins on a futuristic planet Earth, or Terra, that has travel centers that have developed throughout the world allowing travel in mere seconds from country to country, state to state, and city to city. One of these travel centers has developed at the site of the Statue of Liberty. This travel center also includes gates that move passengers from planet to planet, allowing colonists to move to their new home planets in a matter of seconds. The novel then moves to a new setting when Rod Walker walks through one of these gates for his survival test and lands on a planet unfamiliar to him. This planet is much like Earth in its vegetation, but boasts animals that are like nothing Rod has ever seen anywhere else. There are lions that are twice as big as those on earth and some sort of mammal that sings a grotesque, opera-like song all night long.

The setting of this novel is important because it reflects the science fiction aspect of the genre in which the novel is a part. The futuristic planet Earth is fascinating in its modes of travel, the food that simply appears rather than having to be made, and the homes that are hidden under the ground, using televisions for an outdoor view rather than



windows. All of this advanced technology allows the reader to be open to the idea of stepping through a door and finding oneself on a new planet, an idea that is essential to the plot as it is the way in which Rod moves from one planet to the next. The second setting of this novel, the unidentified planet, is uninhabited by humans and has no modern conveniences. Students must learn to make their own food, to travel on their own two feet, and to create a new government under which to survive. This setting is exactly what a reader might expect of a location of such a survival course, therefore the settings in this novel are highly appropriate to the plot and work well with the novel's genre.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel includes some slang phrases that date from the time period in which the novel was written, but these slang phrases are few and far between as to not interfere with the futuristic plot of the novel. The novel also includes slang that comes from the science fiction aspect of the novel, such as names for the travel mode the characters use and the food delivery system used. There are words for the strange animals on the planet that are unlike words used for similar animals on Earth because there is no word for these unknown animals. Finally, the students are warned to watch out for stobor, a word that does not apply to one particular animal as some of the students believe, but is a general word for a dangerous element of an unknown planet.

The language of this novel is simple and easy for readers of all ages to read. The language is appropriate to the plot of the novel, including many words that are made up or invented by the writer to apply to unknown, newly discovered animals and elements on an unknown planet. These words are appropriate to the novel because it is a science fiction novel that deals with things that have not been invented in the modern, realistic world and therefore need to be named and dealt with in a unique fashion particular to the writer of this novel. There are not a whole lot of complicated words and details, however, allowing the plot to flow unimpeded for the average reader.

Structure

The novel is divided into sixteen chapters, each with a title that expresses an event or object that will be important to the plot that develops in that chapter. Each chapter is fairly long, most an average of fifteen to twenty pages. The plot is told in a linear time line, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. The novel is written in both dialogue and exposition, including some amount of internal dialogue, especially in the chapters in which Rod Walker is alone and attempting to survive on an unknown planet.

The novel includes one main plot and several subplots. The main plot revolves around Rod's decision to participate in a survival course's final exam despite drama taking place in his family life. Rod is placed on an unknown planet, essentially on his own, and left to survive for four to ten days using techniques learned in his class. Rod survives,

but ten days turns into more than twenty and it becomes clear that the survival class has been left on its own. Rod teams up with another student from a different school and together they begin bringing in all the students abandoned on the planet. The subplots include romances between several of the students, as well as a power struggle between Rod and another student when it becomes clear that a government is needed among the colonists.



Quotes

Rod walker reread the notice slowly, while trying to quiet the quiver in his nerves. He checked off the test conditions—why, those were not 'conditions' but a total lack of conditions, no limits of any sort! They could dump you through the gate and the next instant you might be facing a polar bear at forty below—or wrestling an octopus deep in warm salt water.

Or, he added, faced up to some three-headed horror on a planet you had never heard of." Chapter 1, The Marching Hordes, pg. 2

"Rod should have gone straight home. His family lived in an out-county of Greater New York City, located on the Grand Canyon plateau through Hoboken Gate. But his commuting route required him to change at Emigrants' Gap and he found himself unable to resist stopping to rubberneck." Chapter 1, The Marching Hordes, pg. 10

"Rocket ships did not conquer space; they merely challenged it."
Chapter 2, The Fifth Way, pg. 23

"As with most children Rod had taken his family and home for granted; he had not thought about them much, nor placed a conscious value on them, any more than a fish treasures water. They simply were.

Now suddenly they were not." Chapter 3, Through the Tunnel, pg. 43

"He was thirsty, too, not having drunk that day. Besides that, he was slightly feverish. Three long, imperfectly healed scratches on his left arm accounted for the fever, but rod paid fever and scratches no attention—he was alive; he planned to stay alive." Chapter 4, Savage, pg. 73

"The decision to keep on burning the smoke signal and thereby to call in as many recruits as possible was never voted on; it formed itself. The next morning Rod intended to bring the matter up but Jimmy and Bob rebuilt the smoke fire from its embers while down to fetch fresh water. Rod let the accomplished fact stand; two girls drifted in separately that day."

Chapter 8, 'Fish, or Cut Bait', pg. 119

"Rod did not get to sleep at once. He told himself that there was no disgrace in losing an election—shucks, hadn't his old man lost the time he had run for community corporation board? He told himself, too, that trying to ride herd on those apes was enough to drive a man crazy and he was well out of it—he had never wanted the job! Nevertheless there was a lump in his middle and a deep sense of personal failure." Chapter 8, 'Fish, or Cut Bait', pg. 141



"Don't be so intense, Rod. You can get along a night or two with bigger fires. Remember, there are human values more important than material values." Chapter 10, 'I So Move', pg. 172

"The stay in the gallery while Roy's let repaired was not difficult nor dangerous; it was merely tedious. Rod would have liked to explore all the caves, but the first time he was away longer than Roy thought necessary to make a kill rod returned to find his patient almost hysterical." Chapter 11, The Beach of Bones, pg. 185

"You don't understand! If you want to move, move...but get somebody else to lead you. Roy can do it. Or Cliff, or Bill. But if you leave it to me, no dirty little beasts, all teeth and no brains, are going to drive us out. We're men...and men don't have to be driven out, not by the likes of those. Grant paid for this land—and I say stay here and keep it for him."

Chapter 13, Unkillable, pg. 212

"Used all his life to Roamsbotham anomalies, Rod nevertheless found those concerned with time confusing—planet-hopping via the gates did not seem odd."

Chapter 16, The Endless Road, pg. 255

"The pinto sprang forward, cut in front of the lead wagon, and Captain Walker headed out on his long road." Chapter 16, The Endless Road, pg. 262



Topics for Discussion

Who is Rod? What type of class is he taking? Why? Why does Rod want to learn to survive on a strange planet? What is Rod's career aspiration? Why does Rod want this career? What are Rod's chances of getting a chance at this career? How will this class help with that? Is Rod well prepared to survive on an unknown planet? Why or why not?

Who is Jack? Why is Jack on the strange planet? What does Rod learn about Jack when Jimmy joins their group? Why does this surprise Rod? Why did Jack not tell Rod the truth? What was Jack attempting to protect? Who was Jack protecting from this truth?

How does Rod spend his first night on the strange planet? Why is Rod frightened? What does this say about Rod's maturity and his ability to survive? What causes Rod to get over his fears? Why? Why does Rod not wander far from trees? What does Rod expect to do if a predator comes up to him? How does Rod's maturity change as the test proceeds?

Why does Rod team up with Jack? Why do they decide to start adding more students to their team? What do they hope will happen as more students come out of the woods? Was it Rod and Jack's intention to begin a new colony? Explain your answer. Why is Rod made the leader of the new colony? Who opposes Rod's rule? Why does Grant suggest a leader be elected? Was it Grant's intention to become the new leader? Why?

Why does Rod want to find a more defensible place to move the colony? How does Rod find the network of caves? Why are the colonists not excited by Rod's discovery? Why does Grant decide not to move the colony? Is this a bad decision? Why do the colonists suddenly change their minds and side with Rod? Why does Rod not move the colony?

What changes take place in the aftermath of Grant's death that show the development within the colony? How have these changes come about? What has not changed? Why? How does Rod react to the things that have not changed? How does Rod feel about his actions as compared to what he believes Grant might have done in his place? Why does Rod compare himself to Grant? How does Rod feel about Grant? How did Grant's death impact these emotions?

How do the Earth technicians finally relocate the planet? Why do most of the colonists decide to return to Earth? Why does Rod refuse to return to Earth? What finally changes his mind? How? What does Rod find different about his feelings and his life on Earth? How does Rod adjust? What career does Rod finally get at the end of the book? Is this what Rod wanted?