

Ungifted Study Guide

Ungifted by Gordon Korman

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Plot Summary

In "Ungifted", a so-called "average" student faces unexpected consequences after an impulsive choice accidentally causes some serious damage to his school's gymnasium. As Donovan Curtis struggles to keep several important secrets, he finds himself making unexpected friends and learning surprising truths about himself and people he once had little time for. As the narrative explores thematic questions about the value of following impulses, it also explores issues around the different interpretations of the word / concept "gifted".

By his own admission, teenager Donovan Curtis is impulsive. Once an idea or a desire for action hits him, he says, he is unable to control it, or to consider the consequences. It's only in the aftermath of his actions, when things start happening that he didn't expect, that he comes to understand that following his impulse might not have been the best possible choice.

This is exactly what happens in the opening chapter of "Ungifted". Donovan whacks a statue outside of his school with an old tree branch, causing part of the statue (a globe) to fall off, roll towards the school, crash through the gymnasium doors, and seriously disrupt a major sporting event.

In the aftermath of the incident, a chain of circumstances sees Donovan not receive punishment for his actions, but instead end up at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction, in a classroom of above-average students that he and his buddies used to call geeks, dweebs, nerds, or brainiacs. Realizing that staying in this class is his one sure way of avoiding the consequences of causing the destruction at the school, Donovan does his best to fit in, even though he's clearly not as intellectually "gifted" as the other students in his class. Those students, for the most part, give him a very tentative welcome, although two of them (Noah and Chloe) become more interested in him when they see how "normal" he is, normal being something they've NEVER been. Meanwhile, the rest of the class becomes friendlier, albeit grudgingly (in some cases), when he helps them improve the robot they are building as an entry in a regional robotics competition.

As Donovan ingratiates himself more deeply with his classmates, teachers at the Academy become increasingly suspicious about how he came to be there. At the same time, the Superintendent of Schools is searching for the boy responsible for the gym accident, and Donovan's pregnant sister Katie gets closer and closer to her due date. Eventually, Donovan is forced to take one of the school's admission tests. He anticipates failing quite badly, but is shocked and surprised to discover that someone (one of his classmates?) has hacked into the school's computer system and is answering the exam questions for him! He passes and remains at the school – until, that is, an incident at a school dance leads him to being recognized by the Superintendent and being taken out of the Academy.



Back at his old school, Donovan realizes how much he misses both his new friends and the robot they'd been working on, particularly as the date for the robotics competition gets closer. His friends at his old school see how upset he is, and conspire with Katie (now very close to delivering her baby) to take him to the meet. While there, Donovan once again gives in to an impulse and engages "his" robot in conflict with a competing robot, resulting in both robots / schools being disqualified from the competition.

It is at precisely that moment that Katie realizes her baby is coming. She is rushed to the hospital, gives birth safely, and names the baby girl after the robot built by Donovan and his academy classmates. Everything goes back to normal – or close to normal: Donovan continues to attend his old school, but is allowed to continue participating in the Academy's robotics club.



Chapters 1 – 3

Summary

“Unearthed”, narrated by Donovan (IQ: 112) As he describes the reasons for his being placed in detention (broadcasting his jokingly negative opinion about an important basketball game over his school’s PA system), Donovan also describes how his life and character are defined by an irresistible drive to be spontaneous, rebellious, and a little dangerous. He also comments on how he searched online (Ancestors.com) for historical relatives who had the same tendency towards anarchy. He goes on to describe how he escaped detention with the help of his two friends and allies, “The Daniels” (Sanderson and Nussbaum), and how once free, he and The Daniels head for the gym to watch the game. Donovan is distracted by a long-standing desire: to whack a bronze statue of Atlas holding a globe of the earth to see what kind of sound it makes. Caught up in the intensity of the moment, he doesn’t realize right away that the globe has fallen off the statue. When he finally notices what has happened, he also notices the globe is heading straight for the gym. He tries to head it off, but the impact is inevitable. As the chapter draws to a close, he describes how he did find an ancestor like him – a man named James Donovan who survived the sinking of the Titanic and who, Donovan comments, he’s probably going to need to take as a role model of how to survive extremely difficult situations.

“Unidentified”, narrated by Dr. Schultz (IQ: 127). School district superintendent Dr. Schultz is at the game when the globe hits the gym. As parents hurry to make sure their sons are all right, Schultz looks outside and sees “the culprit” lying on the ground. Commenting in narration that his one rule of work is “no screw-ups”, he takes the boy to his office, learns his name (Donovan Curtis), and writes it down. He then listens with disbelief as Donovan explains that what happened was an accident. Their conversation is interrupted by Shultz’s assistant, who explains that he’s needed down in the gym. Schultz dismisses Donovan, saying their conversation will continue the following morning. After Donovan goes, the assistant reminds Schultz that she needs the list of students for the “gifted” program, and he says it’s on his desk. Later, when everything down at the gym is sorted out, Schultz returns to his office, only to find that the slip of paper with Donovan’s name on it has disappeared. Schultz theorizes that Donovan sneaked back and took the paper, commenting in his narration that his (Schultz’s) rule had just been broken.

“Unexplained”, narrated by Donovan. The next day at breakfast, Donovan anxiously waits for a phone call to his parents from Dr. Schultz. Meanwhile, he banters with his pregnant older sister Katie, living back at home while her husband Brad is deployed with the Army in Afghanistan. At school, Donovan starts to wonder why Schultz hasn’t called for him, becoming even more confused when a summons to the office results in a reprimand for leaving detention instead of any consequences for the globe incident. Back at home, with no phone call or any other notification even after a few days, two things happen to change Donovan’s perspective. The first is the arrival of Brad’s



apparently unwell dog, Beatrice, who immediately takes a shine to him and ignores the rest of the family, especially Katie. The second thing that changes Donovan's perspective is the arrival of a letter from the school, signed by Dr. Schultz, announcing Donovan's transfer to the Academy for Scholastic Distinction. Donovan realizes that Schultz must have written his name on the bottom of the list of qualifying students by mistake, and also realizes that being at the Academy might be a chance for him to avoid consequences for the globe incident. This thought, combined with his parents' evident pride in his "accomplishment" and his realization that James Donovan would have done whatever he had to do to survive, leads Donovan to decide to take the offered placement at the Academy, even though his academic achievement to date has been mediocre at best.

Analysis

There are several noteworthy points about this introductory section of narrative. Among the most apparent are the use of chapter titles (the prefix "un" is used in every chapter title in the book); the repeated shift in narrative point of view (even though the events of the story unfold chronologically); and the inclusion of the narrator's IQ as s/he is identified at the beginning of the chapter. While all of these elements seem primarily stylistic (that is, related more to the manner of the story's telling than to the actual story itself), all three have thematic, if not narrative implications. In terms of the chapter titles, each one is a clear, if sometimes oblique, reference to an event, circumstance, or thematic consideration in the chapter that follows. In terms of the shifting points of view, there is both narrative (in that the shifting engages and builds the reader's interest, and also in that the reader gets to experience the same narrative events from different perspectives) and thematic value. This emerges in relation to the novel's thematic consideration of different kinds of gifts (i.e. different forms of perception and/or interpretation). Finally, the inclusion of the IQ of the narrative is significant because intelligence, and the application / perception thereof, is a key component of character, relationship, and theme (specifically: consideration of different kinds of gifts).

Other important elements in this section include the incident that simultaneously sets the story in motion and provides a clear, vivid example of a defining, motivating character trait in protagonist Donovan. Specifically, the hitting of the Atlas statue is the first of a series of interrelated events that form the basis of the story's plot, events that in many cases are triggered, either directly or indirectly, by Donovan's impulsiveness. This means that the hitting of the Atlas statue is both a literal and metaphoric foreshadowing of events and how the "worlds" of several of the characters are knocked about in the same way as the "world" on Atlas' shoulders is knocked off.

There are several other key foreshadowings as well: Dr. Schultz's reference to "no screw ups"; the arrival of Beatrice the dog and her apparent illness; the reference to Katie's pregnancy; and the reference to Donovan's academic mediocrity should be noted, as they all foreshadow key plot-and-theme defining events in future chapters.



Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

Do you agree or disagree with Donovan's decision to accept appointment to the Academy of Scholastic Distinction? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

In what way does Donovan's knocking the globe off Atlas' shoulders (i.e. "shaking up the world") metaphorically echo events in Chapter 3?

Vocabulary

ancestry, forefathers, foremothers, battlement, llama, toupee, lynch, vantage, skulk, grotesque, jostle, belligerence, celestial, corrosion, prognosis, juggernaut, carom, pulverize, shard, burdensome, alumni, onslaught, culprit, traction, skewer, foundry, aggravation, chagrin, melancholy, reverie, deployment, eavesdropper, "modus operandi", aptitude, languid



Chapters 4 – 6

Summary

“Unarmed” is narrated by Chloe Garfinkle (IQ: 159). In narration, Chloe describes what it’s like to be a “gifted” student at the ASD, identifies some of the other students in her class (including hyper-competitive Abigail and hyper-intelligent Noah), and then narrates the arrival of Donovan at the school – specifically, his first appearance in her robotics class. Noting that robotics is one of her specialties, Chloe describes how, almost immediately after arriving, Donovan accidentally breaks off part of the robot currently under construction (i.e. a part corresponding to its hand), and just as immediately, starts a debate about what name the robot should be given, a conversation ridiculed by the controlling Abigail, who also tells Chloe that she went to elementary school with Donovan and thought he was pretty much just “normal”. The thought of being in a class with someone “normal” interests Chloe a great deal, and after class she tries to make friends with Donovan. Their conversation touches on the recent incident at Donovan’s school, with Chloe commenting in narration that he all of a sudden seemed very defensive. The chapter concludes with Chloe’s hypothesis in which she wonders “what if the normal people are even weirder than we are?”

“Unknowing” is narrated by Donovan. Riding on the bus to the ASD, Donovan is surprised and intrigued by the bus driver’s analytically scientific reaction to being hit on the head by a paper airplane thrown by one of the students. He also realizes that because both he and the student had a certain recklessness, it might be relatively easy for him to fit in, or at least fake fitting in, at the school. When he tries to follow this thought through by copying answers on some math problems, he ends up getting caught. Donovan is further surprised when, instead of getting disciplined or lectured (as he would at his old school), he is taken for a walk by his home room / robotics teacher, Mr. Osborne, who says that not everyone at the Academy is good at everything, that he (Donovan) can take his time figuring out what his strengths are, and that his input would be welcome on the robotics team.

Later, in the food court at the mall while hanging out with The Daniels and a couple of girls, Daniel is surprised to see Chloe, there with her mother. In narration, Donovan describes how Chloe’s appearance is very different (i.e. less carefully put together) than the other girls, and how The Daniels tease him both during his conversation with Chloe and afterwards. He also finds himself defending the work he and his classmates are doing on the robot, which seems to have gotten the name Tin Man as the result of the conversation about its name Donovan started previously. Conversation with The Daniels concludes with their warning Donovan away from his old school – Schultz is searching for him. Donovan then realizes the truth of what he’s doing at the Academy – “hiding out”.

“Uncredited” is narrated by Mr. Osborne (IQ: 132). Mr. Osborne and the other teachers at the Academy hold a special meeting to discuss Donovan and his apparent lack of



giftedness. None of the teachers have been able to find anything special about him, and all are wondering how he got into the school. One of them actually suggests the truth (that his name got onto a list accidentally) without knowing it. Meanwhile, Mr. Osborne reveals that the Donovan-inspired naming of Tin Man has humanized both the invention process and the class. As the meeting concludes, Mr. Osborne is warned by the principal that the robotics class (of which Mr. Osborne is in charge) is the only class that hasn't taken "Human Growth and Development" (which Mr. Osborne calls "sex education"), that there needs to be a credited teacher for the course, and that he (Osborne) has to find room in his students' schedule for it, otherwise they'll have to take it in summer school.

Back in the classroom, Osborne watches as Donovan introduces Noah to YouTube, and Osborne notices how the usually emotionless Noah laughs heartily – just before he does some complicated calculations on the number of views each YouTube video might receive. As Osborne half-seriously ponders whether Donovan's giftedness might be related to an ability to get others to venture outside themselves, the class gets into an argument over whether a video of Tin Man should be posted on YouTube. Abigail is the only one arguing against it, saying that posting a video might give their traditional robotics-meet rivals (Cold Spring Harbor) an advantage. She's shouted down, and the class puts Tin Man through a trial movement run. The movements are jerky, but become smoother when Donovan, who has years of experience moving video game joysticks (like the one controlling Tin Man), takes over controlling the robot's joystick. As the chapter concludes, Osborne muses again on how Donovan got into the program.

Analysis

This section introduces several new elements. These include new narrators Chloe and Mr. Osborne. Chloe includes frequent interjections of hypotheses consistently reflecting thoughts or ideas arising from incidents in the story. Mr. Osborne's commentary/analysis introduces and develops one of the book's key themes – specifically, its consideration of different kinds of gifts.

Other new elements introduced here include the new setting (the Academy for Scholastic Distinction which, as discovered by Donovan, is a much nicer, much better equipped school than the one he came from), new characters (particularly Abigail and Noah, whose actions play important, defining roles later in the narrative), and the "character" of Tin Man. This last is among the most important elements of the section, in that "he" is a central element in many of the book's forthcoming plot points, and also a central element in one of the book's key themes.

To be specific, the defining of Tin Man's name is the first of several manifestations of the book's thematic exploration of the process of humanization. But it is not just Tin Man who is "humanized" as the result of being given a name; as Osborne notes in his narration, both here and in later sections of the narrative, the process of humanizing Tin Man also humanizes the students creating / working on him. In the same way as Tin Man becomes less of an object and develops more of an identity, the students at the



ASD come to think of themselves as less of the brainiacs/nerds they are initially known to be, and become more “normal”, more “human” – more like regular teenagers.

This process continues, albeit in a slightly different form, as Donovan finds himself defending his new classmates in the face of derisive, negative commentary from The Daniels. In the same way as the ASD students discover more about themselves, Donovan discovers more about himself – specifically, that his previous attitudes have been as judgmental and hurtful as those of The Daniels. This section, therefore, marks a key point of transition in Donovan’s overall journey of transformation into something of a better human being himself.

Other important elements here include the reference to Dr. Schultz continuing to search for Donovan (which continues to exert pressure on him to keep the truth about his being at the Academy a secret); the reference to the Human Growth and Development Class (which foreshadows both important plot developments and important thematic considerations); the reference to Noah’s discovery of / relationship with YouTube (which has several important consequences); and the reference to the ASD’s rivalry with Cold Spring Harbor. This rivalry motivates and defines several key narrative points later in the book, most notably its climax. There is also the reference to the teachers at the ASD wondering about Donovan’s qualifications for being there which, like the reminder about Dr. Schultz, puts additional pressure on Donovan - but notably, from the other direction. Finally, there is the increasingly vivid portrait of Abigail’s intense competitiveness, which foreshadows several important events later in the narrative that are entirely motivated by that competitiveness.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

In what ways do you think the smoothing out of Tin Man’s “jerky” movements relate to how he seems, according to Mr. Osborne, to be relating to the other kids in the robotics class?

Discussion Question 3

What are your experiences of being perceived as “different”? How did that feel? How did you respond? What was “normal” to you? What lengths have you gone to to be perceived and/or related to as “normal”?



Vocabulary

hypothesis, robotics, hydroponic, normalcy, conceivable, chasten, titanium, polymer, mishap, buffoon, pneumatic, capability, interrogation, smattering, encrusted, liquefy, methodical, peripheral, calculus, marathon, expectant, tentative, differentiate, ironclad, clientele, adamant, austerity, credential, eureka, harpsichord, linguist, infrared, spelunking, convulsive, stratospheric, convulse, incredulous, dissertation, pathetic, maneuverability



Chapters 7 – 10

Summary

“Unrepaired” is narrated by Donovan. Donovan receives a poor grade for a social studies project he worked really hard on. When the teacher sees how upset he is and asks what’s wrong, Donovan lies and says he has ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), which leads the teacher to give him another week’s worktime. As he considers which other disorders to use in order to fake his way into success at the Academy, Donovan describes the increasing size and apparent illness of Beatrice (the dog guesting at his house), the financial difficulties his family is facing (as the result of having Katie and the impending baby in the house), and his family’s pride in his accomplishments (which makes him feel guilty). Donovan also discovers that repairs to Hardcastle Middle School’s gym after the accident with the globe are on hold as the result of the insurance company refusing to pay the claim. This leads him to believe that if the truth of his involvement ever comes out, he and his parents will be financially responsible for the repairs.

One day, when Donovan goes into the Academy early to work on his science project, he discovers that the students who need to take the “Human Growth and Development” class might have to do so in summer school. He also learns that the class needs to be taught by either a credited teacher OR someone with relevant “hands on” experience. This leads Donovan to ask his pregnant sister Katie to be a tutor for the class, telling her that if she doesn’t, he won’t take care of Beatrice. He comments in narration that he knows he’s being selfish, in that he hopes that his assistance in solving this problem will take the Academy’s attention off his un-giftedness and therefore enable him to hide out for longer – but then comments that he believes that James Donovan would have done the same thing.

“Unsurprised” is narrated by Chloe. In narration again interspersed with various hypotheses, Chloe comments on her relative lack of surprise that Donovan managed to solve the problem of the “Human Growth” class in a way that the faculty and more academic members of class could. This, in turn, leads her to consideration of how he might be gifted in a different way from what most people associated with the school would think. Meanwhile, the first session of the “Human Growth” class includes Katie’s laying down the parameters for her participation in the class (Chloe’s hypothesis: “The one with the belly makes the rules”) and her sharing of some pictures of the unborn baby, taken by sonogram. Noah spots something on the pictures that makes him think the baby is a boy. Later, as Katie watches Donovan operate Tin Man, Chloe asks her what Donovan is like at home. When Katie speaks negatively of him, Chloe reminds her what a great thing he’s doing for the class. This leads Katie to comment that it’s interesting to see her brother through someone else’s eyes. Their conversation is interrupted by Katie feeling the baby kicking and letting Chloe feel it. This leads to Chloe’s realization that there’s something more than just a class going on.



“Unfailing” is narrated by Noah (IQ: 206) Noah describes his attempts to fail his classes (which he always passes), explaining that because he’s so smart, a passing grade means exactly the same thing as a failing grade. He also describes his longing to go to a “normal” school, to be away from the pressures and expectations of being at the Academy. He then discusses Donovan – specifically, his grateful amazement that Donovan improved Tin Man in a way none of them had even imagined, and his certainty that Donovan doesn’t belong at the Academy at all, and his (Noah’s) simultaneous joy that there’s something he doesn’t know and/or understand. He also discusses how grateful he is that Donovan introduced him to YouTube, which he (Noah) says has changed his life, adding that he spends as many hours on it as he can. Finally, he describes how the class was shaken by the news that because repairs to the Hardcastle gymnasium were still incomplete, the school’s spring dance was to be held at the Academy instead. Chloe is excited, Donovan is bored, and Abigail refuses to go – until, that is, Mr. Osborne makes attendance required ... as research for a paper he’s assigning. This means that everyone, including Abigail and Donovan, is going.

“Unpasteurized” is narrated by Donovan. Katie becomes upset when Brad emails her to say that pictures of the baby had been seen, via YouTube, at the base where he’s posted. This leads Donovan to explain that they were probably posted by Noah, which doesn’t make Katie much happier. Meanwhile, Donovan’s narration reveals that The Daniels aren’t happy about having to go to a dance at The Academy, believing that the “dweebs” there will ruin it. Narration also reveals that Donovan is becoming upset at how his earlier classmates are talking about / treating his newer ones. Later, Donovan takes Katie to an appointment with her obstetrician, an appointment which Donovan’s class also attends as part of their “Human Growth” project. The doctor, who says he used to work in a teaching hospital, is pleased to have “an audience”, and gives the class a chance to listen to Katie’s baby through his stethoscope. After a few quiet moments with the doctor, Katie returns to the waiting room, where she is greeted with a standing ovation from the class.

Analysis

This section introduces and / or develops several elements that continue to put pressure on Donovan. In general, this pressure manifests in three ways. First, there is the pressure within the ASD for him to perform up to its standards. This, in turn, makes Donovan feel the pressure of fear – specifically, the fear of what will happen to him if he’s forced to return to Hardcastle. Then there is the pressure from Dr. Schultz, which manifests in the latter’s search for the truth about what happened at Hardcastle Middle School. Finally, there the pressure from within Donovan himself to do the right thing – or, to be more accurate, a wrong thing (i.e. continue to deceive the faculty and staff of the ASD in order to remain hidden from Schultz) and a couple of right things. These include confessing the truth about his involvement in the Hardcastle gym accident, protect his new friends at the ASD from the taunts of the Hardcastle students (while, at the same time, preserving his friendships with those same students), help his new friends among the ASD students achieve their Human Growth and Development credit, and ensure that he helps the ASD robotics club achieve the goal, which he helped



define, of winning at the robotics meet. He also feels torn because he doesn't want to cause his parents any more financial hardship than they already have: as indicated earlier, they're strapped financially because of Katie having moved in, and in Donovan's mind, can't possibly afford to pay for the repairs to the gym. In other words, Donovan has gotten himself into a mess, and this section portrays several ways in which that mess is not only getting deeper, but the ways in which Donovan is making it deeper himself.

Meanwhile, the narrative also keeps several other elements visible, reminding the reader of their presence and simultaneously foreshadowing important roles they have yet to play. These reminders include the glance at Beatrice's illness (which, later in the narrative, turns out to be not what it seems); the hypotheses in Chloe's narration (which continue to pithily, and sometimes wryly, sum up conclusions that can be drawn from the events in each chapter); and continuing changes / improvements / discoveries about Donovan's character – specifically, his happily surprised discovery that there might be more to life than being impulsive. There are also several new elements that prove to be similarly important. The most important of these are Katie's sonogram pictures and, more specifically, Noah's interpretation of them (events which foreshadow the role that both the pictures and the interpretation play in triggering eventual transformation in Noah).

Perhaps the most important element of this section is a key plot development: the decision to have the Hardcastle dance at the ASD gymnasium. As some of the characters (particularly Donovan) realize, the decision to bring the school together promises several things: what might best be described as a clash of school cultures (i.e. between the "brains" and the "normal" kids); a chance for the ASD kids to really experience being normal (as Chloe affirms in the following section, she's never been to a dance in her life); and increased potential risk for Donovan's identity to be discovered by Dr. Schultz. The decision to have the dance at the ASD is, in short, the sort of narrative twist that really draws the reader in and causes him / her to want to read on.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with Donovan that he's being selfish in recruiting Katie to help the class? What is your opinion of all his efforts to stay at the ASD under what amounts to false pretenses?



Discussion Question 3

What is the relationship between Donovan's choices in this section and his views of Titanic survivor James Donovan? Why does Donovan think James would make the same choices he (Donovan) is making?

Vocabulary

dyslexia, varicose, affix, corrode, hospice, apex, bestow, defective, spectacular, gangbusters, cavalry, sonogram, amniotic, forlorn, conundrum, envision, adamant, entirety, enticing, obstetric, spacious, entourage, enthusiasm, infectious.



Chapters 11 – 13

Summary

“Unsuccessful” is narrated by Dr. Schultz. School Superintendent Dr. Schultz describes his frustration at not being able to find / identify the “horrible boy” who caused the accident to the Atlas statue and to the gym at Hardcastle Middle School. He comments that it’s been three weeks since the accident, that repairs to the gym are still postponed, and that he can’t let himself become obsessed by this particular incident: he’s got other functions to attend to, including the dance combining the student bodies at Hardcastle and at the Academy, which he plans to attend to see how the first time blending of student bodies goes. Meanwhile, his assistant brings him a preliminary report on how the “Human Growth” program at the Academy is going. She refers to Katie and starts to refer to the fact that she’s the sister of a student she begins to name (“Don –”) but she’s interrupted by the impatient Schultz, who tells her to put the report on his desk and then contemplates how generous and noble both Katie and her family must be.

“Unrockin’” is narrated by Chloe. Chloe gets ready for her first-ever dance, worrying that she’s got nothing to wear and doesn’t know how to do her makeup. She also reflects on Donovan – how he brought so much positive change, but how he couldn’t possibly be responsible for the biggest change of all: enabling the Academy kids to go to the dance. She also reflects on the gossip that suggests he’s not gifted at all, and hints that reluctantly, she’s aware of the truth. She eventually decides to wear a dress she wore to a family wedding and keep her makeup to a minimum. As she’s getting ready to leave, her father tearfully compliments her on how pretty she looks (“Hypothesis: the compliment loses credibility in direct proportion to how closely related you are to the speaker.”) When she gets to the dance, she discovers that Noah is dressed even more oddly than she is, but that it doesn’t matter: she’s ready to have a good time, and after some initial nervousness, starts dancing with the rest of the already dancing crowd.

“Untrustworthy” is narrated by Donovan. Donovan comments on his discomfort at the dance, which arises partly because of the watchful presence of Dr. Schultz, and partly because of how the Hardcastle students (most notably The Daniels) are making fun of the Academy Students. Donovan watches with increasing unease as The Daniels move in first on Abigail and then on Chloe (who, much to Donovan’s amazement, actually seems ATTRACTIVE). Seeing their actions as part of a plot to first make them feel attractive and then dump them, Donovan distracts them by taking them to see Tin Man. When they taunt him about how important being at the Academy and his classmates both seem to him, Donovan reminds them of why he’s there, and pleads with them to give him and his friends a break. The Daniels agree, but Donovan is later shocked to see that they’ve brought Tin Man to the gym and are dancing with him in a way that puts the robot in danger. This, Donovan says, puts him in a dilemma: save Tin Man but reveal himself to Schultz, or keep his head down and let Tin Man be damaged. He realizes that he has a chance here to redeem himself somewhat, grabs a baseball cap to disguise himself, and rushes in to get The Daniels away from Tin Man. Abigail and



Noah have the same idea, and the ensuing fight over Tin Man (led by Noah diving off a speaker tower in imitation of a wrestling move he saw on YouTube) results not only in the robot being damaged, but in the two sets of students getting into a huge brawl. The fight is broken up by Dr. Schultz setting off the fire alarm and dispersing the students. Donovan melts into the crowd, grateful that Schultz didn't see / identify him.

Analysis

The primary element worthy of note in this section is connected to its pervasive sense of irony. That sense arises from several incidents: Schultz once again "screwing up" and missing a chance to find the person responsible for the damage to the gym; the irony of Schultz's referring to the generosity and nobility of Katie's family (the irony being that Donovan, the apparently destructive boy he's after, is a member of that family); and the irony of Chloe reflecting that Donovan can't possibly be responsible for how the dance came into being (ironic because he is, indirectly, responsible). Perhaps the most significant irony in this section arises from the fact that while he doesn't want The Daniels to manipulate / hurt the students at the Academy, Donovan is, in a very important way, doing exactly the same thing: he is manipulating the situation at the Academy to his own purposes and, therefore, setting up Chloe, Abigail, and the other students for a different sort of pain and humiliation.

Meanwhile, the dilemma Donovan struggled with in the previous section intensifies here, as he is again forced to navigate the opposing pressures placed on him by Schultz and his emerging, increasing loyalty to the robotics team. His eventual choice indicates that he's learning more about loyalty and its value, and as such is a manifestation of one of the novel's secondary themes.

Significant new elements introduced in this section include the hints of attraction that are starting to emerge in the Chloe / Donovan relationship, and the hints of the extremity with which Noah is embracing his new freedom (which, in turn, has clear echoes of Donovan's tendency towards impulsiveness).

Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

In what way does Donovan's reaction to Abigail's treatment at the hands of The Daniels manifest / represent the novel's thematic consideration of humanization?



Discussion Question 3

Do you agree or disagree with Chloe's hypothesis about compliments? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

idiotic, ransack, culprit, pathetic, shindig, attire, complexion, credibility, proportion, exhilaration, beseech, gyrate, rollicking, commiserate, suppress, tolerance, riotous, excruciating, trajectory, inaudible



Chapters 14 – 16

Summary

“Unsorry” is narrated by Noah. The robotics class struggles to work out how to repair Tin Man, whose motor was damaged beyond repair in the brawl at the dance. Mr. Osborne reveals that there’s no money available to buy a replacement, and his attempts to substitute the motor from his lawn mower fail completely. Donovan discovers that the motor from the custodians’ floor polisher is just about the right size, and even stronger than the original motor. He leads the class in the theft of the motor in spite of Abigail’s increasingly shrill protests but with the support of Noah, Chloe, and everyone else. When the motor is put into Tin Man, the class discovers that it works really well, and things seem on an upswing ... but then they discover that because of his generally poor grades, Donovan is about to be tested to find out whether he actually belongs in the Academy. Noah, Chloe, and the others debate possible alternatives for helping him succeed at the test, all suggesting that they need him to win the robotics meet. Abigail argues fiercely against helping him, but Noah comes up with the idea of substituting at least a few of his own answers for Donovan’s on the computer-taken test. He concludes his narration here by commenting on his belief that he and Donovan are two sides of the same coin: Donovan is struggling to stay in the program, while he “Noah” is struggling to get out.

“Untested” is narrated by Donovan. When Donovan learns that one of The Daniels (Sanderson) got a black eye as a result of the brawl at the dance, he goes over for a visit in the hopes that The Daniels will apologize for what they did. Instead, he finds that they’re making the injury worse than it is in the hopes of gaining sympathy from some girls. Again The Daniels taunt Donovan about his affection for the Academy kids, and again Donovan defends them. Back at the Academy, Donovan prepares with increasing dread for the Academy admissions test, coming close to admitting defeat when Chloe’s attempts to tutor him turn out to be useless (although he does realize that even when she’s in her regular clothes, he’s starting to find her as attractive as she was at the dance).

On the day of the test, Donovan hands in his science project – a report on what he thinks is the dying Beatrice – in the hopes that the teachers will find it so incredible that he will be excused from the test. Noah, however, comments that Beatrice is not dying, but pregnant. Donovan grabs his now-thoroughly discredited project and attempts to run away with it, but before he leave the room, he’s summoned to the library for the test. With a feeling of hopelessness he starts the multiple choice exam, but is surprised to discover / realize that someone is checking off the correct answers for him. He realizes the computer he’s working on is being hacked, and as the outside answering continues, he wonders who could be helping him in this way.

“Unforgivable” is narrated by Ms. Bevelaqua (IQ: 140). Math teacher Maria Bevelaqua reveals that Donovan passed the entrance test handily, but also reveals her suspicions



(to the reader, to the principal, and to Mr. Osborne) that he cheated. Mr. Osborne, happy and relieved that his robotics program is going well because of Donovan, and that Donovan helped with the Human Growth and Development Class, is at first reluctant to see that Ms. Bevelaqua might be right. But then she points out that Donovan could easily have been helped by one of the other students, adding that from what she saw of them, the ones most likely to help – Noah, Abigail, and Chloe – all have a great deal of affection for Donovan and could easily have assisted him on the test. She also admits, in narration, that the likelihood of finding out who that was is unlikely. The chapter concludes with a brief section of transcribed dialogue in which Ms. Bevelaqua suggests that Donovan had help and Donovan suggests that no-one in the class would, or could, have done it – they all have too much integrity.

Analysis

There are several noteworthy points in this section – Donovan's being forced to take the admissions test, and the revelation that someone is checking off the correct answers for him; Ms. Bevelaqua's subsequent interview of Donovan (which foreshadows several similar investigatory interviews in future chapters); and the revelation of Beatrice's true "illness". While this last doesn't come as much of a surprise to astute readers, it would likely raise some questions: why does the possibility of the dog being pregnant not occur to anyone, particularly to the pregnant Katie who, as the narrative makes clear, has similar symptoms? And above all if, as the narrative makes clear, she came into the Chase household unwell, why has nobody taken her to a veterinarian before now?

In any case, the most significant events in this chapter are related to Donovan. First, there is his reaction to The Daniels and their continued mocking of the students at the ASD which is even more heartfelt and compassionate than even his actions in the previous chapter. He is portrayed here as becoming increasingly sensitive to how the ASD students are being perceived and treated, which, in turn, can be seen as a double-barreled, interconnected manifestation of the narrative's thematic interest in the process of humanization. By seeing the ASD students as capable of being hurt and worthy of respect, Donovan is seeing THEM as being more human, while in the process of becoming more compassionate and understanding, Donovan is himself becoming more human.

The other significant, Donovan-related element in this section has to do with the theft of the motor from the custodians' floor polisher. There are several important aspects to this incident. First, and in terms of plot, it contributes to the set-up / foreshadowing of the novel's climactic confrontation between Tin Man and the rival robot from Cold Spring Harbor School. Second: it is another example of how Donovan acts on impulse without apparent, careful consideration of the consequences. A third, and related, aspect is the fact that Donovan is never caught or punished for this theft. This has the potential to suggest to the reader that if the goal is worthwhile (in this case, not just the repair of Tin Man but the fact that he runs even better as the result of this illicit act), then any action is justified – in other words, the end justifies the means, which is not generally held to be universally true. This aspect of his "crime" (which also, incidentally, teaches the



students at the ASD that it's all right to do whatever it takes to win, both friends and competitions) also reinforces the narrative's apparent thematic contention that ultimately, and no matter what the actual choice, following one's impulse is by definition a good thing.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

At this point in the narrative, who do you think is the person filling in Donovan's answers, and why?

Discussion Question 3

If you were Mr. Osborne in this situation, torn between wanting to do the right thing by his students and doing the right thing by the school, what would you do? How would you navigate a situation like this?

Vocabulary

conundrum, optic, anterior, heist, defiant, delinquent, comatose, distended, prominent, languid, militant, infallible, bastion, complacent, resuscitate



Chapters 17 – 19

Summary

“Unreal” is narrated by Katie (IQ: 107). Katie describes how a visit to the vet confirmed Noah’s diagnosis that Beatrice is pregnant, commenting that she didn’t tell her husband and that both she and the dog will have their babies at around the same time. She then comments on how unhappy she is with everything in her life except the visits to / work with the Human Growth and Development Class, which she says makes her feel like she’s actually making a contribution to something important. She also describes how the research skills of the kids in the class help them with her questions about her pregnancy, and how aware she is of how they all feel about Donovan. She goes on to describe how, on a day when Donovan seems to be taking a lot of bathroom breaks, the class is visited by Dr. Schultz, the Superintendent, who wants to see firsthand how the class is working. Katie notices that Donovan interrupts his return to the classroom when he sees Schultz, and later goes to confront him (Donovan). When faced with pressure from his big sister, Donovan confesses everything – the destruction of the Atlas statue and the gym, his manipulation of circumstances so that he can stay hidden at the Academy, his awareness that the test results were cheats. He also reveals that the reason behind his determination to stay hidden was his belief that his family would be held financially responsible for the destruction to the Hardcastle gym. With that, Katie realizes that there is something more to her once-selfish brother.

“Unmasked” is narrated by Dr. Schultz. Following his visit to the Human Growth and Development Class, Dr. Schultz wonders why one of the students took so many bathroom breaks when, in his experience, most of the students were extraordinarily dedicated to what was going on in the classroom. In an attempt to find out who the absentee was, he looks at some of the videos of Tin Man posted on YouTube, discovers that Donovan was its operator, and immediately recognizes him. The chapter concludes with the transcription of another interview, this one between Ms. Bevelacqua and Chloe, who defends herself from the accusation that she helped Donovan and, even more vehemently, from the suggestion that he is her boyfriend.

“Unwelcome” is narrated by Donovan. In the middle of celebrating a successful test drive of Tin Man, during which Donovan feels both personally successful and a happy part of a happy team, Dr. Schultz arrives. As Schultz removes him from the team and from the Academy, the rest of the robotics team protests, one of them (the narrative doesn’t make it clear which) shouting that “He’s gifted”. Narration then jumps ahead to Donovan fulfilling his punishment – twenty hours of community service, which Shultz has defined as cleaning and polishing the globe that fell off the Atlas statue. Narration reveals that Donovan’s parents are not being held financially responsible for the destruction of the gym; that the insurance company has still not agreed to pay for the damages, and that Katie (in support of her brother) has quit the Human Growth and Development class at the Academy.



Donovan also describes his feeling wounded that his father is not more disappointed about Donovan not being at the Academy, conversation revealing that Donovan's dad had done his own family tree research, and that none of the family's ancestors had been "gifted". Donovan reflects again how he and James Donovan (the ancestor who survived the Titanic) are both survivors, on how dull and rundown Hardcastle Middle School is compared to the Academy, how uncomfortable he is with the ongoing taunting of The Daniels, and how he doesn't feel worthy of one of his classmates there risking their education to help him pass the admissions test. The chapter concludes with another of Ms. Bevelacqua's interviews, this time with Abigail who, in spite her determination to win at all costs, insists that there's no way she would have helped Donovan (someone she "can't even stand") pass the test.

Analysis

This section contains several important points: the most recent in a series of near-misses involving Dr. Schultz and Donovan; Katie's discovery of several truths (including the fact that her once-troublesome younger brother seems to be growing up – another example of the novel's thematic interest in the process of people becoming humanized); and, perhaps most importantly, the confrontation that both Dr. Schultz, Donovan, and perhaps even the reader have been anticipating all along – Dr. Schultz finally catching up with the "horrible boy" he's been pursuing for several chapters. With this last incident, the narrative reaches what is arguably a key turning point – a seemingly insurmountable obstacle for both the robotics club (who now no longer have a driver for Tin Man in the robotics meet) and for Donovan (who, almost in spite of himself, had found a kind of school "home" of the sort he'd never really had before).

Donovan's realizations about himself are foreshadowed in this section by Katie's observations and realizations. In the same way as she discovers that he's become a somewhat better human being as the result of what's happened (in spite, it must be noted, of him having done several things that might tactfully be described as inappropriate), he too discovers that he's a changed person. He doesn't join in with the jokes of the Daniels – in fact, he's beginning to resent them; he notices just how much better / nicer / more welcoming the ASD actually IS, and how much better about himself and his schooling he felt while he was there; and he seems to be discovering that being a "survivor" (in the tradition of his century-ago ancestor) isn't necessarily all it's cracked up to be. The results of all these contemplations and changes become clear in the following section, which contains the book's climax and reveals that while Donovan may have changed in some very significant ways, there are still some important parts of him that haven't changed at all.

It's important to note, meanwhile, that even though one of the primary questions at the core of the book's plot has been resolved (i.e. will Donovan get caught?), there are still several plot threads / questions to be answered – who helped Donovan on the test? What will happen about the Human Growth and Development class? And, perhaps most importantly, what will happen at the robotics meet? The careful shaping of the narrative



to keep these questions active, even while the plot's major question is answered, works effectively to draw the reader in and keep the pages turning.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

This section contains the only chapter narrated by Katie. What do you think the significance of this is? What is the value / implication of this being the sole section in which Katie's narrative voice is heard?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think is the significance of someone shouting "He's gifted!" just as Donovan is being led away? Who do you think says it, and why?

Vocabulary

whelp (v.), mongrel, fiasco, terrarium, aggravation, squander, encryption, extension, simulate, audible, interject, familial, gigantic, ossify, celestial, turpentine, pacifist, predicament



Chapters 20 – 23

Summary

“Unbelievable” is narrated by Chloe. Chloe reflects on how much the robotics class needs Donovan, and not just because he was their way of winning the robotics meet. She also challenges Mr. Osborne to see his value, even threatening to quit school over the way the Academy and the School Board are treating him. That afternoon, she cuts class to find Donovan at Hardcastle and apologize. The trip (by city bus) takes longer than she planned, and she arrives at the school just in time to see not only the Atlas statue, but also swarms of students coming out of class. She makes her way through the crowds and is surprised when, every time she asks about Donovan, she’s told that nobody knows him. This leads her to form a hypothesis (“Donovan made a bigger impression in just a few weeks at the Academy than in nearly three years here”) and to search even harder. She eventually finds The Daniels, who recognize her, taunt her, and tell her to leave Donovan alone. She bursts into tears, explaining that the robotics class and the Academy mean nothing without Donovan, and that all she wants to do is apologize. The Daniels indicate they might be able to help her. The chapter concludes with an interview between Ms. Bevelaqua and Noah. Ms. Bevelaqua reveals that whoever helped Donovan would likely be expelled, while Noah admits the possibility that Donovan could have been helped on the test, but denies that he did it, saying that he was busy filming a YouTube video.

“Unschooling” is narrated by Donovan. Comparing his experience to that of James Donovan (who was compelled to give evidence at the hearing into the sinking of the Titanic), Donovan briefly describes his uncomfortable appearance before the insurance executives deciding whether to cover the cost of repairs to the destroyed gym. He also describes the even more uncomfortable ride home, given to him by Dr. Schultz, and how lonely and mopey he feels, comparing his situation to that of the still-pregnant Beatrice. On the Thursday of the robotics meet, however, his mood is lifted when Katie and The Daniels take him out of school and to the auditorium where the meet is being held. Donovan experiences a rush of excited pride when he sees Tin Man, and makes his way down to the crowded competition floor, where he favorably compares Tin Man to most of the other competitors – except, that is, for the robot from Cold Spring Harbor, which is sleek, sophisticated, large, and run by students whose arrogance and uniforms vividly define them as “the enemy”. Donovan, who nicknames the robot “Pot-Zilla” because of its pot-shaped head, is about to say hello to the robotics class when he sees Dr. Schultz and, because he’s supposed to be in class at Hardcastle, turns away and nervously rejoins The Daniels and Katie.

“Unseen” is narrated by Mr. Osborne. As he describes the tension surrounding the various competitive events at the robotics meet, Mr. Osborne reflects on how much both he and the team benefited from Donovan’s presence in spite of his (Donovan’s) evident mis-fitting within the traditional definition of being an Academy student. He also comments in passing on how he kept imagining that he saw Donovan, specifically



referring to a glimpse of him he says he had before the meet began. As for the events, Tin Man takes an early lead which is quickly eroded as Abigail proves herself to be a good operator, but less good than both Donovan and the operators of the other robots. In spite of an attempt at sabotage by the Cold Spring Harbor team, the team from the Academy and their robot make it into the final competition round.

“Uncontrolled” is narrated by Donovan. Donovan and the Daniels cheer the placement of Tin Man and the Academy in the last round of the meet. As the final event begins, they all watch intently as Abigail manages to manipulate Tin Man into the lead. When Pot-Zilla interferes with Tin Man, apparently on purpose, Donovan impulsively rushes down to the floor to help Abigail, whom he sees is panicking. She puts the controller into his hand and Donovan manages to complete the next phase of the event, but not before Pot-Zilla takes a commanding lead. This triggers an impulse in Donovan, and he runs Tin Man into the path of Pot-Zilla, first blocking it then picking it up and, in spite of the shouts of the referees, judges, other teams, and Mr. Osborne, ramming the robot into the judge’s table. Noah follows up by slamming a chair into the robot, knocking it to the floor. The auditorium goes quiet, the silence broken by Katie shouting: it’s time for her to have the baby.

Analysis

The first point to note about this section is that it contains the novel’s climax, its point of highest emotional and narrative tension – specifically, the confrontation between Tin Man and Pot-Zilla at the robotics meet. There are several steps along the way – the conversation between Chloe and the Daniels, which leads to The Daniels taking Donovan (and Katie) to the meet, which leads to Donovan becoming even more emotionally engaged in the competition, to yet another (and perhaps the most significant) incident of him following his impulse. This is his taking of the control from Abigail and putting Tin Man into direct and destructive conflict with the robot from Cold Harbor. What’s particularly interesting about this impulse is that unlike the first of Donovan’s impulses portrayed in the narrative (the hitting of the Atlas statue), this impulse has an additional layer of thematic meaning – see “Discussion Question 3”. In any case, the various steps leading up to the confrontation between the robots can be seen as a building, and/or an intensification, of momentum or narrative drive as the story drives towards its climax.

It could be argued that the confrontation between Tin Man and Pot-Zilla is merely a prologue to what could be interpreted as another climax – the birth of Katie’s baby, which is prologued here (with her shriek of labor pain into the silence) and which actually takes place in the following section. It must be remembered, however, that both the action and thematic considerations of the novel are primarily defined by Donovan’s character and his impulsive actions. Because Katie’s situation is in no way connected to EITHER of those narrative elements, it can be seen as a secondary climax, or the climax of one of its sub (secondary) plots – the Human Growth and Development subplot.



One other key point to note takes place early in this section – specifically in Chapter 21, as Chloe stages her own act of following an impulse as she cuts class and goes in search of Donovan. In this moment, her action embodies / manifests the novel's thematic interests in loyalty, in humanization, and in the value of impulses. The insights Chloe develops about Donovan and herself take this section's exploration of humanization even further, while her encounter with The Daniels leads them, in turn, to take action that manifests the novel's thematic interest in loyalty – in their case, to their buddy Donovan.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

What is the connection between Chloe's experiences looking for Donovan at Hardcastle and the novel's thematic consideration of humanization?

Discussion Question 3

In what way are Donovan's actions at the book's climax reflective of the book's thematic exploration of loyalty?

Vocabulary

truancy, meticulous, mystify, epidemic, contestant, atrocious, affable, expound



Chapters 24 - 27

Summary

“Unexpected” is narrated by Chloe. Katie is driven to the hospital in the Academy’s minibus, accompanied by the members of the robotics team and The Daniels. Katie is admitted and wheeled into the delivery room. Chloe and the others discuss the possible outcomes of what happened at the meet, with The Daniels excitedly commenting on how Pot-Zilla deserved what happened, and Chloe reflecting on how differently she and her other classmates would have reacted to a similar event before Donovan arrived in their class. Meanwhile, Dr. Schultz arrives with the remains of Tin Man in his car, news of both the Academy’s and Cold Spring Harbor’s disqualification from the meet, and uncertainty about the Academy’s involvement in future meets. Shortly afterwards, Donovan emerges from the delivery room with news that Katie had had a baby girl. As the group celebrates, Noah has a particularly happy reaction: it’s the first time he has ever been wrong, and he loves it. Mr. Osborne announces that the credit requirement for Human Growth and Development has been met, Dr. Schultz comments that some good might have come out of everything that’s gone wrong, and Chloe forms a new hypothesis (“Maybe the Human Growth and Development requirement isn’t so pointless after all.”)

“Unburdened” is narrated by Abigail (IQ: 171). In this chapter, the only one narrated by the extremely competitive Abigail, she describes how she labored to come up with a resume-benefitting way to describe the results of the robotics meet (which she did), how jealous she is of Noah’s mind, and how close she came to having to take summer school (which she believes would be a black mark on any college application). She also admits to being the one who helped Donovan out on the test.

“Unchallenged” is narrated by Noah. Noah describes how the video of the confrontation between Tin Man and the Cold Spring Harbor robot took off on YouTube, how he’s been making videos of Katie’s new baby (named Tina, after Tin Man), and how his newfound freedom, resulting from the discovery he can be wrong, led him to enroll in a new school – Hardcastle Middle School. When he runs into the very surprised Donovan, Noah explains that he got himself expelled by confessing that he helped Donovan on the test, calming the protesting Donovan down by saying that he didn’t actually do it but said he did to get out. He adds that he discovered the truth (that it was Abigail) when he faked the evidence that HE did it, assuring Donovan that what Abigail did was totally within her self-serving, ambitious character. When Donovan tells him that he (Noah) won’t find Hardcastle particularly challenging, Noah says he didn’t find the Academy all that challenging, and that the discovery that he (Noah) could be wrong made it possible for him to be wrong about a lot of things, something that really excites him.

“Unlittered” is narrated by Donovan. Via a hacked satellite hookup engineered by Noah, Katie’s husband Brad is able to watch from his moving tank as Beatrice gives birth to a litter of six puppies. Donovan describes how Katie will be keeping one (to keep the baby



company), Chloe is taking one (which, he says, gives him a chance to go over and visit – to see how the puppy is doing), and the rest are going to be adopted. He also describes how Noah is being protected at the school by Donovan and The Daniels, how he and Noah are allowed to go back to the Academy to keep working in the robotics program (with plans to enter the next year's meet), and how Dr. Schultz called for suggestions for a memorial to replace the Atlas statue (Donovan requested a Titanic memorial, to honor his ancestor, James Donovan). Finally, Donovan closes the chapter and the novel with one last reflection on the impulsiveness and spontaneity that “reshaped the world – or at least [his] little corner of it”, adding it didn't need being “gifted” to know that it would likely get him into trouble again.

Analysis

In technical / structural terms, this four-chapter section of the novel is its denouement, or falling action. In the aftermath of a narrative climax, here or in most other forms of narrative, there often remain questions to be answered, loose ends to be tied up, and lingering tensions / conflicts to be resolved. All those things are accomplished here. Questions are answered, most significantly the question about who helped Donovan on the admissions exam (which is given an answer that may or may not be surprising, given what the narrative has revealed about Abigail's character to this point). In terms of loose ends, both Katie and Beatrice give birth to their babies, with the gender of Katie's newborn providing one more manifestation of the book's thematic emphasis on humanization (specifically: Noah's realization that he, like every other human being, can be WRONG and, therefore, a bit more normal). Also in terms of loose ends, there is the almost too-casual reference to Donovan's plans to visit the puppy – which, most readers will understand, isn't about visiting the puppy at all, but more about tying up the loose end of Donovan's and Chloe's budding attractions to each other. Finally, lingering tensions and conflicts that are finally resolved include the tension between Donovan and Dr. Schultz (which is resolved by Schultz's happy commentary on the outcome of the Human Growth experiment).

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this section, however, is its final words – the final words of the novel, and the words that put the final touches on Donovan's journey of transformation. These words – specifically, his reference to believing that he will continue to live his life primarily by impulse – can, first of all, clearly be seen as a manifestation of the novel's apparent thematic contention that living that kind of life is a good thing. Some readers might suggest that because Donovan professes his determination to keep living that way, he hasn't really had that much of a journey of transformation – he is, after all, defining his life in the same way as he did at the novel's beginning. While this is true, and again a clear component of the novel's contention that following impulses is to be valued positively, there is also the sense that as a result of the novel's events, the relationships he's developed and the new ways of looking at other people, he has undergone a significant transformation – he, like Tin Man and the students in the robotics club, has become more human, more open minded, more open in general. While some of the outlines / defining elements of his character and identity haven't changed, what fills the spaces within those outlines / elements has deepened



and evolved, which is perhaps the core of several of the book's thematic emphases – that there is always opportunity, space, and/or the capacity for change in anyone.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the titles for each chapter. What incident / experience / thematic element do you think each one describes? Keep in mind that in each case, there might be more than one level of meaning.

Discussion Question 2

This section contains the only chapter narrated by Abigail. What do you think the significance of this is? What is the value / implication of this being the sole section in which Abigail's narrative voice is heard?

Discussion Question 3

Have you ever been glad to be wrong about something, in the way Noah is glad he was wrong about Katie's baby? What did being wrong feel like?

Vocabulary

congregate, amend, gladiator, mayhem, immaculate, jubilant, vanquish, interpolate, extrapolate, adjudge, surmise, curriculum, infamy, berserk.



Characters

Donovan Curtis

Donovan is the novel's central character, its protagonist and one of its many narrators. He is in his mid-teens, comes from what might be described as a relatively average family and, as he himself understands, is driven by his impulses. Encouraged by his two best friends, Donovan says what he wants, does what he feels inclined to do in the moment he feels the inclination, and tends to do both without a clear sense, or consideration, of potential consequences.

At first this aspect of Donovan seems to be primarily negative: the narrative is initiated, and almost entirely driven, by the results of Donovan's ultimately destructive impulse to take a powerful swing (with a tree branch) at a statue outside his school. But while the narrative doesn't necessarily, or directly, condone Donovan's actions – or, for that matter, his tendency to act on impulse – it does very strongly suggest (both thematically and narratively) that acting on impulse, even if it leads to destruction or a series of lies (which Donovan also initiates), ultimately has positive consequences. To be specific: as the result of Donovan's impulsive actions, other characters in the novel come to believe that following impulse leads to a kind of freedom that becomes worthy of WHATEVER consequences result directly from such an action. Donovan himself is the primary example of a character who learns this lesson: when the narrative reaches its conclusion, he says in narration that he knows full well that he will continue to follow his impulses, and doesn't seem to have absorbed the fact that on the way to freedom, he caused a lot of suffering and destruction, not to mention lied, manipulated, and was unable / unwilling to take responsibility for his actions (and even then only a few of them) until forced to do so – for example, he faces no consequences whatsoever for taking the motor from the custodian's floor polisher and giving it to Tin Man.

On the other hand, Donovan does learn compassion and open-mindedness over the course of the narrative, both lessons coming as a result of attending the Academy for Scholastic Distinction. Up to the point at which circumstances sent him there, he had been as his best friends (The Daniels) are for most of the narrative – patronizing, dismissive, and judgmental of the kids they call dweebs, nerds, or brainiacs. But in his coming to understand that the students he once ridiculed are, in fact, vulnerable human beings, he both matures as a person and, in a more technical sense, embodies two more of the book's major themes – its contemplation of different kinds of gifts, and the value of looking at individuals AS individuals.

James Donovan

This character never actually appears in the novel, but is referred to several times and plays an important role in the plot-driving choices, and eventual transformation, of protagonist Donovan. James is one of Donovan's ancestors, having come over on the



ill-fated ocean liner Titanic. According to Donovan's research, James survived the vessel's sinking, and even ended up testifying at the legal inquiry into what happened. Donovan takes what he sees as James' courage, risk-taking, and willingness to do whatever it takes to survive as models of behavior, a course of action that has significant consequences throughout the narrative.

The Two Daniels

Daniel Sanderson and Daniel Nussbaum are Donovan's two best friends and kindred spirits at his original school, Hardcastle Middle School. Physically different but temperamentally quite similar, they are playful, teasing, sharp tongued, and like Donovan is initially, impulsive and judgmental, particularly when it comes to the intelligent, disciplined students at the Academy. Eventually, and also like Donovan, they come to a degree of respect for the gifts of the Academy's students, although unlike Donovan, they don't quite get to a place of changing their core attitudes and behavior.

Katie

Katie is Donovan's much older sister. Married to Brad, a serviceman on a tour of duty in Afghanistan, she has moved back in with her family because she's expecting a baby. In spite of being wise to the manipulative ways of her younger brother, Katie helps him out in times of need, stands up for him when she thinks he's being treated badly, and turns out to be part of one of the best things he's ever done (helping out his classmates at the Academy). Near the end of the book, Katie gives birth to a baby girl, whom she names Tina.

Beatrice

Beatrice is Brad and Katie's dog, a temperamental chow-chow who comes with Katie when she moves back in with Donovan's family and who quickly bonds with Donovan while ignoring everyone else. Everyone thinks that she's ill because she's extremely overweight and has several other symptoms, but she is eventually diagnosed as being pregnant, a situation which, like Katie's own pregnancy, leads to an important success for both Donovan and his Academy classmates.

Chloe

Chloe is a student at the Academy, one of the members of the robotics club that eventually becomes both Donovan's home room class and his friends/allies. Chloe is also one of the book's narrators, her chapters each containing several "hypotheses" she develops as a result of her experiences. Chloe longs to be "normal", or at least MORE normal, and discovers that side of herself as the result of Donovan's influence on her class.



Noah

Noah is the second of the three most important members of the robotics club / Donovan's home room class. The most intelligent person in the club, and quite possibly the most intelligent student in the whole Academy, Noah (like Chloe) wants to be normal – more specifically, he wants to be WRONG about something. His introduction to YouTube (as a result of Donovan's influence) is a key component of his achieving his first desire, while getting the gender of Katie's baby is a key component of achieving his second.

Abigail

Abigail is the third of the three most important students in the robotics club / Donovan's home room. Abigail, unlike Chloe and Noah, celebrates her intelligence to the point of obsession. Highly competitive, judgmental of those who are less intelligent and less determined to do well, she is nonetheless quite vulnerable, a combination of characteristics that leads her to some extreme actions / decisions over the course of the story.

Dr. Schultz

Dr. Schultz is the school superintendent, whose personal and professional motto is “no screw-ups”, a motto that gets broken (much to his chagrin) when he loses track of Donovan in the aftermath of the latter's destruction of the Hardcastle Middle School statue and gym. He eventually tracks Donovan down and finally extends punishment / consequences, but shortly afterwards reveals himself capable of compassion.

Mr. Osborne

Mr. Osborne (“Oz” to his students and colleagues) is the teacher of the robotics class. He is conflicted about Donovan, on the one hand recognizing him as not apparently gifted, but at the same time recognizing how he is opening the quite obsessive members of the robotics club to greater awareness of themselves, of each other, and of the bigger picture of the world.

Ms. Bevelaqua

Ms. Bevelaqua is the Academy's math teacher. She becomes the most suspicious of all the Academy faculty when Donovan doesn't display any clear, overt giftedness, and spearheads an inquiry into how he could have possibly passed the school admissions test.



Donovan's Parents

Mr. and Mrs. Curtis play relatively minor roles in the narrative in terms of presence (i.e. they're small characters), but when they do appear, they contribute significantly to Donovan's journey of transformation. Specifically, their pride in his apparent accomplishment (i.e. getting into the Academy) makes him feel guilty for being there under false pretenses; his mother's grief at his being expelled makes him even MORE guilty; and his father's gentle compassion in telling Donovan that no-one in their ancestral history was gifted simultaneously opens Donovan to more compassion for himself and his father, and inspires him to consider whatever gifts he has as valuable and significant.

Symbols and Symbolism

I.Q.

“IQ” is short for “Intelligence Quotient”, a scientific rating / grading system by which individual intelligence is measured. Each of the book’s narrators is identified by his/her IQ as well as his/her name. This is significant because intelligence, and presumptions of intelligence, are a significant component of the book both narratively and thematically.

The Statue of Atlas

In Classical Greek mythology, the Titan Atlas held the world on his shoulders. Donovan sets the events of the book in motion by hitting a metal sculpture of Atlas carrying the world with a large stick, causing the globe to fall off, roll into Donovan’s school gymnasium, and damage it severely. The question of who will pay for repairs to both the statue and the school plays an important role in defining events in the latter sections of the book.

The Titanic

In the early 1900’s, the Titanic was the largest, most luxurious ocean liner ever built. Described as “unsinkable” by its designers and builders, it nevertheless sank on its maiden voyage, killing thousands. One of its survivors, in this narrative if not historically, was a man named James Donovan, whose influence plays a significant role in defining the attitudes and actions of protagonist Donovan Curtis.

Robots

Robots are machines designed and built to emulate, and at times replace, human function. A club at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction studies and practices the science of robotics. Robots, their “characters” and functions, can be seen as important components of the narrative’s thematic exploration of the process of humanization.

Tin Man

“Tin Man”, with its echoes of the Tin Woodman character in “The Wizard of Oz” is the name given by Donovan to the robotics class’s major project. Most of the class accepts both the name and the relative humanization of the robot that goes along with it. Tin Man is a specific example of the novel’s thematic consideration of “humanization”.



Cold Spring Harbor

This is the school that is the main rival, both academically and extramurally, to the Academy. Its robotics club is the particular enemy of the Academy's robotics club, with Donovan and his classmates becoming increasingly determined, over the course of the narrative, to defeat Cold Spring Harbor at the upcoming robotics meet.

Pot-Zilla

"Pot-Zilla" is the name given by Donovan to the robot constructed by the Academy of Scholastic Distinction's main rival, Cold Spring Harbor. At the Robotics Meet that is the setting for the novel's climax, Tin Man and Pot-Zilla are manipulated by their various drivers into a confrontation that disqualifies both teams.

Ancestry.com

Ancestry.com is the website Donovan uses to trace his family history, and is the means through which he discovers James Donovan, the inspiring ancestor who survived the sinking of the Titanic.

YouTube

This internet video channel plays an important role in the character development of Academy student Noah (who, as a result of being introduced to YouTube by Donovan, discovers new freedom and new passions) and also in the resolution of the book's main plot. Specifically, it is through a YouTube investigation that Dr. Schultz discovers Donovan's identity and corrects his (Schultz's) mistake by bringing Donovan back to Hardcastle Middle School from the Academy.

Human Growth and Development

This is a class that the students of the robotics class are required to take during the school year, or else they'll have to take it in summer school. The solution Donovan finds to the problem of how to meet the requirement goes a long way towards endearing him to his classmates and to some of the Academy faculty.

Katie's Sonogram Pictures

As part of her participation in the robotics class's Human Growth and Development program, Katie brings pictures of her sonogram, a medical procedure in which sound-waves are used to formulate a picture of a baby in the womb. Noah notices something in the pictures that he thinks defines the baby's gender as male, but when the baby is



born and it's a girl, his mistake frees the self-constricted Noah by proving to him he can be wrong.

The Academy Admissions Test

During his time at the Academy, several faculty note that Donovan seems below average, and un-gifted. Eventually, they force him into taking a test for admission that, with the computer-hacking help of one of this robotics-team classmates, he manages to pass, much to his surprise and gratitude.



Settings

Hardcastle Middle School

This is the school that Donovan initially attends, and to which he eventually returns. Run-down, poorly equipped, and overpopulated, he comes to experience the school as a comparatively negative place when compared to the Academy for Scholastic Distinction.

Academy for Scholastic Distinction (ASD)

Donovan is sent to this school for the academically gifted by mistake. Described in narration as being technically of-the-moment, completely environmentally friendly, and full of very intelligent students, it becomes a catalyst for the journeys of transformation of Donovan and several of his Academy classmates.

The Robotics Meet

This is the annual competition for robotics clubs that Donovan and his Academy team/classmates are desperate to both compete in and win. It is the setting for the novel's climax, when the Academy's entry (Tin Man) comes into conflict with an entry from the Academy's rival school, Cold Spring Harbor.



Themes and Motifs

The Process and Value of Humanization

This is one of the novel's major themes, and manifests in two key ways.

The first takes place relatively early in the story. It comes about shortly after Donovan arrives in at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction and is placed in a homeroom that also consists of the membership of the school's robotics club. When he is "introduced" to the club's robot creation, he wonders what its name is, and is shocked to discover that the club had not given it one. Over the protests of at least one of the club members (the competitive Abigail), Donovan suggests several possibilities, with the class agreeing that the robot should be named Tin Man. Abigail's protests are based on her belief, which is true enough, that the robot is not a person and, therefore, does not need a name. What happens in the aftermath of the robot's naming, however, is that the members of the club (eventually including Abigail) come to care more about both the robot and their work on "him". In other words, the humanizing of the robot, the novel suggests – making the robot a "him" rather than an "it", also leads to the humanization of the students working on him, students who, as several of them admit, have been treated like / see themselves as academic robots and could use some "humanization" themselves.

This, in turn, is the second key way in which this theme manifests. For many of the students, the process of humanizing Tin Man, and of getting accustomed to Donovan's presence and ways in general, opens the door to the realization that "normal", being more human, is actually both possible and appealing. They discover passion, freedom, and a broader range of feeling than they experienced when they were just smart – or rather, only acknowledged and/or valued, by themselves and others, as BEING smart.

Meanwhile, as the students at the Academy are becoming more humanized, Donovan is also discovering the students' humanity – they are becoming humanized to HIM, and through him, to his friends.

Different Kinds of Gifts

As part of the process of humanization, many of the characters simultaneously explore what it means to be "gifted". At first, almost all the characters (including the students and teachers at the Academy as well as Donovan and the other students at his old school, Hardcastle Middle School) believe that the only way a person could be "gifted" is if s/he is particularly intelligent or extremely talented / capable in some other area. This is the standard by which Donovan's achievements in his few weeks at the school are initially measured, and continually measured by one or two students and most of the faculty. This is also the premise that triggers one of the novel's key events – Donovan



being given the school's admissions test to see if he qualifies intellectually to be at the school.

Even while all this is going on, however, the narrative is also making it clear that there are, in fact, other sorts of gifts. Several of the students in the robotics class and their teacher (Mr. Osborne) are the first to catch a glimpse of this idea. Not only do they begin to see Donovan's skills with, and contributions to, Tin Man as being gifted in their own way: they also come to see, and appreciate, his gifts for helping people open up to themselves. This is particularly true of Noah and Chloe, two highly intelligent students who long to be more "normal" and who are opened up to both the possibilities and realities of being "normal" as the result of Donovan's actions and attitudes.

Here, it's important to note that the novel does not seem to be suggesting that intellectual gifts such as those experienced/received by students at the Academy are not worth recognition, or are not valuable: on the contrary, the book is very clear that such gifts are, in fact, QUITE valuable. What the novel is suggesting, both narratively and thematically, is that there are very different sorts of gifts in each different person, and one only has to open one's mind to the possibility that what may, at first, seem a handicap or a weakness is, in fact, a possible gift to be celebrated.

The Value of Impulsiveness

This is the second of the book's major themes, and is presented primarily through the actions and attitudes of its protagonist, Donovan Curtis. The novel begins with an impulsive act on his part that causes a degree of destruction and has the potential to get him into serious trouble but which, over the course of the narrative, in fact turns out to be the beginning of a very positive series of events. The novel concludes with a climactic confrontation in which Donovan once again behaves impulsively and results in destruction, but turns out to both trigger positive feelings of satisfaction in Donovan's friends, and to eventually be of relatively little actual consequence. Both these situations, in turn, lead to the final moments of the book in which Donovan, in narration, unrepentantly suggests that he knows he's going to act on impulse again, and that he has faith that as has just proved to be the case, the consequences of such a choice will ultimately be positive.

This celebration of acting on impulse carries over into the narratives of other characters as well. One key example is the character of Noah. Until Donovan's arrival at the Academy, the narrative suggests, Noah had channeled his intellectual and emotional energy into finding ways to be wrong, because he was so intelligent that all he could ever be was right. Once Donovan introduces him to YouTube, however, Noah experiences a whole new world of intellectual and emotional freedom, to the point where he not only starts taking on the personas of wrestling personalities he sees on YouTube: he acts with the same sort of spontaneity as those fighters do, with the result that his wildly impulsive, or impulsively wild leap into the fray at the joint dance is, for him, a claiming and a celebration of freedom.



That's the key: for both Donovan and Noah, acting on impulse is the ultimate act of freedom, meaning that as the novel celebrates impulsivity, it is actually celebrating individual liberty.

“Human Growth and Development”

The novel's thematic and narrative considerations of humanization, different kinds of gifts, and impulsivity can all be seen as components of its third major thematic consideration: the types and value of human growth and development.

On first glance, this theme manifests throughout the novel on what might be best described as a biological, or physiological level. Specifically, “Human Growth and Development” is the name of a class that the members of the robotics club are required to take, a class that is, in fact, a study of sexuality and reproduction. It's important to note, however, that while the class is making a clinical study of the subject through the participation of Donovan's pregnant sister, the students are simultaneously, and perhaps subconsciously, growing and developing in non-biological, non-physiological ways.

As indicated above in discussion of the novel's other themes, and as the result of Donovan's actions, the “humans” with whom he works in the robotics club are “growing” and “developing” as individuals. They are experiencing freedom, they are following impulse, they are humanizing themselves and each other. In other words, it is not just the growth and development of the child in Katie's womb that they are experiencing: they are experiencing their OWN. Some of the characters (i.e. Noah, Chloe, Mr. Osborne) seem to be aware that this is the case; others (i.e. Abigail, Ms. Bevelacqua) seem aware, but also seem resistant ... that is, they know that change is taking place, but they are so determined to stay within the parameters of the lives they have known and trusted that new perspectives, particularly ones that seem to be improving the lives of the other students, are seen and reacted to as dangers. Instead of growing and developing, they are remaining stagnant, unchanging and rigid.

It almost goes without saying that Donovan, like the more open-minded / hearted of his classmates, is also undergoing a process of human growth and development over the course of the narrative. He comes to realize that his beliefs about the sort of people the “smart kids” were/are were wrong, at least to some degree, and he grows / develops into someone who, like his classmates but for different reasons, can appreciate the value of the different sorts of gifts possessed by the people he becomes close to.

Loyalty

There are several ways in which loyalty plays a role in the narrative. The first is in the perhaps misguided loyalty of Donovan's friends, The Daniels, who both refuse to reveal his role in what happened to the statue at the beginning of the novel and who, after Donovan goes to the Academy, continue to insist that they are Donovan's only true, only lasting, and only like-minded friends. While this loyalty is superficially admirable, the narrative also reveals its dark side, in that The Daniels come very close to demanding,



or insisting upon, Donovan's loyalty, particularly when it comes to taunting the "nerds", "dweebs", or "brainiacs" of the Academy. Their reaction when he doesn't loyally join with their taunting, and at times actually tries to prevent it, might be described as a "curdled" or "reverse" loyalty – they want him to remain loyal to the friendships they had in the past, so they put pressure on him to do so.

This, in turn, relates to the second main way loyalty manifests in this narrative – a growing, evolving, more positive loyalty experienced by Donovan as he becomes more and more involved with the robotics class and with Tin Man. It is a loyalty based on shared experience and interest, on growing respect and emerging mutual insight, on companionship and need. As Donovan makes himself more and more indispensable when it comes to the development and running of Tin Man as well as to the changing needs of his classmates (particularly Noah and Chloe), both those classmates and Donovan himself experience the loyalty that grows out of that set of shared interests.

On the other, contrasting side of the coin, the narrative develops and presents the character of Abigail who, as Chloe suggests, is only loyal to herself, and only sees the other students and their contributions in terms of how they can help her look good, achieve her academic goals, and realize success. Hers is a selfish, closed loyalty, similar to that of The Daniels and to the sort that The Daniels demand. But where The Daniels eventually realize, and act upon, their genuine affection and respect for Donovan, Abigail stays locked within her primary loyalty – to herself, that loyalty (self-serving-ness?) defining and motivating the one action she takes to help Donovan – the cheating on the exam.

Styles

Point of View

The use of point of view in the novel is easily and clearly one of its most intriguing elements. While the events of the narrative unfold in a primarily linear fashion, the point of view from which those events are described shifts constantly, from chapter to chapter. The overall point of view is first person, but in each chapter, that “first person” is different.

The primary narrator is the book’s protagonist, Donovan Curtis. His actions set the plot in motion (as described in the first chapter); his actions and choices define many of the other characters’ actions and transformations in the middle section of the book; his actions motivate and define the book’s climax; and his overall interpretations of / reactions to those events define the perspective of the book’s denouement, or final chapter. His is the point of view from which the story is told most often.

Other frequent contributors to the storytelling include Chloe (whose point of view, true to her interests, incorporates various hypotheses, or theories, developed in response to the events she describes), Noah (whose point of view integrates, and is based on, his intense desire to be normal and his enthusiasm when that seems possible), and Mr. Osborne. The last is the only teacher who makes a substantial number of contributions to the narrative. Other teachers / adults who contribute, albeit briefly, include math teacher Ms. Bevelaqua and school superintendent Dr. Schultz.

Finally, and aside from the above noted teachers, there are a few characters who contribute only one or two chapters narrated from their point of view. Among the most notable are Abigail (whose only narrated chapter is the one in which she confesses to what she would normally consider a serious academic offense) and Katie (whose only narrated chapter is the one in which she discovers some intriguing truths about why she got involved in Donovan’s class). The fact that these two chapters are the only ones narrated by these characters adds extra significance to the information they contain.

Language and Meaning

In general, the language used throughout the narrative is effectively appropriate for the characters – their age, their level of schooling, their perspectives and values ... in short, their identities.

The language for the younger characters (i.e. the students) is effectively delineated, or differentiated, from that of the older characters (i.e. parents, teachers, and siblings). Here, it’s important to note that while the language used by the students feels age appropriate, it does not come across as being tied to a particular period, or year. The popular slang and/or vernacular of teens changes quickly, and there is the sense that the author has wisely forgone the use of the immediate and contemporary in favor of



utilizing terms that have been used for years. This is particularly, and most specifically true of the terms used to define / disparage the “academically gifted, terms like “dweeb”, “nerd”, and “brainiac”.

This latter point is particularly interesting, in that these derogatory terms are used by both of the two main types of students in the book, both the so-called “normal” students (like Donovan, The Daniels, and the other students at Hardcastle Middle School”) and the so-called “academic” students (like Chloe, Noah, Abigail, and the other students at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction). When it comes to the latter students, in fact, this use of self-negating language has thematic implications, in that most of them want to be more “normal”, more like the students / teens whom they perceive as having less pressure on them to perform and/or succeed. it’s important to note the irony in these students wanting to be more like teenagers who look down on them, their attitudes indicated by the language they use.

One last point about the language used in the book, and its appropriateness, has to do with the use of scientific language. While it would be entirely understandable for the students at the Academy to speak with a vocabulary heavy with technical terms and jargon, the author tends to steer away from an over-use of that kind of language. There are circumstances / moments when it seems to become unavoidable, but for the most part, those moments are relatively few and are present because they’re necessary for the truth of a moment or relationship to become apparent, and at times even for comic effect.

Structure

The overall structure of the piece is linear and straightforward. Action leads to reaction, leads to action ... cause leads to effect ... and, perhaps most significantly, choice leads to consequence. This latter way of looking at the work’s structure in that it is also connected to aspects of character (specifically that of protagonist Donovan) and theme (specifically the book’s thematic exploration of the value of impulse).

In terms of the former, and as Donovan himself states early on in the narrative, his impulsive choices / actions tend to lead to consequences that he doesn’t usually consider while making those choices, or taking those actions. Thus, the book’s structure is tied in with the journey of transformation undergone by Donovan over the course of the narrative: he, like the reader, is forced to at least become more aware of the potential for consequences when it comes to impulsive choices. In Donovan’s case, and as he states at the novel’s conclusion, that increased awareness isn’t necessarily going to lead to a change in impulsive behavior, but it has led him to an understanding that feared negative consequences, or fear OF negative consequences, can have positive results.

This, in turn, also relates to / is part of the book’s thematic consideration of impulses. Over the course of the narrative, Donovan and the other characters experience, understand, and appreciate the potential for personal growth as the result of following

impulses and experiencing their consequences. Basic cause and effect structure, like that utilized here, is entirely defined by how consequences follow actions, making the structuring of events and story entirely relevant to, and integrated with, the book's primary theme.



Quotes

...when the thing is right there in front of me, and I can kick it, grab it, shout it out, jump into it, paint it, launch it, or light it on fire, it's like I'm a puppet on a string, powerless to resist. I don't think; I DO.

-- Narration (Donovan) (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 2)

Importance: In this quote, Donovan introduces and defines a key aspect of his character, his impulsivity, that plays a significant, motivating role in most of his actions throughout the narrative, as well as playing a similarly significant role in the development of its themes.

There's a PRICE for being gifted. The cost is your life. You don't die or anything like that. But you don't live either. Free time? Forget it ... Friends? Those are the people you slave alongside. ... Sports? When? And besides, why play when you probably stink. ... What about TV or video games. Oh please ... Pep Rallies? For what – the robotics team? Forget it – and the same goes for school dances, funny-hat day, drama club, charity drives ...

-- Narration (Chloe) (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 31)

Importance: In this narrative introduction to her first appearance, Chloe sums up her attitude towards being a “gifted” student. It also foreshadows her reaction (and that of at least one of her classmates) to being able to actually attend a school dance later in the book.

... half of being gifted was just the fact that everybody EXPECTED you to be smart. Like that seventh grader on the bus ... the guy made a paper airplane, and he couldn't resist flying it. Well, Couldn't Resist was practically my middle name. I wasn't that different from the Academy kids.

-- Narration (Donovan) (Chapter 5 paragraph Page 48)

Importance: In this quote, Donovan discovers the similarities between himself and at least one of the Academy students, if not all of them. This rationalization leads him to the resolution shortly afterwards that with this similarity in mind, he should be able to “fake” his way into belonging.

Maybe [Donovan] wasn't gifted in the way we were, but he had an uncanny knack for making a difference. Take the robotics program. From a scientific standpoint, Tin Man hadn't changed at all since his arrival. Donovan had contributed a name, a few pictures from the internet, and his joystick skills. Yet somehow he'd transformed our entire team. We were focused, excited, united. Cold Spring Harbor had better watch out.

-- Narration (Chloe) (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 94)

Importance: In this quote, an element of one of the narrative's key themes (the nature and value of different kinds of “gifts”) is described from the perspective of one of the students (Chloe) who observes, analyzes, and experiences it first hand.



I could feel it tapping against my hand, like little hiccups. It was strange, but also kind of beautiful. I was so much more than just one hour closer to my Human Growth and Development credit. In those sixty minutes, I'd learned what a brand-new human life felt like.

-- Narration (Chloe) (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 98)

Importance: The narrative portrays an experience that is a variation on the first of the book's key themes – specifically, its consideration of humanization - as it explores the difference between “it” and “him”. Here, Katie's baby becomes more than an “it”, a school project for credit: it becomes a person, a “him”.

Obviously, I understood that Donovan hadn't made any of this happen directly. He couldn't possibly have destroyed the Hardcastle gym, forcing them to move the dance to ours. Nobody was capable of shaping human events like that. Yet the minute he'd walked into [Mr. Osborne's] homeroom that day, I knew things were about to change ... it was almost as if the gods of Normal had sent us their messenger as a sign that our geekdom was coming to an end.

-- Narration (Chloe) (Chapter 12 paragraph Page 122-3)

Importance: This quote is significant on several levels: it is deeply ironic, given that Donovan is in fact responsible for something that Chloe says he cannot POSSIBLY be responsible for; it foreshadows the eventual revelation that he IS responsible; and it sums up how Donovan's actions / identity manifest several of the novel's thematic elements.

I should have been laughing myself. What did I care about Abigail Lee? The girl hated me, and I wasn't too fond of her, either. But the whole attitude – the idea that the gifted kids were here for the entertainment of the cool people made me sick.

-- Narration (Donovan) (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 133)

Importance: This quote marks a key point in Donovan's journey of transformation, from selfish user of the Academy kids as a place to hide from Schultz to someone who truly cares about the kids.

That's when it hit me. I did care. Not so much about the robotics team – and definitely not about some bucket of bolts on Mecanum wheels. How many chances did I get to limit the damage of my impulses? Once Atlas's globe is rolling, there's nothing anyone can do to save the gym at the bottom of the hill.

-- Narration (Donovan) (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 144)

Importance: Later in the dance, while facing a powerful dilemma about whether to stay “hidden” at the Academy or reveal himself by protecting Tin Man, he has an important realization about the true nature of that dilemma, and draws a significant (and somewhat metaphoric) connection between the current situation and the decision he made to get him INTO the situation in the first place.



I'd never been much of a joiner, so this was my first taste of how it felt to be a part of a team that was a real contender. And not just a part. With the robot completed, I was more important than any of them. All those geniuses, and the one person who could make Tin Man perform at championship level was the dummy who got stranded in the gifted program by mistake ... for the first time since I'd landed at the Academy, I truly BELONGED.

-- Narration (Donovan) (Chapter 19 paragraph Page 204)

Importance: Here, Donovan realizes, acknowledges, and accepts his value and contribution to the robotics project. The moment is particularly poignant and significant (not to mention ironic) because immediately afterwards, Donovan is confronted by Schultz and removed from the project.

None of us ever did anything without thinking it out in detail, making an elaborate plan. Donovan ACTED – whether it was hitting a statue, or naming a robot, or stealing a motor, or finding someone to teach Human Growth and Development because she WAS human growth and development. For Donovan, it was all as natural as breathing.

-- Narration (Chloe) (Chapter 21 paragraph Page 225)

Importance: Chloe comes to an important realization at which a reader might have already arrived – that because he's so fundamentally different from the kids at the Academy, Donovan not only changed them, but proved himself to be “gifted” in a way none of the characters had ever thought possible.

There were a lot of robots, but I only had eyes for ours. I hadn't built him, and I wouldn't be driving him, but the pride of ownership was electric.

-- Narration (Donovan) (Chapter 22 paragraph Page 237)

Importance: At the robotics meet, Donovan catches sight of Tin Man and feels a strong connection to both him and the class – note the use of the word “ours”.

My group was unmatched in ability level, but it took Donovan to make them a team. On the surface, he contributed very little. But without him, nothing worked.

-- Narration (Mr. Osborne) (Chapter 23 paragraph Page 242)

Importance: Here Mr. Osborne reaffirms the value of Donovan's participation in the development of Tin Man, even while he reminds himself (later in the chapter) of all the ways Donovan was an inappropriate student at the Academy. The quote is also an affirmation of the novel's thematic commentary on the value of different kinds of gifts.

The impulsive act was over, but the consequences had not yet descended on my head. It was as if time had ground to a halt, and we were all frozen there. What the future held I couldn't predict, but I had a sense that it had something to do with Dr. Schultz, pushing through the throng toward me, his face a thundercloud.

-- Narration (Donovan) (Chapter 24 paragraph Page 255)

Importance: In a clear echo of his experience in the moments after knocking the globe



off the Atlas statue, Donovan feels a momentary suspension of time in the aftermath of knocking Cold Harbor's robot off the robotics course.

The mayhem that had ended the robotics meet would have freaked us out a few weeks ago. Now we were gloating over having destroyed our enemy. If Oz had hoped Donovan would become more like us, here was proof that the opposite was true.

-- Narration (Chloe) (Chapter 25 paragraph Page 259)

Importance: Chloe sums up how she and the other members of the robotics class had been changed as the result of Donovan's joining their group.