

Vineland Study Guide

Vineland by Thomas Pynchon

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Plot Summary

Vineland tells the story of the people surrounding Frenesi Gates, a one-time sixties radical who turns government informer and goes into hiding, abandoning her husband and young daughter. Pynchon moves fluidly in his narrative from character to character and between the time settings of 1970 and 1984, describing a loosely-knit group of people whose lives are greatly affected as Frenesi passes through them.

The novel opens in the fictional Northern California town of Vineland, where Zoyd Wheeler, Frenesi's ex-husband, lives in semi-seclusion with Prairie, his 14-year-old daughter who has no memory of Frenesi, her mother. Zoyd learns that Prairie is being targeted by Brock Vond, the charismatic federal prosecutor in love with Frenesi who first convinced her to betray her friends in 1970 and is now seeking revenge on her for leaving him. Zoyd sends Prairie away to escape Vond who is preparing a full-scale military invasion of Vineland.

Prairie meets up with DL Chastain, a ninja and former friend and lover of Frenesi who provides her with background about her mother's radical activities in the late sixties as a documentary filmmaker, and the story of how she become an informer for Brock Vond. DL Introduces Prairie to a group of female ninjas who have a commune in the heavily wooded hills of Northern California, where she is taken in and put in charge of the kitchen.

In the years since she left Zoyd and Prairie, Frenesi has entered into a witness protection program, remarried and has a son. When the most recent government check she receives bounces, she understands she has been cut loose owing to budget cuts under President Reagan. She and her husband and son return to Vineland where she has family.

Her return is arranged by Hector Zuniga, a federal drug enforcement agent who has a long relationship with Zoyd and who has gone partially insane from his addiction to television. Hector has a movie deal in the works and wants Frenesi to direct it.

All of the main characters converge on Vineland at the end of the novel, at the large annual reunion of Frenesi's traditionally radical extended family. Brock Vond's secret military force is there, too, and he lowers himself from a helicopter in an attempt to kidnap Prairie as she sleeps alone in the woods near the reunion. Just as he is about to grab her, the funding for his secret program is cut and he is hauled up. Prairie is ambivalent about her escape and the novel ends ambiguously with her longing for Vond to come back and carry her away.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Zoyd Wheeler wakes up late on a summer morning in 1984. He slowly eats a breakfast of Froot Loops with Nestle Quik sprinkled over them and reads a note from his daughter, Prairie, that tells him the local television channel called earlier while he was asleep.

Zoyd is the recipient of a monthly check from the federal government for mental health benefits. As a condition of his benefits, he must do something publicly "crazy" once a year in order to maintain his status. For several years, Zoyd has chosen to smash through the large window of a local business as his public display. Today is the scheduled day, and he returns the call to the local television station to dictate his press release.

He is surprised to learn from the TV station that the news media has all been told that Zoyd's display is to be held at the Cucumber Lounge, not at the Log Jam bar, where Zoyd planned, instead of jumping through a window, to put on a dress and cut the bar up with a chainsaw.

Zoyd goes to the Log Jam, but does not find any news media there. He receives a call at the Log Jam from his friend, Van Meter, who tells him all the news vans are at the Cucumber Lounge. Zoyd goes there and discovers that it was an old acquaintance of his, a federal drug agent named Hector Zuniga, who told the news media to be at the Cucumber Lounge to see him smash through a window. Furthermore, Hector wants Zoyd to meet with him the next day. The two exchange some weary banter. Zoyd is reluctant to get involved with anything Hector has planned, but finally agrees to meet him the following day at the local bowling alley.

Zoyd smashes through the glass window, which he finds has been replaced with a movie-stunt sugar-glass window.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel opens with a taste of surreality that will permeate the entire story. Zoyd Wheeler, an apparently burned out unemployed hippie living in Northern California on government checks, is not actually crazy, but deliberately plans a crazy act in order to keep his mental health benefits coming. There is more to the story of this government handout than Pynchon reveals here, however. It is part of an elaborate deal Zoyd has made involving his ex-wife, his daughter, and a federal prosecutor. The author hints that there may be more to it than meets the eye by introducing Hector Zuniga, a drug enforcement agent, who seems to have taken control of Zoyd's annual demonstration.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

That evening, Zoyd and his daughter, Prairie are watching his performance on the evening news. They begin to argue lightly about her boyfriend, a punk musician named Isaiah Two Four. As they banter back and forth, Isaiah suddenly appears as if from nowhere and greets Zoyd. Prairie produces a huge bowl of guacamole and some tortilla chips and a six pack of Zoyd's favorite beer, and he realizes with some pride that she is hustling him.

It turns out Isaiah Two Four wants Zoyd to co-sign a bank loan for him. He wants to open a chain of "violence centers" where people can come to shoot guns and relieve their pent up anger. Zoyd laughs at the prospect, as he already owes money all over town and there is no chance of him getting any kind of loan.

Isaiah is in a punk band called Billy Barf and the Vomitones. He mentions to Zoyd that they have not been playing many gigs lately, and Zoyd tips him off to a possible wedding gig for an Italian mobster named Ralph Wayvone. Excited, Isaiah borrows Zoyd's phone and calls about the gig. He returns to the room and announces his band has been hired. He also adds that he told Wayvone the band was Italian. Zoyd advises him to learn a few Italian tunes.

Isaiah and Prairie leave, and Zoyd sits down in front of the television to smoke a joint. He is worried about his daughter's choice of boyfriend, but this is almost nothing compared to the fact that Hector Zuniga has suddenly returned to his life.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter introduces Prairie, Zoyd's daughter and one of the central characters of the novel. She is an independent girl, raised by Zoyd, and good at living by her wits. This is a trait she apparently shares with Zoyd, who has a streak of parental pride when he witnesses her trying to butter him up for her boyfriend's business proposal.

Isaiah is outwardly a violent punk rocker in a thrash band, as his plan to open a series of violence centers seems to attest. He is adept at quickly diffusing the tension between Zoyd and himself left over from a previous argument, however, simply by talking. He will use this persuasive ability later in the novel when the band is in trouble for trying to fake their way through an Italian wedding.

At the opening of the chapter, Zoyd and Prairie are watching Zoyd's demonstration on the television. The footage has been enhanced to make the sugar glass sound like real glass breaking, and the coverage includes several experts seriously discussing the nature of Zoyd's insanity. Of course it is all empty talk because Zoyd is not really crazy at all. The Tuge, as Pynchon consistently calls television, does not reflect reality. It does

represent a kind of reality to its viewers, however, and this strange relationship is a central theme in the novel.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Zoyd goes to meet Hector at the bowling alley the next day. He has known Hector ever since the late sixties, when he first knocked on the door of the shack near the Southern California beach where Zoyd lived with Van Meter and several other musicians and hippies. Hector was looking for information and willing to pay for it. In the time since then, Hector and Zoyd have crossed paths several times, but Zoyd has never snitched on anyone.

Over lunch at the bowling alley, Hector tells Zoyd his ex-wife, Frenesi Gates, is in trouble. She has been in the witness protection plan, but the budget covering her hiding has been cut and she has been turned loose. Her files have been deleted from the government computers. Zoyd has not been in contact with Frenesi since she left him when Prairie was still a small child. Hector wants Zoyd to contact him if Frenesi should try to get in touch.

As the two men conclude their lunch, a group of paramilitary soldiers storm in and Hector quickly disappears. The soldiers are from NEVER, a group that runs an asylum for people addicted to television. Apparently Hector has escaped and they are trying to recapture him.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Frenesi Gates is the central figure in the novel but is seldom seen herself. Rather, Pynchon uses her character as a pivot point around which the stories of the people who have been affected by her revolve. A bit of her past is revealed in this chapter, including the fact that she left Zoyd with the very young Prairie. This provides the motivation for Prairie's character to seek out her mother and also hints at the perhaps unstable, possibly sinister side of Frenesi's character.

Hector and Zoyd have an easy rapport based on a mutual understanding that they are on opposite sides. Pynchon compares them to the cartoon characters Sylvester and Tweety, hinting at the elaborate plans of Hector and the blithe good luck enjoyed by Zoyd.

Pynchon introduces another theme that runs through the novel, the existence of semi-secret paramilitary forces that can strike at any time with mysterious suddenness. In this case, it is NEVER, the National Endowment for Video Education and Rehabilitation, a government organization that supposedly cures people who are addicted to television. The characters in Pynchon's novel seem to take the existence of these kinds of forces and the raids they undertake as expected occurrences. Pynchon depicts them as paranoid, but their paranoia is usually justified.

Pynchon's narrative is fluid and frequently shifts in time and place based on a recollection or casual remark by a character. This fluidity is displayed here in the passage where the first meeting between Zoyd and Hector is described. Up to this point the action has taken place mostly in the present year of 1984. After this point the narrative will move more and more freely between the past and the present, eventually weaving a complete narrative that explains the motivations and behaviors of the characters.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Zoyd lends his car to his neighbor Elvissa and then borrows a small camper from a friend named Trent. He drives up into the hills to a family who provides him with crawfish that he then sells to restaurants in the region. As he drives his rounds in the borrowed camper, he gets strange reactions from the people who know him. Hector has been around asking after him, they tell him, but also other people. He receives a warning from Vato and Blood, two partners with a sketchy tow service, that he ought to consider not going home.

Zoyd learns from Elvissa that his car has been impounded by soldiers. He calls Trent, who tells him that agents have taken over Zoyd's house and thrown everything into the yard. Fearing for Prairie, he calls her at the pizza restaurant where she works and asks her to stay put until he can get there.

When he arrives at the restaurant he finds Hector there, half crazed. Hector has told Prairie he knows where her mother is and wants to take her with him to meet her. Hector tells Zoyd that the man leading the raid on his house is Brock Vond, the man who took his wife from him. Prairie wants to go with Hector, but Zoyd convinces her to stay with him that night in the borrowed camper, and she agrees. They speak about Frenesi and Prairie expresses her strong desire to find her again. The following day, he sends her away with Isaiah, who picks her up in his highly decorated band van.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The primary action of the novel is set into motion in Chapter 4. Brock Vond, the federal prosecutor who has some kind of personal score to settle with Zoyd and Prairie over Frenesi is closing in on them. Vond's motivation is not yet revealed but will become more plain over the course of the story. Hector has spoken with Prairie and made the possibility of her finding her mother seem like a reality, tempting her to go with him. There is more military action as Zoyd's car and home are seized. Zoyd once again falls back on his good luck and is able to escape.

Zoyd makes a short reference to the deal he thought he had struck with Vond to leave him and Prairie alone. The full terms of this deal will be explained later, but it is suggested to the reader that Zoyd's actions may be more deliberate and calculated than might appear. The relationship between Vond and Frenesi is referred to here, as well. This odd triangle, and its apparent collapse, is a central theme of the novel.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

As Prairie is about to leave, Zoyd gives her an unusual amulet-like business card, and the narrative backs up to give the story of how he came to receive it. It is in the final days of his marriage to Frenesi and she has gone off to Hawaii to be alone. Zoyd leaves the infant Prairie with Sasha Gates, Frenesi's mother in California, and works his way to Hawaii as a musician on an independent and obscure airline that provides a club-like atmosphere on its flights. He confronts her in her hotel room, but she is not interested in returning to him. He bums around Honolulu for a time before returning to California.

On one of the flights where Zoyd is entertaining the passengers, a mysterious dark aircraft comes up beside the passenger plane and attaches itself to it in mid air. Through the hatch come dark figures moving with military precision and carrying weapons. The captain of the flight asks the passengers to take their seats and announces that the men who have boarded are looking for someone. He asks the passengers to cooperate and announces free drinks for the inconvenience.

Zoyd is approached from behind by a man in a blond wig and Hawaiian costume. He guesses the man is escaping from the intruders and lets him hide as part of the band. The intruders leave, and the man in the wig thanks Zoyd for saving his life. In return, he gives him the strange business card. It reads "Takeshi Fumimota, Adjustments" (pg. 66.) Takeshi tells Zoyd he will remember the card if he is ever in a jam and needs help. Zoyd doubts it, but manages to hold on to the card over the years and indeed, when he is about to send Prairie away for her safety, remembers the card and gives it to her.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Some of Zoyd's past obsession with Frenesi is revealed in the fifth chapter when he works his way across the Pacific to Hawaii to find her after she has left him. The airline on which he flies is one that operates on the fringes of mainstream society, a type of operation that is common in the novel. Pynchon's darkly paranoid humor is on display here as he describes how the low budget airline cannot afford to bribe the mysterious forces that patrol the skies, boarding passenger craft to abduct people. "This is for our own good," the captain announces. "They don't want all of us, just a few." (p. 65) He then promises free drinks. This seems to mollify the passengers and soon Zoyd's music and the alcohol has them ignoring the potentially violent secret force moving around right under their noses.

Takeshi Fumimota is apparently the target of this abduction, but he escapes in a scene that recalls the classic movie "Some Like It Hot," when two characters escape the mob by putting on wigs and pretending to be with a band.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

It is 1984 and Frenesi Gates is sitting in the kitchen of her new apartment drinking a cup of coffee. It is the latest in a long string of apartments she and her husband, Flash, have moved into over the years and each time she moves her thoughts return to Prairie, who she last saw as a baby.

Frenesi and Flash are both government informers in the witness protection program. They met while they were inmates at a "reeducation camp" run by Brock Vond and have spent the years since being moved from place to place and receiving regular checks from the federal government. They have a son, named Justin.

As Frenesi sits watching television, a U.S. Marshall comes to the door with the regular check, which is an unusual occurrence. Soon afterward, Flash calls from the government office where he works and gives her the strange news that many of the people they know in the same program have been deleted from the central computer. Nervous, he asks her to cash the check as soon as possible.

The banks are closed. Frenesi tries to deposit the check in her bank machine, but it will not take her card. She tries to cash it in several places, but is refused. Finally she is told by a supermarket clerk that payment has been stopped on the check. She has a sudden realization that she and thousands of others have been suddenly cut off. She is no longer in the computer.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Frenesi Gates is finally fully introduced in this chapter as Pynchon locates her in Las Vegas, having remarried and had a son with a fellow government informer named Flash. Exactly what she has been doing in the intervening years since leaving Zoyd and Prairie is not revealed, but a rehabilitation camp is mentioned as the place where she met Flash. This is probably meant to refer to the PREP camp founded by Brock Vond to which Frenesi was taken after the episode at the College of the Surf that will be described later in the novel, and from which she was reluctantly rescued by DL Chastain.

The air of paranoia is heightened in this chapter as it seems a way of life is ending for hundreds of people from Frenesi and Flash's generation who have relied on the government for their support for nearly fifteen years. A hint of anti-technological commentary is evident as Pynchon reduces Frenesi and her companions to digits in a computer that can be deleted without conscience or consciousness by at the stroke of a computer key.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Ralph Wayvone is a wealthy Italian with probable mob ties. It is the morning of his daughter's wedding day and he is worried about the band, who he has never heard, and who call themselves Gino Baglione and the Paisans. The band is actually Billy Barf and the Vomitonos, and in the few days they have spent driving to the Wayvone mansion they have arranged costumes to disguise their punk appearance to look like an Italian wedding band.

The band opens with a set of rock and roll standards, but is approached afterwards by a large man named Carmine, who requests that they play more Italian songs. Fortunately, Isaiah Two Four is able to calm down the agitated muscle man and the bride slips the band a song book of Italian favorites.

Meanwhile, Prairie has gone into one of the large bathrooms of the mansion and is studying her hair in the mirror. Another woman comes in and pulls a small device from her bag which is playing the theme from the television show "Hawaii 5-O." The device has been set off by Takeshi Fumimota's business card in Prairies purse. The woman asks about the card and introduces herself as Darryl Louise Chastain.

Prairie immediately recognizes her from photographs she has been shown by her grandmother. At the same time, Darryl Louise, who goes by "DL," realizes Prairie is Frenesi's daughter. She and Frenesi "ran together, back in the old days, she tells Prairie (pg. 100.)

Prairie tells DL why she is on the run, and mentions Brock Vond, at whose name DL is startled. She takes Prairie to speak with Ralph Wayvone, who seems to have a past with Vond as well, and is concerned to hear that he is leading some kind of raid in Vineland. He promises to check into it and help DL.

DL invites Prairie to come with her to meet Takeshi to see how he can help. Prairie decides to go with her. She says goodbye to Isaiah and DL and Prairie roar away in DLs flashy Trans-Am.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Pynchon engages in some broad humor as the punk rockers Billy Barf and the Vomitonos try to pass as an Italian wedding band and are quickly suspected by Ralph Wayvone's enormous muscle-man as being fakes. Here again Isaiah Two Four demonstrates his fine ability to defuse violence with quick talking as he befuddles the mob goon who is about to strangle Billy Barf.



Darryl Louise Chastain, called DL, is introduced in this chapter. She is the partner of Takeshi Fumimota and has homed in on the business card amulet in Prairie's purse. The two women have a mutual shock of recognition when they meet and realize their common tie with Frenesi. Ralph Wayvone is also brought in as someone who is somehow tied to Brock Vond.

Prairie seems to be enjoying the same kind of good luck her father has received much of his life, being in the right place at the right time to meet people who can help. Her meeting with DL is to eventually lead her to her desired goal of learning more about her mother and reconnecting with her in person.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

DL takes Prairie to a secluded compound in the wooded hills called the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives, a commune of female ninjas who offer self-improvement courses and training. DL is a member of the sisterhood and introduces her to Sister Rochelle, the leader of the group. Sister Rochelle is skeptical of DL's motives, but takes Prairie up on her offer to work in exchange for being allowed to stay. She is put in charge of the kitchen, which is in a state of disarray, and manages to produce a delicious and popular meal of spinach casserole and roasted baloney in grape jelly glaze. After the meal, Prairie is given access to the computer database maintained by the sisters, which has a wealth of information about her mother. She stays up nearly the whole night reading newspaper articles, partly blacked-out government files and looking at photographs of her mother, some of them with DL.

The narrative shifts to the story of DL, who grew up the daughter of a military man who was at one point stationed in Japan. There she is discovered in a pachinko parlor by a martial arts teacher, called a sensei, who offers to teach her everything he knows. Inoshiro Sensei instructs her in many ancient ninja secrets, such as how to kill with a touch and how to disappear into the shadows.

Back in the U.S., DL lives freely, riding a motorcycle around California and going wherever she feels like. In Berkeley, she meets up with Frenesi Gates, who is part of a radical documentary film group called 24fps. The two women become close friends. Later, DL hears about the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives and hitchhikes her way to their retreat, where she becomes a member.

It is now several weeks since DL has brought Prairie to the retreat. Takeshi Fumimota is expected to arrive one day soon but is overdue. Prairie asks DL if she is worried about him. She replies that he can take care of himself. Prairie asks how DL met Takeshi. DL responds with an anguished scream.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Pynchon takes the novel into a parallel story in this chapter and the next, providing extensive background for the character DL Chastain and her relationship with Takeshi Fumimota. The narrative becomes very fluid as he moves back and forth between the present and past. While Prairie examines old pictures of her mother from the late 60s, the narrative brings them to life. The first meeting between DL and Frenesi is described. DL is the experienced, worldly woman, taken with Frenesi who seems to have an innocent and perhaps naive notion that her documentary filmmaking can change the world.

DL is a ninja, able to move silently and possessing a kind of sixth sense that can anticipate what is about to happen. Prairie seems to have a similar natural ability to run a busy kitchen, and she takes over the job at the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives with a startling efficiency.

Pynchon pokes fun at the self-improvement movement in his characterization of the Sisterhood and the residents at their retreat. The kitchen is paralyzed when Prairie arrives because the cooking and eating has been turned into an exercise in criticism and therapy for the main chef. The extreme self-centered nature of the residents has overtaken even their most basic bodily needs such as eating. Meanwhile, the Sisterhood, which started out as a commune environment that welcomed anyone, has been transformed over the previous 15 years into a large business.

The chapter concludes with Prairie asking DL how she met Takeshi. It seems like an innocent conversational question, but DL's surprising reaction sets up the next chapter.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

DL tells Prairie it was through Ralph Wayvone that she met Takeshi, and proceeds to give the details.

In the early 1970s, Wayvone approaches DL to ask her to help him kill Brock Vond. DL has a deep hatred for Vond for having taken Frenesi away from her, and also has the skills to assassinate him. Wayvone proposes that she get close to him, with his help, and use the Ninja Vibrating Palm on him, a method that is painless at the time but which causes the victim to drop dead a year later.

DL is tempted, but reluctant. She refuses and runs away from Wayvone, taking a plain job in Ohio and changing her appearance. After a time she is suddenly kidnapped and taken to Japan, where she is apparently sold into prostitution at an auction of wealthy bidders. She discovers her purchaser is Ralph Wayvone, who pitches his plan to her again. Brock Vond is due to visit Japan for a convention. He is known to visit a certain exclusive brothel. Wayvone's plan is to have DL pose as a prostitute and attract Vond as a customer. When she is close enough to him, she will use the Death Touch on him. To attract him, she will made up to look like Frenesi Gates. This time, DL agrees to the plan.

Vond is tipped off to the plan somehow, however, and at the last minute decides to send someone else in his place. As it happens, Takeshi Fumimota, an insurance investigator who is trying to escape a mysterious force that has just destroyed a large laboratory, is walking past Vond and his bodyguard as they are discussing the plan. The bodyguard grabs Takeshi, who looks surprisingly like Vond, gives him a little white card, and puts him in the back seat of a large car, promising him the best night of his life.

Takeshi is taken to the brothel, and is welcomed inside after swiping the card through a slot. He is led to the room where DL is waiting. To look more like Frenesi, she is wearing blue contacts and cannot see clearly, so she does not realize that the man is not Vond until after they have had sex and she has given him the Vibrating Palm. After discovering her error, she runs away, watched by Wayvone on surveillance cameras.

DL makes her way back to California and to the Attentives. She tells Sister Rochelle what has happened, that she has given the Vibrating Palm to an innocent man. In the meantime, Takeshi has been flown to San Francisco by Wayvone, who gives him directions to the Sisterhood of the Attentives, who may be able to reverse the Vibrating Palm.

Takeshi goes to the Attentives, who hook him up to a series of odd machines meant to undo the effects of DL's ninja attack. As punishment for her act, they require her to be



bound by duty to Takeshi for a year and a day. After he is cured, Takeshi and DL leave the sisters and drift around California by car.

They pick up a hitch-hiker named Ortho Bob, who turns out to be a Thanatoid. Thanatoids are something like ghosts or zombies. People who are not quite dead and not quite alive, lingering on the Earth with unfinished karmic business. Ortho Bob is heading back to a place in the wooded hills called Shade Creek where there is a whole community of Thanatoids. He invites Takeshi and DL to stay there.

Takeshi is fascinated by the Thanatoids and recognizes a business opportunity in "karmic adjustment," providing a kind of therapy for Thanatoids. He and DL set up a clinic there.

Back in 1984, at the Attentives' compound, Takeshi has arrived and met Prairie. While Prairie is trying to prepare a meal one day, DL suddenly appears and tells her they have to leave right away. Suddenly the retreat is raided by military troops. DL, Takeshi and Prairie make their way to where DL has hidden her Trans-Am and escape the invasion.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Pynchon continues the parallel story of DL and Takeshi in this chapter, and explains the connection Ralph Wayvone has to the story. The tale is a surreal one. Takeshi is an insurance investigator in Japan looking into what appears to be the destruction of a large laboratory by the stomp of a gigantic sea lizard. DL is kidnapped and apparently sold into prostitution in Japan, but is actually being recruited to kill Brock Vond. Takeshi just happens to be in the right place at the right time to be substituted for Vond, setting into motion the events that will tie DL and Takeshi together for life.

The apparent Godzilla attack being investigated by Takeshi is an example of how Pynchon blurs the line between popular entertainment and the supposed real world. Takeshi in particular seems to appreciate that there is a parallel world on the fringes of the mainstream, there in plain sight for anyone who knows where to look. It is in this fringe that the secret forces like those directed by Brock Vond operate, however, making people like Takeshi a target of those who do not want to be discovered. He is apparently on the run from those who know the true source of the giant footprint.

The Thanatoids are an example of these fringe-dwellers. They are like zombies, but zombies who go on living everyday lives in a place called Shade Creek. They are people who have died but who cannot cross over into the afterlife because of some kind of karmic imbalance. Takeshi recognizes that these Thanatoids can use his help, and sets up a business around providing them therapy. The Thanatoids are a fixture in the Vineland region, apparently taken for granted by the fully-living people around them. Thanatoids spend all of their time with the television on, and Pynchon suggests that their undead state has something to do with the Tube. As Takeshi theorizes, the television makes them only half alive while they are living, so it is no surprise that they should end up half dead. His "karmic adjustment" service seems to be as a kind of



karmic hit-man, providing the revenge or resolution his clients need to be able to become fully dead.

The darkly comic figures of Vato and Blood are further developed in this chapter, two men who sometimes impound cars that are never returned to their owners. They have another important duty of guiding dead souls to the underworld, which is revealed toward the end of the story.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Takeshi and DL take Prairie to their clinic in Los Angeles, which is full of impressive machinery apparently used for "karmic adjustment." Prairie wants to learn more about Frenesi, and although DL is reluctant to give her the full story, she arranges for her to see some old footage taken by the film group they had both belonged to in the 1960s.

The film archive is kept by a woman named Ditzah Fisk, who along with DL, Frenesi and others was part of a documentary film group in the 60s called 24fps. She spools up some footage that was shot by Frenesi of Brock Vond in which the two engage in a flirtatiously hostile exchange. It is the first time Prairie has seen Brock Vond.

The scene shifts back to the late 60s as the members of 24fps discuss their mission among themselves. They view the camera as a weapon that can destroy as effectively as a gun, but there is some disagreement about whether they should ever turn to actual violence. DL is in charge of security for the group and is often frustrated at their drug-addled carelessness and reckless behavior.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The visit to the 24fps archive allows Prairie to see her mother's young womanhood through her mother's own eyes, through the lens of her camera. She first lays eyes on Brock Vond just as her mother did while shooting footage of him in the late 60s. Pynchon creates an interesting juxtaposition here of images created for television and the documentary film images made by Frenesi and 24fps. The documentary film would seem to be a more accurate reflection of reality, but Prairie is to learn that it does not tell the full story of what happened.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The College of the Surf is an enclave of hippie activity surrounded by a military base and expensive residential property in Southern California. Originally established as a kind of technical school by the wealthy conservative people who live nearby, the campus is changed irrevocably when some highly potent marijuana is brought in and attitudes begin to change. When a campus protest is met with violence by the authorities, the campus declares itself an independent nation, the People's Republic of Rock and Roll, or PR3

The accidental leader of PR3 is Weed Atman, a tall mathematics teacher. Weed is not especially political, but is associated with a graduate student named Rex Snuvvle, who holds political views on the far left. The day after the campus declares independence, 24fps arrives to document the events.

Weed develops a cult of personality and has several women vying for his attention. He manages several affairs at the same time, all begrudgingly accepted by his wife Jinx. Soon Frenesi becomes involved with Weed, as well.

However Frenesi has also become involved with Brock Vond, and she moves back and forth between the two men, feeding information about PR3 to Brock, who sees it is a practice opportunity to try out methods for bringing down Marxist countries. He wants Frenesi's help to bring down Weed Atman, and implies that it is because he loves her. Frenesi is wary, but finds she has fallen in love with Vond.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Pynchon's surreal sense of humor is evident in this chapter. The College of the Surf is in a region so conservative that a gigantic monument is being erected to Richard Nixon, who is the current president. The college is suddenly and inexplicably changed almost overnight into the most liberal and radical example of campus protest when the students declare independence and form their own country, naively named the "People's Republic of Rock and Roll."

The students seem more interested in partying than in any real political action, although there are those like Rex Snuvvle who seem to have genuine convictions. The group would appear to pose little threat to anyone, but Brock Vond views them as an opportunity to try out methods for destabilizing larger "countries." He succeeds by gaining internal access and information from Frenesi and setting the political members against those who are just along for the ride. Vond never need set foot on the campus except to sweep in after it all collapses. He is adept at exploiting people, including Frenesi.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Back in 1984, Weed Atman is now a Thanatoid in Northern California, neither alive nor dead, attending a party thrown by the Thanatoid community at a hotel convention center. Van Meter is playing bass guitar in a band hired for the event. He wishes he had Zoyd there to play keyboards, but Zoyd is hiding out in a nearby region called Holytail.

Holytail is an isolated marijuana growing region where Zoyd is staying with a grower. Every year the local sheriff wages a campaign to track down marijuana fields and burn them, but he has always had a hard time getting into Holytail, which is in rugged country and whose growers have an extensive warning network.

At the hotel, Weed runs into Dr. Larry Elasmoo, a dentist he has vague memories of visiting back in the 60s. Dr. Elasmoo was an odd kind of dentist who made appointments for new patients without their knowledge, sending out letters that implied they were required to come. Weed had visited Dr Elasmoo's office, but had only fuzzy memories of what went on there. Seeing him again brings up other memories of the time and soon Weed is lost in recollection.

It is the late 60s again, back at PR3. Rex Snuvvle is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the cult of personality that Weed seems to be encouraging and questions whether Weed shares his own political convictions. Rex has just proven his own socialist convictions to himself by giving his prized sports car to a group of black revolutionaries.

Frenesi, working for Brock Vond, lies to Rex and tells him Weed is an FBI informer. She gives him a gun supplied to her by Vond. Rex confronts Weed angrily, in front of Frenesi and the 24fps cameras. As Rex accuses him of being an informer, Weed turns to Frenesi, understanding he has been set up. Weed tries to leave, but Rex shoots him down. The entire episode is caught on film.

Back in 1984, Prairie is watching the film and listening to the audio with DL and Ditzah. The footage following the shooting shows the coordinated invasion of the campus under the direction of Brock Vond. DL and a few of the other members of 24fps escape the campus, but Frenesi is seen being taken by mysterious convoy that leaves the campus and disappears into a tangle of secluded roads on what appears on the map as a "national security refuge."

DL studies the area on the map and decides she must go rescue Frenesi, who she is certain was kidnapped and taken unwillingly. Using her ninja skills, she makes her way silently along a classified freeway to the area and finds a large compound near Berkeley, a "re-education camp" operated by Vond. She hypnotizes a guard who leads her to Frenesi. They escape the compound and drive off, Frenesi in tears and seemingly reluctant to leave.



DL confronts Frenesi about the rumors that she set Weed up. Frenesi partly admits to it, saying that she could have prevented it. DL also confronts her about the rumors she is involved with Brock Vond. The two women argue about it for two days as they drift around California. Finally DL lets Frenesi out at a freeway exit near a town called Las Suegras.

This is where Frenesi meets Zoyd, Prairie tells DL and Ditzah, back in 1984. Zoyd's band was playing in a bar in Las Suegras when Frenesi walked in. "It was love at first sight," she tells the women. "It usually was," DL responds (pg. 261.)

The three women are still in Ditzah's house, having finished watching the old footage from 24fps. Ditzah receives a call from her sister, Zipi, warning her that strange things are happening and that Brock Vond seems to be getting close. Fearing that they are all about to be picked up and thrown in prison camps, DL, Ditzah and Prairie leave the house and take to the road in DL's Trans-Am.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Pynchon foreshadows Weed Atman's death at the beginning of the chapter by introducing him in the present day as a Thanatoid. After quickly establishing that Zoyd is in partial hiding, the author returns once again to the People's Republic of Rock and Roll and describes the events as Rex Snuvvle shoots Weed Atman.

The entire event is captured by the 24fps crew, who have set up lights and cameras in apparent anticipation. The shooting itself does not appear on film, as the cameraman is changing rolls at the time, but it appears on audio tape. Prairie watches it all unfold in the film archives years later.

Frenesi has not only betrayed Weed, with whom she has been having a sexual relationship, but has betrayed her passive role as a documentarian. She is no longer the all-seeing camera person, simply recording what is happening, but is taking an active role in affecting what is happening on camera. The crossing of this line is hinted at earlier with her on-camera flirtation with Brock Vond. Later in the novel, she will be sought after vehemently by Hector Zuniga to direct his Hollywood film. This might be an acknowledgment that Frenesi has been directing the action of the novel just like she might direct a film.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Brock Vond is thinking about Frenesi, fantasizing about her. He has just had her taken to his "Political Re-Education Program" camp, called PREP, built on the idea of programming politically liberal prisoners to be servants of the conservative government. Brock's philosophy is that the political left, while calling for the destruction of the existing order, actually craves order and wants to belong to the larger community. He is preparing to visit the camp the morning after the PR3 roundup, knowing he will see Frenesi there, called out to stand among the other prisoners for his inspection.

The prisoners are wakened early and brought out for Vond to look over. He is a believer in an obscure theory that tries to predict criminal tendencies by the shape and formation of the skull and face, and he examines the brow lines and jaws of the prisoners as he passes by them.

When he comes to Frenesi, the two exchange some more flirtatiously hostile banter just before Vond turns and leaves the camp, squealing away in a car driven by his bodyguard.

When Brock learns that Frenesi has escaped his camp, he is insane with rage. He is in a bind, however. If he follows his instinct to drop everything and use the forces at his command to look for her, his superiors will put it to a stop. He decides to play for time, finishing the establishment of his PREP camp and looking for the opportunity to start searching for Frenesi.

In the meantime, Frenesi has moved in with Zoyd at the shack near the beach, gotten married and become pregnant with Prairie. Zoyd had approached her at the bar in Las Suegras and she had decided to go with him to provide some cover.

During the pregnancy, Frenesi grows more remote from Zoyd and visits her mother, Sasha, frequently. After Prairie is born, Frenesi enters into a deep depression, culminating in an uncontrolled crying fit when she tells her mother to keep the baby Prairie away from her. She reassesses her life, wishing more than anything that she could return to her innocent childhood with her mother. AS she emerges from her depression, she decides she really does like the baby and is willing to go through the motions of staying with Zoyd and raising the girl.

It is at this point that Brock Vond locates her and has her arrested and brought to him. Soon they are having an affair again.



Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter and the next take place almost entirely in the late 60s and fill in many of the gaps from earlier in the novel, explaining the full story behind Vond's actions in 1984 Vineland.

Pynchon peeks into one of the secret paramilitary forces that pervade the novel. PREP is a prison camp set up by Vond with the apparent purpose of re-educating radical liberals to appreciate the government's conservative values. He also uses it to indulge his control fantasies over Frenesi, however. Vond is motivated by personal revenge and with a great deal of government resources at his disposal, this makes him dangerous.

But Vond cannot justify his program on a purely personal basis, so he must bide his time when Frenesi is rescued from his camp by DL. The question is left open whether Frenesi is actually rescued or is kidnapped against her will. As she is leaving with DL, she looks back in longing.

The story of how Zoyd and Frenesi meet is more fully examined here. He is simply an available source of cover at first, but after she emerges from her depression following the birth of Prairie, she starts to see the possibility of achieving some of the stability she craves by sticking it out with Zoyd. Unfortunately, Vond intervenes and she is caught up again by his charms.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

When Vond learns that Frenesi has had a child, he sneers at first, but later has a jealous drive to go after Prairie. First he must get Zoyd out of the way, however, and he arranges for him to be set up.

Frenesi has moved out and left Prairie with Zoyd. It is about a year after she has gone that Zoyd comes home from a walk to the beach with Prairie to find Hector Zuniga standing in his living room next to a comically large block of marijuana too big to even have fit through any of the doors or windows. Zoyd recognizes he is being set up, and guesses that Vond wants to take Prairie away. Hector insists that he is not there to take the baby. Zoyd asks if he can at least call Sasha before he is arrested. Hector hints that he might grant the favor if Zoyd agreed to inform on some of his friends, something Hector has never convinced him to do. Before Zoyd can answer, Sasha arrives. Hector has already called her.

Sasha takes Prairie and Zoyd is arrested and put in a holding cell where he is visited by Brock Vond. It is the first time he has met Vond, although he already knows about Frenesi's affair with him. Vond offers him a deal. He will be allowed to go but he must take Prairie away and never let Frenesi see her again. Zoyd has no choice but to agree.

He is released to Hector, who explains the terms of the deal. He will be placed on mental disability and receive regular government checks. This will be their way of checking up on him and knowing where he is. If he fails to pick up a check, they'll come looking for him.

Zoyd goes to see Sasha to pick up Prairie. She suggests that he head to the Vineland area, where her family is from and where they hold an annual family reunion. She suggests that if Frenesi should one day grow tired of Brock Vond and come looking for Prairie, she might probably head back to the annual reunion one day.

Zoyd takes Prairie and begins to work his way north, hooking up with an old record producer friend who helps him along. He meets up with Van Meter, who is living near Vineland, and stays with him as he gets established, finding odd jobs and doing carpentry work. He connects with Sasha's family, the Traverses, who disapprove of his freelance work, being longtime union activists, but allow him to attend their reunions as long as he brings Prairie. As Prairie grows up, Zoyd finds himself becoming more and more devoted to her and to her safety, willing to face anyone, even Brock Vond, to keep her safe.



Chapter 14 Analysis

Hector and Zoyd's complicated history is explained in Chapter 14. Hector is doing Brock Vond's dirty work, but out of respect for Zoyd tries to help him in small ways, such as arranging for Sasha to come get Prairie when Zoyd is about to be arrested. The arrest itself is comical in its exaggeration. The amount of marijuana planted in Zoyd's house is unreal, too big to even have fit through any of the doors or windows. Pynchon does not explain how it was moved or removed. It is left to the reader to imagine the strange ways in which these secretive forces can come and go at will, setting up any situation they need to in order to reach their dubious goals.

The full details of Zoyd's deal with Brock Vond explain why Zoyd goes through the bizarre ritual of smashing through a window once a year, and why the event is televised. It is a way for Vond and Hector to monitor Zoyd's location without having to watch him closely. The Tube has been transformed literally into a surveillance system.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

In a large meadow near Vineland, the members of the extended Traverse family are waking up at their annual family reunion. Some are in campers, some tents, some sleeping on the ground. Many have been up late the night before playing cards.

In the Thanatoid village near Shade Creek, the Thanatoids are also waking up. Unusually, the entire Thantoid town has slept through the night before and all wake at once. Something has changed, and they are alarmed. They send out a kind of distress call which is picked up in Los Angeles by DL and Takeshi, who tell Prairie they must respond and ask if she will come with them.

While in Los Angeles, Praire has met up with a friend named Che, a girl about her own age with whom she had once hung out with at various California malls. They meet up at a mall and catch up. Che describes her unhappy life with her mother and her mother's boyfriend, with whom she has been having an affair. She has left home and is working as a prostitute. She encourages Prairie to join her, but Prairie declines.

Prairie returns to their office and finds them in a rush. They had gone to Ditzah's house to get her films but found that the house had been raided by Vond's men and all the archives pulled into the street and burned. Prairie decides she is in danger unless she sticks with DL and Takeshi and the three of them take off for Shade Creek, where DL and Takeshi have an office.

They arrive in Shade Creek to find the Thanatoids deeply disturbed. The area is being flown over regularly by government planes and Hector Zuniga has been running around with a full film crew and raving about Frenesi Gates.

Hector had been in Shade Creek just a few minutes before their arrival, and it this time is headed into Vineland, driving with a television rigged in the back seat so he can see it in the rear view mirror while he drives. The TV was stolen from the "Tubaldetox" center from which he has escaped, and where the therapy he was undergoing backfired and made him even more reliant on television.

Before coming to Vineland, Hector had been in Las Vegas, where Frenesi Gates was living and working at a cocktail lounge. Frenesi is surprised to see him and asks immediately whether it is an official visit or not.

Hector explains that he has a film deal and is holding out for her to direct it. She is skeptical, and Hector begins to try to persuade her. He tells her the film is being made in Vineland, and that he has been in touch with Prairie who wants to see her. He gives her a polaroid photo of Prairie.



Frenesi is upset. She tells Hector that she has traveled all over the country, going wherever she was told to go, but had never gone near Vineland. That was the deal she made with Brock Vond, she tells him, and she stuck to it. Hector replies that there is no more deal. Vond has taken over the Vineland airport and seems to be waiting for something. Hector thinks he is waiting for Frenesi.

Frenesi, Flash and Justin board the plane for Vineland with tickets that Hector provides. When they arrive at the Vineland airport, they are met by Hector and a film crew. Hector escorts them through back doors past security and puts them up at a hotel.

Meanwhile, Zoyd has cut his hair to change his appearance and is lying low with Isaiah Two Four and Van Meter, making plans to get his house back, by violent means if necessary. His lawyer tells him there is little chance of getting it back legally, as it has been seized by the government.

At the hotel in Vineland, Sasha Gates has arrived for the family reunion and has a happy meeting with Frenesi. In Shade Creek, Prairie has struck up a friendship with Weed Atman despite her guilt over her mother's involvement in his murder. Weed explains that Frenesi and Rex were really just instruments of Brock Vond and that the karmic balance he is looking for may be tied to Vond's fate, or possibly to Prairie's.

Prairie finally meets Frenesi at the Traverse reunion. Sasha is there, as well, and the three of them sit and reminisce for several hours. Zoyd meets Flash and tries to put him at ease among so many people. They talk about Frenesi and about Vond, and are just about to discuss the possibility of finding Vond and killing him when Prairie interrupts them. Night has fallen and she is carrying a sleeping bag out to the woods to sleep by herself. She makes her way to a clearing in the forest, climbs into her bag, and falls asleep.

She is awakened by the sound of a helicopter directly overhead. Suspended by a cable and hovering a few inches above her face is Brock Vond. She screams at him to leave, but he calmly asks her if she knows who he is. Prairie pretends to have a knife and threatens him. Vond simply replies that he is her real father, not Zoyd Wheeler.

"But you can't be my father, Mr. Vond," she objected, "my blood is type A. Yours is Preparation H." (p. 376)

As Vond is trying to process the insult, he feels the cable holding him start to winch up. The funding for his special program has suddenly been pulled. The message has been relayed from headquarters to the airport to the helicopter that Vond's authorization has been ended. Screaming in protest, he is hauled up to the helicopter.

Vond is enraged. Back at the airport he steals a helicopter and heads back to finish his mission. He finds himself inexplicably behind the wheel of a car, unaware of how he got there. The car seems to have no power and gradually comes to a stop. By the side of the road is a telephone with a sign that reads "DO IT." He picks up the phone.



At the other end is Vato, who has been watching television with his partner in their tow service, Blood. Vato hangs up the phone and tells Blood it was Brock Vond calling. They take their tow truck out and find Vond, alone on the dark road. The car has disappeared. Vond is confused and uncertain. He climbs into the tow truck.

They drive along a dirt road that gradually seems to be descending into the earth. They come to a river and an old man and an old woman approach the car. Vato and Blood explain they have come to take out Vond's bones, which stay on this side of the river. Then they will take him across.

Back in Shade Creek, the Thanatoids have learned the Vond is dead and DL and Takeshi celebrate. At the Traverse reunion, Prairie is in the clearing, looking at the sky, thinking to herself that the episode with Vond was over too soon. She whispers "You can come back," and "Come on, come in. I don't care. Take me anyplace you want" (pg. 384.) Sensing that Vond is somehow unable to return, she drifts to sleep.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The paths of all the main characters converge in Northern California in the final chapter. Vond is already there, having taken over the Vineland airport. Frenesi and her husband and son have been flown in by Hector in anticipation of creating a scene he can use in his proposed film about the events. DL and Takeshi have rushed there in response to a disturbance felt among the Thanatoids, bringing Prairie with them.

The reunion of Prairie and Frenesi is downplayed in the narrative. They simply retreat to the shade of a tree at the Traverse family reunion and reminisce. Zoyd's obsession with Frenesi has cooled over the years and he seems content to sit and commiserate with Flash, her current husband.

Vond's death is treated mystically and from his own point of view. He is uncertain what has happened, but he has apparently crashed and died in the helicopter he stole to go after Prairie. He is conducted to the underworld by Vato and Blood. Interestingly, he does not become a Thanatoid, but is apparently completely dead, his life having run out at the same time his funding did.

Pynchon ends the novel ambiguously. Prairie stylishly tells off Vond when he tries to kidnap her, but at the end finds herself wishing he would come back and get her. She has fallen under the same spell of her mother, if not of Vond himself, then of the life he represents.



Characters

Zoyd Wheeler

Zoyd Wheeler is an unemployed former hippie surfer from the 1960s who in 1984 lives in Northern California near the town of Vineland. He lives in a house of his own construction with his 14-year-old daughter, Prairie. He makes money performing odd carpentry jobs and by selling crayfish caught in the creeks around his home to restaurants. He also receives regular mental disability checks from the government.

As part of his deal to receive the checks, Zoyd is required to make a public display of his insanity at least once a year. For several years his chosen act of insanity has been to smash through a large window of a local business while being taped by local news stations.

Zoyd was briefly married to Frenesi Gates, who is Prairie's mother, but was divorced when Prairie was a small child. He still obsesses about how he was treated by Frenesi, who he met in a bar where he was playing in a band. He has been living in Vineland for several years, fulfilling his promise to Brock Vond that he will not try to find or contact his ex-wife.

When Brock Vond's forces begin to invade Vineland, Zoyd's house and car are seized and he changes his appearance and send Prairie away for her safety.

Frenesi Gates

Frenesi Gates is the daughter of Sasha and Hub Gates, two politically radical Californians with family histories of radical politics. As a young woman she helps form an activist documentary film group called 24fps, which goes to the campus of a small Southern California college to document the students' radical declaration of independence from the U.S. She also becomes involved in a relationship with DL Chastain, a female ninja who is in charge of security for the film group.

Frenesi enters into a sexual relationship with Weed Atman, one of the leaders of the college group. She also becomes involved with Brock Vond, a federal prosecutor, who wants to undermine Atman and the radical group. She agrees to help Vond by falsely accusing Atman of being an informer, leading to his murder by another member of the group. In the raid that follows she is taken away to a prison camp run by Vond, but is rescued by DL Chastain, who leaves her at a freeway ramp after fighting about her betrayal of Atman and the film group. Shortly afterward, she meets Zoyd Wheeler and eventually marries him.

After giving birth to Prairie, Frenesi becomes extremely depressed and moves in with her mother. Brock Vond eventually finds her again, and they resume their relationship. She enters into the witness protection program and marries a man she met at the prison



camp named Flash, with whom she has a son named Justin. When her government support checks suddenly stop, she realizes she has been cut loose and goes to Vineland where she is reunited with her mother and daughter.

Prairie Wheeler

Prairie Wheeler is the 14-year-old daughter of Zoyd Wheeler and Frenesi Gates. She is raised by her father and has no recollection of her mother, who left when she was only a child. Sent away from Vineland by her father, who fears Brock Vond is after her, Prairie takes to the road with her boyfriend, Isaiah Two Four. She meets with DL Chastain, a former friend of her mother's, who is able to provide her with photographs, film footage, and other information about her mother's past. After several weeks living with DL and Takeshi Fumimota, Prairie returns to Vineland and is reunited with her mother. She also narrowly escapes being kidnapped by Brock Vond.

Brock Vond

This individual is a federal prosecutor with a semi-secret program that aims to educate liberal activists to live in a conservative society. Vond is motivated by a need to control others and is infuriated when he loses possession of Frenesi. He seeks revenge on her by going after her daughter, Prairie, but is thwarted when the funding for his program is suddenly cut just as he is about to abduct her. Infuriated, he steals a government helicopter and apparently crashes into a hillside and dies.

DL Chastain

A martial arts expert and ninja, DL Chastain is the daughter of a military family that moves around the world. While in Japan, she is approached by a martial arts instructor who teaches her the secret ways of the ninja, including how to kill with a touch that takes a year to work. She is recruited by mobster Ralph Wayvone to assassinate Brock Vond while posing as a prostitute, but accidentally gives the death touch to Takeshi Fumimota, who has been sent in Vond's place after the plot was discovered. She is later reunited with Takeshi when he appears at the commune of female ninjas DL belongs to seeking a cure for the death touch. In return for the cure, Takeshi and DL are joined in a kind of partnership by the leader of the commune. The two of them eventually start a business providing therapy to Thanatoids.

DL once had a very close relationship with Frenesi Gates. She takes in Prairie when she is on the run from Vineland and keeps her safe while providing her with background information about her mother.



Sasha Gates

Sasha Gates is the mother of Frenesi and the grandmother of Prairie. She does not think highly of Zoyd, but helps him raise Prairie and provides him with some protection through her extended family in Vineland.

Hector Zuniga

A federal drug enforcement agent who has become a kind of friend to Zoyd Wheeler over the years. Hector is addicted to television and has a movie deal in the works to tell the story of Frenesi Gates and Brock Vond. He is motivated by his promise that Frenesi Gates will direct the film, and works to reunite her with Prairie to give the story a happy ending.

Weed Atman

A math professor at the College of the Surf and the accidental leader of the People's Republic of Rock and Roll. Atman is framed by Frenesi Gates as an informer and shot by Rex Snuvvle. He becomes a Thanatoid, a not-quite-dead person who moves to Shade Creek, a Thanatoid village near Vineland.

Isaiah Two Four

The flamboyant punk rocker boyfriend of Prairie who plays in the band Billy Barf and the Vomitones. He is an advocate of violence but is in reality adept at avoiding violence through quick-witted fast talk.

Takeshi Fumimota

A Japanese insurance investigator who is on the run from a strange force when he stumbles into Brock Vond and is sent to meet DL Chastain, who gives him the ninja death touch. He is later attached to DL by the leader of the ninja commune that cures him of the death touch and goes into business as a therapist to Thanatoids. Takeshi becomes indebted to Zoyd Wheeler when Zoyd helps him escape capture and gives him a business card to use whenever he needs help. Zoyd passes the card on to Prairie and it eventually leads her to Takeshi and DL.

Inoshiro Sensei

This is the mysterious martial arts teacher who instructs DL in the ways of the ninja.



Vato and Blood

These are the owners of a questionable tow service in Vineland. Vato and Blood are also in charge of conducting newly dead souls to the underworld.

Ralph Wayvone

This is an extremely wealthy mobster who tries unsuccessfully to kill Brock Vond.

Rex Snuvvle

This is the idealistic graduate student who shoots Weed Atman after being told by Frenesi that Weed is an informer.

Flash

Frenesi's second husband who she met while both were in Brock Vond's prison camp.

Hub Gates

Frenesi's father, this is a former gaffer for Hollywood films once blacklisted for his liberal leanings.

Justin

This is the son of Frenesi and Flash.



Objects/Places

Vineland

This is a fictional Northern California coastal town based around fishing and logging. Vineland is surrounded by deeply forested hills where marijuana growing is common.

College of the Surf / People's Republic of Rock and Roll

This is a small conservative college in Southern California that is transformed in the 1960s into a rebellious independent nation under the leadership of Weed Atman.

Sisterhood of the Kunoichi Attentives

This is a commune of female ninjas isolated in the hills of California. The sisterhood runs a kind of self-improvement camp based on its martial arts principles. DL Chastain is a member of the sisterhood and takes Prairie there for a time

Tokyo

This is a large city in Japan where Takeshi Fumimota is an investigator and where Ralph Wayvone and DL Chastain try to assassinate Brock Vond.

Shade Creek

This is a village of Thanatoids, people who are not quite alive and not quite dead, located in Northern California near Vineland.

The Cucumber Lounge

This is a roadhouse near Vineland with a series of cabins nearby that are rented out to tourists. Zoyd Wheeler smashes through a window at the Cucumber Lounge at the beginning of the novel.

PREP camp

Short for "Political Re-Education Program," this is a prison camp run by Brock Vond where Frenesi Gates is taken after the raid on the People's Republic of Rock and Roll



Gordita Beach

This is a Southern California beach where Zoyd Wheeler lives as a surfer in the 1960s.

Ditzah Pisk's House

This is the location of the film archives of 24fps where Prairie and DL watch footage from Frenesi's days as a radical filmmaker.

24fps

This is the radical documentary film group in the 1960s that DL Chastain and Frenesi belong to.

Thanatoid

This is a kind of undead person who does not pass into the afterlife because of unfinished business on earth. Thanatoids gather together in villages and apartment complexes to live together.



Themes

The Tube

Television plays a central role in the lives of the characters in "Vineland" and Pynchon raises several questions about its influence not only on American culture, but also on the beliefs and behaviors of regular watchers. He recognizes television as a cultural institution by referring to it always as "the Tube" with a capital T, suggesting it is more than just passive entertainment.

Pynchon's characters frequently refer to the real events unfolding in their lives in terms of television programs. When Brock Vond and his bodyguard, Roscoe, have a narrow escape after being chased through a marijuana field, Roscoe says "Feel like we been in a Movie of the Week!" (pg. 271.) Later, when Flash and Zoyd are about to consider going after Vond, Flash expresses it in TV terms, saying they should find him and "cancel his series" (pg. 374.) For Hector Zuniga, the line between reality and television is nearly non-existent as he runs around humming theme songs constantly and trying to arrange events as if they are episodes in his upcoming movie.

The Tube cannot be trusted, however, Pynchon suggests, hinting that it is one of many tools used to control the population. When Isaiah and Zoyd are discussing the failure of Zoyd's liberal politics to prevail, Isaiah sums it up as a result of them not fully understanding how to use the Tube, and his assessment seems to be apt in Pynchon's world. The Tube has become an accepted reflection of reality for most viewers even as the programming has become more and more surreal. In Pynchon's programming, John Ritter plays Bryant Gumbel and Sean Penn plays Larry Bird in the Movie at Nine, reenacting a basketball game.

Contrasted with these bizarre images on television are the documentary film images taken by Frenesi as a young radical and watched by Prairie years later. Pynchon raises the question of whether the film images are any more or less truthful than the Tube images when the people who appear in Frenesi's films are being directed and manipulated in real life just like actors on a TV program.

The Rise of Conservatism

Vineland was published in the early 1990s after Ronald Reagan, the former governor of California, had been elected US President twice. Much of the novel takes place in the summer of 1984, a few months before Reagan will be elected to his second term.

President Reagan symbolizes the rise of conservatism in the years between 1970 and 1984, as embodied by characters like Brock Vond and Hector Zuniga, whose careers are made as their services are increasingly in demand. Ironically, it is fiscal conservatism that leads to the end of Brock Vond's own career, as budget cuts end his crusade to re-educate the liberal-minded activists of the 1960s and 70s.



But the end of Brock Vond has been coming for some time. His camp is closed down because there is no need to re-educate anyone to work for the conservative government. A steady stream of willing applicants has sprung up. There is no need to keep a lid on the old liberals who have passed through Vond's program. They have been rendered harmless by years of government support. They can safely be purged from the system to save money and to make room in the memory banks of the computers.

Pynchon hints at one of the possible reasons for the failure of the idealism of the 1960s and 1970s is that they failed to see the influence that television could have on American culture. Conservative forces were able to use it to mold opinion and partially hypnotize people into accepting what they see as reality and into defining their own reality in terms of television.

Pynchon also explores the mixed motivation of the idealistic radicals like Frenesi Gates. They seem to be set upon changing the world but are perhaps motivated more by a need to feel they belong to a large and accepting family. This leads to the perverse situation where Frenesi longs to be held in Vond's prison camp and Prairie, whose real family ties have been partly unraveled during her young life, longs for the same kind of fate.

Ambiguous Ethic

The personal ethics of Pynchon's characters vary greatly and have very little connection to what is legal. Brock Vond, who as a federal prosecutor is supposedly one of the "good" guys, is perhaps the least ethically motivated character in the novel, using violence and illegal methods to enact his own version of revenge on Frenesi Gates. Zoyd Wheeler, on the other hand, is equally guilty of breaking numerous drug laws but holds to a personal ethic of loyalty that leads him to never inform on his friends. In between the two is Hector Zuniga, who is not above setting up Zoyd on a false drug possession charge, but also makes sure that his young daughter is taken care of.

The ethics of Frenesi Gates are not so clear, and Pynchon leaves them ambiguous. She appears to be motivated by her love for Brock Vond into violating the trust of her friends and eventually leaving her daughter, yet she also holds true to her word to Vond that she will stay away from Prairie in exchange for being left alone. Her actions seem selfish on the surface, but when one considers that her presence in Prairie's life would possibly endanger Prairie, her actions are cast in a different light.

Less explainable is Frenesi's betrayal of Weed Atman by framing him as an FBI informer. She apparently does it to please Vond, but her motivation is left murky by Pynchon and the reader must simply accept it as fact, much as Prairie does.



Style

Point of View

Vineland is written in the third-person, narrated by an omniscient narrator. It assumes the point of view of nearly all of the characters in turn, filtering the main events of the story through their eyes and examining their own thoughts and motivations.

The points of view assumed by Pynchon also change with the time setting. Several of the characters are depicted in 1970 as well as 1984 and the changes they have undergone in the meantime are evident in the differences in their points of view as they examine their earlier lives from fourteen years' distance. Other characters, such as the young Prairie and her friends, are looking more toward the future in anticipation.

Pynchon's rapid changing of time and place makes a coherent narrative point of view difficult to discern in Vineland, but there are some common threads woven through the story. The novel addresses the change in political conditions in the United States between 1970 and 1984 and stands looking back at the earlier time from the benefit of hindsight, but also in a very different environment that has grown directly from the earlier conditions. It is a much different place than the young people of the late sixties envisioned and the narration at times seems nostalgic for the previous era while at the same time, realistic about some of the naive notions the characters shared as young people.

Setting

Vineland is set almost entirely in California with much of the action taking place in two separate time periods separated by several years.

The story opens in Vineland, California, a fictitious town in the northern part of the state not far from the Pacific ocean and surrounded by heavily wooded hills and valleys. The secluded nature of the region has made it an ideal place for anyone wanting to hide or otherwise get away. Marijuana farming is widespread, with the plants growing far up in the woods.

The action in and around Vineland takes place in the summer of 1984. Ronald Reagan is president and is about to be re-elected to a second term. Popular politics are conservative at the time, and the mostly liberal population of Vineland is finding itself under increasing scrutiny by law enforcement.

Most of the main characters who come together in Vineland in 1984 have known one another since the 1960s, and Pynchon frequently moves back and forth between time periods. The earlier action takes place around 1970 in Southern California, mainly on a college campus that is overtaken by radical students and professors who declare themselves an independent country.



The contrast between the two times and places is an important theme in *Vineland*, as the once radical young characters find themselves coping with the political changes that have taken place by 1984.

Language and Meaning

Pynchon writes in a loose and fluid style that moves quickly, rapidly changing characters and settings. The narrative unfolds in parts with frequent jumps backward and forward in time to fill in gaps from earlier passages.

Pynchon's writing is informal, with the regular use of contractions and slang. His characters speak naturally, often with a "California" accent, and he reflects their pronunciation and inflection by using unconventional spelling and punctuation. "Really" is spelled "rilly," for example, and question marks appear at the end of sentences that are not questions to indicate a rising of the voice.

Pynchon frequently includes passages that are lyrics to songs, usually humorous. He often uses invented words, such as "Tubefreak" to refer to someone addicted to television.

Pynchon makes frequent reference to popular culture, especially television, movies and popular songs. His references are sometimes humorously literal, as when he includes the year of release in parentheses after a character makes reference to a movie or song.

Character names in *Vineland* are unusual and often suggestive. The charming villain, Brock Vond, has a name like a movie idol or soap opera character. "Isaiah Two Four" is named after a Bible verse. "Zoyd Wheeler" suggests a free-moving oddball, and "Weed Atman" seems to indicate a character disoriented in a marijuana haze.

Structure

Vineland is divided into fifteen unnumbered and unnamed chapters of varying lengths. The setting is split between Northern California in 1984 and Southern California in 1970, and the narrative moves back and forth freely between the two times and places as characters in the present recall and describe earlier events.

Pynchon's narrative begins near the end of the story as Zoyd Wheeler fears for his daughter's safety and sends her into hiding. The reasons for his fear are then gradually explained over the course of the novel, as his daughter explores her mother's past with the help of some of the people who knew her. As each new character is introduced, Pynchon often shifts the narrative to provide extensive background information and development for that character, usually sending the scene far afield.

The wide narrative begins to come together in the final chapters as all the main characters converge in *Vineland* at the time of a large family reunion. Pynchon finally

ties up several of the dangling questions raised about the motivations of some of the main characters and brings the larger picture into focus. Pynchon ends the novel ambiguously, but optimistically.



Quotes

"Later than usual one summer morning in 1984, Zoyd Wheeler drifted awake in sunlight through a creeping fig that hung in the window, with a squadron of blue jays stomping around on the roof. In his dream these had been carrier pigeons from someplace far across the ocean, landing and taking off again one by one, each bearing a message for him, but none of whom, light pulsing in their wings, he could ever quite get to in time" (Chapter 1, pg. 3.)

"It was a romance over the years at least as persistent as Sylvester and Tweety's. Although Hector may from time to time have wished some cartoon annihilation for Zoyd, he'd understood from early in their acquaintance that Zoyd was the chasee he'd be least likely ever to bag" (Chapter 3, pg. 22.)

"Frenesi had ridden into his life like a whole gang of outlaws. He felt like a schoolmarm" (Chapter 4, pg. 37.)

"Prairie worked at the Bodhi Dharma Pizza Temple, which a little smugly offered the most wholesome, not to mention the slowest, fast food in the region, a classic example of the California pizza concept at its most misguided" (Chapter 5, pg. 45.)

"When the sixties were over, when the hemlines came down and the colors of the clothes went murky and everybody wore makeup that was supposed to look like you had no makeup on, when tatters and patches had their day and the outlines of the Nixonian Repression were clear enough even for the most gaga of hippie optimists to see, it was then, facing into the deep autumnal wind of what was coming, that she thought, Here, finally - here's my Woodstock, my golden age of rock and roll, my acid adventures, my Revolution" (Chapter 6, pg. 71.)

"She stared into her reflection, at the face that had always been half a mystery to her, despite photos of her mother that Zoyd and Sasha had shown her. It was easy to see Zoyd in her face - that turn of chin, slope of eyebrows - but she'd known for a long time how to filter these out, as a way to find the face of her mother in what was left" (Chapter 7, pg. 98.)

"Gross! Her Mom? This girl with the old-fashioned hair and makeup, always wearing either miniskirts or those weird-looking bell-bottoms they had back then? In a few years Prairie would almost be that age, and she had an eerie feeling miniskirts would be back" (Chapter 8, pg. 114.)

"He's presented DL, however, with a crisis. She knew she'd been slowly poisoning her spirit, drifting further into her obsession with Brock Vond. Here was Ralph, promising resolution and release. What was she complaining about? Only that acts, deeply moral and otherwise, had consequences - only the workings of karma" (Chapter 9, pg. 132.)



"It was just before prime time, with the light outdoors not quite gone, birds loud in the trees above a distant wash of freeway sound, the concrete surf" (Chapter 10, pg. 194.)

"Not only was nobody thinking about the real situation, nobody was even brainlessly reacting to it. Instead they were busy surrounding with classically retrograde cult of personality a certain mathematics professor, neither charismatic nor even personable, named Weed Atman, who had ambled into celebrity" (Chapter 11, pg. 205.)

"Beginning the night she and Rex had publicly hung the snitch jacket on Weed, Frenesi understood that she had taken at least one irreversible step to the side of her life, and that now, as if on some unfamiliar drug, she was walking around next to herself, haunting herself, attending a movie of it all" (Chapter 12, pg. 237.)

Brock Vond's genius was to have seen in the activities of the sixties left not threats to order but unacknowledged desires for it. While the Tube was proclaiming youth revolution against parents of all kinds and most viewers were accepting this story, Brock saw the deep - if he'd allowed himself to feel it, the sometimes touching - need only to stay children forever, safe inside some extended national Family" (Chapter 13, pg. 269.)

"Zoyd looked back, eyes swollen, mouth shut, sweating, his hair, not to mention the brain beneath, all matted down. As an average dooper of the sixties, the narc's natural prey, he expected from any variety of cop at least the reflexes of a predator, but this went beyond - it was personal, malevolent, too scarily righteous. Why?" (Chapter 14, pg. 298.)

"'Whole problem 'th you folks's generation,' Isaiah opined, 'nothing personal, is you believed in your Revolution, put your lives right out there for it - but you sure didn't understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato, just like th' Indians, sold it all to your real enemies, and even in 1970 dollars - it was way too cheap'" (Chapter 15, pg. 373.)



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Pynchon's frequent references to popular culture such as television shows and pop songs. What purpose do the references serve?

Pynchon often includes song lyrics inserted into his prose. How do these lyric sections affect the narrative?

Discuss the Thanatoids. What role does death play in the novel?

Why does Weed Atman become a Thanatoid and Brock Vond does not?

What motivates Frenesi Gates? Why does she betray her friends?

What motivates Brock Vond?

Pynchon shifts fluidly from setting to setting and between characters. Discuss this technique as an effective way to tell a story. What drawbacks might it have?

Paranoia runs deep among Pynchon's characters. Are they justified in their beliefs?