

# **The Wasp Factory Study Guide**

## **The Wasp Factory by Iain Banks**

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## Plot Summary

The novel by Iain Banks, "The Wasp Factory" tells the story of 16-year-old Frank Cauldhame. He lives on an island (unnamed) off the coast of Scotland with his father, Angus. Frank has no official status. He has no birth certificate and no national insurance card. At the direction of his father, he must tell anyone who asks that he is the nephew of Angus—not the son.

Angus seems to be somewhat concerned and protective of Frank. He always insists on cooking and makes all of Frank's meals. Angus keeps some things from Frank. He has a study that he keeps locked and has cautioned Frank against entering—although Frank tries the door every time his father leaves. What is the secret behind that door? Angus was a scientist before his retirement so Frank assumes that his father is conducting some kind of chemical experiments.

Frank has many secrets of his own. He routinely kills and mutilates small animals and uses them in his bizarre rituals. Located on the third floor loft of their home is what Frank has dubbed The Wasp Factory. His arthritic father is unable to climb the stairs leading to the loft so he does not know that it exists. Frank designed and constructed the factory, made from a large salvaged city clock and other items. The device is enclosed in glass and aligned with each number of the clock face is a corridor. A live wasp is placed inside the device. It is not large enough for the wasp to fly so in an effort to get out, he walks down one of the corridors seeking a way out. As soon as the wasp passes that threshold, his fate is sealed. He will either meet his death being burned to death, eaten by ants, bitten by a poisonous spider, eaten by a Venus Fly Trap or other terrible ends.

When Frank consults the Wasp Factory, he receives an answer or a prediction by applying the wasp's fate to a person. Between the ages of 6 and 9, Frank murders three relatives. He kills a boy cousin, a girl cousin and his own little brother. He murders them in the manners dictated by the Wasp Factory.

Frank lives an isolated life on the island and misses his brother Eric, who has been committed to a mental institution. At the beginning of the book, Eric escapes and is not seen until the very end although he makes frequent, bizarre telephone calls to Frank throughout the story. Eric had been a brilliant medical student who went insane after witnessing a horrible incident occurring to a hospitalized child with profound birth defects—its skull was basically missing. When he pushed the temporary flap back over the brain, he saw that maggots were eating the child's brain after which Eric spirals into insanity.

When Frank was three years old, the family dog mauled him and chewed off his genitals. He was understandably bitter and angry but had become a soldier and killer to out-man the men who could procreate.



There is a major twist at the conclusion of the story. Frank finally sneaks into the study and finds a set of tiny genitals preserved in a jar of liquid. He also finds male hormones and other mysterious items. He confronts his father who finally admits that the genitals in the jar are made of plastic. Frank was actually a girl, a perfectly formed female. When the dog attacked her, Angus used the opportunity to rid his life of women. He told Frank that he was a boy and that the dog chewed his sex organs off. He put hormones in his food everyday to stimulate beard growth and prevent menstrual periods.

All the killing, mutilation, lies, secrets, fears and anger were all for naught. The Wasp Factory was a fraud. Frank's father taught him to hate women but ironically he turned out to be a woman. In the end, Frances finds Eric asleep on a hill. Eric, who had escaped from the hospital to see his brother, would soon be awake to meet his sister.



# The Sacrifice Poles

## The Sacrifice Poles Summary

The protagonist, sixteen-year-old Frank Cauldhame, is checking the Sacrifice Poles located around the island he lives on off the coast of Scotland. Each pole has the head of a dead animal affixed atop it, designed to scare off unwanted visitors. He hides in a bunker as he spots police officer Diggs ringing the door bell of his house. His father lets the cop in while Frank keeps a close watch. He fears his brother must have escaped. After he is sure the cop has left, Frank decides to go back home but leaves his bag of heads and bodies in the bunker for safekeeping.

Frank's father is putting out his cigar just as Frank enters. The room is full of smoke as his father tells him the news. His half-brother Eric has escaped from the hospital. Frank would like to see his brother again but if he returns it will cause problems. Frank's father is lame and walks with a stick. That stick is Frank's security—Frank can hear when his father is approaching. Frank keeps a secret Wasp Factory in the third-story loft of the house which his father can no longer access due to his arthritic legs.

Frank's father demonstrates some strange behavior and has secrets of his own. He has measured virtually everything in the house—the height, width, all dimensions are noted on pieces of paper attached to the items as well as recorded in his Measurement Book. He often quizzes Frank on these dimensions and becomes upset when he does not provide the correct answers. His father comments that he hopes Frank was not out killing animals. Frank reminds his father that "he is not Eric." His father comments that perhaps it is Frank who should be hospitalized rather than Eric. Frank is not worried. His father would never have him put away since Frank does not "officially" exist. He has no national insurance number, no birth certificate. If the authorities discover that little secret, his father, Angus, would have a lot to explain. Frank has never been to school but has been educated at home by his father who is quite bright, a scientist in fact. So Frank has gotten quite a good education, probably better than those his age who attend school.

Frank has been in every room in the house except his father's study—it is always locked and he is not allowed in there. He is very curious about what goes on behind that door. He thinks his father may conduct chemical experiments there. Frank goes to the bathroom for a "crap." He does not have to pee because he used his urine to leave his scent on the Security Poles that day. He has problems with some bodily functions due to the unfortunate accident he suffered years before.

The phone rings. It is Eric on the phone. Eric will not tell Frank where he is but that he is on his way. Frank reminds Eric not to burn any dogs on the way home—people get upset. Eric becomes enraged denying that he ever set any dogs on fire.



Frank goes to bed listening to the radio. He fantasizes about his Sacrifice Poles, recalling every element of each pole. He feels safe because he knows his Sacrifice Poles—his sentries—will alert him if there is any threat. Frank looks in the mirror and thinks he looks too fat. He blames his weight problem on his accident. With his soft, chubby appearance, no one would ever guess that he killed three people. He recalls how he sometimes puts a wasp on the bells atop his alarm clock. When the clock goes off, it clobbers the wasp.

## The Sacrifice Poles Analysis

The first chapter introduces the reader to Frank Cauldhame who leads a ghoulish, secret life on the island, off of Scotland, where he lives with his father. He affixes the heads of dead animals on Sacrifice Poles and plants them around the island. They serve as a warning system for him and as a way to scare off visitors. Eric Cauldhame, Frank's older half-brother, has escaped from a mental hospital and is on his way home. Frank's father is not happy with the prospect of having Eric there but comments that perhaps Frank should be in the mental ward instead of Eric. When Eric calls, Frank cautions him not to burn any dogs on the way home. The accusation angers Eric who says he has never done such a thing. The reader is led to believe that perhaps Eric has been blamed for Frank's actions.

It is a strange household. Mr. Cauldhame's study is off-limits to Frank—he has never been in there. He thinks his father, who is a scientist, is conducting experiments. Frank blames his soft, chubby body on a yet un-explained mishap he suffered. No one would suspect that he, this chubby fellow, killed three people. Mr. Cauldhame cannot access the loft area of the house due to his arthritic legs. The loft is where Frank has his Wasp Factory. What goes on in that factory is not clear at this point—but it is probably not good!



# The Snake Park

## The Snake Park Summary

Frank checks out his Sacrifice Poles located throughout the island, finding them all in good order. He will not need to replenish them with the contents of his bag of heads and bodies. He had contemplated beginning another war but decides to put it off since Eric will be coming home. He would not want to interrupt the war in the middle of battle. Frank recollects building dams on the island to protect his father's house from fire. He remembers in meticulous detail how he constructed them. After eating lunch with his father, he learns that his father will be away for the day. He does not say where he is going but Frank suspects that it is to Inverness where his father conducts some mysterious business. Frank assumes his departure has something to do with Eric's eminent return. As soon as his father leaves, Frank checks the study door—locked as usual. Someday, he muses, his father will forget to lock it.

Frank takes off with his catapult and air rifle. He will be crossing the small bridge to the mainland to Rabbit Grounds where he will kill some rabbits for his collection. He reminisces about some of his relatives—he has killed three of them who were all about his age at the time. Other than those three deaths, he can recall three other unusual deaths of relatives. His father's brother, Leviticus, was killed in South Africa when a homicidal black threw himself out of a window and fell on Leviticus. His uncle eventually died of his injuries.

On his mother's side, his uncle Athelwald Trapley emigrated to the United States and fell in love with a woman who broke his heart and ruined his life. In despair, he planned his suicide but he botched it. Instead of dying from the gas he turned on in his house, he forgot and lit a cigarette. The house exploded and he caught on fire and ran out of the house. He jumped into a trough of water and got stuck there and drowned. Another dead uncle is Harmsworth Stove who committed suicide by driving the bit of an electric drill into the side of his head. Although not directly to blame, Frank feels some responsibility for his death. The uncle was depressed from the death of his daughter, Esmerelda. Of course, the uncle did not know that it was he, Frank, who had murdered her.

Frank takes off with his gun and catapult to hunt rabbits on the mainland. He crosses the small bridge and quickly runs to the Rabbit Grounds. Town boys used to set traps there but Frank has not seen any lately. He encounters a large male rabbit, a buck. His aim is off and his bullet hits the rabbit in the leg. The enormously large buck runs at Frank and attacks him. They scuffle and Frank is bitten by the rabbit's long teeth. Frank uses his catapult but still the rabbit fights on. Finally, he is able to kill the rabbit. However, Frank's beloved catapult is irretrievably broken but Frank will get his revenge.

Frank runs to his shed and retrieves some of his home-made bombs. He pushes a bomb up inside the dead rabbit and plants other bombs in the surrounding rabbit holes.



He lights the wicks and blows the bombs up which collapse the rabbit holes. Frank is ecstatic as he watches rabbits stumbling out, bloody and disoriented. Frank finishes them off by throwing petrol on them. He explodes the bomb in the buck rabbit and it goes flying into pieces.

That night in bed, waiting to hear his father return, he thinks that the fight with the large rabbit was a bad omen—one that the Wasp Factory had warned him of. The current feeling is similar to the time he killed his cousin Blyth Cauldhame. Blyth had come to spend the weekend and as a prank burned all of Eric's and Frank's rabbit hutches with a flame-thrower built by Eric. Although he was punished by his parents, it was not enough for Frank. Blyth visits a year later. In the intervening time, Blyth has lost the lower part of one of his legs in an accident. When Blyth is asleep on a grassy hill, Frank puts a poisonous adder in his artificial leg which Blyth takes while he sleeps. The subsequent bites of the adder kill Blyth but no one suspects Frank. Two years after that, Frank kills his own younger brother, Paul, for very different reasons. He kills his cousin Esmerelda on a whim. But that was years ago. He was just going through a phase and does not expect to ever kill again.

## The Snake Park Analysis

Frank's murdering ways are revealed in this chapter. He kills his cousin Blyth by hiding an adder in his artificial leg. The killing is revenge for Blyth using Eric's flame-thrower to kill Frank's and Eric's pet rabbits the year before. This is Frank's first murder—he is six years old. He recollects that two years later, he kills his own younger brother Paul for very different reasons—yet to be revealed. Frank then kills his cousin Esmerelda, he says on a whim. Frank terms his murdering spree as just a phase he was going through. He does not plan to murder ever again—which the reader probably does not find plausible.

The Wasp Factory is alluded to in this chapter but the mystery remains. Answers or predictions are somehow generated by the Wasp Factory. The Factory recently warned Frank of impending danger. When Frank has to battle a large buck rabbit that he has never seen on the grounds before, he takes it as a sign that the Wasp Factory's prediction of danger had been accurate. He is positioning himself for more danger to come. He makes a slight reference to the current environment being similar to that when he murdered his young relatives.





# In the Bunker

## In the Bunker Summary

Frank hates women and the sea—women because they are weak and stupid and the sea because it washes away things he has built. He hates Mrs. Clamp who is the Cauldhame's housekeeper who cleans the house once a week. She is not really a woman the same way a young girl is not—but she used to be a woman.

The next morning, Frank sees that his father had returned—he is snoring away in his room. Frank meticulously grooms himself. He carefully shampoos his hair and showers. He cuts his nails and washes between his toes and cleans out his nose and ears. When he needs to create special substances and needs toe jam or belly button fluff, he has to go without a shower for days—but he has no need for those materials at the moment. He dresses and takes his equipment outside to check the island. He winds up near a tree that, when a sapling, served as one of his best weapons—he used it as a giant catapult. Frank recalls how he used to go to the pet store in town and purchase gerbils and other small animals so he could hunt and kill them. No one in town seemed to be suspicious.

A bottle has been swept ashore. It irritates Frank—another challenge from the sea. He promptly throws it out to sea and hits it with a barrage of rocks, finally sinking it. It is a victory over his enemy, the sea. Frank then proceeds to the old bunker which he keeps secured with a padlock. Inside he lights a candle. He had long ago stolen a candle making kit from the house, soon discovering that wax was a perfect wasp prison. He looks at the small head of a wasp sticking out from the glowing candle. It soon ignites and becomes ashes from the fire. Frank lights another candle in the Skull of Old Saul, a family dog that had been murdered. The bunker and its contents makes Frank recall the critters he has killed and the flaming bodies of the rabbits he blew up the day before. He bitterly thinks of the demise of his catapult—The Black Destroyer—from the attack of the large rabbit. He thinks of Eric and about the Factory's warning.

All around the room are strung the skulls of a myriad of animals and birds—from horses to mice. They all watch him as he takes a wasp cadaver that had been through the factory and burns it on a pile of sugar and insect repellent. He is hoping for a message or a vision of Eric—but the fumes emit no message or image.

Frank goes into town to buy more pellets and a hunting catapult. The store's proprietor, Mr. Mackenzie, asks how Frank's uncle is. The mothers of small children used to warn their kids to behave or they would get Eric Cauldhame after them. Now Frank has that honor. Rude insults are flung at him when he comes to town—but it does not really bother him. Frank is irritated that he has to buy sugar and pesticide in town and lug it back on his bike. His father has a basement full of the explosive cordite but does not let Frank go near it. He is not sure why his father keeps it—his father's father got it from an old Royal Navy ship. If Frank could use it, it would save him a lot of time and effort.



Frank's father tells him that the authorities are searching for Eric on the moors. At dinner Mr. Cauldhame admonishes Frank about drinking too much when he goes to town. Frank plans to do what he wants: "What the hell's the point of drinking if you don't get drunk?" Frank recalls having difficulty with the boys in town at one time. He defends himself against them but sets up trip-wires and other traps on the grounds just in case they try to sneak up on him. He also rigged a Frisbee with razors embedded on the edge to defend himself with. He has quite a few other weapons and plans to buy a large crossbow.

## In the Bunker Analysis

More of Frank's secret and macabre life is revealed. He has a deep-seated hatred for women and the sea. Serial killers typically have a "woman" issue. Frank has a bunker where he keeps skulls—dozens or hundreds. Old Saul's Skull is the skull of a dog. Frank seems to gravitate to his skull which he uses as a candle holder. He takes the corpse of a wasp and burns it in a ritual hoping to receive a message or an image of Eric but does not. The wasp had been through the "process" in the Factory and was apparently ready to use for sacrifice—a hint of what goes on in the Wasp Factory. He senses that something of significance will soon happen. He has a cache of weapons and is ready for anything.

Eric calls again late that night. Frank answers and pretends to his father that it is someone else. Even though Frank seems to dread Eric returning, he is careful to protect him from his father. The relationship between the two brothers is not explained yet. Frank does not seem like he could be truly close to anyone and Eric is insane. It is difficult to imagine they have a normal relationship but their connection may be part of the so far unrevealed, mysterious plot.



# The Bomb Circle

## The Bomb Circle Summary

Frank begins to think there may be a lot of different people inside him. He sometimes feels guilty for killing his brother and two cousins. He even feels guilty about killing the rabbits in revenge for the rouge rabbit that destroyed his catapult. He acknowledges that he is prejudiced against black people although he has never been around them much. He wishes he could prove that he is not a racist. Part of him does not enjoy the naming ceremony for his new catapult. However those protests are in the minority—for the most part, Frank likes the ceremony because it makes him feel powerful.

As Frank walks to the Bomb Circle he thinks about the motorbike he wants that his father refuses to give him, about the candles and the skulls in the bunker, the many dead animals. He blames all his difficulties on Agnes—his father's second wife and his mother. He did not know her because she left soon after he was born. However, she was in part responsible for the accident he had. Frank reflects on the murder of his younger brother, Paul. Frank was 8 and Paul was 5 when Frank killed him. Frank knew that he would "never be free of the dog" until Paul was gone. The memory of his brother's death is vividly recalled to him as he walks to the Bomb Circle—where Paul died.

The two brothers are walking along the beach when Frank spots a large, abandoned German mortar stuck in the sand, nose up. He tells Paul that the item is a bell and that he needs to strike it hard to hear it ring. Frank tells Paul to wait until he is a good distance away so he can determine if the tone carries. Paul is practicing his swing with a large plank, hitting it on the sandy surface and tide pools. When Frank is far enough away to avoid injury to himself, he gives Paul the signal to hit the "bell." After a few misses, Paul hits the bomb and disappears in the huge explosion that follows. Chards of splintered rocks fall to earth and form a rudimentary circle. Frank dubs the area the Bomb Circle.

Frank meets his friend, Jamie the Dwarf, after diner at the Cauldham Arms—the town pub named after his family. Jamie sits atop Frank's shoulders so he can see the band. Against his father's warning, Frank again gets very drunk—so drunk and sick that he can hardly stumble home.

## The Bomb Circle Analysis

Frank thinks that there are many voices inside his brain—which are not always in agreement about what he should do. Is this a figure of speech or a subtle recognition of insanity? An internal conflict is brewing since this chapter is the first in which there is any reference to guilt. The first mention is made of Frank's mother who leaves him



before he can remember her. She abandons him and he hates her. His hatred of women no doubt originates with his hurt from being abandoned and unloved by his mother.

Frank recalls the murder of his younger brother, Paul, with no apparent regret. He comments that Paul "had to die" because he—Frank—would never be free of the dog. There is a running theme with Frank and his brother and dogs. Eric apparently burned some neighbors dogs, Frank's cherished Saul's Skull is that of a dog and now the reference of Frank's need to be free from the dog. The connection between Frank's liberty from dogs and the death of his younger brother is not yet clear.



# A Bunch of Flowers

## A Bunch of Flowers Summary

Frank recalls that his decision to kill his cousin Esmerelda was because he had knocked off two male relatives and that her death would serve to balance things out a bit. Nine-year-old Frank plots to kill her with a kite. He constructs a large kite painted with a large red dog. He literally straps Esmerelda's arms onto the strings of the kite. It is so large, that the brisk wind lifts the kite and the little girl into the air. As she screams and struggles, Frank runs after her, pretending to try to save her—just in case anyone is watching.

He is aware that the police and his relatives may suspect him since two other children had died in his custody in recent years although he had never been blamed for their deaths. He rubs sand in his eyes and pretends to be upset and near catatonic when the search party discovers him on the shore. He is desperately clinging to a bunch of wild flowers that Esmerelda dropped as she was lifted up by the kite. They then begin to look for Esmerelda. The parents of Esmerelda shake him for answers but he remains mute. He pretends to be distraught and feigns nightmares to add authenticity. He finally tells Officer Diggs that Esmerelda tried to fly a kite that was too big for her and it took her out to sea. He tells the officer that he ran and chased after her but in vain. He pretends to feel guilty. He cries that he is jinxed—people around him die.

Esmerelda was never seen again. Frank figured she either would up in the bottom of the ocean or crashed into a mountain and was eaten by eagles. He hoped, however, that she remained aloft and died of starvation, becoming the skeletal pilot of the large kite.

Eric telephones again. Frank is fearful when he hears the sound of a dog in the phone booth with Eric. Suddenly there are horrible noises as Eric is apparently torturing the dog. Eric is angry, however, as the dog is able to escape. Frank is concerned and determines he will have to fix the matter of Eric long distance. He will have to enlist the help of the Factory. All dogs are not the issue—it was just Old Saul who was the Castrator and Saul was now in his power.

## A Bunch of Flowers Analysis

The last murder Frank commits, to this point, is described. The main reason for killing his young female cousin, Esmerelda, is to balance out his killing of two male relatives. Since it has already been established that Frank hates women, it makes sense that he could ruthlessly plot and perpetrate the murder of the little girl who thought she was going to fly a kite. Although most assuredly mentally imbalanced, he is grounded enough to feign despair over her loss.



Eric calls Frank again. This time Frank can hear the sounds of a dog in the phone booth with Eric. Her hears the sounds of Eric torturing the dog but the dog is able to run away. Frank decides to illicit help from the Factory which is a signal that the purpose of the Factory—insane as it may be—may soon be revealed. Frank's accident is probably that the dog Old Saul bit off Frank's penis when he was a youngster—the main source of his anger and revenge and madness no doubt.



# The Skull Grounds

## The Skull Grounds Summary

Both of Angus' wives leave him—Eric's mother first and then years later, Frank's mother. When Frank is just a baby, his mother, Agnes, takes off with no explanation. Three years later she re-appears at the Cauldhame house 8 months pregnant with someone else's child. Frank's father allowed her to stay and have the baby, Paul. The family dog, Old Saul, is spooked by the motorcycle Agnes arrives on. When he barks at her, she viciously kicks him sending him into more confusion.

When Agnes has the baby, three-year-old Frank is outside playing by himself. Right when the baby is about to be born, Frank's father hears Frank scream. He runs out and finds that his son has been attacked by Old Saul. The dog has bitten off his genitals. Mr. Cauldhame kills the dog and buries it. Years later, Frank begins killing mice and gerbils. While in the act of burying these "pets" he is actually searching for Old Saul's skull. He finally locates it and feels he has reclaimed his power from the dog.

Since the baby is named Paul and is born at the same time Old Saul is killed, Frank believes that the spirit of Old Saul is instantaneously transferred to Paul. Therefore, Paul has to die.

## The Skull Grounds Analysis

Frank's castration by the dog, Old Saul, is confirmed. It is also revealed that Paul was not Mr. Cauldhame's child. Agnes leaves her husband right after Frank is born. Three years later, she returns and has the baby, Paul, then leaves again. When Agnes is in labor, Frank is attacked by Old Saul. Frank's father kills the dog and buries it. Since the baby is named "Paul" at the same time Old "Saul" is killed, Frank is sure that the dog's soul is transferred to Paul. In the Bible, "Saul" and "Paul" refer to the same person.

To avenge his injury, Frank determines that he must do two things. First, he must find the skull of Old Saul buried somewhere on the grounds; and secondly, he must kill Paul who has taken on the spirit of Old Saul. He accomplishes both and feels these actions have given him renewed power.

He blames Agnes in part for the accident because she scares the dog with her motorbike and kicks him.



# Space Invaders

## Space Invaders Summary

Frank meets Jamie at the Cauldhame Arms in town. They play space invaders which Frank likens to current man. It would be better to wipe out the human race before it sends space invaders out to destroy other worlds. That night at home, Frank decides it is time to get an answer from the Factory. He steals up to the loft and checks on the device's mechanisms and doors—everything seems in order. Frank ventures out and catches a fresh wasp which he keeps alive in a jar. He constructs a dam near the shore but then decides to blow it up. He runs for a bomb and blows the dam to smithereens, watching with glee as the water runs down the various channels caused by the explosion.

Frank takes the new wasp to the house. As he lays asleep he contemplates the Factory. The Factory is about the end, about death. He feels content knowing that the Factory is primed and ready to work. Tomorrow he will learn from the Factory what is about to happen. After his consultation, he will attempt to contact Eric through Old Saul's skull. He and Eric are brothers and both men, even though he is only half a man. He and Eric understand each other even though Eric is crazy and Frank is sane. Everyone has a purpose. Women were made to give birth and men were made to kill.

## Space Invaders Analysis

Frank has decided to consult the Wasp Factory to find out what is going to happen after which he will try to contact Eric through Old Saul's skull. He feels confident that the Wasp Factory will accurately predict the future. In Frank's mind, he and Eric understand each other and are both men. Women were meant to have children and men were meant to kill. Frank refers to Eric as crazy and to himself as the sane one. By this time, the reader is well aware that Frank is insane and it seems that Eric is as well although he has only been visible in the story via late night phone calls to Frank.





# The Wasp Factory

## The Wasp Factory Summary

Early the next morning, Frank takes the wasp up to the Wasp Factory. The factory is a large layout, based on the face of a clock. At each of the clock's numerals is a corridor and a door that closes behind it. It has plywood sides and is covered in glass. Once a wasp enters the Factory, he cannot escape. Frank proceeds with a ritualistic catechism in which he confesses all his sins and murders as well as his wishes and hopes. The ceremony includes the skull of the snake that killed Blyth, a piece of the bomb that killed Paul and a piece of the kite that took Esmerelda to her death. Also present are several teeth of Old Saul, the dog who destroyed Frank's manhood.

After concluding the ceremony, Frank places the wasp at the entry of the Factory. The wasp enters and the door closes behind him. There is a photograph of Eric affixed to the factory. The wasp wanders around the face of the clock. He could travel down a corridor that takes him to a waiting Venus Flytrap or a hungry spider (where Blyth was sentenced to death). A wasp chose Paul's death by fire and Esmerelda's death by drowning. Other choices will take the wasp to the Volt Room where he will be electrocuted or the Blade corridor where he will be sliced to pieces. The choice the wasp makes will provide Frank with his answer. The wasp finally chooses the corridor leading to his fiery death. Frank takes the wasp corpse, places him in a matchbox and ends the ceremony at the candle lit altar.

Frank takes the wasp coffin to the Bunker and places it in front of Old Saul's skull. Eric was once clever and kind. But now he is crazy and is a force of fire and an approaching menace. Frank clutches at his eye socket and grasps that of the dried up skull of Old Saul. He feels a connection to Eric but envisions fire and is flung back to the bunker wall. He burns the wasp coffin along with the photo of Eric. He had felt he was in Eric's body, feeling his blood pumping and seeing the world through his eyes but being part of Eric's insanity proved too much for Frank. Eric is a lunatic and his only mission is to set fires. Frank now knows that he is facing a Jihad from Eric and he must prepare.

Eric calls again that night with his usual nonsensical comments. He tells Frank that he will soon be home but refuses to tell him how far away he is. Eric has broken into someone's vacant vacation home and is enjoying himself in its comfort. Frank asks him if he experienced a strong feeling that morning. Eric says he did not and hangs up on the frustrated Frank.

## The Wasp Factory Analysis

Here it is revealed that the Wasp Factory is a device that Frank constructs to provide answers about the future. The base of the device is a large city clock that he obtained from a salvage dump. He aligned a corridor with each numeral on the clock's face. Each



corridor leads to a type of death. He inserts a live wasp into the device and depending upon which corridor the wasp selects, he receives his answer as to how a subject should die. A wasp selects a venomous fly trap for Blyth who dies from the venom of a snake. Another wasp travels down a corridor toward fire, determining Paul's death in a fiery explosion. The wasp for Esmerelda chooses drowning for her demise.

Frank consults the Factory about Eric. The answer is death by fire—although it is not clear who will die by fire. Frank is preparing himself to face his brother who will soon be home.



# What Happened to Eric

## What Happened to Eric Summary

Frank recalls the love he had for his older brother, Eric. Eric spends years away with relatives. They have intervened in a what they think is a bad situation. Angus is letting little Eric run amok on the island and, worse, dress like a girl. The relatives suggest that they unburden the single father Angus. They will take care of Eric so he can tend to young Frank. Eric rejoins his father and Frank a year after Frank's unfortunate accident. Frank remembers running and playing all over the island with Eric. He loves when his brother is home and loathes the time he spends away at boarding school. Eric is brilliant and like his father decides to become a doctor. When Eric starts going away for university semesters, Frank begins to feel he is losing his brother. When Eric returns in the summer, he still plays with Frank but more like an adult playing with a child—not especially enjoying it himself. Frank comforts himself with his ability to be a man by living vicariously through his brilliant, kind brother who is out in the real world.

During his second year in med school, Eric is helping out in the ward that cares for children with terminal illnesses and profound birth defects. Eric is going through some personal trauma. He has fallen for a girl who ultimately rejects him. As he has for years, Eric is suffering from debilitating migraine headaches. One evening, he is attempting to feed a child who is born with no skull to cover its brain. In place of the skull is a flexible plate. The child seems different that night and is not responding to food. Eric thinks he sees something move slightly on the child's head. He gently pushes back the plate. Maggots are crawling all over the child's brain and consuming it. He goes rather out of his mind that night. He recovers somewhat and begins attending classes again but soon he begins drinking, missing classes and becoming belligerent.

He is not allowed to finish that year and comes home. Eric's mental condition continues to deteriorate at home. He scares the town's children—trying to push worms down their clothes and maggots in their mouths. He begins snatching neighbor's dogs and setting them on fire. He is arrested and soon declared insane. He is a combative patient and assaults several hospital workers. He escapes several times from institutions but finally seems to be more settled once he is moved to a high security hospital in Glasgow. However, alas, he has escaped again now and is on his way home.

## What Happened to Eric Analysis

The reader learns two important elements of the story. When Frank is a young boy, after his horrible accident, Eric moves back to the island to live with Frank and his father. Eric is Frank's salvation. He worships his older brother. When the brilliant Eric leaves for med school, Frank is comforted that though he will never advance beyond adolescence, he can live vicariously through his older brother who is intelligent, successful, kind and



out there in the real world. When Eric goes mad, he not only destroys his life but Frank's one chance to overcome his tragic disability.

Frank is preparing to meet Eric—yet another person and perhaps his only true friend—who has abandoned and disappointed him.

# Running Dog

## Running Dog Summary

Frank is angry at Eric for going insane. Insanity is for women—it is a weak reaction to strife. A real man can handle the challenges of life. Eric has too much woman in him. Frank spends the very hot day exploring the island, checking the coast for any goodies from the sea and checking the dump for the same. He rests against a tree as he pans his binoculars along the horizon. He spots a boarded up holiday home near the coast. Then on a distant hill he sees an animal figure on fire running wildly along the turf. He loses sight of the animal and goes after it on foot. He finally finds the animal, a dog, resting in a creek. The dog is badly burned so Frank uses his catapult to put it out of its misery. He buries the dog and tries to remove any tracks that he made to the creek. He burns the grass around the area to cover for the incident as well.

Eric calls that night but denies he burned the dog. Sensing that Eric is nearby, Frank warns him to leave the dogs and the town children alone.

## Running Dog Analysis

More of Frank's disappointment in his brother is revealed. He is angered and feels betrayed that his brother allowed himself to go insane. It shows that he is weak and has too much "woman" inside of him, thus tying his long-held hatred of woman with the profound abandonment by the brother he loved so dearly. Frank sees an animal burning, presumably set on fire by Eric who must be nearby. The question has posed itself throughout the story: Eric, in his deranged state, is presumably exacting revenge on dogs because of the tragic accident that happened to Frank.



# The Prodigal

## The Prodigal Summary

Frank takes a spin around the island to check his Sacrifice Poles all the while looking for any sign of Eric. He comes back inside just as Mrs. Clamp is serving lunch. She acts rather annoyed and mentions that one of the townspeople's dog is missing. Frank comments that he is glad his brother is not in town or else he would be blamed for it. While Frank is scouting around again in the afternoon, he sees his father stagger and stumble toward the bridge that leads to town. Frank races back in the house and sees an empty bottle of whiskey on the table and the phone off the hook. Maybe his father got a call from Eric that upset him so much that it drove him to drink.

The phone rings again and it is Angus asking, in a slurred voice, that Frank meet him in town by the Library—Eric has been captured. As Frank walks toward town, he sees that the telephone wire has been freshly cut. He also sees a still bloody black and white ear pinned to one of the poles. Frank rushes back to the house. The phone is dead. His father lied—Eric is not caught. He is out there. His father ran off because he fears facing Eric. The nerve to call himself a man, Frank thinks. Frank takes his binoculars and watches the horizon out the window of the loft.

Frank startles awake and realizes he had been asleep for several hours. He hears someone inside. He sneaks down and sees that it is father, still very drunk. Soon there is silence except for static from the TV. Frank sneaks down and finds his father's coat with his set of keys inside. He runs up and finds his father fast asleep and snoring loudly. Frank tries an odd looking key in the study door—it fits. He goes inside and sees a desks, tables and bookcases, cluttered with papers and all matter of things. There is also a table with chemicals and test tubes. Then he spots a jar containing a specimen in water—the specimen is a set of tiny genitals. Frank tears up at the sight. Another key fits a locked desk. In it he finds tampons and a box labeled "hormones—male." He briefly thinks of the similarity of his mother's and father's first names—Agnes and Angus. Are they one in the same? There is a box marked "KBr" which seemed familiar but Frank cannot recall its exact meaning.

Frank angrily picks up the specimen jar and barges into his father's room. He wakes him, demanding answers. Frank holds a knife up to his still drunken father's throat as he takes his father's pants down. Well, Angus is a man as witnessed by has large male genitals. Just then, they hear a scream and look out the window. Sheep are running over and down a far hill and are all on fire. Frank runs outside to confront Eric who is taking an ax to the cellar door. Through Frank's protests he finally breaks in and sets a fire. Frank is able to put the fires out before the flames engulf the cordite. The fire causes Frank's homemade bombs that he keeps in the shed to explode, destroying the little building. Eric vanishes.



Frank returns inside. He wants to know what happened to him. As Angus picks up the jar, it slips and breaks. He picks up the genitals and closes his hands around them. When he opens his hand, he has a pink ball made of something like plasticine—not human flesh. Frank demands that Angus tell him the truth.

## The Prodigal Analysis

Frank knows that his father lied to him about Eric being caught—he wanted to lure Frank away to save him from danger since Eric was still on the loose. Curiously, Angus gets very drunk and seems upset and overly protective of Frank. Later that night, Frank finally gets Angus' set of keys and gets into the study. He finds what he assumes must be his genitals in a jar of liquid. He also finds a box marked "male hormones" and some other strange items. He is outraged and confronts his father. The author has hinted at several possibilities. Are the hormones for Eric who was allowed to wear dresses when he was little; or, were Frank's mother and father one in the same—Angus and Agnes? Neither scenario is correct—they are both red herrings designed to throw the reader off.

Eric goes on a fiery rampage and vanishes again. However, Eric's behavior does not distract Frank. He sits his father down—he wants to know the truth. As his father picks up the jar to show Frank that he indeed lost his genitals, fate steps in. He drops the jar and the "genitals" fall out. They are not sex organs at all—they are artificially created out of plastic. The reader is now very aware that Angus has been lying to Frank—but what is the truth?



# What Happened to Me

## What Happened to Me Summary

Frank sees Officer Diggs heading toward the house as he heads out looking for Eric. He finds Eric asleep and sits down next to him. He wakes momentarily and puts his curly head in Frank's lap. Frank reflects on what his father just told him. Frank is really a girl. When the dog mauls her, Angus uses the opportunity to drive women from his life altogether—his wives had both deserted him. Angus creates a small set of genitals from plasticine to keep in a jar in case he had to prove to Frank that he had actually lost them. What Frank thinks is a mutilated penis stump is really her female genitalia, a little scarred but in tact. Her father, who always insists on cooking, puts male hormones in Frank's food, which cultivate beard growth and eliminate the menstrual cycle. Angus feeds Frank enough androgen to ward off any sexual drive. Angus keeps Frank out of school and tells him he has no birth certificate to strengthen the ruse.

Since he believes has been stripped of his male sex organs, Frank becomes a killer in order to reclaim some semblance of his stolen manhood. He will out-man other men. The years of hurt and anger, the mutilations, the murders are all for nothing. The Wasp Factory is a fraud. Frank thinks she had traveled down a corridor where her fate had been sealed. However now she is walking down another that she could have never imagined and the door this time is truly closed behind her. Eric comes home to reunite with his brother. When he wakes up he will find that he has a sister.

## What Happened to Me Analysis

Angus has been very hurt by women in his life. Both wives leave him. Frank or Francis is actually Frances, a girl. Out of Angus' rage at women, he uses the dog mauling as an opportunity to rid his life of women. Frank could never see his birth certificate because it would reveal that he is a female. Unfortunately, his father teaches him to hate women, even though he finds out in the end that he is a woman.

Growing up all those years thinking he is a male who has lost his sex organs and is thus emasculated, Frank turns to murder to prove his manhood. He has no purpose in life—he will be an adolescent forever and can never procreate. In the end when Frank accepts that he is a woman, he realizes that the anger, fear, secrecy, mutilations and the murders were all unnecessary. He learns that the Wasp Factory is a fraud. He had gone down a corridor that he thought had sealed his fate only to ultimately learn there is a totally unimagined path he will now be traveling.





# Characters

## Frank Cauldhame

Frank Cauldhame is a 16-year-old who lives with his father on an island off the coast of Scotland. He kills animals and mounts their heads on long poles—he calls them Sacrifice Poles—which he plants around the island to serve as his sentries. They are intended to scare off visitors and alert him to danger. The book is written in first person and allows the reader to know all of Frank's thoughts. He recollects how he killed three members of the Cauldhame family, noting that they were all about the same age as he when he killed them.

Frank has never been to school but has been educated by a form of home-schooling. His father is apparently brilliant having been a scientist before his retirement. Frank feels he has received a better education than kids who attend school. Strangely, Frank does not officially exist. He has been told that there is no official birth certificate and he has no national insurance number. His father has kept his true identity a secret.

Frank is told by his father that he suffered a terrible mutilation as a child—the family dog chewed off his genitals when he was just three-years-old. However, Frank finally gets his father to confess the truth. Frank's genitals were not chewed off by a dog. Frank is a female. His father used the dog's attack on the little girl as opportunity to remove all women from his life. He chose to "make" his daughter a son.

## Angus Cauldhame

Angus Cauldhame is the father of Eric and Frank. As the story opens, Eric has just escaped from a mental institution and is presumably on his way home—which Mr. Cauldhame is none too thrilled about. Mr. Cauldhame is an older man who has a bad case of arthritis in his legs. He walks with a cane most of the time. Fortunately, for Frank, his father cannot access the upper floor where the loft is because Angus is unable to maneuver himself through the narrow, twisting staircase due to his arthritic legs. The loft is where Frank maintains the secret Wasp Factory.

For a reason that is not initially apparent, Mr. Cauldhame keeps the true identity of Frank a secret. There is no birth certificate and no national insurance number—legally he does not exist. When Frank travels to the small town to buy supplies for his maniacal ventures, the store proprietor asks him how his uncle is (really his father). Frank must pretend to be his father's nephew and also must pretend to only live on the island with his uncle part of the year.

Mr. Cauldhame has some secrets himself. He does not allow Frank—or anyone—to enter his study. Frank thinks he is conducting some experiments in there. Frank keeps trying to gain access, but the door is always locked. Mr. Cauldhame also has a large



supply of cordite explosives in his basement that he keeps a cautious eye on but never seems to use or dispose of.

Mr. Cauldhame hates women, having been abandoned by two wives. He lies to his son Frank that he was mutilated as a youngster by a dog who chewed off his male genitals. In reality Frank was born a girl. Angus used the dog mauling incident to devise a lie and raise Frank as a son rather than a daughter.

## **Eric Cauldhame**

Eric Cauldhame is Frank's older, half-brother. He has escaped from a mental hospital and is on his way home as the story beings.

## **Officer Diggs**

Officer Diggs is the local police officer who investigates the death of Frank's young relatives and Eric's escape.

## **Jamie the Dwarf**

Jamie is Frank's only friend. They meet at the town pub where Jamie sits on Frank's shoulders so he can see the band.

## **Mrs. Clamp**

Mrs. Clamp is the Cauldhame's housekeeper, coming to the house once a week to clean.

## **Blyth**

Blyth, Frank's cousin, is killed by a poisonous adder planted by Frank.

## **Paul Cauldhame**

Paul Cauldhame is Frank's younger brother. When Frank is 8 and Paul is 5, Paul dies when Frank tricks him into exploding an abandoned bomb.

## **Esmerelda**

When Frank is nine, he attaches his young cousin Esmerelda to a large kite that lifts her and sends her to her death at sea.



## **Agnes Cauldhame**

Agnes Cauldhame is Frank's mother. She abandons him right after his birth. He hates her and blames her for many of his problems.

## **Old Saul**

Old Saul is the dog that mutilates the three-year-old Frank.



## Objects/Places

### Wasp Factory

Frank Cauldhame captures wasps and uses them to provide answers and predictions in the secret Wasp Factory he maintains in loft of his home.

### Sacrifice Poles

Frank Cauldhame affixes heads of dead animals to the top of poles. These poles are distributed around the island he lives on to scare people away.

### The Bunker

Frank Cauldhame keeps dozens of skulls of dead animals in the secret bunker, including the skull of his nemesis, Old Saul.

### Measurement Book

Mrs. Cauldhame is obsessed with measuring the dimensions of everything in his house—tables, doorways, anything that can be measured. He records these measurements in a book.

### The Island

The Cauldhames live on an unnamed island off the coast of Scotland.

### Cauldhame Arms

The Cauldhame Arms, named after Frank's family, is a pub in Porteneil, the small town near the island. Frank hangs out with his friend, Jamie, at the Cauldhame Arms.

### Scotland

The Cauldhames live on an island off the coast of Scotland.

### Porteneil

Porteneil is the only town Frank Cauldhame is allowed to visit.



## **Mr. Cauldham's Study**

Frank is never allowed to go into his father's study. He thinks his father, who is a scientist, has chemicals there and is conducting some kind of research.

## **Inverness**

A town that Mr. Cauldham travels to where he conducts some kind of mysterious business.



# Themes

## Murder

"The Wasp Factory" is the story of Frank Cauldhame, a sixteen-year-old mass murderer. The story begins to reveal early on that Frank kills and mutilates animals. He has dozens if not hundreds of animals skulls hidden away in a secret bunker. He has a bag of animal heads and body parts that he carries around with him. He affixes the severed heads of small animals atop long poles located around the small island where he lives. These macabre sentries are meant to keep unwanted visitors away. They also serve in some bizarre way to warn Frank of impending danger. Mass murderers are known to mutilate animals.

As a very young boy, Frank began his murderous ways. At six he kills his cousin by inserting a poisonous adder into the boy's artificial leg. When the boy puts the leg back on, the adder repeatedly bites him, causing his death. The cousin had killed Frank's pet rabbit the year before—so this murder is an act of revenge. When Frank is just eight years old, he kills his younger brother who is five by tricking him into striking a live bomb with a wooden board. The bomb blows up and kills the boy. Frank thinks the spirit of Old Saul, the dog who mutilates him, is living within Paul. Therefore, to be free of the dog, he has to kill Paul. A short while later, he kills another cousin, he says, just on a whim.

Frank is constantly arming himself with weapons and thinking of ways to kill the small animals he hunts. Murder is never far from Frank's mind. One day his housekeeper stops by with a supply of food. As she reaches into the deep freeze to stow away some frozen foods, he muses how easy it would be to push her in.

## Secrets

There are many "secrets" in the Wasp Factory. Frank, the protagonist and serial killer, does not exist officially. His father has kept his identity secret. He does not have a birth certificate nor a national insurance card. When Frank goes to town, he must pretend that he is the nephew of his father rather than his son. He has never been allowed to attend school and must lie to anyone who asks that he only spends part of the year with his uncle on the island.

Frank has a secret cache of slain animal skulls in an abandoned bunker. There are skulls from birds to mice to horses. He has them strung all over the bunker and seems to gain strength from them when he visits the bunker. He keeps the bunker padlocked so no one else can enter.

Frank has created a secret Wasp Factory in the loft of the Cauldhame house. His father's arthritic condition prohibits him from climbing the stairs to the loft and therefore he does not know that the Wasp Factory exists.



Angus Cauldhame, Frank's father, has his share of secrets. He has a study that is always locked. Frank is prohibited from ever going in there. Frank thinks his father, who used to be a scientist, is conducting experiments in the study. Angus has a stash of cordite explosives in the basement that he has warned Frank not to touch. Frank does not know what this supply is for or why his father keeps it. Angus also leaves the house for all-day errands that he does not discuss with Frank. Frank thinks he is conducting some mysterious business transactions.

## Ritualism/Obsessive Behavior

Frank Cauldhame is the protagonist and serial killer in the book, "The Wasp Factory." The reader does not have to read very far into the book to learn that Frank is deeply troubled. Although he is able to function and function well within his dementia, it is obvious that he is not well. He demonstrates a ritualistic characteristic in many episodes of the book. The Sacrifice Poles that Frank has peppered around the island serve as a macabre defense against danger. Frank kills small animals and affixes their severed heads atop long poles. They are Frank's sentries intended to ward off unwanted visitors and warn him of danger.

The episode in which Frank grooms himself points to his obsessive nature. He is careful to clean himself thoroughly and in just the same sequence and manner each time he showers. His overly meticulous attention to each detail of his grooming is compulsive and another form of ritualistic behavior.

Each time Frank consults the Wasp Factory, he recites the same catechism prior to seeking an answer from the factory. The recitation includes confessing his murders, admitting his sins, and stating his wishes and hopes. Present while he recites his catechism are the skull of the adder that killed his male cousin, a piece of the bomb that killed his brother and a piece of the kite that took his young female cousin to her death.

Frank grasps his eye sockets and that of the dried out skull of Old Saul in an attempt to communicate with his brother, Eric, who has escaped from a mental institution and is on his way home. He performs this ritual in a last-ditch effort to save his brother.



# Style

## Point of View

The story of "The Wasp Factory" is told in the first person omniscient allowing the reader to know all the actions and thoughts of the main character, sixteen-year-old Frank Cauldhame. Frank is a serial murderer who begins murdering at age 6. By the time he is nine, Frank has killed a male cousin, his five-year-old brother and a female cousin. The reader is privy to the steps he takes in their murders as well as his cover-ups and cover stories. The reader also learns that Frank feels little if any remorse or guilt. The fleeting guilt he feels over the years he ascribes to the many voices in his head who do not always agree—certainly a sign of schizophrenia.

The book, which is considered one of the top 100 novels of the 20th century, allows the reader into the dark mind of a young man obsessed with killing. Although he does not kill another human after the age of nine, he turns to the killing and mutilation of animals to quench his thirst for blood. By writing this story in first person omniscient, the reader gains insight into the thoughts of a mad man, providing fodder to a general public that is ever curious about the motives of a serial killer. The reasons behind the murders range from revenge to misguided reasoning to whim. There is evidence from Frank's own descriptions that he is obsessive/compulsive

## Setting

Frank Cauldhame and his father live in a large house on an un-named island off the coast of Scotland. Frank is often out hunting small animals in the rough grounds and on the sandy beach. The island is just across from the mainland which is accessible via a small bridge. Frank hunts rabbits on the Rabbit Grounds which are located on the mainland.

The large house that the Cauldhames live in is located in a very isolated spot. There is never mention of any near-by neighbors. There is a small town that is located across the bridge called Porteneil where a pub, named after the Cauldhame family, is located. In the house, there is a mysterious room—Mr. Cauldhame's study—which Frank is never allowed to enter. His father keeps the room locked at all times. Frank always tries the door when his father leaves the house. He finally does gain access to it near the end of the story.

Frank has a secret room himself. Located in the loft of the house, is Frank's Wasp Factory. His father has arthritic legs and cannot climb the twisting stairs that lead to the loft so therefore does not know of the Factory's existence.





## Language and Meaning

The story of "The Wasp Factory" by Iain Banks, takes place on an island off the coast of Scotland. Therefore, there are some words and phrases that, while English, are not common to an American readership. For example, "firth" (earth or grounds); "Kickers" (pants); "steelies" (marbles); hitching lifts (hitchhiking); "jotters" (notes); "elevenses" (English tea served in the morning); "half-seven" (7:30); and more. Not surprisingly, the British spelling of words prevail; i.e., "realise" and "analyse", "honour," "centre," "programme" and "defence" to name a few. However, the story is clearly presented and there is no difficulty in following it.

Since the story is about murder and mutilation there is a good measure of blood and gore. The reader must be braced for this type of language as it crops up quite frequently. Frank speaks of slicing the "anus of a buck rabbit" that he kills and sticking a bomb up it. In his secret bunker, Frank has a vast collection of animal skulls and other body parts. He has a favorite candle holder which he calls Old Saul's Skull—the family dog that mutilated him when he was three. He describes how the skulls seem to be looking at him—especially Old Saul whose eye sockets are lit from behind and seem to be staring at him.

Frank describes the hunting and slaughtering of animals in great detail. He affixes their severed heads on long poles that he refers to as Sacrifice Poles. These poles with dead animal heads serve as sentries for the island, warding off unwanted visitors. Beyond animals, he describes the murder of several young cousins and his younger brother. It is a brutal tale that does not hold back.

Frank gives formal names to parts of his island and some of his equipment. For example, he calls the poles affixed with dead animal heads "Sacrifice Poles." He has a special catapult that he uses for hunting which he names the Black Destroyer. When the Black Destroyer itself is destroyed by a rouge rabbit, he names the hill where it was destroyed "Black Destroyer Hill."

## Structure

The novel, "The Wasp Factory" is divided into twelve chapters. The chapters are numbered and titled. The story is told by the protagonist and serial murderer 16-year-old Frank Cauldham. The story begins in the present day and provides hints of prior murders. These murders, perpetrated when Frank is between 6 and 9, are described in flashback segments. When Frank encounters certain areas of the grounds surrounding his house, they set off memories of his murders. The narrative then takes a flashback posture which serves to explain the methods and reasons—although insane—for these murders.

The Wasp Factory is a secret place located in the loft of his home. Frank's arthritic father cannot climb the steps to the loft and therefore does not know of its existence. The author hints at the Factory's purpose with faint inferences to the mysterious place

throughout the story. However, it is not until the end that the reader is given a complete description. The author also hints at an accident that Frank incurs as a youngster and an aversion he has to dogs. This style and structure provides intrigue and stimulates curiosity compelling the reader to read on.



## Quotes

"Sometimes I wish I had a cat. All I've ever had was a head, and that the seagulls took." (16)

"My dead sentries, those extensions of me which came under my power through the simple but ultimate surrender of death, sensed nothing to harm me or the island." (20)

"My greatest enemies are Women and the Sea. These things I hate. Women because they are weak and stupid and live in the shadow of men and are nothing compared to them, and the Sea because it has always frustrated me, destroying what I have built, washing away what I have left, wiping clean the marks I have made." (43)

"Well, people are stupid, but it all seems to have more to do with mood, caprice and atmosphere than carefully thought-out arguments. I can feel the same sort of thing going on in my head. Sometimes the thoughts and feelings I had didn't really agree with each other, so I decided I must be lost of different people inside my brain." (62)

"I can't remember my mother, because if I did I'd hate her. As it is, I hate her name, the idea of her." (66)

"Eric was crazy all right, even if he was my brother. He was lucky to have somebody sane who still liked him." (103)

"All our lives are symbols. Everything we do is part of a pattern we have at least some say in. The strong make their own patterns and influence other people's, the weak have their courses mapped out for them. The weak and the unlucky, and the stupid." (116)

"Both sexes can do one thing specially well; women can give birth and men can kill. We—I consider myself an honorary man—are the harder sex. We strike out, push through, thrust and take." (118)

"I remembered him as the clever, kind excitable boy he had been, and I thought of what he was now: a force of fire and disruption approaching the sands of the island like a man angel, head swarming with echoing screams of madness and delusion." (125)

"After I'd come to understand evolution and know a little about history and farming, I saw that the thick white animals I laughed at for following each other around and getting caught in bushes were the product of generations of farms as much as generations of sheep; we made them, we moulded them from the wild, smart survivors that were their ancestors to that they would become docile, frightened, stupid, tasty wool-producers. We didn't want them to be smart, and to some extent their aggression and their intelligence went together. Of course, the rams are brighter, but even they are demeaned by the idiotic females they have to associate with and inseminate." (145)



"Having no purpose in life or procreation, I invested all my worth in that grim opposite, and so found a negative and negation of the fecundity only other could lay claim to. I believe that I decided if I could never become a man, I—the unmanned—would out-man those around me, and so I became the killer, a small image of the ruthless soldier-hero almost all I've ever seen or read seems to pay strict homage to." (183)

"Poor Eric came home to see his brother, only to find he's got a sister." (184)



## Topics for Discussion

Why does Frank Cauldhame position "Sacrifice Poles" around the island? What does Frank affix to the top of the poles?

Why does Angus Cauldhame keep the real identify of his son a secret?

What tragic accident happened to Frank Cauldhame when he was just three years old? What impact did that accident have upon the rest of his life?

Why does Frank Cauldhame decide he has to kill his younger brother, Paul? How does Frank make a connection between Paul and his dog, Old Saul?

What is the "Wasp Factory" and how is it designed? How does it provide answers to Frank?

Why does Mr. Cauldhame keep his study locked and disallow Frank from ever entering it?

Where does Frank's hatred of women originate? Why does Frank blame his mother for his "accident?"

What is Frank's true identity and why did his father perpetuate a lie about it?