

We Study Guide

We by Yevgeny Zamyatin

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Plot Summary

We is the thoughtful diary of a mathematician describing forthrightly how from the spring of one year through the autumn of the next, he is caught up in a revolutionary movement that helps him discover his human soul, only to lose it when the powers that be prevail.

Famed mathematician and rocket designer D-503 keeps a diary to convince people on other planets to accept the United State way of life. He and fellow Numbers live by a rigid Table of Hours. A glass Green Wall keeps the City separate from nature, and covert Guardians and the Operation Department with its dreaded Gas Bell protect society from dangerous people. Criminals are publicly executed by the Well-Doer's Machine. D-503's Integral, destined to take his diary and the works of all capable writers on its inaugural flight, is nearly complete.

D-503 is involved in a State sanctioned sexual "triangle" with rosy, round O-90 and his old school friend, the rising poet R-13. D-503 detests the seductive I-330 when they first meet. She breaks several laws in front of him and dares him to report her to the Guardians; when he fails to do so promptly, he becomes a criminal. Gradually, I-330 introduces D-503 to the chaotic world that the State has suppressed. D-503 grows aware that he is being covertly followed by S-4711, a hunchbacked, sloshing Guardian, one of I-330's lovers. I-330 seduces D-503 in the Ancient House, a State-run museum that she frequents. D-503 feels himself dividing into two persons, the dominant one being infused with I-330's ancient wildness. He knows that he is on a crash course towards the Well-Doer's Machine, and seems to have lost all of his friends. His obsessions increase, first with a soul that he discovers he has and which he struggles to understand; and with I-330, who replaces O-90 in his heart. O-90 tearfully offers not to stand in their way. D-503 still believes his Integral will spread happiness through the cosmos.

O-90 wants to illicitly bear D-503's baby, even if it means execution. I-330 continues testing D-503's loyalty and promises to reveal everything. On the Day of Unanimity, Numbers gather to re-elect the Well-Doer. A unanimous yea vote is expected, but I-330 is among a considerable group of dissidents who vote nay. She spirits D-503 outside the Wall to meet members of her underground group, survivors of a free humanity. She announces D-503 will help them hijack Integral. MEPHI signs crop up everywhere, a sign of contagion, and the Guardians charge into action. D-503 escapes arrest and commands Integral's test flight, which is postponed a day by the order mandating all Numbers submit either to the Great Operation or to the Well-Doer's lethal Machine. Pregnant O-90 is whisked to safety beyond the Green Wall. D-503 is a nervous wreck but manages to execute his duties automatically. When the coup is thwarted, however, D-503 sets Integral on a suicide plunge, which the mutinous Second Builder countermands.

D-503 is summoned to explain himself before the Well-Wisher, who finds him a naïve dupe of the revolutionaries. Feeling Doomsday has arrived, D-503 cleanses his soul



before I-330 and S-4711, learns mathematically that the universe is finite, is arrested, and undergoes the Great Operation, which strips away fancy and love. I-330 undergoes torture but stubbornly says nothing. D-503 rejoices that a temporary Wall has gone up and Reason will prevail.

Records 1-5

Records 1-5 Summary

The morning State newspaper announces the Integral will be finished in 120 days and rise into space. This generation will subjugate other planets to the United State, which has existed 1,000 years. They will try to persuade primitives to abandon freedom and embrace "mathematical faultless happiness." Numbers are encouraged to write tributes for inclusion in the Integral's first cargo. Its builder, D-503, blushes as he starts a diary about what "we" think and do. It is like being pregnant, nurturing and painfully making his sacrifice, as nearly everyone is ready to do.

O-90 comes to pick up D-503 for the supplementary walk. She is short and round. Oddly, she comments on the beauties of springtime rather than D-503's dancing machinery. They join thousands dressed in blue, walking four abreast. Admiring the "square harmony" of their way of life, D-503 recalls a raucous 20th-century painting and laughs, which an unfamiliar female to his right echoes. I-330 is slender, flexible, and has white, sharp teeth, and irritating, X-shaped eyebrows. She suggests one could throw a bridge over time—precisely as D-503 earlier writes, and intuits he is thinking about diverse body types as he eyes an unknown, S-shaped male. When O-90 remarks that D-503 is registered to her, he grimaces; she speaks faster than she thinks. As the "personal hour" ends, I-330 suggests D-503 come next day to Auditorium 112, and is sure he will be assigned. D-503 and O-90 walk hand-in-hand. She wants their next sexual day early.

D-503 fears that many of the common terms he uses may make no sense to potential readers. It must have been as hard to adapt to privations after the Two Hundred Years' War as it was for primitive man to make do without a tail or wear clothing. D-503 cannot imagine life without a Green Wall or the Table of Hours, whereby millions awaken, work, eat, walk, exercise, and go to bed at precisely the same minute. At 16:00 and 21:00, "personal hours" are scheduled, but one day, all 86,400 seconds will be incorporated. Once upon a time, states allow people to do as they please, including having sex uncontrolled by Maternal and Paternal Norms. When such atavism arises nowadays, the heavy-handed Well-Doer and Guardians are vigilant. D-503 recalls seeing the S-shaped Number outside the Bureau of Guardians and instinctively respects him.

Until today, everything seems clear to D-503, but being assigned to Auditorium 112—a 1:20,000 probability—shakes him. At a bell, all rise, sing the Hymn, and attend to a "phono-lecturer" telling of an ironic 20th century book in which a Wild Man so likes rain that he adjusts the mercury level in a barometer so it always reads "Rain." Numbers may laugh, but in a primitive way, Wild Man understands cause-and-effect. The lecture continues, but D-503 hears nothing until he hears a "musicometer," which allows anyone to write three sonatas per hour without "inspirations" (a form of epilepsy). A curtain opens, revealing a black box called a "Royal Grand," which I-330 in a tight black dress proceeds to play in the "wild, convulsive," ancient way. People laugh. By contrast,



contemporary music is wholesome and regular. Four abreast, the Numbers exit. O-90 is due at D-503's room in an hour, so he hurries to submit his pink ticket. Normally the walls are transparent, admitting light and making the job of the Guardians easier. Bad things happen in antiquity, when people live in opaque personal fortresses. At 22:00, D-503 lowers the curtains, and O-90 enters, smiling and out of breath. They kiss until 22:15, after which he talks, she listens and weeps, an old lament about a child or something else absurd.

D-503 mentions an old comrade, R-13, a poet with "Negro" lips. D-503 fears unknown readers may not understand pink checks. The Two Hundred Years' War proves, "Love and Hunger rule the world," leaving only 0.2% of humans alive, fed on petroleum food, but now enjoying 300 years of bliss without jealousy or envy, because the Lex Sexualis allows any Number to apply for a license to use any other Number(s) as a sexual product. The Sexual Department determines their sexual days, enters these in the Table, and issues a pink checkbook. Sex, a source of "stupid tragedies" becomes a useful function like sleep, labor, eating, etc. As he writes, D-503 is tempted to cross out these remarks, but has vowed to record everything. It is hard, writing for primitives.

Records 1-5 Analysis

The first section introduces the major characters and begins gradually sketching life in a future time when all enjoy a regimented way of life. The author uses the device of a diarist. D-503, is keeping a diary intended to help convert people on other worlds to this way of life. His concern that readers understand commonplace elements in his society allows him to explain much. He draws analogies from the quaint, ancient 20th century and is fond of both figurative and mathematical language. Note the discussion of how carbon-based objects differ in quality; similar analyses crop up later. Note also D-503's preoccupation with types of noses, his hairy hands, and blots from tears, ink, or anything else. All become motifs. That disorder is bad is firmly established and about to be developed.



Records 6-9

Records 6-9 Summary

D-503 reiterates: he conceals nothing. I-330 has flown him to the Ancient House. A wrinkly old woman admits them. Upstairs, they enter an "apartment" decorated in a chaotic, nonsensical style analogous to I-330's earlier music. They pass through rooms with tiny windows and massive, loudly colored furniture. D-503 sees waste and an analogy to the head: opaque with two tiny openings. He feels caged and unnatural. I-330 changes into a short, low-cut yellow dress with black hat and stockings. When it is nearly time for a required course, I-330 tells someone on the phone that she is alone at the Ancient House and gives D-503 the aero. She mentions she is registered to someone in the Medical Bureau who will certify D-503 is ill—and asks if he will report her to the Guardians. D-503 arrives on time at 17:00, and at 21:30 has free time, but is too tired to file a report that by law he has 48 hours to do.

That night, visions from the Ancient House terrorize D-503. How could his clean, precise brain be dreaming, a serious mental disease? It is as irritating as an eyelash in the eye. The 07:00 wake-up sounds and D-503 is invigorated to see everyone going through the same synchronized actions. The underground railway takes D-503 to the dock where the Integral is being built. As he dreams of the complex formulae that calculate escape from earth's gravity, D-503 sees Guardian S-4711 and feels his sparkling eyes drill into him. D-503 tries to tell him about yesterday, but wonders if he is assigned to I-330. D-503 is upset by a newspaper story about a covert liberation movement and marvels that some humans still do not equate criminality and freedom. He vows to go to the Guardians at 16:00. At 16:10, he sees O-90, who frowns when she learns he is going to "the spies." Using the lilies of the valley she has bought him, D-503 says angrily that as they and henbane both have odors, but very different ones, so ancient and modern spies are not to be confused. His tirade attracts attention and he declares he must go to the Medical Bureau instead. He is kept there until 17:00. Later D-503 and O-90 do arithmetic problems together and after she leaves, he smells something disagreeable and discovers hidden lily of the valley.

Long before, in school, D-503 hears from their mechanical mathematician, Plappa, about the irrational square root of minus one. It tortures him then as his inability to go to the Guardians does now. At their headquarters today, he watches Numbers turn in loved ones, friends, and themselves, but he cannot join them. R-13 and O-90, en route to their sexual time, interrupt his thoughts. They take him to R-13's for half an hour of chatting. Both selecting O-90 three years ago has bonded their old friendship. Talking so fast that every "P" produces a fountain, R-13 offers to arrange for D-503 to enter the poets' trade, and jokes that at the rate poets are writing, Integral will not be able to lift off. D-503 reveals he too is writing when time permits. R-13 talks of putting the Death Sentence into verse, a mad poet bragging about his own genius, and other ramblings, before D-503 excuses himself before their pink check expires. Crossing the street, he sees the curtains lowered. He thinks of them as a triangle (not isosceles) and family.



On a bright day, Gothic silence envelops the serene Numbers who fill the 66 concentric sets of circular stands on the Plaza Cube. It is like ancient "church services" to an unknown, elusive, demanding god—except the god of the United State is rational, fully known, and giving. The liturgy recalls the victory of all over one, the sum over the individual. Today's "one" has been stripped of his badge and ceremonially bound in red ribbon. Beside the Machine stands the Well-Doer, motionless, face concealed, mighty hands capturing attention. Verses boom out the miscreant's insane deeds and talk of Prometheus harnessing fire and fettering chaos with law. R-13 delivers additional swift, sharp verses. Thousands focus on the Machine, as the Well-Doer gestures the criminal forward. He takes the last step of his life and looks up at the sky as the Well-Doer throws a switch releasing a blade of electric ray that fells him, makes his body phosphoresce and smoke, until in the end there remains only chemically pure water. Every time Numbers witness this, it seems miraculous. By custom, women cover the Well-Doer's unif with flowers as he passes through the cheering crowd. The celebration owes something to the ancient religions, a sense of purification.

Records 6-9 Analysis

The next section shows things beginning to "happen." In a State where everything is scheduled, this means trouble. The seductive but detestable I-330 introduces D-503 to the chaotic world that the State has suppressed. It troubles him. When he fails to report I-330 within 48 hours, he too becomes a criminal. The "triangle" of D-503, O-90, and R-13 is described, but it is about to be broken. R-13 is developed as a character not openly rebellious but unorthodox, and he enjoys a special place in the secular "liturgy" of a criminal's disintegration. R-13 also links D-503 back to the mission of his Integral: delivering propagandistic poetry to distant planets. Russia's premier poet, Pushkin, plays a cameo role in a recurring observation on noses and two plants are contrasted much as carbon products are earlier. Note the reference to Christian Guardian Angels given to babies at birth. This is applied to S-4711 in the next section.



Records 10-14

Records 10-14 Summary

In the morning, D-503 feels purified, distilled, and transparent. The controller, U-, tells him to expect a letter by noon, after it is cleared by the Guardians. At work, he cannot concentrate. He fetches the letter: an official notice that I-330 has been assigned to him. He is aghast, and memories of the last day swim in his head. At 20:45, with his heart beating painfully against the iron bars of his ribs, D-503 goes to I-330's room and hands her the pink check. He watches as she finishes doing something. The mocking X of her face irritates him. Smiling, she reminds him of the penalty for not reporting crime, making him feel like a guilty little boy, caught in a net.

I-330 closes the curtains, cutting them off from the world, rustles in her closet, and emerges in a saffron dress far more seductive than had she been naked. She smokes and a poisonously green bottle of liquid sits on the table before her. D-503's heart pounds furiously as he asks why she has had him assigned to her. She pours, sips, and offers him a taste. D-503 recalls the Cube and shivers, citing the law against nicotine and alcohol poisoning. She suggests her persistent lover, S-4711, plays a pious act in public. D-503 is repulsed at the thought of that man holding her, but then admits all honest Numbers have a right to life's joys. I-330 laughs, looking inside him. She says she has no fear he will turn her in for these vices, invites him again to partake, and throws herself at him. He has not expected or desired it, finds her lips unbearably sweet, but pulls away. He sees himself walking over a red sea of fire and being two D-503s, old and "other," hairy-pawed, breaking from his shell. Declaring he will not allow this, he grabs for I-330, but she eludes him. He falls at her feet, supplicating her. She removes his badge and shows him it is 22:25—five minutes before curfew. D-503 grabs the badge and flees, taking the stairs to avoid detection and racing through the deserted streets. He arrives at 22:29. He cannot sleep that night, even using auto-suggestion to remind him sleep is his civic duty. Again, he feels he is a criminal.

For the first time in his life, D-503 sees himself not as "I" but as "he." He sees the face of a stranger, and thinks about how the ancients picture above the foggy sky their god, a perfect skeptic. Moderns know there is nothing up there, but D-503's faith is shaken. He refuses to submit to nonsense and delirium brought on by an unknown poison. R-13 finds him composed 20 minutes later, and enthusiastic about the poet's performance. R-13 is sick of congratulations. He wants to talk about his new poem about Paradise. He takes the ancient legend of two people having to choose between happiness without freedom and freedom without happiness. Foolishly, they choose freedom and for centuries mankind longs for the fetters of old. Only moderns have broken the head of the cunning serpent and regained Paradise. There is no more mulling over good and evil. Instead, childlike, Numbers accept the good that is imposed on them. The style of R-13's poem is solemn and pious. D-503 admires his orderly mind, despite his nonsense and asymmetry. Laughing, R-13 asks about the next pink check day. O-90 is too bashful to ask; she feels affection for R-13, but not love. R-13 asks about the fourth



member D-503 is bringing into the triangle. D-503 asks if R-13 has ever tried nicotine or alcohol. He temporizes in a way that shows he too knows I-330. The "real" D-503 begs R-13's forgiveness and admits he is sick. R-13 says he is acquainted with all this, "theoretically." He returns to give D-503 his latest book. Left alone, D-503 has a tête-à-tête with his other self and pictures himself shriveling in his bed. I-330 is showing that love and jealousy are not idiotic ancient myths. He knows the triangle is broken. He is alone and does not know who he is—or which D-503 is he.

D-503 believes he may recover. He has slept well, without dreams. Riding the underground railway, he recites R-13's verses to himself. From the corner of his eye he sees S-4711 and finds it pleasant to have someone lovingly keeping him from incorrect steps. The ancients dream of Guardian Angels, but moderns have them. D-503 enjoys the poem "Happiness," an ode to the multiplication table. The ancient god creates man capable of making mistakes; ergo, god makes a mistake. The multiplication table is absolute, infallible, and R-13 has grasped this. D-503 feels the S-4711's warm breath and is ready to tell all. He turns and makes eye contact, but S-4711 neither understands nor wants to understand. Ancient poets write whatever they want, which is as foolish and wasteful as failing to harness the power of the tides. Now, poetry is State service. As the "Mathematical Norms" make education possible, so do the Guardians, like Thorns, protect the tender State Flower from rough hands. Life is stamped in the "gold of words." Poets no longer soar, but have come down to earth, to march among the masses and deal with mundane subjects. The gods have come down too, becoming one with humans—and making them gods. Earthlings will soon visit other planets, to make others' lives godlike, rational, and correct.

D-503 awakes at rose-colored dawn, thinking of O-90's visit that night, is sure he is healthy again, and goes back to sleep. When the Morning Bell sounds, he sees the world shrouded in fog. At 11:45, as he is about to leave for physical labor, I-330 phones, ordering him to meet her at the corner. He complies, meaning to tell her only the United State directs him, but seeing her red lips, he is helpless. As she leans on his shoulder, power streams into him, telling him to submit joyfully. He is like iron ore obeying a lodestone, a stone thrown upward obeying gravity, a man convulsing before he dies. D-503 smiles vaguely and mentions the fog. I-330 asks, "Thou lovest fog, dost thou?" using the ancient verb form by which masters address slaves. She explains one loves only what one cannot conquer.

They walk as one and the world seems to exist only for D-503. Where they are going does not matter. They stop at the Medical Bureau, where a male Number as thin as paper, who seems only to have a sharp profile, provides each a certificate testifying to illness and excusing them from work. This makes D-503 a thief, liable to death by the Well-Doer's Machine, but he is indifferent. They fly to the Ancient House. The wrinkly woman is now dear to him; she promises to warn them, should anything happen. Inside, they make love without pink check, but as they later dress, I-330's brusque manner returns. D-503 obeys as she orders, but is drawn back. He finds the key swaying in the keyhole of the only exit; I-330 is not inside. The whole day is an improbable adventure and D-503 hopes to find a logical sequence in the absurdities.



Expecting O-90, he goes to claim a curtain permit. The controller says he seems peculiar. He says he is ill and, blushing, hands over I-330's certificate. She looks surprised. At 21:30, the curtains to his left lower; to his right, his bald, lumpy-headed neighbor is reading—and staring at him. At 21:45, O-90, like a "rosy whirlwind," enters, hugs him, but then lets her arms drop. She declares him "not the same" and no longer hers. It occurs to D-503 that for the first time in his life, he does belong to someone and he no longer wants to live in this regimented world but in the world of "the square root of minus one." As the curtains fall, D-503 talks about wanting to meet earlier and to talk now. He feels sorry when she frowns, but cannot tell her about his crimes, for she would not have the courage to report him. That would make her an accomplice. He speaks of being sick and visiting the Medical Bureau. He kisses her but realizes it is hollow. O-90 trembles and covers herself as D-503 sits on the cold floor in silence. He tries to explain how his true self feels but O-90 orders him away. He steps into the hall. She runs past him to the elevator and descends, leaving D-503 afraid and robbed of his two friends.

Records 10-14 Analysis

This section shows I-330 seducing D-503 and the "triangle" with O-90 and R-13 being broken. The seduction occurs with State sanction but outside the Table, in the Ancient House. Note his new attitude toward the wrinkly woman: something fundamental has changed inside him. D-503 feels himself now two persons, the dominant one infused with I-330's ancient wildness. Figurative language abounds, involving magnetism, gravity; D-503's ribs are like iron bars constricting his heart, a powerful simile that serves as a motif. As he muses about Creation, D-503 uses specific language from the biblical Book of Genesis, although it is implied earlier that religion has no place in the educational system. D-503 knows he is on a crash course with the Well-Doer's Machine, and apparently has lost all of his friends.



Records 15-18

Records 15-18 Summary

At Integral's dock, the Second Builder reports to that yesterday workers find and turn in a non-numbered male. Under direct supervision of the Well-Doer, the experienced doctors of Operation Department extract confessions using the Gas Bell, an improved version of an apparatus once used by physicists on rats. Five centuries previously, when the Department begins, fools liken it to the Inquisition, which is like comparing surgeons with cutthroats, since both use blades. Thinking about I-330 and finding life good, D-503 flusters his assistant and then recalls that until recently he too finds imagination offensive. The exquisite glass body of Integral is nearly complete. True to the Taylor system, humanized machines and mechanized humans work as one. When the Second Builder asks again about his health, D-503 races to another area. He feels corrupt and out of place, certain to burn eternally, running, hiding. He has lost his rudder.

D-503 does not write for days and time seems like yellow sand. He cannot live without I-330, whom he sees once, during the Walk, with S-4711, the paper-thin Doctor, and a Number with raylike fingers. They mention Integral; look at him, and vanish. That night, I-330 has a pink check on D-503, who checks every time the elevator stops, but she does not come. Perhaps she is with someone else—even S-4711. Every day, D-503 hears S-4711 and feels him like a shadow. Alone in his room, D-503 dials I-330, without success. Yesterday, he runs to her house, to say, "Thou knowest I cannot live without thee any longer." Alone on the street when the Musical Tower goes silent at 17:00, D-503 smiles at S-4711 and follows him through a world upside down and, expecting to see the Gas Bell. He is relieved to reach the Medical Bureau.

There, one doctor is short and heavy, with eyes like the horns of a bull. The other is I-330's paper-thin friend, who tells D-530 he has an incurable disease: a soul. He likens it to a mirror's surface heated to become three-dimensional and retain traces of everything that touches it, rather than reflect images. D-530 recalls the dripping water in the washstand and understands it is forever. The short doctor implores him to accept surgery on his "center for fancy" and thus avert an epidemic. Until recently, D-503 would have submitted. The other says this might impede work on Integral. For insomnia and dreams, he prescribes long walks and writes a two-day certificate of illness. D-503 departs feeling light, knowing joy comes tomorrow.

D-503 is puzzled finding new unknowns when he thinks all is untangled. The Ancient House is the center of X-, Y-, and Z-axes. D-503 follows the X-axis down Avenue 59 to the center. The world is inverted and everything seems wrong, rotating around his "soul." At the Green Wall, mankind's greatest invention, isolating it from the world of wild nature, D-503 briefly sees, dimly through the glass, yellow eyes and wonders if the creature is happier than he. Approaching the dark red Ancient House, D-503 learns I-330 is here, kisses the wrinkly woman, and runs through familiar places to the bedroom



where he hesitates, wondering if she is inside—and not alone. He enters, calls her name, and tries to stop the faucet's leak. Several other doors are locked. Suddenly there is an explosion and footsteps below. D-503 sees S-4711 rushing, and to avoid being seen, sneaks upstairs to "their" apartment. S-4711 follows, but D-503 ducks into the cupboard and suffers 5-10 seconds of "temporary death" before returning to life, feeling himself falling, and then landing with a soft bump.

D-503 opens a door, steps out into dim light, sees the platform ascend without him, and feels cut off and lost. Small lights on the vaulted ceiling remind him of the "tube," but the walls are not glass, but some ancient material. He has heard of caves where people hide during the Two Hundred Years' War. He walks 20 minutes before the tube brightens and he hears dim droning. He knocks on an opaque door behind which he hears voices. He is dumbfounded to confront the thin doctor, who brushes him aside and orders him to stay put. I-330 appears in her saffron silk. She opens her eyes and he enters. Slowly, I-330 presses her shoulder, arm, and whole body against him and they walk away, fused into one. He regains his senses in the Ancient House's courtyard, to which I-330 tells him to return, day after tomorrow at 16:00, and vanishes, leaving D-503 to wonder if this has really happened.

That night, D-503 feels himself sinking in green water, but awakens to find he is in his room. A sunbeam shining on the closet door mirror keeps him from meeting the Tables' sleep quota. He gets up to shut the door, finds I-330 in the closet, jumps in and clings to her, but the sunbeam falling on her bare neck makes him scream—and awakens him. With his heart beating erratically and his fingers and knees hurting, D-503 knows something has happened. He thinks, as he lies waiting for the Bell to ring: irrational numbers are taking over his life; it is insane to think that the square root of minus one has a corresponding curve or solid; like death, mathematics never makes mistakes or plays tricks; the unseen exists as an immense world beneath the surface of life. Without waiting for the Bell, D-503 gets up and paces, thinking about this absurd "soul" tearing him from his life's anchor, mathematics. He believes he has seen something infinitely large (or small) through thick glass, stinging itself like the legendary scorpion: the square root of minus one. The Bell rings and D-503 joins the masses, chewing each bite of breakfast the mandatory 50 times. He goes down and logs out like everyone else, although he now lives in his own separate world. He wonders why he is recording these absurdities in what is becoming a fantastic novel. Perhaps his childlike readers will swallow these bitter things without crying.

That evening, D-503 writes about how a hurricane is making him forget the earth. O-90 is written in his Tables, so he must confront her. He walks 128 minutes on doctor's orders along deserted roads while others are in auditoriums. It feels unnatural, like a severed finger not needing its hand. D-503 wants to be alone or with I-330. He comes home at sunset, thinking how this pink is melancholy while dawn's is boisterous. From the controller, U-, he receives an envelope, which he is sure is from I-330. U- sighs twice, smiles, and averts her eyes, knowing the contents. She says she has been watching him, knows he needs someone with life experience, and hints it is she. D-503 is shocked. The letter is from O-90. She cannot live without him because she loves him, but intends to take his name from her list.



Records 15-18 Analysis

In this section, D-503's obsessions increase, first with his soul, which he tries to understand, and with I-330, without whom he cannot live. O-90 feels the same about him, but is ready to sacrifice herself to his happiness in the name of love. The Green Wall is described and hints are given about what lies beyond it. The Gas Bell and Operation Department that uses it are introduced. More information about the mysterious Antique House is given. Note how psychological conditioning makes a changing D-503 still defend the State reflexively: the Department is not like the Inquisition; Integral will spread happiness through the cosmos.



Records 19-23

Records 19-23 Summary

The appointed time for another meeting arrives on the same day as Integral's motor is first test fired. A dozen loafing workers are vaporized, but this does not disturb the rhythm of work; they are 0.000001% of the population—infinitesimal. What the ancients consider a pity is to moderns absurd. At 16:00, D-503 skips the supplementary walk. A man with a forehead like a slanting awning delivers an envelope, specifies that "she" wants everything done per her note without fail, and leaves. A perfumed pink check and a tiny note fall out: lower the curtains as though she were there; she is sorry. D-503 destroys the note, keeps the check, and wonders. He wishes he had another doctor's certificate so he could walk around the Green Wall instead of enduring a two-hour phono-lecture on child production. He daydreams about the Ancient House. A pudgy child illustrating the talk sits dangerously near the platform edge and is about to fall when O-90 screams, dives, catches it, and deposits it in the middle of the table. She is frowning and her eyes are filled with tears.

Walking home, D-503 fears that by following instructions he is cutting himself off from retreat. He knows S-4711 will follow him to his door and remain, wondering what criminality the curtains conceal. Entering his room, D-503 finds a tearful O-90; she needs an answer to her note. When he says that she is undoubtedly right, she begs to be impregnated. Even if it means going to the Well-Doer's Machine, she needs to feel life within her and see a tiny wrist like hers. D-503 remembers being taken as a child to the top of the Accumulating Tower and looking down. He imagines himself now jumping. D-503 takes I-330's pink check down to the controller. O-90 knows whose it is. D-503 mentally jumps again.

D-503 sees recent events as bringing him to the point of electrical discharge—explosion and then silence. He feels again part of the "we," free of his soul. He pictures O-90 condemned to the Cube or Gas Bell and does not care if she gives him up. Offending Numbers should accept punishment as a right and a privilege. As the ancients show heaven is only blue nothing, so moderns show right is a function of might. "I" relates to "we" and "rights" to "duties" as an ounce to a ton. Morality can only be built on the eternal four rules of arithmetic. O-90's upcoming illegal maternity will, like the poet's verses thrown in the face of the State, be punished by premature death, just as the ancients' god treated sacrilege as a capital crime. Both morose Uranians and pink Venerians must agree that human history moves in circles. After 360° comes another zero, but a new one, a minus, separated from the positive by the thinness of a knife (man's most inspired invention, used to cut knots).

Yesterday, I-330 sends another incoherent note, and D-503 calmly takes the pink check to the controller so he can lower the curtains. He sits alone, powerless to resist her, for he fears losing the only one who can explain to him all the unknowns. D-503 takes an aero at 16:00 to the Ancient House and finds no one at the entrance. The wrinkled



woman is near the Green Wall, where black birds caw as invisible electricity repels them. She says no one is here, so it is useless for him to come, but admits him. It is empty and quiet as he walks through the arches, feeling he is being watched. He wanders, unable to find an exit, so this might be another absurd dream. Returning to the main yard, he encounters S-4711, who asks if he feels better after his walk. D-503 replies he is returning to normal. Some 50 meters above, 10-20 Guardian aeros buzz, far more than the usual 2-3. S-4711 explains this is "prophylaxis," and warns him to be careful. Flying home, D-503 wonders what he means.

That evening, D-503 wants to explain to his readers the upcoming Day of Unanimity, but is too expectant of something to write. U- enters his room, sits, innocently smooths her unif over her knees, and smiles pleasantly. He is glad to see her. She reports seeing a caricature of herself with gills in the Child-Educational Refinery where she works. She calls the Guardians immediately. He reads to her a passage from Record No. 20, which she wants to transcribe and make the children memorize. In a low voice, U- asks if he has heard rumors of what will happen on the Day of Unanimity. D-503 is startled. She sits him down, calms him, and assures him she will stay with him that day. He resents being treated as a child and refuses. Calling him stubborn, she promises to think over registering him. Strange wings seem to fly around him, and D-503 protects his head and crawls into bed, wondering how to cure or harness his dream sickness.

D-503 invites his readers to imagine waves at the seashore stopping; that is how confusing it is for the prescribed Table walks to be cancelled (the last time is 119 years ago, when a meteor crashes). Numbers are walking like warriors in an Assyrian monument when, at the Accumulating Tower, guards seize three Numbers and strip them of their badges. One, a young man, looks for someone in the crowd, but is dropped with an electric whip. Everyone continues as usual, except for a female Number, who throws herself into the quadrangle like a meteor, demanding the torture end. She is not a Number, but a human being. Certain who she is, D-503 throws himself at her but finds a freckly-faced girl, not I-330. Detained, he knows he will soon leave this beautiful world, but S-4711 vouches for him. As the multi-million body marches on, the prisoners disappear forever. D-503 walks with them, trembling, conscious of his personal identity. It is like an enflamed eye, infected finger, or bad tooth that makes itself felt. He and I-330 are like microbes being devoured but pretending to be phagocytes. Today's "accident" is surely just the beginning of infinity pouring itself onto their glass paradise.

D-503 feels like a flower that blooms once in a thousand years. Nothing seems ordinary, even the controller, as he hands her his pink stub. She warns he is killing himself, and he agrees mentally, for he has a soul. He wonders if it is painful when buds burst and believes spermatozoa are the most terrible of microbes. Back in his room, I-330 sits in his armchair. D-503 falls at her feet and dissolves into her. He babbles about his feelings, and she declares humans ought to have cultivated foolishness as they have intelligence—it could produce something precious. For his foolishness and for what he does during the walk, I-330 loves him more. She has been testing his obedience. Numbers have an inner metronome that helps them know the time within five minutes; D-503's stops and, fearfully, he checks his badge. They still have 20 minutes left and he



has so much to tell about his life. I-330 lifts his face, asks if he will ever forget her, and gestures like she is throwing something away. As he fetches her stockings, he scatters manuscript pages and frets about putting them back in order. He says he cannot bear being near her when she seems distant, beyond a wall, apparently withholding something. I-330 promises to tell all after the holiday and asks if Integral is nearly finished. This question puzzles him.

Records 19-23 Analysis

This section heightens the tension. O-90 wants to bear D-503's baby, even if it means execution. I-330 is acting so strangely that during a walk, D-503 assumes a demonstrator is she and tries to protect her from arrest. S-4711, the Guardian Angel, comes to his defense. I-330 confesses she has been testing his loyalty and promises to reveal all to him. D-503 and the reader are left wondering why she is interested in Integral's completion date.



Records 24-27

Records 24-27 Summary

D-503 is like a motor running too fast, headed for meltdown. He establishes $L=f(D)$ —"love is the function of death." That is why he is afraid of I-330 and struggles against her. He longs for the "happy death" he escaped yesterday. Tomorrow is the Day of Unanimity, which they will both attend, but not together. It is absurd to long for pain. That evening, watching a feverish pink sunset, D-503 reminds himself for whom he is writing this diary, and explains the coming holiday. The Day of Unanimity is like the ancient Christians' Easter. As a boy, D-503 prepares an hour calendar to count down the wait. New unifs are distributed. Every year, Numbers wear them to witness the annual re-election of the Well-Doer. It is symbolic of their powerful union, quite unlike the unpredictable elections of the ancients, conducted in darkness and secrecy. Moderns all vote openly for the Well-Doer. Unseen Guardians care for anyone who might do otherwise. D-503 wants to destroy what he has written, for unanimity has no value and a Day is glorious only if he is with I-330. He phones and asks her to be with him at the celebration. He hears someone whispering to her and she declines, promising to show him why.

All rise and sing the Hymn. D-503 forgets that I-330 says something alarming will happen. He feels like a little boy again, who weeps over a tiny ink stain on his unif. Now he is covered by criminal stains and ought not to be among honest Numbers. He is ready for the end if it comes. All look upward as the Well-Doer descends like "a new Jehovah" in his aero. He is as wise, loving, and cruel as the ancient Jehovah. He looks down on concentric circles of stands dotted with blue unifs; it looks like a web and he is the wise spider settling in its center. Silence falls. D-503 half-rises and looks around, and sees alarmed Guardians exchanging finger signs. As a poet recites his pre-election ode, D-503 scans faces but cannot find the one. S-4711 runs past the platform and heads into the stands. D-503 is convinced there is some bond between him and I-330, which he hopes someday to untangle. S-4711 stops and bows to her and the repellent R-13. D-503 feels pain in his heart, seeing them together. Custom provides for a five-minute pre-election recess, normally spent in pious silence; today it seems like what the ancients call the "lull before the storm." All watch their badge-clocks for the moment when a cast-iron voice will order all in favor to lift their hands. Millions obey, including D-503, weakly, with foreboding.

The voice calls, "Those opposed?" This is the most magnificent moment, when all sit still with heads bowed. Today, however, there is a light rustling and for an instant, thousands of hands go up, including I-330's. In another instant, Guardians descend on dissenters, who voice inaudible screams. O-90 presses against a wall, white-lipped, protecting her abdomen. D-503 is repulsed seeing R-13 carrying I-330, her white unif torn open and red with blood. He leaps agilely from bench to bench. D-503 launches after them and demands he put her down. When R-13 starts to run away, D-503 hits him over the head with elation and takes over the carrying. That evening at 22:00, D-



503 records the shame of a spoiled election and wonders who "they" are. He recalls I-330, with breast proudly uncovered, telling him tomorrow is an "unknown." They sit together a long while. She promises to take him beyond the Wall—if nothing happens. D-503 feels himself dissolve into a point, the geometric form that, when it moves, creates thousands of curves and solids. He is afraid to budge. As he writes in his glass cell, there are none of the usual noises. D-503 wonders what will become of him the next day.

The red-cheeked sky of morning makes D-503 wonder if "our world" still exists or is being kept moving for 3-4 revolutions before inertia wears out. The Journal of the United State reports unanimous re-election of the wise Well-Doer for the 48th time. The few confused enemies who cause confusion are not counted; they are like a cough during a symphony. At 12:00 the Administrative, Medical, and Guardian bureaus will hold a joint meeting and an important State decree is expected. The Walls appear to stand fast and D-503 no longer feels lost. He walks with others with a firm step, but sees people shying away from one particular street corner. Arriving there, D-503 sees MEPHI written in green letters on paper pasted just too high for S-4711 to swipe down. No one is willing to help, for fear he or she will be taken for an accomplice. Recalling how often this Guardian Angel has helped him, D-503 pulls it down. S-4711's smile is confusing only until D-503 realizes this is like when a patient spikes a fever and breaks out in a rash; the disease is now easier to diagnose and treat. MEPHI signs are everywhere. At the docks, everything is silent, with only the cranes working to fuel Integral for her trial flight. D-503 and a washed-out Second Builder are counting when D-503 laughs aloud at the idea of consulting the Tables about dinner when one's airplane loses a wing and begins plunging from 5,000 meters.

When I-330 is late, D-503 grows horrified, alone in Ancient House. When she arrives, she says only they must go. Now, 24 hours later, recording his first reactions of being beyond the Green Wall is hard. Unfiltered light is blinding; trees move, jump, and rustle; the ground is an uneven plane of disgusting green stuff. I-330 tells him to be brave; all feel this the first time, but it passes. The paper-thin doctor helps break his fall and drag him to a clearing. There stands a crowd of 300-400 naked beings, covered with short glistening hair (except the women's faces and breasts). Atop a skull-like rock in the center of the clearing, silhouetted against the blue sky, I-330 addresses the Brothers, telling them that Integral is nearly ready to carry the walled way of life to thousands of worlds, while they are ready to tear down the walls and let the wind blow. They must capture Integral and can, because its Builder is now one of them. A silky-golden woman gives him a cold, sparkly drink that burns within and his blood and senses move faster. He notices MEPHI inscribed on the rock and a rough picture hewn of a youth with wings, a transparent body, and a blazing coal where the heart belongs. Feeling disembodied, D-503 jumps on the rock and declares this folly. I-330 agrees, but says them must soon all become insane. He sees S-4711's ears flit by and warns I-330, but she laughs: the Guardians are searching for them inside not imaging anyone going outside.

Records 24-27 Analysis

This section focuses on the electoral practice of the United State and the way dissent is handled. O-90 has gotten her wish. R-13 has, without explanation, become D-503's enemy and is in league with I-330. The motivation behinds her question about Integral's readiness is revealed: an underground group wants to hijack it. MEPHI signs appear everywhere, a sign of contagion. A showdown is near.



Records 28-30

Records 28-30 Summary

Going beyond the Green Wall is too novel to embrace. I-330 and U- shoot into D-503's room, with I-330 demanding if he has given U- permission to guard him from her. U- insists it is her duty: D-503 is a child and this is a foul game. D-503 orders her out and, stammering, she leaves. I-330 dismisses U-, says she is in his hands to the very end. D-503 blushes at the mention of his hands, part of his former self. She tells him that all auditoriums are closed as medics set up tables in them, for what no one knows. D-503 no longer understands "we" and "they," but sees I-330 is on the edge, and declares it folly to oppose the United State—like stopping a bullet by covering the muzzle of a gun with one's hand. The dark cross on I-330's face is especially distinct.

D-503 offers to drop everything and run off beyond the wall, but she has made up her mind: they are going elsewhere. She holds D-503's hand and tells him women used to fall in love with such hands. He has a little sun and woods in his blood. He grows upset, not knowing who "they" are. She replies they are the lost half; both H2 and O are needed to form water. She talks about colors, the invention of petroleum food, black nights, smoke, endless strings of people being driven into the city—all of which D-503 knows about—and then talks about those who remain outside the Wall, naked, learning from nature, growing hair for protection, connecting to instinctual emotions, and praying to fire. MEPHI comes from Mephisto, whose picture is on the rock. Two forces are at work in the world: entropy and energy. One leads to equilibrium and the other destroys it. Their Christian ancestors worship entropy like a God, but moderns are not Christians.

The messenger with an awning forehead warns that Guardians are on their way. I-330 laughs it off, but at D-503's begging, departs, leaving him alone. He sits at his desk to appear busy. Realizing he dares not let anyone see his recent writings or dispose of anything in a glassed-in room, he snatches a handful of pages and sits on them. The Guardians move room-to-room, coming closer. Some Numbers sit torpidly like him, while others flee. D-503 writes patriotic nonsense with a trembling hand, head bent low, then faces morose, silent, S-4711, whose eyes drill everywhere. U- is among those looking in at him, and D-503 figures out why they are here. Instead, she vouches for him: always working at his desk. S-4711 demands a sheet, reads, smiles, declares it "somewhat ambiguous," but allows him to continue. D-503 feels his soul redistribute itself evenly throughout his body. U- lingers to remind him of his luck, and then explains that three Numbers have been lead quietly away. Wise people are discussing only the weather.

Oddly, the barometer drops but there is no wind. Storm clouds move rapidly overhead and invisible threads from beyond the Wall tickle peoples' faces. D-503 and I-330 meet in their apartment in the Ancient House. Near the House, he is overtaken by O-90, now fully rounded out. He thinks of branches blooming in the spring. They talk of seeing one another at the Day of Unanimity, and she declares how happy she is. She caresses his



hand until he pulls it away. When D-503 reminds her of her coming fate, O-90 frowns and he feels emotions that are absurd in a pumping organ like the heart. He realizes he and I-330 can save her and the baby, so she can see it grow up. He happily pictures making the arrangements when O-90 rejects his help and declares it is none of his business if she dies. He walks sadly to the Ancient House.

In a cacophony of noise and color inside Ancient House, I-330 says that day after tomorrow they will seize Integral. They cannot lose a minute, for hundreds have been arrested, including 20 Mephis, who in days will perish. At 12:00 sharp, when the dinner bell sounds, D-503 must lock everyone in the dining hall so Integral can be taken. D-503 condemns the absurdity, arguing that everyone knows the last revolution has taken place. I-330 asks the philosopher-mathematician to name the highest, largest, last number; he cannot, of course. She continues: "last" is used to frighten children. Science deals in entropy: the flame and explosion needed to cause motion. The only thing wrong with the Two Hundred Years' War is that the revolutionaries come to believe they are the last. It is Galileo's mistake: being right about the earth going around the sun, but missing that the solar system too revolves around center. The Mephis know there is no last number but probably will forget, as they age. She asks if D-503 is with them, embracing him. Her last word is a reminder: 12:00 sharp. He promises to remember. D-503 hurries home, thinking about the beauty of the Accumulating Tower. Auditoriums are full of tables covered by white sheets stained with blood. Something alarming is coming. Humans cannot live among unknowns without stumbling. He ought to turn himself in and disentangle everything.

Records 28-30 Analysis

This section shows the Guardians in action, searching out dissidents, but D-503 again escapes, thanks to his reputation. His phobia about hairy hands crops up, with two women finding them attractive. Integral's inventor must play a central role in its highjacking, an act which intends to keep the terrible social structure of the United State from spreading to other planets. The founders of the State make a fatal error in believing theirs is the final revolution. Bloodied sheets on auditoriums full of gurneys suggests hidden terror is being forced out into the open.



Records 31-34

Records 31-34 Summary

Reading the State Journal, D-530 feels saved. It tells how State science has discovered a simple X-ray procedure to eliminate the part of the frontal lobe that controls fancy. All Numbers will now be perfect, their sleepless nights ended. Guardians have been noticing telltale smiles and sighs that indicate the disease. All must hasten to undergo the Great Operation. D-503 phones I-330 to ask if she has read this. She must see him at 16:00. D-503 sees Numbers watch an Operation. At the docks, he strokes Integral's motor, knowing he must betray it. The Second Builder reports that the trial flight has been postponed a day because of the Operation. At 12:30, D-503 goes to his room and finds U- at his table. He recalls the morning confrontation with I-330, but today is too happy not to forgive. Her cheeks quiver with emotion as she thinks of D-503 being restored to health, born anew. He notices his papers are undisturbed but does not care who reads them now. U- is herding the children to the Operation, because love must be pitiless.

At 16:00, D-503 knocks at I-330's door and falls on the floor, embracing her and gazing into her eyes. He talks of flying to other planets, some of which may have attained the apex of happiness. I-330 asks if the apex is rather not comprised of an organized society. Desires are tortures. How curious to have marked happiness with a "plus" sign, when absolute happiness must be a "divine minus." D-503 dislikes her morbid tone and mockery, but she laughs, and kisses him goodbye, declaring the Operation will cure him of any need for her. He is shocked and his head is splitting. She declares he must choose between her and the Operation and 100% happiness. He babbles about not being able to live without her, and tells her about the postponement, which she says works to their advantage. On the dusky, windy street, D-503 brushes against many Numbers but feels alone. All but he are being saved; he does not want salvation.

D-503 doubts whether readers truly believe they will die—that their fingers will turn yellow and icy—for if they did, they would have jumped from a tall building by now. Instead, they read, shave, smile, and write. That is how he spends his time, watching the clock. Aboard Integral, he knows how to act, checking on the fueling operation with the Second Builder, calculating the quantity of fuel needed for the test flight. He suggests being cautious: take 1,000 tons. The wind whistles and D-503 has difficulty breathing as he walks by the Accumulating Tower, sucking electricity from the clouds. The Musical Tower is resounding and rows walk four abreast, but with arms swaying more than usual, stumbling, congealing, stretching their necks like geese. In one auditorium, 50 people—automatons now—are advertised as "The first," and others are exhorted to follow them. D-503 is making his way through this "human clot" when someone yells, "They are driving us in! Run!" and peoples scatter. S-4711 is briefly visible.



As D-503 stops in a doorway to catch his breath, O-90 overtakes him, looking very small. She is panicking about having the Operation and losing their illegal baby. He renews his offer to take O-90 to I-330 and she accepts. They walk on, each busy with his or her own thoughts through silent streets. As he hears S-4711's familiar steps, D-503 begins talking patriotically about Integral's maiden voyage and keeps her from voicing confusion. Knowing he cannot shake S-4711—or risk leading him to I-330—D-503 leads O-90 to his building. She feels betrayed. Irate Numbers surround the controller's desk, so he leads her aside to an empty corner, writes a note to I-330, and presses it into O-90's hand. They say a sad goodbye. U- declares to him that everyone has gone crazy. Has he heard talk about a hairy naked man near the Ancient House?

The newspaper announces in large print that tomorrow, all work is to stop and all Numbers are to submit to the Operation. Those who fail will be submitted to the Machine. D-503 tries to file the paper with all the others on a shelf, but it falls from his hand. He mentally packs a valise and says goodbye to his room, his possessions, and his unknown readers.

Boarding Integral, D-503 cannot bear to look at the Second Builder and his two assistants, gray, turtle-like, and rayless, discussing where they may land. He recalls an ancient children's tale, "The Three Forgiven Ones," in which three Numbers excused from work for a month find within ten days they cannot live without their normal routine, and walk hand-in-hand into the river. D-503 knows in an hour, with his own hands, he will cast these men off to such a fate. Inspecting the engine room, D-503 answers questions quickly and precisely, as by a phonograph-within, while remaining lost in his own thoughts. Seeing the man with the low forehead, D-503 begins to quiver. He rushes to the commander's bridge and gives the order that fires Integral's motors. The City becomes a relief map. They pierce the clouds and enter darkness, so suddenly that all grow timid and silent. D-503 feels himself soaring bodiless into a new, upside-down world. He orders the current course kept and hands over command to the Second Builder.

D-503 races to the saloon door he is soon to latch and lock. The Number guarding it, who has exceptionally long arms, fails to recognize the Builder, but stands aside when informed D-503 is in charge. Not finding I-330 here, he runs back to the hot, roaring engine room. There he asks the man with the low forehead, who says I-330 is working the radio. She is the tallest of three workers wearing receiving helmets that emanate blue sparks and ozone; she looks like an ancient Valkyrie. He orders her into a small cabin to take dictation. As they sit side-by-side, holding hands, I-330 talks happily about the wonder of flying nowhere and finding themselves tonight together somewhere in grass or leaves. Loudly, he dictates Time: 11:20. Speed: 5,800. Quietly, she reports getting O-90 to safety. D-503 returns to the bridge, enjoys the delirious starry sky, and watches the clock. Thinking it would better for the take-over to occur closer to the earth, he orders Integral's engine stopped. She hangs motionless as by a hair, and then begins plummeting like a stone. D-503's heart beats audibly. He feels a compulsion to be broken into tiny particles, but the phonograph-within orders four lower tubes fired, holding the ship motionless 1 km. from earth. Everyone marvels at autumnal woods,



prairies, a lake, and remnants of an ancient church tower. Beings with faces ride a herd of horses.

As the dinner gong sounds, people move toward the dining saloon, but two unnaturally long arms block the door. The man declares in the name of the Guardians that Integral shall not be taken over. The rebels' numbers are not yet known, but will be. I-330 hisses that D-503 has done his duty and storms away. D-503 files in with everyone else and his phonograph-within forces him to chew each bite 50 times. He cries to I-330 inaudibly as she sits across the table from him, refusing to look at him, and talking with a companion about "nobility" being a superstitious remnant of feudalism. D-503 resumes command and Integral ascends again into dark blue space. He sees in his mind U-bending over his desk, reading his papers—and it is clear what has happened. He rushes to the radio room, where I-330 ignores him. He dictates loudly to another worker Time: 14:40, going down, motors stopped. "The end of all." His heart remains in the clouds, which seem to say, "Soon the end," but the Second Builder strikes him and, as D-503 loses consciousness, orders: "Full-speed aft!"

Records 31-34 Analysis

This section shows Integral's fateful test flight. It is postponed a day by the order mandating the Great Operation or the Well-Doer's Machine. While not stated, it appears Integral's crew enjoys a reprieve. O-90 finally accepts D-503's offer to arrange her safe conduct beyond the Green Wall. Throughout the one hour of flight before the proposed take-over, D-503 is a nervous wreck but manages to execute his official duties automatically; the idea of an internal phonograph is introduced. When the coup is thwarted, I-330 immediately suspects D-503 has sold out and he again suspects U- is the culprit, whom he will soon confront. The ineffectual Second Builder mutinies when D-503 sets Integral on a suicide path. It is unclear whether this is survival instinct, patriotic duty, or if he is, like the long-armed crewmember, a Guardian plant.



Records 35-40

Records 35-40 Summary

D-503's head is bandaged in a "pitiless ring of glass iron" and he cannot sleep, planning U-'s murder. The taste of something "disgustingly sweet" has him spitting into a handkerchief. He pulls out a defective piston rod he has been studying, wraps it in pages of his manuscript, and heads to the controller's table. He remembers work is cancelled today and steps out into the street, where crowds are walking every which way. It is like letters jumping from a page and rearranging into nonsense. A man and a woman kiss for the last time. A banner overhead denounces machines and the Operation. A boy runs by, face distorted, weeping, fleeing someone, and D-503 figures U- must be in school. He enters the Underground Railroad but no trains are running. He tries to claw his way toward I-330's voice, but cannot. She denounces the stupidity of the Great Operation and relates how, in antiquity, asses are motivated to move by dangling carrots before them. Shouts come from behind, warning "they" are coming. A cable is cut and the lights go out, but D-503 finds his way back to the sidewalk, still carrying his terrible package.

Back at the desk, U- is still missing. With his temples throbbing, D-503 climbs to his room and paces. His neighbor to the left has the curtains down, while the bald man to the right reads and watches D-503. At 21:00, U- enters, sits, and arranges her unif. Her gills are waving as she asks if he is wounded. D-503 sees the piston on the table and locates the place where he will strike. To prevent his neighbor from witnessing the blow, D-503 lowers his curtain without permission. U- intuits what is coming and rushes to the door, but too slowly. She backs away toward the bed, trembling, tensed, as D-503 reaches to the table. He would have killed her had she not torn off her unif, revealing a "large, yellow, drooping body," and fallen to the bed. It is so unexpected - and so stupid - that D-503 breaks into laughter and drops the piston. The phone rings: the Well-Doer summons D-503 at once and hangs up. Offended, U- dresses, while D-503 wonders why HE has called. With tears streaming down her face, U- says she has not reported I-330, for fear of losing his love. He understands the whole absurd, ridiculous truth and opens the door.

D-503 recalls nothing of his walk to face the Well-Doer. Afraid to raise his eyes, he sees only massive cast-iron hands weighting down the Well-Doer's knees. He moves his fingers and begins speaking with a surprisingly ordinary human voice: Integral's Builder should have marked a glorious new chapter in history, but ... D-503 recalls no more words, just a threatening finger. The Well Doer demands the truth: does D-503 want execution? The Well-Doer is not afraid of that word. The Christian God ought to have remunerated richly those who nailed the body to the cross, for theirs is the important task. Those who weep below and hiss at the executioners are secondary. The Christian God, through his followers, burns at least as many enemies as they themselves are burned, and still, he is worshiped as the God of Love. This is not absurd, for since the dawn of time, man has realized that cruelty is the inevitable mark of truth. Fire burns



and hurts. The Well-Doer asks if D-503 cannot see that they are simply using him, Integral's Builder? The words fell him like a bullet. He raises his head and laughs before this bald, Socrates-like man. Everything is trivial and ridiculous.

D-503 next recalls running in a crowd of shouting people, heading toward the Machine of the Well-Doer in the deserted square. He imagines I-330 lying there, with her head thrown back on a white pillow, and he does not want to see it. No one hears him crying out to be saved. He wishes he had a mother as in ancient times to whom he would be a living human being, a piece of herself. Whether nailed to a cross or driving in the nails, he would hear her wrinkled lips speak words no one else could hear.

In the morning, D-503's refectory neighbor asks why he is not eating. They are watching. Painfully, he smiles, and lifts his fork, but it falls as do everyone else's, when the air rings with a terrible roar and then dies away. Faces blanch and jaws go slack. In confusion, people jump up and mill about, wondering how pieces of the great and perfect Machine could be raining down. People stampede into the street, pointing, questioning. D-503 sees a crescent crawling on the western horizon. Guardian aeros are massing overhead. The sky then fills with black triangles of living birds, which land everywhere. The face of the man with the protruding forehead grows bright with joy as he proclaims they must have blown up the Wall. D-503 asks where I-330 has gone. The man says she is in town, acting, doing great work. Fifty cheerful people with protruding foreheads begin walking westward, toward the operated ones. Stumbling against the wind, through empty streets, D-503 runs to I-330, not knowing why. It seems like Doomsday. He sees couples embracing shamelessly without lowering curtains in the middle of the day. He finds the building empty. Everything in I-330's room has been overturned. The floor is strewn with pink checks, mostly bearing D-503, but a few some F- Number. He stamps them under his heels and exits. Asked about I-330, an old man waves his hands and stumbles off. D-503 is home at dusk, the western sky twitching with electric convulsions, and roaring. He falls instantly asleep.

D-503 awakens to a painful glare. I-330 has turned on the light and sits, smiling, looking at him. He rushes to her, anxious to explain everything. He sees she is smoking. She tells him not to speak; "they" are waiting for her below and she wants their last few minutes to be special. The curtains fall and she embraces him. He is plunged into warm sleep, recalling her room and the pink checks bearing the number F-. He crushes her so she cries out in pain. In 10-15 minutes, he watches I-330 lying with her sharp line of teeth, and embraces her, tenderly, cruelly, and illicitly. She asks if it is true that he has seen the Well-Doer and grows pale when he confirms it. He tells her everything except the claim that "they" have been using him. He does not need to ask why she has come. He knocks over a chair with his "foreign limbs." Her lips are as cold as the floor on which he once sat beside her. She leaves and D-503 cannot write. He no longer wants to.

D-503 decides that he must tomorrow morning go on the suicide mission that will mean rebirth. The western sky twitches, D-503's head burns, and he falls asleep only at 07:00. He awakens at 10:00 (the Bell fails to ring) and heads out, as quickly as possible, lest he lose his nerve. The storm has passed, leaving the sky a brittle autumnal blue. D-



503 is not seeing properly, but only registering impressions of branch-strewn pavements, fallen leaves, birds, aeros. The streets look as though they have been swept by plague. He trips over R-13's laughing corpse, a mere 20 steps from the Bureau of Guardians. He steps inside, joining a crawling chain of Numbers, and feels himself pushed forward. S-4711, his wing ears purplish and Adam's apple tossing, demands to know why D-503 is here. D-503 wants to tell everything and is glad it is S-4711, for he too knows I-330, and D-503 will see a familiar face in his closing seconds of life. S-4711's airless room feels like the Glass Bell. S-4711 is silent. D-503 begins: he has always hated I-330 from the start, struggles against her, but ultimately wants to perish. Does S-4711 know he has been summoned to the Well-Doer? S-4711 is impatient; others are waiting. D-503 stumbles through a confession of everything he has written in these pages about his real, hairy self, the lies, the false certificates, the underground corridors, and being beyond the Wall. S-4711 nods and his smile grows more curved as he asks why D-503 has concealed seeing him beyond the Wall. D-503 suddenly understands: this is all like the story of Abraham and Isaac, when God at the end proclaims, "Never mind ... I was only joking."

D-503 pushes out of his chair and dashes out, taking refuge in a public restroom in the Underground Railway. Overhead, a great civilization is crumbling, but here all is normal and beautiful. It too will perish and only myths will survive. As D-503 moans aloud, his neighbor to the left gently pats his knee and says he understands him completely. He tells him of a great discovery: there is no infinity. The average density of matter in the universe is not zero, so it must be finite. Everything is final. D-503 is shattered by the discovery and the realization that he has reached the "apocalyptic hour." It is his duty to record this in a finished form, so he borrows paper and writes the final lines. He asks what is there, where the finite universe ends, but heavy footsteps prevent an answer.

D-503 recognizes the handwriting, but not the crazy content. He is absolutely healthy now, light, and empty-headed. He smiles because that is the normal state for a human being's face. Along with everyone else lacking proof of having undergone the Operation, D-503 has been taken to the nearest auditorium, tied down, and given it. Next day, he appears before the Well-Doer and tells all he knows about enemies of happiness. Without a soul, it is easy. That evening, D-503 sees the famous Gas Chamber for the first time. A stubborn woman, smiling with pretty, sharp teeth, is put under it. She looks at D-503 and seems familiar. The air is sucked out; she passes out, only to be resuscitated. The procedure is repeated three times, but she says nothing. Everyone else confesses after the first trial. Tomorrow they will all go up to the Well-Doer's Machine. The revolt is still alive in the western areas, but a temporary Wall of high-voltage waves has been set up across Avenue 40. Reason certainly will prevail.

Records 35-40 Analysis

In the final section, D-503 is unable to kill U- for her supposed treachery when he is disarmed by laughter, the world's most powerful weapon. She has been in love with him all along. He is summoned to appear before the Well-Wisher, who offers a novel interpretation of Christ's Crucifixion and Christians' predilection for violence over the



centuries. Religious imagery continues in D-503's musings about the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 21:1-19). The "Socrates-like" appearance of the Well-Doer is not unlike the wizard in L. Frank Baum's "The Wizard of Oz." Given the publication dates of the two books and the fact that Oz had been translated into Russian, this may not be coincidental. It is hard for a modern reader not to imagine it. Also, juxtaposing the Christian God and Socrates is meaningful in the Russian Orthodox tradition.

Feeling Doomsday has arrived, D-503 decides to cleanse his soul through confession. I-330 comes to bid him farewell and he makes an almost-clean breast of it with her and then with S-4711. Note the irony of D-503 realizing a great civilization is crumbling and learning that the universe is finite while sitting in a public restroom in the Underground Railway. The effects of the Great Operation are seen in D-503's final diary entry: he remembers nothing. Oddly, the Guardians use the Gas Bell on suspects whom they have thus pithed. I-330 holds out stubbornly, while others fold. D-503 has confessed fully once his soul is gone. How so, if his memories are gone? At any rate, he who once found the world beyond the Green Wall so refreshing (if scary) now rejoices that a temporary Wall has gone up and Reason will prevail.



Characters

D-503

The novel's protagonist, D-503 is a 32-year-old philosopher-mathematician who responds to a call for literary works to send to distant planets about Integral, the spacecraft he has designed and whose construction he oversees. In his youth, D-503 contemplates becoming a poet like his friend R-13, but is in love with numbers and calculations. He chooses to keep a diary to share with distant readers whom he assumes will be as unenlightened as humans on Earth before the Two Hundred Years' War. Because he believes current humans are quite evolved, D-503 is morbidly ashamed of his hairy, apelike hands.

D-503 and R-13 are licensed to O-90 for (separate) sexual liaisons on specified days. Their "triangle" is broken when D-503 meets I-330, a strange free thinker who helps him discover his human soul and the non-regimented life depicted in the Ancient House, which the State maintains as a museum, but I-330 uses as her home away from home. When an estranged O-90 begs for a child, D-503 impregnates her and later arranges for her removal from the City to safety.

Through I-330, D-503 joins a resistance group, MEPHI, who want him to help hijack Integral, to prevent State slavery from expanding throughout the universe. D-503 is, like every newcomer, overwhelmed and disoriented by life beyond the Green Wall, but is so enamored of I-330 that he throws his lot in with MEPHI. When the highjacking is thwarted, D-503 assumes he has been turned in by U-, the controller in his building, and intends to murder her, but discovers she has been all along in love with him, which he finds laughable. In the end, D-503 is arrested, undergoes the Great Operation, where his fancy is removed, and for one day before the rebels are executed, resumes his previous existence.

I-330

Consistently described as having a face that forms an irritating X—because her eyebrows slant up toward her temples and deep creases descend from her nose to the corners of her mouth when she frowns—I-330 is, nevertheless, called beautiful. She has white, sharp teeth and a slender body as flexible as a whip. Initially D-503 finds her irritating and repellant, cold as brass but with blazing eyes, lacking the beauty of simplicity. This, of course, means he must fall in love with her. I-330 takes the lead, obtaining a pink checkbook authorizing sexual encounters with him, and testing him systematically to see if he is reliable.

I-330 smokes and drinks alcohol in front of D-503 and suggests she can get him a medical pass to miss work. All are capital offenses in the United State, which he is duty-bound to report within 48 hours. He fails to do so and falls into I-330's control. A frequent



visitor at the Ancient House, a museum maintained by the State to show prehistoric living conditions, I-330 is soon seen to be the organizer of the underground revolutionary movement, MEPHI. Taking D-503 behind the Green Wall, she delivers a fiery speech that declares he has joined them, making the highjacking of his Integral possible. She signs on as a radio operator for the test flight, during which the takeover is thwarted. In the end, I-330 is captured, undergoes the Great Operation, and withstands three rounds of torture under the Gas Bell without saying a word.

O-90

Round all over, including infant-like dimples on her wrists, O-90 is 10cm shy of the "Maternal Norm" that makes childbearing legal. She is in a sexual "triangle" with D-503 and his childhood friend, R-13, seeing both of them (separately) on prescribed nights. O-90 finds beauty in spring rather than in dancing machinery like D-503, whom she truly loves. Her wonderful, round, unclouded blue eyes frequently fill with tears when she thinks about babies. They betray nothing foreign or superfluous in her simple, round mind. When sad, her rosy, crescent-shaped mouth points its "horns" downward in a pout. D-503 finds fault with how she speaks faster than she thinks. Still, they enjoy walking hand-in-hand and she pushes to have their next sexual day moved forward.

The triangle is broken when D-503 falls in love with I-330. O-90's heart breaks but she gives him his freedom. Later, desperate, she begs D-503 to impregnate her illegally; even though she knows this will result in her execution. She needs to feel life inside her and look at a wrist like her own, if only for a day. Before the flight of Integral, which D-503 assumes will bear him far away, he makes arrangements with I-330 to spirit O-90 beyond the Green Wall to safety. Earlier, O-90 had proudly refused the offer.

R-13

A poet who has been D-503's best friend since school days, R-13 is described as having "Negro" lips which release a spray every time he pronounces a word beginning with "P." He loves to joke, which is something D-503 never understands. When thinking, R-13 scratches the back of his head, which D-503 considers square like a valise. The friends begin the novel in an authorized sexual "triangle" with round O-90. She likes R-13 but loves D-503, but R-13 is content. He receives the honor of delivering the death sentence in verse at public executions and is writing odes for inclusion when D-503's Integral carries literary works to other planets to convince backwards humans to accept the order of the United State. R-13 disappears from the story for a while, until he tries to rescue I-330—D-503's new love—from a dangerous melee. D-503 punches his former friend with all his might to wrestle her away. R-13 last appears as a smiling corpse in an apocalyptic city—D-503 must jump over him.



S-4711

A mysterious, lurking character, described as hunchbacked with a body shaped like the letter S, with pink bat-like ears, an Adam's apple like a broken couch spring, and sparkling little eyes that drill into people, S-4711 works for the Bureau of Guardians. D-503 first sees him close up during a walk with O-90, during which D-503 also first meets his future love, I-330, who is at that point with one of her authorized sexual partners. D-503 recalls seeing his distinctive figure outside the Bureau of Guardians and instinctively respecting him.

Soon, D-503 hears S-4711's distinctive sloshing footsteps everywhere he goes and catches glimpses of the fleeting ears. Several times, S-4711 proves to be D-503's Guardian Angel, getting him out of jams with his colleagues. D-503 seeks S-4711 out to make his final and complete confession, omitting only that he has seen S-4711 beyond the Green Wall. What S-4711 does there and what his relationship is with the underground revolutionary group, MEPHI, are left a mystery.

U-

The controller in D-503's building, U- is described as a large fleshy woman whose cheeks look like a fish's brownish-pink gills. D-503 goes out of his way to emphasize that U- is a nice person. He conceals her number in his diary, lest he write something unkind about her. Her regular job is at the Child-Educational Refinery, where her appearance is mocked. Whenever she sits down, she innocently smooths her unif over her knees. When U- treats D-503 as a child, he resents it, and puzzles him by talking about perhaps registering him.

Twice U- gets into situations that appear to compromise her as a State informer, but she vindicates herself. When the highjacking of D-503's Integral is thwarted, however, he can see no one else to blame and plans to kill her with a heavy piston. She misinterprets his lowering of the curtains as a prelude to rape, tears off her unif, revealing a "large, yellow, drooping body," and falls to the bed. It is so unexpected—and so stupid—that D-503 breaks into laughter and drops the piston. Offended, U- dresses and, with tears streaming, says she has not reported I-330, for fear of losing his love.

The Second Builder

D-503's humorless assistant on the Integral project, the Second Builder's face resembles a porcelain plate with round eyes and a childish, innocent smile. When D-503 appears to set Integral on a crash trajectory during its test flight, the Second Builder knocks him unconscious and assumes command for a safe landing.



Taylor

The oft-spoken of but never seen organizer of synchronized lifestyle of the United State, Taylor is revered by D-503 as a prophetic genius who by ten centuries anticipates the Tables of Hours. D-503 believes Taylor has been badly neglected by historians in favor of Immanuel Kant.

The Well-Doer

The current leader of the United State, the Well-Doer is revered as a wise man, and in the course of the novel is unanimously re-elected for the 48th time (the few confused enemies who sow confusion by opposing him are not counted; they are like a cough during a symphony). The Well-Doer presides at public executions, using his heavy hand to throw the lever on his Machine, which atomizes the victim. Awestruck Numbers do not dare gaze upon his face and his voice is amplified to give it the timber of terror. He speaks in religious terms about the violence of the Christian God and seems happy to emulate him and the fiery "Jehovah" of the Hebrew scriptures. When D-503 finally looks up at the Well-Doer, he sees a normal human being that looks like Socrates, with a bald, sweating head. The Well-Doer personally supervises putting down the revolution and presides at the executions.

The Wrinkled Woman

An aged lady who acts as doorkeeper to the Ancient House museum, this unnamed character's face is a mass of wrinkles. She sits happily in the sun all day, allowing I-330, a regular visitor, and others come and go. D-503, in one of his flights of joy, kisses her on the lips, which appear to grow together over time. At the end, D-503 imagines her as his mother, seeing himself as a living human being and a piece of her, rather than a famous inventor and a Number, D-503. He will, regardless of his fate, hear her wrinkled lips speak words no one else could hear.



Objects/Places

The Accumulator Tower

The most prominent structure in the City, the Accumulator Tower collects electricity from storm clouds, an activity far more benign than its frequent mentioning suggests.

The Ancient House

Maintained as a "prehistoric site," part of a State-run museum, the reddish Ancient House is a multi-storied, gaudy explosion of avant-garde wall treatments, heavy furniture, and curious artwork—like an ugly bust of the Russian poet Pushkin—that make the Ancient House the polar opposite of austere, transparent modern architecture and furnishings. D-503, on first acquaintance, sees an analogy to the human head: opaque with tiny openings to let light in. A woman whose face is a mass of wrinkles sits outside the front door as doorkeeper, admitting regulars like I-330, who is the head of the underground revolutionary movement MEPHI. A maze of catacombs lies beneath the Ancient House, in which D-503 gets lost.

The Bureau of Guardians

The covert security force of the United State, The Bureau of Guardians is likened to thorns that protect a delicate rose from rough hands. Its name suggests to D-503 the "Guardian Angels" that in Christian antiquity are said to be assigned to each newborn to help them throughout life. He views them as helpers in times of moral crisis, keeping Numbers safe on the established paths. S-4711 is the Guardian who follows D-503 everywhere. Another, anonymous man with unnaturally long arms, declares the takeover of Integral defeated. During isolated incidents of dissent, the Guardians launch themselves at offenders and use stinging, elegant electronic whips to obtain submission.

The Gas Bell

An improved version of an apparatus used by physicists to torture rats, the Gas Bell is the Operation Department's standard tool for obtaining confessions from criminals. At the conclusion of the novel, I-330 is shown being tortured and revived three times without saying a word, while other dissidents reveal all they know after a single instance.



The Great Operation

From its description in the State newspaper, the Great Operation is possibly a prefrontal lobotomy, ostensibly to remove imagination and the ability to love. The newspaper claims it is done by X-rays, but blood on sheets clearly shows physical surgery is involved. Long rumored to exist, the Great Operation is officially announced as a panacea for emotional and physical problems including insomnia. It is the means whereby humans can achieve the paradise they have always sought as a species. The State decrees that Numbers either submit to the Great Operation and receive 100% happiness or be submitted to the Well-Doer's deadly Machine. Along with many other Numbers, D-503 is arrested, strapped down, and given the procedure before being executed. He recalls nothing that is written in his diary (although he recognizes his own handwriting) and finds his lover I-330 merely a familiar face as he watches her tortured in the Gas Bell.

The Green Wall

A massive glass structure constructed around the City at the end of the Two Hundred Years' War, the Green Wall is also fitted with electronic equipment to keep birds from flying over. What goes on outside is unknown and feared. D-503 sees yellow eyes through the distorting glass and wonders how beings could live without the Tables, which minutely regulate life inside. Revolutionaries breach the Green Wall to the west and birds flock in to land everywhere. As the State regains control, a temporary electronic wall is erected inside the city.

The Integral

An exquisite, oblong-ellipsoid body, made of long-lasting, flexible glass, Integral is the brainchild of D-503, a gifted philosopher-mathematician. As the novel opens, Integral is 120 days short of completion and beginning its mission of subjugating other planets to the United State, motivating primitives to abandon freedom and embrace "mathematical faultless happiness." Accordingly, Numbers are encouraged to write tributes for inclusion in the Integral's first cargo. For a long time, D-503 maintains this orthodox view, until he falls in with MEPHI, an underground resistance group dedicated to bringing down the all-powerful state and preventing the spread of its system elsewhere. D-503 agrees to lock up the crew on the first test flight and turn the rocket over to his new colleagues. He commands the first flight, which goes as planned, leaving Earth's atmosphere. It then descends to 1 km. above the surface for the takeover, which is thwarted by the Guardians. D-503 takes it back into space and then sends it hurtling down on a suicide plunge, which Second Builder thwarts by mutinying.



MEPHI

An underground resistance group taking their name from Mephistopheles (the translator uses a variant, "Mephisto"), the devil in the Faust legend, MEPHI meets outside the Green Wall to plan its activities. When taken beyond the Wall, after seeing mysterious MEPHI handbills pasted everywhere, D-503 sees the word inscribed on a rock in a clearing, where hundreds of hairy naked people gather. Beside it is a rough picture hewn of a youth with wings, a transparent body, and a blazing coal where the heart belongs. I-330 assures him that the Guardians are searching for them inside the City, not imagining anyone going outside. Some 20 adherents are arrested in a crackdown and are sentenced to death. MEPHI enlists D-503 to hijack his Integral rocket, and puts agents aboard, but the effort is thwarted.

The Operation Department

Under direct supervision of the Well-Doer, the experienced physicians of the Operation Department extract answers from criminals using the Gas Bell, an improved version of an apparatus used in physics experiments to create a vacuum around a test rat. Five centuries previously, when the Operation Department begins, fools liken it to the Inquisition, but this is to liken surgeons, foolishly, to cutthroats because both use blades.

The Plaza of the Cube

The place of solemn public gatherings in the United State, the Plaza of the Cube consists of concentric circles of stadium seating around a raised cube. When public executions take place, the Cube is surmounted by the dread Machine, whose switch the Well-Doer throws to reduce the criminal's body to purified water. Once a year, on the Day of Unanimity Numbers receive new unifs and wear them to re-elect the Well-Doer, who descends dramatically, Jehovah-like, from the sky. A yea vote is expected from everyone and nays are unprecedented. Unseen Guardians watch for dissenters, who, in fact, appear.

The Tables of Hours

A system, derived after the Two Hundred Years' War by the legendary Taylor from ancient railroad schedules, the Table of Hours insures millions of Numbers in the United State awaken, start and finish work, eat (50 chews per bite), walk, exercise, and go to bed at precisely the same minute. The only variation comes twice a day, at 16:00 and 21:00 when personal hours are scheduled. Eventually, all 86,400 seconds of the day will be incorporated in the Tables. The free periods can be given over to sex behind lowered curtains, in accordance with the Lex Sexualis which allows any Number to apply for a license to use any other Number(s) as a sexual product. The Sexual Department determines their sexual days, enters these in the Table, and issues a pink checkbook.

The United State

The government that for 1,000 years since the disastrous Two Hundred Years' War has legislated human conduct through the Tables of Hours and related legislation, the United State is poised to extend its control to other planets, once the rocket Integral is completed. Over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that the United State rules a small area confined by a protective Green Wall. Only 0.2% of humans survive the war. The current population of the City consists of those forcibly driven in and detained. A considerable but unknown number of humans chose to remain outside, where they live in nature, naked, growing body hair for protection against the elements.

Themes

Regimentation

The total regimentation of society is the major theme and premise of *We*. Human beings have no names; they are "Numbers" (consonants denote males and vowels females). In his diary, intended to enlighten barbaric inhabitants of other planets and convince them that the United States' approach to social order is rational and good, D-503 repeatedly praises the beauty of the system. Numbers are all the same, wearing identical "unifs," with heads shaved, marching everywhere four abreast to the sound of martial music. Modern military organizations certainly live by and extol these virtues.

The need for such a system seems to have grown out of a horrific Two Hundred Years' War. Its basis is the Table of Hours, derived by the legendary Taylor from ancient railroad schedules. It assures that millions of Numbers awaken, start and finish work, eat, walk, exercise, and go to bed at precisely the same minute. One could argue that since these things need to be done by all, there is no harm in having them done all at the same time. The system appears ridiculous, however, when it mires in detail: Numbers must chew every bite of food precisely 50 times. The only variation allowed comes twice a day, at 16:00 and 21:00, when personal hours are scheduled, but the eventual goal is for all 86,400 seconds of the day to be incorporated. The free periods can be given over to sex behind lowered curtains, in accordance with the Lex Sexualis which allows any Number to apply for a license to use any other Number(s) as a sexual product.

The negative side of such a controlling system is that the State assumes that any individual who will not comply is evil. Elections are by public acclamation and are expected to be unanimous (the present Well-Doer has been re-elected 47 times before dissidents dare oppose him). Buildings are made of glass so the ubiquitous Guardians can keep track of activities. It is well publicized that torture is used and, when signs of rebelliousness arise, the State decrees that all Numbers must submit to a "Great Operation" (probably a frontal lobotomy) that will give them the fruits of Paradise. Those who refuse face the Well-Doer's deadly Machine, whose operation are watched in awe in a civil liturgy that has all the trappings of religion.

Sex

Sex plays a central role in *We* because its regimentation is vital to the maintenance of social order. Free periods provided for in the Table of Hours can be devoted to sex behind lowered curtains, in accordance with the 300-year-old Lex Sexualis, which allows any Number to apply for a license to use any other Number(s) as a sexual product. The reason behind this legislation is that sex, a source of "stupid tragedies" in the past, ought to be the same kind of useful function as sleep, labor, and eating. Upon application, the Sexual Department determines a Number's optimal sexual days based



on hormonal levels, enters these in the Table, and issues a pink checkbook. These checks are submitted to the house controller, who issues a permit to close the curtains. Polygyny and polyandry are both acceptable and theoretically cause no friction. O-90 is licensed to two long-time friends, D-503 and R-13. The bond between them is strengthened by the arrangement, but when the "triangle" is invaded by a fourth Number, I-330 whom D-503 favors, O-90 grows jealous and has D-503 stricken from her list.

D-503 several times confides in his diary an obsession with women's cleavage and finds I-330 in a sheer saffron-yellow gown far more exciting than had she appeared naked. At the same time, he is something of a prude (and probably is not atypical of male Numbers), for when anarchy breaks out in the City, he is repulsed by the sight of male and female Numbers embracing and kissing at unauthorized times and without drawing the shades.

Clearly, the United State maintains a controlled breeding program, for O-90 is allowed to have sex but not to become pregnant, falling 10cm shy of the "Maternal Norm" that makes childbearing legal. Once upon a time, states allowed people to do as they pleased, including having sex uncontrolled by Maternal and Paternal Norms. This is considered atavistic and bizarre, and departures from the rules are punished by the heavy-handed Well-Doer and his vigilant Guardians. Later in the novel, O-90 begs D-503 to impregnate her illegally; even though she knows this will result in her execution. He obliges and arranges for her to be taken to safety beyond the Green Wall. She needs to feel life inside her and look at a wrist like her own, if only for a day.

Religion

We treats religion as a quaint part of ancient history. It is stated that the ancestors of Numbers in the United State formerly worshiped "entropy" as a God, but moderns are not Christians. Where religion has striven to bring blessings to humankind, but failed, the United State has in fact delivered them. The State has taken over liturgical actions and bent them to its own goals, particularly during public executions (social purifications) and the annual renewal of the covenant by unanimously re-electing the Well-Doer. Diarist D-503 equates this to the Christians' joyous Easter celebrations, and notes new garments are distributed and the congregation watches in awe as the Well-Doer, like Jehovah, descends from on high.

For having had no religious training (or so he suggests), D-503 refers to a number of scenes in the Bible. He talks about the creation of males and females and their tragic decision to choose freedom over happiness. By allowing this decision, God fails. When summoned before the Well-Wisher, he listens to a novel interpretation of Christ's Crucifixion: God ought to have richly remunerated those who nailed the body to the cross, for theirs was the important task in the drama. Those who wept below—and who hissed at the were secondary. The Well-Doer observes that the Christian God has, through his followers, burned at least as many enemies as Christians have been burned. Still, he is worshiped as the God of Love. This is not absurd, however, for since



the dawn of time, humankind has realized that cruelty is the inevitable mark of truth. Religious imagery continues in D-503's musings about the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 21:1-19), where at the last moment God declares he has only been joking.

Outside the Wall, human beings walk about naked, learning from nature, growing hair for protection, connecting to instinctual emotions, and praying to fire. The revolutionary movement MEPHI derives its name from Mephistopheles (the translator uses a variant, "Mephisto"), the Devil according to the Faust legend. He is depicted as a youth with wings, a transparent body, and a blazing coal where the heart belongs.

Style

Point of View

We is narrated in the first-person by a philosopher-mathematician who has had pretensions of becoming a poet in the past. He alternates present and past tense as he explains his situation or various cultural items to his imagined readers and actual events that have befallen him in the period between diary entries. The purpose of the diary is to help denizens of other planets to accept allegiance to the United State and adopt its uniform way of life.

This 36-year-old narrator, D-503, begins as an enthusiastic and convinced patriot, modest about his scientific accomplishments, and content with his way of life. He cannot conceive how the ancients, to whom he constantly refers (generally meaning people of the 20th century), could live in a chaotic state of freedom. Much of the information in the novel owes its inclusion to D-503's meticulous scholarly nature. First, he is determined to help readers, no matter how primitive or naïve (he is prejudiced to believe they must be), to understand completely his superior culture and the benefits it could bring them. Second, D-503 is dedicated to telling the whole story, disclosing everything. Several times, he refrains from censoring himself before the fact or destroying troubling passages after the fact.

Only when he meets freethinking I-330 does D-503 begin to question the need for unanimity in matters as minute as the number of chews per bite of food. Even at his most rebellious, however, habit and a reticence to say anything bad or unkind constrains him. He learns to laugh and sees it as a powerful tool to change behavior. He jumps to conclusions about people but as a good scientist quickly accepts contrary data. He feels the operation of a soul within himself and battles the tension between old and new. In the end, the revolution is suppressed, D-503 has his soul surgically removed, and he recognizes only his handwriting. All the reality about which he has written is lost.

Setting

We is set in some distant future, after a disastrous Two Hundred Years' War that kills off all but 0.2% of the human beings on the planet Earth. Survivors at that time begin building a City made of glass and surrounded by a great Green Wall topped by an electronic barrier, which effectively seals it off from nature. This "United State" has existed for 1,000 years, but some of its core institutions, like the Lex Sexualis, have been in place only 300 years. The "Table of Hours" developed centuries ago by the legendary Taylor insures that millions of Numbers in the United State awaken, start and finish work, eat (50 chews per bite), walk, exercise, and go to bed at precisely the same minute. The only variation comes twice a day, at 16:00 and 21:00 when personal hours are scheduled. Eventually, all 86,400 seconds of the day will be incorporated in the



Tables. The City is populated by descendents of surviving humans driven forcibly in and detained for the sake of their own happiness before the Wall is sealed. A considerable but unknown number of humans have chosen to remain outside, where they live in nature, naked, and growing body hair for protection against the elements.

The 20th century is remembered in terms of antiquity in the same way Socrates and Shakespeare are. The action of the novel spans approximately half a year, beginning as the sweet "dust" of spring somehow permeates the City and ending as autumn leaves and branches cover the streets and swarms of birds perch everywhere—the Wall having been breached by revolutionaries. Humans routinely fly in "aeros," and a spaceship capable of interplanetary flight is nearing completion. There are already humans on the moon, Venus, and Mars; how they have gotten there is not explained, but this reinforces the feeling that *We* is set in a very distant future, indeed.

Language and Meaning

We is written in Russian in 1924 by Eugene Zamiatin, a gifted young writer who, along with a scientific education, develops social and political awareness at the St. Petersburg Polytechnical Institute. He becomes involved in the revolutionary movement, suffers imprisonment and a bitter exile under the last of the czars, misses the February (democratic) Revolution but returns from exile in time to witness the October (Bolshevik) one. His first satirical works appear in the revolutionary year 1917. Zamiatin tries to live as a good comrade, attending endless lectures, but begins fearing movement toward regimentation and conformity. All of this experience is poured into *We*, which, according to translator Gregory Zilboorg's Foreword, Zamiatin intends as "funny" and "earnest." In the great Russian literary tradition, Zamiatin "laughs through tears."

We is ostensibly the patriotic diary of a philosopher-mathematician, D-503, intended to help denizens of other planets accept allegiance to the United State and adopt its uniform way of life. In the course of the novel, D-503 comes to see the falsity in conformity, platitudes, convention, dogmatism, and legalism (precisely how Marc Slonim in his Preface characterizes his close friend, the former revolutionary). Zamiatin's scientific training is evident in the work. D-503 sees and explains the world in formulae and phenomena. D-503 is meticulous about colors, sounds, and smells. Allusions to ancient philosophies and religions and to Russian literature and music are woven into the text along with comic explanations of 20th century practices supposedly only dimly remembered or understood. Characters are developed in terms of their physical oddities. Extensive use is made of ellipsis, demonstrating the confusion in the characters' minds and allowing some ambiguity to keep the plot moving forward. D-503 tries to remain a loyal Number even as he sees the futility, while his lover I-330 argues it is truly futile to consider any revolution the final one.



Structure

Following an Introduction by Peter Rudy, a Foreword and 35th-anniversary meditation by translator Gregory Zilboorg, and a Preface by the author's friend and noted Russian scholar, Marc Slonim—all most astute and insightful—one reaches the body of Zamiatin's novel *We* consists of 40 numbered and titled "records" (chapters), ostensibly forming a diary intended for publication kept by the protagonist, D-503. They tend to be quite short and flow smoothly from one to the next. Thus, the story moves in strictly linear fashion from the spring of one year through the autumn of the next, told by a forthright scientist caught up in a revolutionary movement that helps him discover his human soul, only to lose it when the powers that be prevail. Flashbacks to "ancient" times in the 20th century are sprinkled throughout, as the diarist, D-503, worries that his unknown readers, whom he assumes to be primitives, might not be able to understand or appreciate the cultural milieu he takes for granted.

The esoteric chapter titles—or better: synopses of the each day's (usually) multiple events—read: 1) "An Announcement. The Wisest of Lines. A Poem"; 2) "Ballet. Square Harmony. X"; 3) "A Coat. A Wall. The Tables"; 4) "The Wild Man with a Barometer. Epilepsy. If"; 5) "The Square. The Rulers of the World. An Agreeable and Useful Function"; 6) "An Accident. The Cursed 'It's Clear'. Twenty-four Hours"; 7) "An Eyelash. Taylor. Henbane and Lily of the Valley"; 8) "An Irrational Root. R-13. The Triangle"; 9) "Liturgy. Iambus. The Cast-iron Hand"; 10) "A Letter. A Membrane. Hair I"; 11) "No, I Can't; Let It Be without Headlines!"; 12) "The Delimitation of the Infinite. Angel. Meditations on Poetry"; 13) "Fog. Thou. A Decidedly Absurd Adventure"; 14) "'Mine'. Impossible. A Cold Floor"; 15) "The Bell. The Mirrorlike Sea. I Am to Burn Eternally"; 16) "Yellow. A Two-Dimensional Shadow. An Incurable Soul"; 17) "Through Glass. I Died. The Corridor"; 18) "Debris of Logic. Wounds and Plaster. Never Again"; 19) "The Infinitesimal of the Third Order. From under the Forehead. Over the Railing"; 20) "Discharge. The Material of an Idea. The Zero Rock"; 21) "The Duty of an Author. The Ice Swells. The Most Difficult Love"; 22) "The Benumbed Waves. Everything is Improving. I Am a Microbe"; 23) "Flowers. The Dissolution of a Crystal. If Only (?)"; 24) "The Limit of the Function. Easter. To Cross out Everything"; 25) "The Descent from Heaven. The Greatest Catastrophe in History. The Known. Is Ended"; 26) "The World Does Exist. Rash. Forty-one Degrees Centigrade"; 27) "No Headings. It is Impossible!"; 28) "Both of Them. Entropy and Energy. The Opaque Part of the Body"; 29) "Threads on the Face. Sprouts. An Unnatural Compression"; 30) "The Last Number. Galileo's Mistake. Would It Not Be Better?"; 31) "The Great Operation. I Forgave Everything. The Collision of Trains"; 32) "I Do Not Believe. Tractors. A Little Human Splinter"; 33) "This Without a Synopsis. Hastily, the Last"; 34) "The Forgiven Ones. A Sunny Night. A Radio-Valkyrie"; 35) "In a Ring. A Carrot. A Murder"; 36) "Empty Pages. The Christian God. About My Mother"; 37) "Infusorian. Doomsday. Her Room"; 38) "I Don't Know What Title. Perhaps the Whole Synopsis May Be Called a Castoff Cigarette Butt"; 39) "The End"; and 40) "Facts. The Bell. I Am Certain."



Quotes

"I rushed to the house office, handed over to the controller on duty my pink ticket, and received a certificate permitting the use of the curtains. This right exists in our State only for the sexual days. Normally we live surrounded by transparent walls which seem to be knitted of sparkling air; we live beneath the eyes of everyone, always bathed in light. We have nothing to conceal from one another; besides, this mode of living makes the difficult and exalted task of the Guardians much easier. Without it many bad things might happen," Record 4, p. 19.

"She opened a heavy, squeaking, opaque door and we found ourselves in a somber disorderly space (they called it an 'apartment'). The same 'royal' musical instrument and a wild, unorganized, crazy loudness of colors and forms like their ancient music. A white plane above, dark blue walls, red, green, orange bindings of ancient books, yellow bronze candelabra, a statue of Buddha, furniture with lines distorted by epilepsy, impossible to reduce to any clear equation.

"I could hardly bear that chaos. But my companion apparently possessed a stronger constitution," Record 6, p. 26.

"The car of the underground railway carried me swiftly to the place where the motionless, beautiful body of the Integral, not yet spiritualized by fire, was glittering in the docks in the sunshine. With closed eyes I dreamed in formulae. Again I calculated in my mind what was the initial velocity required to tear the Integral away from the earth. Every second the mass of the Integral would change because of the expenditure of the explosive fuel. The equation was very complex, with transcendent figures. As in a dream I felt, right here in the firm calculated world, now someone sat down at my side, barely touching me and saying, 'Pardon.' I opened my eyes," Record 7, p. 32.

"I turned around. She was dressed in a saffron-yellow dress of an ancient style. This was a thousand times worse than if she had not been dressed at all. Two sharp points glowing with rosiness through the thin tissue; two burning embers piercing through ashes; two tender, round knees..." Record 10, pp. 51-2.

" 'I made you wait, I think. And now you are late for your work anyway?'

'How ...? Well, yes, it is too late now.'

I glanced at her lips in silence. All women are lips, lips only. Some are rosy lips, tense and round, a ring, a tender fence separating one from the world. But these! A second ago they were not here, and suddenly ... the slash of a knife! I seemed even to see the sweet, dripping blood," Record 13, p. 68.

"Here a thought occurred to me. If that world is only my own, why should I tell about it in these records? Why should I recount all these absurd 'dreams' about closets, endless corridors? With great sorrow I notice that instead of a correct and strictly mathematical poem in honor of the United State I am writing a fantastic novel. Oh! if only it were a



novel and not my actual life, full of X's, square roots of minus one, and downfalls! Yet all may be for the best. Probably you, my unknown readers, are children still as compared with us. We are brought up by the United State; consequently we have reached the highest summits attainable by man. And you, being children, may swallow without crying all the bitter things I am to give you only if they be coated with the syrup of adventures," Record 18, pp. 97-8.

"Needless to say, in this respect as in all others we have no place for contingencies; nothing unexpected can happen. The elections themselves have rather a symbolic meaning. They remind us that we are a united, powerful organism of millions of cells, that—to use the language of the 'gospel' of the ancients—we are a united church. The history of the United State knows not a single case in which upon this solemn day even a solitary voice has dared to violate the magnificent unison," Record 24, p. 129.

"But why should I be surprised? A doctor always prefers a temperature of 40°C and a rash to the slow, languid rise of the temperature during the incubation period of a disease; it enables him to determine the character of the disease. Today 'Mephi' broke out on the walls like a rash. I understood his smile," Record 26, p. 140.

" 'Ah, you shall not go yet! You shall not go until you tell me about them, for you love ... them, and I don't even know who they are, nor where they come from.'
'Where are they? The half we have lost. H₂ and O, two halves, but in order to get water—H₂O, creeks, seas, waterfalls, storms—those two halves must be united,'" Record 28, p. 152.

" 'But I-330, please realize that our ancestors during the Two Hundred Years' War did exactly that!'
'Oh, they were right! A thousand times right! But they did one thing wrong: later they began to believe that they were the last number, a number that does not exist in nature. Their mistake was the mistake of Galileo; he was right in that the earth revolves around the sun, but he did not know that our whole solar system revolves around some other center, he did not know that the real, not relative, orbit of the earth is not a naïve circle,'" Record 30, p. 163.

"Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, it became shamelessly clear to me: he—he, too—And everything, about myself, my torment, all that I had brought here, crushed by the burden, plucking up my last strength as if performing a great feat, all appeared to me only funny—like the ancient anecdote about Abraham and Isaac: Abraham all in a cold sweat, with the knife already raised over his son, over himself, and suddenly a voice from above: 'Never mind ... I was only joking,'" Record 39, p. 214.

"Tomorrow they will all ascend the steps to the Machine of the Well-Doer. No postponement is possible, for there still is chaos, groaning, cadavers, beasts in the western section; and to our regret there are still quantities of Numbers who have betrayed Reason.

But on the traverse avenue Forty we have succeeded in establishing a temporary Wall of high-voltage waves. And I hope we win. More than that; I am certain we shall win. For Reason must prevail," Record 40, p. 218.

Topics for Discussion

How do body shapes figure in this novel?

How might the Mephis be using D-503, as the Well-Doer contends? Does this make I-330 a hypocrite?

What function do the curtains play in this novel?

What role does ritual play in this novel?

Why would D-503 make so many references to the "ancient" 20th century in his diary?

What role does R-13 play in the novel? Why the change in D-503's attitude toward him?

In what ways might the final words of the novel, "For Reason must prevail," be interpreted? What do you think Zamiatin's intention is? How do you choose to interpret it?

What does We say to political and social conservatives? To liberals?