

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot Study Guide

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot by David Shafer

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Due to the nature and structure of this novel, quotes and references to the text are attributed by page number. This study guide specifically refers to the May 2015 First Mulholland Books paperback edition.

“Whiskey Tango Foxtrot” is a contemporary dystopian novel by David Shafer in which three young adults seek to stop a shadow group known as The Committee from monopolizing control of the world’s information to bring about a new world order. When the novel begins, 30-something Leila works for an NGO seeking to bring about a better life for the citizens of Myanmar. Having fled the tyranny of Iran with her family, Leila is now a proud American citizen. While in Myanmar, she stumbles across a strange jungle operation where two white security contractors provide protection for a computer programmer. She sends out a mass e-mail to all of her contacts asking for more information about it. Within hours, her visa has been revoked and she is to be sent home. She also learns that her father, a principal, has been arrested for having child pornography on his school computer.

In Portland, Oregon, 30-something Leo Crane, heir to a family company fortune, cruises unsteadily through life, never holding down a steady job, and drinking and doing drugs frequently. He wonders how people find purpose and meaning in their lives, and wonders how anyone could ever believe in an idea bigger than themselves. Meanwhile, Leo’s old college friend, Mark Deveraux, has found himself at the pinnacle of success as a business and self-help guru who is largely a fraud. Mark has lifted most of his book and self-help material from Leo’s obscure blog, which apart from its conspiracy theories is full of some deep thoughts about life and the world. Mark, who once worked in a middle-level job at SineCo, has now become the company’s most celebrated member and the face of the company at the urging of CEO James Straw.

As Leila travels home, she is diverted to Dublin where she encounters a secret group known as Dear Diary, who are opposed to the actions of the Committee – a secret cabal of leaders, businessmen, and other powerful figures who control vast resources and wealth. The Committee is led by James Straw and SineCo, who have been putting together a new project called New Alexandria. New Alexandria, as Straw explains to Mark, is designed to gather all of the information in the world together – from transcripts of every telephone call ever made to the hopes and dreams of people – in one place under the Implied Consent Decree of 2001. All of this information is to be stored, protected, and accessible only to those who have paid a fee. Mark is to be the face of this project, selling it to the public at large. Mark is worried about this, and is given time to think about taking the job. What Mark does not know is that the Committee will manufacture a catastrophe in which all the data of the world will be destroyed – except for the data of New Alexandria. This will, in turn, lead to the salvation of some and the genocide of others.

Leila is assigned to get to Mark through Leo because of their history, and because Leo has already essentially figured out the Committee’s plot on his blog. Leo ultimately



agrees to help, and arranges a meeting with Mark. Mark, who has already been having moral reservations about SineCo's operations, willingly agrees to help Dear Diary put down the Committee. Mark is assigned to implant a computer virus into the system aboard Straw's data collection ship. Mark arranges a meeting with Straw, saying he will accept the job, but in reality, intends to plant the virus. As the novel ends, Mark is waiting to board the ship, and knows that he very well may not be alive much longer.



Section 1: Pages 1 – 83

Summary

Leila Majnoun awaits a meeting with Colonel Zeya of the Ministry Department in Mandalay, Myanmar. Leila works as Director, In-Country, Myanmar/Burma for Helping Hand, an NGO, where she hopes to establish a program of scholarships and building infrastructure. While Leila waits, she thinks about her family, including her sister Roxana, her brother Dylan, her father who is a principal, and her mother whose health is in question. Leila also considers how she has been waiting six months for a shipment of medical equipment held up in Myanmar's customs for lack of bribe money. Leila is told in no uncertain terms that the people in charge do not want her in Myanmar, and she does not receive her shipment or her meeting. Leila is annoyed by this, because she is only trying to help the country. She is also annoyed by how few people have been friendly toward her. She watches as a private jet lands, a single man gets off, and enters one of the three SUVs that arrive to meet him. Leila thinks about her favorite taxi driver, Aung-Hla, whom she selects whenever he is on duty to get around the city because he is friendly and thoughtful. Another person who has been friendly toward Leila is Dah Alice, head of an orphanage and charity.

Leila knows she needs someone's assistance in securing her shipment, but does not know who to turn to. She considers another American acquaintance in Myanmar. She hires Aung-Hla to drive her to meet a local, young nurse named Ma Thiri in the town of My Thit in Kachin State, though Aung has reservations about this. Leila encourages Ma to take a scholarship to study medicine further, but Ma will not abandon her village. On the way back, Leila must wait while Aung speaks to some officers near a jungle checkpoint, during which time another car pulls up. Two white American security contractors emerge while a hipster-like young man goes into the officers' building to install software of some kind. Leila and Aung leave a few moments later, because Leila is unnerved by the two security guys.

In Portland, Oregon, Leo Crane bikes over Broadway Bridge on his way to work at Brand-New Day, a preschool. Leo can trace his ancestry back to the Mayflower. Leo finds it amazing that the bridges now have bike lanes, and imagines they are the result of someone who has campaigned hard for them. Leo wonders how anyone can care for an idea more than themselves. As Leo pedals, he wipes out. He wonders if he isn't being targeted for being a rebel of the elite, or if he is being followed. Leo arrives at work. He is a favorite with the kids for his creative and unusual activities, such as letting them listen to The Clash. Leo's boss, Sharon, tolerates Leo's methods because he does so well and makes the parents happy. At BND, the kids are all worried about Leo's scrapes and bruises from his accident. Sharon calls him into her office. She explains he has been getting weirder over the past few months, and that he has now become a liability. She fires him. Leo throws a beanbag frog at Sharon, who accuses him of assault and calls the police.



In New York City, Mark Deveraux works as a new-age business consultant and guru who has written a bestselling book and has been featured in Time Magazine. Mark now prepares for an interview with TV host Margo. Mark recalls how he had written an article (“Motivation in an Unjust World”) two years before about uncertainty and the importance of kindness in business, which had propelled him. In the present, Mark, a drug-user, knows he is selfish and self-serving, and even recognizes that it is ironic he should write about morality in business when he himself acts immorally in pretending to know something genuine about business. Still, Mark goes on to be interviewed by Margo. He speaks about the importance of honesty and he has put most of the proceeds from his book sales into the Bringing the Inside Out Foundation. The purpose of the group is to help young people become “informed digital citizens”, and to provide them with new phone/tablet devices from the company which first employed Mark, SineCo. They are easy to use, good quality, and cheap to produce.

Leo meets with a psychologist who is a fan of Mark. Leo considers himself a loser man-child, while his younger sister, Heather, and his older sister, Rosemary, manage the family board and computer game company, CraneCo, which they have taken to even greater heights and success. Only Leo’s sister, Daisy, continues to speak to him without contempt. Leo reflects on how he has never been able to hold a steady job, and how his older sister has always had to pick up after him – such as handling his failed bookstore venture. The psychologist is mostly interested in Leo’s belief that he is being followed or set up, including Leo’s blog where he maintains there is a shadow government controlling the world. The psychologist finds it a bad sign that Leo was fired from his most recent job after Brand New Day, where he worked construction and drank on the job.

In Myanmar, Leila begins to be followed by two minders she refers to as Heckle and Jeckle. Leila knows it is because she had stumbled onto something criminal going on at the officers’ station in the jungle. She sends out an e-mail out to numerous contacts asking if there is anything fishy going on near the Chinese border with Myanmar, around the Chinese town Baguanzai and the Burmese town Ashang. She also provides GPS coordinates, for 24-22’40” North, 97-32’39’ East.

Analysis

“Whiskey Tango Foxtrot” is a contemporary dystopian novel by David Shafer in which three young adults seek to stop a shadow group known as The Committee from monopolizing control of the world’s information to bring about a new world order. Dystopianism becomes an important and central theme from the very start, as hints of something wrong appear quickly to Leila while she is in the jungle of Myanmar. The dystopian concern here isn’t that an organization or group has already seized power, but is on the verge of doing so. Leila’s accidentally stumbling upon part of the operation in progress is symptomatic of the greater reach and extent of the plot – something which Leo believes is going to happen. Given Leo’s lackadaisical lifestyle, it is clear why almost no one – especially his family – would believe him.



It is through Leo that the theme of redemption will also come into play, however. Readers should note that as Leo tries to get to his job, he realizes that someone had to make bike paths on bridges possible. Leo cannot imagine how anyone could commit to a cause larger than themselves. Leo, with money to burn and no cares in the world except himself, cannot see outside of himself. It is from this position that Leo will ultimately come to trace a new trajectory for himself. What is ironic is that Leo is one of the few to have correctly surmised a rising shadow government, but doesn't actually seek to do anything about it. His theory is of global concern, but his primary concern is himself. Irony is also apparent through Mark, who knows he is both selfish and self-serving, and even recognizes that it is ironic he should write about morality in business when he himself acts immorally in pretending to know something genuine about business. Mark, as well, will have the chance to redeem himself – to make something important out of his life.

Information also stands to be an important theme in the novel thus far. Part of Leila's efforts in Myanmar for her NGO is to provide access to information so that Myanmar might better improve its society and the lives of its citizens. At the same time, Mark not only represents himself and SineCo, but an organization called Bringing the Inside Out Foundation, which donates thousands and thousands of tablets (later revealed to be called "Nodes") to people around the world in order to help them become informed citizens, the idea being that information will be more widely available – and collectable. Information becomes a theme upon which the theme of dystopianism is dependent, as the reader will come to learn in later chapters.

The reader should also note several other disturbing and unnerving incidents as they relate to Leila's time in Myanmar. Leila, an Iranian-American, is looked upon suspiciously by the military rulers of the country. However, as Leila notes, two American security contractors seem to get around in the country just fine. What Leila is doing is being seen as undermining the authority of the ruling powers because through the use of information, people can learn and make informed choices. What the contractors are doing must be either in line with, or must enjoy the support of the Burmese government, otherwise the contractors could not move around so easily. The fact that two contractors, and an IT guy should be visiting a remote officers' station in the jungle is disconcerting enough to Leila that she sends out a mass e-mail asking her contacts for more information.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Leila in Myanmar? What is her experience like there? Why does this seem to be the case?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Leila seem so disturbed by the presence of two contractors and an IT guy in the middle of the jungle of Myanmar? What does she do as a result? Why?



Discussion Question 3

In what ways are Mark and Leo presented as ironic characters? What accounts for their ironic behavior?

Vocabulary

illegible, clamorous, palletized, terrestrial, abet, endemic, haranguing, salubrious, destitute, benighted, implausibly, ineffable, exhortations, charades, indignant, potentate, machinations, automaton, despotic



Section 2: Pages 84 – 170

Summary

Ned Swain regrets his decision to try to quit cigarettes as he gathers intelligence with his older comrade, Nigel, for the U.S. Central Security Service, the most elite and highest-ranked clandestine military outfit. The CSS is tasked with building and maintaining the world's best intelligence and cyber-defense apparatus in the world. Their security agents are known as Bluebirds (from their security contracting firm called Bluebird), and Nigel has been unnerved by Leila's presence at a security station. Nigel has ordered that pressure be stepped up on Leila following her mass e-mail. It is revealed that her two minders are not actually Zeya's men, but two monks who command great power among the people. Ned is ordered to pick out Leila's driver for an assassin. Ned finds Aung, but tells the hired assassin that the person believed to be Aung is not actually Aung.

Leila hates her weekly, Monday morning conference call. She especially hates the present call because she must report little progress since all of her local contacts and friendships have been turning away from her. Leila then calls her brother, Dylan, from a phone in the lobby of her hotel, the Excellents. She explains that she has just received a notice that her visa will expire in seven days, and that she must leave the country then. Meanwhile, Ned gives in and has his first cigarette in two weeks. He reflects on his family's history in American espionage, going all the way back to George Washington's spies. Ned has had to take out evil people in his day, so he is morally bothered by the attention being given to Leila. Ned reports to Nigel that he does not believe Leila will challenge her deportation. Nigel shows Ned a news story where the police have raided Leila's father's office to remove computers and electronic equipment, and to arrest him. Nigel believes this will put Leila in her place. But this is too much for Ned. He leaves a note for Leila requesting a meeting at the Excellents Bar at 8 p.m.

Leila's father is charged with possession of child pornography and suffers a mild heart attack during interrogation. Roxana reports to Leila that it is hard to say how many people will support their father, but those who already do believe the situation to be a mistake or a setup. Ned, meanwhile, knows his meeting with Leila will be important, so he decides to play the romance angle to explain why he wants to help her. He also pretends to be a linguist and computer technician employed by the CSS. Ned meets with Leila, who recognizes him from the station in the jungle. Ned reveals that he thinks the meeting in the jungle was about some Chinese pesticide company wanting to do a test on a product. He also explains in a lie that he stumbled across Nigel's ability to read Leila's e-mail, so it is a safe bet he could also put porn on her father's computer. Ned then gives Leila the internet address of a network of people who help those screwed over by the government and big corporations to get back at them.

Leila heads back to her room. She does not know what to make of Ned, finding him dumb but also well-intentioned. She is also suspicious as to how someone in an



intelligence agency would need a computer technician. She posts her account of the secret meeting and the fallout at the networking site, ding-dong.com. She then stores all of her nursing scholarship files on a thumb-drive which she intends to deliver to Dah Alice. Dah Alice reveals the two men following Leila are friends of hers. Leila says good bye, and promises to come back one day. Leila then receives an e-mail from the network, asking her to meet on her layover at Heathrow in London.

Mark is now staying in the SineCo company flat in London, where he stays up late writing because his second book is expected in only a few weeks. His agent, Marjorie Blinc, is also the CEO of the company publishing the second book, Conch Shell Media. Mark recalls being introduced to Blinc by James Straw of SineCo. As the pressure mounts, Mark's drinking becomes worse and his desire for drugs grows greater. The haze Mark exists in causes him to remember the past, including his long-gone friendship with Leo Crane at Harvard. Mark remembers how well he and Leo had gotten along until time and distance in their thirties led to drifting apart. Mark remembers how, upon encountering Leo's blog "I Have Shared a Document With You", he began to lift phrases and thoughts from Leo's blog for his own first book.

In the present, Mark has become interested in James Straw's new SineCo branch, the Core Vision Department, for which the brightest computer-literate minds have been hired in the hundreds. In a meeting with Mark, Straw describes it as the "New Alexandria", a realm where knowledge can be stored and protected – and used to make good decisions by the select few who can access it. The ramifications of this cannot yet be revealed, says Straw, but he will seek to make it possible for Mark to learn more. He arranges a meeting with Mark onboard his yacht, Sine Wave, the next week.

Leo continues his rehab psychotherapy at Quivering Pines, where he shares a room with a man named Jams Dean. Leo wonders if his stint will set his life on a new path, or simply be a brief stop before his continuing descent. Still, Leo is already planning on figuring out a way to get out of Quivering Pines by appeasing his sisters, who had him committed. Leo confesses to James Dean that it was when he discovered Mark lifting things from his blog that he really went over the edge. Leo reveals that Mark's company is likewise giving away thousands and thousands of digital devices called Nodes, which are used for biometric sampling and surveillance. Leo reveals that and others believe it is SineCo's mission to get these devices into the hands of every person on Earth. Leo also notes that the TSA has a pre-vetting line called "Clear" where people can skip the wait and get right onto planes, while Baxter-Snider, a pharmaceutical giant, is giving out free contact lenses called CLEAR (for Contact Lens-Enabled Astigmatism Research), and "clear" is a state the Scientologists are trying to achieve. Leo believes they are all involved together, and that Mark is a part of it all. Leo reveals he printed his theory in a broadside format, making fifty copies.

Leo later meets a man named Al who has been in and out of rehab for years. Al tells Leo to keep clear of alcohol, or it will consume his life. Al explains the longest time he was clean was when Ronald Reagan was president. Leo meets with the psychologist again. The psychologist believes Leo might have borderline personality disorder, and



may even have a touch of Asperger's. The psychologist believes Leo will need stronger therapy.

Analysis

As it turns out, Leila's suspicions that something is going on are proven to be true in a very dystopian sense. At first glance, it appears as though the activities of the contractors in the Burmese jungle are clear and straightforward – an American effort at defending global intelligence and implementing a cyber-defense network. However, within a few moments, readers understand that Ned Swain's boss, Nigel, has no compunctions about assassinations and other brutality. This calls into question his true motives. Indeed, Ned Swain's own appearance in the novel as a member of the CSS – but his unwillingness to follow through orders to kill Aung – make Ned's motives unclear and suspect. This confusion increases when Ned relays information to Leila. The reader should bear this in mind for much later in the novel.

Dystopianism is also reflected greatly in Leo's blog, wherein Leo posits that there is a shadow government forming that seeks to take over the world through the use of technology and information. Information is the key to such power. Leo's conspiracy theory slowly unravels not to be just theory, but fact. Readers will note that what is known of Leo's theory is already being confirmed independently by Mark. Mark takes special interest in SineCo's New Alexandria department, which seeks to collect digital information so that it can be stored and protected –and accessed by the select few. At the same time, Leo's explanation that SineCo is giving away thousands upon thousands of free Nodes demonstrates the company has more than just good will in mind. A Node which gives access to information also makes it possible to retrieve and store information. This information grab would seriously compromise human privacy (with privacy becoming another important theme in the novel). This is some of the information that Straw contends will be available only to the select few.

The theme of redemption also reappears subtly in this section of the novel. Mark has much more to redeem himself for than merely pretending to be something he is not. Part of his ability to pretend to be something he is not comes from the fact that he has stolen entire phrases and ideas from Leo's blog (the non-conspiracy sections). Mark feels guilty about this, and in a drug-induced stupor, reflects on his friendship with Leo many years before. Mark's false self-representation and his plagiarism are things for which he will have to atone. Leo, meanwhile, slowly has a fire building in him as he speaks about and reflects upon his theory about the information conspiracy. The idea that Leo does not have a cause larger than himself is about to be severely tested.

A taste of the dystopian future, and a taste of the dystopian power possible is given to the reader through Leila's situation. It is not surprising that Leila's private e-mail to several contacts does not remain private, for Nigel and his agency are able to see the e-mail. Based on the broad extent of their power, they are able to revoke Leila's visa to Myanmar, and are able to frame her father. What is chilling is that the organization is able to destroy someone without actually killing them, though killing them is not beyond



their reach. Irreparably damaging someone's reputation is enough to destroy someone for life. If the dystopian organization that is forming can already do something of this nature without actually having achieved actual power, one can only imagine what would be resorted to in order to maintain power once it has been achieved.

Discussion Question 1

What happens as a result of Leila's mass e-mail? Who helps contextualize things for Leila? What does Leila make of this all? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What is known so far about New Alexandria? How does New Alexandria fit into Leo's conspiracy theory?

Discussion Question 3

What is Leo's conspiracy theory? What evidence backs up the theory so far?

Vocabulary

deficits, clandestine, apparatus, espionage, nondescript, nonfurtively, viscerally, holistic, erudition, entropy, soliloquies, abject, effeminately, bewildered, grandeur, abstruse, prosaic, implausible, mortified

Section 3: Pages 171 – 256

Summary

Leila is at Heathrow Airport. She thinks about the little owl icon that has been deposited on her laptop's desktop by Ding-Dong.com. She is met by a dark-haired American beauty who identifies herself as Paige Turner. Paige quickly gets to the point, saying she is part of a group called Dear Diary opposed to a cabal of business people and powerful figures called "The Committee" who are planning an electronic coup where they will control, store, and transmit all information in the world. Paige explains that Leila's jungle run-in was with men who were implementing the system, and based on her mass e-mail, they retaliated. Paige explains the Committee's members control 70% of the bandwidth in Asia, have access to men, material, resources, security groups, infrastructure, and so on, on a scale that is unheard of. They are extremely powerful, and are believed to be planning to make their move, soon. Paige explains it will be like a protection racket, and that those who pay or submit will be protected, especially if the world collapses under the weight of so many people.

Paige goes on to explain that she and her group are preparing a broadcast platform which they believe they can defend and keep up for 72 hours to alert the world to the truth of what is going on. All of the data collected on the people of the world will be destroyed, while the people will then be given a chance to sign up with Paige's group. This disturbs Leila, but Paige insists they are the good guys. If not, the Committee will be able to manufacture an emergency that requires people to pay them to secure their data. Paige then reveals that instead of going home to California, Leila will be sent to Dublin to attend a meeting because Leila is now considered a valuable asset. Leila's family situation will be looked into by the Diary. Paige is given an old Nokia phone. As Paige leaves, Leila discovers her purse has been emptied of valuable contents, and replaced with a cookie tin full of cash from different countries, and the documents of a person named Lola Montes who shares the general outline of Leila's life, and looks like Leila. In Leila's new wallet is a photo of an old, dead cat, and her brother, Dylan. Leila then receives a message on the Nokia, telling her that all her personal possessions will be returned to her after Dublin if she decides to walk away.

A problem with Mark's ticket to Rotterdam, where he will board the Sine Wave, keeps Mark delayed at Heathrow Airport. While waiting in a lounge, Mark receives a text message that the meeting has been changed, and to await more details. At the lounge bar, he meets Leila, who introduces herself as Lola. To pass the time, they chat and play cards. Mark then learns that his meeting has been moved to Hong Kong. Mark says goodbye to Leila, then heads out.

Leila travels to Dublin. In Dublin, a man named Dermot holding a sign with her new name meets her at the airport, then drives her to a residential street in Dublin with brick houses. There, Leila is ushered inside by a man named Feargal, and a kind girl named Sarah who brings Leila to a guest room. After a nap, Leila heads out in a car with



Feargal and Sarah where they pull into the back garage of a fish store when they learn they are being followed by a white Ford. Leila is then sent on to a market, where she is pursued by three men. At the market, she meets Dermot, who is waiting in his black taxi. Dermot then drives Leila to the Liberties, where she is dropped off at the Widows House of the Parish of Saint Nicholas Without & Saint Luke. A man greets Leila at the door, introducing himself as Nicotine Lozenge.

Inside, Nicotine helps settle Leila, and offers her some tea. He gets right to the point. He explains the Diary's branches in New York, London, and Berlin have been taken out. Many of their members are missing. Nicotine explains that when the Committee began, they called themselves the Committee for Cloud Acquisition, and that they are very dangerous. Nicotine explains that they killed a friend and coworker of Leila's named Joel two days before when he investigated Leila's e-mail. Since Parker Pope, CEO of Bluebird was brought on board, Nicotine explains, things have gotten very nasty. A young man named Kwame X. Nkrumah then appears. Kwame is from Ghana, and explains that Leila must be brought up to speed very quickly because time is of the essence. Leila, because of the vast array of her contacts, is considered valuable. They will need her help to get machines to remote parts of the world. It is revealed that Diary has tapped the lines of the Committee.

Leila is brought to a meeting in wooden library where some 60 people are already present. A man who calls himself Roman Shades introduces himself. Leila is beyond annoyed at this point, and asks him what is going on. Roman says all will be revealed in time. He then has her look at a screen in a small black laptop, from which a number code – 85146110326225 – is generated for her on a sticker. The screen sharpens Leila's vision and memory, something known as "the effect". Leila is taken to stay overnight at an Ikea, where the other members of the group stay as well. It is a perfect hiding place, for it is close to the airport. Sarah then gives Leila her assignment: get to Mark Deveraux, the man from the airport lounge bar (the bartender being a Diarist) through Leo Crane, who has essentially figured out the Committee's plot on his own. Mark is important because he has influence with SineCo, the primary front for the Committee. The goal is to find out where SineCo is storing all its data. The Diary does not want to recruit Leo, but merely wants the information Leo claims to have on Mark in his broadside. Leila will have a layover at JFK International, then fly to Portland.

On his way to Hong Kong, Mark cannot help but think of Leila. He also wonders if his mother would be proud of him for the heights to which he has climbed professionally. Mark is accompanied on the trip by another young man, Seamus Cole, who explains he is the executive engineer and information architect of New Alexandria. Upon landing in Hong Kong, Mark and Seamus are flown 45 minutes by helicopter to the harbor. There, Mark is taken aboard Sine Wave Two, an industrial ship where a steward named Singh brings Mark to his cabin, then to dinner with James Straw and Parker Pope. Parker reveals his organization has recently changed its name from Bluebird to Blu Solutions/Logistics. Straw then offers Mark a job as "storyteller-in-chief" for the new operation. Mark agrees to discuss it the next day. Dinner is cut short then by a phone call for Pope. Later that evening, while trying to find a way to get on deck to smoke a cigarette, Mark veers into the room of Pope's pretty assistant, Tessa. Tessa helps Mark



get up on deck, but makes sure he knows she is a lesbian so he won't hit on her. Their conversation drifts on about some of the aspects of New Alexandria, including that it will be dependent on offshore data collection ships. Mark asks if there is anything illegal about what they are doing, but Tessa then ends the conversation.

After breakfast the next morning, Mark is sent on a tour of Sine Wave Two with a guy named Tony. The central hub of operations on the ship resembles an IT department, where dozens and dozens of men, all under 35, are working. The data is collected, bundled, amalgamated, and gleaned, where it is then sent over to processing for encryption, stored on remote seabed servers called "whales" for the way they spin, dive, and make sounds. Cole then arrives to show Mark more about gleaning. A person's entire life – from birth and medical records to every word they have ever spoken or written on a phone to a person's fears and dreams are digitized. Mark is given a demonstration using his old girlfriend, Margaret, who has since had a baby – and the videos of the baby are brought up. Mark becomes angered, wanting to know why this sort of thing has been collected. Seamus says it is because it was made public over their network, so they call "dibs" on it through implied-consent. Seamus says information is free, and storage is unlimited. This still disturbs Mark. Seamus then brings Mark to see "the beast", a computer that is fed information which then builds models and predictions, thereafter copying these onto the whale drives.

Mark then meets with Straw. He expresses his concerns about the theory of collecting information, then "loaning" it back to the individual for a fee. Straw contends the information is being protected for the "clients" from which it originated. Mark is to construct a story to explain New Alexandria in limited fashion until an explanation can be written as to how the company's clients have become clients without knowing it. It will be Mark's job as well to continue to push the Node. Straw contends that it is all legal and moral under the Implied Consent Decree of 2001. The entire New Alexandria program will come to be known as "SineLife". Straw explains that if people don't have to worry about their data and information, they can focus on the things truly important in life – and that is how Mark must sell SineLife. Straw explains he drew inspiration from Mark's book, specifically about building the world one wants to be a part of. Mark is stunned by this. He is given a special access card to go anywhere on the ship.

Mark goes to see Tessa. Tessa explains the program has been in the works for years, and soon nothing will be possible without going through the internet. Someone, she explains, will need to control all the data and access to knowledge. Meanwhile, Leo wakes up from a deep sleep. He is still at Quivering Pines. He is told his sister is there to see him. When he goes to meet her, he discovers a woman named Leila instead. Leila gets to the point immediately, saying she has read Leo's broadside and needs his help. Leo agrees immediately, and leaves Quivering Pines with her. They drive toward Leo's house, but do not go in because a suspicious-looking mailman is in the neighborhood.



Analysis

Dystopianism continues to be an important theme in this section of the novel. Leila – and the reader – learn that Leo’s theories about an information-controlling conspiracy are indeed true. Leila learns that Roman Shades, and other members like him who work under assumed names, are part of a counter-effort called Dear Diary. Dear Diary wants to stop the Committee, as the shadow organization is known, from taking over the world. Mark himself comes to learn about the operations of SineCo, without actually realizing the true purpose of the New Alexandria program.

Mark’s reservations about the information collection being conducted by New Alexandria have nothing to do with a new world order or a takeover of the world, but have everything to do with simple privacy and human decency. Privacy again emerges as an important theme that works hand-in-hand with information. Straw explains that all they are doing is legal and moral, since it is protected under the Implied-Consent Decree of 2001. Still, Mark isn’t totally convinced. This is evidenced by his unwillingness to accept the new job that Straw has for him, despite the greater fame and greater paycheck it will bring him. This is evidence that Mark has already begun his journey to redemption. While he may be very flawed and very selfish, he is, at heart, a good person as Leo later explains.

Mark’s reservations are well-founded. The information operation being conducted by SineCo will be called SineLife, and will essentially be a backup of all information on the planet. Those willing to pay will have access to their own information under the guise of it simply being stored and protected given a disaster or calamitous situation. In essence, the lives – and the information generated by the lives – of people will be held ransom. Those who want to play must be willing to pay. Mark is deeply disturbed by this, because essentially a person’s very existence will have a price tag put on it. Likewise, the fact that SineCo has been collecting all of this information without actual, informed consent under the Implied Consent Decree of 2001 will come as a shock to many people when the news is made public.

The reader should well note that the information herein being stored does not merely make protection possible, but control as well. That a person would even have to pay money to access his or her own information in the first place is a demonstration of control – and of dystopianism. That SineCo should go to such great lengths to store the information – launching it in underwater drives – demonstrates the seriousness of the situation, and the seriousness with which SineCo approaches its operations.

They are also willing to kidnap and kill, let alone ruin reputations. As Leila learns from the Diarists, entire groups of Diarists have simply disappeared throughout the world. SineCo is aware of the existence of the Diarists, and is wiping them out. Time is of the essence as the situation is getting desperate. The dystopian nature of the Committee is apparent in its willingness to do whatever it must to gain power. Once it gains power – and demonstrates its control of all information in the world – there will be no stopping the Committee. This is why Leila is tasked with reaching out to Leo in order to gain



access to Mark. Leila's assistance is explained most apparently as her desire to get her family out of the manufactured trouble in which it has found itself. However, Leila has a deeper reason for wanting to help, which will only be explained at a later point. The reader should bear this in mind, because whether or not Leila's father is cleared, a deeper motive for risking her freedom and her life will be necessary.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Leila initially go along with the Diarists and their wishes that she join and meet up with Leo? Why are the Diarists so desperate to have Leila on board?

Discussion Question 2

What is SineLife? What does Straw want Mark's role to be in relation to SineLife? Why does Mark have more reservations about such work, and about SineLife in general?

Discussion Question 3

James Straw argues that the Implied Consent Decree of 2001 gives him the moral and legal right to collect information on anyone anywhere in the world. Do you agree or disagree with his assertion? Why?

Vocabulary

cabal, disseminate, reflexive, disinclination, petulantly, judiciously, anachronism, systemic, oligarchy, transnationals, circuitous, sensate, innocuous, contentious, banalities, megalomania, stuporous



Section 4: Pages 257 – 339

Summary

Leo and Leila wait out the suspicious-looking mailman in Leila's car. She then briefly fills Leo in on Dear Diary and the Committee, confirming Leo's theories except for the Scientologist part. Leo is both thrilled and terrified to know he has been validated. Leo explains he wants to help but doesn't know how much his "thing" on Mark will help, because what he has on Mark is only a video of him masturbating, pretending to be retarded. Leila is let down by this. When the mailman leaves, she and Leo go inside Leo's house. Leo explains the video was made while both of them were stoned in college and looking to donate sperm. Leo kept the video in anger over losing his friend, he explains. Leo does not want to use the video to blackmail Mark because even though what Mark is a part of is immoral, Leo does not want to sink to the level of immorality himself. Leila receives a text on her Nokia from the Diarists, saying that if Leo is of no use, she is to leave him and proceed to Los Angeles. Roxana then calls on Leila's regular phone, demanding to know why Leila hasn't arrived home yet. Leila promises she will be home soon. That night, Leila leaves a thank you note for Leo, and sneaks out and leaves.

Mark returns to Brooklyn. He is haunted by his time aboard the Sine Wave Two, and also under pressure to finish his next book, now due in two weeks. Mark is also scheduled to appear on a panel of writers in a MegaBooks! bookstore in a suburb of Chicago, meaning he will be given a reprieve from writing. The panel will be hosted by the MegaBooks! founder and CEO. Mark travels to the bookstore. After the panel, Diane Carlifter, one of the other panelists, asks Mark if he has made up his mind about SineCo, and says that James Straw wants an answer. Mark tells her he isn't comfortable with the data-stealing operation, but she urges Mark to commit. Later on, Mark gets drunk and realizes Leo would be thrilled by everything Mark has learned. Knowing he has a talk to give at Nike in Portland soon, and knowing that Leo lives in Portland, Mark decides to contact Leo and ask him to get together.

Dylan picks Leila up from the airport late that night. He reveals that the FBI has gotten involved in the case, and is interviewing anyone and everyone they can. In the morning, Leila goes in to visit her father, who has been confined to bed. Leila tells her father she knows he is innocent. Leila then speaks to Dylan, filling him in on the Dear Diary people, and the truth behind their father's situation. Dylan wants his father to be cleared, but worries about Leila's involvement with the Diarists. Word suddenly comes that the charges against Leila's father are to be dropped. Dylan explains that a man walked up out of nowhere to give him a thumb drive with instructions to show it to their solicitor, which Dylan did. The forensics examiners found an encrypted and decrypted file on the drive, showing correspondence ordering the framing through TMI Data Solutions in Roanoke, Virginia. The prosecutor has offered a plea deal, Dylan now reports. Their father must accept a plea bargain by way of a gag order not to speak about the events, in exchange for confessing to illegally downloading Adobe Creative Suite.



Leo arrives in Portland, Oregon, where Daisy confronts him. She demands he write a contract vowing never to use substances of any kind again, that he will keep in contact with his sisters, and that he will stay away from conspiracy theory nonsense. Daisy explains that Leo will not have another chance, that their sister Rosemary wants to have Leo committed to a serious institution out on the East Coast. Leo will be required to see a social worker named Alice Waters, a therapist named Larry Davis, and attend AA meetings as proof he is serious. An electrician named Len becomes Leo's sponsor. Davis prescribes lamotrigine while Daisy also forces Leo into a schedule of walks and activities that keeps his mind occupied and keeps him focused. Leo actually comes to like the schedule, but begins to tell his friend Louis, whose wife is a public defender about SineCo. A man walking his dog then suddenly confronts Louis and Leo, and spills out a slew of information about Louis's life before continuing on his way. Leo tells Louis to forget everything he has just told Louis, knowing they have been threatened. At home, Leo uses lemon-soaked paper to write a letter to Leila.

Leila drives downtown to have lunch with Roxana, and believes she is being followed by a plumbing van. Roxana, who has no arms, works in control and dynamical systems where she is modeling a language. It is there that Leila meets Roxana in her office at the LA County Large Array Facility. Roxana thanks Leila for whatever she did to help their father. Leila explains everything quickly, and asks if there is a way to access the hidden internet. Roxana agrees to help, though she is immensely skeptical of all she has been told. Leila insists that, having lived under cruelty in Iran, she is now a patriotic American who deeply loves her adoptive country and wants to ensure it and its people survive. She then asks Roxana what Roxana is working on. Roxana says she can't reveal it all, but says most of her work is for a group called New Solutions, formerly Blu Solutions/Logistics, an IT defense contractor. Leila persists, and Roxana admits she is working on a gaze-capturing device, so that a screen can be worked by eye.

Leila receives a call from Sarah congratulating her on her work so far. Sarah explains that Rusty Trombones, the man who gave Dylan the thumb drive, messed up the operation, and was supposed to deliver the thumb drive to the prosecutor to make it look like a whistleblower act – but instead, there is now a line that connects the information to the Diarists. Sarah says the case against Leila's father will be reopened with a new prosecutor now, and that if things get bad, Leila's entire family will be evacuated. Sarah then says she wants to speak to Roxana. Sarah steps out of the room, then returns to find Roxana crying. On two of her computer screens are documents detailing that she had been given an experimental drug as a child designed to increase intelligence, courtesy of the Iranian Ministry of Health and Baxter-Snider Pharmaceuticals. The document also includes evidence seeking to frame their father to force Roxane to do as she is told.

Roxana confesses she has also been working on retinography, and obtaining information through electronic contact lenses, including information that could be written and sent to the back of the eye. Roxana then explains the Diarists want her to create a computer virus to collapse their network. Leila then receives the lemon letter from Leo. The letter notes that Leo is furious at the Committee, and that Mark has gotten in touch with him and wants to meet. Leo contends that Mark is a good man, has gotten caught



up with the wrong people, and probably only needs to be offered a way out. Leo invites Leila to the meeting Mark has arranged.

Analysis

Leila meets with Leo and confirms that all of Leo's dystopian conspiracy theories are indeed true. Leo, however, can offer Leila little help both because of what he has on Mark, and his unwillingness to sink to the immoral level of Mark by using something so juvenile against Mark. Leila is disappointed by this turn of events, but still seeks to do what she must to bring down the Committee. Leila is now fully committed not merely in defense of her family, as she explains to her sister, but because she is a proud American. Having grown up under the despotic regime of Iran, Leila knows America has offered her family a new life and a new chance. She has fallen in love with America, and no matter what happens, will not abandon the country that has given her such opportunity. Leila knows that a dystopian regime will be even worse than the radical despotic regime of Iran, and she is not about to give up what she and her family have so desperately earned – freedom – without a fight. This is important because the operation to clear Leila's father has been bungled, and the prosecutor killed in order to replace him with another who will continue the case.

Leo, meanwhile, is in the midst of continuing to clean himself up, and preparing for redemption. Without the drugs and alcohol in his system, Leo has a clearer frame of mind, and can finally think outside of himself. His selfishness was not merely a product of his privileged upbringing, but his substance abuse. Sobering up is an important step for Leo, for his clarity of mind brings him to the point that he knows he must do more than merely point out a conspiracy: he must do something to actually stop it. He therefore reaches out once more to Leila to bring down the Committee, inviting her to a meeting he has set up with Mark.

Information is critical not only in a dystopian organization like the Committee gaining and holding power, but in bringing them down as well. Leo's decision to reach out to Leila will open him up to a new world of information that he could only previously merely guess at based on clues and correlations (such as the connections the world "clear" made between different parts of the Committee). Leila is determined to spread information about the Committee whenever and to whomever she can, including her own sister. Ironically, the dissemination of information against the Committee is just as dangerous as the collection of information by the Committee. However, the Committee works and evolves in anticipation of this. The reader should reference how the Committee frequently has its projects and sub-organizations change names. For example, Bluebird Security Contracting becomes Blu Solutions/Logistics before it becomes New Solutions. This makes it more difficult for information to be gathered or gleaned by those opposed to the Committee.

What the reader should also note as interesting is that many involved with the Committee's operations have no idea that they are even helping at all. Roxana, for example, has been given many high-level projects to complete, but has no idea what



their end goal is. This is why it is so important for individuals like Leila to unveil information to those only unwittingly associated with the Committee, because it puts their work into terrifying perspective. At the same time, Mark is doing everything he can to delay making a decision in whether or not to accept Straw's offer to be the public face of SineLife. Much of this comes from Mark's moral suspicions about what Straw is up to. Mark's moral compass may be skewed when it comes to himself, but when it comes to things larger than himself, ironically, he can distinguish right from wrong.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Leo choose not to help Leila at first? What ultimately brings Leo around to help her? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Leila takes a great risk in confessing the truth of the Committee to both Dylan and Roxana. Why does Leila choose to do this?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mark remain so torn about accepting the job as the spokesperson for SineLife? What does this have to say about Mark's character morally?

Vocabulary

flux, whipsawed, suave, inane, morose, opine, turbid, contrition, elation, debouched, dexterous, lucrative, affluent, germane, exfiltration, obliquity, pomposity, nefarious

Section 5: Pages 340 – 422

Summary

Mark arrives at Newark Airport. When TSA agents harass a father trying to say goodbye to his wife and children, Mark intervenes and is detained by the TSA in a backroom. Suddenly, another TSA officer enters with a Node, and orders the interrogating agent to leave and go home for the rest of the day. Mark then calls Parker Pope to thank him for his help. Parker tells Mark in no uncertain terms that Mark is to accept the job offered by Straw, end of story. That night, Mark goes to a strip club, gets wasted, and bungles his presentation for Nike the next day. Mark then texts Leo, who arrives with Leila to pick Mark up from the Nike facility in Beaverton. Mark is stunned to find that Leo and Leila already know each other. Mark becomes nervous when Leo and Leila say they are bringing Mark to meet someone rather than back to his hotel or somewhere to eat. They come to the garage of Powell's Bookstore, from where they go inside, and then go outside.

A man named Chip Hazards is waiting in a car to bring them to the meeting. Leo explains succinctly that Mark has a chance to redeem himself and be on the right side of history. Mark is given a sleeping pill and a blindfold while enroute. They travel to the business aviation part of the airport, where Mark is brought on board a plane. When Mark awakens, the plane is over Southern Oregon where it lands on a rural, dirt runway. There, old laptops and other devices are unloaded, while Leila, Leo, and Mark ride horses into the countryside. Hazards leads the way into the hills to a caldera and a small farmhouse. There, they are met by a woman named Constance Nozzikins, and by Roman Shades. Leo notices that there is a mystery plant being grown all around the cabin, but cannot determine what it is. Leo is given his screen test, and his number. Mark, however, has reservations about taking the test. Constance says it is for the best, that the Committee's ultimate goal is actually to influence language, thought, culture, and the social order by controlling the means of communication, wherein they will instigate targeted genocide to create a new, sustainable Enhanced Humanity. Mark heads out onto the porch to get stoned, where Leo confronts him. Mark apologizes for stealing Leo's words for his book. Leo says he is past it. He tries to encourage Mark to do the screen test, but Mark refuses. Constance again appeals to Mark, saying that she can communicate with the strange, mystery plants (called novophylum) around them, that they have their own codes for it, but that everything is very new and largely untested. She impresses on Mark it is important he joins them. Mark consents and takes the test.

Mark is given his assignment: install a computer virus on the server house on the Sine Wave. Mark thinks the Diarists should be much more concerned about Sine Wave Two. None of the Diarists know about Sine Wave Two. Mark says this is the place he needs to plant the virus. Meanwhile, Leo, feeling strange from the effects of the screen test, tells Leila he wants to marry her and move to Rome with her to raise a family. Leila likes this idea, but knows she needs to stay focused on the mission. Mark then calls James



Straw to officially accept the job, saying he wants to meet Straw in person. Straw is delighted by this and says he will send a Zodiac to collect Mark.

In the morning, word comes that there has been a security breach, and the farm must be evacuated. Trip refers to Leila, Leo, and Mark as Whiskey, Tango, and Foxtrot, telling them to get themselves ready to leave at once. As they rush to leave, Leo realizes his number is the square root of Leila's number. They are amazed by this. Mark is given a flamethrower to help set everything on fire. Leo discusses the fact that he thinks Leila is Tango, while he is Foxtrot, meaning that Mark is Whiskey. Following his work with the flamethrower, Mark will be driven to the coast by an untested government agent. Constance then introduces Mark, Leo, and Leila to Ned Swain, of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the last uncorrupted branch of the American government. Leila remembers Ned well. It is Ned who tipped them off, Constance reveals, leading to the evacuation. Ned says he learned of their location from Mark's call to James Straw. Mark is then driven to the coast where he awaits the arrival of the Zodiac raft. Mark expects that what he will now do may end up costing him his life, but hopes that his parents would be proud.

Analysis

The theme of dystopianism continues to remain prevalent through the conclusion of the novel. Leila, Leo, and Mark all come together for the Diarists against the Committee, but it is only a matter of time before the Committee manages to track them down to their remote hideout in the Oregonian wilderness. In order to cover their tracks against the Committee, everything the diarists have been working on – including their technologically-modified plants – are burned by flamethrower. It is necessary to protect the people of the world against the Committee, because the Diarists are still technologically ahead of the Committee – at least for now. As Constance explains, the Committee seeks not only to control information through SineLife, but to control human behavior and actions through SineLife as well. Such a dystopian means would produce a government that could never even be dreamed of challenging – literally, because SineLife tabulates dreams.

What the reader will remember from early in the novel is how Ned Swain deliberately disobeyed orders to assassinate Aung, and gave up crucial information to Leila. It is revealed that Ned is part of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the only organization within the American government not infected by the Committee. Even this proves to be a source of irony because the Postal Service now presents the greatest remaining threat alongside the Diarists to the Committee, while no one has ever suspected the Postal Service of having such capabilities. It is because of Ned that the Diarists have managed to escape and fight again another day, while Ned himself personally drives Mark down to the coast to await pickup for the Sine Wave Two. Leo, Mark, and Leila become, respectively, Whiskey, Tango, and Foxtrot.

Leo and Mark, meanwhile, are ultimately redeemed in their work for the Diarists against the Committee. When the novel began, Leo cared only for himself and his substance



habits. Now clean, he imagines a life with Leila and dedicates himself to bringing down the Committee. By risking his own life and being willing to give up his past for someone else in Leila, Leo demonstrates he has been changed. Leila recognizes this change, and can indeed imagine a life with Leo.

Mark, meanwhile, is tasked with bringing down the Committee's New Alexandria operation by way of a computer virus. While Mark has not cleaned himself up in terms of substance abuse, he has indeed made the effort to make things right with Leo for plagiarizing Leo's work. Mark apologizes to Leo, which Leo willingly accepts. Mark, who has cheated and lied his way to the top, now has the ability to do something good with the heights to which he has ascended. The great tragedy of this is that Mark has set himself up for this new role. Ironically, Mark, as such a public and vocal figure for life and lifestyle will now commit an act which no one will ever know about, and which may very well cost him his life. Whether or not Mark is successful is left uncertain at the end of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mark ultimately agree to try to unleash a computer virus on the Sine Wave Two? Does Mark have any regrets about his decision and his life? If so, what are they? If he does not, why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ned Swain help the Diarists, Leila, Leo, and Mark? What are his motives? How influential is Ned in the course of events toward the end of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

How do both Mark and Leo redeem themselves for the way they have lived their lives? Why is redemption so important to their characters with respect to the plot of the novel?

Vocabulary

attenuated, perturbed, precipitously, mitigate, liability, benign, euphemism, blithe, transcendently, ardent, auspicious, anomalous



Characters

Leila

Leila Majnoun is a 30-something Iranian-American citizen who escaped Iran years before with her family, where they resettled in Los Angeles. Intelligent, insightful, and beautiful, Leila has fallen in love with her adoptive country, and considers herself a proud American. It is why she takes on NGO work in helping the underprivileged around the world, including in Myanmar. It is in Myanmar that she stumbles upon the Committee's efforts, and is guided by Ned to contact the Diarists.

Leila comes to volunteer for the Diarists as her family is targeted by the Committee for her efforts in Myanmar, and because she wants to defend her adoptive country. Leila is assigned to contact Leo, and to bring him into the fight by way of getting to Mark. Leila is successful in her efforts, and ultimately comes to have romantic feelings for Leo. By the end of the novel, Leila evacuates with the Diarists from their hideout in Oregon, anxiously awaiting results of Mark's operation.

Leo

Leo Crane is a 30-something man-child, as he calls himself. A resident of Portland, Oregon, and heir to his family's vast game company fortune, Leo dawdles through life. He never holds down a steady job, frequently indulges in drugs and alcohol, and maintains a blog about life in general and conspiracy theories in particular. Leo is very selfish, and doesn't see how anyone can live for anyone other than themselves. When he gets clean, meets Leila, and reunites with his old friend, Mark, Leo comes to learn that his conspiracy theories are mostly true and decides to live beyond himself. He commits to helping the Diarists take down the Committee, and ends up falling in love with Leila.

Mark

Mark Deveraux is a 30-something celebrity made famous for an article and a book about business and life – though he lifted much of the book from the blog of his old friend, Leo. Mark is a protégé of James Straw at SineCo, and is being groomed to become the spokesman and face of the SineLife project. Mark, though he spends money like crazy, drinks, and does drugs continuously, has enough of a moral center left to question SineLife. He is ultimately contacted by Leo and Leila, and eventually agrees to help the Diarists bring down the Committee when he learns the truth of everything going on. Mark is personally made responsible for the installation of a computer virus to bring down the Committee's SineLife project, which he endeavors to do at the end of the novel.



Roman Shades

Roman Shades is a contact member of Dear Diary, who first meets Leila in Dublin. Roman helps to situate Leila, contextualize important information for her, and to orient her to the truth of things. Roman later arranges to meet up with Leila, Leo, and Mark in Oregon, and helps to arrange the exposing of the setup of Leila's father.

James Straw

James Straw is the founder and CEO of SineCo. James is immensely wealthy, powerful, sharp-minded, and possibly gay. He has taken Mark under his wing either as a matter of fatherly interest or romantic inclinations, though neither possibility is made clear in the novel. James relies on ideas from Mark's book to inspire his New Alexandria/SineLife project, in which he endeavors to control all of the information in the world. James offers Mark the position of "storyteller-in-chief" wherein Mark will be the face of SineLife, selling it to the public.

Parker Pope

Parker Pope is the CEO of Bluebird Security (later Blu Solutions/Logistics, and later still, New Solutions) which provides security contracting for SineLife. Parker is cold, direct, and has no time for nonsense. Parker is the right-hand man of James, arranging the less-than-scrupulous and dirty tactics sometimes needed to make things happen. Parker consistently urges Mark to accept the job that James has offered Mark.

Ned Swain

Ned Swain is a member of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service intelligence agency, though he poses as a member of various other organizations as needed, including the CSS. Ned is tough-as-nails, but has a good heart and a strong moral center which precludes him from carrying out particularly nasty instructions, such as assassinating Aung. It is Ned who tips Leila off about what is happening to her and her family, and it is Ned who helps Leila reach out to Dear Diary.

Constance Nozzikins

Constance Nozzikins is the wife of Trip Hazards, and manages the day-to-day operations at the Dear Diary Oregon farm hideout where Leila, Leo, and Mark later come to stay. Constance is courageous and patriotic, and urges Leo and Mark to take the test to become full-fledged members of the Diary. When the hideout is discovered, Constance helps to organize the escape.



Trip Hazards

Trip Hazards is a field agent of Dear Diary, and is the husband of Constance Nozzikins. Trip frequently goes into the field on missions, including safely escorting Leo, Leila, and Mark to the Oregon hideout. Trip is later among those responsible for torching the hideout when it is found out by the Committee and must be evacuated.

Paige Turner

Paige Turner is the Diarist agent who meets Leila in Heathrow Airport. Paige briefly discusses the Committee with Leila, and encourages her to go on to Dublin for a meeting with the Diarists, after which time she will be free to walk away if she so chooses. Paige gives Leila an old Nokia phone for the purposes of contact, while at the same time, all of Leila's personal things are taken away.

Symbols and Symbolism

The Committee

The Committee is a quasi-governmental shadow organization led by James Straw and SineCo that endeavors to take over the world. The Committee seeks to do this through controlling access to all of the world's information, and forcing people to bend to their will if they want access. The Committee's ultimate goal is to control the actions and behavior of human beings, as well as to limit the global human population. The Committee, due to the vast resources it controls, is able to easily manipulate laws, get around legal issues, frame, and kill with impunity.

Dear Diary

Dear Diary is a secretive organization of people who have rallied together to oppose the Committee and to protect information privacy (note the name "Dear Diary" is used to denote entries in a traditional, physical, privately kept journal or book). Dear Diary consists of numerous cells of dozens upon dozens of individuals in various cities throughout the world. They have been monitoring and doing what they can to slow the Committee's reach and growing power, but it is only when Leila, Leo, and Mark come to work for Dear Diary that they are able to develop a singular plan to take down the Committee. Mark is given the task by Dear Diary of planting a computer virus on Sine Wave Two to cripple the Committee.

Owl icon

An owl icon is the symbol of Dear Diary. It appears on Leila's laptop desktop after she successfully establishes contact with Dear Diary. The owl represents wisdom and knowledge, the very things which Dear Diary opposes the Committee collecting and controlling for their own purposes. The owl also symbolizes truth, at which Dear Diary is determined to spread and preserve.

Nokia phone

Leila is given a Nokia phone by Paige Turner at Heathrow Airport so that Dear Diary may keep in touch with Leila. The Nokia phone has been reverse-engineered to be accessible only when members of Dear Diary make it possible. This in turn provides greater protection against tracking being conducted by the Committee. Leila keeps the phone with her throughout the novel, allowing her to keep abreast of events with Dear Diary.



Nodes

Nodes are smartphone/tablet combination devices produced by SineCo and being distributed around the world for free by the tens of thousands. The devices are ostensibly to allow the world to have greater access to information, but the devices are also designed to collect every shred of information they can about the user – from transcripts of phone calls to the dreams and fears of the user. The Nodes are the primary way that SineCo is beginning to collect and register information for the New Alexandria project.

Sine Wave Two

Sine Wave Two is a massive, industrial ship specially outfitted to serve as an information gathering and processing hub. Sine Wave Two is the brainchild of James Straw, and becomes the headquarters of the entire data collection operation for SineLife. Mark is brought about Sine Wave Two to learn more about what James Straw is planning, and it is later to Sine Wave Two that Mark returns to plant a computer virus that will bring down the entire system.

Whales

Whales are swimming computer drives that are filled with information and then deposited into the ocean floor for safekeeping and access by the Sine Wave Two. The drives are so named “whales” for the whale-like sounds they make upon their release into the water. The drives are only accessible by communication through Sine Wave Two, and thus may only be destroyed by a computer virus.

I Have Shared a Document With You

“I Have Shared a Document With You” is the name of Leo’s blog. Leo’s blog is full of his musings on life in general, and his conspiracy theories about a shadow government seeking to take over the world in particular. While mainstream culture ignores the blog, Dear Diary and the Committee take it seriously. Mark, however, uses the blog not for the purposes of freedom or safety, but for his own personal wealth. Mark lifts entire passages off of the blog for use in his own book, which ultimately makes him famous.

Broadside

The broadside that Leo produces lays out his theory about the shadow world government, and provides what evidence he can find to back up those claims. Fifty copies of the broadside are printed by hand by printing press, and are disseminated to any who will take them. One copy is managed to get into the hands of a Diarist, at which time it is decided that Leo must be brought into the fold officially in order to get to Mark.

Motivation in an Unjust World

“Motivation in an Unjust World” is the original article that Mark writes which propels him to fame. The article is about uncertainty and the importance of kindness in business, which had propelled him. It is this article that causes his then-boss, James Straw, to take an interest in him. Straw is delighted to have an in-house writer, and soon comes to realize that Mark could have a far greater impact on the company and his own plans for world domination.



Settings

Myanmar

Myanmar, formerly the country of Burma, is located in Southeast Asia. It is a largely impoverished country, run by an all-powerful military-led government. It is to Myanmar that Leila travels for her NGO in order to build infrastructure, educate, and provide resources for information to empower regular citizens of the country. It is while traveling through the country that Leila first encounters elements of the Committee, though she does not recognize them as such at the time. Myanmar, due to its corruption, is one of the few world governments consciously and deliberately – though secretly – working with the Committee to bring about a shift in world order. When Leila sends out a mass e-mail seeking information about what she has witnessed, the Committee moves in and has Myanmar revoke Leila's visa.

New York City

New York City is the single major port and cultural hub of the State of New York in the United States of America. New York is where Mark spends most of his time, frittering away his life on alcohol and drugs while sobering up just long enough to do what is expected of him by his publisher and James Straw. Mark loves New York, for it makes him feel as if he is at the height of power with the elites of the world. It is while Mark is in New York that Mark does a series of interviews about his book, including one on the hit show Margo!, and it is in New York that Mark begins to reflect on his path which will signal the beginning of his journey to redemption.

Portland

Portland is a major city on the Oregon coast, and is the hometown of Leo and his family. Portland is where the family video game company is headquartered, and where Leo lives life sliding through on his family's wealth. Portland is where Leo arranges a meeting with Mark and Leila in order to bring Mark into the Dear Diary fold. It is while in Portland that Dear Diary must help Leo, Mark, and Leila escape the city when the Committee zeroes in on them. It is from Portland to the Oregonian backcountry that Leo and the others are taken to flee.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles is a major city in California, and is the home of Leila and her family. It is in Los Angeles that Roxana works unwittingly on projects for the Committee, and it is in Los Angeles that Leila's father is setup for a child pornography sting at the hands of the Committee. To Leila, Los Angeles is a reminder of the good things in America that she wants to protect, for she has lived under the despotic Iranian regime as a child. It is

while Leila is in Los Angeles that she is contacted by Leo, requesting that she meet with him and Mark.

Oregon

The Oregon backcountry, located some hours by plane from Portland, is accessed by Leila, Leo, and Mark as they flee from the Committee. The backcountry is noted not merely for its rural setting, but for the beauty of its scenery, its isolation, and its difficulty in accessing it. The Oregon backcountry is where Constance Nozzikins and Trip Hazards maintain a small farm where they direct Dear Diary operations in the state. It is to this farm that Leo, Leila, and Mark are taken. It is where they come to learn that Ned is on their side, and it is where the Committee ultimately tracks them. The backcountry must be evacuated, while Mark is taken to the coast by Ned to rendezvous with James Straw to plane the virus on Sine Wave Two.



Themes and Motifs

Dystopianism

Dystopianism is an important theme in the novel “Whiskey Tango Foxtrot” by Dave Shafer. Dystopianism involves a government, organization, association, or company, that exercises tremendous or total power and influence in the lives of everyday people, often denying their human and legal rights in the name of the greater good. Those in power will do whatever it takes to retain power, and will do whatever is necessary to secure their own ends. On the surface, those with power have the stated goal of helping the people, but in reality, all they do is harm people.

The Committee represents such a dystopian power that is ascending to take control, but has not yet done so. It is estimated that they are some five or ten years away from truly taking control to the extent that they want, but they are nearer than ever to seizing power. The Committee is comprised of business and political leaders, in addition to numerous other powerful figures, groups, and entities focused on establishing a new world order. The Committee is led by James Straw of SineCo, whose path to power is through information.

James Straw explains to Mark that SineCo is developing a new program that frequently changes names (this is done to make it harder to trace, thereby ensuring the power and viability of the program) that aspires to collect all of the information in the world where it will be processed and stored through whale drives by the Sine Wave Two. Alternatively called New Alexandria (based on the Library of Alexandria in ancient Egypt) and SineLife (which will be the name released to the public), the program ostensibly is meant to protect the information about people so that they may focus on their lives instead. In truth, the Committee aspires to use this information to control people by influencing how they communicate and behave. Ultimately, it will be used to generate targeted genocide to reduce the size of the human population.

The Committee, in traditional dystopian fashion, is not afraid to ruin reputations, frame innocent people, or kill to achieve its ends. Only Ned’s refusal to carry out an order prevents the assassination of Aung early in the novel, while a technology company based in Virginia frames Leila’s father for child pornography possession after Leila snoops around too much in Myanmar. The Committee also gets Mark out of legal trouble with the TSA while it assassinates the prosecutor in Leila’s father’s case in order to carry on its power and assure its own survival.

Privacy

Privacy is an important theme in the novel “Whiskey Tango Foxtrot” by Dave Shafer. Privacy is essentially a person’s right to live his or her life without scrutiny or public exposure. Privacy also consists of the a person’s right that all of his or her personal



information, including e-mails, phone calls, documents, beliefs, thoughts, correspondence, and other electronic activities are not made public, and are not culled or collected by any private or public organization.

In the novel, privacy is something which is believed to be a mere annoyance by the Committee. James Straw and the Committee believe privacy is nonexistent thanks to the Implied Consent Decree of 2001 in which those who use public services do not have a right to remain private on those public services. Straw thus argues it is moral and legal to collect and store every kind of possible information about the people who use his company's services and products, and to do with that information what he will.

Mark disagrees, believing that people have a moral, natural, and legal right to privacy because non-criminal things done by individuals do not affect the people around them. Because these private things are not intended for public, corporate, or government consumption, the owners of these pieces of information have every right to expect that such things will not be collected away. As a result, Mark refuses to commit to being the spokesperson for the SineLife project, which will collect all of this information without the conscious consent of those about whom the information is being collected.

Mark's support of privacy is the first real reason he has to distance himself from James Straw and SineCo. This demonstrates that Mark is not the mindless idiot that some suppose him to be, but rather that, despite his flaws, he has a moral center. This violation of privacy ultimately confirms to Mark later, through meeting up with Leo and Leila, that Straw is bent on world domination.

Irony

Irony is an important theme in the novel "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot" by Dave Shafer. Irony, thematically, includes the opposite occurrence of what is expected to happen, or what is believed to be so. Irony appears throughout the novel, and always comes to work itself out.

Leo, early in the novel, contends that he has no idea how a person can live for an idea greater than themselves. Leo's contention is very ironic, for he will come to very much believe in ideas greater than himself as he commits to opposing the Committee. Leo considers himself largely a failure, for every venture and opportunity he has taken in his life has so far failed. His dreams have never turned out the way he expects them to – and neither has life. Leo recognizes that his own life has been one of failures, and will always be one of failure. Ironically, Leo's life will not continue as it has gone so far, because his involvement with the Committee will give him something to truly commit to that will not end up being a failure. Additionally, Leo is one of the few people in the world to have correctly surmised the Committee, but he doesn't actually seek to do anything about it beyond writing. His theory should be of global concern, but ironically, his primary concern is himself.



Mark, like Leo, is a locus for irony. Mark, a drug-user, knows that he is selfish and self-serving, and even recognizes that it is ironic he should write about morality in business when he himself acts immorally in pretending to know something genuine about business. Mark also speaks ironically of the importance of honesty in success, though Mark's successful book has largely been plagiarized from Leo's blog. Mark's moral compass may be skewed when it comes to himself in terms of his substance abuse and how he pretends to be something he is not, but when it comes to things and issues larger than himself, ironically, he can distinguish right from wrong. This is the case when it comes to privacy and information collection.

Irony abounds elsewhere in the novel as well. Mark's being troubled by Straw's New Alexandria data collection operation also provides another example of irony. Straw explains that if people don't have to worry about their data and information, they can focus on the things truly matter in life. It is an ironic, twisted, and warped way of at looking at privacy – allowing a third party to know everything private about oneself in order to keep it private. Meanwhile, Leila is determined to spread information about the Committee whenever, wherever, and to anyone she can, including her own sister, Roxana. Ironically, the spreading of information against the Committee by Leila is just as dangerous as the collection of information by the Committee, because the Committee seeks to crush those who oppose and spread the truth about it. It is also ironic that the Committee wishes to privatize private information so that it may be used publicly or privately by the Committee.

Information

Information is an important theme in the novel "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot" by Dave Shafer. Information in the novel consists of everything relating to a human life, from important documents and records to habits, activities, phone call transcripts, e-mails, photos, videos, beliefs, dreams, fears, ideas, creations, and so on. All of these are seen as key to the control of humankind by James Straw and the Committee. Information thus becomes crucial thematically and instrumentally to the plot of the novel.

Straw and SineCo have developed a system which becomes known both as New Alexandria and SineLife which aims to collect every scrap and shred of information on the planet to be stored on whale drives, and overseen by SineCo. Only those who pay will be allowed to access this information. This gives SineCo and Straw tremendous power, for it controls such an important aspect of human existence in the contemporary era. Straw wants SineLife presented to the public as a convenience for them to have their information protected so they can focus on the important things in life.

In reality, Straw wants to use the information to be able to influence and control people. As it is revealed, the collection of information is indeed a breach of the right of privacy, and the information being collected is being used to analyze, interpret, and predict human behavior and human actions. By controlling information and its communication, SineCo wants to be able to influence human behavior and ultimately control human action. By controlling human action, SineCo will be able to ensure that the Committee



retains power, thus setting the stage for a dystopian world. The Committee also seeks to shut down all information about itself so that it cannot be challenged, and so that its plans cannot be exposed.

Dear Diary, however, believes that all personal information generated or created privately is meant to remain private and solely owned by the individual. It is for this reason, and to oppose the Committee's desire for world control, that Dear Diary comes to stand against SineCo. They do this not only through direct action such as a computer virus, but by spreading information and knowledge about the Committee and its plot. Each person who is informed comes to stand against the Committee. Each bit of free information intended for public consumption, such as information about the Committee, undermines the Committee which wants to privatize all private information for its own personal use.

Redemption

Redemption is an important theme in the novel "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot" by Dave Shafer. Redemption is the act for seeking to atone or make up for a past wrong, intentional or unintentional, by doing something good. In the novel, both Leo and Mark seek to atone and redeem themselves for the way they have been living their lives.

Leo is simply an overgrown child who can't hold down a steady job, lives off his family's wealth, makes his family clean up his messes, and drinks and does drugs. He lives as he wants to, utterly selfishly and terribly unconcerned for those around him beyond what it might mean for him. Leo, upon using bike paths on the bridges, wonders how anyone could devote themselves to a cause outside of themselves. Leo, however, comes to have a total change of heart and mind by the end of the novel.

Leo sobers up, gets clean, and stays clean. Outside the haze of substances, Leo begins to see the world beyond himself. His exposure to the truth – that his conspiracy theories are not actually conspiracies – and his meeting Leila cause him to end up fighting for a cause larger than himself that far transcends something like bike paths. Leo comes to be a key figure in the fight against the Committee, for Leo has access to Mark. Likewise, Leo comes to care deeply for someone other than himself as he falls in love with Leila. His love for Leila, and his desire to oppose the Committee, redeem Leo for the way he has been living his life.

Mark, on the other hand, never quite sobers up the way that Leo does. Mark has skated through life based on plagiarizing the normal parts of Leo's blog and presenting such writing as his own. Mark spends his days drinking, doing drugs, and chasing girls, sobering up only as needed to do public appearances. Likewise, Mark has unwittingly become wealthy and powerful through the Committee. Mark is not comfortable with SineCo's data and information collection plans to begin with. Only upon learning the truth does Mark realize the gravity of what James Straw is attempting to do, and so Mark turns against SineCo. Mark seeks to redeem himself for the way he has lived his life, and his association with SineCo by seeking to plant a computer virus on the Sine

Wave Two. Whether or not Mark succeeds is left uncertain, but Mark hopes and prays that at least his efforts will redeem him.

Styles

Point of View

David Shafer tells his novel “Whiskey Tango Foxtrot” in the third-person omniscient perspective. Given that Shafer has employed three diverse, primary characters that, for the majority of the novel act independently of one another in different parts of the world, the third-person narrator provides a common, unifying voice against what at first seem to be three unconnected storylines. This helps the reader to navigate each character’s spheres of action with ease until all three ultimately intertwine. The reader is also given a privileged view of events through the omniscient nature of the narrative, learning things before the characters do themselves. For example, the reader learns that Ned is not truly working for the Committee very early on in the novel, while the reader learns alongside Leila just what the Committee is long before Mark does. This provides important contextual information for the reader to understand about the plot, so that the action of the novel may be advanced by way of the confrontation Dear Diary is planning against the Committee.

Language and Meaning

David Shafer tells his novel “Whiskey Tango Foxtrot” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons; first, the novel has been written in the contemporary era (the 2010s), in which the language employed is casual and straight-to-the-point. Second, the novel takes place in the contemporary era, so the language used in the novel both by the characters and to tell the story is reflective of the era in which the novel takes place. This gives the novel a feeling of authenticity and realism. It also gives the novel a more fast-paced feel in that the Spartan language makes for a quick read, underscoring the fast pace of the plot.

Structure

David Shafer divides his novel “Whiskey Tango Foxtrot” into titled and untitled chapters and sections. The chapters that are titled are titled by locations as identifying features – either a city and state (such as Portland, Oregon), a city (New York), a place (Newark Airport), or a set of GPS coordinates (the Oregonian coastline). Each chapter initially primarily revolves around either Leila, Leo, or Mark. Untitled chapters are sometimes continuations of chapters given titles, but not always so. Untitled chapters are mixed in with titled chapters, and the chapters themselves are sometimes subdivided by sections denoted by asterisks that mark a transition in time or place.



Quotes

Tireless campaigners who probably cared more about ideas than they did about themselves. How do you care about something more than yourself?

-- Narrator (Section 1)

Importance: Leo, who is wealthy by his family, enjoys life and gets around Portland by bike. He is able to afford a hipster-like lifestyle due to his wealth, and enjoys being able to ride his bike across bridges. He wonders what person campaigned for bike lanes on bridges, and finds it hard to believe that some people can care more for ideas than for themselves. Leo's conception is ironic, for he will come to very much believe in ideas soon enough.

For Leo, the single salient observable fact about the future was that it never turned out to be what you thought it would be.

-- Narrator (Section 1)

Importance: Leo considers himself largely a failure, for every venture and opportunity he has taken in his life has so far failed. His dreams have never turned out the way he expects them to – and neither has life. Ironically, even Leo's life now will not continue as it has been, and will not continue to be what he expects it to be – a series of failures – because he will become a part of something very important.

I don't know what is happening.

-- Leila (Section 2)

Importance: Leila visits briefly with one of her few friends in Myanmar, Dah Alice. Leila explains she must leave the country, and that she has no idea what is truly going on. Her life seems to be changing second by second, and it is throwing Leila off. It is making life in general difficult at best. Dah Alice explains that such a life is normal for the people of Myanmar. This affects Leila greatly.

But it seemed to Mark that Straw was now calling it New Alexandria. He was apparently describing some sort of Tolkienesque realm where knowledge could be stored and protected. He kept saying that what was needed was all the information stored in one place; then everyone with access to that information would be able to make perfect decisions.

-- Narrator (Section 2)

Importance: While meeting with his company's boss, Mark learns that the new department being formed by Straw – the Core Vision Department – is being designed to collect all information in the world in a single place. Essentially, this will be a digital library of sorts where only certain people have access and can then make appropriate decisions. The ramifications of this cannot yet be revealed, says Straw, but he will seek to make it possible for Mark to learn.



A secret oligarchy has rigged the system past the point of its being correctable by legal political means. The world might tip the wrong way right now – toward the oligarchs... they don't know how much we know; they don't know what we have.

-- Nicotine (Section 3)

Importance: Leila meets with members of Dear Diary in Dublin, who reconfirm the story Paige provided about a secret shadow government taking over the world. Nicotine succinctly sums up the situation, but then notes that Dear Diary has a few tricks up its sleeve that the Committee does not know about. These tricks, which are soon revealed, mean that Diary has a fighting chance against the Committee – including tapping the tap lines of the Committee.

Well, will you please tell me what the fuck is going on?

-- Leila (Section 3)

Importance: Leila is brought to a meeting in wooden library where some 60 people are already present, and where she is inducted into Dear Diary. A man who calls himself Roman Shades introduces himself. Leila is beyond annoyed at this point, and asks him what is going on. Roman says all will be revealed in time. The phrase “what the fuck” can be seen as the acronym WTF, or Whiskey Tango Foxtrot. Leila, Leo, and Mark will later become known as Whiskey, Tango, and Foxtrot, respectively.

There's no going back from anything, Lola. You learn something true, it sticks with you.

-- Sarah (Section 3)

Importance: After Leila receives her eye test and is inducted, she asks if she is ever allowed to quit or go back. Sarah explains that there is no going back from the truth, from having one's eyes opened to knowledge and understanding. From here on in, Leila will either have to work with the Diarists to save the world or die trying, or live with the knowledge of the truth and a plagued conscience.

Information is free. Storage is unlimited.

-- Seamus Cole (Section 3)

Importance: Mark is given a firsthand glimpse of the data collection operation being conducted through SineCo's New Alexandria department. Much of this information is very personal, including home videos and every word ever spoken on a telephone. Mark becomes angered, wanting to know why this sort of thing has been collected. Seamus says it is because it was made public over their network, so they call “dibs” on it because the information is free, and the ability to store it is unlimited.

SineLife sets you free – to concentrate on what's really important.

-- James Straw (Section 3)

Importance: Mark is trouble by Straw's New Alexandria data collection operation, to be called SineLife. Straw explains, however, that if people don't have to worry about their data and information, they can focus on the things truly important in life. This, explains



Straw, is how Mark must sell SineLife. It is an ironic, twisted, and warped way of at looking at privacy – allowing a third party to know everything private about oneself in order to keep it private.

Point is, I think he's a good man, at heart. Maybe he's gotten caught up with these people without meaning to, and all he needs is to be offered a way out.

-- Leo (Section 4)

Importance: Leila receives a letter from Leo after Leo is contacted by Mark, asking for a meeting. Leo wants to see the Committee brought down, and believes Mark may be the one to help him do it. Leo has found a purpose larger than his own life – something he earlier imagined impossible. He likewise believes that Mark, despite his flaws, is a good man who would be able to help if given the chance. This suggestion will be crucial to the outcome of the novel.

We both want to save America from a clutch of greedy dukes, right? That's our common cause.

-- Ned (Section 5)

Importance: Ned Swain speaks to Leila, Mark, and Leo about his role in stopping the Committee. Ned is actually a member of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the last agency not yet infected by the Committee. Ned is a patriotic American, and like Leila, Mark, and Leo, wants to stop the Committee. There isn't any time for more explanation, as Mark must be driven to the coast by Ned before the Committee's people show up.

Mark would get to write his great work, but maybe only on his heart, and for an audience of one.

-- Narrator (Section 5)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains Mark's position as he prepares to board the Sine Wave Two to plant the computer virus. Mark has wanted to write a great book of his own after having stolen from Leo, but knows he may never get that chance. The only book he may write will be one in his own heart, and he might be the only person who ever knows about it - the story being his role in Dear Diary and bringing down the Committee. It is very possible that Mark may die, but he doesn't care anymore. He has a purpose and a calling larger than himself, and he will see it through.