

Zero K Study Guide

Zero K by Don DeLillo

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Plot Summary

The science fiction novel *Zero K* by Don DeLillo (1st hardcover edition) opens with a young man named Jeffrey Lockhart travelling many miles to an isolated facility in order to say farewell to his father's second wife, Artis. Here, Jeffrey learns that the purpose of the facility, called the Convergence, is to freeze terminally ill people, using a process called Zero K, so they can be thawed in the future when, presumably, their conditions will be cured. While Artis is being prepared for her deep freeze, Jeffrey learns that a hospice is located in the facility and that a monk speaks to them about their deaths. He also finds a wall-mounted monitor that shows him images of natural disasters and other destructive things. His father, Ross Lockhart (which Jeffrey tells us is not his real name) tells Jeffrey that he has full confidence in the process. Jeffrey does not. During this initial visit to the Convergence, we learn that Ross has been investing large amounts of money in the project.

Later, Jeffrey is guided to a room with a view slot. He witnesses a meeting of people (including his father, Ross). This meeting discusses the dystopic future that the administrators predict and how the Convergence can help save humanity and mend the wounds of the apocalypse. At this point, Jeffrey still has issues with the project and his father.

Jeffrey's family history is shared with readers. His father left when he was 13, and his mother eventually died. It is also implied that his mother, Madeline, had some sort of mental illness, which Jeffrey also seems to have. This causes Jeffrey to have long lasting disdain for his father; the disdain is so powerful that it still exists at the end of the novel.

Later, Ross tells his son that he is to be frozen using Zero K in order to be with Artis in the future. Jeffrey is shocked and argues with Ross. Then, Jeffrey meets Ben-Ezra in the facility's garden, who advises Jeffrey to get Ross to change his mind. Ross changes his mind without Jeffrey's help. After this, Jeffrey is shown to an area called the veer, where he sees three pods with individuals inside of them. He learns that these people are referred to as the heralds, as they have no life-threatening condition, but are heralding in the new world. Artis is frozen, and the narrative briefly shifts to her perspective. She can still think while she is in the pod.

Part II of the novel opens with Jeffrey being interviewed for a job by Ross' boss. He gets the job but rejects it out of principle. We meet Jeffrey's girlfriend and her adopted son Stak, who was adopted by her ex-husband in the Ukraine. We learn that Stak focuses on numbers and bets on terrorist attacks. Soon after, Jeffrey meets with Ross, and Ross explains that he will be frozen after all. Jeffrey agrees to travel with him to the Convergence facility. Before they leave Jeffrey is interviewed for a job as an ethics specialist at a college. Jeffrey travels to the Convergence facility and learns that some of the artwork around the facility actually consists of human corpses and witnesses the large number of frozen individuals in pods. Ross is frozen and Jeffrey returns home. He

then accepts the offer for the job as an ethics specialist and witnesses the sun aligning with the city street layout.



Part 1: In the Time of Chelyabinsk, Chapter 1

Summary

The novel begins with a very short chapter that introduces the main character (who remains unnamed in this chapter). This character is also the narrator (therefore this novel uses a first person point of view) The chapter begins with a recollection of a phrase his wealthy father used, “Everybody wants to own the end of the world” (3). The narrator has been on a journey for quite a while. He has been flying on various planes for many hours. When he lands, some sort of company car picks him up from the airstrip. The guard is wearing a soccer jersey and, apparent from the bulge on his hip, is carrying a firearm. The speaker reveals that he has made this journey to visit his ailing stepmother, who was previously an archeologist, and give her “an uncertain farewell” (4). When the car drops him off, he realizes that he is surrounded by salt flats, meaning he is in a desert. He looks before him and sees a facility of indeterminable size. A bit away from the entrance of the facility stands two more jersey wearing guards with guns. At the entrance, the narrator sees a couple of women, wearing some sort of shrouds.

Analysis

This chapter gives very little detail about the narrator, but simply acts as an introduction to the protagonist's (the narrator) situation. The only information we are given is that he is visiting his stepmother, and it is implied that he is not extremely close to the woman and that his father, her husband, is very wealthy. The description of the narrator's journey shrouds the facility and its purpose with mystery. It is implied that this facility has great importance, as it clearly possesses many planes and is quite heavily guarded, as the planes act as a symbol for the project's importance.

The phrase “an uncertain farewell” (4) only adds to the mystery. It is implied that the narrator's stepmother is quite ill, but what is unclear is why he is uncertain about seeing her before she dies. The reader is not given the nature of the connection between this facility and the narrator's father, but the mention of him in the first few lines makes it clear that a connection exists. Also, it is important to note the fact that the guards are armed. These firearms symbolize the perceived importance of the convergence project, as it is important enough to warrant deadly force to protect.

Discussion Question 1

What does the narrator's journey tell the reader about his destination?



Discussion Question 2

What does the narrator's progression of labels for his stepmother mean for his character?

Discussion Question 3

Look to the descriptions of the guards and the shrouded women. What other settings would these types of people fit in to?

Vocabulary

rayed, bollard, salt flat



Part 1, Chapter 2

Summary

The chapter opens with the narrator meeting his father in the facility. His father, Ross Lockhart, is grayer than the narrator remembers. The narrator remarks that a major amount of money must have gone into building this project and its associated facilities. Ross explains that his wife, Artis, will soon be subject to a process called the Convergence. Ross elaborates that the Convergence involves the cryonic suspension of an individual until their ailments can be cured (the narrator internally remarks that Artis has MS, among other things). Ross tells his son that he has complete confidence in this process. The speaker comments that the Convergence sound like a religious concept. His father agrees and argues that this type of science is faith based. Those who are being frozen have faith that they will one day be awoken to a day when their ailments can be cured.

The speaker recollects the day his biological mother died and the fact that he was with her (while his father was not). Ross tells the speaker that a major part of the facility is a hospice, where the speaker cannot go. The people in the hospice are all going to the same destination, and Ross compares these people to a group of pilgrims. His father gives the speaker a sort of disk connected to a wristband. This object acts similarly to a criminal's ankle bracelet. He is told that he cannot remove it without alerting security, but it does grant him access to some locked parts of the facility. After this conversation, the narrator walks the facility's halls. He comes to a screen that descends and stretches. Scenes of flooding and rapids. At the end of the video, a life-sized man appears on the screen, staring at him. The narrator looks around for other witnesses to this video, but none are present.

Analysis

This chapter primarily focuses on the similarities between some sciences and religion, introducing the theme of faith into the novel. Many scientists and philosophers argue that science is quite the opposite of religion because it is not faith-based, but instead is driven by facts and data. According to Ross Lockhart, this is not exactly true, as a great deal of faith is involved. Logically, there is no confirmation that there will be a time in the future where diseases such as MS are curable. Those who are being frozen are putting faith in the world of science and scientists to cure these diseases so they can be thawed and cured. Interestingly enough, it seems that Ross also has almost religious-like faith in Convergence as well. As we learn later, the narrator does not know his father to be a religious man, so this is quite out of character for Ross. In short, as this is not the last mention of religious or scientific faith, this chapter works as an introduction of this concept.



The chapter also continues to inform the reader that the narrator is not that close to Artis. While his father is talking about Artis, the speaker's mind drifts to his mother. In this recollection, it is implied that he seems cross with his father for not being with his dying mother. This also implies that his father and mother separated at some point in time. This gives us much more development regarding the narrator and his past. This chapter also is the start of the rising action.

The chapter is also the first to mention natural disasters. The narrator watches the monitor and sees people presumably drown. The man in the water seems quite alive, somewhat mirroring the concept of one being in stasis; the person is frozen yet alive, like the man in the water is submerged yet alive. Also, within the entirety of the novel, natural disasters symbolize the transition between the past in the future, which the Stenmark twins explain later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

With the details given in this chapter, what does the Convergence sound like? How would you describe it?

Discussion Question 2

What does the tracking armband imply about the facility?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the differences regarding how the narrator feels about Artis compared to his biological mother.

Vocabulary

syndicate, cryonic, earthwork

Part 1, Chapter 3

Summary

The narrative shifts to Artis' room. In the room, sits Artis, Ross, and the narrator (we are finally given his name), Jeffrey. Jeffrey thinks back to his prior thinking regarding Artis. He first thought of her as his father's second wife, then his stepmother, and finally the archeologist. Jeffrey realizes that he was brought here to be with Ross when Artis finally dies. Jeffrey states that Ross is a man shaped by money. He previously worked as a person who calculated the profit impact of natural disasters. The recollection continues, and Jeffrey remembers how Ross would always be diagramming or reciting speeches he would later give, and that Ross once had an affair. Ross left the family when Jeffrey was only 13. However, years later, Jeffrey saw his father on a news program speaking in French about the ecology of unemployment.

Later, Jeffrey remembers the time he went to a church on Ash Wednesday. Jeffrey explains that his family was not Catholic, or even religious for that matter. The priest put the ash on Jeffrey's head, and Jeffrey came home. His mother saw the ash and questioned what makes the holiday so special.

Artis speaks to Jeffrey, and Jeffrey internally explains that Artis is the only person who refers to him as Jeffrey. Jeffrey asks Artis if she wonders about the kind of world she will wake up to after being frozen. She explains that she does not, however she has been thinking about a memory when she was in the shower and water was dripping down. She compares the water to prehistoric ooze that assumes a new shape (like evolution). Jeffrey explains that he has thought about a time when he went to his dark room with his eyes closed. He compares this to surrendering to the darkness.

Jeffrey leaves and goes to his room. His room has no windows. Ross predicts that in about a day Artis will be dead, and he will leave. However, his father will stay for a while, making sure the cryonics are working properly. Jeffrey thinks about leaving and saying goodbye to Artis. He does not, however. Instead, he wanders the halls again.

Analysis

The chapter explores Jeffrey's father's connection to money. It is implied that Jeffrey blames the money for Ross abandoning his family. It becomes clear that Jeffrey deals with substantial abandonment issues after his father left. It seems that Ross almost exclusively focused on his work and somewhat neglected his familial duties. Jeffrey's paternal issues only grow when he sees his father on television, as he was not aware that his father could even speak French. This implies that Jeffrey may not have known his father as well as he thought. Due to all of this, Jeffrey went to Ash Wednesday even though he is not Catholic. Here, we see that Jeffrey was looking for some sort of meaning or way to fill the hole that his father left within him.



This chapter uses extensive symbolism. Firstly, Artis compares the shower water to life and evolution. Artis describes the water as having the ability to take new shapes throughout its descent. Artis elaborates that this is quite similar to primordial ooze during the early days of life on Earth. If we look at that comparison in the novel's current context, the water, or ooze, has changed quite drastically. The ooze is no longer ooze, but it is humans that have the ability to cryonically freeze its species. Jeffrey uses a symbol that acts inversely to this. Jeffrey recalls walking into his dark room with his eyes closed. He was not able to see due to the darkness, but he closed his eyes anyway. He compares this to surrendering to the dark, symbolizing the inevitable death of a human life. Those who are being cryonically frozen do not seem to surrender to the dark. Instead, they delay the dark and hope that in the future, the coming darkness can be delayed. This chapter also speaks at length about Jeffrey's family and introduces the theme of family. Jeffrey's family is not a stable one, but we will see more instances of family dynamics throughout the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Is Artis mentioning things like the shower water because of her philosophical state of mind or the medication? What supporting evidence exists for both possibilities?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Ross. Was he a good father? Is Jeffrey biased about him due to his familial situation?

Discussion Question 3

What does Jeffrey's practice of closing his eyes in the dark say about his state of mind?

Vocabulary

implanting, orblet, divot



Part 1, Chapter 4

Summary

The chapter opens with Jeffrey roaming the halls of the facility. He begins to theorize that no one is actually behind the many doors within the facility. Eventually he spots a small boy in a motorized wheelchair flanked by adults. Jeffrey wants to speak to the boy but the adults seem to avoid this interaction. After this, he spots a mannequin resembling a naked woman in a self-defense position. Jeffrey then decides to just pick random doors, knock on them, and see what happens. Eventually a man in a turban answers his knocking. Jeffrey apologizes and states that he knocked on the wrong door. The man replies that all of the doors are wrong. After this interaction, Jeffrey thinks back to his childhood, and the times when he decided to read difficult books.

Jeffrey eventually ends up in his father's office. They drink rare Irish whisky together. Jeffrey asks Ross where the facility is located. Ross replies that the closest city is Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Ross goes on to explain that there are project-related laboratories all over the world, and that this facility is just central command. Apparently, the facility is the best place for central command because of its fortifications and structural redundancies. Ross proclaims that the people behind the facility's doors are making the future. Jeffrey asks Ross if he remembers Jeffrey's mother. Ross hesitates and refuses to say her name (her name is Madeline). Ross changes the subject explaining that experts in fields such as biology, philosophy, and climatology are working on this project, and that a Convergence language is being developed. Ross asks Jeffrey to think about how we can count our lives in years, and also more precisely seconds. Ross compares this to the amount of time the universe has existed. Jeffrey leaves and watches the monitor again. It shows a tornado completely decimating a town. Ross then states that he does not know what time it is, as his watch is still set in American EST.

Analysis

This chapter provides more detail regarding the relationship between Ross, Jeffrey, and Jeffrey's mother, Madeline. However, the chapter does not provide the true nature of the relationship between Ross and Madeline. Ross seems very businesslike in his language regarding Madeline, portraying a cold and technical attitude towards their relationship. This reflects the attitude that Ross seemingly has towards all things; he is very precise and logical. This interaction foreshadows the possibility of a reveal regarding the reason that Jeffrey's family fell apart, and why Ross abandoned them.

The chapter also comments on the minuscule period that humans have lived on Earth. Ross explains that humans are a rather new addition to the universe's landscape. He analyzes this on a more personal level as well. Initially he does not ask Jeffrey to think about how long humans have lived on Earth, but he does ask him how many years and



seconds he has lived. With both contexts in mind, the period of a human life is incredibly minute compared to the greater existence of the universe. It is clear that the Convergence may change the mechanics of this relationship. If the Convergence is able to extend the lifespan of individual humans, there could be no end to the overall reign of the human race.

Discussion Question 1

What points is Ross attempting to put forth in this discussion?

Discussion Question 2

Does it seem like Ross has any selfish motives in helping fund the Convergence? What is the evidence for this?

Discussion Question 3

What does Ross' refusal to say Madeline's name imply about their marital relationship?

Vocabulary

philologist, discourse, redundancy



Part 1, Chapter 5

Summary

The chapter begins with Jeffrey interacting with a person at the food unit (the facility's cafeteria). Jeffrey asks about the contents of the food they are eating, the cloaked man replies that it is a mixture of carrots, onions, and mutton. It is revealed that this man speaks to the individuals in the hospice. Jeffrey questions if he prepares them for the Convergence. He states that he does not, he just prepares them for the end. The man explains his backstory. He was previously a member of a post-evangelical group that awaited the inevitable destruction of Earth. He briefly mentions an asteroid impact that took place in Siberia. He compares himself to the Knights Templar who would heal the pilgrims during the Middle Ages. The man also explains that he actually stole the cloak he is wearing.

The narrative shifts to Artis' room. She recalls a time when, after a medical procedure, she had to wear an eye-shield. She states that at one point, she took off the eye-shield. She was surprised at what she saw, everything was more vivid and clearer. She implies that what we perceive in day-to-day life are actually just hints of the true nature of things. Eventually, her eye recovered and she lost this advanced perception. The people in the room question what she will perceive after she is thawed. Artis claims that perhaps her soul would have moved on by this point and entered the body of a baby boy. She also proclaims that her voice sounds like her voice is originating outside of her body. Ross blames this on the medication.

Artis mentions the art within the facility which causes Jeffrey to mention the mannequin. Ross asks him about this and asks him to recall what he saw when he arrived. He mentions the cloaked women. Ross reveals that these women were actually mannequins. Then, Jeffrey internally reminisces about how, as a child, he was uncomfortable going to his friend's house, his fascination with his mother's lint roller, and his peculiar fascination with the definition of words. Jeffrey recalls that his mother once called him "vivid boy" and "shapeless man" (57). Jeffrey returns to his dark room and shuts his eyes. While resting, he recalls the times he would go back to the libraries that his father visited.

Analysis

This chapter, like some previous chapters, revisits the comparison between the Convergence and religion. The man at the food unit uses a comparison that we have heard previously. This compares the similarities between those who are being frozen and religious pilgrims. However, it is slightly more poignant here because of the fact that the man is actually a member of some religious clergy. It seems that since he is not preparing the hospice patients for the Convergence, but instead preparing them for the end, he may not agree with the science that the facility is performing.



The chapter brings forth the idea that the human eye and mind cannot perceive the true nature of things. Artis theorizes that parts of our body such as the brain and optic nerve have limits and just cannot perceive certain things. This connects to Ross' previous comments about the human race's relationship with the universe and time in an interesting way. If humans are not capable of perceiving some aspects of the universe, it only exemplifies the validity that the universe is not made for humans and that, in the grand scheme of things, humans are quite insignificant. Artis compares this to the possible change in perception she will witness when she is revived from stasis. Artis predicts that by the time she is revived, humans may have developed the technology or the ability to perceive the true nature of the universe. This prediction aligns with the philosophy of those who foresee a post-human android society.

Discussion Question 1

Based on the attitudes of Ross and Artis, describe their views on the human race, humans, and the universe. What may they think the purpose of humanity is?

Discussion Question 2

How would you describe beliefs mentioned in the previous question? Are they nihilistic? Optimistic? Neither?

Discussion Question 3

What does Jeffrey's fascination with definitions say about his character?

Vocabulary

inclination, intimations, precedence



Part 1, Chapter 6

Summary

The chapter opens with Jeffrey watching the monitor. The monitor shows a scene of three men taking turns pouring kerosene on themselves. They light themselves on fire and react very calmly about their deaths. Jeffrey turns around and notices a 40-year-old woman standing behind him. She gestures to him to follow her. He does and they enter a room with a view-slot.

Jeffrey looks through the slot and sees a meeting. In the meeting room is a large wooden table with a man and a woman sitting at it, a large decorated human skull, and individuals sitting on benches (who are most likely the funders of the project). The woman at the table compares the project to those who travel to Mecca. She explains that what they are doing here is more personal. He notices his father sitting on one of the benches, and he nods to Jeffrey. The woman proclaims that the human race is at the mercy of the sun. The man, who Jeffrey names Szabo predicts a cybernetic human future. A pair of twins enter and begins making a great many statements and asking many questions. The questions deal with the possible ethical issues with the project and the possibility that a group of people will develop who will fight the project in order to bring back death. However, they state they will return to this place once their ends are near. Jeffrey names these twins Stenmark, and realize that they are the artists of the facility. They made the mannequins. The Stenmark twins predict a future of nanobots, and Jeffrey leaves. The woman and Jeffrey go to a bedroom and have sex.

Analysis

Again, a comparison is made between the Convergence and religion. The woman's comparison aligns the Convergence facility with the Islamic holy place, Mecca. Szabo, like Artis, predicts a cyborg-like post-human future. This is just one example of a character's view of the future, as it is a recurring theme in the novel. Here, the Stenmark twins act as the devil's advocate regarding the Convergence. They list the possible consequences of the project's purpose. However, they state that they will still return to the facility to be frozen. This implies that they believe that the Convergence is worth all of the bloodshed and negative consequences that they predict. Regarding the theme of life and death, one of the biggest consequences that they mention is the development of the group that intends to return death to the human equation, again making life and death absolutes. This makes it clear that those associated with the project are completely aware of the ethical dilemma attached to the purpose of the Convergence and will proceed anyway. The woman explains that the human race is at the mercy of the sun. This is the first mention of the sun within the novel, but it is clear that the sun is symbolizing the fragility of the human race.



Discussion Question 1

What could be the motives of the woman who brings Jeffrey to the room?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Ross want Jeffrey to witness the meeting? What is Ross trying to tell Jeffrey?

Discussion Question 3

What is the relationship between the art in the facility and the Convergence itself?

Vocabulary

reciprocity, arboreal, nonbeing



Part 1, Chapter 7

Summary

The chapter opens with Jeffrey explaining that his father's name, Ross Lockhart, is fake, and that his mother informed him of this when he was a young adult. In fact, his real name was Jeffrey Satterswaite. Jeffrey questions whether anyone knows the genealogy or origins of both the Lockhart name and the Satterswaite name. The narrative shifts to the food unit, where Jeffrey sits and eats with the monk, who is wearing a black hoodie under his robes. Jeffrey asks the monk about the videos on the hallway screens, specifically the aforementioned video involving men setting themselves on fire. The monk states that he is aware of the videos and the people in the specific video Jeffrey mentioned are monks. The monk goes on to explain that before he truly became a monk, he climbed a sacred Tibetan mountain, and that he sees the thinness of contemporary life. Suddenly, an escort appears to escort the monk. They exchange words in Turkish, and the escort uses a device on Jeffrey's wristband.

Jeffrey follows them down to the hospice, which is full of people in crib-like beds. Jeffrey tries to speak to a large man in one of the beds, but the man explains that he is "looking right through" Jeffrey (93). Eventually he sees the child he saw earlier in the motorized wheelchair. He attempts to talk to the child, but the child just speaks nonsense back. Jeffrey overhears the monk speaking to a patient in Spanish, discussing the end of the world. They leave, and the escort does not revert his wristband back to its previous state. Jeffrey decides to visit his father.

Analysis

This chapter, like previous ones, connects the Convergence to religion. The monk, who had previously gone on a sort of pilgrimage, is now preaching to a new sort of pilgrim, the pilgrim of the Convergence. In a way, the Tibetan mountain symbolizes the monk's spiritual rebirth or transition. This chapter reveals why the hospice area of the facility is assigned that name. The individuals in the room are either sick and awake, tranquilized, or in an unknown state of consciousness. Regardless, it is clear that these individuals are close to dying, and when they do, they will be frozen within the Convergence.

The chapter leaves the mental state of those Jeffrey interacts with quite unclear. The large man clearly speaks English, but does not truly respond to any of Jeffrey's questions. He simply states that he sees right through Jeffrey. This could mean two things. The man could be explaining that he sees right through his motivations of being in the hospice, curiosity, or he could be quite intoxicated from the medications that the hospice is clearly pumping into his system.

This chapter also foreshadows that something greater is at play. The escort does not revert Jeffrey's wristband back to its original condition. Presumably, this will grant



Jeffrey access to sections of the facility that were previously restricted to him. We are not told this takes place.

Discussion Question 1

Could “looking right through you” mean something other than what was mentioned in the analysis section?

Discussion Question 2

Why would the monk have the escort change the permissions of Jeffrey’s wristband?

Discussion Question 3

What is the thinness of contemporary life?

Vocabulary

genealogy, immolation, circumambulation

Part 1, Chapter 8

Summary

The chapter begins with Jeffrey entering his father's office. His father is not there and neither is any of his belongings. Jeffrey walks to Artis' room and expects to see her in her chair. Instead, Ross sits in her chair. Ross explains that Artis will finally die and be frozen tomorrow. Ross states that men are supposed to die first. Jeffrey explains that women should die first so the men can kill each other. Ross tells Jeffrey that Madeline once stabbed him with a steak knife after an argument (which he cannot remember the subject of).

Jeffrey remembers developing a fake limp at age 14. He further reminisces about his childhood. He recalls that his mother would only use paper napkins, had to have the utensils in a particular order within the drawers, and hated fruit stickers. According to Jeffrey, his mother could also tell the exact time within 3-5 minutes without using a watch. Madeline also had two "boyfriends," one who was not romantic in nature and another that Jeffrey never met.

Ross explains that he will be frozen with Artis. Jeffrey reacts poorly to this, stating that this goes against Ross' previous remarks about the importance of the short life-span of humans. Ross explains that a process called Zero K will help him die so he can be frozen like Artis, and that he has made provisions for Jeffrey after he is dead. He elaborates that Jeffrey will have to accept or reject these provisions. Jeffrey continues to criticize his decision and Ross hits him and explains that he has not lived yet. As the chapter closes, Artis mouths the words "come with us" to Jeffrey.

Analysis

This chapter includes a dramatic shift in character for Ross. We are not given the exact details of how Ross decided to end his life so he can be frozen with Artis, but, as Jeffrey states, it seems to go against Ross' previous comments about taking advantage of the short, normal, human life-span. It is possible that Ross is doing this out of love or perhaps something else.

We also see a different side of Madeline in this chapter. According to Jeffrey's descriptions, Madeline seems quite unhinged. She violently stabs her husband with a knife, and Ross did not seem that phased by it. It is also implied that she has some sort of mental disorder, possibly Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. The evidence for this lies in the strange ordering of clean utensils, her necessity of using paper napkins, and her hatred for stickers on fruit. We also learn about the namesake of the book. Zero K is implied to be some sort of technology that causes a healthy person to die in a way that they can be frozen like a dying or dead person. The details about Zero K are not elaborated upon, but this foreshadows a greater importance of Zero K within the book.



However, it is clear that Zero K symbolizes hope, life, and rebirth, which all associate with the hope of rebirth in the future.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Jeffrey wait this long to bring up Madeline's odd behavior?

Discussion Question 2

What does Ross' nonchalant response to his stabbing say about his marriage?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ross decide to be frozen?

Vocabulary

equity, predicated, deliverance



Part 1, Chapter 9

Summary

The chapter opens with Jeffrey knocking on the doors of the facility. He comes across the monitor and watches a fire blaze across a town. He then sees many people wearing facemasks and shuffling in mass. He spots a woman exiting a room and follows her. He eventually turns down a corridor and enter an exterior walled garden. He sits next to a man named Ben-Ezra who refers to Jeffrey as “the son (123). Ben-Ezra explains to Jeffrey that eventually, years in the future, he will sit on this bench again; the ivy may be the same or different, due to time. They speak about Ross, and Ben-Ezra tells Jeffrey that he could convince Ross not to be frozen. Jeffrey doubts that will work. They speak about the isolation of the facility. Ben-Ezra explains that isolation is not a drawback, but it is the point. They are far away from the planetary woes, and will be again, in the future. They also briefly discuss the aforementioned asteroid that crashed in Siberia. Jeffrey leaves and walks past the garden, he sees dozens of mannequins in robes, and even more, naked in a put. Jeffrey thinks that this may be an ancestral vision of those who have and will be frozen in Convergence pods.

Analysis

This chapter deals heavily with the state of Earth. Ben-Ezra explains that the world is full of planetary woes; people are starving, being forced out of their homes due to war, and are being killed due to manmade and natural disasters. Ben-Ezra seems to think of the facility and the Convergence as a way to eliminate these woes by developing isolation. He does not elaborate regarding how the Convergence, after those that are frozen and woken up, will help eliminate planetary woes or promote this beneficial isolation. Jeffrey also comments on the possible ancestral vision regarding the frozen humans and the mannequins. Jeffrey comments that the mannequins either symbolize the ancestors of contemporary people or the descendants of contemporary people.

Discussion Question 1

Based on how Ben-Ezra speaks about the Convergence, what role could Ben-Ezra play in the project?

Discussion Question 2

What all might the mannequins represent?



Discussion Question 3

Why is there a garden within the facility?

Vocabulary

enameled, trellis, disinfestation



Part 1, Chapter 10

Summary

The chapter opens with Jeffrey and Ross in Artis' old room. Jeffrey internally explains that Ross has decided against joining Artis in the Convergence. An escort guides Ross and Jeffrey to a room called the veer, where they can see the facility's personnel preparing Artis for her procedure. Near the veer, Jeffrey notices three frozen individuals in pods. The escort explains that they refer to these people as the heralds, as they were the first to be frozen, and were frozen well before their expiration date. Ross tells Jeffrey that hours before, he was pleading to Artis to forgive him. However, he was unsure whether she was even conscious enough to hear him. The escort takes the father and son to another room. In this room is a single figure of a girl with a boyish haircut. Ross explains that Artis would have been able to determine this apparent art piece's meaning. Jeffrey leaves and views the screen. On it, he sees a large group of people of all genders and races running. Suddenly, the people on the screen begin actually running down the hallway that Jeffrey is in. Among these people are the Stenmark twins. Jeffrey leaves and notices that he is limping.

Analysis

Ross' predictions of what will happen when Artis is woken up. The chapter also uses the imagery of the running people in an interesting way. Jeffrey is unable to determine if they are running to something or away from something. Perhaps they are running to the future or away from it. Jeffrey's limp is also very important. In a previous chapter, Jeffrey remembered the time when he developed a fake limp when he was 14. While his entire motives (we know some of it was to make part of him noticeable) are unknown, there is a clear connection between his prior motives to his possible subconscious motives. However, at this point, these motives are unknown.

Discussion Question 1

What are the possible reasons for Jeffrey to redevelop his limp?

Discussion Question 2

What does Ross' change of mind say about the relationship between him and Artis?
Ross and Jeffrey?



Discussion Question 3

Are there any external factors that could have caused Ross to change his mind (other than Artis and Jeffrey)?

Vocabulary

reverent, apparatus, furrowed



Artis Martineau

Summary

This chapter bridges the gap between Part I and Part II of the novel. The chapter consists of a series of short statements, presumably thought by Artis while she is frozen within her pod. The statement consists of claims that the woman is both a first and third person, but she is unable to reconcile these persons. The woman also states that she is a person that she cannot remember and that she is experiencing a nightmare of the self. At the end of the chapter, the speaker reveals that she is a body within a pod.

Analysis

Most importantly, this chapter demonstrates a change in point of view. We learn that this chapter is being narrated by Artis herself. The author may have done this in order to inform the reader about the mental status of someone within Zero K. This also makes it very clear that the concepts the Stenmarks and the people at the meeting were speaking about regarding the capability of mental activity within the pod, is true, further expanding the novel's theme of life and death. We learn that it is true that life and death do not have to be absolutes, there can be a middle-ground. This chapter explores the possible mental side effects that one could experience if they were cryogenically frozen for a long period of time. Interestingly enough, previous chapters have stated that those who are frozen are essentially clinically deceased. If this is true, where are these thoughts coming from? This could imply that her soul (which Artis previously claims she has) is asking these questions or that, while she is dead, some of her mental capacities still function.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean that someone is both a first and third person?

Discussion Question 2

What previous statements by Artis seem to influence what she thinks within this chapter?

Discussion Question 3

Does this chapter imply that Artis may be experiencing some sort of mental degradation?

Vocabulary

sheddings, soundings, barest



Part II: In The Time of Konstantinovka

Chapter 1

Summary

In this short chapter, the narrative shifts back to Jeffrey. He is sitting in his father's workplace waiting to be interviewed. Ross has set up a job interview with Jeffrey with his boss, Silverstone. Jeffrey states that the position would have something to do with water infrastructure. Jeffrey claims that he will participate in the interview, but refuse the job regardless of what happens. Jeffrey tells the audience that he will have to tell a woman named Emma about the interview. He also mentions that after Artis' transition, Ross began to tremble and decided to grow his hair out.

Analysis

This chapter highlights the ongoing conflict between Jeffrey and his father. While they were both at the Convergence facility, Jeffrey exhibited a subtle amount of hostility that grew as situations became direr (like when Ross stated that he would join Artis in the Convergence). This job would clearly help Jeffrey, as he previously stated that his career consists of moving from sub-par job to sub-par job. This job would bring him both job and financial security, but he seems to want to refuse it out of spite. This chapter also brings up a character named Emma and alludes that Jeffrey and Emma are in some sort of relationship.

Discussion Question 1

Is there any language in this chapter that alludes to Jeffrey actually accepting the job?

Discussion Question 2

Based on the language and context of the chapter, what could be the nature of Emma and Jeffrey's relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Jeffrey mentions Ross' trembling; what could this mean?

Vocabulary

burnished, microdecibels, discernible



Part II, Chapter 2

Summary

The chapter opens with Jeffrey, Emma, and her adopted 14-year-old son, Stak, riding in a taxi. Stak is briefly visiting his mother and spends the majority of his time at school or with his father, who found him at a Ukrainian orphanage. Suddenly, Stak begins speaking to the Middle-Eastern taxi driver in Pashto. Emma asks about the job at Silverstone's office and asks if it will change him. He says it will not, but it will help him figure out who he is as a man. Jeffrey questions the reasons why some of his bank transactions are off by \$1.12. Emma rebuffs this, but Jeffrey claims that it cannot be a coincidence. Stak proclaims that the taxi driver is a former member of the Taliban. Jeffrey believes him. Emma explains to Jeffrey that Stak seems obsessed with numbers. He memorizes temperatures and statistics about countries and cities from all over the world. Emma explains that Stak fabricated the story about the driver being a former Taliban member, and that Stak often imagines these fictions. They drop Stak off at jiu-jitsu, and when he is finished, they call another taxi. Jeffrey contemplates whether the next taxi driver could be Ukrainian or a "lavish fiction" (181).

Analysis

This chapter gives the reader much perspective regarding Stak's character. He seems highly intelligent, as he strives to learn languages like Pashto and can memorize large amounts of number. However, it is implied that Stak has some sort of impediment. These obsessive and peculiar tendencies can be perceived as possible symptoms of conditions such as autism or obsessive compulsive disorder. If this is true, Stak seems to have an interesting connection to Jeffrey. Throughout the book, we have witnessed Jeffrey develop a noticeable amount of obsessive and compulsive tendencies. It seems that Stak is obsessed with temperatures just as Jeffrey is obsessed with the definitions of words. Jeffrey also tends to formulate backgrounds or fake names for individuals like the Stenmarks. This is not so different from Stak's fabrication of the taxi driver's Taliban background. Even though Jeffrey seems largely dismissive of these things, Jeffrey has more in common with Stak than he may perceive. The theme of family is also developed. In this chapter, we begin to learn about Emma and Stak's family dynamic and that, while it is not stable, it seems more stable than Jeffrey's was.

Discussion Question 1

In the context of the chapter, explain Jeffrey's opinion of Stak.

Discussion Question 2

How is Stak and Emma's relationship different from Ross and Jeffrey's relationship?



Discussion Question 3

complicity, algorithm, tract

Vocabulary

complicity, algorithm, tract



Part II, Chapter 3

Summary

The chapter starts with Jeffrey explaining to the reader that he seems to constantly check the oven burners and door locks in his house. He also seems compelled to insert both his keys and his handkerchief into his pocket in such a way as to guarantee maximum cleanliness. Ross and Jeffrey meet in Ross' office, and Ross questions why he would turn down Silverstone's job offer. Jeffrey explains that the job was not right for him and that he prefers to drift into things. Ross offers to give Jeffrey one of his many paintings. Jeffrey refuses and Ross asks him to think about the place he would like to live. Jeffrey assumes that Ross is attempting to convince him to live in his townhouse. Jeffrey internally rejects this idea as he does not believe that his pictures of Madeline would fit well in the townhouse. Jeffrey then goes to Emma's home, and we learn that Emma is a former dancer. Emma shows Jeffrey Stak's room and his giant map of the USSR. Jeffrey internally recites the names of many of the map's places (and he seems to have an erotic response to this). Jeffrey goes with Emma to a parent-teacher night at Emma's work (a school for children with impairments). Jeffrey spots a girl who cannot speak playing a game. Jeffrey is unable to make a fake name for her.

Analysis

The chapter gives further credence to the idea that Jeffrey is developing some sort of mental disorder, as his behavior regarding his keys and burners are noticeably compulsive. It is also possible that Jeffrey's tendency to create fake identities for people is part of some type of disorder as well. It is quite odd that Jeffrey is unable to establish a name for the girl with the speaking disorder. This may be because Jeffrey and the girl both suffer from similar conditions. Jeffrey seems almost unable to establish commitments as he refuses to accept a steady job and moves often. In short, Jeffrey is afraid to do these things. In the chapter, the mute girl is said to be afraid to speak. With this in mind, it is possible that the girl can technically speak, but is just too afraid to do so. Back to Jeffrey, he can, in fact, take on commitments. This is further shown in the phrase, "some days are better than others" (191). This is referring to the effects of Jeffrey's condition on his day-to-day life, and because it directly followed his comments about the mute girl, it ties the two together.

This chapter is not the first where photos have appeared. For Jeffrey, photos symbolize his memories, and associating his good memories of his mother with the father that abandoned them is unspeakable to Jeffrey.

Discussion Question 1

Is there any textual evidence implying that Jeffrey does not have a mental disorder?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Jeffrey find the map of the USSR so interesting?

Discussion Question 3

What reasons (besides his mother's pictures) does Jeffrey have for not wanting to live in his father's townhouse?

Vocabulary

tentative, sedately, streamlined, monochrome



Part II, Chapter 4

Summary

Jeffrey calls Silverstone and rejects his job offer. Later, Jeffrey goes to his room and looks through his various bills and late payment notices. The narrative then shifts to Emma telling Jeffrey that Stak is using a betting website to bet on assassinations and terrorist attacks. Later, Jeffrey goes to an ATM and is quite annoyed that human tellers do not distribute in the clean and orderly way that ATMs do. Jeffrey then meets his father at a restaurant (Jeffrey wears a reused shirt, as he cannot afford new clothing). Ross explains that he is very confused about why he rejected Silverstone's job offer. He then changes the subject and explains that it is time for him to go back to the Convergence and be frozen. Jeffrey, while bewildered, agrees to go with him. Jeffrey then explains that he was with Madeline on the day of her death. Ross asks where he was and Jeffrey answers by telling him he was on the cover of Newsweek. Ross tells Jeffrey that clear instructions will be left for him.

Analysis

Jeffrey begins to show even more signs of an OCD-like disorder, as the distribution of paper money is not normally something to be upset over. The topic of disasters also returns in this chapter. We learn that Stak is betting on human made disasters like terrorist attacks. Jeffrey has seen disasters as well, just on the Converge monitor. Analytically, both Stak and the creators of the Convergence are doing similar things. Those who are developed the program partially uses the technology as a back-up plan if a disaster strikes. Succinctly, if the world becomes over-populated and humans begin to die, there will still be humans in the Convergence pods. Stak is using this concept a bit differently. He is actually using his obsession with numbers and statistics to create money. In previous chapters, we learned that Ross used to do something very similar to this. In a prior chapter, Jeffrey explains that Ross used to work on estimating financial information in regards to natural disasters.

Discussion Question 1

How has Ross and Jeffrey's relationship changed over the course of the novel so far?

Discussion Question 2

What could Ross mean by his "instructions?"



Discussion Question 3

Why did Ross suddenly decide to return to the Convergence.

Vocabulary

insurgent, astronomically, introspective



Part II, Chapter 5

Summary

The chapter opens with a brief description of Jeffrey and Emma looking at themselves and each other in a bathroom mirror. After this, Jeffrey looks into his mirror and contemplates whether his reflected right ear is his actual right ear, mirroring a prior statement from his father. Later, Emma calls Jeffrey, telling him that Stak has decided that he will not return to school and will discontinue his practice of ju-jitsu. Jeffrey offers to speak to him the day after tomorrow. They meet in a restaurant. Stak describes his new way of thinking, he no longer knows things once, but instead he thinks about them (he later explains that he no longer cares about the weather either, regardless of the fact that he was previously obsessed with temperatures). Jeffrey takes Emma and Stak to an art museum exhibit that Jeffrey thinks may be helpful. The exhibit consists of a large rock in the center of a room. Jeffrey asks Stak to define “rock.” He does, and Jeffrey tells him about a philosophical statement, “(objects) are, but they do not exist” (218). Jeffrey inserts the word rock into this statement and Stak begins to think about it. Days after this interaction, Emma shows up at Jeffrey’s apartment and begins undressing with a sexual intent. She explains that Stak embraced her and left her home. Later, Jeffrey begins counting each individual step he takes while walking outside.

Analysis

This chapter effectively alludes to the fact that there is definitely something awry with Stak. Not only does he seem less motivated, but he seems completely skeptical regarding his older forms of thinking. He also seems quite cold towards Emma, which is unlike the behavior we have previously seen from Stak. This upsets Emma greatly, especially after he suddenly leaves. At the art museum, Jeffrey attempts to utilize his own way of thinking to encourage Stak to extensively contemplate things. Essentially, Jeffrey is trying to get him to think about things multiple times, just as he did before. He asks Stak to define rock, which forces him to think critically about what a rock is, and the nature of a rock’s existence. This seems to work initially. However, it later becomes clear that Stak’s behavior has not changed, foreshadowing Stak’s later behavior.

Discussion Question 1

Has Stak’s attitude changed, or is it possible that such behavior is due to external causes?

Discussion Question 2

What is the importance of the opening paragraph of the chapter (the mirror scene)?



Discussion Question 3

What does Emma shedding her clothes represent?

Vocabulary

meandering, middling, self-approration



Part II, Chapter 6

Summary

The reader is informed that Jeffrey is at a job interview. The position Jeffrey is interviewing for is an ethics specialist at a college in Connecticut. After a brief back and forth it begins to seem like the woman interviewing Jeffrey is attempting to dissuade Jeffrey from taking the job, as he does not belong there. When he gets home he receives two phone messages from a State office stating that a large disruption of service will occur. The chapter moves to Jeffrey and Ross sharing some food. Ross explains that it is almost time to return to the Convergence and assures Jeffrey that he will be notified when the date is set. Ross asks about the job interview, and Jeffrey thinks about Ross' money. He contemplates whether he will accept or reject it once Ross is frozen. On the way home, Jeffrey rides the subway and sees a woman who he thinks is the still woman on the street from before. It is later clear that she is not.

Later, Jeffrey attempts to call Emma to no avail. He visits her apartment and she is not present. He then calls her job who informs him that Emma has taken a brief leave. Eventually, Emma calls and tells Jeffrey that, after acting unusual, Stak has vanished. She elaborates that the police have confiscated his digital devices and that she is with his father and a private detective. After this conversation Jeffrey looks in the mirror and feigns shooting himself in the head.

Analysis

This chapter contains the continuing string of the novel's characters' mental crises. Ross seems somewhat in crisis, as he will soon return to the Convergence. His son seems to be having a breakdown as well. Jeffrey begins to obsess over the still women on the street. It is unclear what drives him to think about this women, but it does not seem sexual in nature. After his discussion with Emma, he does something shockingly worrying, he feigns shooting himself in the head from multiple angles. It does not seem like Emma has caused this, as Jeffrey does not seem to explicitly love Emma. Instead, he seems rather complacent. At this point, the cause of this behavior is unknown. Stak seems to also be having a crisis of some sort. If Stak has voluntarily vanished, it is likely that this action is a result of his newfound way of thinking. It is also possible that the philosophy that Jeffrey imparted on Stak could have jumpstarted his unfortunate behavior. We simply do not know enough about Stak as a person to determine this. Regardless, it is clear that Stak's disappearance could weigh heavily on both Emma and Jeffrey.

Discussion Question 1

Is there any indication that Jeffrey's explanation of being could have caused Stak to run away?



Discussion Question 2

Does Jeffrey's consideration of taking the ethics job indicate that there has been a change in Jeffrey's character or attitude?

Discussion Question 3

What does the multiple angles of Jeffrey's imaginary suicide say about his motives?

Vocabulary

bilateral, muraled, partisans



Part II, Chapter 7

Summary

Ross and Jeffrey have arrived at the Convergence. A guide name Dahlia directs Jeffrey to a room that seems eerily similar to his room that he had last time he was here. Dahlia brings the two to a room with a nude, headless, male figure on a granite base. Dahlia states that it is not made of art material but is actually a real human body. It is then revealed that there are actually several objects like this in the room. Jeffrey assumes that they froze the heads and stored them somewhere else. The facilities barber shaves Ross, and Jeffrey states that there is nothing left of him except for his clothes. Jeffrey contemplates calculating Ross' life in seconds, but second guesses this after he remembers that he abandoned his wife and son. Jeffrey then walks to the monitor but nothing appears.

Later, they are guided to a room with four other shaved people. A woman at a table explains that these people are heralds who will live outside of society's narrative and re-encounter themselves in Zero K. The woman tells the heralds about the rise of megadata which will lead to a global implosion. One of the Stenmark twins appears and explains that war drives society and that it is not necessary. Stenmark stops talking and the woman tells the heralds that they will understand the multiplicity of time in Zero K using the language of the Convergence. Jeffrey focuses on the woman and concentrates on her skirt, he decides to name her Nadya Hrabal.

Analysis

The majority of this chapter is spent looking at the current state of the world. This is incredibly similar to the previous chapter involving the Stenmark twins, together, speaking about this subject. Here, the author, or Stenmark, is critiquing the massive amount of trust we hold in technology and the extent in which the world relies on it. The point that Stenmark makes is, what would happen if something like a techno-virus disabled the technological infrastructure? Wars, economies, and individuals' lives all rely on the availability and reliability of technology. Something does remain unclear however. What does this critique have to do with the Convergence or Zero K? Presumably, the facility and its technology relies on digital technology just as the rest of the world does. With this in mind, it reveals that those involved in the Convergence tend to have a rather cult-like mindset. Stenmark implies that the heralds and those involved are special in some way and different from those outside the facility. As stated before, this is not necessarily true as the Convergence has to rely on the same thing that the world Stenmark is criticizing does: Technology.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Ross choose to focus on the Nadya's skirt?



Discussion Question 2

How does Nadya know that the heralds will understand the multiplicity of time if all the other heralds are frozen? How would she gain this information?

Discussion Question 3

What could the absence of one of the Stenmark twins mean?

Vocabulary

multiplicity, separatist, insurgent



Part II, Chapter 8

Summary

Jeffrey awakens in the Convergence facility and senses Madeline's presence. Due to this, Jeffrey comments that he never felt more alive than when he witnessed his mother die. Eventually Jeffrey is led to the foot unit where he once again meets the monk. However, the monk is different this time, he seems disheveled (food is all over his robe) and indifferent about everything. He claims that he has "outlasted his memory" (249) and that he only speaks Uzbek now. Jeffrey asks him what he does when he is not talking to those in the hospice, the monk answers, "I walk the halls" (250).

Soon after, Jeffrey is guided to a room where Ross lies, hairless and naked, on a slab, and Ross mutters the words "gesso on linen" (253) (an art term). A woman in the room tells Jeffrey that life is a biological accident and leads him to a room that Ross wanted Jeffrey to see. The woman tells him to put on a breathing apparatus and a special suit. In this room are hundreds of pods with frozen people inside. They find a different section with two pods. One contains Artis, naked and beautiful (according to Jeffrey), and the other is empty, as it is intended for Ross. Jeffrey remarks that Artis belongs here but his father does not. He leaves the room and goes to the monitor. The monitor depicts many war scenes. Jeffrey acknowledges that this is supposed to represent the world wars that Stenmark spoke about.

The final scene shows a man in a car firing his gun at a figure. Eventually, a closer camera shot of the figure appears and it is clear that the shot man is Stak, Emma's "son."

Analysis

This chapter alludes to the idea that Stenmark was right about the current state of the world, and the timing of this realization is of great importance. This chapter is the final chapter before Ross is frozen in the Convergence. For Ross and Jeffrey, they are witnessing the Convergence first hand. After this happens, Jeffrey then witnesses the consequences of the state of the world on the monitor. In a way, the concept of the Convergence and of the world wars are intersecting at this point. The Convergence is being used to ultimately save humanity from the inevitable carnage that humans are inflicting on themselves and the world. Essentially, once the carnage reaches a point where those on the surface are gone, those in the Convergence, with medical advancements at a point where the individuals can live again, can come back to the surface and save the human race. The author also makes it very clear that even after all Ross and Jeffrey have gone through during the course of the novel, Jeffrey still feels angry at Ross for abandoning him in his mother. In short, in this chapter, Jeffrey states that Ross does not deserve to be inducted into Zero K. He does not deserve it, while Artis does. He also does not seem very shaken up about his father's semi-final fate.



Discussion Question 1

Has the relationship between Ross and Jeffrey grown throughout the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of “gesso on linen (253)?

Discussion Question 3

Is it a coincidence that Stak appeared on the monitor?

Vocabulary

promenade, bloodletting, sardonic



Part II, Chapter 9

Summary

This chapter consists of a small amount of short statements and takes place an indeterminate amount of time after Ross is frozen in Zero K. Jeffrey has taken the ethics job and the college and is relatively content. On the street Jeffrey notices a taxi driver paying towards Mecca. Jeffrey also mentions his compulsion to check the expiration date on everything he purchases. He also mentions that he occasionally visits his father's townhouse and looks at his paintings. He thinks about the words "gesso on linen." Jeffrey mentions that he always feels the shadows of Artis and Ross over him. Emma calls Jeffrey and tells him that Stak is dead, and she will now be living with Stak's father. Jeffrey does not mention that he watched Stak die.

Analysis

In this chapter, Jeffrey continues to exhibit his almost ambivalent behavior. He does not seem to be that upset about either his father's fate or Emma's decision to stay with Stak's father (this develops the theme of family and also changes Emma's family dynamic. It seems like the death of Stak stabilized part of Emma's family, showing that dynamics can in fact change however, note that Jeffrey's really does not). Jeffrey's actions at his father's townhouse also promote this analysis. He visits his father's townhouse not to reminisce about his father, but to look at his art collection instead. He contemplates his father's final words, but not in a personal way. He thinks about the phrase as concept, not through the lens of his father's final words. Inversely however, Jeffrey does show some sort of affection towards Emma by not telling her she saw Stak die. Also, the Ross' new frozen state marks the beginning of the novel's falling action leading up to the resolution.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Jeffrey mentioning the taxi driver?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Jeffrey concerned enough to not tell Emma that she saw Stak die?

Discussion Question 3

If Jeffrey was not close to his father, why does he feel that his father's shadow is over him?

Vocabulary

effigies, declarative, requisite



Part II, Chapter 10

Summary

The final chapter is also the shortest chapter in the novel. Jeffrey looks up to see the sun aligning itself with the Manhattan street grid. This is something that Jeffrey had heard about but never seen. He notices a boy making noises and looking up at the sky as well. Jeffrey reminisces about his father stating that everybody wants to own the end of the world. Jeffrey sits and thinks “I didn’t need heaven’s light. I had the boy’s cries of wonder” (274).

Analysis

For Jeffrey, the sun seems to represent the thing that those involved with the Convergence are preparing for. The end of the world. Jeffrey does acknowledge that this light may not signal the end of the world, but it could. The author alludes to something very interesting with the last line regarding heaven’s light and the cries of wonder (274). He prefers the cries of wonder because it is something that he does not naturally have. Nowhere in the novel is Jeffrey amazed or ensnared by wondrous things. The boy has something that Jeffrey lacks, and therefore he does not need the light or the end of the world. This chapter marks the novel’s resolution, and we also see some final character development for Jeffrey. He seems to accept the state of the world and is no longer troubled regarding life, death, and the future (all themes).

Discussion Question 1

Describe Jeffrey’s attitude in this chapter. Has his character changed?

Discussion Question 2

How can the sun be used as symbolism in this chapter?

Discussion Question 3

Jeffrey reminisces about his father’s words in this chapter. Why does he do this?

Vocabulary

macrocephalic, unceasing, flaring



Characters

Jeffrey Lockhart

Jeffrey is the main character of the novel. He and his mother, Madeline, were abandoned by his father, Ross, when Jeffrey was 13 years old. Jeffrey lived with Madeline until her untimely death. Jeffrey has a strained, yet somewhat cordial, relationship with Ross, and he accompanies him to the Convergence facility. The main reason for their strained relationship is the simple fact that Ross abandoned them. He does not forgive this action at any point in the novel. This is made clear through Jeffrey and Ross' frequent verbal arguments, where one ends up involving Ross physically hitting Jeffrey.

Jeffrey seems to have a different type of relationship towards his father's second wife, Artis Martineau. Jeffrey seems rather loving towards Artis, and Jeffrey tends to want to hear what Artis has to say. At one point, Jeffrey makes a remark that Ross should have been frozen instead of Artis. This either demonstrates his extreme positive opinion towards Artis or his negative view of his father. Jeffrey seems rather indifferent to most of the other characters within the novel. He never states that he loves his girlfriend, Emma, or anyone in his personal life. This could possibly be a response to Jeffrey's familial problems or his possible mental illness. He also clearly does not agree with the concept of Zero K.

Jeffrey seems to have some sort of compulsion disorder just like his mother. He seems to perform certain rituals like putting his keys and handkerchief in his pocket in a certain way, or compulsively checking the window locks and stove burners. These actions seem like symptoms of a mental disorder such as OCD.

Ross Lockhart

Ross Lockhart is Jeffrey's father, whose real name is actually Jeffrey Satterswaite. He is very wealthy and acquired his wealth through calculating the impact of natural disasters. He abandoned his first wife, Madeline, and eventually found love with a woman named Artis Matineau. He is methodical, intelligent, and contemplates things before pursuing them. He invests in the Convergence project and uses this to freeze Artis. He flips back and forth between wanting to join her in the Convergence and not. He eventually does and leaves much of his fortune to Jeffrey. He has a strained relationship with Jeffrey, yet it is clear that he does care for his son. He does not seem regretful towards his decision to leave Jeffrey's mother, nor does he seem to show any remorse towards abandoning Jeffrey.

As stated before, it does seem that he does care for his son. Once Ross is frozen in Zero K, he leaves his townhouse and possibly some money to Jeffrey. Jeffrey refuses to



move into the house but visits every so often. We do not learn much about Ross' psychology or his past; the only things we know are what Jeffrey tells the reader.

Artis Martineau

Artis Martineau is Ross Lockart's second wife. Artis, before taking ill, was an archaeologist by trade, and would often allow Ross to come with her on expeditions. For most of the novel, it is implied that Artis' mind is being affected by a cocktail of medications, but she seems to have an existential outlook on life. By the start of the novel, she is quite ill with MS and possibly other conditions. She is frozen through Zero K, yet still seems somewhat conscious between the two parts of the novel.

Madeline

Madeline is Ross' first wife and Jeffrey's mother, who is dead by the start of the novel. She seemed to have some sort of mental condition (possibly OCD, Bi-polar disorder, or some psychosis). Her actions seemed loving to Jeffrey but very violent towards Ross. In one instance, she stabs Ross with a large steak knife. When Ross leaves, she is quite cross with him and makes this known to Jeffrey.

The Monk

The monk is an unnamed monk that Jeffrey meets in the Convergence facility. The first time the two meet, the monk is quite confident about the good he is doing in his job of speaking to those in the hospice area of the facility. By the end of the novel, he is broken and unmotivated; the reason for this is unknown. It should be noted that he spoke to the hospice patients about the end and not the transition that the Convergence claims to provide.

The Stenmark Twins

The Stenmarks are twin brothers who are administrators/artists at the Convergence facility. They created the art, including the mannequins and the skulls that are displayed in the facility. They have a very grim outlook on the world and claim that wars will eventually bring humanity to the point where those within Zero K can be reborn to help the planet, provided that cures for many of the frozen people's ills are found.

Emma

Emma is Jeffrey's girlfriend for the majority of the novel. Before the novel begins, she married and gained a son, Stak, whom her husband adopted in the Ukraine. She is quite concerned with what Stak thinks of her. At the end of the novel, she chooses to stay with her ex-husband instead of returning to the city to be with Jeffrey.



Stak

Stak is Emma's Ukrainian adopted son. He seems to have a sort of mental disorder which motivates him to memorize seemingly arbitrary things like the temperatures of certain cities of the world. He becomes disillusioned, joins a militia group, and dies in combat.

Szabo

Szabo is a man of unknown nationality that Jeffrey sees in the meeting room in the Convergence. He predicts a cybernetic future, where humans will be combined with robots.

Ben-Ezra

Ben-Ezra is the man that Jeffrey meets in the garden of the Convergence facility. He is similar to the Stenmark twins in the fact that they both believe that planetary woes will damage society, and that those frozen in Zero K will be thawed. He also states that isolation is a way to reduce the severity of these woes.



Symbols and Symbolism

Mannequins

Jeffrey theorizes that the mannequins, posed by the Stenmark twins, symbolize one of two things: they are either the ancestors of contemporary people or the descendants of contemporary people. The latter seems more likely as later in the novel, Jeffrey sees a human figure and assumes it is a mannequin, but it ends up being a preserved human. The human is preserved, similar to how those in Zero K have been preserved, which is a product of the future.

Water

The concept of what water symbolizes in the novel is explicitly stated by Artis; she states that water symbolizes evolution, as it starts in one form and gradually morphs. This includes the evolution of humans and human technology. Humans have morphed from a species of creatures with short lifespans, to, thanks to The Convergence, a species with an almost limitless lifespan and potential.

The Dark

The dark, which symbolizes death and causes Jeffrey to accept the fact that humans eventually surrender to their deaths. Artis states that she does not do this, and therefore does not surrender to death, which is shown through her decision to become frozen and avoid her natural death. Jeffrey states that he surrenders to the darkness.

The Sun

The sun symbolizes the insignificance and fragility of the human race. The sun appears in two instances within the novel. The first is when the woman at the meeting states that humans are at the mercy of the sun. Later, Jeffrey sees the sun's light match the lines of the city. This fills Jeffrey with wonder. If the sun become colder or hotter, humans would cease to exist. However, currently it allows us to exist. Jeffrey acknowledges this, yet is still fills him with wonder.

Firearms

The Convergence guards' firearms symbolize the importance of the Convergence program. Those involved with the program have decided that the program is so important that it must be protected with lethal force if necessary.



Natural Disasters

Natural disasters symbolize a transition between the past and the future. Jeffrey witnesses many natural disasters on the monitor within the Convergence complex. Those involved in the Convergence program acknowledge that it is possible that planetary woes such as natural disaster will wipe out society,

Aircraft

Aircraft symbolize the great amount of wealth that has been put forth for the Convergence project. At the beginning of the novel, Jeffrey makes a remark about the varied hired aircraft that he travels on in order to reach the Convergence facility. This type of organized private travel would require great amounts of money in order to obtain.

The Tibetan Mountain

The Tibetan mountain symbolizes the monk's spiritual transition. The monk mentions that he once climbed a Tibetan mountain. This quest allowed him to see the thinness of contemporary life, which initiated his religious awakening.

Zero K

Zero K symbolizes hope, life, and rebirth. Those who are put into Zero K have some sort of hope that one day their ills will be cured, allowing them to live again. It also acts as a rebirth of humanity after the effects of natural disasters and world wars.

Photographs

Photographs symbolize memories for Jeffrey. After Madeline's death, he keeps photos of her around and refuses to hang them in Ross' townhome. These photographs represent the life Madeline and Jeffrey had together; a life that was somewhat sullied by Ross.



Settings

The Convergence

A facility in a desert somewhere near Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, The complex consists of seemingly hundreds, or possibly thousands of rooms, both above and below ground. The facility was built as a central command science complex to develop technology and freeze people in hopes of waking them up in the future. The Convergence complex contains various sections such as a hospice, cafeteria like food units, and an area for storing frozen people.

New York City

This city is almost an inverse of the Convergence complex. The city, where people like Jeffrey and Emma live, contains a great number of people who are oblivious of the future and the planetary woes (as Ben-Ezra calls them). Jeffrey describes New York as a place of many cultures and languages, each with their own motivations and lives.

The Lockhart Household

The Lockhart Household was Jeffrey's childhood home. Before Ross and Madeline divorced, the house was an incredibly tense place to be. Ross seemed very cold and Madeline very violent. Many of Jeffrey's memories of this place are rather neutral, however Jeffrey seems quite fond of it, as it likely reminds him of his dead mother.

Ross' Townhouse

This townhouse, before his death, was owned by Ross Lockhart. After his death, it is passed to Jeffrey. Earlier, Ross alludes to Jeffrey that he should live in the townhouse, but Jeffrey refuses, as he thinks that it would be inappropriate to hang the pictures of Madeline on Ross' walls.

The Outside World

The places that Jeffrey sees on the monitor are of the outside world. When these places appear in the novel, it is usually negative. When Jeffrey sees these places, they are being annihilated by natural disasters. Jeffrey separates this place from the Convergence facility, as it is so remote. These places represent the distant future.



Themes and Motifs

Faith

The author uses the theme of faith to demonstrate that faith has to do with more than just religion. Religious faith is used as a comparison to faith in science. This can be most obviously seen in the large amount of pilgrimage imagery used within the novel.

Characters like the monk, Szabo and the woman at the meeting, and the Stenmark twins make many references to pilgrimages when discussing the Convergence. The woman at the meeting makes direct reference to the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. Essentially, she compares the city of Mecca to the Convergence facility. Just as many Muslims make the long and arduous trek to their religions holy city, the woman believes many will make the journey to the Convergence, just as the heralds did. However, it must be noted that the Convergence is not a religion in the exact sense. The Convergence has no god, holy book, or a specific rule set.

Those who trust in the Convergence are putting a massive amount of faith in the project and the future. There is no guarantee that the project will succeed or that the many diseases will be cured that will allow many of the frozen individuals to be thawed and cured. However, people like Artis, Ross, and the Stenmark twins are convinced that everything will go according to plan. This is similar to the religious notion that an afterlife exists and that believers will certainly ascend to it when they die. Many may say there is no proof of an afterlife just as there is no proof that the Convergence will succeed and that the future will occur in the way that those involved with the Convergence believe.

Family

There are two main family units within the novel, and these units portray an idea that the dissolution of the traditional family unit can cause negative effects on the members of the family, but that it is not the sole cause of these negative effects. Basically, troubled family units will cause damage whether they stay whole or not. These two units are the Lockhart family (Jeffrey, Ross, Madeline, and Artis), and Emma's family (Emma, Stak, and Emma's ex-husband).

Stating that the Lockhart family is an unstable one is a great understatement. Even before the family was broken up, there was a large amount of tension and violence within the household. In the novel, Ross informs Jeff that Madeline once stabbed him with a steak knife. Ross was not very alarmed by this, which possible alludes to the fact that this type of behavior was not necessarily uncommon. Jeffrey was not aware of this, but it clearly had negative effects on Madeline and Ross. When Jeffrey was 13, Ross left the family, causing Jeffrey extensive distress. In short, if the family had stayed together, Ross and Madeline's situation would have worsened, but the breaking up of the family negatively affected Jeffrey.



The same thing can be said about Emma's family. However, the reader is not told about the ultimate reason that her family broke up, but the reader is told that it broke up due to something happening between the couple (possibly travel). However, this break up could have possibly attributed to Stak's later behavior. A case can also be made for Stak's nonexistent family, but we are not told much about them.

The Future

The author uses the idea of the future in order to portray the period in which someone is awoken from Zero K as a new world. As stated before, many characters in Zero K theorize the nature of the distant future. In fact, it seems that part of the entire purpose of the Convergence is to ensure the success of the future. It is implied that characters like Ben-Ezra and Szabo believe that many aspects of humanity will be destroyed thanks to planetary woes, wars, and natural disasters like feminine or extremely inclement weather. They seem to believe that this fate is completely inevitable. If it was not, why would those involved in the Convergence that focus on things beyond the medical aspects not be focusing on preventing the future dystopia of Earth? Instead they look towards the future as something to inherit after the disasters have occurred.

In short, many of the novel's characters strive for the future and only focus on aspects of the present that help them achieve their version of the future. For example, Ross wants his future to be with Artis and after great amounts of thought, he decides to be frozen using Zero K in order to be with her when she is thawed. By doing this, Jeffrey is completely neglecting his son, regardless of the rocky relationship they may have. His son is in the present and will most likely not be in the far future, or be frozen to ensure that he lives during that period. He completely abandons anything tying him to the present, like money, reputation, and his family in order to secure the future that he envisions. The only characters that seem to have an attitude that is inverse to this are Jeffrey and Emma.

Life/Death

In the novel, the author uses the theme of life and death in order to put forth the idea that life and dead are not absolutes. In order for Zero K to function and the Convergence to succeed, the individual who is being preserved must clinically die. People like the Convergence nurses and the Stenmark twins state that the mind is still active while the person is clinically deceased. We see this first hand in the chapter Artis Martineau. According to the living characters, including the apparent administrators at the Convergence state that Artis is basically dead. However, in the chapter we witness Artis' mind still thinking and trying to figure out what her current state is. The novel also touches on death's inverse, life.

In one of Ross and Jeffrey's first conversations, Ross gives Jeffrey a lecture about the very short period of time a person has to live and the very short period in which humans have inhabited Earth. He basically tells Jeffrey that he has to live his life, because he



will not be around for long, in the grand scheme of things. Ross does eventually change his mind and is frozen, but Jeffrey does somewhat accept Ross' attitude on life. However, we later learn that (as mentioned before), when it comes to Zero K, there are middle-grounds between life and death. Zero K makes use of that middle-ground in order to create the possibility that someone can be revived in the future.

However, the characters do seem to approach this idea as one of rebirth. Those who are frozen are naked and shaved, just as one would be when they are born. This muddies the approach to life and death. If the Convergence regards rebirth, would that not mean that the person died in order to be reborn?

Mental Illness

The author implies that some of the novel's characters suffer from some sort of mental illness, and through this, the author demonstrates that mental illness can have two sides, a destructive side and a functional side.

The destructive aspects of mental illness in the novel lie in the character of Madeline. It is heavily implied that Madeline suffered from sort of compulsion disorder (probably OCD). The following is the technical definition of OCD: "unreasonable thoughts and fears (obsessions) that lead you to do repetitive behaviors (compulsions). It's also possible to have only obsessions or only compulsions and still have OCD" (MayoClinic). If we compare this to Madeline's behavior, a connection appears. Madeline seems compelled to organize the cutlery a certain way and must take all of the stickers off of pieces of fruit. It is also possible (implied but not definite) that her disorder had something to do with her assault of Ross. This shows the destructive side of mental illness, as it both possibly destroys her as a person, but seems to destroy her family as well.

However, her son, Jeffrey shows these types of symptoms but does not show destructive tendencies. Jeffrey's symptoms can be seen in his obsessive checking of the stove burners and door locks, and his compulsion to insert his keys and his handkerchief into his pocket in a certain way. Jeffrey does not let his compulsions to dictate his life. It does not seem to affect him much outside of his home and does not have any clearly negative effects on others. Jeffrey is functional, unlike Madeline. Essentially, DeLillo, in his novel, is showing the variety of ways mental illness can express itself.

Styles

Point of View

This novel uses a first-person perspective. The reader sees almost the entire story from Jeffrey's perspective. We are privy to many of Jeffrey's thoughts, but often he does not reveal his motivations to the reader. For example, the reader is not told why Jeffrey does not tell Emma that he witnessed Stak's death. However, he does reveal enough for the reader to tell that he is somewhat troubled, possibly due to mental illness, but also through his familial difficulties. One chapter differs from this perspective. This chapter is the bridge between Part I and Part II of the novel, Artis Martineau. In this chapter, the perspective is first-person, but the reader is not initially told from whose perspective. Eventually we learn that the chapter is from the perspective of Artis, while she is frozen inside her Zero K pod. After this chapter, and for the rest of the novel, the chapters are returned to Jeffrey's perspective.

Language and Meaning

It is clear that, due to the language used in the novel, it is meant for a young-adult to adult audience. This is due to relatively advanced vocabulary in some of the chapters and the occasional profanity. However, upon reading the novel, it is clear that certain characters use different language to portray meaning differently. Jeffrey's language is relatively straightforward, this is due to the fact that we receive much of the story from his perspective, eliminating the need for certain out-loud explanations. However, many of the other characters use much technical and advanced language in order to give off an almost existential meaning. For example, characters like the Stenmark Twins and Artis seem to view the world from an existential perspective. Due to this, they use language that describes a detailed and technical explanation of earthly phenomena and the "after-life." This language sounds both scientific and religious in nature. This type of language also pushes forward the recurring theme of the existence of faith regarding some aspects of science. Language is also used to inform the reader that certain characters have some sort of expertise. For example, the guides, Szabo, and even Ross use technical language throughout the novel. This is due to their knowledge and involvement with the Convergence and the Zero K technology, because Jeffrey does not have this type of knowledge, he does not use this type of language.

Structure

The novel flows in a mostly chronological fashion. The chapters in both Part I and II are chronological with some flashbacks within these chapters. These flashbacks take place when Jeffrey recalls past experiences in present time. So in turn, it is still chronological, as Jeffrey is recalling things in real time as the reader is reading the chapter. However, the chapter Artis Martineau's (the chapter that bridges the gap between the two parts of

the novel) place in time is unknown. We are told that those who are frozen in the Convergence could be frozen for an indeterminate amount of time. With this in mind, this chapter could take place in between the two parts, as that is where it is placed, or it may take place in the far off future. The reader cannot know.



Quotes

Everyone wants to own the end of the world.
-- Ross (Part I, Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is a set-up to the entire novel. The Convergence is a way to own the end of the world.

I liked reading books that nearly killed me, books that helped tell me who I was, the son who spites his father by reading such books.
-- Jeffrey (Part I, Chapter 4 paragraph 8)

Importance: This quote is an indicator of the deep-seated contempt Jeffrey has for his father. Here, it is clear that it started at an early age.

Catastrophe is built into the early brain.
-- Szabo (Part I, Chapter 6 paragraph 23)

Importance: Szabo explains that catastrophe is not a new phenomenon and that humans have been thinking about it for centuries.

When the time comes, we'll return. Who will we be? What will we find? The world itself, decades away, think of it, sooner, or later. Not so easy to imagine what will be there, better or worse or so completely altered we will be too astonished to judge.
-- Stenmark Twin (Part I, Chapter 6 paragraph 37)

Importance: The Stenmark twins contemplate about the time when those within the Convergence will be thawed.

The thinness of contemporary life. I can poke my finger through it.
-- The Monk (Part I, Chapter 7 paragraph 22)

Importance: The monk is informing Jeffrey that, when put in perspective, life is much thinner than he realizes. He learned this on his pilgrimage up the mountain.

Going with her. You're turning Artis into a mirage.
-- Jeffrey (Part I, Chapter 8 paragraph 48)

Importance: Jeffrey tells his father that he is not seeing Artis in a proper perspective. Succinctly, he is making her out to be an image of herself.

Isolation is not a drawback to those who understand that isolation is the point.
-- Ben-Ezra (Part I, Chapter 9 paragraph 20)

Importance: Ben-Ezra argues with Jeffrey about isolation. He explains that the isolation of the Convergence complex is not a bad thing.



I need to come at this in the simplest way.
-- Jeffrey (Part I, Chapter 10 paragraph 1)

Importance: Jeffrey attempts to figure out how to convince his father to not join Artis in the Convergence.

Am I someone or is it the words themselves that make me think I'm someone?
-- Artis (Artis Martineau paragraph 4)

Importance: Artis, in her existential state, thinks about what makes a human.

This was New York. Every living breathing genotype entered his cab at some point, day or night. And if this was an inflated notion, that was New York as well.
-- Jeffrey (Part II, Chapter 2 paragraph 3)

Importance: Jeffrey highlights the diversity of New York, and therefore the world. This adds to the overall theme of modernity.

He is a man on line for tickets to a ballet that a woman wants to see and he is willing to wait for hours while she tends her schoolchildren.
-- Jeffrey (Part II, Chapter 5 paragraph 2)

Importance: Jeffrey describes his current relationship with Emma.

I'd never felt more human than I did when my mother lay in bed, dying.
-- Jeffrey (Part II, Chapter 8 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote describes Jeffrey's personality. He is not very expressive, but he felt the most emotion during Madeline's death.