

Cloud Atlas



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID MITCHELL

David Mitchell was born and raised in Northern England. He obtained a degree in English and an MA in Comparative Literature from the University of Kent, then spent eight years in Hiroshima, Japan, where he met his wife and taught English to technical students. He published his first novel, *Ghostwritten*, in 1999. The book received widespread acclaim, and his next two novels, *number9dream* (2001) and *Cloud Atlas* (2004), have gone on to become perhaps his best-known works. Mitchell has published a total of nine novels, along with several stories and essays. He has also written for film and television, including *Sense8* and *The Matrix Resurrections*. Mitchell currently lives in County Cork, Ireland, with his wife and two children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Several of the stories in *Cloud Atlas* take inspiration from real-life events. “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” deals with the real genocide and enslavement of the Moriori people of the Chatham Islands. The events of “Letters from Zedelghem” resemble the life of British composer Frederick Delius and his assistant Eric Fenby. “Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery” draws inspiration from the life of Karen Silkwood, a real union activist and whistleblower who died in a mysterious car crash. Mitchell wrote *Cloud Atlas* near the beginning of the War in Afghanistan and the Iraq War, which may have influenced the novel’s themes of violence and pacificism.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Cloud Atlas takes inspiration from the postmodern novels of the late 20th and early 21st century. In particular, its structure resembles Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, which also contains several stories that get interrupted. Some of *Cloud Atlas*’s stories contain direct references to previous works. “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish,” for instance, references Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. In addition, the story “An Orison of Sonmi~451” features human clones with a limited lifespan called fabricants that bear a strong resemblance to replicants in the 1982 science fiction film *Blade Runner*, which is based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Cloud Atlas
- **When Written:** Early 2000s

- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 2004
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel, Metafiction
- **Setting:** Six different locations in the present, past, and future
- **Climax:** Adam Ewing realizes he’s being poisoned.
- **Antagonist:** Greed, Mortality
- **Point of View:** First Person and Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Eternal Return. Some of the characters of *Cloud Atlas* appeared in previous books by David Mitchell, including Timothy Cavendish, who appeared in Mitchell’s first novel, *Ghostwritten*. Mitchell has claimed that he’d like to include all of his recurring characters in one big novel.

Rock around The Bone Clocks. Although David Mitchell often writes about music, he doesn’t play or compose music himself. While *Cloud Atlas* focuses on classical music, his 2020 novel *Utopia Avenue* deals with rock music of the 1960s.



PLOT SUMMARY

In the Chatham Islands, of the coast of New Zealand, Adam Ewing writes in his journal about meeting a strange doctor named Henry Goose. The two become friends. While on the island, Adam learns about the history of the Moriori people, who existed peacefully on the island until the Maori came and attacked them, killing many Moriori and enslaving those who remained. One day, Adam witnesses some villagers whipping a tied-up Moriori man. As Adam leaves aboard the *Prophetess*, he finds a Moriori stowaway in his cabin. The stowaway is Autua—the Moriori man whose whipping Adam witnessed. After some hesitation, Adam agrees to help Autua, and he convinces the captain of the ship to take Autua to **Hawaii**. While aboard the ship, Adam begins to suffer from severe headaches. Dr. Henry Goose diagnoses him with a brain parasite and offers a cure, but Adam’s condition only worsens. Many years later, in a remote part of Belgium near Bruges, the young composer Robert Frobisher writes letters to Rufus Sixsmith. Robert’s father recently disinherited him, and so, in order to win back his father’s respect, Robert decides to become the assistant of Vyvyan Ayrns, a famous British composer who is blind and hasn’t composed any new work in several years. While living with Ayrns, Robert discovers and reads the first part of Adam Ewing’s journal. Though Ayrns and

Robert don't get along at first, Robert ultimately helps Ayr create some unusual late-career works.

Later, in California in the 1970s, Rufus Sixsmith, an engineer at a nuclear plant located on Swanekke Island, still holds on to Robert's letters. Rufus he warns gossip-column journalist Luisa Rey that Seaboard Power (the company behind the nuclear plant) is trying to cover up the risk of a deadly accident at the plant. Soon after, Robert ends up dead. Though authorities rule his death a suicide, Luisa believes it's murder and investigates the story. In the process, she draws the attention of Seaboard Power, and the company hires an assassin to ram Luisa's car off a bridge, seemingly killing her.

As it turns out, Luisa's whole story is a manuscript that comes across the desk of Timothy Cavendish, the sixty-something owner of a vanity publishing company in London. None of Timothy's books sells well until the day when one of his authors, Dermot Hoggins, throws a famous literary critic off a roof, killing him. This act turns Dermot into a famous murderer, and sales of his memoir, *Knuckle Sandwich*, go through the roof, making Timothy a lot of money. But when Dermot's brothers come to try to extort more money from Timothy, Timothy asks his brother Denholme Cavendish for help. Denholme tricks Timothy into committing himself to a nursing home called Aurora House, located outside London. Soon after he realizes he's trapped in Aurora House, Timothy has a stroke.

The events of Timothy Cavendish's life so far make up the first half of a film that exists in a futuristic version of Korea, where a "fabricant" (synthetically created human clone) named Sonmi~451 awaits execution by the "corpocratic" (hyper-capitalist) government. An interviewer known only as the Archivist asks Sonmi questions about her past. Sonmi tells the Archivist that she used to know practically nothing about the world around her and worked at a restaurant chain called Papa Song's—until a fellow fabricant named Yoona~939 helped Sonmi learn to read and "ascend" to a higher state of intelligence. After Yoona dies during a botched escape attempt, Sonmi becomes a research subject at a university and continues to read and learn more about the world.

Many years after her death, Sonmi survives as a goddess to the Valleymen people of a remote Pacific Island; the Valleymen survived a nuclear apocalypse and now live hunter-gatherer lives without advanced technology. But when Valleymen Zachry has a crisis of faith when he meets Meronym, a woman from the technologically advanced Prescient people. Meronym stays with the Valleymen to observe them. She has an egglike object called an "orison" that contains a recording of Sonmi's interview with the Archivist. Zachry's Pa died at the hands of a rival tribe called the Kona, and just before Meronym leaves the Valleymen, the Kona attack again, capturing Zachry. Although Meronym initially intends to observe the Valleymen without interfering in their lives, she breaks her promise to save Zachry. Together, the two of them venture across the island to meet up

with one of Meronym's Prescient allies. Zachry tells this story to future generations of Valleymen, and many of them wonder how much of his story is true. One of Zachry's descendants watches the orison that contains the rest of Sonmi's interview.

At the university, Sonmi gets involved with an anti-government rebel group called the Union. While working with the Union, Sonmi learns that fabricants like her don't get to retire after their 12 years of service but in fact get butchered and turned into food. She writes a manifesto against the government called *Declarations*, but shortly after completing it, government agents swoop in to capture her. As she awaits execution, Sonmi wonders whether the Union was a true resistance group or whether it was all part of a government conspiracy to turn people against fabricants. For her last request, Sonmi asks to see the end of Timothy Cavendish's movie.

After slowly recovering from his stroke, Timothy decides he must escape Aurora House. He develops a scheme with fellow nursing home residents Ernie Blacksmith and Veronica Costello, and together they steal a car and escape. Timothy manages to return to his old life in publishing, where the first thing he does is request the end of the manuscript for *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery*.

As it turns out, Luisa Rey manages to survive when her car crashes into the water, but she loses the documents that prove Seaboard Power's dangerous negligence. She continues pursuing the story, even as agents from Seaboard continue to threaten her life. Ultimately, she gets a tip from Megan (Rufus Sixsmith's niece) about how to find a backup copy of her uncle's documents. The story goes to print, finally exposing Seaboard's corruption. Afterward, Megan sends Luisa the remaining letters from Robert that belonged to Rufus.

In Belgium, Robert continues working with Ayr, but he becomes even more interested in his own work, the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. When Ayr attempts to plagiarize Robert's work and pass it off as his own, the two "divorce," and Robert leaves. After completing the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, Robert mails a final letter to Rufus where he announces that he's about to kill himself. Robert includes the rest of *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing* in his letter to Rufus.

The narrative returns to Adam Ewing as he sails on the *Prophetess* toward Hawaii. His condition hasn't improved, and Dr. Henry Goose's supposed "cure" doesn't seem to be working. After overhearing a conversation between Henry and Autua, Adam realizes that Henry is trying to poison him to get his money. Adam tries to confront Henry, but he's too weak and passes out. When Adam regains consciousness, he finds that Autua has saved him, and Henry is gone. Adam decides to devote the rest of his life to fighting against the predatory side of human nature. A later note from Adam's son states that this is the part of the journal where Adam's handwriting stops being intelligible.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Adam Ewing – Adam Ewing is the protagonist of “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing,” a book that Robert Frobisher later finds. Adam’s journal makes up the first and last chapters of *Cloud Atlas*. He is a white American with family back in San Francisco (including a son, Jackson), and he travels in the Pacific for his job as a notary. While in the Chatham Islands waiting on repairs to the ship he’s traveling on (*The Prophetess*), Adam meets a strange man named Dr. Henry Goose, who seems like a friend but who ultimately tries to poison Adam to steal his money. Despite initially holding racist beliefs, Adam nevertheless helps an indigenous Moriori man named Autua travel to **Hawaii** as a stowaway on the *Prophetess*. Adam faces even more challenges to his beliefs when he sees slavery on a remote island at the Christian mission of Preacher Horrox. Later, when Autua saves Adam’s life by rescuing him from Henry’s poisoning, Adam finally begins to put aside his white supremacist beliefs. Adam’s journal ends with him promising to fight for a better world for his son, Jackson, and so Adam’s life suggests the possibility that people can change.

Robert Frobisher – Robert Frobisher is the protagonist of “Letters from Zedelghem,” which contains his letters from Belgium to his companion Rufus Sixsmith in England. Robert’s letters later end up in the possession of Luisa Rey. Robert is a brilliant young composer but also a big spender. He resents his father for disinheriting him, which Robert feels is partly because Robert could never live up to the legacy of his brother Adrian (who died in World War I). To try to win back his father’s respect, Frobisher decides to become the assistant of the legendary British composer Vyvyan Ayr, who lives in Belgium and hasn’t produced any new work in a long time. Their artistic partnership starts well, but Robert soon tires of Ayr, who is temperamental and eventually begins to steal Robert’s ideas. Robert’s most successful work is the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, which has an unusual interlocking structure that seems to mirror the structure of the novel itself (which also has six “soloists,” or central characters). Robert is chronologically the first in a lineage of characters who all have a **comet**-shaped birthmark, and his suicide seems to set into motion a cycle of rebirth and reincarnation. Robert’s character embodies how destruction and creation can coexist, exploring how artistic success doesn’t necessarily lead to happiness.

Luisa Rey – Luisa Ray is the protagonist of “Half-Lives,” a detective novel manuscript that Timothy Cavendish receives. She is a 26-year-old journalist who writes a gossip column but who dreams of writing more serious stories like her father, the renowned Vietnam correspondent Lester Rey. She is one of the characters with a **comet** birthmark. Luisa gets her opportunity for a big story when the scientist Rufus Sixsmith reveals to her

that a planned nuclear plant on Swanekke Island carries a serious risk of disaster. After hired assassin Bill Smoke murders Rufus as part of the cover-up, Luisa spends much of the story searching for a report from Rufus that details all the nuclear plant’s problems. Meanwhile, a nefarious group of people associated with Seaboard Power all try to stop or even kill her before she can get her story to print. Luisa’s story demonstrates both the danger and necessity of telling the truth, as she ultimately triumphs over forces much bigger than herself by stopping the construction of the dangerous nuclear plant—but only after overcoming serious threats to her own life.

Timothy Cavendish – Timothy Cavendish is the protagonist of “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish,” a film that Sonmi~451 watches. He is in his 60s and runs a vanity publishing company that experiences a freak success after one of his authors, Dermot Hoggins, throws the critic Felix Finch off a roof and becomes a famous murderer. But Timothy soon becomes a victim of his own success when Dermot’s violent brothers demand more money on behalf of Dermot. In an attempt to escape the situation, Timothy makes the mistake of trusting his own brother, Denholme, and he ends up imprisoned in a nursing home called Aurora House. Stuck in Aurora House, Timothy struggles to convince the nurses he’s not senile and realizes that he’ll have to break out on his own. He hatches a plan with fellow nursing home residents Ernie Blacksmith and Veronica Costello, ultimately escaping Aurora House and reclaiming his old life. Timothy’s ordeal highlights how society neglects the sick and the elderly. His brute-force escape from the nursing home shows how it’s not always possible to navigate a bureaucracy, so sometimes the only option is to take direct action. He also symbolizes the necessity of facing one’s own mortality and the potential benefits of doing so, as his encounter with old age at the nursing home helps motivate him to return to his old life with renewed vigor.

Sonmi~451 – Sonmi~451 is the protagonist of “An Orison of Sonmi~451,” which survives as a recording on an egg-shaped device called an orison that Meronym carries with her. She answers the questions of the Archivist, who visits Sonmi in prison while she’s awaiting death for her role as a government dissident. Sonmi is a fabricant (synthetically created human clone) who initially has limited sentience and works in a chain restaurant called Papa Song’s. She is also one of the characters with the **comet** birthmark. As Sonmi learns more about the world, particularly from her friend Yoona~939, her ability to think improves, and she eventually “ascends” to the point where she is at least as smart as any “pureblood” human (i.e., someone born naturally and not a clone). After ascending, Sonmi develops ideas that are blasphemous in the ultra-corporate society she lives in, like how fabricants are treated like slaves and deserve the same rights as purebloods. She befriends Hae-Joo Im, who turns out to be a part of a

revolutionary group known as the Union. Sonmi writes a grand manifesto to help other fabricants who ascend rebel against their masters. At the end of her interview with the Archivist, however, Sonmi reveals the surprising fact that she believes that Hae-Joo and other revolutionaries might all be part of an elaborate show put on by the government to turn people against fabricants. Sonmi shows how the powerful find ways to exploit the weak, but her character also suggests that the oppressed might be able to join together to fight their oppressors.

Zachry Bailey – Zachry Bailey is the protagonist of the post-apocalyptic “Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After,” the only story in the book that doesn’t take place inside another story. As a boy, he witnesses a violent tribe called the Kona murder his Pa and kidnap his brother Adam Bailey to enslave him. Later, as a teenager, Zachry’s life changes forever when he meets Meronym, a Prescient woman who comes from a civilization with much more advanced technology than Zachry’s Valleymen people, suggesting that she is one of the last survivors of pre-apocalyptic civilization. Meronym doesn’t want to disturb life in Zachry’s village, but Zachry is more curious than the other Valleymen, and his interactions with Meronym cause him to question some of his deepest beliefs, such as his faith in the benevolent goddess Sonmi and the evil spirit Old Georgie. A second Kona attack separates Zachry from his family and forces him to run away with Meronym to find one of the other surviving Prescients. With his constant references to supernatural forces like Sonmi and Old Georgie, Zachry’s story blurs the line between “real” events and fantasy, and many years later, when Zachry is dead, his children wonder how much of his life story was actually true. Zachry’s story represents the consequences of violence as well as the difficulty of separating objective truth from emotion and superstition.

The Archivist – The Archivist spends most of “An Orison of Sonmi~451” interviewing the protagonist, Sonmi~451. Although the Archivist is a major character, he reveals almost nothing about his own identity, preferring to focus the conversation on Sonmi. (Later, Zachry sees a recording of the interview and can’t see the Archivist but describes him as having a soft, masculine voice.) The Archivist takes on great personal risk by interviewing Sonmi, who is a notorious political prisoner. Despite this, the Archivist doesn’t necessarily agree with Sonmi’s radical political views. When Sonmi says that their society requires slavery from fabricants to function, the Archivist pushes back, defending the “corpocracy” they live in as the best form of government that has ever existed. The Archivist is fascinated by Sonmi’s story but expresses skepticism about parts of it that challenge his own beliefs, such as Sonmi’s description of slaughterhouses for “retired” fabricants. The Archivist’s lack of a personal identity reflects how corporate culture encourages people to give up their

individuality and instead identify as interchangeable consumers. Nevertheless, the Archivist seems to become more sympathetic to Sonmi over the course of the interview, suggesting how people can change when exposed to new and unfamiliar ideas.

Meronym – Meronym is a Prescient, meaning she comes from a small group of people with advanced technology who manage to survive a nuclear holocaust known as the Fall. She is the only character with a **comet** birthmark who isn’t the main character of the story she appears in (“Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”). Her technologically advanced people trade with the Valleymen, who live a hunter-gatherer lifestyle after the Fall, and Meronym ends up staying with Ma and Zachry like an anthropologist in order to better learn their lifestyle (although in fact, she is scouting out new places for her own people to live to escape a plague). Meronym quickly earns the respect of most of the Valleymen, but Zachry remains suspicious of her. Despite Meronym’s efforts to avoid impacting the lifestyle of the Valleymen, Zachry’s curiosity leads him to find some of her advanced gadgets, including an egglike communication and recording device called an “orison” that contains an interview with Sonmi~451. Meronym’s experience explores the consequences of technologically advanced “civilized” nations interacting with people who don’t have the same technology. Although Meronym means well, she can’t help but influence the lives of the Valleymen, particularly when she saves the life of Zachry’s sister Catkin. Meronym embodies the benefits of technology but also its limitations and downsides.

Rufus Sixsmith – Rufus Sixsmith is a supporting character in two stories, keeping up correspondence with Robert Frobisher in “The Zedelghem Letters,” then, many years later, acting as a source for the journalist Luisa Rey in “Half-Lives.” None of Rufus’s letters to Robert appears in the novel, although Robert occasionally references Rufus’s replies in his own letters. Rufus seems to worry about his friend Robert, but there’s nothing he can do to stop his friend from dying by suicide. Later in life, Rufus continues to be cautious, and he is one of the few people at Seaboard Power who realizes the danger of a proposed new nuclear plant. Rufus risks his own life to pass on this information to Luisa, and as a result, he ends up getting assassinated by Bill Smoke. Rufus’s life demonstrates how it is noble—but also dangerous—to put ideals ahead of greed.

Dermot Hoggins – Dermot Hoggins is a memoirist with a criminal history. He publishes his book, *Knuckle Sandwich*, through Timothy Cavendish’s vanity press. The book remains obscure until Dermot gets so angry with the literary critic Felix Finch that he throws him off a roof and kills him. The murder makes Dermot instantly famous, and sales of *Knuckle Sandwich* soar. Unfortunately for Dermot, the restrictive terms of his contract with Timothy mean that most of the profits go to Timothy. This doesn’t sit well with Dermot’s brothers, who are just as violent as him and try to extort Timothy for money,

starting a chain of events that ends with Timothy confined in the Aurora House nursing home. The events of Dermot's life satirize the publishing industry and fame in general, showing how all publicity is good publicity and how some people try to exploit tragedy for personal gain.

Dr. Henry Goose – Dr. Henry Goose is a strange Englishman who meets up with Adam Ewing while they're both on the Chatham Isles. Henry initially tells Adam that he's in the area to collect teeth, all as part of an elaborate revenge plot against some people in Britain who have disrespected him. Eventually, he and Adam seem to bond and become friends over chess, but Henry reveals at the end of the book that he has been poisoning Adam the whole time in order to steal his possessions. Henry's behavior is unsettling—he pretends to be Adam's friend for months, all so that he has a chance to kill him for a little bit of money. Henry views other humans as little more than pieces of meat, and he represents the lengths people will go to for the sake of greed.

Vyvyan Ayrs – Vyvyan Ayrs is a famous British composer who has moved to Belgium and hasn't written any new music in a long time. Robert Frobisher seeks out Ayrs, hoping that by becoming Ayrs's protégé, he can advance his career and win back the respect of his father (and get back in his father's will). Ayrs is an eccentric who alternates between insulting Robert and praising him. At first, Ayrs and Robert seem to have a mutually beneficial partnership, but by the end of the story, Robert has grown so much as a composer that Ayrs becomes a parasite, trying to pass Robert's work off as his own.

Eva – Eva is the daughter of Vyvyan Ayrs and Jocasta van Outryve de Crommelynck. Initially, her father's new assistant, Robert Frobisher, annoys her, but she warms up to him over time. Robert, however, mistakes her new friendliness for romantic love and writes a letter where he proposes eloping—despite the fact that Eva already has a fiancé. The embarrassing incident happens shortly before Robert's suicide, although in his suicide letter, Robert is adamant that love had nothing to do with it. Eva represents the passion and unpredictability of youth.

Alberto Grimaldi – Alberto Grimaldi is the ruthless CEO of Seaboard Power, which plans to build a nuclear plant on Swanekke Island, despite a report from Rufus Sixsmith that the plan poses the risk of a nuclear disaster. Grimaldi is one of the most ruthless figures at his company, willing to use the assassin Bill Smoke to kill anyone who stands in the way of his plans. Unfortunately for Grimaldi, Lloyd Hooks and William Wiley are even more ruthless, and they blow up his jet to take control of Seaboard Power.

Lester Rey – Lester Rey is the father of Luisa Rey. He was a police officer who tried to follow the rules but who, during one fateful investigation, ended up getting hit by a grenade and losing an eye. Disillusioned with the police, Lester went on to become a well-known Vietnam War correspondent, and his

legacy hangs heavy over Luisa, who also wants to be a journalist but who struggles to live up to her father's lofty name. Lester embodies an old-school style of journalistic integrity, often in the minority in his stand against corruption and greed but nevertheless able to effect change.

Joe Napier – Joe Napier is a security consultant for Grimaldi, but although Napier seems at first to be a villain, he has been battling with his conscience ever since he watched Bill Smoke brutally assault Margo Roker. Napier used to be a police officer with Lester Rey, and Lester saved Napier's life by kicking away a grenade. Ultimately, Napier follows his conscience and ends up sacrificing his own life to save the journalist Luisa Rey and help her take down the corrupt company Seaboard Power. His character demonstrates the possibility of redemption by repaying karmic debts (since Napier repays his debt to his savior Lester by saving the life of Lester's daughter, Luisa).

Bill Smoke – Bill Smoke is an assassin who kills on behalf of Seaboard Power. He starts off working with Grimaldi and Napier but is ultimately a free agent who ends up working for Wiley and Hooks. Bill Smoke specializes in assaults and murders that look like accidents, and he enjoys getting to know future victims. He is a purely evil character who helps set the melodramatic detective-novel tone of "Half-Lives."

Yoona~939 – Yoona~939 is a fabricant who works with Sonmi~451 at the restaurant Papa Song's. While at the restaurant, Yoona "ascends" and realizes that she's living like a slave. She passes on her knowledge to Sonmi, who takes longer to ascend but is an eager learner. Ultimately, Yoona tries to escape the restaurant by kidnapping a child and gets shot and killed in the process. Yoona raises questions about what it means to be human. Her character also shows how knowledge can help motivate people to try to change their circumstances.

Hae-Joo Im – Hae-Joo Im seems to be a typical postgrad at a university called Taemosan. He's friends with fellow postgrad Boom-Sook Kim. In fact, however, he collaborates with Boardman Mephi as a member of the Union, a resistance group that opposes the current government. Mephi encourages Sonmi~451 to get to know Hae-Joo better, and this leads her to get involved with the Union too. When enforcers raid the Taemosan campus, Hae-Joo goes on the run with Sonmi, getting her to safety so that she has enough time to write a manifesto. Later, when she's in prison, Sonmi claims that Hae-Joo was an actor who was really playing a role on behalf of the government, but the truth of Hae-Joo's motives remain ambiguous, since his character disappears from the story. Hae-Joo's character explores complicated questions about political protest, raising the question of which forms of resistance are effective, and which are just for show.

Old Georgie – Old Georgie is an evil spirit who represents the opposite of the benevolent goddess Sonmi in the religion of Zachry and the Valleysmen people. In Zachry's narration, Old Georgie seems like a real person who speaks and acts, so it isn't

clear whether Old Georgie is real, a hallucination, or just a metaphor. Old Georgie often tempts people to commit violence, and in Zachry's mythology, Old Georgie even motivated the Fall (a nuclear holocaust that destroyed most of old civilization). Old Georgie is a physical embodiment of the forces that motivate characters to commit evil, in particular violence and selfishness.

Captain Molyneux – Captain Molyneux captains the *Prophetess*, the ship that Adam Ewing sails on. Molyneux isn't as cruel as his first mate, Mr. Boerhaave, and he allows the Moriori stowaway Autua to stay on his ship after seeing Autua's prowess as a seaman. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, Molyneux mostly cares about money, as demonstrated by his willingness to ferry goods made with slave labor.

Isaac Sachs – Isaac Sachs is a flirtatious, heavy-drinking scientist who used to work with Rufus Sixsmith. After Rufus's death, Luisa Rey tells Isaac she thinks someone murdered Rufus, and ultimately Isaac agrees to betray his bosses by collaborating with Luisa. He gets killed, possibly just as collateral damage, during the same jet explosion that kills Grimaldi. Isaac's life highlights the dangers of trying to tell the truth and go against people in power.

Fay Li – Fay Li is a woman who works in PR at Seaboard Power. Although she seems to be working for Grimaldi and Napier, in fact, her loyalties are more complicated, and she's willing to sell out her partners and even get the nuclear plant shut down if it means she gets reward money. Li's shifting loyalties reflect the double-crossing tropes of detective fiction, and they also embody the paranoia and confusion of the Cold War era.

Denholme Cavendish – Denholme is the brother of Timothy Cavendish. The brothers have a strained relationship, with Timothy often trying to take out loans from his brother to pay off his many debts. When Timothy needs money to pay off Dermot's brothers, he goes to Denholme and asks for help. But Denholme tricks Timothy, getting him committed to a nursing home called Aurora House. Denholme doesn't get to enjoy his revenge for long, however, since he dies while Timothy is in Aurora House.

Mrs. Noakes – Mrs. Noakes is a nurse at Aurora House, the nursing home where Timothy Cavendish gets trapped while trying to escape Dermot Hoggins's brothers. She is cruel and uses her minor position of authority to control the lives of the nursing home residents, and she drugs anyone who tries to stop her. She demonstrates how people can abuse power not just in politics but in personal life and business as well.

Boardman Mephi – Boardman Mephi is an influential figure at a university called Taemosan. But despite his important position, he is secretly a member of the Union, which opposes the ruling corpocratic government. He keeps a close watch over Sonmi~451, saving her after Boom-Sook Kim nearly kills her during a drunken game and helping her to feed her own

curiosity about the world. He introduces Sonmi to Hae-Joo Im, who seems to be a normal grad student but is actually a fellow member of the Union. When enforcers raid campus looking for Sonmi, Mephi reportedly gets killed, although since Sonmi has a theory that the Union was actually working with the corpocracy, the true nature of Mephi's fate and his motives remains ambiguous.

Javier Gomez – Javier is a 10-year-old boy who often stops by Luisa Rey's apartment to get away from his own family. Javier is an innocent character in a story full of schemers, and his presence raises the stakes by giving Luisa someone to care about—meaning she can't just skip town when her job gets dangerous.

Papa Song – Papa Song is the mascot for a futuristic McDonald's-like restaurant franchise. Although he sounds like a person when Sonmi first describes him, after she "ascends" and becomes more intelligent, Sonmi realizes that Papa Song is just a hologram. The fabricants working in the Papa Song restaurant franchise endure dehumanizing conditions, showing how the government that Sonmi lives in requires slave-like labor to function.

Seer Ree – Seer Ree is a "pureblood" human who manages the fabricants at a location of the restaurant Papa Song's, where Sonmi~451 and Yoona~393 live. He doesn't seem to enjoy his life—his wife openly cheats on him, and he often gets intoxicated on Soap, a substance that wipes the memories of the replicant workers. Seer Ree eventually overdoses on Soap in an apparent suicide, introducing Sonmi to the concept of death. Seer Ree shows how in a hyper-consumerist society, life isn't necessarily much better for the managers than for the workers.

The Abbess of the Valleysmen – The Abbess is the leader of The Valleysmen people, including Zachry and his family. Her name comes from a ruined abbey nearby that survives from before a nuclear holocaust called the Fall. The Abbess preaches the value of civilization, encouraging the Valleysmen to try to act the way people did before the Fall, but so much knowledge vanished during the Fall that the Abbess and the other Valleysmen often don't understand the purpose of the relics that survive from the old civilization. This abbess probably isn't the same person as the Abbess of the Mountain Colonists from "An Orison of Sonmi~451," who is already in her 60s in that pre-Fall story, but it's possible that she is a reincarnation of that Abbess, given that role that reincarnation seems to play with the **comet** birthmark characters.

Boom-Sook Kim – Boom-Sook Kim is a postgrad student at Taemosan who enjoys drinking, gambling, and crossbow hunting. He ostensibly uses Sonmi~451 as a research subject, but because he skates by on nepotism and his rich father, Boom-Sook mostly ignores his work, leaving Sonmi to pursue her own interests. Although Sonmi appreciates her

arrangement with Boom-Sook at first, he nearly kills her when he accepts a drunken bet to shook fruit off her head with a crossbow. Boom-Sook represents how the whims of rich buffoons can have life or death consequences for the people around them.

Pa Bailey – One of the formative events in Zachry's life is watching as warriors from the rival Kona tribe kill his Pa. Zachry's failure to do anything during his father's murder leads Zachry to think of himself as a coward, and Zachry wrestles with the concepts of bravery and cowardice over the course of the rest of the story. Pa's death and absence help Zachry form his view about the world, making Zachry skeptical of outsiders and teaching him about the power and consequences of violence.

Adam Bailey – Adam Bailey is Zachry's brother who gets kidnapped by members of the rival Kona tribe and forced into slavery. He is a different character from Adam Ewing, although their similar names seem to offer a bookend, since Adam Ewing is from the first story chronologically and Adam is from the last story chronologically. During a pivotal moment, Old Georgie convinces Zachry to kill a sleeping Kona who is the same age as Adam would be, but Adam's fate never gets revealed. The incident represents how, metaphorically, all violent acts hurt people who under different circumstances might be a brother or ally.

Wing~027 – Wing~027 is an ascended "disasterman" fabricant. He seems to be as intelligent as a human and is able to survive in extreme conditions. Although Wing and Sonmi~451 only meet twice, he gives her some important advice that helps her to ascend. When one of Boom-Sook's friends makes a careless mistake in an experiment, Wing ends up being burned to death. Wing's death, which the postgrads treat as comedy instead of tragedy, highlights how casually the upper class treat the lives of the lower class as well as how some people miss seeing the humanity in others.

The Abbess of the Mountain Colonists – The Abbess is a woman in her 60s who leads an anarchist colony that lives in the mountains, away from the corpocracy that rules the nearby urban centers. Her colony sits next to a giant stone carving of Siddhartha, and she promises Sonmi that Siddhartha will help her reincarnate in the Abbess's colony someday. Since Meronym has the same **comet** birthmark as Sonmi (suggesting she is a reincarnation of Sonmi), this could imply that the Abbess of the Valleymen is a reincarnation of this Abbess.

Ernie Blacksmith – Ernie Blacksmith is a resident at Aurora House who befriends Timothy Cavendish and schemes with him (and Veronica Costello) to escape. Ernie has a temper and fights with Timothy but ultimately remains loyal. Ernie's Scottish heritage becomes important to the plot when Ernie uses Scottish soccer fans to aid his escape from Aurora House. Ernie shows how, with ingenuity, the oppressed can sometimes

overcome authority figures.

Duophysite – Duophysite is a Prescient who lives in **Hawaii** and communicates from a distance with his fellow Prescient Meronym using an egglike device called an orison. Duophysite motivates Meronym and Zachry's final journey by informing Meronym that a plague seems to have wiped out many of the surviving Prescients, and that Meronym should come to meet Duophysite.

Megan – Megan is the niece of Rufus Sixsmith who is a scientist like him. She lives in **Hawaii**. Luisa Rey sometimes gets mistaken for Megan. Although Megan is absent for most of the story, she helps Luisa find one of Rufus's important documents, giving her the proof she needs to publish a story on Seaboard Power's corruption.

Dom Grelsch – Dom Grelsch is Luisa Rey's boss at the magazine *Spyglass*. Although he seems at first like a washed-up editor who cares more about selling copies than printing the truth, he takes a big risk at a pivotal moment in the story by secretly supporting Luisa's ambition to keep investigating the nuclear plant at Swanekke Island.

Autua Autua is a Moriori man whom Adam Ewing discovers stowed away in Adam's cabin on the *Prophetess*. Autua begs Adam to help him, explaining to Adam that he fled his home to escape a life of slavery. Though initially reluctant to help, Adam ultimately befriends Autua and helps him get a job aboard the ship. At the end of the book, Autua saves Adam from Dr. Henry Goose, who had been secretly poisoning Adam over the course of their journey overseas.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jocasta van Outryve de Crommelynck – Jocasta is the wife of Vyvyan Ayrs and the eventual secret lover of Robert Frobisher. Robert seems to have sex with Jocasta as a way to be more like his musical hero, Ayrs, but as he grows more disillusioned with Ayrs, he begins to resent Jocasta as well.

Veronica Costello – Veronica Costello plots with Ernie Blacksmith and Timothy Cavendish to escape Aurora House. She acts as a mediator, helping Ernie and Timothy put aside their egos to cooperate.

Lloyd Hooks – Lloyd Hooks is a former political appointee who wants to get involved with Seaboard Power. Grimaldi fiercely opposes giving Lloyd a seat on the board, so Lloyd has Grimaldi killed in a way that looks like an accident.

Ma Bailey – Ma is the mother of Zachry who helps hold the family together after the death of Pa and the kidnapping of Adam Bailey. She welcomes the outsider Prescient Meronym into her home.

Adrian Frobisher – Adrian Frobisher, the brother of Robert Frobisher, died in World War I. He represents an impossible ideal that Robert will never live up to, which contributes to the

discord between Robert and his father.

Mr. Chang – Mr. Chang is a chauffeur for Boardman Mephi. He is always kind to Sonmi~451, making him one of the first characters to treat Sonmi like a normal human.

Mr. D'Arnoq – Mr. D'Arnoq is a white man on the Chatham Islands who, after speaking with Adam Ewing, makes Adam an unwilling participant in a scheme to get the Moriori islander Autua to freedom in [Hawaii](#).

Mrs. Judd – Mrs. Judd is the woman who works at reception at Aurora House. Like Mrs. Noakes, she uses the small amount of authority she has to oppress the residents of the nursing home.

Hendrick – Hendrick is a servant of Vyvyan Ayr's. Robert Frobisher imagines Hendrick is having sex with Ayr's wife, Jocasta, but this may just be a reflection of Robert's own guilty conscience (since Robert himself is having sex with Jocasta).

Monsieur van de Velde – Monsieur van de Velde is a friend of Vyvyan Ayr's family who lets Eva live with his family when she's at school. Robert Frobisher and Eva bond over how boring the van de Velde family is.

Mr. Hotchkiss – Mr. Hotchkiss is the son of a woman who lives in Aurora House. He always leaves his key in the engine, which becomes a key part of Timothy Cavendish's escape plan.

Catkin Bailey – Catkin is Zachry's sister. When she gets poisoned by a scorpionfish, it motivates Meronym to break her promise not to intervene with the Valleysmen lifestyle.

Mr. Evans – Mr. Evans is an old white man on the Chatham Islands who first introduces Adam Ewing to the story of the Moriori, a tribe indigenous to the islands.

Mr. Boerhaave – Mr. Boerhaave is the first mate on the *Prophetess*, the ship where Adam Ewing is a passenger. Boerhaave is sadistic and treats crew members cruelly, driving the young Rafael to suicide by repeatedly raping him.

Margo Roker – Margot Roker is a woman who opposed Seaboard Power. As a result, Bill Smoke assaulted her, and she fell into a coma. Watching Bill Smoke attack Margo was a turning point for Napier, who began to regret his choices.

Rafael – Rafael is a young Australian crew member on the *Prophetess* who befriends Adam Ewing. Rafael dies by suicide, seemingly to escape the sexual abuse of the first mate, Mr. Boerhaave, and others; Rafael's death haunts Adam in his nightmares long after.

Preacher Horrox – Preacher Horrox is a British missionary on a Pacific Island who shows the hypocrisy of many missionaries; though he claims to improve the lives of locals, he actually profits off slave labor.

William Wiley – William Wiley is the vice-CEO of Seaboard Power who schemes with Lloyd Hooks to have Grimaldi killed.

Hester Van Zandt – Hester Van Zandt is the leader of the anti-nuclear protesters on Swanekke Island.

Ursula – Ursula is a woman that Timothy Cavendish loved a long time ago. When he sees her again, she's a grandmother with her own life, and for him, she represents a different life that he might have had.

Jackson Ewing – Jackson Ewing is the son of Adam Ewing who publishes his father's journal (which Robert Frobisher later finds and reads).

Morty Dhondt – Morty Dhondt is a friend of Robert Frobisher's who takes him on a drive to try to find the grave of his brother, Adrian Frobisher.

An-Kor Apis – An-Kor Apis is an important member of the Union who communicates with Hae-Joo and Sonmi remotely, giving them orders about where to go.

Ma Arak Na – Ma Arak Na is a member of the Union who helps hide Hae-Joo and Sonmi from the corpocracy.

Hal Brodie – Hal Brodie is Luisa Rey's ex-boyfriend. Ever since they broke up, Judith Rey has been trying to set Luisa up with new men.

Mr. Wagstaff – Mr. Wagstaff is a racist white man who shows Adam Ewing around a British colony on a Pacific island that the *Prophetess* stops at on the way to [Hawaii](#).

Verplancke – Verplancke is a man who visits Robert Frobisher shortly before Robert's suicide and sees a preview of his most famous composition, the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



CYCLES OF HISTORY

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* contains six stories that, despite occurring at very different points in history, share many themes, motifs, characters, and events. The novel has a nesting-doll structure, where each story takes place within another story. This intricate structure highlights how history changes and repeats itself over the years.

One of the most important cycles in the book involves a [comet-shaped birthmark](#), which the characters Robert Frobisher, Luisa Rey, Timothy Cavendish, Sonmi~451, and Meronym all have in the same location near their shoulder. Taken literally, the comet could be evidence of reincarnation (particularly since a statue of the Buddha also appears prominently in one chapter). Figuratively, the comet suggests how human nature both changes and remains the same over time. All of the

characters with the birthmark are different kinds of writers (Robert is a composer, Luisa is a journalist, Timothy is a memoirist, Sonmi is a manifesto-writer, and Meronym is an anthropologist), and this particular commonality suggests that humans in all eras need to tell stories, even if the forms of these stories change greatly over time.

Often the events from one story “echo” in another story, even when the events have no other direct connection. The head pains that Adam Ewing experiences on a schooner headed to **Hawaii** in “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing,” for example, foreshadow the brutal slaughterhouse in “The Orison of Sonmi~451,” where fabricants (human clones) expect a boat trip to Hawaii but instead get shot in a head with a bolt and turned into meat. When Adam Ewing confronts his supposed friend Henry Goose (who betrayed Adam by poisoning him), Henry replies that he has no remorse because, as a doctor, he sees Adam as little more than “meat,” further connecting the scene to the fabricant slaughterhouse. Ultimately, the links between characters and events in *Cloud Atlas* suggest that human beings can’t help being connected to each other, even across long distances of space and time, implying that to truly understand humanity, one must simultaneously remember the past, imagine the future, and bear witness to the present.



GREED

The villains in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* are all characters who are willing to do whatever it takes for the sake of greed. From the murderous thief Henry Goose in “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” to the brutal Kona warriors of “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After,” some characters are willing to do whatever it takes—even kill—to make even a small profit. Many greedy characters think more in the short term than the long term. The Seaboard CEO, Alberto Grimaldi, for instance, risks a nuclear accident in California, all for the sake of his company’s profit. However, Grimaldi schemes so much that he gets killed before he can put his plan into action. Greed reaches its apex in the novel in “The Orison of Sonmi~451,” where all of Korea lives under a hyper-charged version of capitalism called “corpocracy.” Under corpocracy, “citizens” become “consumers,” and poor humans suffer and die in slums to provide organs to the rich, showing the consequences of greed on a mass scale.

Greed defines not just the novel’s villains but also many of the sympathetic or morally ambiguous characters. Robert Frobisher, for example, is the protagonist of “Letters from Zedelghem,” and he struggles to pay for his own extravagant desires, tricking staff members at several fancy hotels to avoid paying his bills. Timothy Cavendish similarly tries to capitalize off a freak success at his vanity publishing company—only to face the consequences of his greed when he exploits his star author, Dermot Hoggins, leading Dermot’s violent brothers to target him. Throughout the novel, greed inevitably leads to

violence, making it perhaps the greatest threat to humanity’s continued existence. Thus, *Cloud Atlas* suggests that greed is at the center of all human flaws.



SLAVERY AND IMPRISONMENT

Most of the stories in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* deal with some type of slavery. The first story chronologically, “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing,” depicts slavery as it existed in the real world, focusing specifically on the genocide and enslavement of the Moriori people in the Chatham Islands, as well as referencing oceanic slave trading more generally. Though the middle stories don’t overtly refer to slavery as *slavery*, it still exists in some form. From the locked sweatshop in “Half-Lives” to the cruel Aurora House nursing home in “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish,” slavery takes new forms, often hiding in places where more privileged characters can ignore it. In “The Orison of Sonmi~451,” for instance, the political revolutionary Sonmi~451 argues to her interviewer, the Archivist, that their modern society can’t exist without the slave-like labor of an underclass of fabricants (synthetically created human clones), directly stating a theme that is also present in most of the other stories.

By the time at which the last story chronologically, “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After,” takes place, open slavery has returned, at least for the violent Kona people, who kidnap children of rival tribes and rule a post-apocalyptic world through force. Notably, the last story inverts the power dynamic—while Adam Ewing is a privileged white man who still holds some racist beliefs in the first story, the last story begins with the Kona people abducting narrator Zachry’s brother Adam Bailey into slavery. Although the two Adams are different people, they suggest that the master in one era just might end up being the slave in another. The persistence of slavery in the *Cloud Atlas* stories suggests that historically, domination and exploitation have been essential parts of human civilization—and that perhaps challenging this status quo is the only way to break violent cycles of history.



AGING AND MORTALITY

David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* portrays many characters near the end of their lives and meditates on the inevitability of death. While some characters, like Robert Frobisher, die young and violently (in his case, from suicide), many struggle with what it means to grow older. Robert’s friend Rufus Sixsmith, for example, lives long enough to see his body grow frail from disease. He witnesses a modern world that Robert couldn’t ever have imagined, holding on to Robert’s letters as a way to remember a far-off past, although ultimately, Rufus dies in circumstances very similar to Robert’s (also by a gun to the head, in a murder staged to look

like suicide). Perhaps the character who struggles the most with aging is Timothy Cavendish, who gets accidentally trapped in a nursing home called Aurora House and who struggles to convince the nurses that he doesn't belong there. While "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish" focuses on the cruel neglect of the elderly, showing how the bureaucracy of Aurora House nearly destroys the relatively healthy Timothy, the novel also deals honestly with the difficulties of aging—for instance, it depicts Timothy's struggle to recover from a stroke. Ultimately, Timothy's story ends on a triumphant note, with Timothy escaping the prison-like nursing home and reclaiming his former life as a publisher.

For all his flaws, Timothy is arguably a more positive character than the aging composer Vyvyan Ayrs, who tries to hold on to the past by leeching off the compositions of his young protégé, Robert. Ayrs's efforts to plagiarize Robert's work seem to stem from his own bitterness about aging and being forgotten, and he's so consumed by this desire not to be forgotten that he abandons creativity, giving up on his own promising final works and instead jealously dedicating his time to controlling Robert and his work. Meanwhile, Timothy's experiences, such as his stroke and his harsh treatment at Aurora House, force him to more directly confront his own mortality. He leaves Aurora House with a new lease on life, and instead of relying on his past successes, he tries to forge a new path by publishing *Half-Lives*. *Cloud Atlas* illustrates the inevitability of aging and dying, but it also illustrates the value of acknowledging one's own mortality, using life's fleeting nature as an incentive to hold on to youthful vitality, creativity, and curiosity instead of slowly fading away.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE COMET BIRTHMARK

The comet-shaped birthmark that several characters share represents all that connects humans across time and space. Many comets, like the famous Hailey's Comet, follow an elliptical orbit and travel past Earth at regular intervals. Similarly, the comet-birthmark characters seem to be reincarnations of one another, where each new character is like a comet passing by Earth. Notably, the comet-birthmark characters do not all have the same personality—Luisa Rey is a journalist willing to put her own life at risk, whereas Robert Frobisher is selfish and mostly just cares about securing his own wealth and reputation. But the characters do have a few things in common. All the comet-birthmark characters practice some form of writing (Robert is a composer, Luisa is a journalist, Timothy Cavendish is a

publisher and memoirist, Sonmi~451 is a manifesto-writer, and Meronym is an anthropologist). Similarly, these characters struggle to overcome the greed of the other characters around them, with the greed often leading to violence. While on a literal level the comet suggests that the novel takes place in a universe with a Buddhism-derived type of reincarnation, on a metaphorical level it also suggests that the struggles of past humans are not so different from the struggles of present and future humans, even if these struggles take different shapes.



HAWAII

Throughout the novel, Hawaii symbolizes how most humans live both in isolation and as part of a larger society at the same time. Although the stories of *Cloud Atlas* take place in a wide variety of locations and time periods, one location the action repeatedly returns to is Hawaii, which often symbolizes the endpoint of a journey. Adam Ewing takes the *Prophetess* to Hawaii, where the enslaved Moriori man Autua hopes to finally earn his freedom. Centuries later, fabricants like Sonmi~451 seemingly get sent to Hawaii after 12 years of service to live out their retirement—but in fact, Hawaii is a lie, and the fabricants get butchered to become food. Thus, Hawaii connects characters and stories that would otherwise seem disparate and unrelated. On the other hand, Hawaii, as a remote island, also symbolizes isolation. Many of *Cloud Atlas*'s characters live in solitary conditions, becoming figurative "islands" themselves. Sonmi, for example, lives in solitary confinement, while Timothy Cavendish also finds himself imprisoned and separated from his old life after he gets trapped in a nursing home. But isolation can also have its advantages; for instance, the only reason why Zachry and the Valleysmen people survive a nuclear apocalypse is that they live on their own remote island. And so, Hawaii. And so, paradoxically, Hawaii links many of the stories in the novel while also representing isolation, encapsulating both *Cloud Atlas*'s nested structure and its themes of human connection and isolation.




QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *Cloud Atlas* published in 2004.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ Beyond the Indian hamlet, upon a forlorn strand, I happened on a trail of recent footprints. Through rotting kelp, sea cocoa-nuts & bamboo, the tracks led me to their maker, a White man, his trowzers & Pea-jacket rolled up, sporting a kempt beard & an outsized Beaver, shoveling & sifting the cindery sand with a teaspoon so intently that he noticed me only after I had hailed him from ten yards away. Thus it was, I made the acquaintance of Dr. Henry Goose, surgeon to the London nobility.

Related Characters: Adam Ewing (speaker), Dr. Henry Goose

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis


These are the first few lines of the novel. The passage marks the beginning of Adam Ewing's journal and describes how he met the unusual Dr. Henry Goose. One of the most noteworthy aspects of the passage is how it mimics the writing style of real 19th-century journals. The archaic spellings like "trowzers" contributes to the feeling that the journal is an authentic artifact rather than what it really is, which is the work of a contemporary author writing historical fiction. Further contributing to the journal's authenticity is how it starts right in the middle of the action, as if a reader has just picked the journal off the shelf and flipped to a page in the middle.

But while the first lines of *Cloud Atlas* immediately set the tone, in some ways they are also misleading. Although the novel contains elements of historical fiction, it also contains elements of contemporary fiction and science fiction, meaning future chapters have tones and styles that differ wildly from the first chapter. While the novel begins with the relatively uneventful meeting of Adam and Henry, later chapters deal with events that change the whole world.

☞ He jabbed at his eyes & jabbed at mine, as if that single gesture were ample explanation.

Related Characters: Adam Ewing (speaker), Autua

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis


This quote describes a moment shortly after Autua reveals himself to be a stowaway on the *Prophetess* and begs Adam Ewing to help him. Autua is a Moriori man, part of an oppressed indigenous group of Islanders whose survivors mostly live in slavery. Earlier, Adam made eye contact with Autua while Autua received a public flogging for disobeying his master. At the beginning of his journal, Adam is more open-minded than some of the other white Europeans and Americans around him, but he nevertheless holds racist views about the inferiority of non-white races. When Adam looks Autua in the eyes, however, he must confront the fact that Autua is a fully realized human being, just like Adam. For this reason, Adam struggles to hold Autua's gaze, particularly during the whipping—since if Adam acknowledged Autua's humanity then, he would have to also acknowledge the cruelty of making fellow humans like Autua suffer under the institution of slavery.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ A telegram, Sixsmith? You *ass*.

Don't send any more, I beg you—telegrams attract attention!

Related Characters: Robert Frobisher (speaker), Adam Ewing, Rufus Sixsmith, Vyvyan Ayr

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

This quote from Robert Frobisher comes at the beginning of one of his letters to Rufus Sixsmith. Like Chapter 1, which tells Adam Ewing's story, Chapter 2, which takes place several decades later, is also historical fiction, though the genre changes from a journal to a series of letters, and the timeframe jumps ahead several decades. This quote helps establish the structure of the chapter: Robert writes letters to his companion Rufus, and while Rufus writes replies (that sometimes Robert references in his letters), none of Rufus's words actually appears in the chapter.

Robert's letter references the telegram—a form of communication that didn't exist in Adam Ewing's time. One thing that unites the various chapters of *Cloud Atlas* is how each of them depicts the evolution of human communication technology. Also relevant in this quote is Robert's concern about attracting "attention." Robert has a complicated relationship with attention. On the one hand,

Robert's story begins with him fleeing his debtors (since after Robert's father disinherited Robert, he couldn't cut back on his extravagant spending). Robert wants to keep a low profile so that the debt collectors can't find where he's hiding. At the same time, however, Robert dreams of becoming a famous and respected composer. And so, Robert lives in conflict, seeking anonymity and fame at the same time.

☛ V.A. was unsure of himself for once. "I dreamt of a ... nightmarish café, brilliantly lit, but underground, with no way out. I'd been dead a long, long time. The waitresses all had the same face. The food was soap, the only drink was cups of lather. The music in the café was"—he wagged an exhausted finger at the MS—"this."

Related Characters: Robert Frobisher, Vyvyan Ayrs (speaker), Sonmi~451, Papa Song

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis



This passage describes the moment when the elderly composer Vyvyan Ayrs writes one of his first great melodies in a long time. Robert refers to Vyvyan Ayrs as "V.A.," suggesting that by this point in the story, Ayrs is such a familiar fixture in Robert's life that Robert decides to abbreviate his name rather than continuing to write it out. Robert's attitude toward Ayrs remains ambivalent throughout the story, shifting from admiration to frustration to contempt, depending on what the old composer has done lately.


Ayrs's dream of a "nightmarish café" may seem random at first, but Chapter 5 reveals that in fact, this café is a real place called Papa Song's where Sonmi~451 works. Ayrs seems to see the future in a vision and bring a melody back with him. This strange passage shows how the past and future connect to each other, and it also dramatizes the strange, inexplicable nature of inspiration.

☛ She plays with that birthmark in the hollow of my shoulder, the one you said resembles a comet—can't abide the woman dabbling with my skin.

Related Characters: Robert Frobisher (speaker), Luisa Rey, Timothy Cavendish, Sonmi~451, Meronym, Rufus Sixsmith,

Vyvyan Ayrs, Jocasta van Outryve de Crommelynck

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes a birthmark on Robert's shoulder that Jocasta notices while having sex with him. The passage is important for several reasons, perhaps above all because it introduces the comet, one of the most important images in the whole novel. At first, the comet birthmark seems to be a casual aside. Robert mentions that Rufus himself is the one who noted the birthmark's resemblance to a comet, perhaps suggesting that Robert and Rufus have themselves had sex with each other before. But when the next chapter reveals that Luisa Rey also has a comet birthmark in the same location, it seems that in fact, the comet might signify a lineage of reincarnation that includes Robert, Luisa, Timothy Cavendish, Sonmi~451, and Meronym.



The comet provides the clearest link between stories that, at first glance, might not seem to have many connections. The comet's journey makes little logical sense, since many of the stories in the novel exist as fictional stories-within-stories, meaning that "real" characters seem to be reincarnations of "fictional" ones (for example, Sonmi has the same birthmark as Timothy, even though in her world, Timothy is a fictional character from a movie). Nevertheless, the stories of *Cloud Atlas* contain similar events and themes, and so the comet symbolizes how even events and characters with little logical connection might nevertheless be related.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☛ Robert Frobisher mentions a comet-shaped birthmark between his shoulder blade and collarbone.

I just don't believe in this crap. I just don't believe it. I don't.

Related Characters: Luisa Rey (speaker), Adam Ewing, Robert Frobisher, Rufus Sixsmith

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

This quote contains narration in normal font and Luisa's thoughts in italics. It describes the moment after Rufus Sixsmith's assassination when Luisa reads Robert Frobisher's letters to Rufus and realizes that she has the exact same birthmark as Robert. One of the key elements of *Cloud Atlas's* structure is that in the first half of the book, each character reads (or watches) the events of the previous chapter, with Robert reading Adam Ewing's journal, then Luisa reading Robert's letters, then Timothy Cavendish reading a manuscript of Luisa's story, and so on.

This nested structure of the novel, tied together by the comet birthmark, serves many purposes. On the one hand, it emphasizes connections between the past and present, showing how events that happen in the past have a direct connection to events that happen in the present and future. Additionally, the structure emphasizes the role of media, exploring the role that books, films, and historical documents all play in shaping people's worldviews.

☝ He yanks the wheel sharply, and metal screams as the Beetle is sandwiched between his car and the bridge railing until the railing unzips from its concrete and the Beetle lurches out into space.

Related Characters: Luisa Rey, Rufus Sixsmith, Bill Smoke

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the moment when the hired assassin Bill Smoke rams his black Chevy into Luisa Rey's Volkswagen Beetle. Luisa has a report from Rufus Sixsmith that will prove that Seaboard Power is trying to cover up the possibility of a serious accident at their Swanekke nuclear plant, and so Bill Smoke's job is to get rid of Luisa in a way that looks like an accident. Fittingly for a man named "Smoke," Bill Smoke tries to cover up the truth, suggesting that perhaps the real truth doesn't matter in a world where some companies are powerful enough to shape narratives for themselves—although the chapter's cliffhanger ending leaves open the question of whether it's really so easy to suppress the truth.

Bill Smoke's black Chevy and Luisa Rey's VW Beetle each symbolize the values that they represent. The Beetle is synonymous with hippie culture, including environmentalism, which reflects Luisa's anti-nuclear

activism. Meanwhile, Chevrolet is one of the most famous American companies, and so Bill Smoke's black Chevy represents American industry's attempt to forcefully stifle environmentalist values.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ I will not deny a nascent sense of a silver lining to this tragic turn. My Haymarket office suite housed ninety-five unsold shrink-wraps of Dermot Hoggins's *Knuckle Sandwich*, impassioned memoir of Britain's soon to be most famous murderer. Frank Sprat—my stalwart printer in Sevenoaks, to whom I owed so much money I had the poor man over a barrel—still had the plates and was ready to roll at a moment's notice.

Hardcovers, ladies and gentlemen.

Fourteen pounds ninety-nine pence a shot.

A taste of honey!

Related Characters: Timothy Cavendish (speaker), Robert Frobisher, Dermot Hoggins

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes a transformative moment in Timothy Cavendish's life when he goes from the owner of a small vanity publishing house to an overnight publishing success. All this happens because one of Timothy's authors (Dermot Hoggins) happened to get angry at a critic (Felix Finch) and throw him off a roof, setting off a chain of events that made Dermot famous and increased demand for his previously obscure memoir. The passage above captures Timothy's distinctive way of speaking. Although Timothy can be selfish and opportunistic, he often uses polite language, suggesting that the success of *Knuckle Sandwich* is simply a silver lining to a tragedy (even though Timothy doesn't actually care about Finch's death and is thrilled to be making so much money).

Despite Timothy's boasting, this passage also foreshadows trouble ahead with Timothy's mention of debts to his printer. Like Robert Frobisher before him, Timothy racks up debts without any intention of repaying them, and this habit comes back to haunt him once he stumbles into real success. Timothy has no regrets about exploiting his printer for his own advantage, and so this passage foreshadows that perhaps one day the people Timothy takes advantage

of will stop being so accommodating and take advantage of Timothy in return.

☛ Ominous, no? I had seen *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* with an extraordinarily talentless but wealthy and widowed poetess whose collected works, *Verses Wild & Wayward*, I was annotating but who was less widowed than initially claimed, alas. "Look, I'm sure you're a reasonable woman." The oxymoron passed without comment. "So read my lips. I am not supposed to be here. I checked into Aurora House believing it to be a hotel."

Related Characters: Timothy Cavendish (speaker), Denholme Cavendish, Mrs. Noakes

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Timothy Cavendish describes his reaction after learning that his brother, Denholme Cavendish, has tricked him and that Aurora House isn't a hotel but in fact a nursing home where Timothy finds himself treated like a prisoner. Timothy thinks immediately of the 1975 film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which tells the story of a man who gets trapped in psychiatric facility. Timothy often makes references to books and films, and this reflects how media shapes his understanding of the world. Timothy's reliance on media resembles the structure of *Cloud Atlas* itself, since each chapter (except for the first and last chapters) features a character who references the events that happen in another chapter.


The irony of Timothy's situation is that, by checking himself into a nursing home instead of a hotel, Timothy demonstrates that he may be losing some of his mental sharpness and turning into the sort of person who usually inhabits a nursing home. Rather than accepting his fate, Timothy resists it, and so his encounter with his own mortality ends up ultimately inspiring him to change his ways.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☛ Truth is singular. Its "versions" are mistruths.

Related Characters: Sonmi~451 (speaker), The Archivist

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from near the very beginning of the Archivist's interview with Sonmi~451, when Sonmi promises to only tell the truth. It may seem surprising at first that Sonmi suggests that there's only one version of the truth, given that *Cloud Atlas* contains so many different characters with different perspectives that seem to each portray a variation of the truth. But Sonmi's statement makes more sense in the context of the dystopian "corpocratic" government in her country, where her reference to different "versions" of the truth seems to reference the government's extensive propaganda operations.

Arguably, *Cloud Atlas* leaves open the question of whether multiple versions of the truth exist or whether there are simply multiple ways to get at the same truth. Perhaps the best argument to support Sonmi's belief in a singular truth is the comet birthmark (which she has). The comet birthmark suggests that people and events in one time period may simply be reincarnations of the same people and events from an earlier period; this, in turn, suggests that some deeper truths about humanity remain constant, even as superficial factors change.

☛ Catechism Three teaches that for servers to keep anything denies Papa Song's love for us and cheats His Investment. I wondered, did Yoona~939 still observe any Catechism? But misgivings, though grave, were soon lost in the treasures Yoona showed me there: a box of unpaired earrings, beads, tiaras. The exquisite sensation of dressing in pureblood clothes overcame my fear of being discovered. Greatest of all, however, was a book, a picture book.

Related Characters: Sonmi~451 (speaker), Adam Ewing, The Archivist, Yoona~939, Boardman Mephi, Papa Song

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which comes from Sonmi~451 during her interview with the Archivist, describes an important turning



point in her character development when her friend Yoona~939 introduces her to the world that exists beyond Papa Song's. Just as Adam Ewing's journal contained old-fashioned spellings of certain words, the transcript of Sonmi's interview contains new spellings of words that might exist in the future, like "xquisite" instead of "exquisite."

The reference to a Catechism (a set of questions and answers that lays out Christian doctrine) is one of several religious references in Sonmi's story—Sonmi's interview with the Archivist itself resembles the structure of a Catechism. Even more significant in this passage is the reference to a book. Sonmi has never encountered books before, and books become the cornerstone of her education as she "ascends" from being a nearly mindless worker to an intelligent writer and speaker. Books symbolize how, even in a future full of new technology, traditional education methods may still survive and have value.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞☞ Old Georgie's path an' mine crossed more times'n I'm comfy mem'ryin', an' after I'm died, no sayin' what that fangy devil won't try an' do to me ... so gimme some mutton an' I'll tell you 'bout our first meetin'. A fat jooesome slice, nay, none o' your burnt wafery off'rin's ...

Related Characters: Zachry Bailey (speaker), Sonmi~451, Old Georgie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

This quote begins the sixth chapter of the book and introduces its narrator, Zachry Bailey, as well as the evil spirit Old Georgie who often tempts Zachry and may or may not actually exist. Right away, this passage establishes Zachry's unusual speaking style, which seems both archaic and futuristic at the same time. As the chapter goes on, it becomes clear that Zachry's chapter takes place after Sonmi's, and so Zachry's language is a far-future dialect of modern English. In Sonmi's chapter, the English language has already evolved, with the "ex" at the start of some words turning into "x" for example. In Zachry's time, this trend of dropping letters increases significantly.

On the one hand, Zachry's tendency to replace letters with apostrophes feels like a throwback, recalling the speech patterns of Mark Twain's famous character Huckleberry

Finn. But on the other hand, there's also something futuristic about Zachry's language, and it could just as easily be an evolution of old internet slang (which also involved dropping letters). As the central story of the novel, Zachry's chapter combines several elements of all the other stories, combining the future and the past into one setting.

☞☞ So hungrysome was my curio, I held it again, an' the egg vibed warm till a ghost-girl flickered'n'appeared there! Yay, a ghost-girl, right 'bove the egg, as truesome as I'm sittin' here, her head'n'neck was jus' floatin' there, like 'flection in moon-water, an' she was talkin'! Now I got scared an' took my hands off the sil'vry egg, but the ghost-girl stayed, yay.

Related Characters: Zachry Bailey (speaker), Sonmi~451, The Archivist, Meronym, Adam Bailey

Related Themes:    



Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage Zachry describes when he peeks at Meronym's belongings and finds her "orison," a futuristic communication and recording device that Zachry describes as looking like an egg. Although Zachry doesn't understand at first what he's seeing, it's clear that he is watching some sort of projection of Sonmi~451's conversation with the Archivist from the previous chapter. In Zachry's culture, Sonmi is a goddess, and so seeing the real version of her threatens to undermine his whole religion, which is why Meronym initially tried to hide the orison from Zachry. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Zachry can't help following his curiosity, and so the orison represents a sort of "forbidden fruit" that gives Zachry knowledge, but at a cost. Just as Sonmi herself struggled with the knowledge that fabricants lived in slave-like conditions, Zachry must confront the knowledge that the god of his religion might not be what he expected, illustrating how knowledge can be both a blessing and a curse.

☞☞ *List'n, savages an' Civ'lizeds ain't dividied by tribes or b'liefs or mountain ranges, nay, ev'ry human is both, yay. Old Uns'd got the Smart o' gods but the savagery o' jackals an' that's what tripped the Fall. Some savages what I knowed got a beaoutsome Civ'lized heart beatin' in their ribs. Maybe some Kona. Not 'nuff to say-so their hole tribe, but who knows one day? One day.*

Related Characters: Meronym (speaker), Adam Ewing, Zachry Bailey, Adam Bailey

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 303



Explanation and Analysis


This quote comes after Meronym has decided that instead of trying not to interfere with the lifestyle of the Valleymen, she will just try to be honest with Zachry, even if she risks drastically altering his worldview. Zachry wonders if the violent Kona tribe has the right idea, since they always seem to triumph over the peaceful Kona, who try to act more civilized (“Civ’lized”). In her quote, Meronym argues that it’s not as simple as a group of people being civilized or uncivilized—everyone has a little bit of both qualities in them.

Meronym seems to speak Zachry’s dialect like a native speaker, but other Prescients speak in a way that sounds strange to Zachry, suggesting that Meronym has studied the culture of the Valleymen extensively. Although she uses the word “savages,” she seems to mean it in a very different context than someone like Adam Ewing would use the word “savages.” In fact, Meronym believes that some of the Kona might be just as “Civ’lized” as any Prescient or Valleymen, and so she likely uses the word “savage” just because she knows Zachry is familiar with it. The story raises questions about the costs and benefits of civilization, and this passage highlights how one of the main advantages of civilization (advanced technology) can directly cause one of the main disadvantages (self-destruction, like the nuclear disaster called the Fall).

☝ Zachry my old pa was a wyrd buggah, I won’t naysay it now he’s died. Oh, most o’ Pa’s yarnin’s was jus’ musey duck fartin’ an’ in his loonsome old age he even b’liefed Meronym the Prescient was his presh b’loved Sonmi, yay, he ’sisted it, he said he knowed it all by birthmarks an’ comets’n’all.

Related Characters: Adam Ewing, Sonmi~451, Zachry Bailey, The Archivist, Meronym, Jackson Ewing

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes after Zachry completes his story, when, following a brief jump ahead in time, one of Zachry’s children comments on Zachry’s story after his death. It mirrors the ending of the novel itself, where Adam Ewing’s son (Jackson Ewing) leaves a footnote about his dead father. Zachry’s child both confirms and casts doubt on Zachry’s story. On the one hand, the presence of the orison makes it clear that part of story involving Meronym and her record of Sonmi and the Archivist’s conversation is true. On the other hand, however, Zachry’s descendent notes that Zachry was eccentric and that he may have embellished or invented parts of his story.

Despite Meronym’s fear that she would destroy Zachry’s religion, it seems that Zachry held on to his beliefs, modifying them to fit the new information. Zachry came to believe that Meronym was the embodiment of the goddess Sonmi herself—which might even be true, if the comet birthmark that Sonmi and Meronym both share is evidence of reincarnation. The ending of Zachry’s story (the only story in the book that doesn’t get interrupted in the middle), reflects both how change is inevitable but also how people will find ways to adapt old traditions to new lifestyles.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ The economics of corpocracy. The genomics industry demands huge quantities of liquefied biomatter, for wombtanks, but most of all, for Soap. What cheaper way to supply this protein than by recycling fabricants who have reached the end of their working lives? Additionally, leftover “reclaimed proteins” are used to produce Papa Song food products, eaten by consumers in the corp’s dineries all over Nea So Copros. It is a perfect food cycle.

Related Characters: Sonmi~451 (speaker), The Archivist, Hae-Joo Im, Papa Song

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 343

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Sonmi’s horror after she and Hae-Joo Im witness what happens to fabricants at the end of their life cycle. When Sonmi worked at Papa Song’s, they told her that after 12 years, fabricants earned their retirement and a ride on a Golden Ark to Hawaii. As Sonmi learns, however, this was all a lie—in fact, “retired”

fabricants get slaughtered like cattle and turned into food for living fabricants and even for pureblood humans. The whole process satirizes the fast food industry, blurring the line between the industry's brutally efficient animal-slaughtering processes and its equally efficient process for controlling human employees. Papa Song's becomes a microcosm of the whole nation of Nea So Copros, where the "corpocratic" government treats large groups of humans, both fabricant and pureblood, as totally expendable, leaving them to languish in slums like the one that Sonmi and Hae-Joo visit. Sonmi's speech shows the danger of putting profit above human welfare, showing how greed can lead to business practices that might be efficient economically—but which have extremely negative effects on many people's welfare.

☞ We see a game beyond the endgame. I refer to my *Declarations*, Archivist. Media has flooded Nea So Copros with my Catechisms. Every schoolchild in corpocracy knows my twelve "blasphemies" now.

Related Characters: Sonmi~451 (speaker), Luisa Rey, Zachry Bailey, The Archivist, Hae-Joo Im, Boardman Mephi

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from near the end of Sonmi's story, where she reveals a twist: she believes that many of the Union activists that she met on her journey, like Boardman Mephi and Hae-Joo Im, were actually people the government planted in order to make the public afraid of giving rights to fabricants. Moreover, despite knowing about this deception, Sonmi decided to go along with them anyway and write her *Declarations*.

As with many stories in *Cloud Atlas*, including Zachry's in the previous chapter, the ambiguous ending of Sonmi's story raises more questions than it answers. Is Sonmi correct that Mephi and Hae-Joo worked for the government, or is she simply discouraged that the Union didn't live up to her goals? And if Sonmi is correct, did she make the right choice by collaborating with Mephi and Hae-Joo, even though she knew they weren't really on her side? The question about the value of protest and the most effective strategies reverberates throughout the novel, perhaps most prominently in Luisa Rey's chapter, which takes place in the politically turbulent Vietnam War years and features many environmental activists.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ "I wouldn't have locked up Noakes and stolen a car if I'd known you couldn't pick the lock!"

"Aye, exactly, you're nesh, so you needed encouragement."

Related Characters: Timothy Cavendish, Ernie Blacksmith (speaker), Mrs. Noakes, Veronica Costello

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 380

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation between Timothy Cavendish and Ernie Blacksmith takes place just as Timothy is about to ram their stolen car through the gate of Aurora House. Although Ernie previously told Timothy that he could pick the lock on the gate, he reveals that he always planned to smash a car through the gate—and simply waited to tell Timothy until it was too late for Timothy to back out. ("Nesh" is slang for "sensitive" or perhaps "oversensitive.")

Although Ernie's actions might seem reckless, they also show that he understands something important about Timothy. Timothy's time in Aurora House leaves him discouraged, and in the days around Christmas, he considers resigning himself to living the rest of his life in the nursing home. Ernie, however, realizes that Timothy still has a lot of fight left in him—he just needs some encouragement to help him get his spark back. And so, by crashing through the Aurora House gate with Ernie and Veronica, the selfish Timothy finally learns the value of building genuine connections with other people rather than treating relationships like business transactions.

☞ That is more or less it. Middle age is flown, but it is attitude, not years, that condemns one to the ranks of the Undead, or else proffers salvation. In the domain of the young there dwells many an Undead soul. They rush about so, their inner putrefaction is concealed for a few decades, that is all.

Related Characters: Timothy Cavendish (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 387

Explanation and Analysis


This quote comes from the end of Timothy Cavendish's story, after he himself has already declared "THE END" and moved into a sort of epilogue. Although Timothy often uses

sarcasm and euphemism, here, he states the themes of his story rather succinctly. According to Timothy, a person's age has nothing to do with whether they are "Undead" (i.e., a person who moves through life carelessly, like a zombie). Youth can hide a person's "Undead" status, but with age, a person's true nature comes out. Timothy himself had a brush with becoming "Undead" during his darkest moments at Aurora House when he considered giving up on his escape plans. But ultimately, his daring escape from the nursing home reinvigorates him, helping him discover that he still has plenty of things he wants to do with his life. Like Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* (a story that Timothy references at one point), Timothy doesn't let his age stop him from starting his life over and attempting to become a better person.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ "I ask three simple questions. How did he get that power? How is he using it? And how can it be taken off the sonofabitch?"

Related Characters: Luisa Rey (speaker), Dr. Henry Goose

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 403


Explanation and Analysis

This is something that Luisa Rey says during a conversation with some young men at a party hosted by her mother (Judith Rey) and stepfather. Although Luisa's mother hopes Luisa might meet a nice young man, Luisa's choice of conversation topics shows that she's not great at making small talk—and perhaps has no desire to improve. Although Luisa's quote seems to be an offhand comment about Cold War politics, it ties into several of the main themes in her story and in *Cloud Atlas* in general.

Luisa's reference to people in power being "sonofabitches" suggests a distrust of authority, which makes sense, given how many powerful people want to assassinate or otherwise silence her. It also ties together with her journalistic duty to always tell the truth, even about powerful people. In the final chapter of the book, Henry Goose proposes a theory of power about how the strong eat the weak. While Luisa's theory of power doesn't necessarily contradict Henry's, she focuses more on how to evaluate and limit the influence of people in power, reflecting how her values and goals as a character differ greatly from Henry's.

☝ Seaboardgate is no longer her scoop. Swanekke swarms with reporters, Senate investigators, FBI agents, county police, and Hollywood scriptwriters. Swanekke B is in mothballs; C is suspended.

Related Characters: Luisa Rey, Joe Napier, Lloyd Hooks, William Wiley

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 435

Explanation and Analysis


This passage describes the moment when, after Luisa successfully exposes the corruption at the Swanekke nuclear power plant, she leaves the story over to others. The made-up word "Seaboardgate" is a reference to Watergate, which happened in real life just a few years before the fictional events of Luisa's story. The different people who swoop down on Swanekke all reflect different ways of telling the truth (or twisting it), showing how politicians, law enforcement, and entertainers all try to put their own stamp on major events.


Although Luisa's story ends happily in many ways, with her alive and Lloyd Hooks headed to jail, not all is well. Joe Napier died protecting Luisa, and the slippery William Wiley seems to dodge the consequences of his actions by switching sides yet again and trying to pin everything on Hooks. This ending reflects the morally gray worlds of many pulp detective novels as well as matching the hopeful but ambiguous endings of the other stories in *Cloud Atlas*.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ Spent the fortnight gone in the music room, reworking my year's fragments into a "sextet for overlapping soloists": piano, clarinet, 'cello, flute, oboe, and violin, each in its own language of key, scale, and color. In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recontinued, in order. Revolutionary or gimmicky? Shan't know until it's finished, and by then it'll be too late, but it's the first thing I think of when I wake, and the last thing I think of before I fall asleep.

Related Characters: Robert Frobisher (speaker), Luisa Rey

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 



Page Number: 445


Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Robert Frobisher describes his plan for a piece of music called the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. As Luisa Rey's story reveals, this sextet never becomes a major success, but it does go on to become a cult classic among record collectors. With the reference to six "overlapping soloists" the structure of Robert's composition has clear parallels to the structure of the novel *Cloud Atlas* itself, which contains six stories that each focus on a different character and where each story gets "interrupted by its successor," just like in Robert's composition. Robert also mentions how each solo is in a different "language," which parallels how each of the six stories in *Cloud Atlas* has a very different tone and narrator. Robert's concerns about whether his concept is "revolutionary or gimmicky" seems to playfully encourage an autobiographical interpretation (that author David Mitchell himself felt anxiety over the state of his novel), breaking the fourth wall and adding yet another layer to the book.

☝ Time cannot permeate this sabbatical. We do not stay dead long. Once my Luger lets me go, my birth, next time around, will be upon me in a heartbeat. Thirteen years from now we'll meet again at Gresham, ten years later I'll be back in this same room, holding this same gun, composing this same letter, my resolution as perfect as my many-headed sextet. Such elegant certainties comfort me at this quiet hour.

Related Characters: Robert Frobisher (speaker), Rufus Sixsmith, Vyvyan Ayr

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 471

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Robert's final letter to Rufus Sixsmith, as he describes the moments leading up to his own suicide. Robert's previous few letters have all suggested a deteriorating mental state as he slips into despair and seems to lose track of time. Despite the extremely dark ending to Robert's letters, they still contain a glimmer of hope—while Robert's mention of a "next time around" sounds like the orbit of a comet, and some part of Robert seems to get reincarnated in the future characters who all

share a comet birthmark with him.

Robert's language in this passage strongly recalls the concept of "eternal recurrence" associated with Friedrich Nietzsche (one of Vyvyan Ayr's favorite philosophers). The novel often deliberately mashes together different religious and philosophical ideas, in this case drawing connections between the Buddhist concept of reincarnation and the secular concept of eternal recurrence, which is the idea that time repeats itself over and over and the same events happen each time. In a way, Robert almost seems to realize that he is trapped inside a book, since a book is the perfect example of a cycle where the same events repeat every time.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ "The weak are meat the strong do eat."

Related Characters: Dr. Henry Goose (speaker), Adam Ewing, Sonmi~451, Sonmi~451, Vyvyan Ayr, Preacher Horrox

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 489

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, which occurs during a conversation with Preacher Horrox and gets repeated a few pages later, outlines Dr. Henry Goose's philosophy of how some humans achieve power over others. Henry's philosophy bears a strong resemblance to Darwin's concept of "survival of the fittest," and perhaps an even stronger resemblance to Social Darwinism, a social and political movement that loosely used Darwin as an excuse to champion eugenics and which often served as a justification for racism. The events of Adam Ewing's journal predate the publication of Darwin's most famous work, *On the Origin of Species*, but it's almost as if Henry can see the future, just as Vyvyan Ayr has a vision of the future café where Sonmi~451 works. In fact, Henry himself seems to predict Sonmi's world—his quote about meat could just as easily apply to how fabricants get slaughtered and turned into recycled food to satisfy the corporatic government's insatiable economic needs. Henry's theory of power encourages selfishness and greed instead of cooperation, and so for this reason, it makes sense that Henry was secretly a villain the whole time, since he shares the same selfish values as many of the other evil characters in the novel.

●● Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?

Related Characters: Adam Ewing (speaker), Sonmi~451, Jackson Ewing

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 509

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is the final line of Adam Ewing's journal (not counting the brief footnote by Jackson Ewing about how his father's handwriting trails off). On the most basic level, Adam's quote means that every big thing is often made up

of smaller parts. Specifically, Adam's quote refers to people who want to change the world. Adam notes the difficulty of trying to change human nature and of overcoming opponents who resort to violence—all of the stories in *Cloud Atlas* dramatize this struggle. But despite all the barriers to change, Adam remains hopeful that change is possible—or that at the very least, it's worthwhile to try. Good people may seem as small and powerless as drops of water, but an ocean is mighty, and Adam suggests that when good people work together, their cooperation can turn drops of water into an ocean, perhaps ultimately bringing about a better world.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Thursday, 7th November—Writing in his journal, Adam Ewing talks about a recent experience he had outside an Indian village: he noticed some tracks and follows them to find Dr. Henry Goose, a surgeon who is white and from London. Adam asks Dr. Goose if he can help him, but Dr. Goose just shakes his head. He shows Adam a handkerchief full of teeth and claims they're used to make dentures and are extremely valuable.

Henry explains that he is in India because an old marchioness in London spread rumors about him that caused society to shun him. The marchioness herself wears dentures made of human teeth. Henry plans to go back to London and tell everyone that the Marchioness got her teeth from a “cannibal” in the South Pacific, then when people ask for evidence, he'll fling his own new collection of teeth in her face. Adam Ewing thinks Henry is crazy, so he quickly says goodbye.

Friday, 8th November—Adam Ewing looks out his window at a shipyard and finds that his ship, the *Prophetess*, still needs a week of work before it's ready. In the meantime, he's staying at a place called the *Musket*, and he happens to see Henry (who is also staying there), and they have breakfast together. Adam decides that, while Henry has his quirks, Adam judged him too harshly the previous day. They enjoy conversing, and Henry has a chess set that they can use until either Adam's ship is repaired or the ship Henry plans to take arrives.

Saturday, 9th November—Adam Ewing's ship still looks like it's in bad shape, so he and Henry head for a local beach. As they get outside of the Indian village, they hear a humming sound. They come across a public flogging where they are the only two white people present but all castes of Indians have gathered. The humming comes from the darkest-skinned, enslaved people, who make a humming sound as they watch the punishment. The victim is tied up and looks older, with gray hair. Suddenly, the man being flogged looks Adam in the eye. Adam asks the people what crime the man committed, but he soon realizes that it would be better for him and Henry to leave.

Cloud Atlas, which contains six separate but interconnected stories, starts in the 1800s. For the first narrator, Adam Ewing, author David Mitchell mimics the style of real journals from that time period (while lightly modernizing some of the spellings and language). Fittingly, the novel begins with a man named Adam—in the *Book of Genesis*, Adam is the name of the first man that God creates.



Adam Ewing's story takes place at the height of both colonialism and the slave trade, when global sea routes connected different parts of the world to a greater extent than ever before. Henry's reference to the South Pacific native people as “cannibals” reflects the prejudices that many white men like Adam (an American) and Henry (a Briton) would have held during the time period.



Chess often symbolizes a battle of wits and foreshadows a future conflict between Henry and Adam, even though it brings them together here. The name of Adam's ship—the *Prophetess*—is significant for several reasons. On the one hand, the book contains several religious themes, and a prophetess is a religious figure. The novel also deals with the future, which is what a prophetess would predict. Finally, “prophetess” may be a play on the word “profit” since profits and greed play an essential role in each story within *Cloud Atlas*.



The scene Adam witnesses conveys the brutality of slavery. Although this passage takes place on a Pacific island, it shows clear parallels to slavery stories from America and elsewhere in the world, suggesting slavery's global reach. Eyes are a recurring motif in the story, and Adam's eye contact with the man being whipped suggests that they share a connection, even if Adam hesitates to acknowledge it at first.



Sunday, 10th November—Adam Ewing finds that the place where he’s staying has turned into a makeshift bordello, where white men, including Mr. Boerhaave (the first mate of Adam’s ship), find Indian girls. Adam and Henry disapprove, so they decide to go out instead of taking breakfast. Adam goes back to hide his journal and finds one of the white men having sex with an Indian girl in his own bed. When Adam complains to the innkeeper, the innkeeper just offers him a discount on one of the girls. Adam declines, protesting that he is a husband and a father.

Adam Ewing and Henry go to the local chapel for a simple service. Afterward, an old man from their chapel named Mr. Evans invites them to a meal. They accept and go with him to his farmstead. Over the meal, Mr. Evans and another guest, Mr. D’Arnoq, talk about places they’ve traveled, including Chatham Isle. Henry asks if there are any Christian missionaries in Chatham Isle, but Mr. Evans says the aboriginal Maori don’t like when outsiders spoil their “Moriore.” Adam isn’t familiar with the word “Moriore,” but he learns from Mr. D’Arnoq that it has an interesting history, which Adam promises to recount in later entries of his journal.

Monday, 11th November—While Adam Ewing and Henry are having breakfast at the inn, Mr. Evans comes to see them. A widowed neighbor of Mr. Evans needs a doctor urgently, so Henry grabs his kit and rushes off to help.

Adam Ewing begins recounting the story that he heard from Mr. Evans and Mr. D’Arnoq about the Moriore people of the Chatham Isle (also called Rēkohu in the local language), the island they’re currently on. Mr. Evans believes the Moriore are the descendants of Jews exiled from Spain, while Mr. D’Arnoq feels that they must be Maori who got stranded on remote islands. The Moriore live in isolation, without even a word for “race,” and they still get much of their food from foraging.

What distinguishes the Moriore from similar isolated island tribes is their unusual religion, which strictly forbids murder. Any Moriore who kills someone also destroys their own *mana* and gets immediately ostracized from the tribe—they pretend they can’t even see the murderer. And so, they’ve lived without war, possibly for millennia.

Then, one day fifty years ago, the British ship the HMS *Chatham* landed on the Moriore islands. They introduce foreign plants and slaughter many seals for their pelts, marking the beginning of the end for the traditional Moriore way of life. Whalers come to the area, and they bring diseases with them, further eroding the Moriore traditions.

Mr. Boerhaave represents the boorish way that white foreigners treated locals in the Pacific. The innkeeper’s indifference to Boerhaave’s actions suggests that Boerhaave’s behavior is typical, and that Adam is unusual for disapproving.



The chapel represents an attempt by white European and American travelers to bring their own culture abroad. While Mr. Boerhaave interacts with the local culture like a conqueror, Adam tries to isolate himself from it. While Adam’s behavior is less aggressive than Boerhaave’s, it nevertheless suggests discomfort with the local way of life and a belief in the superiority of the customs of his own culture.



European doctors are rare in this part of the world, so Henry Goose finds his services in high demand.



Although the Moriore are a real group of people, Mr. Evans and Mr. D’Arnoq don’t know the real history, and so the version they tell combines fact with myth. Their ignorance reflects how, despite how connected the world was becoming, some subjects still remained a mystery.



Mr. Evans and Mr. D’Arnoq seem to exaggerate elements of the Moriore history. Although they seem to admire the Moriore, their idealized version of the story distorts the truth and exoticizes the Moriore.



The Chatham (the ship) represents the brutality of colonialism. The British violently exploit the land and even impose a new name on it, reflecting how colonialism destroys local traditions.



Sailors report back to New Zealand that the Moriori islands are full of valuable eels and shellfish to harvest, with a native population that never fights back. A ship of 500 Maori men and women sets off to settle the islands, but the ship lacks proper supplies, and the passengers arrive sick and weak. The Moriori have met Maori before and never had trouble, so they help tend to the sick Maori on the ship. But then another ship with 400 Maori arrives, and they begin claiming the Chathams as their own.

The Moriori men go off to debate whether they'll still lose their *mana* if they kill foreign Maori, but the elders insist on remaining peaceful, even toward enemies. Meanwhile, the Maori try to overcome their numerical disadvantage by striking first. When the Moriori men get back from their counsel, they find that the Maori have already slain many of the women and children.

At this point in the story, Adam Ewing interrupts to ask Mr. Evans and Mr. D'Arnoq why none of the white settlers on the island tried to stop the Maori. Mr. Evans tells him that when Maori warriors enter a blood frenzy, they become like sharks. Writing in his journal in the present, Adam muses that as much as God loves peace, it doesn't help if your neighbors *don't* like peace.

Night—Adam Ewing asks around at his inn, the *Musket*, and finds that many people don't like Mr. D'Arnoq, who is rumored to be mixed-race. They also don't like the Moriori, with one drunk Maori telling Adam that the whole history of the Moriori is all a story invented by Mr. D'Arnoq so that he has an excuse to take Chatham Isle from the Maori. A nearby white man suggests that the Maori did white people a favor by clearing out the Moriori. Adam is horrified, believing that white men should "civilize" the "Black races" by converting them instead of killing them. One man points out Adam's hypocrisy, since America (where Adam is from) still has slavery. Henry remains ambivalent on the value of missionaries.

Tuesday, 12th November—Captain Molyneux, the captain of Adam Ewing's ship, comes to look at the progress of the ship's repairs in the shipyard. To Adam's surprise, the man asks to speak with Henry in private. **Later**—Adam finds out the captain has an illness that he doesn't want to talk about. Although Henry also doesn't say anything, it seems the captain has gout.

While Mr. Evans and Mr. D'Arnoq seem to admire the peacefulness of the Moriori, the Maori see the Moriori's pacificism as an opportunity. The Maori themselves have been victims of colonialism, showing how cycles of violence can lead to role reversals, with victims becoming perpetrators.



The Moriori elders have the strongest connection to the old traditions, and so they are most adamant about interpreting old doctrines literally, whereas the younger Moriori are more willing to adapt their ways, illustrating a generational divide.



This journal entry deals with the difficult subject of pacificism. Adam, like many, acknowledges the virtues of pacificism, but he wonders if it is a viable philosophy in such a violent world. Most of the other stories in the novel also explore this theme to some extent.



The different versions of the story that Adam hears at the bar suggests that different people hold their own versions of the truth. Although Adam has demonstrated that he's more tolerant than people around him like Mr. Boerhaave, he still holds some racist views, particularly his opinion that it's possible to put all non-white people into a single group that needs to be "civilized."



Captain Molyneux's shame about his illness suggests that he fears looking weak. Perhaps he has good reason to fear looking weak, since the Moriori themselves became victims of the Maori because they looked like such an easy target.



Wednesday, 13th November—One morning, while Henry is off treating the widow again, Adam Ewing goes to climb a hill called Conical Tor to get a better view of Chatham Isle. It's a tough climb, and when he makes it to the top, there's too much mist to see anything. At the top of Conical Tor is a crater. Adam gets startled while exploring the crater and fears it's an evil spirit, but it turns out to just be a bird. Nevertheless, he suddenly feels himself falling into the crater.

Moss and mulch in the crater cushion Adam Ewing's fall. His eyes adjust to the darkness, and he sees faces carved into the wood of trees. Adam thinks it must be the work of the Moriori. He hears a noise and asks whoever's there to show themselves, but it's just a salamander. Adam wants to get out. After a struggle, he finally manages to climb over the crater's lip. He doesn't tell anyone about the tree carvings, which he calls "dendroglyphs," since he doesn't want white collectors to find and sell them.

Evening—Henry gets back to the *Musket* after treating the widow. He's concerned to see Adam Ewing's injuries (from falling into the crater). Since Adam isn't sure when he'll see Henry—or any skilled doctor—again, he tells him about his injuries and some "spells" he's been having lately. Henry advises him to get back to San Francisco and see a specialist on tropical parasites. After hearing this, Adam doesn't sleep well.

Thursday, 14th November—In the morning, Adam Ewing finally boards the *Prophetess* and sets sail. His cabin is cramped, making the voyage unpleasant. Adam gets a pleasant surprise, however, when he suddenly sees Henry. It turns out Henry accepted a position as the ship's doctor.

Friday, 15th November—Many sailors are superstitious and don't like working on Fridays, but Captain Molyneux puts them to work. Adam Ewing and Henry stay out of the way. *Afternoon*—A Swedish sailor comes to visit Adam and Henry. The Swede asks the two men if they'll make a deal and tell him where the best "veins" are. Adam realizes he means California mining veins, then promises the Swede that he really knows nothing on the topic, but he agrees to mark some rumored gold-mining areas on a map.

The first mate, Mr. Boerhaave, comes down and gets angry at the Swede for bothering a passenger and demands to take the map Adam Ewing gave him. Mr. Boerhaave punishes the Swede by putting him on masthead watch. Mr. Boerhaave then warns Adam that he once saw a careless passenger just like him fall overboard and get eaten by a shark.

The "evil spirit" that Adam believes he sees will become significant much later in the story, gaining new meaning in particular in Chapter 6. Falling is another common motif in the novel and usually symbolizes how, despite a character's best efforts, they aren't in control of what's going on around them.



Adam's fall into darkness gives this passage a dreamlike quality. Although Adam's story is primarily a work of historical fiction, other stories in the novel contain more fantastical elements, and touches of fantasy appear in the grounded stories like Adam's. This passage may be a joking reference to Biblical Adam, who also famously "fell," although his fall wasn't a literal fall into a crater but instead a moral "fall."



Tropical parasites represent how men like Adam Ewing aren't suited to life in places like the Chatham Islands, where Adam is an outsider. The island seems to be physically repelling Adam, first by dragging him into a crater, then by giving him parasites.



In general, Adam seems to prefer keeping company not just with white men, but specifically with white men of his own social status, like the doctor Henry Goose.



The Swedish sailor's interest in California illustrates how many men at sea were just out looking to make some easy money. The Swede's questions are naïve, since almost no one actually got rich off the gold rush, but they show the enduring attraction of get-rich-quick myths, which appeal to human greed.



Mr. Boerhaave behaves ruthlessly and aggressively in all parts of his life, even toward his own crew members. He is one of the first of many characters who shows that sometimes the people with the smallest amount of authority abuse their power the most.



Saturday, 16th November—Adam Ewing complains that he's going to become the subject of gossip. The previous night, he went to sleep but woke up suddenly when he heard a voice call his name and tell him to stay quiet. A hand reaches out of the darkness to cover Adam's mouth, and the Moriori stranger says he's a friend of Mr. D'Arnoq. His name is Autua, and it turns out he's the man that Adam witnessed being whipped earlier. He reveals that Mr. D'Arnoq helped him stow away in Adam's cabin because he believed Adam to be a good man. Adam is annoyed at Mr. D'Arnoq for involving him, since if anyone gets caught, Adam will get in trouble too.

Adam Ewing remains reluctant to help, so Autua gives Adam a knife and says if Adam won't help him, Adam should just kill him right there so that it's quicker and less painful. Reluctantly, Adam says he'll help and tells Autua to put away the knife. Autua goes back under the ropes where he was hiding. But as Adam wonders how he might get out of his situation, he hears someone yell and fall onto the deck. Someone calls for Henry, the doctor. But there's no need for a doctor—the man is dead. Adam is relieved to see it's one of the Castilians and not someone he knows well, like his young Australian friend Rafael.

Adam Ewing leaves the dead man and picks up some food for Autua on the way back to his cabin. Grateful for the food, Autua tells Adam that pain is strong, but a friend's eyes are even stronger, pointing to his own eyes, then to Adam's. The gesture confuses Adam. Although he's still wary about his stowaway, Adam listens to Autua's life story because it helps him deal with his own seasickness.

As a boy on Rēkohu, Autua was eager to learn about the mysterious white people who sometimes came to the island. He had an uncle who worked for several years as a seal hunter on a ship from Boston, and he wanted to go see the foreign lands his uncle had seen. With his uncle's help, Autua got a position on a French whaling ship and saw the world. By age 20, Autua came back to his home island, hoping to build a life, but he found that the Maori had already slain most of the Moriori. Autua becomes a slave, like the other living Moriori.

Autua lived in slavery, enduring many cruelties until finally he saw an opportunity to escape. He escaped and was caught multiple times, but the Maori tolerated him because the supply of Moriori slaves had gotten so low. One night, Autua tried to trick his master's wife into feeding her husband poison fish, then he escaped in his master's canoe. Many months later, his master came looking for him—his dog ate the fish and died instead. His master publicly flogged Autua, which is where Adam Ewing first saw him. Autua knew at that moment that Adam would save him.

After learning about the Moriori from rumors and myths, Adam now faces a Moriori man in the flesh. Although Adam admired the Moriori from a distance, his first thought when he meets Autua is to fall back on his old prejudices about non-white races. Perhaps Mr. D'Arnoq chose Adam because he saw something in Adam and thought he could put aside his prejudices, or perhaps Adam was just the best available option.



This passage illustrates the brutal nature of life at sea. First Autua references the violence that he would face if Adam decided to turn him in. But as it turns out, the real violence in the scene happens randomly, when a sailor falls off a mast to his death. The lack of commotion after the death suggests that such incidents have become an accepted part of life at sea.



This passage parallels the passage where Autua looks at Adam while being whipped. It emphasizes how people across different cultures can find ways to communicate, even in cases where they don't speak the same language.



Although Autua seemed sheltered when Adam first met him, in fact, Autua has already seen the world. This passage humanizes Autua, showing him to be a well-rounded person with a family and his own goals in life—which makes his time in slavery such a cruel injustice.



Autua's attempt to kill his master shows extraordinary ingenuity, and he also shows remarkable persistence by continuing even after many failed attempts. Autua's escape foreshadows other escape stories that appear in later parts of the novel. The death of the master's dog reflects the unpredictable nature of violence and how even justified violence can lead to unintended victims.



Back in the present, the next morning, Adam Ewing tells Autua to pretend that he has just appeared and that he hasn't spoken to Adam before. Adam goes to Captain Molyneux and says he just found a stowaway who claims to be an able seaman. Mr. Boerhaave is skeptical and wants to punish Adam for collaborating with the stowaway. Captain Molyneux decides to see the stowaway for himself. Autua plays along well, pretending he just met Adam. Captain Molyneux orders Autua to lower one of the masts as a test. While Autua is up there, the captain orders Mr. Boerhaave to aim a gun at him and fire on command. But Autua works well, and so the captain doesn't give the order to fire. Captain Molyneux agrees to take Autua to **Hawaii**, if he works for no pay.

Wednesday, 20th November—Henry examines Adam Ewing and determines he does have a parasite. It's a Polynesian worm that, if left untreated, would eat his brain and make his eyeballs pop out. Fortunately, there's a cure, although the cure is itself dangerous and requires precise dosing. Henry warns Adam not to discuss his condition with the rest of the crew, since they might not understand and decide to throw him overboard. *Wednesday, 30th November*—Henry's powder, which Adam inhales through his nose, makes him feel better, making him feel more alert and causing strange dreams.

Wednesday, 2nd December—It's hot and miserable on the ship. Adam Ewing relaxes by playing chess with Henry. Recently, Autua thanked Adam for saving him and said he hoped he'd have the chance to save Adam's own life someday. Adam hopes it never comes to that, and Henry warns Adam about the dangers of interracial friendships. At night, Adam and Henry walk around on the deck, while other sailors sing bawdy songs. Rafael, the Australian, sings an American song that his mother knew somehow and taught to him.

Saturday, 7th December—Adam Ewing's eyes are yellowy, with red rims around the outside, but Henry assures him this is the medicine doing its work. *Sunday, 8th December*—Adam and Henry conduct their own private Bible reading in the morning. Adam's journal cuts off mid-sentence.

Although Captain Molyneux isn't necessarily a morally upstanding character, he is too profit-driven to ever give up a solid worker like Autua. Mr. Boerhaave, on the other hand, is a pure sadist, and he gets more joy out of domination than profit. While Captain Molyneux ultimately helps Autua by allowing him to go to Hawaii and try to reclaim his freedom, he does so for purely selfish reasons, and if Autua hadn't been able to lower the mast correctly, the captain would have let Boerhaave shoot him.



Adam's painful condition isolates him from the rest of the crew, since he can't discuss it with any of them for fear of appearing weak. He already knows not to discuss medical conditions on the ship, given Captain Molyneux's secrecy about his gout. The passage from November 30th reminds the reader that Henry comes from an era of pre-modern medicine when not all interventions from doctors were helpful—and some just made things worse.



After all the violence in previous parts of the story, things on the Prophetess finally seem to be settling down. Still, Adam's feverish condition suggests that not all is well. Like Adam, Henry is not a vocal racist but nevertheless sometimes reveals some very prejudiced viewpoints. Henry's motivations for isolating Adam from the rest of the crew, first by suggesting that Adam hide his illness, then by telling him to stay away from Autua, are unclear and perhaps even suspicious.



The abrupt ending of Adam's journal is deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand, it could suggest that Adam's story isn't complete yet and will resume at some later time. On the other hand, however, it could imply that Adam died mid-sentence of his parasite and therefore his story ends in an incomplete and unsatisfying way—at least for the moment.



CHAPTER 2

29TH–VI–1931—A letter from a man named Robert Frobisher (R.F.) addresses Rufus Sixsmith and comes from “Château Zedelghem, Neerbeke, West Vlaanderen” (in Belgium). The letter is the first in a series. In the letter, Robert describes a dream about being in a china shop and smashing things to make beautiful music. He wakes in his suite at his hotel to find a debt collector pounding rudely on his door. Robert escapes the collector by climbing out his window and down a drainpipe. He laments that he is a former Caius College (at Cambridge) music student forced to the brink of bankruptcy.

Robert weighs his options. He could beg for enough money from his uncle to rent a shabby room somewhere and teach music to amateurs for a living, but he hates this idea. Alternatively, he could try to find some Caius people to live with, but he'd have to hide the fact that he's broke. Finally, he could try to find a turf accountant (a person who takes bets), but that comes with the danger of losing. Robert knows he's the only one responsible for his problems, but he asks Rufus to bear with him and keep reading.

Robert's plan is to find an old and blind but esteemed British composer named Vyvyan Ayrs, who lives in seclusion in Belgium and hasn't put out any new work in a long time. But a review of a recent performance of an old work mentions that Vyvyan Ayrs has a whole drawer of unfinished works. Robert hopes to find the famous composer and become his amanuensis (assistant who transcribes work for an artist), then his protégé, ultimately becoming famous enough to make his father put him back in his will.

Robert tells about his trip to Belgium, complaining about all the poor accommodations along the way. In Belgium, things aren't much better, although he manages to find a police sergeant who tells him where Vyvyan Ayrs lives and allows him to borrow a bicycle from the lost-and-found. Robert rides his bike to the Château Zedelghem, where Ayrs lives.

When Robert makes it to Ayrs's place, he finds that Ayrs looks very old and very surprised to see him. Robert explains that he was a student at Caius College and wishes to be Ayrs's amanuensis. Ayrs thinks Robert is crazy. He asks if Robert was his teacher's favorite, and Robert replies that actually, his teacher hated him. Ayrs is intrigued. He decides to test Robert the next morning. Ayrs skips dinner that night, and Robert eats with Ayrs's wife, Jocasta van Outryve de Crommelynck, and his daughter, 17-year-old Eva.

The date on Robert's letter reveals that a lot of time has passed and that Adam would be long dead regardless of what happened with his brain parasite. In fact, the beginning of this chapter is so different from the previous chapter, that it isn't even clear at first if the stories take place in the same continuity. Whereas the previous chapter imitated the journal genre, this chapter imitates a genre called the epistolary novel, where a whole novel is composed of letters by the characters.



Robert's thought process reveals that he comes from a wealthy background. His education at Cambridge combined with his distaste for working with amateurs both suggest that he is most comfortable among the upper class. Nevertheless, it's clear that his circumstances have changed and he can no longer rely on the wealth that he once had.



Robert struggles to live up to his father's expectations, and a similar conflict plays out for some of the characters in later stories. Although Robert needs money, his even deeper goal seems to be recognition and respect, suggesting that he doesn't quite fit into the same mold as the many other profit-driven and greedy characters in the story.



Robert struggles to adjust to his new lifestyle after his father disinherits him. He has gotten used to luxurious accommodations, and so he doesn't know how to live within his new means.



Robert appeals to Ayrs by bringing up Cambridge, showing how important prestige and credentials are in his profession. But it also seems that Ayrs is a bit of a contrarian, and so he and Robert bond over the fact that Robert didn't fit in with his Cambridge classmates.



6TH–VII–1931—Robert scolds Rufus for sending him a telegram, since telegrams attract attention (specifically from debt collectors). He then continues his story about Ayrs, describing his audition for Ayrs as a mixed success. Robert plays several famous pieces while Ayrs heckles him. To Robert's surprise, however, at the end of the session, Ayrs admits that Robert might have potential, but he'll need time to think over taking him on as his amanuensis. Ayrs leaves. Robert dislikes needing Ayrs's help so much.

While Ayrs remains distant, Robert hears from Jocasta that despite Ayrs's cold exterior, he seems interested in Robert—it's just that he doesn't like handing out praise. Additionally, he hasn't composed for many years. Then, one day at breakfast, Ayrs approaches Robert and says he'd like for him to attempt to transcribe a viola melody. Robert is delighted at first, since he expected a smaller task to start, but then instead of playing viola, Ayrs just shouts some nonsense syllables at Robert. Robert can't follow and asks Ayrs to repeat or explain himself several times. At the end, Ayrs complains to a servant in earshot of Robert that Robert is helpless at transcription.

In the postscript to his letter, Robert asks Rufus for a loan. He says he can't ask anyone else because otherwise news would get around.

14TH–VII–1931—Rufus sends Robert some money, which Robert thanks him for in his next letter. That day, Ayrs comes and apologizes to Robert for treating him poorly. He asks Robert to stay for a few weeks or perhaps even a few months and accept a salary. Robert enthusiastically agrees. Ayrs sends Jocasta to fetch a bottle of wine.

Robert and Ayrs develop a work routine. Although Ayrs remains difficult, Robert learns to anticipate what he wants and even gets to make a suggestion or two. They work in the morning, then Ayrs naps in the afternoon while Robert works on his own material. Later, they have supper, and afterward, they listen to the radio or a gramophone. Sometimes friends come to visit, although Ayrs has few relatives.

Rufus's letters (and telegrams) don't appear in the novel, but Robert's references to them make it clear that the book only depicts one side of the conversation. Robert's early interactions with Ayrs reveal him to be a temperamental and mysterious man. He appears to dislike Robert on the surface, but his actions seem to reveal that he respects Robert more than he lets on.



Jocasta helps interpret the confusing moods of her husband. It seems Ayrs is someone who struggles to be open about his feelings—or perhaps he suffers from professional jealousy and insecurity after his long period without releasing any new works. During his first transcription with Robert, Ayrs's motivations become even more opaque, and Robert wonders for the first time whether Ayrs is really still a genius or whether he's too far past his prime.



Money problems continue to plague Robert, adding urgency to his business with Ayrs.



Ayrs seems to change his moods frequently. His earlier success has given him a sense of entitlement, and he expects others to bend to his whims, even though Ayrs doesn't seem to be the influential figure that he once was.



By spending time with Ayrs, Robert learns that the great composer lives a lonely lifestyle. The isolation of Ayrs's personal life contrasts with his widespread fame, suggesting how a person's public image doesn't necessarily reflect who they are as a person.



After a while, Robert begins to learn his way around the Château Zedelghem. At dinners, Eva complains about how long Robert is staying with them. As he looks around his room at the château, Robert finds a book that seems to be the travel journal of a man named Adam Ewing. The journal, which seems to have been published posthumously by Ewing's son, starts on the 99th page and ends mid-sentence about 40 pages later. He asks Rufus if he can track down the rest of Adam's journal, then he sends Sixsmith a list of the oldest books in the Zedelghem library in order to have them appraised.

28TH—VII—1931—Robert completes his first collaboration with Ayr's. It's a brief tone poem, but Robert considers it among his best work. He feels that he's now the "golden boy" for the first time in a long time. Jocasta offers Robert a bigger room, to the annoyance of Eva. Robert begins to fear that Jocasta is subtly flirting with him. She gives him gifts and makes ambiguous statements about his body. One night at dinner, Ayr's pulls out a pistol and says he can still shoot even though he's blind. Robert wonders if this is a threat.

29TH—VIII—1931—Robert references a letter from his father's "solicitor" that Rufus sent him, saying he found it boring. He says he will leave Zedelghem to go into town and meet the solicitor to sign documents. Meanwhile, at the château, Robert has begun to feel uneasy ever since he started "servicing" Jocasta every few nights whenever Eva isn't home. Even more than Ayr's, Robert fears the servant, Hendrick, who remains a mystery to Robert.

Robert goes into town to meet the "solicitor," but it's actually the bookseller that he and Rufus have been communicating with, and Robert has brought along some valuable books. After confirming there are no creditors lurking around, Robert allows the bookseller to inspect the books. After some haggling, Robert walks away with a lot of money.

Robert enjoys spending his money on various things like spats and a cigarette box, as well as some beer in a café. As he's walking around killing time before meeting back up with Ayr's, he happens to run into Eva, who is with a man twice her age who's wearing a wedding ring. Robert marvels at how bold they're both being. Later, back at Zedelghem, Robert confronts Eva about what he saw. She asks if he told anyone else yet, and he says no. Eva informs him that the older man is Monsieur van de Velde, and that she stays with his family during the school week. He was with her because the school doesn't like the girls to walk around unaccompanied. Eva asks what Robert thought van de Velde was going to do to her, and if he was jealous. Robert is shocked and stammers an apology. He's glad Eva will be leaving soon for Switzerland.

This passage offers an important clue about the larger structure of Cloud Atlas. The title of the first chapter is "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," and so it seems that Robert is reading the very text that appears in the first chapter of the novel. (The fact that Robert says the journal ends mid-sentence, also like Chapter 1, confirms this.) This also suggests that perhaps Robert's story will have its own connections to later stories.



As Robert gets closer to Ayr's and his family, he feels proud of accomplishing his goal, but he also realizes the dangers of spending so much time in isolation with them. It's impossible for Robert to keep his personal life separate from his work life, and this creates tension with the other members of the family, like Eva (who seems annoyed by Robert) and Jocasta (who seems to be flirting with Robert).



Robert uses euphemistic language, perhaps in case his letter gets intercepted, but it's pretty clear what he's referring to. The "solicitor" is actually a bookseller that Rufus knows who wants to look at Ayr's rare books, and the "servicing" of Jocasta refers to sex.



Despite Robert's relatively good relationship with Ayr's, he has no trouble stealing some books from his house and selling them for a profit. This small betrayal, combined with Robert's affair with Jocasta, suggest a growing conflict between Robert and his mentor.



Although Robert desperately needs money, he still can't resist spending what he has on extravagant things. Up until this point in the story, Robert and Eva have mostly stayed away from each other, but as Robert gets more involved with Ayr's work, he finds himself drawn even deeper into Ayr's family. This passage reflects the strict gender roles that existed in many parts of Europe at the time, where young women of a certain social class couldn't walk around in public without a chaperone to escort them.



29TH—VIII—1931—One evening, when Robert has Jocasta in his bedroom, Ayrs comes knocking and demands to be let in. Robert fears Ayrs is about to shoot him, but it turns out Ayrs is eager to record a violin melody before he loses it. Robert is so relieved that he doesn't even mind being asked to work in the middle of the night. Hendrick is standing by to help Ayrs get around, and Robert wonders again how much Hendrick knows about him and Jocasta.

Ayrs hums his violin sonata. Robert tells him it's strange, unlike anything that Ayrs—or anybody else, really—has done before. Ayrs says he dreamt the music came from a nightmarish café. After transcribing the melody, Robert calls Hendrick to take Ayrs back to bed. To Robert's horror, however, after he gets back in bed with Jocasta under his sheets, the blind Ayrs stumbles into his room to see him and sits on the bed, not far from where Jocasta is under the sheets.

Ayrs says he'll be direct: He's heard rumors that Jocasta is unfaithful, and he wants to know if she's made advances on Robert. Robert denies everything. Ayrs asks why a smart, rich, good-looking young man like Robert is still hanging around in Zedelghem. Robert says Ayrs is his muse, like the older poet Verlaine was to the younger poet Rimbaud. Eventually Ayrs leaves. After he's gone, Jocasta gets angry with Robert. When he asks why, she says that Ayrs loves Robert.

Later, Robert reports that all of Zedelghem seems to be stirring, with even the plumbing making a lot of noise. He reflects on Ayrs's desire to make immortal music and finds it vulgar and vain, likening it to ancient cave painting.

14TH—IX—1931—Sir Edward Elgar, one of the most famous English musicians other than Ayrs, stops by for a visit one day. Like Ayrs, Elgar is also old and in declining health. They talk for a while; Elgar mentions that, after a long break, he's working on a new symphony. The two of them eventually fall asleep, and Robert listens to their snores as if he's notating them. Three days later, Ayrs announces he wants to complete one last big symphonic work called *Eternal Recurrence*, based on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. He wants to keep Robert on for another six months in exchange for a continued salary.

As Robert spends more time with Ayrs, he gets bolder about how he deceives him, and this brings Robert dangerously close to getting caught. Due to his own wealthy upbringing, Robert is used to ignoring servants like Hendrick, but his own status as an assistant to Ayrs perhaps prompts him to give greater attention to people like Hendrick.



The nightmare café that Ayrs describes has a vaguely futuristic feel to it, and it strongly resembles the setting of a later story in the novel. This passage captures the mysterious nature of inspiration and how, with one of his best melodies, Ayrs seems to have a vision of a future world.



Verlaine and Rimbaud were French poets who had a short but passionate romance. While other parts of the story hint at a homoerotic subtext to the relationship between Ayrs and Robert, this passage makes that tension more explicit. Given that homosexuality was still illegal in many parts of Europe at this time and that Ayrs is already married, it makes sense that he would hide his feelings.



The noise that Robert hears at Zedelghem reflects the turmoil that he himself feels in his own head.



*Elgar is a real composer who is most famous for composing the Pomp and Circumstance Marches (which readers may recognize as the music that accompanies graduation processions). The 19th-century philosopher Nietzsche's concept of "eternal recurrence" (also sometimes translated as "eternal return") is the idea that time repeats itself and that the same events will happen again and again. (Note that the concept originated in ancient Greek philosophy—Nietzsche revived and expanded on the idea.) Eternal recurrence ties directly to the themes and structure of *Cloud Atlas*, where elements of some chapters come back again in other chapters.*



28TH—IX—1931—Jocasta begins to irritate Robert, asking about other women he's been with. She's fascinated by the birthmark on Robert, which looks like a **comet**. She even tells Robert she loves him. He tells her he's never loved anyone but himself. She gets angry and leaves. Robert has agreed to Ayr's proposal to stay for another six months. Later that day, he transcribes a piece based on the sound of burning leaves. Robert doesn't even remember when it became fall.

The comet birthmark is perhaps the most important image in the book. Comets follow an elliptical orbit, and so a comet ties in directly to the concept of eternal recurrence in the previous letter. Although this chapter doesn't end as abruptly as the previous one, it nevertheless leaves several crucial elements of the story unresolved.



CHAPTER 3

1. On a balcony in California where disco music is blaring from next door, the 63-year-old Rufus Sixsmith consider what would happen if jumped over the ledge and fell to the sidewalk. A young woman comes out to the balcony at the party next door. Rufus thinks, jokingly, that maybe he and the woman should make a suicide pact—although he doesn't actually plan to jump, he knows there are dangerous men out there like Napier and Grimaldi who want him dead. He's currently in hiding and gets scared when the wind slams the balcony door shut because it sounds like a gunshot. Rufus goes back inside to watch *M*A*S*H**.

The beginning of Chapter 3 establishes immediately that it takes place in a very different time and place from the previous story, with disco music replacing the classical music of Ayr's. Nevertheless, the character of Rufus Sixsmith appears in both stories. The fact that this chapter comes with its own sub-numbered chapters suggests that it stands as its own novella-within-a-novel.



2. The 26-year-old Luisa Rey hears a noise from the balcony next door. She feels nauseous from eating greasy chicken. A man in leather pants comes out and starts talking to her about his guru. He offers to give her weed and write a song about her for his next album. Luisa, who is a magazine gossip columnist, turns the man down.

This passage further establishes this chapter's setting in the 1970s, to the point where it borders on self-parody. The chapter is a totally different genre than the previous two, setting a tone that's pulpier—that is, more sensationalized—and less naturalistic.



3. As Luisa goes to take the elevator, Rufus holds the door for her with his cane. As they go down, the power suddenly cuts out, and they're stuck. 4. An hour later, Rufus tells Luisa that he used to read her father's (Lester Rey) writings from Vietnam all the time. He asks how Lester, a police officer, became such a well-known journalist. Luisa begins the story.

Similar to Robert Frobisher, Luisa also fails to live up to the legacy of her father. Although Rufus was the previous chapter's audience, he doesn't actually speak in the novel until this chapter.



Lester was police officer who, during the celebrations after World War II, got assigned to investigate a looting at a warehouse. He and his partner crept up on some men who didn't look like dock workers. Some other police cars arrived on the scene. Then, all of a sudden, the men pulled out submachine guns and started firing. As the gunmen, who were arms smugglers, jumped into a truck to escape, they threw hand grenades out the back. One hit Lester. He woke up two days later in a hospital without his left eye.

This passage adds to the chapter's pulpy tone, adding mobs and a whole criminal underworld to the story. Lester's actions in the story make him sound like a melodramatic hero, perhaps in part because his daughter Luisa is the one retelling the story. Lester loses one of his eyes, extending the motif about eyes from Adam Ewing's story in Chapter 1.



Although three officers died in the incident, no investigation ever took place. Rumors spread that the mayor's office had some connection to a crime syndicate. Lester lost faith in law enforcement and became a globe-traveling journalist. Even after the birth of Luisa, he rarely stopped traveling, and she didn't see much of him. Back in the present, Rufus says Luisa's father must have been proud of her, but Luisa protests that she's still just a gossip columnist.

5. Luisa tells Rufus about her encounters with Hollywood people like Hitchcock, who was witty but distant. 6. Rufus shows Luisa a picture of himself with his niece Megan. Megan is a physicist with a Ph.D. from Caius College at Cambridge. Rufus himself doesn't have any children. As the conversation turns back to journalism, Rufus asks Luisa how far she'd go to protect a source—would she risk her own life? Luisa says she would. Rufus feels he should tell Luisa something, but he hesitates. Then he leaves, promising to call her later.

7. The 10-year-old Javier Gomez is looking at stamps at Luisa's apartment. When Luisa gets back, she's angry because Javier had to jump across the balcony to get into her place. Javier asks why she's back so late, and she tells him about the power outage. Javier begs Luisa to let him stay, and she agrees.

8. At a meeting for *Spyglass* magazine, a writer proposes a story about piranhas in the sewer that eat people. When it's her turn to pitch to her boss, Dom Grelsch, Luisa is tired of reporting on untruthful stories. Instead, she proposes a story she heard from an inside contact (Rufus) about how a new nuclear reactor on Swanekke Island isn't as safe as it's supposed to be. Grelsch is skeptical, but he says she can run the story if it's sensational enough and she can prove everything.

9. Luisa drives her VW Beetle to Swanekke Island for her story, passing protestors who all oppose the new plant. But the guards don't seem worried, and when Luisa shows her press pass, she gets in easily. Luisa meets up with Fay Li, a Chinese American woman who works in PR. 10. Joe Napier watches several security cameras, including one where Li has a visitor (Luisa). Rufus is a whistleblower, and it's Napier's job to track him down.

11. Alberto Grimaldi is the CEO of Seaboard, the company behind the Swanekke Island nuclear plant. He gives a presentation at a podium about how nuclear energy is the power source of the future. Lloyd Hooks comes onto the stage next, and the two men jokingly insult each other, with Grimaldi saying the only way Lloyd will ever make it onto the company board is over Grimaldi's dead body.

Lester's lack of faith in the police force suggests that in this story, traditional institutions of justice have lost their influence or become corrupted. Later chapters explore the idea of government corruption in greater detail, suggesting that people will have to look elsewhere for justice.



The events of Chapter 3 bear some resemblance to the suspense movies of Alfred Hitchcock, who Luisa mentions here. Megan's education at Cambridge provides yet another link to the previous story (since Robert Frobisher also went to Cambridge). Rufus's question to Luisa about protecting her sources suggests that the events of the story may soon turn deadly.



Javier's innocence contrasts with the danger and conspiracies that dominate much of the story. He provides a sense of normalcy for Luisa, giving her someone to care about.



*The name *Spyglass* is fitting because it suggests voyeurism and observing from a distance. The story about the killer piranhas makes it clear that *Spyglass* is more of a tabloid than a serious news publication, but Grelsch seems to share Luisa's ambition to write more substantial stories, as long as she can find a way to make it feasible.*



The novel frequently jumps around between perspectives; here, one subchapter shows Luisa entering a building while the next subchapter depicts a character watching her on camera. This shift in perspectives adds to the paranoid nature of the story, suggesting that Luisa is about to get involved with a force much bigger than her.



Separate from Luisa's story, a story about corporate intrigue between Grimaldi and his rivals plays out in the background. The omniscient style of the story, with frequent cuts between different scenes, gives it a naturally cinematic feel.



12. During her interview, Luisa pretends to leave to for the restroom, then tries to find Rufus's office. The office door is open, and when she finds someone looking through Rufus's notebooks. The man, an engineer who introduces himself as Isaac Sachs, assumes that Luisa must be Megan. Isaac asks where Rufus is, and Luisa says she's been wondering the same thing. Eventually, Luisa reveals she isn't Megan. Li comes to find her, and Luisa says she was looking to interview Rufus, but Li says Rufus will be away for a long time.

13. Rufus places a call to **Hawaii** while watching Grimaldi and Lloyd on TV. He expects to hear Megan on the other line of the phone, but instead, a male voice tells him that people are coming to get him, and he has 20 minutes, max. 14. Luisa tries to focus on her work while the other writers in her office joke around. She goes to see her boss, and he tells her that her article about a cover-up at Seaboard doesn't have enough evidence.

15. Rufus hides a binder in a locker at the airport. He tries to book an immediate ticket to London, but due to an air-traffic-controller strike, the earliest flight is the next morning. Reluctantly, Rufus takes the ticket for the next day and accepts a room in the airport hotel. 16. Javier is doing homework at Luisa's place while she works. Luisa gets a call from her mother that she lets go to voice mail, and her mother complains about various topics, like how she only recently heard that Luisa broke up with her boyfriend (Hal Brodie) a month ago.

17. At his hotel, Rufus reads some old letters that his old friend Robert Frobisher wrote almost 50 years ago. He worries for Luisa's safety but hopes all will be well once he gets to Cambridge. 18. An assassin, Bill Smoke, sneaks into Rufus's room and waits for him. When Rufus comes out, the assassin pounces and shoots Rufus in the head at close range.

19. Before a *Spyglass* meeting, Luisa reads the newspaper and is shocked to see an article about Rufus's death, which gets classified as a suicide. Luisa tells a skeptical colleague that she believes the death is a murder. 20. Luisa shows up at the hotel and tries to get into Rufus's room by pretending to be Megan. But all that the hotel management can do is give Luisa Rufus's old letters, including his correspondence with Robert.

Luisa is not a master spy, but she shows ingenuity by using Isaac's own preconceptions against him and pretending to be Megan. While some characters like Li seem to have a clear affiliation with Seaboard Power and Grimaldi, Isaac's role in the story is more ambiguous, and it isn't clear at first where his loyalties lie.



Rufus's mysterious phone call adds more melodrama to the story, once again recalling spy novels and films. The high drama of Rufus's life contrasts with the more mundane work that Luisa does with her coworkers at Spyglass.



Once again, the urgency and drama of Rufus's life contrasts with Luisa's relatively normal and stable life. Voice mail is a relatively new technology at the time when the story is set. Many of the stories in the novel focus on the technology that humans use to communicate, whether it's letters and telegrams, voice mail, or new communication technology that will exist in the future.



Although Rufus already provided a clear connection between this chapter and the previous one, the reference to Robert's letters here shows specifically how the letters in the previous chapter are a text that exists in this chapter. All of the paranoia and threats of the previous subchapters come to a climax here when suddenly Rufus gets murdered, proving that the danger to Luisa is real.



The failure of the police and the newspapers to realize that Rufus's death is a murder suggests once again how traditional institutions fail to provide justice, leaving the responsibility to outsiders like Luisa.



21. Luisa gets back to the office, and Grelsch is angry that she's late for a meeting and that she continues to believe in the Seaboard cover up. Luisa, however, points out that something strange is going on: Rufus left a typed suicide note, even though he didn't have a typewriter with him, and he also supposedly shot himself with a very quiet gun. Grelsch thinks it's absurd to suggest that Seaboard has bought the cops, but Luisa points out that Seaboard is the 10th-largest corporation in the country. She says that according to her father (Lester), back in the day, Grelsch had grit and published real stories. Grelsch gives Luisa a little more time to follow her lead.

Grelsch doesn't want to believe that the police are corrupt, but Luisa's experience with her famous father, Lester, has left her more skeptical. Luisa raises valid questions about Rufus's death, suggesting that a cover-up is indeed taking place. Like Luisa, Grelsch also struggles to live up to the past (in his case, his own past accomplishments), and this is why he becomes her reluctant ally.



22. Luisa calls a man at a music store on the telephone and asks about a recording called *Cloud Atlas Sextet* by Robert Frobisher. The man has it and agrees to put the record aside. 23. Bill Smoke drives his black Chevy past Luisa's apartment building, but she doesn't notice. She rereads Robert's letters to Rufus and is surprised when Robert references a **comet**-shaped birthmark. Luisa's super tries to tell her that someone went up to her apartment already, but she can't hear him because of the construction work outside.

A sextet has six parts, just like Cloud Atlas, which is divided into six stories. The name Rufus Sixsmith also contains the number "six." This chapter explores the similarities and differences between symbolic connections in a literary novel and conspiracy connections in a spy thriller. The return of the comet birthmark connects Luisa to Robert, hinting at a deeper mystery that goes beyond the scope of Luisa's story.



24. Hal Brodie surprises Luisa in her apartment, as he's taking books and records from her shelves. He says he left a voicemail for her, but apparently, she never checks her messages. They talk awkwardly, and Hal says he's sorry Luisa's dad died. Eventually, Hal leaves. Luisa goes in the bathroom and checks the mirror, where she sees she has a birthmark on her shoulder that looks just like a **comet**, in the same location where Robert described his.

Hal Brodie represents Luisa's old, normal life. He stops by for the very mundane task of picking up old books and records, which contrasts with the more exciting spy activities in other parts of the chapter. Notably, Hal and Luisa have broken up, suggesting that Luisa is about to embark on a new phase of her life.



25. Luisa drives her VW to find the anti-nuclear protestors who were near Swanekke Island. She meets Hester Van Zandt, who seems to be a leader among them. 26. Luisa goes with Hester to her office. Hester explains how channeling public outrage is one of the only ways protestors can wield power. Hester knows Rufus and is shocked to learn that Rufus wrote a report condemning the new nuclear plant. She tells Luisa to look into the name "Margo Roker." She lets the anti-nuclear activists stay on her land. One day, some burglars broke into her place and beat her until she was in a coma. Hester thinks Margo's coma is too convenient for Seaboard to be a coincidence.

The politics of protest come up in several chapters in the novel. Adam Ewing's chapter hinted at abolitionism, and later chapters show other forms of protest. The paradox of the protestors is that on the one hand they're practically powerless when compared to the massively influential and well-funded nuclear company, but on the other hand, their ability to channel public outrage gives them a different kind of power.



27. Grimaldi, Napier, and Bill Smoke convene in Grimaldi's Swanekke office. Such meetings are common, although this time, Li is also with them. They ask Li what she knows about Luisa, who describes her as unremarkable and probably not a radical. She thinks Luisa was just fishing for a story when she came to the office earlier, but Grimaldi warns that it's dangerous enough that she knows there's a story to find somewhere. After Li and Napier leave, Grimaldi tells Bill Smoke that he's worried about Lloyd Hooks. He also recommends that Bill Smoke should keep an "accident" ready for Luisa in case they need it.

28. Isaac Sachs sits at the Swanekke Hotel, thinking of Rufus's death and imagining what might happen if he were to betray Seaboard. He sees Luisa wander into the hotel. 29. Grimaldi sits in a banquet hall, listening to the head of the Environmental Protection Agency give a speech and thinking about how his own speech earlier got a better reception than Lloyd Hooks'. Lloyd looks serious as he talks with the vice CEO, William Wiley. 30. Luisa tries to play innocent at the hotel, where she's talking with Li. Li reintroduces Luisa to Isaac, who will speak with her for an interview.

31. Isaac Sachs talks to Luisa for a long time. He gets drunk and tries to shift the subject away from himself, asking if Luisa's VW has a name. Luisa replies it's named Garcia (named by an ex-boyfriend after Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead). Just then, Isaac gets up the nerve to ask Luisa why she was in Rufus's office. Luisa says she's heard about a report Rufus wrote. Isaac confirms he was part of Rufus's team. Luisa asks if Isaac agrees with Rufus's report, and Isaac cautiously says that he agrees there's theoretical potential for risk.

32. The next morning, Luisa wonders what would've happened if she'd invited Isaac to her room. They have plans to meet for breakfast. Napier comes up to her and says she looks concerned. He informs her that Isaac can't make their meeting because he's hungover. Napier can show her around Swanekke Island instead. 33. Napier shows Luisa around the nuclear site. He thinks to himself about how he used to work as a police officer with Lester Rey and recalls how it's been two decades since he last saw Luisa.

34. Li comes to Luisa's hotel room alone, searching for Rufus's report, since oil companies will pay a lot for a document that discredits atomic energy. 35. Later, Li takes Luisa to a lobster dinner. Li tells about a Seaboard employee who harassed her and how she got him transferred to a remote Kansas plant. She says she thinks that as a journalist, Luisa might be useful to her. She also says she's also willing to cooperate with Luisa. Luisa remains guarded but says she understands.

This passage reveals that Luisa's enemies aren't united and that within Seaboard Power, there are different factions with their own interests. The members of Seaboard Power keep secrets from each other, and their selfishness leads them to put their own interests above all else, setting the stage for later conflict.



As the tension builds, the shifts in perspective come quicker and quicker, giving a panoramic view of the unfolding action. The shifting perspectives also highlight how each character has their own goals and motivations for acting and how drama arises when these goals conflict with each other. The mention of Hooks and Wiley, who have naturally villainous names, suggests even more internal conflict at Seaboard.



The Grateful Dead are another important touchstone of 1970s counterculture, embodying pacifism and environmentalism, the opposite of a greedy, violent corporation like Seaboard. In some ways, the hippie lifestyle resembles the peacefulness of the Moriori tribe, suggesting that perhaps Luisa's VW (which symbolizes hippie values) makes her vulnerable to people who want to take advantage of her.



Several of the stories in the book include unfulfilled romantic attraction, and so the tension between Luisa and Isaac parallels the tension between Ayr's and Robert. As part of the security team at Swanekke, Napier seems to be a villain, but his connection to Luisa's father suggests that there might be greater depth to his character.



This passage reveals that Li has her own agenda and has no qualms about double-crossing her associates at Seaboard. This makes her both an enemy of Luisa but also potentially an unlikely ally, illustrating the tangled nature of allegiances in a spy story.



36. Sometime later, Luisa's phone rings, waking her from a dream. It's Isaac. He tells her that before he left California, he gave Garcia a present. 37. Napier, who is tapping Luisa's phone line, doesn't see a Garcia anywhere in her file. Bill Smoke asks who Garcia is, and Napier angrily says he doesn't know.

Once again, the quick shifts in perspective build tension, as Luisa's enemies seem to be preparing to take action against her.



38. Luisa tries to sneak away and feels just like Robert Frobisher ducking out of a hotel without paying. She goes out to her VW, Garcia, and finds a report under the carpet in the trunk. Napier comes running after her, asking her to wait. Luisa rushes to start the car and go, accidentally hitting Napier when she backs up.

Luisa and Robert both share the comet birthmark, and so it makes sense that her life would parallel his. She seems to be a "return" of him—perhaps literally a reincarnation—despite the fact that their chapters have two totally different genres.



39. Somewhere at a roadside checkpoint near the hotel, Bill Smoke tells a guard that he should ignore Napier's orders to stop the orange VW. Bill Smoke threatens the guard's family and advises him to just look away. When Luisa comes to the gate, the guard lets her pass. Bill Smoke gets into his black Chevy and follows her. He pulls his car up next to her VW, then he swerves and bumps her car off the bridge and into water.

Bill Smoke establishes himself as the most ruthless character in a story full of cutthroats. Luisa's VW, which symbolizes the hippie ideals of the 1960s and 1970s, doesn't protect her from the violence of Bill Smoke's black Chevy, which represents the dark side of American industry, since unlike Volkswagen, Chevrolet is an American car manufacturer.



CHAPTER 4

Narrator Timothy Cavendish describes a time a few summers ago when he was in his sixties and strolling through London. He ran into three teenagers and yelled at them for littering. They beat him up. When he retells the story to people, he exaggerates to say his attackers were actually five Nazis.

The start of Chapter 4 establishes that yet again, the new chapter means a new genre. The narrator, Timothy, admits at the very beginning that he sometimes lies and exaggerates, showing early on that he is an unreliable narrator.



Timothy says he got distracted and actually intended to start his story with Dermot "Duster" Hoggins. At the start of the story, Timothy is Dermot's editor. Timothy is at a bar the night before a big literary prize gets announced with some other high-profile people connected to the publishing industry. Suddenly, Dermot makes an unexpected appearance at the bar. No one knows who invited him, and although some blame Timothy, he insists it wasn't him.

This section satirizes the publishing industry. Timothy seems to be more an observer than a participant at the bar, suggesting that he is not a major force in publishing. The networking in the publishing industry recalls how earlier Robert Frobisher tried to use his Cambridge connections to advance as a composer.



Dermot, who will later become famous for a book called *Knuckle Sandwich*, wants to talk to Timothy, who runs Cavendish Publishing, about the publicity campaign for his upcoming boo. He feels that Timothy isn't doing enough to promote his book. Timothy assures him that while his resources are limited, he's supporting Dermot as much as he can.

Timothy named his publishing house after himself, suggesting that he's vain. In fact, his publishing company is a "vanity press," meaning it charges money from authors (instead of paying authors for books with the expectation of later making back the money in sales).



Still at the bar for the literary event, Dermot is enraged when he sees a man named Felix Finch. Suddenly Dermot clangs some trays together to give an award. He says he presents Finch with an “Award for Most Eminent Literary Critic.” People don’t realize Dermot is sarcastic, and even Finch seems to appreciate the attention. But when Finch and Dermot talk and things get heated, Dermot physically attacks the short-statured literary critic, grabbing him by the jacket and throwing him off the roof. Finch dies, twelve floors down. Timothy immediately sees the silver lining: Dermot is about to become a famous murderer, and Cavendish Publishing still has several unsold copies of *Knuckle Sandwich*.

Timothy hates flashbacks and other flourishes of postmodern literature, but he refuses to apologize for how he jumps around in time in his own story. He says that shortly after Dermot threw Finch off the roof, *Knuckle Sandwich* climbed to the top of the bestseller charts. Finch’s reputation also climbs, as people forget how rude he used to be. An ongoing trial gets extensive media coverage. Over four months, *Knuckle Sandwich* sells 90,000 copies, and Cavendish Publishing, previously a vanity publisher, becomes a success story. Timothy hints that he made so much money that he had a hard time keeping his financial records straight.

Timothy tries to rebrand his publishing house as a home for serious works, printing new business cards. But his success also brings debt collectors. One day, three burly intruders break into Timothy’s home. Timothy realizes that they are Dermot’s three brothers. One of the brothers says Dermot is getting frustrated with Timothy. Timothy tries to explain that, per the contract Dermot signed, Timothy technically owns the copyright to *Knuckle Sandwich*. But Dermot’s brothers say things have changed, and they’ll need 50,000 pounds by three o’clock the next day.

Timothy goes to his publishing office and tries to come up with the 50,000 pounds. His secretary tells him that all his cash is already tied up paying off his other debts. Timothy goes back to his office with a whiskey. On his desk are several junk letters, along as a new manuscript called *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery*. He calls some people to ask for money and is unsuccessful. Eventually, he leaves the office, telling his secretary he’s going to meet the one person in the world who will always believe in him.

Although Timothy’s story mostly takes place in the real world, it contains elements of farce. This passage satirizes how scandal helps sell books. Nothing has changed about Knuckle Sandwich, but as soon as its author becomes a notorious murderer, the book becomes an overnight success. This passage captures people’s fascination with violence, and how, even though many people claim to dislike violence, they can’t look away from it. As is often the case in the novel, violence and greed are interconnected.



Ironically, Timothy would hate the very book that he appears as a character in. This passage further satirizes the absurdities of the publishing industry and of business in general. While Dermot and Timothy benefit from Finch’s death, even Finch himself sees some posthumous benefits after he becomes a martyr. Adding to the humorous contradictions, Timothy becomes so successful that it threatens to cause him problems by messing up his financial records.



Timothy is an opportunist who tries to make the most of his unexpected success. But like Robert Frobisher before him, he finds it difficult to escape his past debts. Dermot’s brothers show how sometimes violence is more influential than the letter of the law. Timothy might legally control Dermot’s copyright, but that legal status means nothing if Dermot’s brothers resort to violence.



It shouldn’t be difficult for Timothy to come up with 50,000 pounds, given that he just sold 90,000 copies of a book where he owns the copyright. This suggests that either he’s bad with money or he was already bogged down with previous debts. This passage shows that Luisa Rey’s story exists as a manuscript in Timothy’s world, which explains why the world Luisa lives in feels so much like a detective novel.



Denholme, Timothy's brother, doesn't seem happy to see him. He doesn't believe Timothy's claim that gangsters want 60,000 pounds from him. Denholme protests that his own bank has crashed. He says Timothy's only option is to hide, ideally far away from London—he can't help Timothy with money, but he might be able to help with a place to stay.

Timothy grudgingly goes to King's Cross Station and books a ticket to Hull, all the while fighting with other people in line. He boards the train. Shortly after Essex, the train makes an unscheduled stop. Frustrated by the delay, Timothy takes the opportunity to read *Half-Lives*, finding it entertaining enough. Another announcement informs the passengers that the next leg of the train is cancelled, and they'll have to make alternative travel arrangements.

Timothy gets off the train, looking at all the suburban homes in the town. He gets the idea of trying to find someone he used to know named Ursula who lives in the area. He gets to the house and sees a girl playing outside, then looks over and sees that Ursula is her grandmother; Ursula looks almost exactly the same, despite all the years that have passed.

Suddenly, a boy asks Timothy what he's doing, startling him. Timothy explains he's an old friend of Ursula's. The boy threatens to call the police, but Timothy says he's the Ghost of Christmas Present and he will send the Ghost of Christmas Future to get the boy and his family if he does anything. And so, the boy lets Timothy go.

Timothy goes to a café and gets drunk while waiting for the next train. He makes it to Cambridge and finds a shabby hotel for travelers. He imagines Dermot's brothers are probably robbing his house and not finding much to take. He reads a little more of *Half-Lives* and falls asleep in the middle. The next day, he struggles and fails to get a refund for the cancelled part of his train ticket.

Timothy gets back on the train. It makes another unscheduled stop. Later, a brake issue at a rural station means the rest of the trip gets cancelled. But after all these setbacks, Timothy finally makes it to Hull, where an Arabic man greets him and takes him in a taxi. Later, as Timothy goes to leave the taxi, he realizes he's missing his wallet, so he pays the man with his leftover pocket change. At last, Timothy gets to Aurora House, where Denholme has sent him. He's happy to be safe—and that his brother is paying for his lodging.

Timothy asks for 10,000 pounds more than he needs from his brother Denholme, suggesting that he views his relationship with his brother as transactional and has no qualms about being dishonest.



Although Timothy doesn't seem to be ultrawealthy, he is rich enough that he resents having to mingle with ordinary people. All of Timothy's struggles with public transit show how far he has fallen from his big recent success.



Ursula represents a life that Timothy might have chosen instead of his current one. She lives in a more suburban area, whereas Timothy stayed in the heart of London to run his publishing company. Given how things have turned out lately, Timothy seems to regret his decision not to settle down with someone like Ursula and live a different kind of life.



The scene of Timothy watching Ursula recalls the episode with the Ghost of Christmas Present from Charles Dickens's [A Christmas Carol](#), which is why Timothy himself references it here. The reference to [A Christmas Carol](#) could suggest that selfish Timothy is about to undergo a redemption arc.



*Timothy's interest in *Half-Lives* comes at the point when his own life becomes more like a thriller, as he skips town to avoid Dermot's violent brothers. Timothy's struggles at the ticket office illustrate how, despite his big literary success, he remains a nobody in other parts of his life.*



Denholme and Timothy have a strained relationship, so it should perhaps seem a little suspicious that Denholme would be willing to pay for Timothy's lodging. Timothy, however, has a high opinion of himself, and this sometimes prevents him from seeing when he's being tricked—until it's too late.



The next morning, Timothy finds a woman looking through his things and scolds her. Her name is Mrs. Noakes, and she scolds him back for his bad language. She slaps Timothy and says he'd better learn not to go against her. Timothy is shocked at the way she treats him, but she shows no remorse. At breakfast, Timothy finally learns the problem: Aurora House is a nursing home for the elderly.

Timothy protests to Mrs. Judd, a woman at reception, that he doesn't belong at Aurora house. But he's informed that he already signed a custody document the previous night (which he thought was a hotel registry). Timothy wants to speak with management, but in fact, that's Nurse Noakes. Timothy keeps complaining that she's holding him illegally, but Mrs. Judd doesn't budge.

Timothy goes back to his room, plotting vengeance. Someone locks the door behind him. Around 11 a.m., the door unlocks the man and woman in charge of the residents' committee arrive. They warn Timothy that if he keeps acting up, they'll have to medicate him. They try to convince him to make the best of his time at Aurora House.

Later that day at Aurora House, Timothy has a bland lunch. He realizes that he won't get out of his situation by yelling, so maybe he should take some tricks from *Knuckle Sandwich* and learn how to be more cunning. But just as he's scheming, he suddenly feels like fireworks are going off in his skull.

CHAPTER 5

Throughout the chapter, a character called the Archivist asks several questions of a prisoner named Sonmi~451, who tells her life story. Sonmi is a "fabricant" who works at a restaurant seemingly owned by a man named Papa Song. Fabricants (human clones) don't get breaks and rarely wonder about the outside world. Once a year, Papa Song hosts a "Star Sermon" where every fabricant gets a star pinned to their collars, and, to the envy of the other workers, the fabricants with 12 stars get taken away in Papa Song's Ark to [Hawaii](#).

Timothy seems to be the last one to realize the situation he's in. An aurora is a natural light that appears in the sky at night, meaning it connects to some of the other sky phenomena that recur throughout the book, like comets and clouds.



*Timothy's time in Aurora House draws a lot of inspiration from the novel and film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which is about a mentally healthy man who ends up trapped in an asylum. Timothy references the book at one point, just as he references [A Christmas Carol](#) earlier. Since he is a publisher, Timothy sees the world through the lens of books.*



The concept of making someone docile with medication will play an important role in the next chapter. More broadly, the question of how people wield and maintain power echoes throughout the entire book.



Although Timothy feels strongly that he doesn't belong in Aurora House, his chapter ends with a cliffhanger that suggests he might be suffering from some sort of medical emergency (not so different from the head pain that Adam Ewing experiences in Chapter 1 or perhaps the bullet to the head that Rufus Sixsmith gets in Chapter 3).



The restaurant that Sonmi~451 lives and works in seems to be the very same café that Vyvyan Ayrs dreamed about before composing his best work. This illustrates how, in addition to the book's nested structure, where each chapter is a story inside the next chapter's story, the stories have other, less linear connections to each other. The futuristic terminology and character names in the chapter make it clear that this story contains elements of science fiction. Sonmi's number, "451," is likely a tribute to Ray Bradbury's famous science fiction novel, [Fahrenheit 451](#).



The Archivist asks about Yoona~939, and Sonmi says she was the fabricant Sonmi knew best. Yoona was dignified, refusing to answer drunk customers. The Archivist is surprised to hear of a fabricant with a personality, but Sonmi says it's a myth that fabricants don't have personalities, so that "purebloods" (naturally born humans, as opposed to synthetically born clone "fabricants") can feel better about enslaving them. Sonmi first realized that Yoona was different because of her way of speaking, which became increasingly complex. Particularly while ascending (which both Sonmi and Yoona did), Yoona's ability to speak became more complex.

The Archivist asks Yoona if she was happy back in the restaurant. Yoona says it depends on the definition—if happiness is the lack of adversity, then fabricants are the happiest beings in existence, but if happiness is a sense of purpose, then fabricants are about as happy as enslaved humans. Yoona suggests that all of "corpocracy" relies on slavery, even though the word "slave" has been abolished.

The Archivist reveals that his friends think he's crazy because of the risks he's taken to interview Sonmi, who is a well-known heretic. He asks about Seer Rhee, whose journal played a big role in Sonmi's trial. Sonmi describes Seer Rhee as a weak man devoted to corporate hierarchy, whose wife uses her influence to sleep with young male aides in the corporation. Yoona, who acted more like a pureblood than a replicant, posed a threat to Seer Rhee's career.

Sonmi continues her story. One day, Yoona told Sonmi the definition of the word "secret." The concept is unfamiliar to Sonmi, who is used to having Papa Song know everything she knows. Yoona takes Sonmi to the office of Seer Rhee, who is unconscious on his desk. Yoona explains that every 10 days, Seer Rhee drinks Soap, which makes him unresponsive for the whole night. Yoona takes Rhee's keys and leads Sonmi through a door to a dark room. Yoona has hidden a flashlight in the dark room—Sonmi has never seen anything like the flashlight before.

According to Papa Song's Catechism, replicants may not keep anything for themselves, since doing so would cheat Papa Song out of his investment. Over the next few months, Yoona takes Sonmi back to her secret room several more times. Yoona tells Sonmi she has doubts about Papa Song and even the corpocracy itself. At first, Sonmi begs Yoona to stop being blasphemous.

The novel is ambiguous at first about what Sonmi is—whether she's a human, a robot, or something else. Her answers to the Archivist make it clear that she talks like a sentient being. As the chapter progresses, it becomes clear that, aside from being a clone and being born in a lab instead of a womb, Sonmi is physically more or less a "normal" human too, which makes the cruel treatment of her and the other fabricants all the more shocking.



Corpocracy is a fictional form of government that seems to imagine a world where corporations are explicitly more important than people. Yoona's criticisms of corpocracy strongly resemble economist and philosopher Karl Marx's criticisms of capitalism, perhaps suggesting that corpocracy is a futuristic possible evolution of capitalism.



Seer Rhee is a human manager (with "seer" being a title, perhaps a futuristic contraction of "overseer"). A seer is also someone who sees the future, connecting back to the novel's eye motif as well as recalling the Prophetess (the ship that Adam Ewing sails on).



Soap's name comes from the fact that it wipes clean the minds of the fabricants. Seer Rhee's use of Soap seems to have clear parallels to alcohol abuse (since alcohol can cause memory blackouts and since highly concentrated alcohol makes a good substance for cleaning). The flashlight that Yoona shows Sonmi symbolizes how she will "enlighten" her by introducing her to new knowledge.



A catechism is a summary of Christian beliefs (usually referring to Roman Catholic beliefs), and it takes the form of a question-and-answer document. And so, Sonmi's conversation with the Archivist itself resembles a catechism. Mitchell may be referencing James Joyce, whose modernist, multi-genre novel [Ulysses](#) also has a chapter that takes the form of a catechism.



One night, Yoona tells Sonmi she wants to flee the restaurant. Sonmi resists, both because leaving is prohibited and because she believes that Yoona's dreams of an outside world full of forests and mountains are all a fairy tale. Sonmi believes Yoona had a condition that "consumers" (citizens in a corpocracy) know as *chronic depression*.

Back in the present, The Archivist asks Sonmi what happened with Yoona on a specific New Year's Eve. In her story, Sonmi recalls a children's party at the restaurant. Yoona has not spoken any more about escape to Sonmi or even acknowledged her presence recently. Suddenly, Yoona picks up one of the boys and carries him out. The "purebloods" watching assume Yoona must just be someone's maid.

Suddenly, the kidnapped child's mother sees Yoona, just at the elevator door is closing. The whole restaurant erupts in chaos. Seer Rhee comes out to see what's happening, but he gets trampled by customers. The elevator comes back down, and when the doors open, an enforcer shoots Yoona several times.

In the present, The Archivist says he saw the image of Yoona full of bullet holes on the news too. He and people like him realize that this news about Yoona changes everything—it means that all fabricants may be dangerous.

Sonmi continues her story. Although the restaurant fabricants usually get their memories wiped with Soap at the end of the day, when they go to sleep that night, they wake up the next morning with most of their memories about Yoona's body still intact. That year, instead of a Starring Ceremony, Papa Song gives an Anti-Union Sermon.

At the sermon, Papa Song tells of terrorists called Union who must have infected Yoona. This event damaged the trust of the consumers in the country, so now all the replicants of the restaurant must work hard to regain the consumers' trust. Much later at her trial, Sonmi doubts Yoona could have been a Union member, since the Union had no opportunity to recruit her.

The passage explores how materialism promises happiness but ultimately fails to provide satisfaction. The choice of the word "consumers" to describe people living under a corpocracy suggests how in this dystopian future, people have become passive consumers of what the government gives them.



Yoona taught Sonmi the meaning of the word "secret," and this passage reveals that in fact, Yoona has been keeping her own secret from Sonmi and the rest of the fabricants. The children's party makes the class divide clear, showing how the fabricants exist solely to serve the purebloods.



A major theme of the Luisa Rey chapter was the failure and corruption of traditional institutions of justice, like police departments. The futuristic "enforcers" of Sonmi's chapter similar fail to uphold justice by using brutally violent tactics against Yoona.



The Archivist's reaction to the image of dead Yoona shows how the government successfully turned the image into propaganda to make people afraid of fabricants, instead of more sympathetic toward them.



The fabricants get to keep their memories of Yoona's death because the memory could deter them from their own escape attempts. Papa Song's speech represents another example of how propaganda affects the lives of the fabricants.



The name "Union" likely comes from labor unions, which in the real world, often represent the opposite of corporations, and so the Union is the opposite of the corpocracy. Unions generally represent the interests of workers, and so the Union seems to be interested in fabricants, which make up a significant portion of the workforce in this dystopia.



After the sermon on New Year's, the restaurant goes back to normal, mostly. The Starring Ceremony is unusually subdued. After the ceremony, medics examine all the replicants. They're puzzled to see that Sonmi has a birthmark near her shoulder that looks like a **comet**, since fabricants don't usually have birthmarks. Sonmi has known for a while that she's different—in fact, she seems to be on the brink of ascending, based on how she holds on to memories longer than the other fabricants. For several months, she lives with the fear that her masters will discover her new awareness.

One night, Sonmi wakes to the sound of breaking glass and goes to investigate. She goes over to Seer Rhee's room and finds him face-down on the floor and bleeding next to a used Soap container, apparently dead. It seems to be suicide by Soap overdose. Sonmi goes back to bed and pretends nothing happened.

The next morning, a man in a dark suit comes to see Sonmi and ask her questions. Sonmi initially thinks he might be an enforcer, but in fact, Mr. Chang is the chauffeur for a wealthy man. Chang offers Sonmi the opportunity to leave the restaurant and finish her investment elsewhere—otherwise, she can stay at the restaurant and wait for DNA sniffers to connect her to Seer Rhee.

Sonmi agrees to leave with Chang. While in the elevator, she experiences nausea. Outside, all the stimuli overwhelm her even more. Eventually, Sonmi and Chang make it to Mount Taemosan, the university where Sonmi will be staying. Sonmi finds her new surroundings much dirtier than the restaurant. Chang leads her to the lab of Boom-Sook Kim, who is annoyed that Sonmi has arrived so early, since it conflicts with a conference he's supposed to attend.

With Boom-Sook away, Sonmi spends three days at the university doing nothing but staying in place and observing. Eventually, a replicant named Wing~027 comes and asks Sonmi what she's doing. He is a "disasterman," able to survive in extreme conditions. He tells Sonmi that she'll need knowledge and that the best way to get knowledge is to teach herself to read. After a brief second meeting with Wing, Sonmi mostly teaches herself. Before Boom-Sook gets back, Sonmi has completed elementary school. It takes six more months for her to complete the equivalent of secondary school.

Sonmi's comet birthmark connects her to the previous characters in the story with the same birthmark. While some people in Sonmi's world refuse to accept that fabricants are real people, Sonmi's birthmark proves that she is an individual, with thoughts and feelings just like Robert Frobisher, Luisa Rey, Timothy Cavendish, and the other characters with the comet birth mark.



Seer Rhee's death symbolizes the emptiness of life under a corpocracy, even for humans. Despite having an enslaved workforce at his disposal, Rhee still wasn't happy, suggesting that consumerism doesn't actually lead to happiness.



Mr. Chang is a mysterious character when he first appears, and it isn't clear whether he intends to help or hurt Sonmi. The "investment" that fabricants must pay off by working seems to be a futuristic parody of how many people in the real world live in debt, whether it's from credit cards, education loans, or a mortgage.



Many of the characters in Cloud Atlas come from remote islands, and Sonmi's character puts an interesting spin on this trend—although she lives in a busy urban center, her highly restricted lifestyle has made her as sheltered as any remote islander from the Pacific.



The presence of disastermen in the story hints at apocalyptic conditions outside of the relatively stable area where Sonmi herself lives. Like Yoona before him, Wing serves as a mentor to Sonmi, who becomes important not for what he teaches her but for how he encourages her to learn for herself. Although Sonmi is like a pureblood human in many ways, that she's a fast learner suggests that in some ways, she even surpasses pureblood humans.



Boom-Sook is no Abolitionist, but he drinks and gambles a lot because he has a rich father, so this gives Sonmi a lot of freedom. He talks to Sonmi the way most other pureblood humans talk to their cats. For nine months, Sonmi's sentence grows, seemingly without anyone noticing.

One day, Sonmi overhears another student, Hae-Joo Im, telling Boom-Sook that a mutual friend of theirs accidentally burned Wing-027 up in an experiment. The other student finds this funny, but Boom-Sook looks at Sonmi. He doesn't note any reaction from her, but in fact, Sonmi is furious.

Over the summer recess, Boom-Sook is supposed to lock Sonmi up in a holding room, but he doesn't bother. He goes off crossbow hunting fabricant elk. Sonmi locks herself into a small room for 50 days and learns all about modern culture. When Boom-Sook comes back, he's moody because he lost a lot of money gambling while he was on vacation. Time passes. It becomes autumn, and Sonmi sees snow for the first time.

One snowy night, on Sextet Eve, Boom-Sook and some of his friends (including Hae-Joo Im) get drunk. Boom-Sook's friend taunts him, saying that his crossbow-hunting stories are probably all made up. Boom-Sook vows to prove that he has good aim with a demonstration. At the encouragement of his friends, he shoots a melon off Sonmi's head with his crossbow. His friends still aren't satisfied, so next he shoots a mango off her head. Finally, they try a plum, but this time, Boom-Sook hits Sonmi's ear.

Just then, Boardman Mephi storms in. Boardman Mephi scolds Boom-Sook and calls Chang to come in. Chang treats the injury on Sonmi's ear. Mephi informs Boom-Sook that his doctorate program is over. Chang tells Sonmi that she's coming with him and Mephi. They transfer her to another part of the campus and take Sonmi to a room so nice that she originally thinks it must be Mephi's office.

Mephi apologizes for not realizing earlier that Sonmi had ascended so far. Sonmi, however, remains cautious of a trap and doesn't want to reveal everything she knows. As it turns out, the university already knows about her ascension because the library keeps track of downloads, and Sonmi has such an unusual checkout history. While Sonmi remains cautious, in some ways she is glad she doesn't have to pretend anymore.

Boom-Sook is a buffoon, but this ends up being a good thing for Sonmi, because it allows her to spend her own time how she pleases, learning new things about the world.



Wing had at least the intelligence of a human, so his death should be horrifying, but it's funny to the grad students, suggesting that they refuse to see fabricants as human, in spite of all the evidence suggesting it.



Boom-Sook's crossbow hunting seems anachronistic in this setting, but the fabricant elk give his trip a futuristic touch. His crossbow represents the return of the past, but it also connects to the future, since crossbows will play an important role in the following chapter.



"Sextet Eve" is yet another example of the importance of the number six in the story. Although Boom-Sook seems at first to be an unlikely ally to Sonmi, this passage reveals that he is fickle and willing to gamble with her life all for the sake of impressing his friends.



Mephi's big entrance suggests right away that he is an important character and that Sonmi is about to enter the next phase of her life. Like Robert Frobisher before him, Boom-Sook pushes his privilege too far and suffers the consequences.



Although this story takes place in a futuristic setting, books are a time-honored way to learn, suggesting that even in the future, some elements of culture from the past remain important. After learning more about the world, Sonmi has learned to be careful around new people she meets, regardless of how friendly they seem.



The discovery of Sonmi's intelligence caused a lot of controversy at the university, with some wanting to dissect her brain. Mephi wanted to just let her remain undisturbed for the time being, but Boom-Sook's crossbow game forced them to act. Now, Mephi proposes that Sonmi should become a student at Taemosan and have a "Soul" implanted in her metal collar so that she can come and go as she pleases.1111

Sonmi learns that both she and Yoona were so well-suited to ascend—before the restaurant, they both were at a tech institute in Baikal, where the political situation was unstable, and their original scientists died suddenly in a car bomb. Now, on the Taemosan campus, Sonmi enjoys going to lectures but dislikes the cold because she's still used to being in a hot restaurant. Some students at Sonmi's first lecture pick on her, asking her to make them food. Later, Mephi tells Sonmi that some purebloods dislike her because fabricants are like a mirror, and many people don't like what they see. Later, an enforcer takes Sonmi to her next lecture.

At Sonmi's third lecture, the other students are curious. Afterward, though members of the media swarm her and she's nearly injured as she tries to escape the mob. From then on, she and Mephi agree that she should take her classes remotely. In between classes, Sonmi spends hours undergoing experiments that last a long time and make her miserable. One day, Sonmi laments that her curiosity is diminishing, so Mephi recommends that she get out more.

On Mephi's orders, a postgrad named Hae-Joo Im comes to Sonmi's apartment. He is a friend of Boom-Sook's who was there when Boom-Sook fired the crossbow at Sonmi. He is nervous around Sonmi because of what Boom-Sook did and because everything Sonmi says sounds so smart to him. Sonmi finds him irritating at first but tries to put up with him to please Mephi. Hae-Joo proposes taking Sonmi away from the university to a shopping district.

A taxi driver extends Hae-Joo and Sonmi's trip to show them some landmarks. They make it to the shopping district, and Sonmi is amazed at all the things for sale. The area has many fabricants, so Sonmi doesn't stand out, although one woman assumes that Sonmi is a pureblood who has undergone cosmetic surgery to look like a fabricant. Sonmi doesn't fully understand what she sees, but she feels her curiosity return to her.

Even people on the campus who recognize Sonmi's intelligence want to dissect her, reflecting how deeply many people in this world have internalized their prejudices that fabricants represent something less than human.

Sonmi struggles to adjust to life on campus, reflecting the culture shock that many people experience when they go somewhere new to get an education. People in the corpocracy don't like facing the reality that fabricants (whom the corpocracy exploits) are much like pureblood humans; Sonmi's presence on the campus upsets many of the purebloods because it forces them to confront her humanity—and their complicity in her and other fabricants' exploitation.



This passage shows that, while not all people react to Sonmi with fear, even some of the positive reactions affect her in a negative way. Sonmi finds that her new freedoms come with new responsibilities and that she still has duties to perform, even outside of Papa Song's.



Hae-Joo shows Sonmi that, while books are important for education, they aren't everything. Education is also a social experience, and Hae-Joo teaches Sonmi things about life that she can't learn from a book.



This section expands on the world of the story, revealing that Sonmi has only seen a fraction of it. Fittingly for a corpocracy, the shopping district is one of the most important parts of the city. The pureblood woman's reference to cosmetic surgery to look like a fabricant seems to be a humorous example of a futuristic version of what is today called cultural appropriation.



Sonmi decides she and Hae-Joo must go back to her old restaurant. Cautiously, they descend on the elevator to enter the restaurant. Papa Song stands on a platform near the entrance, and Sonmi suddenly realizes he's just a hologram. She tries to speak to some of the fabricants she used to work with, but none of them recognize her.

Sonmi's new intelligence allows her to see how hollow her old life was. As a hologram, Papa Song literally lacks substance and is simply an avatar for his company. Seeing the ignorance of her former coworkers helps Sonmi understand how far she herself has come in a relatively short period of time.



Overall, Sonmi finds her return to Papa Song's anticlimactic. She determines she used to be a "slave" at the restaurant, and at the university, she's just "a more privileged slave." However, after Sonmi's excursions with Hae-Joo become a regular occurrence, she begins to like him better. She learns from him that Taemosan doesn't have a unified campus government but lots of different groups vying for influence.

Sonmi begins using the Marxist-tinged language that Yoona used earlier, suggesting a growing consciousness of her role in society and a growing dissatisfaction with the world around her. Sonmi's journey raises the question of whether ignorance might be bliss, since at least at first, Sonmi doesn't become any happier from realizing the truth about her life, especially since she lacks the ability to create meaningful changes.



Hae-Joo likes "disneys" (movies) and introduces them to Sonmi. One of his favorites is *The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish*, which comes from a time before the current government in the early 21st century. In the present, the Archivist is surprised, since he himself could never get access to such restricted contraband. Although he regrets this, he believes that corpocracy is not just the latest in a series of political systems but in fact the natural world order, so he follows the rules.

In the novel, characters refer to films as "disneys" suggesting that The Walt Disney Company has become so large that "disney" has become the generic word for a film. Since Cloud Atlas's 2003 publication, the Disney corporation has only expanded, making the prediction prescient.



Sonmi continues her story. Hae-Joo shows her the first 50 minutes of *The Ghastly Ordeal* before pausing during an important scene when the protagonist, (Timothy Cavendish) has a stroke. Just then, Hae-Joo gets news that enforcers have stormed campus and already arrested Mephi. They have orders to kill Sonmi. Chang, however, is still free and waiting with the car. Before they leave, Hae-Joo tells Sonmi that he's been hiding his true identity from her.

The parts of Timothy Cavendish's story that Sonmi watches seem to align exactly with what happens in Chapter 4, right up to the same cliffhanger ending. Sonmi's story ends with its own cliffhanger, right before Hae-Joo has a chance to reveal his true identity to Sonmi.



CHAPTER 6

Zachry Bailey, the narrator, is a Valleysman on Big Isle who speaks English with a heavy dialect. One day, Adam Bailey (his brother) and Pa Bailey are walking back from the market and pitch a tent near Sloosha's Crossin'. Zachry walks away from the tent and imagines he hears the voice of Old Georgie, an evil spirit, calling out to him. Old Georgie escapes through the trees. Zachry goes back to find Pa and Adam. But instead, Zachry finds about a dozen Kona men, who come from a rival tribe.

While each of the chapters so far has had a different style and tone, Chapter 6 is arguably the most radical departure, being written in a made-up dialect that at times might not even seem to be English. The story deliberately blends past and future, and it isn't clear at first that it takes place after the events of Chapter 5. Pa's death sets the violent tone of the story.



The Kona notice Zachry and he flees. He manages to escape, but the Kona circle the camp where Adam Bailey and Pa are. Adam and Pa resist, but one of the Kona slashes Pa's throat. Adam is so shocked he stops fighting, and the Kona tie him up to take him away. Zachry feels awful and thinks that the god Sonmi ought to kill him for being so cowardly. He builds a burial mound for his father.

Zachry believes that being able to talk to goats well is a gift. Years after the death of Pa, Zachry becomes a goat herder. At age 12, he has his first baby (that he knows of) with a girl named Jayjo. But the baby comes out premature and can't breathe, so it dies. Jayjo herself looks pale but manages to survive.

In Zachry's valley, there's only one god: Sonmi. Other nearby tribes have more gods, some of them including Sonmi and others not. Valleysmen try to behave in a civilized manner, because they believe if they act too "savage," Old Georgie will take their soul. There's a place called the Icon'ry where people go to pray to Sonmi—Zachry went there with Pa and Adam once when Ma Bailey was sick, and Sonmi showed mercy on Ma.

There's a room at the "school'ry" that contains books that supposedly contain the mysteries of the "Civ'lize Days." The windows of the school'ry remain intact, even after "the Fall." Perhaps the most interesting room at the school'ry is the still-working clock, which seems like it must have been very important to people in the Civ'lize Days.

Zachry talks about the Great Ship o' the Prescients, which some dismiss as a myth. One day, a big ship that looks like it came from Civ'lize Days shows up in water near the Valleysmen. The people on board the ship are a race called the Prescients. They speak in a strange way and come to barter with the Valleysmen, taking food and giving back impressive ironware, although the Prescients never barter anything "Smarter" than what the people on Big Isle are used to. The Prescients also never speak of what lies beyond the ocean.

*With his heavy dialect and his superstition, Zachry bears some resemblance to the famous literary character Huckleberry Finn, the titular character in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Like that novel, Zachry's story is also a kind of coming-of-age story, and both stories feature themes of prejudice and slavery.*



Zachry's lifestyle as a goat herder reveals that he lives in a society without advanced technology. And so this chapter begins with the mystery of how the extremely hi-tech world of Sonmi became the land of Zachry and the Valleysmen.



Parts of Sonmi's previous chapter hinted at religious symbolism (since the word "orison" in the title of the chapter means "prayer"). Some elements of her story resemble the life story of Jesus (who was also executed by the state). The "Son" in the name "Sonmi" could be another parallel to Jesus (the "Son of God"), and it also sounds similar to "sun," which many ancient humans worshipped.



In the previous chapter with Sonmi, the English language has already evolved to drop some letters (with "ex" in some words becoming just "x"). This trend seems to accelerate in Zachry's time, and Zachry's lack of formal education may also contribute to his habit of leaving out letters.



The Prescients seem to be the last survivors of a more technologically advanced society—either Sonmi's or one similar to it. Despite their advanced technology, however, the Prescients seem to have made a pact not to interfere in the lives of less technologically advanced civilizations. Despite all their technology, however, the Prescients still rely on the Valleysmen for food, suggesting that pre-technological ways may still have value, even in the far future.



When Zachry is 16, a Prescient named Meronym visits Zachry's house and changes his life forever. One evening, Zachry is herding his goats home. When he arrives, he hears that the Prescient chief wants to speak with a local leader called the Abbess of the Valleysmen. The Prescient chief wants a special bartering session that year: If one Prescient woman is allowed to live with the Valleysmen for a year, the Prescients will pay them double for their goods. Since the death of Pa, Ma and Zachry have empty space to host Meronym.

Meronym fascinates the Valleysmen with her talk of ships that run on fusion engines, although they don't understand her. She answers their questions, explaining that all Prescients are Black because at one point in the past, they altered the genomes of their children to give them protection against sunburns, and now it's passed on genetically. She reveals that she's married with a son, but her husband got murdered by "savages." She is 50 years old, which amazes the Valleysmen, who rarely make it past 40.

Meronym proves to be a good worker, helping with the cows. At night she keeps a journal. While most Valleysmen like Meronym, Zachry wonders if the journal means she is secretly some kind of spy whom Old Georgie sent. Days pass, and Meronym travels the Valleys meeting more people, making maps and learning about the different tribes. She agrees to teach math at the school'ry. Zachry's suspicion grows particularly intense when he sees Meronym in the sacred Icon'ry. He accuses Meronym of trying to make the Abbess of the Valleysmen and his Ma look stupid. Meronym swears on Sonmi that she means no harm, but Zachry thinks she doesn't actually believe in Sonmi.

Zachry takes his concerns about Meronym to the Abbess of the Valleysmen, but she requests proof that something's wrong with Meronym. Zachry sneaks around and finds where Meronym has stashed her possessions. He finds a lot of objects he doesn't understand, including an egg-shaped device that contains a recording of a man asking a woman questions (the Archivist and Sonmi). All of a sudden, a man's face appears on the egg-shaped device and asks where Meronym is. The man tells Zachry to put the egg away and never again sneak into Meronym's gear.

The introduction of Meronym sets up a larger conflict between the culture of the Prescients and the culture of the Valleysmen. The Prescients' motives are mysterious, but Meronym seems to be some sort of anthropologist sent to study the Valleysmen without interfering in their ways of life.



Chapter 6 deliberately flips the racial dynamics of Chapter 1, making the non-white characters more technologically advanced—the Valleysmen's fear of sunburns suggests they have paler skin. Notably, the Black Prescients don't try to forcefully colonize or enslave the Valleysmen people, suggesting that while history repeats itself, events don't always play out the same way.



Like many of the previous protagonists, Zachry is deeply curious about the world around him, and this causes him to treat Meronym with more skepticism than some of the other Valleysmen. Zachry is perceptive and can tell that Meronym comes from a different culture where the things that are sacred to the Valleysmen (like Sonmi) might not be so sacred to her.



The recording that Zachry sees in the egg-shaped device seems to be the interview between Sonmi and the Archivist that's transcribed in the previous chapter. Meronym and the anonymous Prescient man who appears in the device both understand that seeing the real Sonmi could drastically impact Zachry's religious views, which is why they don't want him to see it.



Zachry decides to act nicer toward Meronym so he can spy on her better. One morning, Zachry's sister Catkin Bailey steps on a scorpionfish and gets mortally poisoned. Zachry runs to ask Meronym about a cure, but she protests that the usual Big Isle cures are best for Big Isle people. Zachry gets angry and says he knows Meronym must have cures for her own people. In reply, Meronym reveals she knows Zachry was snooping through her things. Meronym says Catkin would've stepped on the fish whether Meronym was there or not, since that was just the natural order.

Zachry keeps trying to convince Meronym, telling the story of how he watched Kona murder his father. At last, Meronym agrees to give Zachry something to cure Catkin, but she makes Zachry swear that he'll keep it a secret and give credit to the local herbalist. Three days later, Catkin is fully healed. Zachry decides to stop spying on Meronym.

Meronym tells Ma she has to climb a nearby mountain to make a map, and she has "Smart" (what the Valleysmen call advanced technology that they don't understand) that will stop Old Georgie from freezing her on the way up. The Valleysmen know the mountain as a dangerous place, and Meronym's trip attracts interest. To pay back Meronym for healing Catkin, Zachry agrees to assist Meronym on her journey.

As Meronym and Zachry make it up the mountain, they pass Sloosha's Crossin' and suddenly jump off the road to avoid being seen by three Kona warriors. Zachry imagines the one Kona boy might be Adam, but he always thinks this when he sees a Kona boy who would be the right age.

The next day, Meronym and Zachry stop to drink at a brook. Zachry says he thinks Meronym doesn't believe in Old Georgie, who caused the Fall. Meronym confirms she doesn't but says that doesn't mean Old Georgie can't be real for Zachry. She says the Old Uns didn't need Old Georgie to make them Fall—they did it to themselves, even with their Smart. With all the Old Uns had, it still wasn't enough, and they boiled the sea and poisoned the earth.

More days pass, and Meronym continues to tell Zachry more surprising truths about the world. At last, they make it to the top of the mountain, where the winds are intense. Both Meronym and Zachry stand in awe of the view. Zachry feels like the wind is bringing him the voice of his grandfather.

The situation with Catkin represents a serious challenge to Meronym's vow not to interfere with the Valleysmen. Zachry and Meronym debate the ethics of interfering, with Meronym basing her arguments on logic and theory but Zachry relying more on emotion.



Meronym manages to find a compromise, intervening on Zachry's behalf to help Catkin but making him promise to keep a secret. Their interaction reveals how in times of crisis, emotional arguments often hold more sway than detached, logical arguments.



Although Zachry doesn't understand many things about Meronym's life, he demonstrates a willingness to see the world beyond the small part of it that he calls home. His trip up the mountain is a much more climactic version of Adam Ewing's trip up a hill on the Chatham Islands. Adam Ewing thought he saw an evil spirit on his climb, and centuries later, the Valleysmen believe that the evil spirit Old Georgie attacks travelers up their mountain.



On the outside, the Kona represent pure violence, and yet Zachry's belief that his brother Adam might still be living among them suggests that things might be more complicated.



"The Fall" is a phrase with a lot of different meanings. Adam Ewing falls into a crater in Chapter 1, and other characters experience their own falls (whether it's the literal fall of Luisa Rey's VW into water or Timothy Cavendish's metaphorical fall from grace as he goes from celebrated publisher to imprisoned nursing home resident). The Fall also refers to when God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden for being too curious—a trait they share with many characters in this book, particularly Zachry.



The splendor of the natural world is another motif that runs throughout the novel, often as a contrast to the oppressive effects of technology and profit-seeking.



Near the top of the mountain, Meronym and Zachry enter an observatory from before the Fall that is full of old Smart. Inside, Meronym pulls out her egg-like devise and explains that it's an "orison" with multiple purposes, including preserving memories. Meronym asks about the woman he saw in the orison earlier. Meronym says the woman is dead and just a memory. After some hesitation, Meronym reveals that the woman is Sonmi, the same human that the Valleysmen believe is a god.

Zachry is shocked to learn Sonmi was human, since he always learned that she was born from a god of Smart named Darwin. Meronym explains that hundreds of years ago, the Old Uns who feared Sonmi put her to death. As Meronym and Zachry leave to find other similar observatories, Zachry wonders if he was right earlier to distrust Meronym, since she's trying to change all his beliefs. He suspects Meronym still isn't being fully honest with him. In one of the observatories, they find the surprisingly well-preserved body of a chief astronomer who apparently died by suicide after the Fall. Zachry imagines he hears the astronomer's body calling out to him, telling him to kill the outsider Meronym, but Zachry has no desire to become a murderer.

Zachry throws a spear but intentionally misses Meronym. She doesn't notice that Zachry threw it. Zachry hears Old Georgie getting angry at him. Old Georgie wants him to try killing Meronym for real, threatening that otherwise, Zachry's whole family will die. But after being briefly tempted, Zachry believes Meronym will stay loyal to the Valleysmen. They head back home. Zachry finds that he's a changed person after everything Meronym told him, particularly about Sonmi.

More time passes, and Meronym comes to her last evening with the Valleysmen. The Valleysmen prepare for their annual barter, preparing to travel with more people than usual, since they have more goods to trade than usual (due to accepting Meronym). As they travel to the site of the barter, one of the Valleysmen asks Meronym to tell them a Prescient story. She hesitates then agrees.

The orison seems to be an evolution of the cell phone. (Cloud Atlas came out in 2003, when cell phones were common but before the widespread popularity of smartphones.) The word "orison" means "prayer," suggesting that in the future, people will replace religion with a worship of technology, for better or for worse. In Sonmi's world, brand names become generic terms, with films becoming "disneys" after the massive entertainment company Disney, and so it's possible that "orison" is a corruption of "Verizon," one of the biggest cell phone companies in the real world at the time.



Zachry's religious beliefs show how some elements of the past endure (like Sonmi and Charles Darwin), but also how the memories of them become distorted. The ruins at the observatory hint at a larger apocalyptic story beyond what Zachry himself understands. The moral of this apocalypse seems to be that no amount of technology can save humanity from itself, although the survival of people like Meronym, Zachry, and the Valleysmen adds the hope that humanity will find ways to keep going.



Old Georgie is a mysterious presence in the story—it isn't clear whether he's a full-on hallucination that Zachry literally sees and hears or whether he is just the personification of intrusive thoughts that tempt Zachry into doing things he knows he shouldn't do.



Cycles are an important motif in Cloud Atlas, and the cycle of bartering between the Prescients and the Valleysmen is yet another example of this. After spending a year with the Valleysmen, Meronym has loosened up some of her self-imposed rules and is more willing to share elements of Prescient culture.



Meronym starts her story: Back during the Fall, humans forgot how to make fire. The humans went to see Wise Man and ask him about fire, so Wise Man sent out the Crow, telling him to dip part of a long stick into a volcano and come back. The Crow does what it's told, but on the way back, the burning stick begins to hurt it. The story ends while the Crow is still flying, before it either drops the stick or doesn't and leaves open a question: Do humans remember the invention of fire or not? Meronym says the story isn't about fire, it's about how humanity got its spirit.

The Valleymen make it to the village where bartering takes place, and the trades go well. Night falls, and they draw lots for keeping watch. After Zachry serves his sentry duty, he takes Meronym over to where people play music and dance with the other tribes. In the morning, Zachry wakes up next to a girl from the Kolekole tribe that he was dancing with the previous night. When he goes back to his people, however, he finds a dead guard with a crossbolt through his neck. Zachry runs to warn everyone that the Kona have come, but it's too late. As the Kona surround the area, Zachry gets pushed down and hits his head.

Zachry wakes up in pain. He's on a cart and figures that, like his brother Adam before him, the Kona have enslaved him. He asks the other prisoners if any of them are awake, but a Kona tells him to shut up or die. Zachry prays to Sonmi. They travel farther, then they stop. The Kona chief addresses the prisoners, who are all young men from different tribes, telling them that are slaves who must follow their masters' orders or risk death.

That night, the Kona feast on chicken and liquor without giving anything to the prisoners. Eventually, they decide to give some chicken and alcohol to one young prisoner. Zachry is jealous at first—but then the Kona start raping the boy. Just then, a red spot appears on the forehead of one of the Kona, and he falls over. A different Kona in a helmet comes over and shoots two more Kona. The remaining Kona fight back, but soon, the helmeted Kona has killed them all. When the stranger takes off their helmet, it turns out it's not a Kona at all but Meronym.

Meronym and Zachry untie the other captives. She tells Zachry about how she wasn't in the village when the Kona attacked since she was out sketching the sea. When she got back and saw the attack, she found a helmet and a horse from a dead Kona that she used as a disguise. When she saw the cart with Zachry, she followed it, then waited until nightfall to attack.

Meronym's story of the invention of fire seems to mash up several real-life legends about fire. Unlike other legends that carry a clear moral, Meronym's story is more like a koan (a paradoxical riddle used in Zen Buddhism to promote enlightenment), with an open-ended conclusion that asks a question rather than answering one. Several chapters of Cloud Atlas end on a similarly ambiguous note.



The bartering is a big event in the lives of the Valleymen, and so it becomes an occasion for celebration. But the joyous festivities abruptly stop when violence erupts. The crossbolt (from a crossbow) in this story recalls the reckless violence of Boom-Sook in the chapter before this one.



Zachry's descent into slavery parallels the experience of Autua in the first chapter. The Kona remain ruthless, with no redeeming features, perhaps reflecting Zachry's own feelings toward them. Slavery appears in some form in almost all of the chapters, although it is only in Adam Ewing's chapter and Zachry's chapter that it gets openly called slavery.



The Kona assert their authority through sexual violence, recalling Mr. Boerhaave's behavior on the Chatham Islands in the first chapter. Zachry doesn't understand what's happening at first when Meronym starts shooting because her technology is too advanced for him to comprehend. Meronym's decision to use her weapon shows that she has fully gone back on her old non-interference policy and decided that she won't sit back as an observer anymore.



Despite Meronym's advanced technology, the Kona greatly outnumber her, and so she has to use her wits to fool them and overcome her disadvantage.



Zachry rests overnight in a building of the Old Uns. The next day, he wakes to Meronym talking into her orison. When Meronym notices that Zachry is awake, the Prescient on the other end of the orison, Duophysite, tells Zachry that he'll have to lead Meronym on a journey to a place called Ikat's Finger, where Duophysite will meet them. It turns out the Prescients on the ship have stopped responding to messages, so the ship probably isn't coming. Duophysite explains that there's a deadly plague that even the Prescients' Smart can't cure.

Duophysite decides it's time to tell Zachry the whole truth. According to Duophysite, there are just five Prescients with him in Hah-Way (**Hawaii**), one on each island. They've long feared that the plague would wipe out the last of Civ'lize, and so they've been looking for new places to settle. Meronym's job was to scope out the island for this purpose. Zachry wants to help, but he says he needs to try to find his family first.

Zachry and Meronym stay in the Old Un ruin one more night for Zachry to recover. The next day, Meronym teaches Zachry how to fire her modern weapons. Zachry asks Meronym how she learned to ride horses as well as the Kona, and she says most Prescients don't, but she spent some time earlier with a different tribe called the Swanekke. They journey for a while, until they reach an encampment of Kona with 34 enslaved Valleysmen. There are far too many Kona to kill, so a reluctant Zachry tells Meronym to retreat.

Zachry can't escape his guilt as he imagines what might be happening to his family under the Kona. Meronym warns Zachry that, while he faces a difficult decision about what to do next, the Kona will catch them if they stick around. Zachry goes back to his family's place to pick up some things, but while there alone, he happens to find a young Kona man who is supposed to be standing guard but who has fallen asleep. He is about the age Adam would be, but Old Georgie wants Zachry to slit the guard's exposed throat. Zachry hesitates, not wanting to listen to Old Georgie, but in the end, he decides to slash the guard's throat instead of sneaking away.

Despite the Prescients' advanced technology, they remain vulnerable to forces of nature, like plagues. The journey to Ikat's Finger sets up the final events of the story, giving Zachry and Meronym one last goal to achieve. The plague means that, like Zachry, Meronym has probably also lost people she loves recently (although it still isn't clear what happened to Zachry's family during the Kona attack).



Hawaii shows up in several chapters of Cloud Atlas as an important location. Here it bookends the story, since Adam Ewing's ship, the Prophetess, is headed for Hawaii, and now Zachry's story (the last one chronologically) also involves a journey toward Hawaii.



Zachry wants to prioritize saving his family, but he faces the harsh truth that there are too many Kona for him and Meronym to defeat (and that some of his family members may already be dead). Zachry shows maturity by facing this hard truth and continuing to live his life rather than making a doomed attack on the Kona, representing a culmination of his coming-of-age story.



This mysterious passage never receives any clarification—Zachry goes through the rest of his life without knowing whether he actually slit his brother's throat. Zachry's violent act raises complicated moral questions, since while Zachry may have reasons to attack the Kona as a whole, it's unclear if the sleeping Kona young man was himself responsible for any of the Valleysmen massacres. This passage shows how even potentially justified violence involves hurting people who, under different circumstances, might be like a brother.



When Zachry makes it back to Meronym, she warns him about Kona in the area. They ride off quickly. Zachry confesses to Meronym that he killed the sleeping Kona. Meronym says Prescients don't believe in souls, so when you die, you die. Zachry finds this cold and frightening. He wonders if the triumph of the Kona over the Valleysmen and Prescients is proof that it's better to be "savage" than "Civ'lized." Meronym says it's complicated and that both sides have advantages, plus some rare savages actually have Civ'lized in their hearts. As Meronym sleeps that night, Zachry notices that near her shoulder blade she has a birthmark that looks like a hand with six streaks coming off it (a **comet**).

Zachry and Meronym keep going. They face a choice of leaving behind their horses to go one way or keeping their horses to take a faster way where there's a greater risk of encountering Kona. They feel that time is running short, so they take the faster, more dangerous way. Just as they arrive at Ikat's Finger, several Kona sentries pop out with weapons and ask them for a password. Fortunately, Meronym has her Kona helmet on, although it's unusual for a Valleysman like Zachry to be riding a Kona horse.

Meronym gets indignant and shouts at the Kona sentries to let her do what she wants. The Kona turn around to report the news, giving Meronym and Zachry a chance to shoot them. Then they gallop off on their horses. As they try to escape, Zachry gets hit in the left calf by a crossbow. Meronym says they have to get to a safe area first before she can treat the wound. As they approach a bridge, Zachry warns Meronym that Sonmi has told him not to try crossing it. Meronym seems skeptical, but she agrees to follow Zachry to where the river is shallow enough for their horses to cross it. Later, in the distance, they hear the bridge collapse under several Kona horsemen, who fall into the dangerous, rocky river below.

Meronym and Zachry finally make it safely to Ikat's Finger. Meronym pulls the crossbow bolt out of Zachry's leg and uses some Smart on the wound. She stays with Zachry until Duophysite arrives by kayak. Zachry is in a daze due to his injury, but Meronym takes Zachry with her as they leave Big Isle with Duophysite. Zachry watches the island where he spent his whole life shrink on the horizon until it's small enough to fit between his finger and thumb.

As Zachry and Meronym become closer, she decides that it's better to tell Zachry the truth—at least as she understands it—rather than trying to avoid shattering his beliefs. Meronym's comet birthmark suggests that she is connected to the other characters with the comet birthmark and possibly even the latest reincarnation of them. Fittingly for a chapter with so many role reversals, Meronym is the only character with a comet birthmark who acts as a supporting character rather than as a protagonist.



Zachry and Meronym's journey to Ikat's Finger is one final challenge to overcome before the end of the chapter. Although Meronym resorted to violence to save Zachry, they find that in some cases, trickery can be even more effective.



This strange passage has a touch of fantasy to it, seemingly confirming that the voice of Sonmi that Zachry hears in his head is real and omniscient. What matters most about this passage isn't whether or not the goddess Sonmi is "real," just that she is real to Zachry. As the narrator, Zachry gives his own perspective on the events, and so his own belief in Sonmi influences how he sees the world, making her very real in that sense.



Despite the violence and darkness throughout the chapter, Zachry's story ends with a glimmer of hope as he seemingly leaves behind his old life in search of something better. The name "Big Isle" becomes ironic because it seems big to Zachry, but it quickly becomes small at sea.



A new narrator says that his Pa, Zachry, was weird. Zachry believed Meronym was Sonmi herself because of the **comet** birthmark. Zachry's son isn't sure how much of his father's old stories about the Kona and escaping Big Isle are true, but after Zachry died, his son found an egglike orison in his belongings. The orison can't help him kill Kona pirates, but it does still hold a beautiful woman who talks in an old language.

Like Meronym's legend about the invention of fire, Zachry's chapter also ends on a deeply ambiguous note. It isn't clear who Zachry's children are or where they're from. While the presence of the orison confirms that elements of Zachry's story are true, the novel never reveals what happened to Zachry after he got onto the boat (other than the fact that he lived long enough to tell his story to his children and died at some point afterwards). The ending of this chapter sets up a return to the events of "An Orison of Sonmi-451," which does in fact continue in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 7

Picking up where the story left off in Chapter 5, the Archivist asks Sonmi what Hae-Joo's real identity was. Sonmi continues her story. Hae-Joo is part of the Union. He says Sonmi will have to trust him if she wants to stay alive, and Sonmi agrees to trust him. They go down to Chang, who drives them off in a plain car. As they go through a tunnel, Hae-Joo cuts into his finger and takes out a little metallic egg called his Soul. He tells Sonmi to also get rid of the Soul that the university gave her so that no one can track them.

It takes over half of Cloud Atlas's length before the full structure of the book becomes clear. The novel is not, in fact, a collection of unfinished stories, but instead a collection of nested stories that get interrupted but continue on the other side of the book, with Chapter 6 being sole chapter whose story plays out without interruption. This return to Sonmi's story resolves the issue of Hae-Joo's identity, which was where the previous Sonmi chapter left off.



Enforcers chase Chang's car, and after a disorienting journey, Sonmi and Hae-Joo make it to a Union stronghold. Chang disappears, and Hae-Joo takes Sonmi to a poor neighborhood that is full of disease. Sonmi wonders why such a place exists in a great capital, but Hae-Joo explains that all cities need a place for "human waste" and that the upper classes benefit from having a place to enjoy illegal pleasures and to harvest healthy organs from the dying.

As Sonmi's story progresses, it draws from conventions of the thriller genre, making it somewhat similar to Luisa Rey's story (since Luisa is also on the run from forces much more powerful than her). The poor neighborhood that Sonmi visits demonstrates that in addition to the atrocities committed against fabricants, corpocracy also leads to suffering among less-privileged pureblood humans.



Hae-Joo takes Sonmi to the house of Ma Arak Na and gives her the bad news about Mephi's arrest. They communicate with the distant An-Kor Apis, who is also part of the Union. An-Kor Apis explains that other cells of the Union have also been compromised. Mephi managed to die by suicide before interrogation could begin. Apis orders them to journey across the city for Union business.

The resistance members have names that recall dangerous bugs (with "Arak Na" sounding like "arachnid" and "Apis" being the genus for bees). This suggests they are small but powerful. Mephi's reported suicide seems to suggest how deeply ideological he was, willing to give up his own life before his principles, although a later part of the chapter raises questions about Mephi's fate.



In order to travel around the city, Hae-Joo needs a new Soul, so an implanter comes and gives him a new little egg with a new fictional identity. The implanter then performs an operation on Sonmi's collar to remove her own identity and give her a human Soul. Next, they take Sonmi to someone who can give her a new face to make her look like a pureblood. In the present, the Archivist asks why Sonmi currently looks like a standard fabricant Sonmi, and she replies that the government restored her old face for the court proceedings.

Humorously, the corpocracy is so materialistic that even the soul becomes a physical object. A whole black market exists where people buy and sell these souls, providing a metaphor for how money can buy some people's metaphorical souls. The Archivist's interruption addresses a potential plot hole in Sonmi's story while also demonstrating yet again how the corpocracy understands the propaganda value of external appearances.



Sonmi continues her story. She and Hae-Joo take off to complete An-Kor Apis's orders. Along the way, Sonmi asks if Hae-Joo's name is really Hae-Joo, and he replies that no one in his profession has a real name. A guard at a checkpoint stops them and asks about Hae-Joo's finger. Hae-Joo replies that he cut it trying to slice an avocado. The guard lets them pass, and they keep driving. To avoid curfew that night, Hae-Joo and Sonmi spend the night in the spare room of a genomics unit, where "wombtanks" of new fabricants incubate. It's the type of place where Sonmi herself was created.

Between the exchange of Souls in the previous section and Hae-Joo's answer that he has no real name, this chapter questions what truly defines a person's identity. Hae-Joo's lie that he cut his finger on an avocado is funny but also hints at the deeper truth that people in this dystopia have become so disconnected from nature that even simple acts like trying to cut an avocado become difficult. The wombtank reveals how fabricants like Sonmi come into being.



The next morning, Sonmi asks Hae-Joo why the Union wants to protect her so much. Hae-Joo says it's complicated. Basically, the corpocracy is killing itself by poisoning the land. Though the poor are dying first, eventually the wealthy will die too. The corpocracy's plan is simply to deny that anything is wrong, hoping to replace the fast-dying lower classes with fabricants and eventually stabilize things. The Union, on the other hand, wants to put a stop to the corpocracy through revolution by ascending six million fabricants.

The corpocracy's greed leads it to be short sighted and ultimately self-destructive. This passage has a clear environmental message, recalling Luisa Rey's efforts to expose the dangers of the Swanekke nuclear plant (which also has the potential to poison the land). The fabricants' "ascension" takes seems to take inspiration from the goals of real-world revolutions, perhaps most notably resembling yet another Marxist idea of "class consciousness" for the working class.



Although the corpocracy is powerful, it relies on fabricant labor and would crumble if the six million fabricants ascended. Sonmi provides proof that ascension is possible and could act as an ambassador between the Union and newly ascended fabricants.

Like many revolutions, the Union hopes to overthrow a small but powerful ruling class by relying on superiority in numbers.



Sonmi and Hae-Joo continue their journey. They leave the wombtanks and make it out of the city to some mountains, where they leave the car to hike. Sonmi is fascinated by her first hike and notices a giant cross-legged figure carved out of rock who has a face that reminds her of Timothy Cavendish. They make their way to an old abbey that houses a colony of purebloods who have abandoned city life. An old woman greets them. She is the Abbess of the Mountains.

Humorously, the rock figure that Sonmi compares to Timothy Cavendish (a person she recognizes from seeing on film) is actually Siddhartha, the Buddha. In terms of personality, Timothy has almost nothing in common with the Buddha, although Timothy does possess a comet birthmark, suggesting that perhaps he is part of a lineage of reincarnation (which is an important concept in Buddhism).



The purebloods in the abbey all come from different backgrounds and have learned how to live off the land away from the corpocracy, like the nuns that lived in the area for centuries before them. The Union provides the people with technology in exchange for being able to use the colony as a safe house. When Sonmi wakes up the next morning, the Abbess of the Mountains greets her and tells her about the colony. She explains that the giant carved stone man is Siddhartha, a man from the past who believed that people could overcome pain and be reincarnated in better forms in future lives. Sonmi wishes she can be reincarnated in the Abbess's colony someday.

Soon, Hae-Joo and Sonmi must leave the colony. As they do, the Abbess of the Mountains whispers in Sonmi's ear that she'll ask Siddhartha to grant Sonmi's wish. While Hae-Joo and Sonmi are out hiking, they see a car that looks too expensive to be so far out in the woods, driving over a suspension bridge. A man steps out of the car and takes out a cage that holds a 30-centimeter-tall woman, grabs her by the hair, then throws her off the bridge into the rocks below. The woman was a fabricant living doll.

The man comes over to Hae-Joo and Sonmi and complains about how he had to buy the living doll for his daughter because all her friends had one. But the doll went out of fashion and official disposal is expensive, so the man decided to just throw it off the bridge. His wife is with him, waiting by the car. He talks with Hae-Joo about golf, and Hae-Joo pretends to be enthusiastic. Sonmi considers the man a murderer, albeit one too shallow to even realize it.

By nightfall, Sonmi and Hae-Joo reach their destination, Pusan. Pusan has a reputation as the place where Seoul executives come to fulfill their vices. Hae-Joo meets up with a woman he knows who runs a flophouse and provides them with a run-down room for a couple nights. After taking care of some errands that night, the next morning Hae-Joo takes Sonmi to the window and makes her close her eyes. When she opens them, she sees the ocean way in the distance for the first time.

Hae-Joo brings out a contraband transceiver to communicate with An-Kor Apis. Apis says it's time to teach Sonmi a few things, so she can decide on her own if she wants to keep going. Apis disconnects, and Hae-Joo says they're going to Papa Song's Golden Ark, which Sonmi recognizes as the place fabricants go to be exulted after 12 Starring Ceremonies. They go into the city, disguising themselves as maintenance people, and manage to infiltrate the Ark (which is supposedly a ship set to sail to **Hawaii**) without much difficulty, since few people have any desire to enter the Ark illegally.

As is often the case in the novel, nature represents salvation from technology and the struggles it brings. When Sonmi tells the Abbess that she wishes to be reincarnated in her colony, her wish seemingly comes true, since Sonmi has the comet birthmark and Meronym (who has the same birthmark) lives for a year in a different Abbess's colony. Notably, because of how the book is structured, the audience already knows that Sonmi's wish comes true, further blurring the lines between past and future.



This scene that Sonmi witnesses brutally and efficiently shows how little people value the lives of fabricants, treating them like disposable dolls. In fact, this scene demonstrates a point so concisely that later Sonmi will think back on it and wonder if everything was really what it seemed to be.



Like much of the violence in the story, the man's decision to throw his fabricant doll off a cliff stems from greed rather than cruelty. It's more expensive to decommission a doll the proper way, so the man chooses the option that's most convenient for him, regardless of the suffering it causes.



In order to avoid being caught, Sonmi and Hae-Joo journey along the margins of society. While Sonmi witnessed pureblood humans living in relative privilege at the university, she finds that outside of the major urban centers, the corpocracy often fails to live up to its promises, even for purebloods.



The "Golden Ark" of Papa Song's is a play on words. An "ark" can refer to a boat (like Noah's Ark) or an agreement (like the Ark of the Covenant), and Papa Song's Golden Ark is both—a boat that serves as a promise of a well-earned retirement for fabricants. "Golden Ark" also sounds very similar to "Golden Arches," the logo for McDonald's, suggesting that Papa Song's is not just a spiritual successor to the dehumanizing work conditions at businesses like McDonald's but perhaps also the literal evolution of McDonald's.



Hae-Joo and Sonmi make it to a chamber that is full of fabricants in turnstiles, including Sonmis, Yoonas, and other models that Sonmi recognizes. They sing the psalm of Papa Song as they prepare to be “exulted” and taken to **Hawaii**. But when Hae-Joo and Sonmi enter the next room, everything is quiet. Three aids greet fabricants, who entered the room one by one. A helmet descends on the fabricants and kills them with a bolt. It’s a slaughterhouse, and in the next room, workers butcher the remains of the fabricants. These remains become new biomatter for wombtanks, Soap, and even sometimes Papa Song’s food.

In the present, the Archivist interrupts to say that what Sonmi describes is too evil to be possible. Sonmi asks the Archivist if he’s ever seen a fabricant retirement village in person. There should be whole cities full of retired fabricants, based on how many get created. The Archivist protests that fabricants have rights, and Sonmi herself saw fabricants in an ark headed toward **Hawaii** at Papa Song’s, but Sonmi says those images are computer-generated. The Archivist doesn’t back down but suggests Sonmi should continue her story from where she left off.

Sonmi continues her story. In the Ark, Sonmi watches the slaughter of fabricants for what feels like a long time. Even after she and Hae-Joo get back to the flophouse, the images continue to haunt her. At the flophouse, Sonmi and Hae-Joo have sex. Afterward, Hae-Joo examines Sonmi’s **comet** birthmark. In the morning, Sonmi decides they must destroy all the slaughterships. Consumers need to learn that fabricants are purebloods, even if they’re grown in a wombtank, and if this doesn’t work, then fabricants need to fight with the Union against the consumers. Sonmi proposes creating a Catechism to teach newly ascended fabricants about their rights. This eventually becomes a work called *Declarations*, which features prominently in Sonmi’s trial.

Sonmi writes *Declarations* outside Pusan. Over the course of three weeks. The very afternoon she completes it, she gets captured. When she goes out for a walk, enforcers suddenly pop out and surround her. Sonmi expected the raid. As she tells the Archivist in the present, she feels that this event, like the other events she’s confessed to the Archivist, beginning at Papa Song’s, was scripted and that all the major people in her story like Hae-Joo and Mephi were following the script. She brings up plot holes, like how Wing~027 seemed just as stably ascended as she was, implying that she was not as unique as the Union said.

The fabricants hope to gain their freedom in Hawaii, just as the enslaved Moriori man Autua hopes to get his freedom in Hawaii in Adam Ewing’s story. But this passage vividly shows that all the promises that the corpocracy makes to fabricants are simply lies. The mechanism for killing fabricants mimics techniques for killing cattle at real-life slaughterhouses. The premise of fabricants being turned into meat recalls the plot of the science-fiction movie Soylent Green, which Timothy Cavendish references at one point in his story.



Although the Archivist seems to have more sympathy for Sonmi than most other people in his world, he nevertheless refuses to accept her story because it contradicts so many of his own beliefs about the world. Even after Sonmi provides additional evidence and raises important questions, the Archivist refuses to accept her story, reflecting how difficult it is to change people’s deep-rooted beliefs.



The word “declaration” is important in many revolutionary documents, perhaps most notably “The Declaration of Independence” from the American Revolution and “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” from the French Revolution. By simply calling the manifesto Declarations, Sonmi seems to be suggesting a universal struggle, likening the fabricants’ situation to the situations of oppressed humans of the past.



Sonmi’s interpretation of events—that the corpocracy actually staged many Union actions—adds a shocking twist to the story. It’s unclear whether Sonmi’s view is correct, or whether she’s simply become discouraged by her failure to bring about change. It’s even possible that author David Mitchell uses this section to poke fun at himself (by calling the book’s plotting too convenient), adding yet another layer to the novel’s twisted, meta structure.



Sonmi believes the Union is real, but instead of encouraging revolution, its real purpose is to give the corpocracy a defined enemy. Her whole trial and the events leading up to it were one flashy show to discredit Abolitionism. The Archivist asks why Sonmi cooperated with Hae-Joo if she suspected he was betraying her. She says she wanted to get her *Declarations* out anyway, and that she hopes the wide spread of her *Declarations* will lead to a better future, even if schoolchildren learn that her Catechism is “evil.” As her last request, Sonmi asks the Archivist to let her download the end of a movie she started watching long ago.

*Sonmi’s final answers explore the complicated nature of resistance, showing how people who seem to be protesting might simply be helping to further the goals of their oppressors. Notably, however, Sonmi stops short of embracing nihilism, saying that she is glad that she wrote *Declarations* even in spite of all the obstacles that might render her work worthless or even harmful to her cause. Despite the bleak ending, Sonmi’s story reaffirms the value of struggling despite impossible odds, an idea that echoes across most of the other stories in the novel.*



CHAPTER 8

Timothy Cavendish wakes in a daze, finding himself connected to a feeding IV. He doesn’t have his full memory back and soon drifts back into unconsciousness. It takes a couple days before he’s more lucid. Mrs. Judd informs him he’s had a stroke. Timothy describes the process of putting himself back together as a task of “Tolstoyan” proportions. He realizes that no one other than Denholme knows he’s in Aurora House, and so he’s on his own to escape.

Timothy Cavendish’s story picks up after the cliffhanger at the end of his first chapter, revealing that it was indeed a stroke, though he managed to survive it. As always, Timothy tries to understand his situation through books and other media, here referencing the Russian author Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy wrote long books with a focus on human psychology.



Miserable in his confinement, Timothy tries to find some escapism by reading *Half-Lives*. He imagines himself publishing the book and seeing it at convenience store checkout lines. He intends to make some edits, however, such as removing the hippie idea that Luisa Rey is a reincarnated version of Robert Frobisher. But he has to stop editing when he realizes his manuscript runs out of pages right after Luisa’s car drives off a bridge.

Timothy once again makes fun of the very novel he appears in, suggesting that the concept of reincarnation is some hippie fantasy. While Timothy tries to forget his current situation through escapism, even this fails—as he doesn’t have the rest of Luisa’s story, he ends up “trapped” in a different way, at a cliffhanger.



Ernie Blacksmith and Veronica Costello are two other patients at Aurora House. Ernie is a Scottish man who finds ways to smuggle in alcohol, and he and Veronica both tolerate Timothy’s grumpiness. Ernie used to repair boilers and was a locksmith too. Timothy tells them about his past as a publisher. While Ernie and Veronica seem skeptical about some details, they listen attentively. While they’re talking, Ernie happens to mention how Mr. Hotchkiss, the son of the one of Aurora House’s residents, always leaves his keys in the ignition to his vehicle when he comes to visit his mother.

Timothy’s new friends suggest that, despite all his complaints about Aurora House, he has at least found other people to commiserate with. Ernie’s attention to the key in Mr. Hotchkiss’s car’s ignition suggests that Timothy isn’t the only one who has been considering an escape from Aurora House—it also suggests that Ernie might have some skills that will prove useful for such an escape attempt.



Timothy devises his first escape plan. He sneaks over to the phone and calls his publishing company (which goes to voicemail), then his sister-in-law, asking to speak to Denholme. He learns from her that Denholme is dead and that he missed the funeral. Before he can figure out what’s going on, Mrs. Noakes cuts his line.

Denholme’s death is a strange interlude in the story, simultaneously connecting Timothy to his old life for a moment while also illustrating how hopelessly far away that life is from his current situation.



Later, during a breakfast, while Timothy is still reeling from Denholme's death, Mrs. Noakes says she's disappointed to announce that there is a thief in Aurora House. As a result, she puts Timothy on probation. Timothy bides his time playing cards with Ernie and Veronica. Timothy complains that Ernie has become a quitter, afraid to see the outside world again. Ernie, however, claims he has a perfect plan and could escape any time he wants to. Ernie leaves, angry with Timothy.

It's the week of Christmas, and Ernie remains angry with Timothy, while Veronica has sympathy for Timothy but stays with Ernie. Timothy fantasizes about meeting the author of *Half-Lives* and getting to read the rest of it. The Christmas meal is disappointing. Timothy considers dropping his grudge against Ernie but doesn't. Instead, he tries to get the reverend (who is there for Christmas mass) involved in a scheme to get out of Aurora House. He asks for the reverend's help in sending out a letter to his sister, slipping a note into the reverend's pocket.

Timothy dreams about seeing Ursula when he's out. But he's disappointed when he wakes up on Christmas and finds his letter all torn up, apparently intercepted by Mrs. Noakes. Timothy feels like giving up.

On Boxing Day, Timothy, Ernie, and Veronica finally all reconcile. Timothy puts aside his pride to apologize, and Ernie, after some hesitation, invites him to join an escape plan that he has hatched with Veronica. The plan takes place in two days, on the 28th, when Mrs. Judd will be away with her nieces.

The 28th comes. Timothy sets the plan in motion by using a stolen cell phone to call Mr. Hotchkiss and tell him his mother is seriously ill, convincing Mr. Hotchkiss to come right away. The second step involves Ernie reporting to Mrs. Noakes that Timothy has died. They stage a fake dead Timothy with pillows under a blanket. Timothy's room has an external lock, so they trap Mrs. Noakes inside when she comes to check on the supposed body.

Timothy feels confused and has mixed feelings about Denholme's death (since Denholme is the one who trapped Timothy in Aurora House in the first place). Since he has no other way to express his frustration, Timothy takes it out on Ernie, perhaps accidentally hitting too close to home when he accuses Ernie of being afraid of the outside world—or perhaps Timothy is projecting his own fear of the outside world onto Ernie.



Timothy isn't willing to swallow his pride and try to make amends with Ernie, so instead he decides to try to act on his own. Trying to recruit the reverend as an unwilling accomplice, Timothy makes one last desperate attempt to reach the outside world in a way that Mrs. Noakes won't be able to intercept.



The ripped-up letter suggests that either Mrs. Noakes witnessed Timothy giving the letter to the reverend, or the reverend himself took the letter to Mrs. Noakes.



Ultimately, the selfish Timothy grows from his setbacks by finally finding the courage to apologize to Ernie. This ends up being a smart decision, because he, Ernie, and Veronica can accomplish much more together than they can apart.



This passage is one of many in the novel that plays with the tropes of fiction about escaping. Timothy and his partners rely on old but proven tricks like using pillows under the blanket to hide their absence, perhaps suggesting more broadly that some clichés become clichés for a reason: because they work.



Mr. Hotchkiss arrives with his wife at reception and is angry that he can't see his mother yet. Veronica pretends to be a friend of his mother and invites him in past reception, saying the doctor is busy. Ernie and Timothy get into the car, but Ernie realizes there's no key—Mrs. Hotchkiss took the keys in. Just then, Veronica comes out with some keys that she got from Mrs. Hotchkiss. People realize what's going on, and Mr. Hotchkiss comes back and bangs on the car window. But Timothy starts the ignition and drives off.

Timothy says he'll distract their pursuers so that Ernie can get out and pick the lock on the gate. But Ernie says they only have one option: to ram the gate head on. He lied about being able to pick an electric lock and always planned on ramming their way out—he just didn't want Timothy to panic. Veronica finds it all thrilling. Timothy aims the car toward the gate and accelerates. The car smashes through, and then Timothy slams the brakes. The car stops safely on the other side of the gate.

Timothy knows his way around, so he navigates with no problem. He, Ernie, and Veronica make their way to a gas station next to a pub. They park in the pub (so no one sees the car at the gas station), and Ernie goes to get a can of gas. Then they all enter the pub, which is packed with people wildly cheering for a soccer match of England vs. Scotland, and they check their map. While they're inside, they see Mr. Hotchkiss and other people from Aurora House outside.

There's no escape, but the Scottish Ernie gets up and says that some Englishmen have come in to take his rights away. The Scottish soccer fans turn off the TV and face the intruders. Mr. Hotchkiss says something rude to them, and someone knocks his tooth out. Ernie, Veronica, and Timothy make an escape and drive away.

Timothy, Ernie, and Veronica make it to Glasgow, where Ernie has Mr. Hotchkiss's car scrapped. In Glasgow, Timothy parts ways with Ernie and Veronica. Timothy tries to contact his old secretary, who fills him in on what happened. Dermot's brothers tore apart his publishing company after he failed to provide the money. The destruction was caught on video, and the secretary made a deal with the brothers: in exchange for not sending out the video and giving the brothers a share of future royalties, the brothers will give up on trying to get Timothy. Best of all, a Hollywood studio has optioned *Knuckle Sandwich*.

The setback with the keys reveals how even the best plans aren't foolproof. Although Ernie and Timothy seem to be the main architects of the plan, Veronica makes an important contribution by showing up with the keys, emphasizing the value of cooperation and how each person in a group makes their own contributions. By banding together, Timothy, Ernie, and Veronica seem to succeed in doing what the fabricants of the previous chapter could not.



The violent crash of the car through the gate suggests that sometimes it's necessary to use force. The car's smashing of the gate also recalls how Luisa Rey's VW smashed over the railing of the bridge, showing how a destructive act in one context becomes a productive one in a slightly different context.



Ernie is Scottish and Timothy is from London, but they nevertheless come together to collaborate on an escape plan. This tension between Scotland and England humorously plays out in the background as people watch a soccer match between England and Scotland.



Just as Ernie and Timothy collaborated, now Ernie appeals to the sympathy of some complete strangers to convince the Scottish pubgoers to help him, successfully using his Scottish identity to appeal to their sympathies.



*Timothy's story ends happily. Although he will have to readjust to his old life, things seem to be going his way, with the Hollywood option for *Knuckle Sandwich* suggesting that Timothy's publishing success may only continue to grow. Facing his mortality in the nursing home, and with it, the possibility of becoming forgotten and irrelevant, Timothy devotes himself to his work with renewed vigor.*



Timothy ponders his future. He figures that if Dermot can write a bestseller, maybe Timothy can too. He also sends an email to the author of *Half-Lives* to try to get the rest of the manuscript. Timothy returns to his work and tries to avoid becoming prematurely “Undead,” like a nursing home resident.

The ending of Timothy’s story neatly sets up how he will read the ending of the Luisa Rey novel, setting up the next chapter in Cloud Atlas.



CHAPTER 9

40. The cold water shocks Luisa Rey back to life. She struggles to get out of the vehicle before she realizes that Rufus Sixsmith’s report is still in the car. She goes back to get it and pulls it free but gets disoriented and can’t find the way up. She fears she’s going to die trying to get the report back.

As with many of the other chapters from the first half of the book, Luisa’s story ended on a cliffhanger, and now it picks up with the shocking revelation that she managed to survive her car’s plunge into the water.



41. On an airplane, Isaac Sachs wonders whether he did the right thing by giving Rufus’s report to Luisa. A suitcase in the plane’s baggage area holds enough C-4 to blow the whole plane up. Near him on the plane, Grimaldi (whom Isaac betrayed) is laughing, smiling, and drinking a cocktail. Isaac writes in his notebook about how imagined pasts and futures help to influence ideas about real pasts and futures. Suddenly, someone hits the C-4 detonator, and the plane blows up.

The explosion of the plane raises the stakes and sets the tone for the remainder of the story, showing how, even though Luisa survived, there will still be plenty of violence and death. It isn’t clear whether Isaac was one of the targets of the bombing or just a casualty of an assassination attempt against Grimaldi.



42. Lloyd Hooks gives a speech outside the Swanekke Hotel. In the back, he notices Bill Smoke, who holds up three fingers to indicate that Grimaldi, Isaac, and Luisa are all dead. Lloyd continues his speech undisturbed. 43. On Swanekke Island, Hester Van Zandt watches divers looking for Luisa’s VW. She tells a curious teenager that Luisa died, but in fact, Luisa survived and is recovering at Hester’s place. Luisa plans to go into hiding at her mother’s (Judith Rey) place, at least until her enemies realize she isn’t dead.

Previous chapters hinted that Lloyd Hooks was up to something, but he manages to hide his intention to kill Grimaldi until after Grimaldi is already dead. Luisa’s seeming death gives her some time to collect her thoughts, but now that she doesn’t have Rufus’s report anymore, she’ll have an uphill battle to get her story published.



44. One of Hester’s men goes to a payphone and calls Joe Napier. He hints Luisa might be alive and asks how much Napier would be willing to pay for her whereabouts. 45. Luisa returns to her apartment and smells popcorn. She scolds Javier for frying with oil while she was out, but Javier says “Uncle Joe” made the popcorn. Luisa finds Napier sitting on her couch. She orders him to get out, but Napier protests he’s the only one at Seaboard who doesn’t want her dead.

Surveillance plays a big role in Luisa’s story, adding more elements of spy fiction. Luisa doesn’t get to enjoy the benefits of her fake death for long—someone is always watching. Napier invades Luisa’s personal space, suggesting at first that, like Bill Smoke, he is unhinged and enjoys interacting with victims personally.



46. Napier reveals to Luisa how he used to work with her father (Lester Rey) as a police officer. He explains that when Lester took a grenade, he was actually kicking it away to save Napier. Napier says that, for Luisa's sake, she should forget about Rufus's report and leave town. He adds that Grimaldi doesn't even know he's with her. He also claims that he didn't kill Rufus, although he is guilty of sometimes looking the other way. Eventually, Napier leaves. Javier calls Luisa a hypocrite, saying that she scolds him for jumping across balconies while she's off living an even more dangerous life.

47. As they leave the apartment, Javier asks Luisa if she wishes she could see the future. They debate whether seeing the future would allow a person to change the future, and Luisa doesn't give a conclusive answer. She shakes hands with Javier, and they part ways. 48. Bill Smoke watches Luisa enter the home of her mother, Judith Rey. Bill Smoke hopes his next attempt to kill Luisa is more intimate than a car crash.

49. Luisa's stepfather has guests over for a fundraiser, many of them young men, and they discuss Cold War politics. Luisa gives her own theory of evaluating leaders: how did a person get power, how are they using it, and how can they lose it? 50. Judith says the fundraiser guests find Luisa abrasive. She suggests that since Luisa is single, she should try to be nicer to men. Just then, Bill Smoke knocks on the door and pretends to be a party guest from the backyard who's leaving. Judith calls Luisa over to say goodbye to him, but just then, Luisa sees a report on TV about a jet accident that killed 12 people, including Grimaldi (and Isaac).

51. Next Monday, rumors swirl at *Spyglass* that the magazine is going under. Meanwhile, Luisa ponders the recent jet explosion. She knows why people might want Isaac dead but can't understand who'd want to take out Grimaldi at the same time. Her boss, Grelsch, is late to work. When he arrives, he tells them the magazine got sold and there will be layoffs.

52. Napier gets called into the office of the vice CEO of Seaboard, William Wiley. He's surprised to see Fay Li already there. Wiley says that although Napier was very loyal to Grimaldi, they will have to let him go. They offer a generous retirement package. Napier accepts at once, although he plans to keep a gun strapped to his calf until he's safely off Swanekke Island.

As it turns out, however, Napier might actually be telling the truth about his willingness to help Luisa. Napier feels a debt to Lester since Lester saved his life, and Napier may want to try to repay that debt by helping Luisa. Additionally, if Napier is telling the truth, he's putting himself at risk by visiting her without telling Grimaldi first.



*Javier and Luisa's argument about the future is relevant to the novel's themes, given that *Cloud Atlas* itself presents several visions of the future. Meanwhile, Bill Smoke's actions throughout the story reveal that unlike Joe Napier, Bill Smoke is an unambiguously evil character.*



Luisa has strong opinions, which make her unpopular with the young men at the party, who seem to be conservative and traditional and don't appreciate women with strong, vocal opinions. Although Luisa suspects that Seaboard Power has hired an assassin, she doesn't know who Bill Smoke is or what he looks like, which allows him to waltz right up to her front door and pretend to be a party guest. Bill Smoke represents how danger can be hiding in plain sight, reinforcing the overall paranoid tone of the Luisa Rey chapters.



Luisa doesn't know what happened on the plane, so she has to attempt to piece the events together from the surviving evidence. Grelsch's announcement about the magazine's purchase and upcoming layoffs hints at the possibility of a conspiracy to silence the magazine's work.



Grimaldi's enemies recognize that Napier was an ally of Grimaldi but seem to think it will be easier to pay Napier off than to try to stage an "accident" for him too. Although Napier has his doubts, he quickly accepts their offer because he knows the potential consequences of making enemies.



53. Luisa goes to the music store that carries Robert Frobisher's *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. Although it's a very rare recording, Luisa swears she's heard it before. 54. Back at the *Spyglass* office, Grelsch calls Luisa into his office. Out of all the staff writers, she's the only one who gets fired in the buyout. Luisa asks questions to a man from the new company, Trans Vision, Inc., including whether or not the new company has any connection to Seaboard Power, but the man doesn't give straight answers.

55. Joe Napier feels good as he leaves Swanekke Island. He hears a rattling in his car but ignores it. But then the sound keeps getting worse. He goes out to a cabin in a remote location, keeping his gun with him just in case. As he goes to sleep that night, he's haunted by visions of how he witnessed Bill Smoke assault Margo Roker but did nothing.

56. The next morning, Judith wakes up and is surprised to see Luisa already eating breakfast. She's up early to go pick up her things at the office. As she reads the morning paper, she notices an article about Lloyd Hooks taking over Seaboard Power after Grimaldi's death. In the article, William Wiley says he's happy to welcome Lloyd. Luisa tells Judith she's still following the story, even if it means she has to work freelance.

57. On her last day at *Spyglass*, Luisa gets coffee at a diner first and is surprised to see Grelsch there. Grelsch says he's a regular at the diner—he and Luisa just always arrive at different times. Grelsch implies that he's known for a while that he'd have to fire Luisa for a while—he explains that *Spyglass*'s new owners made veiled threats about Grelsch's wife's leukemia and his insurance coverage. He slips Luisa a document that shows that Trans Vision, Inc., pays several unlisted corporate advisers, including Hooks and Wiley. He connects Luisa with a writer at another magazine who is interested in the story—if Luisa gets evidence. 58. Luisa's coworkers help her carry out her things and complain about how unfair her firing is. An envelope came for Luisa in the mailroom—it contains a safe-deposit key and a note.

59. The note is from Rufus. In the note, Rufus explains that he heard about possible danger to his life, so he stashed a copy of his report in a safety deposit box at a bank. Luisa drives to the bank but doesn't notice a beat-up black Chevy parked out front.

Luisa's sense of déjà vu about the Cloud Atlas Sextet lends further evidence to the idea that she may be a reincarnation of Robert Frobisher. Luisa's sudden firing by the new company makes it obvious that Seaboard is involved somehow, but because Luisa lacks evidence, she struggles to prove what she knows to be true.



The surprise revelation that Napier witnessed Bill Smoke assault Margo Roker helps explain why Napier suddenly seems to regret his past actions.



The newspaper article that Luisa reads confirms that Hooks and Wiley plotted to take control of Seaboard Power. In the first part of Luisa's story, Grimaldi said that someone else would only become CEO over his dead body, and this passage proves him correct in a darkly humorous fashion.



*Grelsch reveals that, despite his outward appearance of having given up on journalistic integrity, a part of him still cares about discovering the truth. In particular, Grelsch seems to regret how *Spyglass*'s new owners have made him act as a puppet, using his wife's leukemia as a bargaining chip to make him fire Luisa. And so, just when Luisa's future seems hopeless, she gets some assistance from Grelsch and a mysterious note about a safe-deposit box, giving the story yet another twist of fortune.*



The black Chevy is Bill Smoke's car, and it's damaged because he used it to ram into Luisa's VW. Its presence suggests a danger that Luisa isn't aware of.



60. Already inside the bank, Li reflects that Napier looks dumb but is smart, while Bill Smoke looks smart but is dumb, since Napier knows when to quit but Bill Smoke gets too involved in his job. Li is waiting for Luisa, and Li's men pounce on Luisa when she goes into the vault. In Cantonese, Li orders one of her men to shoot Luisa cleanly in the head and dispose of the body. Li goes to claim the Rufus report, but when she opens the drawer it seems that Bill Smoke set up a bomb.

As it turns out, Bill Smoke isn't the only danger awaiting Luisa. Li acts independently, trying to earn money for herself and willing to confront both Seaboard Power and Luisa to do it. Li pretends to help Luisa while secretly betraying her by telling one of her (Li's) men to shoot Luisa in the head. Li faces the consequences of her greed, however, when she opens the safety-deposit box and activates a bomb intended for Luisa.



61. The bomb blast sends Luisa flying. Someone helps Luisa out of the rubble and forces her toward a black Chevy. 62. Napier grabs Luisa and pulls her away from the black Chevy. He tells her that if she wants to live, she needs to come with him; she doesn't protest. They make their way down the block, but Bill Smoke is reaching into his pocket for a gun. They try to escape by bursting into a warehouse.

Although Bill Smoke isn't visible at first, he seems to be the unseen figure dragging Luisa toward the black Chevy. Fortunately for Luisa, however, Napier decided not to stay in retirement, appearing at the last second to save her. As she did with Grelsch, Luisa's own optimism and persistence seem to bring out the best in characters she interacts with.



63. Bill Smoke curses Wiley and Hooks for trusting Napier to retire quietly. They enter the warehouse and split up to try to find Luisa. 64. Napier and Luisa enter a storeroom and wedge the door shut behind them. They run through rows of cardboard boxes, trying to avoid giving their pursuers a clear line of sight to shoot at them. Suddenly, they reach an emergency exit door that seems to be locked. Napier fires four bullets at it with no luck, then he finally kicks the door open. Inside is a sweatshop full of mostly Mexican women at sewing machines. Luisa and Napier try to exit through a locked door, but one of Bill Smoke's henchmen catches up to them. He asks them for their last words, but before he can shoot, one of the workers hits him over the head with a metal wrench, killing him.

The locked sweatshop in the factory represents how, even in a time and place where slavery is illegal, people often have to work difficult jobs in grueling conditions. Although Napier and Luisa are total strangers to the Mexican workers, the workers seem to instinctively feel a sense of solidarity with Luisa and Napier, and so one of the workers helps kill Bill Smoke's henchman. This passage shows the benefits of collaboration, echoing some of the ideas from Timothy Cavendish's escape from Aurora House.



65. Napier and Luisa get out of the warehouse and take a subway. Napier says he's taking Luisa to see someone who just flew in. 66. Megan Sixsmith (Rufus's niece) just got into town from **Hawaii**. She and Luisa meet at a modern art museum, while Napier stands discreetly nearby. Megan asks Luisa if she thinks Rufus was really murdered, and Luisa says she knows so. After deciding that she can trust Luisa, Megan tells Luisa that Rufus kept drafts of his academic papers on a yacht called the *Starfish*.

Although Megan has been an important part of the story before, this is the first time her character appears in the story in person. She provides key information revealing that Rufus kept copies of his work—meaning that Luisa can still find enough proof for an article. Megan's scientific work on Hawaii seems to be an early precursor to the ruined observatories that Zachry witnesses on his own island in the distant future.



67. Napier parks at a marina that advertises itself as “Proud home of the *Prophetess*: Best-preserved schooner in the world.” At the art museum earlier, Megan gave Luisa a map that shows that the *Starfish* sits just a little past the *Prophetess*. Now, as Luisa approaches it, her **comet** birthmark seems to throb. She and Napier break into the *Starfish* and find a draft of the report on the Swanekke nuclear plant. Just then, there’s motion on the stairs, and someone shoots. Luisa sees Napier fall. An unseen shooter tells Luisa to put the report on a table. Luisa does so. She asks the man if he’s Bill Smoke, who killed Rufus.

68. Napier’s thoughts become hazy. He thinks he sees Bill Smoke. Napier struggles to pull out his own gun. As Napier dies, he pulls the trigger to shoot Bill Smoke. 69. Meanwhile, Hester visits the comatose Margo Roker at the hospital. All of a sudden, while Hester is reading Margo a poem, Margo gasps for air, and her eyes fly open.

70. Luisa reads an article about new Seaboard CEO Hooks skipping his bail. As an eyewitness to the shootout between Napier and Bill Smoke, Luisa herself gets mentioned in the article. Now that the authorities are on the case, she no longer has to worry about “Seaboardgate.” Luisa then turns to a postcard she recently received from Javier, who has moved with his mom to a new house. He says he saw Luisa on TV and hopes she won’t forget him now that she’s famous. Finally, Luisa looks at her last item of mail: a package from Megan containing the eight remaining letters that Robert sent Rufus.

The Prophetess is the ship Adam Ewing takes to Hawaii, and so this passage directly connects back to his story. This, combined with the throbbing of Luisa’s comet birthmark, suggests that various plot threads are all coming together. But before Luisa can get away with the report, the relentless Bill Smoke surprises her, showing just how persistent forces of evil can be.



Napier dies a hero’s death, saving Luisa from Bill Smoke; he manages to redeem himself for his previous actions, but at the ultimate cost. Napier’s sacrifice is so powerful that it even seems to wake Margo Roker from her coma, perhaps because Napier has repented for not doing anything during her assault.



Luisa’s story gets a happy ending, showing how with some help, a gossip-column writer was able to follow the truth and take down a major company. The name “Seaboardgate” references the Watergate scandal, a political scandal that led to President Richard Nixon’s resignation, would have happened recently (“Half-Lives” takes place in the 1970s). Watergate itself was a bit of a spy story, involving surveillance and clandestine meetings with informants just like Luisa’s story. When Luisa receives the letters from Megan, it follows the pattern of all the other chapters in the back half of the book, immediately setting up the next chapter.



CHAPTER 10

10TH—X—1931—Robert Frobisher writes to Rufus Sixsmith that Vyvyan Ayrs has been in a morphine haze for three days. Robert focuses on his own music. One time, he gets so distracted that he works through the night. The next morning, a man named Morty Dhondt stops by to pick Robert up for an excursion. Dhondt drives Robert down to the cemetery where Robert’s brother, Adrian Frobisher, may have been buried during the Great War, then he leaves Robert alone.

Robert struggles to find Adrian’s headstone in all the similar rows. A directory confirms there are no Frobishers in the fields, so Robert lays flowers on the grave of someone with the closest name he can find, “Froame.” Robert thinks back on his brother, and how in his father’s eyes, Robert never measured up to Adrian. He wonders if Adrian was bisexual, or if it’s just Robert who’s that way. Dhondt returns to pick Robert up.

Although Vyvyan Ayrs showed some signs of vitality during Robert’s early days with him, his declining health suggests that he can’t ignore his old age forever. Meanwhile, the reveal about Robert’s dead brother helps explain many aspects of Robert’s personality, including his constant feeling that nothing he’ll ever do in life will be good enough.



In a darkly humorous moment, Robert lays the flowers meant for his brother on the grave of a random stranger. This passage depicts the futility of trying to honor the dead, since Robert has no way to communicate with Adrian anymore, and he can’t ask him the questions he wishes he’d asked while Adrian was still alive.



On the drive back, Dhondt's car hits and injures a pheasant. Robert euthanizes it with a large rock. They get back in the car, but the collision has damaged the car, so Dhondt stops again to inspect it. Robert asks Dhondt how he spent the war, and Dhondt says he and his wife saw the war coming and spent the duration in Johannesburg. Dhondt worries the next war might be so big that there's nowhere to run. Dhondt argues that war will always be with humanity, but Robert argues that maybe someday, humans will invent weapons powerful enough to destroy civilization. Dhondt agrees this is possible.

21ST–X–1931—Robert reports that Ayr's finally seems to be recovering. Meanwhile, Jocasta becomes increasingly needy with Robert. Robert has been working on a piece he calls a "sextet for overlapping soloists." The next day, Robert gets in an argument with a recovered Ayr's, who may have plagiarized one of Robert's own pieces. Ayr's protests that all composers take inspiration and that Robert can leave if he doesn't like his current arrangement.

A couple days later, Jocasta visits Robert and begs him to stay for her sake. She says that though Ayr's is proud, he still values Robert's work. Robert decides to be more cautious about sharing work with Ayr's. The next day, Robert has a lunch appointment with Eva and the van de Velde family, who have five daughters, one of whom wants to marry an Englishman and believes Sherlock Holmes is a real person. Robert finds the whole family pretentious. Later, he and Eva bond over a mutual dislike of the van de Veldes. Eva admits that while she was in Switzerland, she missed a certain young man she knows. Robert is surprised but flattered. Eva says she treated Robert poorly but wants to start again.

24TH–X–1931—Robert curses Rufus for not replying. Robert wants to get rid of Belgium, since if it never existed, Adrian might still be alive. He complains yet again about his father cutting him off. 29TH–X–1931—Robert confesses that he's falling in love with Eva and daydreams about her often.

6TH–XI–1931—Robert says that while divorces can get complicated, his "divorce" from Ayr's happens quickly. One morning, Ayr's asks Robert to put together some ideas for an upcoming work. Robert doesn't like the idea of being a co-composer, but in fact, Ayr's himself wants credit for refining Robert's work. Robert accuses him of plagiarism, which causes Ayr's to get defensive. He threatens to dismiss Robert and reveals that he knows Robert is having sex with Jocasta. The argument gets heated. Eventually, Ayr's recommends that Robert go away, work on the new piece, then come back the next day, pretending nothing happened. Robert goes along with Ayr's's plan so that he'll have more time to think.

Robert's killing of the pheasant hints that Robert may be capable of violence, but it isn't clear yet what form that violence will take. Meanwhile Dhondt shows none of Robert's shame about missing the war. Robert and Dhondt's discussion about humanity destroying itself with powerful weapons references the later chapters in the book that take place after the apocalypse.



Robert's composition seems to be a microcosm for the whole novel itself. Like the Cloud Atlas Sextet, the novel Cloud Atlas is also a "sextet for overlapping soloists," where each of the six stories focuses on a different character but the stories contain similarities and overlapping elements.



As Ayr's health declines, he seemingly tries to compensate for his own shortcomings by relying more and more on Robert's work, which builds tension between them. Meanwhile, Robert seems to be growing closer to Eva (even as he has an affair with her mother), setting up yet another possible source of tension. The dinner scene at the van de Velde family household satirizes the pretentiousness of the upper classes and the isolated lives they live, a theme that is relevant in other chapters as well.



Robert's unusually short letters suggest that his behavior is becoming more erratic and perhaps isn't thinking as clearly as usual.



This new longer letter reveals why his previous two letters were so erratic—Robert's working relationship with Ayr's has finally reached its breaking point. Robert and Ayr's are both extremely proud: Ayr's can't stand the idea of growing old and irrelevant, while Robert can't stand the idea of someone else taking credit for his own work. In his characteristically eccentric fashion, Ayr's tries to solve this conflict by pretending it never happened (or perhaps he's even experiencing memory loss), but Robert holds grudges and has had enough.



Robert goes out walking in some fields, full of anger. He daydreams about Eva and concludes that while he can't imagine working another day for Ayr's, he also can't imagine leaving Eva forever. The next morning, at 4:00 a.m., Robert sneaks out. He stops in Ayr's bedroom feels a strange impulse to steal his pistol and some bullets. As Robert watches Ayr sleep, he feels another strange urge to kill Ayr but doesn't, knowing that it would make no sense. Robert stops by Eva's room, which is empty since she's at school. Finally, Robert makes his way to Bruges and finds a hotel.

In a postscript, Robert reassures Rufus that he's feeling fine. He also mentions that when he was leaving, he just so happened to find the second half of *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing*.

NEAR THE ENDTH—XI—1931—Robert works nonstop on his *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. He thinks that he's doing his best work and is feeling well. His only regret is that he keeps waiting for Eva to show up at his hotel.

25TH—XI—1931—Robert has a cold. Later, the hotel manager comes by, demanding to see some proof that Robert will be able to pay for his room. The next day, Robert feels better but still longs for Eva or even Jocasta. He tries to intercept Eva at an event at the van de Veldes' house, but a butler refuses him entrance. Robert gets one foot in the door and shouts to Eva. She comes to the door, but instead of embracing him, she asks with disgust what happened to him. Robert looks at himself in the mirror and remembers he's been forgetting to shave lately.

Eva is with a handsome young Swiss man. Robert gets angry at him for handling Eva, but Eva protests that the man is her fiancé. Eva tried to tell Robert about the young man earlier, but Robert assumed she was talking about him. Robert feels humiliated, and when Eva's fiancé taunts him, Robert pounces on him and kicks him. After that, Robert feels better.

About a week later, a man Robert doesn't know visits him at his hotel room. The man, Verplancke, warns Robert that Eva's fiancé has an influential father who might press assault charges. Verplancke says Robert might be able to avoid trouble if he leaves Bruges within the next week. Finally, Verplancke asks to get a preview of Robert's new work, and Robert allows it. Verplancke asks for a full copy when it's published.

Robert builds up Eva in his mind, expecting things from her that no human can possibly live up to. Nevertheless, he remains convinced that his plan is a good one. Robert's impulse to steal Ayr's gun seems to be the direct influence of what Zachry would call Old Georgie, but for Robert, it's just an intrusive thought.



The fact that Robert reassures Rufus he's feeling fine suggests that Rufus has noticed something strange about Robert's letters and brought it up in his own correspondence.



As Robert's letters become more eccentric, he doesn't even give them real dates, suggesting that time has started to break down for him. This parallels the structure of the book itself, which plays with time in complicated ways, collapsing past, present, and future together.



Eva's absence suggests that she may not reciprocate Robert's feelings, but this possibility doesn't even seem to occur to him. Robert's sickness in his body seems to go hand-in-hand with a deteriorating mental state. His forgetfulness about shaving could be a sign of depression. The mirror, which Robert looks into, is an important symbol, given that Cloud Atlas has a mirror structure, with stories in the first half reflected again in the second half.



Robert finds out in humiliating fashion that all of his fantasies about Eva were based on delusions rather than reality. While Robert has hinted at his capacity for violence before, here he lets it out, totally abandoning the typical behavior of polite society, which suggests that he is moving further and further from reality.



While Robert feels good about assaulting Eva's fiancé at first, he soon learns that he will have to face the consequences of his actions. Robert must leave town, starting his life over again, just as he did when he first came to Belgium.



QUARTER PAST FOUR IN THE MORNING,
12TH—XII—1931—Robert confesses that he plans to shoot himself through the roof of the mouth with Ayr's gun in about 45 minutes. He says he actually saw Rufus at his hotel, although Rufus didn't see him. In fact, Robert had to move to a new hotel after another visit from the manager at his last hotel.

Robert says he knew he'd never live to 25. He thinks lots of people give suicide a bad name, but the Japanese were right to consider suicide courageous. He tells Rufus not to blame his suicide on love, which would be ridiculous, given how briefly he loved Eva. Robert writes that he's made arrangements for Rufus to receive his *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, as well as the rest of Adam Ewing's journal. Robert laments that he wishes he had been born as music instead of as a human. As the hour of Robert's suicide approaches, he feels like Adrian must have felt when he knew he was going to die. He figures no one stays dead for long and that soon enough, he and Rufus will meet again.

CHAPTER 11

Adam Ewing's journal picks up mid-sentence where it left off in Chapter 1. The ship he's on, *The Prophetess*, approaches land for the first time in many weeks, arriving at a Polynesian island called Raiatea. Captain Molyneux invites Henry Goose and Adam to come ashore to a settlement called Nazareth, in Bethlehem Bay. Adam is suspicious of the offer but agrees. First mate, Boerhaave, accompanies them. The captain leads them ashore to a church run by a British missionary, Preacher Horrox. He uses Henry and Adam's presence to suggest that he runs a respectable ship and never drinks. And so, the captain manages to trick Preacher Horrox and win his favor.

Preacher Horrox and his wife explain that their mission has been so successful on the island because a smallpox plague caused the local Polynesian people to look for spiritual comfort. Captain Molyneux asks how the preacher manages to fund his mission. Preacher Horrox replies that enslaved Black people work on a local plantation, which raises enough to help pay for everything. Captain Molyneux suggests that the preacher's business might be even more profitable if he could sell his goods to a closer market, perhaps San Francisco, which is just three weeks away by sea and has grown in size considerably since the gold rush. Henry's reputation as a doctor causes some of the locals to seek him out. Adam Ewing leaves the meeting and goes out on his own to explore the island.

The chronology of the letter is momentarily confusing: Robert says he's already shot himself, and yet he still seems alive enough to write a letter. This reflects the delay in communication with letters—Robert is alive when he writes the letter but will be dead by the time Rufus reads it, making the letter essentially his suicide note. Robert's suicide foreshadows how Rufus himself will die of a gunshot wound, which the newspapers will report as a suicide.



*Robert's final message is even more erratic than his earlier letters. Even as he prepares to die, however, Robert cares about his pride, taking great pains to reassure Rufus that he didn't kill himself over Eva. The fact that Robert chooses to send Rufus the *Cloud Atlas Sextet* suggests that Robert still wants a part of himself to live on, even as he prepares to die. By sending Rufus the remainder of Adam Ewing's journal, Robert sets up the last chapter, closing the final loop in the novel's structure.*



The fact that Adam's journal picks up mid-sentence helps contribute to the fiction that it is a real journal that Robert just happened to find in Ayr's library somewhere. The names Nazareth and Bethlehem Bay continue the theme of Christian imagery. Although Adam claimed in the first chapter to be a proponent of Christian missionaries to foreign countries, this seems to be one of Adams's first times seeing a missionary in person.



Although Preacher Horrox uses euphemistic language, it seems that he exploited the disease and people's fear of the islands in order to grab influence (and money) for himself. Preacher Horrox shows no qualms about using slave labor, and Captain Molyneux similarly shows no hesitation to transport goods produced through slave labor. The behavior of all these men shows how the pursuit of a profit can lead people to put aside morality and find ways to justify their own selfish actions.



Monday, 9th December—Adam Ewing continues his story from the previous day. He talks to a man he meets in town named Mr. Wagstaff. Wagstaff tells him that white men provide the local “savages” with schools, medicine, and jobs, yet they remain ungrateful. Wagstaff takes Adam to meet his wife, who is resentful that she is stuck on the island but Adam will leave soon. Adam gets embarrassed about starting an argument and leaves. Wagstaff shows Adam around more of the island.

That night, Adam Ewing has dinner next to a bitter old widow at Preacher Horrox’s house. Horrox has agreed to a new business venture with Captain Molyneux. At dinner, Horrox gives a speech about “Civilization’s Ladder,” which suggests that there is a natural hierarchy of the races. Horrox theorizes that in the current century, the superior races will rise up against the weaker ones. Henry protests that all of civilization operates according to an even simpler law: the strong eat the weak. He suggests that white men only rule by muskets, not by any divine right. Horrox argues instead that the musket is merely proof of the white man’s divine right, but Henry sees it as a symbol of greed.

That night, Henry complains to Adam Ewing that all his patients that day were women who exaggerated minor complaints and who fear their husbands are have sex with Polynesian women. The next afternoon, the *Prophetess* pulls away from the island. Adam muses about what he saw, thinking that Preacher Horrox’s attempts to help Polynesian people “ascend” Civilization’s Ladder appear noble on the surface, but Adam can’t endorse them the way he might’ve when he was younger.

Monday, 16th December—The *Prophetess* crosses the Equator, and all the experienced crew members haze the new members who haven’t crossed the Equator before. Boerhaave uses this excuse to treat the newest crew members cruelly.

Wednesday, 18th December—Adam Ewing’s headaches get worse, so Henry gives him larger doses of vermicide. The crew members manage to catch a shark and butcher it, although some sailors refuse to eat shark, believing it’s like cannibalism to eat a man-eater. *Friday, 20th December*—Cockroaches bother Adam as he sleeps. One sailor offers to sell him a “roach rat” for a dollar. *Sunday, 22nd December*—Adam is hot and his skin blisters. He’s been spending a lot of time in his cabin, but he comes up to the deck when several crewmembers point out a pod of migrating humpback whales.

Adam’s apparent dislike of Mr. Wagstaff, and Adam’s skepticism toward Preacher Horrox, suggest that Adam’s experiences on his voyage have inspired him to question some of his racist views.



Preacher Horrox and Henry Goose hold white supremacist views, but they arrive at those views for different reasons. Preacher Horrox believes that the races are genetically different and that white men are scientifically the best—which conveniently enough provides an excuse for his use of slave labor. Henry’s idea that the strong always triumph over the weak seems more modern in some ways by suggesting that white people aren’t genetically superior—they just have muskets. Still, Henry’s brutal worldview seems to foreshadow Social Darwinism (which applies Darwin’s concept of biological natural selection to sociology and economics), highlighting how Henry is racist in a different way.



Horrox’s use of the word “ascend” deliberately recalls the language used in Sonmi’s story about fabricants who become sentient. But while the new knowledge gained through ascension is a positive thing in Sonmi’s world, Horrox twists it to a negative, using ascension as an excuse to force his own ideas about civilization onto the Polynesian people.



Boerhaave once again shows a tendency to take things to extremes, using existing sailing traditions as an excuse to express his own sadism.



Adam’s health seems to be deteriorating, perhaps resembling Robert Frobisher’s own descent into delusion in his final letters. Meanwhile, the other sailors show little sympathy for him, with one of them even trying to profit off the situation by selling Adam a rat to eat the roaches in his room. This behavior once again shows how selfishness and greed can cause people to neglect the needs and suffering of others.



Christmas Eve—Adam Ewing’s finger swells so big that Henry has to cut off his wedding ring. Henry knows a goldsmith in **Hawaii** who can repair the ring later. *Christmas Day*—Although the dinner is better than usual, Adam has trouble digesting it. Later that evening, Adam’s parasite causes painful headaches and vermicide doesn’t help the symptoms as much as it used to. Only a few crew members are still sober, including Autua. Rafael has passed out drunk. Boerhaave picks up the unconscious Rafael, slaps his butt, and carries him off.

Boxing Day—Rafael hangs himself from the mainmast. Adam Ewing is shocked and doesn’t understand why. Henry repeats a rumor he heard that Boerhaave raped Rafael, not just on Christmas but frequently. *Friday, 27th December*—Adam confronts Captain Molyneux, suggesting that Boerhaave and others sexually abused Rafael and he took his own life to escape it. The captain curses him and says he makes all the decisions on the ship, not Adam. Later, Adam wonders if anything he did made Rafael feel like he had “permission” to die by suicide.

Saturday, 28th December—Adam Ewing has nightmares about Rafael killing himself. *Sunday, 29th December*—Adam feels very sick. *Monday, 30th December*—Adam believes that his parasite’s poison sacs have burst and that he will die in hours, still two days away from **Hawaii**. Adam starts writing an unfinished sentence to his son Jackson Ewing about what to do if anything happens to him.

Sunday, 12th January—By New Year’s, Adam Ewing’s condition becomes so severe that he can’t hide his condition from Captain Molyneux anymore. Henry tells the captain and Boerhaave that Adam’s parasite is contagious, so they’ll stay away. Adam spends much of his time in a daze. He overhears Henry telling someone that the worst of Adam’s condition is over and that he’s regaining his color. Autua tries to see Adam to return Adam’s favor and save Adam’s life, but Henry invents lies to keep Autua away, telling him that Adam regrets ever saving Autua’s life.

Henry’s lies surprise Adam Ewing. He suddenly gets the idea that Henry might be poisoning him instead of curing him. He gets up and tries to escape but is too weak. Henry sees him and realizes that Adam has figured everything out, so he drops the ruse. He admits that he’s killing Adam for his money—it’s as simple as that. As a doctor, Henry sees humans as diseased pieces of meat, even his friends, and he lives by his rule of survival that the strong eat the weak. He robs Adam’s trunk and is disappointed at how little it contains.

The events in Adam’s journal take place around the same time of year when, many years later, Timothy Cavendish plots his escape from Aurora House. Adam himself seems like he needs to escape, but the problem is that he’s trapped inside his own body. It is obvious in this passage that Boerhaave is doing something sexual with the unconscious Rafael, potentially even raping him, but Adam seems totally oblivious to this.



The previous journal entry strongly hinted that Boerhaave was sexually abusing Rafael, and this passage reveals that, in fact, the abuse goes beyond one drunken night. Adam confronts the guilt that many people feel in the wake of a death, particularly a suicide, and Adam’s delirious mental state contributes to the intensity of his guilt.



These short journal entries, including one that ends mid-sentence, seem to suggest that Adam is nearing the end of his life. Adam’s incomplete message to his son suggests that Adam himself has prepared for the possibility of dying.



While Henry seems at first to be helping Adam by giving him privacy, the conversation that Adam overhears between Autua and Henry is a turning point that helps Adam realize that Henry’s behavior is unusual. Suddenly, some of Henry’s actions look suspicious in hindsight, like how he took Adam’s wedding ring with the promise of fixing it in Hawaii. Autua helps Adam realize the situation he’s in, meaning if Adam hadn’t saved Autua, Adam might have died himself.



While Henry has hinted at his brutal worldview before, it’s still shocking that he would betray Adam over an inconsequential sum of money. Henry represents the extremes that people will go to to satisfy their greed.



The next thing Adam Ewing remembers is drowning in salt water. He tries to swim but finds that he's actually on deck, vomiting and feverish. Autua has been making him drink salt water so that he'll vomit out the poison. Boerhaave comes over and tries to stop Autua, but Autua just throws the mate overboard. The rest of the crew stays back. Autua carries a weak Adam down a gangplank and off the ship onto what seems to be Honolulu, **Hawaii**. Autua carries Adam to some nuns at a Catholic mission.

Three days later, Adam Ewing is strong enough to sit up. He thanks Autua, who saved his life, making the two men equal. Later, Adam receives some of his things—Captain Molyneux sent them. Henry apparently escaped and fled somewhere in Honolulu. It's Adam's 34th birthday.

Monday, 13th January—It's a pleasant afternoon, and Adam Ewing is in the courtyard of the mission on a pleasant afternoon. There's an orphanage next to the convent, and some of the children there are as old as Rafael, which brings up painful memories for Adam. At night recently, Adam has been getting philosophical, wondering what causes humans to do what they do. He wonders if human nature has doomed humanity to eventual destruction. He decides it's best to believe that a more peaceful world is possible, for Jackson's sake. He feels that he must battle against the violent parts of human nature, even if it seems foolish to do so. A final footnote from Jackson notes that this is the place in his father's journal where the handwriting becomes illegible.

Just as Adam helped save Autua's life, Autua helps save Adam's. This karmic repaying of life debts recalls the situation with Lester Rey, Luisa Rey, and Joe Napier, where Lester saves Napier's life, then Napier returns the favor by saving Luisa's life. When the Prophetess arrives in Honolulu, Autua finally gains his freedom, and he immediately makes use of it by tossing Boerhaave overboard and carrying Adam ashore to safety, underscoring the loyal, unselfish nature of Autua's character.



Adam wraps up some of the remaining loose ends in his story by describing what happened to people like Henry and Captain Molyneux. While Adam was already starting to doubt his old views about race, Autua's heroic rescue of Adam represents a turning point in Adam's changing ideas about race.



The ending of Adam's journal reiterates many of the themes that show up throughout the novel. By dedicating himself to fighting injustice, Adam aligns himself with the protagonists of the other Cloud Atlas stories. The final footnote from Jackson adds one last mystery to the story—why did Adam's journal end so abruptly, and what did he attempt to write in his illegible handwriting? The open-ended conclusion to Adam's journal (and so to the novel as a whole) suggests that perhaps the fight against humanity's dark side that Adam references is part of an ongoing struggle.





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