

Oryx and Crake



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET ATWOOD

Atwood was born in Canada as one of three children. Her mother was a dietician and nutritionist and her father an entomologist. Atwood became interested in writing at a young age and eventually obtained a degree in English, French and Philosophy from the University of Toronto in 1961. She did graduate work at Harvard University, and then taught at various prestigious universities in both Canada and the US. She published her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, in 1969, and since then has written numerous books of poetry, nonfiction, and novels. Many of her novels have been bestsellers, including [The Handmaid's Tale](#), which received the first ever Arthur C. Clark award in 1987. She remains interested in feminist critique, gender roles, environmentalism, and Canadian national identity. She is a decorated author who continues to enjoy critical and commercial success. The MaddAddam Trilogy (comprising *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*) is being adapted into a televised mini-series by HBO. Atwood currently lives with her husband (with whom she has a daughter) in Toronto.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The turn of the 21st century marked unprecedented advances in science and technology which fueled various speculations about the future of culture. The importance and prestige of the humanities has declined as STEM fields have become more and more profitable and influential. Corporate influence over public policy has also been on the rise, and scientific research and consumer culture together have created an environment where commodification is intensifying. Atwood, who has always been a champion of the arts and an avid environmentalist, has been vocal about the risks of downplaying the importance of the humanities. *Oryx and Crake* is widely considered to be an extension of these efforts, an extrapolation of current trends to imagine where those trends might lead.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Oryx and Crake is the first book in the MaddAddam trilogy (books two and three are *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, respectively). The trilogy has frequently been compared to Orwell's [1984](#). *Oryx and Crake* notably references various 20th and 21st century "texts" that are not literary—self-help books, pharmaceutical advertising, and video and computer games—in order to point to the decline of the language arts and the displacement of literature by consumer and entertainment

cultures.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Oryx and Crake*
- **When Written:** 2001-2003
- **Where Written:** US and Canada
- **When Published:** 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary / feminist
- **Genre:** Science fiction /speculative fiction
- **Setting:** North America, unspecified year (most likely late 21st century.)
- **Climax:** Crake, after it is revealed that he has released a deadly plague, slits Oryx's throat and is shot by Jimmy as a result.
- **Antagonist:** Crake
- **Point of View:** 3rd person limited; Jimmy / Snowman's perspective.

EXTRA CREDIT

The LongPen. In addition to being an author and activist, Atwood is also an inventor. She conceived of a remote signing device called the LongPen, which allows her to attend and perform book signings without being present. The LongPen is an actively sold and marketed product by a company Atwood founded.



PLOT SUMMARY

The novel is split into two storylines. The first follows Snowman's endeavors after the human population of Earth has been wiped out by a massive deadly plague, when all that apparently remains are the Crakers (a genetically manipulated group of beings who are similar to but not the same as humans and survive easily in this environment) and Snowman himself, who watches over the Crakers and struggles himself to survive. The second storyline follows Jimmy (this was Snowman's name before the plague hit) and describes how the Crakers, the plague, and Snowman's lonely existence came to be.

The novel opens with Snowman going through his daily routine. He eats some of the food he's scavenged and stored, hears voices from the past in his head, and interacts with the Crakers, who ask him to tell stories from the past. Snowman invents for them a mythology in which someone called Crake is their creator and god, and Oryx, a mysterious woman who appears to Snowman's hallucinating mind in his loneliest moments, is their caregiver and creator of all animal life.

Through flashbacks we learn of Jimmy's childhood. He grew up **inside** a "Compound"—a community built around a corporation where rich scientists and their families live. The compounds are cordoned off from an **outer** world called the "pleeblands," where everyone who is not employed by a corporation must live. Jimmy's father and mother (Sharon) fight incessantly. His mother used to work for the corporations like his father does, but she quits in disgust at corporate corruption and greed and experimentation on animals. Eventually she leaves, taking Jimmy's beloved pet Killer with her (Killer is a genetic combination of a skunk with a raccoon called a "rakunk"). She explains in a note that her conscience could bear it no longer. Jimmy's father continues to live with Jimmy in the compounds, and he invites a coworker, Ramona, with whom he has been having at least an emotional affair for many years, to move in.

Jimmy's only childhood friend is Crake, who is a scientifically gifted young man with a mysterious air, who find Jimmy's aversion to science (Jimmy is a "words person" not a "numbers person") fascinating. The two spend many hours playing computer games and watching pornographic or violent video on Crake's stepfather's (called Uncle Pete) computer server. One game they play is called Extinctathon, and involves cataloguing the long list of extinct species. Crake takes his name from the extinct "Red-Necked Crake." One day when they are watching child pornography, Jimmy sees a young girl who catches his attention—he believes this girl grows up to be Oryx.

Jimmy and Crake go to separate colleges—Crake to a prestigious school for the sciences, and Jimmy to a dilapidated humanities school, where he studies rhetoric and advertising strategies. When Jimmy graduates he obtains a job writing pamphlets for a corporation called AnooYoo—he is bored and depressed by this work and begins drinking heavily and develops a sex addiction. On the news one day he sees a story about a sex scandal in San Francisco, where several girls were being kept in the garages of wealthy men. He sees Oryx among the girls, giving an interview. During this time he is also informed of the death of his mother, who has been executed by compound security forces for treason. One day Crake appears and invites him to go bar crawling in the pleeblands. Before they go Crake gives Jimmy an injection to protect him from diseases that exist there. While they are out Crake tells Jimmy about a job at the prestigious RejoovenEsense compound, where Crake is a higher-up. Jimmy agrees to take the job.

We learn that Snowman must now make his way back to this RejoovenEsense compound, because he knows there will be weapons, food, and other supplies there and he is starving to death and has no protection from predators. He tells the Crakers he must leave to go see Crake, and they express concern about his safety on this long journey. Snowman tells them he must go alone, and leaves with what supplies he has left. He is increasingly troubled by voices from his past and visions of Oryx, whom he loved dearly. His journey is

difficult—he is hunted by pigoons (a genetically modified species of pig with human organs and brain tissue.) On one night of his three-day journey he cuts his foot on a shard of glass and must nurse a growing infection. He eventually makes it to the RejoovenEsense compound and goes to a dome at the center of it called Paradise.

We learn via more flashbacks that Paradise is Crake's project, and the project to which Jimmy is assigned when he arrives at RejoovenEsense. Crake is working on a two-part initiative to eliminate human suffering. The first is a pill called BlyssPluss, which increases libido and energy to eliminate sexual frustration. It is being tested on poor sex workers with positive results. The pill also contains an undisclosed contraceptive—everyone who takes it becomes unknowingly sterilized—in order to reduce overpopulation, which Crake believes is the foremost cause of human suffering. The second part is a project involving the manipulation of human embryos. Crake shows Jimmy the results of this effort, a group of genetically modified humans called the Crakers. They are perfect, strikingly beautiful creatures with bright **green** eyes. They have plant and animal traits bred into them to make them sturdy and to ensure that they reproduce infrequently and experience no lust, attachment, or sexual frustration. Crake has also tried to breed religion, art, and philosophy out of them (though we know from Snowman's eventual interactions with the Crakers that this has more or less failed).

One of Crake's employees is a beautiful woman named Oryx whom Jimmy recognizes from the earlier videos he has seen of her. She is a caretaker for the Crakers, and teaches them how to make fire and eat. She also distributes BlyssPluss pills to test subjects in whorehouses and sex clinics all over the world. Though Oryx and Crake have a sexual relationship, and Jimmy can see that Crake loves Oryx, Oryx feels no emotional attachment to Crake and begins having an affair with Jimmy. Jimmy learns all about her past (she has worked in various sex trades) and falls deeply in love with her. He worries often that Crake knows of the affair, but Oryx insists Crake doesn't believe in jealousy and has too elegant a mind for such things. She ominously mentions once or twice that Jimmy must promise to take care of the Crakers, should anything ever happen to her. One day Oryx goes out for pizza and doesn't come back. Jimmy hears that a terrible plague is raging across every continent. He receives a phone call from Oryx, who is crying and apologizing: the plague had been in the BlyssPluss pills that Oryx had been distributing, and she had no idea. Jimmy begins to realize what has happened. He is safe in the air-locked Paradise dome, but must kill the other employees because he believes they will panic and put him in danger. Crake appears outside the dome and demands Jimmy let that Jimmy let him in. Jimmy hesitatingly unlocks the door, and Crake explains that Jimmy has been immunized by the injection he received to go into the pleeblands. Crake has Oryx,

unconscious, draped over his arm. He tells Jimmy he must take care of the Crakers, and slits Oryx's throat. In shock and horror, Jimmy shoots Crake. Jimmy waits in the dome for weeks, and watches the plague wipe out most of humanity. When the time comes, he leads the Crakers out of Paradise to the seashore where they now live. He hates Crake, and resents fulfilling his diabolical plan, but cannot stand to abandon the Crakers.

Snowman steps over the remains of Oryx and Crake as he goes into the Paradise dome. He gathers the supplies he needs, and does his best to treat the growing infection in his foot. He journeys back to the Crakers, who are delighted to see him. They also tell him that they have seen other men who look like Snowman. Snowman is shocked and elated to hear this, and the next morning travels along the shore to find these people. He sees three—two men and one woman—sitting around a fire on the beach. He wonders what will happen if he goes to talk to them—will they be friendly, will they attack him? Will they kill him? Will he kill them? The book ends here, remaining ambiguous about what he decides to do.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jimmy (Snowman) – Jimmy is the novel's protagonist, who was the best friend of Crake and deeply in love with Oryx before they were both killed at the start of the plague. After they are dead and Jimmy is left in charge of the welfare of the Crakers, he opts to call himself Snowman, as a way of severing himself from the past. Jimmy is not a gifted scientist, but is talented with words (he thinks of himself as a “words person,” not a “numbers person”). He is also, in Crake's opinion, a sex addict, and conducts affairs with numerous women throughout his youth. For all of his romantic engagements, Jimmy is a lonely character, whose parents are distant (his mother leaves when he is young and his father is uninterested in him). Crake is his only true friend, and Oryx his only true love. Jimmy is plagued by various addictions throughout his youth—he craves sex, cigarettes, and alcohol constantly. After the plague, Snowman is alone, and losing his mind. He hears voices from the past in his head, and is tormented by them. Nevertheless, he perseveres, and does his best to take care of the Crakers while keeping himself alive. He is a gifted survivalist, and a person of great interest to the Crakers. He also puts his love of words to good use: creating a kind of mythology for the Crakers, who revere him for his knowledge of their creator (Crake) and his memories of the time before they existed. Though he despises what Crake has done, he does care for the Crakers and worries diligently about their welfare.

Crake – Crake's given name is technically “Glenn,” but Jimmy notes this just once, and only to confirm that he should in fact be called Crake. His name is borrowed from the game

Extinctathon, which tests players on their knowledge of extinct animals (such as the red-necked crane). Crake is a prodigiously talented scientist with a mysterious demeanor who always wears dark, unmarked clothes and shows no interest in love or friendship except with respect to Jimmy and Oryx. Jimmy is his longtime childhood friend, and Crake is seemingly in love with Oryx, though she notes he is not good with either sexual expression or affection. Crake is obsessed with what he calls “elegant solutions” to human problems and believes things like hormones, sex, and emotional attachments, for example, are “inelegant” solutions to reproduction. Over the course of the novel he becomes increasingly interested in the idea of a biologically optimal human, which eventually leads him to create a new kind of human life (the Crakers), whom Crake has created in order to literally breed curiosity, humanism, love, and emotional turmoil out of the human condition. Crake's belief that humanity as we know it is irreversibly flawed becomes an obsessive, manic conviction that drives him to terrible actions.

Oryx – Both Jimmy and Crake are in love with Oryx. Jimmy believes he saw Oryx on a child pornography site when he was 14, again on the news when she was discovered as an enslaved sex-worker in a garage in San Francisco, and finally when she is working for Crake on the Paradise project. Oryx never confirms that these images were in fact of her, and it is possible that the character Jimmy thinks of as “Oryx” is in fact several people. We do know that the Oryx who works as a caretaker to the Crakers in Paradise participated in various kinds of sex work, and started at a very young age. She was taken from her home by a man named Uncle En, who asked her to sell flowers on the street before using her beauty to lure men into hotel rooms and extort them. After Uncle En is murdered, Oryx then then worked for an adult filmmaker man named Jack, who directs child pornography involving Oryx and several other children. Jack begins to teach Oryx English in exchange for sexual favors. She is then purchased from Jack by a San Francisco artist, who saw her on TV and wanted to give her a better life. She is kept in his garage where she continues to learn English until she is finally discovered and released. Crake meets her through a prostitution service sponsored by his school, Watson and Crick. After this first encounter, he arranges to meet with her again, and eventually hires her for project Paradise. Oryx is relentlessly optimistic, peaceful and positive, to the extent that it frustrates and angers Jimmy, who can't see how she doesn't bear any ill will towards the various people who have exploited her. Her patience and simplicity make her an ideal teacher for the Crakers, whom she loves and cares about deeply. Though she is not as fond of Crake as she is of Jimmy, she deeply admires Crake and his project because she believes Crake wants to end human suffering. Oryx is killed shortly after the plague begins, when Crake slits her throat (and is murdered by Jimmy as a result).

The Crakers – The Crakers are the result of Crake's project

“Paradise.” He pitches them as “floor models”—or examples of all of the various genetic modifications that could be sold separately to parents who were willing to pay for more genetically perfect children. But it eventually becomes clear that the Crakers are Crake’s solution to what he sees as human imperfection, and that his plan had been to eradicate humanity as we know it and leave the Crakers in its place. They are strikingly beautiful, with perfect features and flawless skin that is immune to UV damage. They have a digestive system similar to that of a rabbit, so they can survive on a wide variety of simple vegetation, so food is not scarce. Romantic love has been bred out of them entirely: sex occurs as a purely reproductive act, once every three years per female. When a female Crake is ovulating, she gives off a pheromone scent and her backside turns blue (this trait is borrowed from baboons). Then males know they can pursue her sexually, but if a male is not chosen he does not feel any disappointment or anger. The rest of the time, the Crakes are basically sexless, and sexual or romantic frustration is completely absent in them. Crake also tried to breed religion, history, and art out of the Crakers, but it appears he has been unsuccessful. The Crakers ask many questions about where they came from, and with Snowman’s guidance they build a kind of mythology for themselves, where Crake is (ironically, because he would hate any kind of mythology) their god. They also begin, towards the end of the novel, to make art—they build a likeness of Snowman in the hopes that it will help him to return safely from his trip. It is unclear whether or not we should consider the Crakers “human,” but their interest in art and history is distinctly humanistic, and suggests they are more like us than they may seem at first.

MaddAddam – MaddAddam is the mysterious game master of the game “Extinctathon,” where players are tested on their knowledge of extinct species. Maddaddam uses the game to recruit ideas for subversive or rebellious “initiatives” (like devising a virus that might kill off certain animal species invented by the corporations). He only seeks ideas from those (like Crake) who have achieved grandmaster status in the game. Crake ends up hiring his employees at Paradise from Maddaddam’s pool of grandmasters, by convincing them they are safer working inside the compound system than from outside of it.

Sharon – Jimmy’s mother was once a highly regarded scientist, but she became disillusioned with her work and quit, claiming that she simply wanted to spend more time with her son. She is depressed and her behavior is erratic and unpredictable. It is eventually suggested that Sharon knew that companies were introducing diseases into the population in order to profit from their cures, and that her and her husband’s complicit role in this activity overwhelmed her with guilt and moral anguish. Eventually she can’t take living with Jimmy’s father anymore, and leaves suddenly, telling Jimmy in a note that she still loves

him, and that she has taken Killer (Jimmy’s pet racunk) with her so that the animal can be set free. While she is gone, Jimmy hears from her rarely, via secretive post cards sent from distant locations. The CorpSeCorps question Jimmy regularly about her whereabouts. Once Jimmy sees her on television protesting with a group of environmental activists. Eventually Jimmy’s mother is found and executed by the CorpSeCorps for treason.

Jimmy’s father – Jimmy’s father is a very absent figure in Jimmy’s life. He is professionally successful, and does not display any misgivings about the ethics of the work he or anyone else does at his company. Jimmy’s father is initially very upset about Sharon’s disappearance, but slowly begins to feel liberated by it. His colleague and girlfriend, Ramona, with whom he has likely been having a long-term emotional affair, moves in and helps out with Jimmy. Once Jimmy is out of the house, he only hears from his father once or twice a year. Usually it is a birthday e-card, sent to him after his birthday has already passed. Jimmy believes his father is killed by Crake’s plague.

Killer – Killer is a “racunk” that Jimmy’s father brought home from work. It is a creature created by splicing together a raccoon and a skunk, to achieve a desirable combination of docility and cleanliness. Jimmy quickly begins to think of Killer as his best friend and greatest comfort, and talks to Killer about his life when he feels he can talk to no one else. It is therefore especially upsetting to Jimmy that his mother takes Killer with her when she disappears.

Ramona – Ramona is Jimmy’s father’s girlfriend, who moves in after Sharon’s disappearance. Ramona is a longtime assistant and colleague of Jimmy’s father, and Jimmy suspects that they have been in love for quite some time. She is kind to Jimmy after she moves in, and though Jimmy finds his father’s unabashed sexual relationship with Ramona off-putting, he likes Ramona and wishes her well. When Jimmy leaves home, he occasionally hears from Ramona, who tells him that she is trying to get pregnant, with no success yet. Jimmy assumes that Ramona is killed by Crake’s plague.

Crake’s mother – Crake’s mother appears very infrequently. She is kind to Crake and Jimmy, and carefully fixes food for them when they are at Crake’s house. She respects Crake’s privacy, and makes a point of never going in his room. She dies after catching a “hot bioform”—Jimmy believes Crake infected her in order to test his plague.

Crake’s father – Crake’s father dies when Crake is very young. The story is that he fell off an overpass, but Crake believes his father knew about and objected to the common corporate practice of introducing disease into the population in order to profit off the cure, and was subsequently killed (or “eliminated”).

Uncle Pete – Crake’s stepfather insists that Crake call him “Uncle Pete.” He was Crake’s father’s boss before his death, and

has since moved in with and married Crake's mother. Uncle Pete is good natured and supportive of Crake. He dies of a viral infection while Jimmy is working at AnooYoo—Jimmy eventually becomes convinced that Crake infected him with one of his experimental viruses.

Bernice – Bernice lives across the hall from Jimmy during his time at Martha Graham Academy. She is an avid animal rights activists, environmentalist, and vegan whom Jimmy finds deeply unattractive. After leaving Martha Graham Bernice becomes a supporter of the rebellious group “God’s Gardeners.” Jimmy sees her body among other executed protesters in pictures shown to him by CorpSeCorps men.

Amanda Payne – Amanda is Jimmy’s girlfriend after he leaves Martha Graham. She is fiercely individualistic installation artist who grew up in the Pleeblands, and who does not have a favorable view of the Compounds or the corporations around which they are built. She and Jimmy only date for a few months, and break up when Jimmy takes a job at AnooYoo.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Uncle En – Uncle En is the name of the man who takes Oryx from her home as a child and puts her to work selling flowers on the streets, and eventually tempting older men into hotel rooms where they could be extorted. He is eventually murdered and dumped in a river.

Jack – Jack is the American film producer who uses Oryx in his child pornography. Oryx remembers Jack as a nice man, who often acted sad and guilty. He asks Oryx for sexual favors in return for English lessons.

Wakulla Price – This is Jimmy’s first crush. She never shows interest in him, and eventually moves away from HelthWyzer High. Jimmy never sees her again.

Ms. Sally Stratton – An old schoolteacher of Jimmy’s, whom he found attractive when he was a boy.

questions raised about the moral and ethical responsibilities of science and scientists when they became capable of creating new kinds of life and manipulating natural processes.

Many characters in the novel fail to exercise their power over nature responsibly. Crake is the most extreme example of this kind of transgression. His genetic experiments on the Crakers (they are made from stolen embryos which are then genetically altered) and his introduction of a terrible virus into the human population are the nightmarish product of the advanced biological science in *Oryx and Crake*. But the general experimentation on plants, animals, and humans performed by many different scientists throughout the novel is rife with immoral conduct. HealthWyzer spends a great deal of resources and manpower secretly devising new viruses and releasing them into the population, so that new cures can be sold. Sharon (Jimmy’s mother) and Jimmy’s father argue frequently about the work that Jimmy’s father does in genetic manipulation of animals, and it is implied that Sharon knows about and objects to the abuse of knowledge and power happening at HealthWyzer (and at other corporations). Jimmy’s mother ultimately decides to leave and join various rebellious efforts against the corporations in the Pleeblands, while Jimmy’s father chooses to continue to work in spite of the obvious abuse of power occurring at his company and others.

The world of *Oryx and Crake* is not just a comment on the responsibilities and costs of advanced biological science, it is also imagines the *cultural* ascension of science in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, accompanied by the decline in prestige and cultural impact of the humanities, to have continued unabated. The book imagines a world where humanistic questions (regarding ethics, morality, and responsible decision making) have been pushed aside in the name of scientific progress. The resulting suggestion is that scientific progress absent humanistic thinking leads to perverse uses of scientific power and knowledge, affects our moral decision-making, and has a dehumanizing effect on culture generally.



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.



SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS & ITS COSTS

Atwood has described *Oryx and Crake* as ‘speculative fiction’, meaning that it is a novel that takes current trends and extrapolates them to explore what the future might look like. The world of *Oryx and Crake* extrapolates upon the rapid advances around the turn of the 21st century in biological and genetic engineering and the



CORPORATE POWER & COMMODIFICATION

Oryx and Crake also imagines a world in which the growing power of corporations in the late 20th and early 21st century also continues on its present path until corporate power literally reigns supreme, unchecked and unchallenged by any other kind of power. Though the novel occasionally mentions, for example, “Russia” and “Fiji” and other non-western countries, the western world seems effectively divided into pleeblands (which still contain cities like “New New York” and San Francisco) and Compounds that belong exclusively to corporations (Anooyoo, HealthWyzer, etc). There is no law and order outside of the compounds—and the corporations’ security enforcement services (the CorpSeCorp

men) protect corporate interests over individual interests. And the only interest of the corporations is profit.

As a result, in a world controlled by profit-seeking corporations, everything has been commodified. Everything is for sale, and, absent any moral considerations or concerns, the corporations freely exploit people's insecurities and weaknesses to sell sex, beauty, health, and the promise of happiness. Even more grotesquely, in order to preserve their high profits, health companies have even taken to manufacturing and releasing diseases in order to profit off their cures. This is as much an abuse of corporate power as it is an abuse of advanced scientific knowledge. In addition, just as health beauty, and happiness have a sale value, depravity, evil, and violence have entertainment value, and are thus similarly commodified. Executions, suicide, child pornography, animal snuff videos—all have become televised, with their very own channels.

This portrayal of corporate power and commodification in the novel comments on the current rising influence of corporations and their money in the early 21st century and values not only with respect to consumer culture but also with respect to influencing public policy and elections. The Compounds (and their associated organizations) serve as a critique of hyper-commodification and corporate supremacy in our own increasingly consumer- and entertainment-driven culture.



HUMANS & ANIMALS

The advanced science achieved in the world of the novel has challenged the distinction between human and animal. Pigoons, for example, are pigs

that grow human organs and even human brain tissue (for the purpose of transplantation). Their partially human makeup makes it so that people are uncomfortable with the idea of eating them, because it seems vaguely cannibalistic. They are the book's first, but certainly not only, example of transgressing the divide between human and animal. The most distinctive blend of human and animal are Crake's genetically engineered creation, The Crakers. They have color-changing sex organs like a baboon, a digestive system like a rabbit, and the smell of a citrus plant. The Crakers are a particularly interesting example because they are humanoid, with certain human traits, and the book constantly asks the reader if they are human, and if they are, what makes them so.

The characters of the novel also often think about the distinction between animals and humans, though in very different ways. Jimmy frequently compares himself to various animals. In Jimmy's case this kind of comparison grows out of his feeling inferior given that he is not scientifically gifted. His lack of scientific genius makes him feel lesser, like an animal. Crake, conversely, thinks that human ingenuity and scientific curiosity is actually an inferior, animal trait. He refers to the scientific human brain as a "monkey brain," and disdains scientific genius (though he himself possesses a great deal of it.)

He also believes those things which are traditionally revered as "distinctly human" (love, art, language, self awareness, knowledge of mortality) are a kind of evolutionary mistake—he finds them to be "inelegant" solutions to the problem of life and survival. His solution to these problems, on the one hand, is the "invention" of the Crakers, whom he considers to be "superior" genetic combinations of humans, plants, and animals that share neither human intelligence or sexual desire. On the other hand, he solves what he sees as the problem of human beings by developing a plague that effectively wipes them off the face of the earth.

Oryx and Crake therefore wonders about the difference between human and non-human life—is it a matter of intelligence? Of self-awareness? Of artistic creativity, religion, or philosophy? All of these answers are presented as possibilities, but Atwood does not indicate that any one answer is the "correct" one. The question itself is indicative of Atwood's environmentalism. While the characters in the novel seem fixated on the distinction between humans and animals, the novel challenges this distinction in the first place and suggests instead that humans do not exist somehow separately from or outside of nature, that humans are not obviously distinct from the other kinds of life in their environment and were mistaken to ever treat themselves as being so.



THE STATE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The novel examines various kinds of human relationships (sexual, romantic, familial) and how they are affected by the scientific and cultural shifts taking place in *Oryx and Crake's* world. Are human relationships free and safe from corporate and scientific manipulation? Are individuals still even *capable* of human bonding in this culture?

Jimmy spends a great deal of time in the novel seeking connection, and largely failing in achieving it. His mother has left his family for ethical reasons (taking his beloved pet with her), while his father is distant. Jimmy fills this void through his friendship with Crake, though that friendship is founded on video games and watching porn. Jimmy also seeks sex almost constantly—Crake thinks he is a sex addict—yet Jimmy rarely finds comfort in the sex he does have. His only true romantic love is Oryx, whom the novel implies may not even be a single person but rather a conglomeration of televised images of women that Jimmy has seen throughout his life, culminating in the woman that works for Crake in Paradise and with whom Jimmy has a secret sexual relationship. Jimmy's relationships are characterized by emptiness on the one hand and betrayal on the other, until after the plague when he is the last human left he takes on the name "Snowman," which bears a marked resemblance to the words "no man," implying that without any other humans with whom to have relationships that Snowman can't be human himself.

Where Jimmy spends the novel seeking out meaningful human

relationships (often unsuccessfully), Crake grows increasingly disdainful of human bonding over the course of the novel. Crake never shows any familial love for his parents, and Jimmy ultimately suspects that Crake killed his own mother and stepfather (Uncle Pete) in order to test the deadly viruses he was developing. Further, Crake thinks little of sex, seeing it in purely scientific terms as an “inelegant” solution to reproduction, and believes that love is nothing more than the painful consequence of poorly regulated hormones in the human brain. Crake seems to view everything that contributes to human relationships as messy and unnecessary, and tries to eliminate that messiness. With the Crakers, Crake tries to breed out sex and romance entirely, turning copulation into an infrequent and purely reproductive activity, so that sexual frustration and betrayal is eliminated, as is overpopulation. The only exception to Crake’s rejection of sex and romantic love is Oryx, the first woman Crake has ever had any affection for. Yet Oryx finds sex with Crake to be mechanical and impersonal, and conducts a secret affair with Jimmy. It is suggested that Crake knew about the affair, though it is unclear the extent to which Crake’s actions in his final months of his life (releasing the plague, killing Oryx) are a result of her affair and his unrequited love for her.

The novel thematically wonders how human relationships will fare if rapid scientific advancements and corporate greed continue to have an increasing effect on the life of the individual. Trust, love, and bonding are hard to come by in this world, where sex and love are so often paid for, where security organizations sponsored by corporate enterprises are always watching, and where culture is so saturated with consumption and entertainment it is not clear which relationships are real and honest. The effect on the novel’s main characters is clear: Jimmy is alienated and alone and plagued by addictions, where Crake becomes maniacal in his attempt to control human relationships so completely through scientific manipulation that they cease to be relationships at all.



HISTORY, LANGUAGE & THE HUMANITIES

Oryx and Crake portrays a world in which the humanities – history, literature, even language itself – have become devalued in the face of the rise of science, consumerism, and entertainment culture. History has become little more than fodder in video games, such as the game “Blood and Roses” that Jimmy and Crake play, while one of the last colleges to focus on the humanities, the Martha Graham Academy, is run down and a subject of jokes by those in the sciences. Language and writing is primarily a tool for corporations to advertise and market their goods, and as a result language becomes superficial and flat, unable to evoke deeper human feelings or ideas.

Even so, the novel emphasizes the importance of language and

the humanities, and their vital role in making humans human. Jimmy knows that being a “word person” makes him inferior in his society, but he cannot give up his love of language, often repeating to himself lists of old words that, though no longer used, bring him at least some happiness and comfort. And the novel implies that Jimmy being a “word person” in fact humanizes him. While Jimmy is literally one of the last actual humans on Earth after the plague, the novel implies that in a sense that Jimmy is one of the last true humans even *before* most other humans die from the disease. His humanistic or “general thinking” as Crake calls it, is what saves him, figuratively and literally.

The novel worries that a progress-obsessed culture which only looks forward, and fails to attribute meaning and significance to the past, might cause people to fail to see themselves as members of a unified human culture; might cause them to cease to be “human” in a way we would recognize. The book suggests that an unchecked pursuit of scientific progress has a dehumanizing effect—Jimmy’s feeling of isolation and alienation and his desperation to hold on to obsolete and outdated words and images is indicative of this. Even more importantly, though Crake tried to breed such “cultural” and “humanistic” needs out of the Crakers, they continue to have an interest in myth, religion, and even art. Crake developed the Crakers because he believed them to be the most “elegant” solution to the problem of survival. That he could not breed out their interest in history, language and art suggests that these things are not simply a source of happiness or ethical integrity but actually integral to human survival itself.



EXTINCTION & EVOLUTION

The book’s interest in human history and the humanities is accompanied by an interest in natural history and the history of life and death on earth.

The work being done in the compounds—the modification of animals, gene splicing, building new viruses and immunities—is often described as an extension or acceleration of evolution. The game that gives Crake his nickname is Extinctathon, and involves memorizing and cataloging the increasingly long list of species that have gone extinct.

Snowman thinks a great deal about his own species’ extinction, the extinction of *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* brought on by Crake’s plague. In addition he notes the current flora and fauna on the earth, and which species are thriving and which are declining. He also compares his own poor adaptations to those of the Crakers. He suffers from sunburn, infection, starvation and more in this environment, where the Crakers are perfectly suited to survival.

This emphasis on life, death, and change as they are occurring on a grand—in fact, planetary—scale, and the ultimate suggestion of the possibility of *human* extinction, is again an

environmentalist gesture meant to address human arrogance. In this book, humans go from controlling evolution (deliberately creating new species and inadvertently causing the extinction of existing species) to becoming simply another casualty of the story of evolutionary history, replaced by the better-adapted Crakers. The suggestion is that, far from exempting or elevating us above evolutionary forces, far from making us super-men, our scientific progress could in fact make us *cease to be men* at all, culturally and actually.



SYMBOLS

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



THE COLOR GREEN

The color green is featured prominently in the novel. The compounds are decorated with lush artificial plant life, the world after the plague resembles a tropical rainforest, with big green vines reclaiming man-made structures. Most significantly the eyes of the Crakers are a bright and arresting green color (due to their ingestion of enormous amounts of chlorophyll. Though green traditionally represents what is natural and environmentally friendly, in *Oryx and Crake* it often indicates the intrusion of human science on natural processes. Most of the plant life that still exists after the plague is the result of experimentation and genetic splicing. The Crakers' green eyes are the result of a godlike creative act accomplished by Crake—genetically altered human embryos so that they would be able to process vegetation like rabbits. However, green also represents the naiveté and innocence that perhaps preceded scientific advancements—Oryx must put green contacts in because the Crakers will not understand her brown eyes. The Crakers are “green” both in their eye color and in the sense that they have not seen or experienced much (just as a novice in any skill or discipline, for example, may be described as being “green”). Green in the novel is the convergence of hyper-intelligence and naive innocence, arrogance and humility, and complexity and simplicity. It is therefore a figure for much of the conflict in the novel.



INSIDE

The book repeatedly draws attention to the difference between “inside” and “outside” and the efforts to keep the two separated. The emphasis on sanitation is an indication of this: keeping the clean “in” and the dirty “out.” Many people in the compounds work to keep viruses out of human cells (Jimmy’s mom says her job is to put “locks” on the doors of cell walls) and to keep diseases out of the compound. In addition, the Compounds are “inside,” set apart by domes,

gates, and doors, inhabited by wealthy families employed by large research corporations. Snowman enjoyed the privilege of the “inside” his whole life, as a “Compound brat” and as an employee working inside Crake’s airlocked “paradise.” “Inside” represents cleanliness, health, familiarity, wealth and comfort, though it is also possible to argue that it represents being closed off and therefore blind to the world.



OUTSIDE

The Pleeblands are “outside”—lawlessness, disease, and poverty abound. Contagion threatens to break into the body from air or water. Outside stands for fear, foreignness, dirtiness, poverty, and desolation. After the plague, the inside and outside are no longer separated, and the whole world becomes outside. Outside thus stands for the breakdown of order—social, economic, and cultural hierarchies are meaningless “outside.”



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor Books edition of *Oryx and Crake* published in 2004.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

There's no better symbol for order, scientific rigor, and civilization than the clock. As human beings have learned more and more about technology, their clocks have gotten steadily more accurate, to the point where they can measure time to within mere billionths of the correct figure.

In the present sections of this novel, however, civilization isn't what it used to be. Snowman lives in a post-apocalyptic world in which order, science, and civilization have broken down. The world is a dark, chaotic place, and Snowman is frightened of it. Snowman, we later learn, was raised in a world in which time was taken for granted—simply to be *alive* is to know what time it is. The absence of official time, then, is a brilliant symbol for the collapse of humanity and the return of timeless, primeval nature.

- There are a lot of blank spaces in his stub of a brain, where memory used to be.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Snowman, we're slowly learning, is our window into the fictional society of the novel: he's the main character, and his experiences of the world comprise the novel's plot. And yet in his present self Snowman isn't a particularly reliable witness: as we learn here, he's suffering from various mental problems, brought on by the horrors of civilization's collapse. In all, then, Snowman's account of history will be fractured, fragmented, and generally full of "blank spaces." In such a way, Atwood suggests the fragmented nature of history itself. In a society that's broken down to the point where it can't even keep time, history has distorted to the level of myth. Snowman will do his best to remember the past, but we won't always be able to take his account one hundred percent seriously.

Chapter 2 Quotes

- "Leave Daddy alone," said his mother. "Daddy is thinking. That's what they pay him for. He doesn't have time for you.

Related Characters: Sharon (speaker), Jimmy's father, Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In the flashback scenes that begin in this chapter, we see Snowman's early life, back when he was called Jimmy--a life that was characterized by absentee parents and emotional emptiness. Jimmy's parents worked for a major corporation, although Jimmy's mother, Sharon, eventually abandoned the corporation because she objected to what she saw as its immoral uses of science and technology.

Sharon is a complex character in the novel, because she's a moral authority (she seems to be one of the only people who realizes how evil the corporation is), and yet she's not a very loving mother to Jimmy. In this scene, for instance, she speaks to her child harshly--she tells Jimmy to stop bothering her father, who works for the corporation.

There's a strong note of contempt in Sharon's words here--she seems to be suggesting that *she* is just as ignored and undervalued by Jimmy's father as Jimmy himself is. But Sharon seems not to show much love for Jimmy either, and she also recognizes the value of capitalism and commodification in her society--even her husband's "thinking" is something to be bought and sold. In short, the passage shows that Jimmy grew up in an emotionally empty place dominated by the need to work and make money.

- He thought of pigoons as creatures much like himself. Neither he nor they had a lot of say in what was going on.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Snowman/Jimmy thinks back on the pigoons--genetically engineered creatures that combined the DNA of a pig and a human being. A corporation called OrganInc bred and sold pigoons so that sick humans could obtain organs for transplants. Although the corporation insisted that it was only using the pigoons for transplants, not consumption, it was eventually forced to go back on its promise, harvesting the pigoons for meat (due to the famine throughout the country).

Jimmy felt for the pigoons--he didn't want them to be eaten, because he identified with them. The pigoons are partly human, which may account for Jimmy's sense of empathy. And yet Jimmy's sadness seems deeper and more visceral--he sympathizes with the pigoons because they're living creatures, not just because they're partly human. Atwood suggests that Jimmy is an unusually sensitive and moral young man--despite the fact that he's raised in an increasingly corrupt and amoral world, and so he's silenced (much like the poor pigoons themselves).

Chapter 3 Quotes

- From nowhere, a word appears: Mesozoic. He can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can't reach the word...this is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman, in the present, experiences a crisis of the mind. He's suddenly conscious that he's losing his command of language--he remembers the word Mesozoic, then realizes that he's forgotten what, exactly, the word means.

It's telling that Snowman, in a post-apocalyptic world, is forgetting language. (Although Atwood also makes a point that in the pre-apocalyptic world, there is a "dissolution of meaning" as well.) Language, like time, is a symbol of civilization as its best: language is rigorous, standardized, and useful for understanding the world. As order breaks down, so does meaning: it's as if Snowman is reliving the collapse of civilization via the collapse of his vocabulary. (It's also darkly humorous that Jimmy can't remember the meaning of "Mesozoic," which refers to a long-ago period in time, before human beings existed--human beings appear to be headed for another Mesozoic era.)

☝ Strange to think of the endless labor, the digging, the hammering, the carving, the lifting, the drilling, day by day, year by year, century by century; and now the endless crumbling that must be going on everywhere. Sandcastles in the wind.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Snowman contemplates the slow deterioration of civilization. Human beings themselves are long-gone (except for Snowman, seemingly). And yet the emblems of their civilization are still around: cities, statues, paintings, machines, etc. Now, the second phase of human extinction is beginning: the slow deterioration of the things humans built.

The passage is lyrically poetic: it compares the slow destruction of material culture to the destruction of a sandcastle, suggesting that, for all their impressiveness, even the great buildings and machines of mankind are "mortal." The labor and ingenuity that went into building such devices, while not exactly wasted, didn't protect the

devices from the elements or the slow destruction of time.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ There'd been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it. It made you feel like God.

Related Characters: Jimmy's father

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

On his birthday, Jimmy receives a pet from his father: a rakunk, a combination of a skunk and a raccoon. As Snowman, in the present, remembers the rakunk, he thinks about the genetic engineering that went on during his childhood. Scientists seemed to enjoy the engineering projects not so much because of their utility but because they encouraged the scientists to feel powerful: creating new forms of life, after all, is practically the definition of being a god.

The passage introduces a religious flavor to the novel: it's suggested that mankind has been punished for daring to overstep its bounds and rise to a god's level (one of the oldest and most familiar themes of science fiction and fantasy stories, and even mythology). If Snowman is now living in a post-apocalyptic time, then perhaps the apocalypse was a punishment for this kind of hubris and recklessness.

☝ "We give people Hope. Hope isn't ripping off!"
"At Nooskins' price it is. You hype your wares and take all their money, and then it's no more treatments for them...Don't you remember the way you used to talk?...you had ideals, then."
[...] "There's nothing sacred about cells and tissue."

Related Characters: Jimmy's father, Sharon (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jimmy's parents have an argument about the morality of Jimmy's father's genetic research. Jimmy's father works for a corporation called NooSkin that's pretty

clearly corrupt and immoral: it charges people huge sums of money in return for a "new skin" that won't get old or show signs of aging over time. The corporation also researches its technology by experimenting with human DNA, combining it with animal DNA in various unusual ways.

Sharon's attack on her husband's research is twofold: first, she finds it immoral that a company would cheat people into buying new skins for such large sums; second, she seems to find something immoral and even unholy about mixing human DNA with animal DNA. It's the second objection that Jimmy's father focuses on--and perhaps it's a more debatable moral objection than the first. The implication of the passage, however, seems to be that Jimmy's father, in working with DNA so frequently, has lost all sight of morality, basic humanity, and the wonders of life: to him, life is now just a product to be modified and sold for money.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ "Homo Sapiens Sapiens was once so ingenious with language, and not only with language. Ingenious in every direction at once."

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Jimmy thinks back on humanity's past greatness: a greatness that has been squandered, resulting in a post-apocalyptic society. Jimmy, an eloquent man who loves words and language, is particularly impressed with humanity's grasp of language, and is mournful for this loss. He also acknowledges that mankind was impressive in many different ways: it achieved scientific, technological, and musical greatness, to name only a few examples.

And yet Jimmy's tone seems rueful and regretful. Mankind was ingenious, yes, but its ingenuity couldn't save it from destruction: in fact, its ingenuity *brought about* its own destruction. Again, Atwood suggests Biblical or religious themes: mankind, in daring to be great, has brought on the punishment of the universe. Its ingenuity outstripped its morality, its sciences overwhelmed its humanity (and its "humanities"), and thus it sowed the seeds of its own ruin.

☝☝ On some non-conscious level, Snowman must serve as a reminder to these people, and not a pleasant one: he's what they may have been once.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman), The Crakers

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Here Snowman is again interacting with the Crakers, the genetically modified human-like creatures that Crake built. The Crakers share certain traits with humans, but they are more advanced in some ways and primitive in others. Snowman is like a god and a father-figure to the Crakers: his job is to take care of them, to make sure that they don't destroy themselves.

In this passage, Snowman realizes that the mythology and stories he's been teaching the Crakers is a kind of warning: Snowman is a survivor of the old world, and so paradoxically, his presence among the Crakers is a warning that the Crakers are flawed--they share DNA with an ugly, imperfect being. Ironically, Snowman, because he's one of the only survivors of the pre-apocalyptic human civilization, is taken as representative of that civilization, despite the fact that he's always hated it.

☝☝ But love was undependable, it came and then it went, so it was good to have a money value, because then at least those who wanted to make a profit from you would make sure you were fed enough and not damaged too much.

Related Characters: Oryx

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

In this flashback Jimmy learns about Oryx: she's mostly had a horrible, joyless life. Oryx has been sold to many different people; her own mother sold her to a man named Uncle En, for instance. Jimmy is appalled that Oryx's mother would sell her as a slave to another man, and yet Oryx thinks of such actions as a basic part of survival--she seems not to be angry with her mother. The narrator suggests, ironically, that in the future, real love itself has more or less disappeared. Parents don't look out for their children, and strangers certainly don't show any love or respect for each other. Tragically, money has replaced love itself as the dominant way for human beings to interact with one another. Humans treat each other with respect because money mediates their relationship (for example, Uncle En probably won't hurt Oryx because he paid a lot of money for

her, not because he loves her). The passage conveys the essential nihilism of life in the future: human emotion and morality has disappeared, with the notable exception of greed. Oryx is the passive victim of a culture in which everything is for sale, including and especially people.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ Crake thought he'd done away with all that...*God is a cluster of neurons*, he'd maintained...They're up to something though. Something Crake didn't anticipate. They're conversing with the invisible. They've developed reverence.

Related Characters: Crake, The Crakers

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman thinks about the new society that's arisen on Earth, after the decline of humanity. The Crakers have been bred by Crake to be uncreative, emotionless, and basically atheistic. And yet the Crakers are still drawn to art, mythology, and religion: they have a strong religious instinct, apparent in their embrace of the mythology Snowman has invented for them. The Crakers, against all the odds and their own genetic makeup, have maintained a human capacity to worship the divine.

The passage is interesting because it suggests the rivalry between Jimmy (Snowman) and Crake: Jimmy seems to be getting revenge on Crake by teaching the Crakers to worship everything that Crake hated (religion, stories, myths, etc.). Crake, we can tell, was an atheistic person with a highly scientific turn of mind: he didn't believe in "myth" of any kind, whether it was religion, poetry, or fiction.

☝☝ Sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides or murders. Now it's more like an athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp.

Related Characters: The Crakers, Crake

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

In the post-apocalyptic world, the Crakers are what remains. The Crakers are like humans in some ways, but they lack humans' capacity for jealousy, sexual rivalry, and love: thus, they have sex, but only as a means of reproduction. Jimmy notes that the Crakers' habits have some advantages over humans: unlike humans, Crakers don't have any jealousy or sexual violence to speak of--sex is just a regular act for them, like an athletic "demonstration." (And this was Crake's intention in creating them--to free them from all the potential suffering and conflict that arises from sexual desire.)

The passage is interesting because it seems to allude to the Biblical Garden of Eden. Before the fall of man, some religious scholars suggest, Adam and Eve did have sex, but only out of an abstract necessity--they hadn't yet found "fallen" sexual passion. The notion of the fall of man is highly relevant to the novel, since it shows that by discovering the mysteries of life and death, mankind has fallen out of paradise. Thus, the passage is a subtle signal that with the Crakers, we've *returned* to the Garden of Eden: ignorant of the knowledge of death and life, and of sexual passion, too.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ How could I have missed it? Snowman thinks. What he was telling me? How could I have been so stupid?... There had been something willed about it, though, his ignorance...he'd grown up in walled spaces, and then he'd become one. He had shut things out.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman), Crake

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman thinks back on his friendship with Crake, the mysterious young man with whom he grew up. Crake's father died in a car accident, supposedly a suicide. Jimmy remembers Crake remarking that his father was "uncoordinated." Years later, Jimmy realizes the truth: Crake was trying to say that his father was out of joint with the other people in his corporation--he refused to go along with the corporate dogma, and so he was murdered for his disobedience. Jimmy is furious with himself for missing the obvious truth about Crake and Crake's father: he's been willfully ignorant.

The passage is interesting because it shows *Crake*, not Jimmy, being adept at manipulating language in subtle ways. Jimmy is the writer and wordsmith, and yet he misses Crake's hint about Crake's father's supposed suicide. It also shows Crake as being connected with ideas of "walled spaces"--the divide between "inside" and "outside" is an important one in the novel, and we see Crake's secrecy and efficiency as related to himself maintaining his "inside" and keeping everything else out.

So a lot of what went on at Martha Graham was like studying book binding or Latin: pleasant to contemplate in its way, but no longer central to anything, though every once in a while the college president would subject them to some yawner about the vital arts and their irresistible reserved seat in the big red-velvet amphitheater of the beating human heart.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Jimmy doesn't go to a very prestigious school: Martha Graham is a run-down school devoted to the humanities, an area of human knowledge that few, if any, people continue to value in his society. Jimmy is perfectly aware that his society no longer values what he's interested in studying: the subjects at Martha Graham seem esoteric and "useless" compared to most of what Jimmy has seen in the professional world (Jimmy grew up around scientists and businessmen, after all). Even Jimmy himself doesn't seem very enthused when the president of his college makes a speech about the importance of the humanities to the human heart and one's inner life--Jimmy likes the arts, but he has no illusions about their importance to society.

The passage could be interpreted as Margaret Atwood's assessment of the place of the humanities in her own society. As the world becomes more technologically advanced and consumer-oriented, art and literature seem to be growing more and more unimportant--it's possible that someday they'll be considered as esoteric as book binding.

Chapter 9 Quotes

The striped-pyjamas guy upstairs must have been a word person, then: a RejoovenEsense speechwriter, an ideological plumber, a spin doctor, a hairsplitter for hire. Poor bugger, thinks Snowman.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman surveys the ruins of what was once the headquarters of a mighty corporation. Snowman discovers the corpse of a former employee of the corporation--and on closer inspection, he discovers that the employee owned poetry books, suggesting that he was a humanities person, just like Snowman. The employee must have spent his life writing copy for the corporation--selling his verbal talents for money.

The passage conveys some of the pitfalls of the futuristic humanities major (or, for that matter, the present-day humanities major). People who study English and writing don't have many job opportunities--and as a result, they often end up working for large corporations. The advantage of working for such a corporation is that one has a job--the disadvantage is that one's writing is strictly controlled; it has to be centered around the same basic message, "Buy our products." In short, the passage reminds us that Jimmy's world didn't place much stock in words or the humanities in general, unless they were in the service of making money.

Chapter 11 Quotes

Maybe the guards tried to get out of RejoovenEsense just like everyone else. Maybe they, too, hoped they could outrun contagion.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman) (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

Snowman revisits the guard tower of a major corporate building. He realizes that there are no dead bodies inside

the building, suggesting that even the guards were trying to run away from the mysterious "contagion"--the disease that, it's implied, killed most of the human population.

As we go on, we learn more about what, precisely, caused the global apocalypse. Here, we realize that it was a virus that did humanity in; furthermore, the virus may have been developed within or close to a major corporate building. The passage conveys the pathetic quality of humanity's struggle for survival: nothing humanity does can save it from the horrors of disease and amoral, all-consuming greed.

☝ From time to time he looks over his shoulder. The smoke is still there, just one column of it. It hasn't spread. It keeps on rising.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman notices a huge plume of smoke in the distance. The plume of smoke is controlled, and never changes size or shape, suggesting that it was built by a human being (not a Craker). Snowman faces the possibility that he's not alone in the post-apocalyptic world after all; there are other people around, perhaps trying to communicate with him. (It's a sign of the decay of human communication that the only form of communication in the passage is fire).

The passage could also be interpreted as an allusion to the Biblical Book of Exodus, in which God takes the form of a large pillar of cloud and guides the Hebrews out of Egypt through the desert. Perhaps Snowman is a kind of Moses figure, guiding the remains of the human race into an uncertain future.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ "People come here from all over the world—they shop around. Gender, sexual orientation, height, colour of skin and eyes—it's all on order, it can all be done or redone."

Related Characters: Crake (speaker), Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Crake takes Jimmy through the stunningly beautiful RejoovenEsense compound. Here Crake works on genetic modifications, marketed to whomever is wealthy enough to afford them. Crake can use his scientific knowledge to craft anyone's appearance--their eye color, sexual orientation, etc. He can also change a person's genetic makeup for the proper fee. In short, RejoovenEsense--a hugely powerful corporation--is a place where scientists like Crake change people's very identities.

The casual way that Crake talks about changing people's DNA suggests that it's an ordinary part of his life--he's lost any sense that his work is miraculous, sinful, or otherwise out of the ordinary. As Atwood has suggested elsewhere, though, Crake's work is downright unholy; it trivializes human life, treating the human body as a mere product to be retooled, perfected, and then sold for a profit. Atwood links the sexual crimes of Crake's society with the casual way Crake talks about "redoing" a person's appearance: both the scientists and the sexual predators of the future suffer from the same problem, a basic lack of respect for the human body and for human life.

☝ "If you take 'mortality' as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then 'immortality' is the absence of such fear. Babies are immortal. Edit out the fear and you'll be..."
"Sounds like Applied Rhetoric 101."

Related Characters: Crake, Jimmy (Snowman) (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Jimmy first meets the Crakers, the genetically modified beings that Crake has created. Here Crake claims that the Crakers have been programmed to die when they're 30 years old. But Crake also explains that they are "immortal" in the sense that they don't have any concept of death (like Adam and Eve before their fall, in another possible Bible reference).

In this passage we get a better idea of just what Crake values and doesn't value about humanity. He doesn't have a problem with death--or at least he doesn't yet know how to avoid it--he just has a problem with *thinking* about death.

Thus his "perfect" being (the Crakers) aren't necessarily long-lived, they just lack the capacity to wrestle with larger issues like love and mortality (essentially, what art and the humanities are all about). The Crakers don't have to suffer over sex, love, or death, but they can't achieve any kind of joy, fulfillment, or enlightenment either.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☛ Here are Crake and Oryx, what's left of them. They've been vulturized, they're scattered here and there, small and large bones mingled into disarray...He's grinning with all the teeth in his head. As for Oryx, she's face down, she's turned her head away from him as if in mourning. The ribbon in her hair is as pink as ever.

Related Characters: Jimmy (Snowman), Crake, Oryx

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 335

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman, patrolling the ruins of old corporate headquarters, come to the dead bodies of Crake and Oryx: the scientist and his supposed lover. Even in death, we can tell a lot about Oryx and Crake: Crake is still grinning, as if in recognition of the fact that his plan to kill the world has "succeeded" (even if his version of "success" is pretty morbid). For her part, Oryx is an object, through and through: she's been exploited for her beauty and her sexuality again and again. Thus, Oryx's face is turned away from Snowman: she remains a mystery, both to Snowman and to us. (The turned head could also symbolize Oryx turning her back on the destruction Crake has masterminded and she has unknowingly assisted in.)

Oryx is undeniably, transcendently beautiful, to the point where she seems to stand outside the deterioration of time--a fact symbolized by the beautiful pink ribbon in her hair. The ribbon could also evoke Oryx's creativity and hopefulness--even when the world is in ruins all around her, she radiates joy and beauty, something that transcends mere survival.

☛ Had he been a lunatic or an intellectually honourable man who'd thought things through to their logical conclusion? And was there any difference?

Related Characters: Crake

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 343

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman/Jimmy tries to make sense of Crake, perhaps the most complex character in the novel. Jimmy wonders if it's right to classify Crake as a madman--or if he deserves to be called a genius. Jimmy also wonders if his madness and genius are one and the same.

Based on what we know about Crake, it's possible to agree with Jimmy that his friend is a madman. Crake seems insensitive to the thoughts and feelings of other people, and he's singularly fixated on working for his corporate employers (even if his "plot" to kill off the world is ultimately a kind of rebellion against corporate culture) and improving the human race to make it more "elegant." Crake, one could also argue, is misunderstood: he doesn't really understand the human heart, can't really love, and actually thinks he is doing the right thing in ridding the earth of "superfluous" humanity.

On a more abstract level, Jimmy's observations about the similarity between genius and madness tells us a lot about Jimmy's civilization. Jimmy grew up in a world in which values were deteriorating even as science was constantly advancing. Humanity's genius was never in question--and yet humanity was clearly losing its collective mind, selling cures for diseases it had just invented, and tricking consumers into buying new skins and extra kidneys. The best proof of the proximity of madness and genius is civilization itself.

☛ *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* joining the polar bear, the beluga whale, the onager, the burrowing owl, the long, long list.

Page Number: 344

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Snowman notes that humanity has seemingly become another extinct species--no different from the burrowing owl, the beluga whale, etc. (species which were already extinct in Jimmy's pre-apocalyptic world). It's strange to think that humanity, with all its intelligence and ingenuity, ultimately reaches the same fate as so many other species (while animals like rats and cockroaches continue to thrive). Humans are just another animal: flawed and fundamentally mortal.

The passage represents an interesting reversal of an earlier scene, in which Jimmy played a game (Extinctathon) that involved categorizing and listing the various animals that went extinct. While the purpose of the game, one could argue, was to help humans assert their superiority over their fellow animals, it now seems prophetic: humans have been brought back down to earth, and now they're just another extinct species to add to the list.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ *Our arboreal ancestors, Crake used to say. Used to shit on their enemies from above while perched in trees. All planes and rockets are simply elaborations on that primate instinct.*

Related Characters: Crake (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 358

Explanation and Analysis

Snowman remembers that Crake used to talk about mankind's "arboreal ancestors"--i.e., the common ancestor shared with monkeys and apes, the evolutionary forebears of human beings. Crake notes that monkeys (like our ancestors, presumably) defecate on one another, using height to their advantage. By defecating on the animals below them, Crake argues, monkeys anticipated rockets and planes thousands of years later--a bombing from above isn't really so different.

Crake's observation might suggest that humans are hard-wired for aggression and assertions of power: they celebrate their own state by abusing the people below them, just like their evolutionary ancestors defecating on anyone unfortunate enough to be below them. The passage, then, might symbolize the stratification of Jimmy and Crake's world: a world in which the people at the top feel absolutely no need to look out for the "plebs" at the bottom of the pile. One could generalize the concept even more and say that humanity has always contained the seeds

of its own undoing: the aggression, arrogance, and delusions of grandeur that eventually lead to a global plague can be traced all the way back to "arboreal ancestors."

☝☝ "We made a picture of you, to help us send out our voices to you."

Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they start doing art, we're in trouble.

Related Characters: Crake, The Crakers (speaker), Jimmy (Snowman)

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 361

Explanation and Analysis

Snowman returns to the Crakers to find that they've made a picture of him. The picture, Snowman realizes, is a form of art--disproving what Crake had predicted about the Crakers (Crake had claimed that the Crakers would show no interest in art, and also warned that art was dangerous to the human species).

It's important to keep in mind that the "art" that we see in this scene isn't just art--it's also religion. The Crakers make an image of their god-figure and leader, Jimmy, to summon him back--a clear echo of the talismans and icons common to nearly all the religions of the world. Try as he might, Crake has been unable to "stamp out" the religious and creative instinct in his genetic creations: the Crakers seem to be just as hard-wired for creativity and wonderment as human beings.

Is Crake justified in claiming that art is the first sign of trouble? Atwood has shown that it's also possible that *science* and immoral scientific experimentation can eventually lead to destruction. The creative instinct, and the religious instinct, it would seem, are flawed, but they're fundamental parts of what it means to be human, and ultimately they're longer-lived than any scientific advance could ever be.



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

Mango. Snowman wakes up before sunrise. He is in a tree. He looks out through the thick **green** vegetation toward the ocean, and the nearby reef made of rusted car parts. He checks his watch, though it no longer works. He is horrified, for a moment, at the thought that no one anywhere knows the time. He calms himself and climbs carefully down from the tree, keeping an eye out for any signs of wildlife.

He goes to the bathroom in a bush, warning the grasshoppers (as he always does) to look out. He goes to a makeshift storage unit made out of old slabs on concrete and pulls out a mango—his last one. A phrase about the importance of routine comes into his head. He wonders where it came from—either a book or someone he used to know. He tries for a moment to remember other things from his past, his schooling, his childhood. He is unsuccessful and sits down to eat his mango.

Flotsam. A group of “the children” walk across the white beach toward Snowman. They are picking up flotsam and putting it in an old burlap sack. They notice Snowman and chant his name (“Snowman oh Snowman”) as they come toward him. Snowman cannot go out into the sun because it will burn him too badly, but these children have skin resistant to ultraviolet light.

The children open up their sack so they can show the objects inside to Snowman. They hold up various objects: a hubcap, a piano key, an empty “BlyssPluss” container and an empty “ChickieNobs Bucket O’Nubbins.” Snowman explains that these are things from before. When asked if they are dangerous, Snowman says they are safe.

The children lose interest in the contents of their bag and linger around chanting Snowman’s name. Snowman thinks about how the children have never seen snow. He recalls that Crake did not allow any magical or fantastical names—and gets a bitter pleasure out of the thought that he has named himself after the Abominable Snowman.

In this opening moment we are introduced to Snowman’s isolation. The ocean is full of rusted car parts, his watch no longer works, and he is in a kind of jungle. Broken technologies litter an increasingly green landscape—a high-tech world has collapsed into nature.



The emphasis on Snowman’s routine tells us that he has been here for a long time. This also introduces the existence of disembodied voices in his head. His struggle to remember the source of these phrases emphasizes his alienation from the past and in fact from his very own mind. Though Snowman’s routine is consistent, his mind is fractured and chaotic.



We learn that Snowman has companions, but that they are fundamentally different to him. They are better adapted. They demonstrate evolutionary advantages over Snowman, who cannot even tolerate the light of the sun. Their chant as they approach him gestures to a kind of ritualistic appreciation of Snowman,



Snowman is revealed to be a kind of keeper of knowledge whom the “children” trust. Notably, the BlyssPluss that Snowman dubs “safe” will be revealed to have caused the death of most of humanity. It is no longer dangerous only because it is empty and has already taken its victims.



We are introduced to the mysterious title character, Crake, and begin to see that he rejected fantasy, myth, and legend. Snowman’s anger and rebellion is demonstrated by his choice of name, which contains a referent to a long gone past (snow), a legendary or mythological creature, and also a kind of self-abnegation as “snowman” sounds a lot like “no man.”



Snowman knows the children want to hear stories about the past. He bitterly notes how beautiful they are—they demonstrate Crake’s aesthetic. They ask Snowman about the moss growing from his face. Snowman tells them—as he has told them many times before—that his face has feathers, but that they cannot have feathers. When they ask why, Snowman pretends to speak to Crake through his watch. He confirms that Crake says no feathers allowed, and tells the children to leave him alone.

Voice. Left alone, Snowman hears a variety of voices in his head. One is woman, who compliments Snowman’s physique even though he is slowly starving to death. Snowman sadly notes that the woman is not Oryx, and that Oryx rarely talks to him anymore. He thinks the voice is of a prostitute he once purchased.

Snowman worries about his rapidly declining health, both physical and mental. He imagines that soon his auditory hallucinations will become visual, and he will see people who are not there. He yells obscenities at Crake, though Crake is not there. He calms down, and tells himself to “get a life.”

CHAPTER 2

Bonfire. Snowman used to be called Jimmy. Jimmy’s earliest memory is of a bonfire. He remembers wearing rubber boots with ducks on them and being made to walk through a pan of disinfectant. Jimmy is told that the disinfectant is dangerous and that he should be careful not to splash. He worries that the disinfectant might hurt the ducks on his boots. The bonfire was not made from wood but rather from an enormous pile of dead cows, sheep, and pigs.

The smell of the burning hair reminds Jimmy of when he’d burned his own hair, as an experiment. His father had found it funny, but his mother, Sharon, had been furious, and it had caused a big fight. His dad told him not to worry about the fight, and that women “get hot under the collar.” Snowman wonders why he has never heard anything about the “hot collars” of men. His hair got fixed the next day when his father took him to a hairdresser. Jimmy remembers liking how tough he looked.

We learn that the children were apparently designed or built by Crake. Their biological difference from Snowman is again emphasized—they do not understand facial hair. We also see that Snowman has made Crake into a kind of ruler or god, and has faked being in communication with him.



Snowman’s loneliness is emphasized. He is able to conjure up the voice of a prostitute, but not of Oryx, a woman he clearly cares deeply about. The suggestion is that he is losing touch with his memories of meaningful relationships, and what’s left is false affection.



Snowman’s hatred of Crake becomes more visceral. The difference between “staying alive” (survival) and “getting a life” (living meaningfully) is emphasized—Snowman is trying (and perhaps failing) to do both.



This nightmarish vision of the past introduces us to images that will become common: the mass death of animals, the emphasis on sanitation. That Jimmy’s boots have ducks printed on them suggests both Jimmy’s childlike innocence and the hypocrisy of this culture: images of animals are printed on products while the flesh of animals burns.



This memory emphasizes the breakdown of trust and respect in Jimmy’s family. Jimmy’s father does not take seriously the concerns of his wife, which he dismisses as being a product of her gender. This kind of uninquisitive oversimplification gestures at Jimmy’s father’s moral weaknesses. Their fight over something so minor suggests their collapsing marriage.



At the bonfire Jimmy feels anxious for the animals, because the fire could be hurting them. His dad explains the animals, being dead, could not feel pain anymore. Jimmy overhears his dad talking to another man. They are discussing the possibility that “it was brought in on purpose.” It becomes clear that a new kind of virus had been introduced in the livestock population from **outside**. Jimmy’s father and the other man lament that their paid security forces failed to do their job, and both agree that two (or any number) could play at this game.

The next day Jimmy asks his parents why the animals were burned up and they tell him the animals were diseased. Jimmy asks if he will be burned up for getting sick. Jimmy’s father says yes, as a joke, which angers Jimmy’s mother. Jimmy cries, and his mother takes him outside where she lights a cigarette. She tries to explain to him what a disease does, how it attacks the cells and changes things **inside** you—and that if enough cells are infected, the disease takes over. Jimmy doesn’t understand right away, and remarks that he has had a cough before and could have one again. His mother is discouraged by this, and though Jimmy asks her to explain about the cells again she refuses, and they go back inside.

OrganInc Farms. Jimmy’s father works at a company called OrganInc Farms, where he is one of the foremost architects on the pigoon project. The pigoon project creates pigs with fully functional human organ tissue, highly resistant to disease, for the purpose of organ transplants. OrganInc Farms is currently perfecting a pigoon that can grow five or six kidneys—which is highly desirable because it drastically reduces cost. All of this is explained to Jimmy when he is old enough.

As he remembers this, Snowman remarks to himself that he is not “old enough” to handle his current situation—that no one could ever be equipped to handle it. A voice in his head feeds him several lines about choosing a unique path, and traveling that path with grace, strength, and patience. Snowman tells the voice—he believes it is the voice of some old self-help enlightenment handbook, but worries that it may be his own—to “stuff it.”

OrganInc brochures extoll the benefits of using pigoon-grown organs. They also make a point of assuring people that pigoon meat was never sold for consumption. But as the climate and environment deteriorated over the years, and meat became harder to find, it is probably the case that OrganInc started serving and selling the meat. Jimmy is disturbed by the idea of eating Pigoon meat because he identifies with the creatures.

The threat of biological warfare is made clear in this passage. Hired security forces are in charge of protecting livestock. Both men worry about the failure of these forces and comment on the possibility of counter attacks. Meanwhile, Jimmy’s softhearted, humane and ethical concern for the welfare of the animals seems displaced by this conversation about corporate stakes and biological sabotage.



Jimmy’s father’s lightheartedness in the face of fear and worry once again comes out, while his mother’s seriousness is also emphasized. The emphasis on sanitation, on inside vs. outside, is again present. Jimmy’s failure to understand scientific concepts, and his mother’s resulting disdain of him, shows the cultural importance of science. Jimmy cannot have a serious conversation with his father because his father doesn’t take anything seriously, and he cannot have one with his mother because he does not speak her (scientific) language.



Pigoons are a strange, and perhaps unethical, transgression of the line between human and animal. However, their existence is justified by the world of the novel through their cost-effectiveness and their status as products of advanced biological and genetic science. Jimmy’s father’s work on the project shows his belief in scientific progress above all else, and his complicit role in this profit-driven culture.



Again the voices in Jimmy’s head demonstrate his estrangement from the past, from his own history, and from himself. He cannot even distinguish his own voice from others. However, despite his best efforts, the past remains lodged in Jimmy’s brain—he cannot remove it from himself.



Corporations will sell “animal” meat with human genes in it simply to make a profit. It is notable that they are only forced to do so because the same corporate greed and scientific advancements that produced pigoons also reduced natural supplies of meat via environmental damage. Jimmy’s ethical integrity also shines through—his instinct that the pigoons are like him emphasizes his engagement with humanistic and moral questions.



Jimmy often eats lunch at OrganInc with his dad and his dad's coworker Ramona. Ramona asks Jimmy's father many questions about Sharon, expressing concern for her mental health and sadness over the fact that Sharon's intelligence is going to waste. Jimmy's father agrees, and wishes Sharon would take pills or see a doctor. Jimmy is made uncomfortable by these conversations, and usually escapes them by asking to go look at the pigeons.

Jimmy lives in the OrganInc "compound," an insular and secure community built for company employees and their families. Jimmy has never been **outside**, to a city, and has heard that the cities are dirty and dangerous. People **within** the compounds refer to cities and their surrounding areas as "the pleeblands." Jimmy's father likes the safety and serenity of the compound, but Jimmy's mother likens it to a "theme park" and is nostalgic for the "old ways." Though the Compounds are safe, the security force (the "CorpSeCorps") has to work hard to keep them that way; there is always the threat of disease or nuclear attack.

Lunch. Jimmy's mother used to work for OrganInc farms, where she'd worked on making the pigeons immune to hostile microbes and diseases. She explains her work to Jimmy by saying she put locks on the doors in cell walls. When Jimmy asks her why she stopped working, she tells him that she simply wanted to spend more time with him. Jimmy doubts this, because his Mother is often irritated by him or utterly uninterested. When she is sad, Jimmy asks her if she is sick. She says she might be, but takes it back when she sees Jimmy getting upset.

Every so often Jimmy's mother makes an unusual effort to be a "real" mother to him. Sometimes when Jimmy gets up in the morning she has put on fashionable clothes and make up and has painstakingly made his lunch for him. This always saddens and worries Jimmy, because his mom seems artificial or "porcelain" in these moments, but he always pretends to enjoy the lunch completely.

As Jimmy grows older he takes to acting out to get his mother's attention. He likes to make her yell, slam doors, and sometimes cry. After he upsets her he apologizes and comforts her—and though he really is sorry, getting a reaction from his mom in this way makes him feel better.

The nature of the disagreement between Jimmy's mother and father becomes clearer. His father and Ramona think the greatest tragedy is that Sharon's scientific prowess is going to waste, betraying little care about her actual emotions. Jimmy's father is convinced her problems could be solved with a pill, revealing that his grasp of emotional conflict and complexity is shallow at best.



Corporations don't simply define the economic or political landscape; they actually define the literal landscape of the Western world. They draw lines between people and widen the divisions between classes, separating corporate workers from the "pleebs." Jimmy's mother seems aware of the artificial happiness corporations are selling, but his father is content to simply enjoy the perks of living in a compound.



Jimmy senses that his mother she stopped working for moral reasons, not her stated reasons. Their relationship has only grown unhappier since she started staying at home. Her previous work is an extension of the work corporations do—keep filth and disease out by strengthening borders and boundaries. Her quitting suggests her disillusionment with this process.



This illustration of Jimmy's mother's deep sadness points especially to the breakdown of their familial bond. When she acts like Jimmy's mother, she does so by putting on makeup and almost literally "playing-acting" the role of "mother." Their bond in these moments is false and artificial, and Jimmy knows it.



This is Jimmy's response to the absence of functional, loving relationships in his life. His relationship with his mother is reduced to cheap stunts and attention-grabbing, a sad consequence of their emotional estrangement from one another.



CHAPTER 3

Nooners. Noon is the worst time of day for Snowman, because the sun and heat are so intense. He must retreat away from the glare of the ocean back into the forest. Snowman remembers the knife he'd had when he'd first arrived here and set up camp, and wishes he hadn't lost it. This makes him think of his ninth birthday, when his dad had given him a pocketknife. Snowman recalls, years later, telling Oryx about the knife, and Oryx telling him, "you need to give money when someone gives you a knife, so the bad luck won't cut you." Jimmy wonders who told Oryx this, and the thought of her with other men makes him jealous and angry. Her voice and touch soothes him, however—it is hard for Jimmy to concentrate on his hate when he is with Oryx.

We are told how Snowman learned to adapt to his environment: first he'd built a lean-to on the ground, but feral rakunks, pigeons, and, most dangerous of all, wolvoogs had sent him up into the tree where it was safer. In the tree his biggest nuisance is mosquitos and biting ants.

Snowman rests on an old bedframe he'd found early on, trying to cool off. The word "Mesozoic" comes into his mind, out of nowhere. He can't place it, and worries that his grasp of language is diminishing. He comforts himself by acknowledging that the heat is probably getting to him, and wishes dreamily that he could cool down by hanging his tongue out of his mouth.

The voice of an old schoolteacher, Ms. Sally Stratton, is in Snowman's head. She is asking him first to play a game with her, and then her remarks become sexual. Jimmy fails to get aroused, and Ms. Stratton's voice fades.

Snowman lets his mind wander back to his and Crake's afterschool distractions. He remembers computer games they would play: Extinctathon, Three-Dimensional Waco, Barbarian Stomp, and Kwiktime Osama. He and Crake would also play chess on the computer, and Snowman wonders briefly if he could whittle a chessboard. He thinks maybe a diary could help him cope, but he knows his writing would have no audience; the Crakers (the beings he had earlier called children) cannot read.

The memory of the false and damaging relationship with his mother is followed by one of true connection and love. Jimmy feels a range of natural and honest emotions toward Oryx—jealousy, excitement, hate, compassion, love. These are emotions we associate with fully-fledged romantic relationships. Nevertheless, the damaging effects of corporate enterprise looms—Oryx explains that money buys luck. What's more, we will eventually learn that the person Jimmy thinks of as Oryx is actually likely a conglomeration of different televised images. Commodification still intrudes on human connection.



Snowman is threatened by various genetic splices of animals thriving in this environment. Biological science has clearly run amok in this world. Nevertheless he learns to adapt, though his situation is still sorely uncomfortable.



Snowman's worry about losing his grasp of language emphasizes the importance of history and language to his survival—it is not that losing those things will make him die, but that they will make him cease to be human, cease to be him. Notably this worry about losing his grip of language is followed by an image of Snowman cooling himself via panting, like a dog. His temporary loss of language occurs with the temporary loss of his humanity.



The extent of Snowman's loneliness is still being established. Like the voice of the prostitute, Ms. Stratton's voice is evidence that Snowman's mind struggles to hold on to meaningful relationships.



The video games that Jimmy and Crake play are evidence that appreciation and study of history have given way to commodification and entertainment value. 20th century people and events that we would recognize as tragic or of vital importance (Osama Bin Laden, the Waco siege) are reduced to gimmicky computer games. This thought gives way to the realization that Snowman has no literate audience for his writing, and therefore no way to record himself into a meaningful history.



Snowman watches a caterpillar drop down on a silky thread in front of his face—it inspires a sudden and unusual happiness in him, which Snowman suspects is evidence of a vitamin deficiency. He hears the caterpillar begin to speak in the voice of his former “Life Skills” teacher. Life Skills class informed students how to handle banking, contractual negotiation, finding a partner who is a good genetic match, and how to avoid sexually transmitted bioforms.

Snowman realizes he should be spending his time not looking for distraction but looking for food and water. He wishes he’d spent more time studying. A voice in his ear calls him “honey” and tells him he shouldn’t beat himself up. He cannot cool down at the nearby stream and watering hole, because the Crakers play in it, and they make him feel grotesque and ask him too many questions. And when the Crakers are not at the watering hole, predators can be found there. Snowman settles for imagining the pool, and Oryx floating in it, though the image makes him feel uneasy.

Downpour. Every afternoon there is a massive thunderstorm. Today the storm is strong, but there is no hail so Snowman doesn’t need to find cover. As the storm winds down he takes some empty beer bottles to the ruined remains of an old bridge and collects runoff water in the beer bottles and attempts to clean himself off. He looks at the bottles and wonders if he can pretend they actually contain beer.

The thought of beer sends Snowman into a kind of tailspin of longing. He desperately thinks, “let me out!” but realizes he couldn’t possibly be more “out” than he is already. A child’s voice speaks in his head and insists, “I didn’t do it on purpose,” then weeps. Snowman feels it’s a bad performance and doesn’t believe the voice. The voice of another self-help book tells him he must stay focused on the task at hand.

CHAPTER 4

Rakunk. Snowman sees a Rakunk in the weeds and calls to it. He wonders if a pet would make him feel better. He wants someone to talk to. He is reminded of a moment when Oryx asked him if he had ever *really* talked to her.

Snowman’s concern about a vitamin deficiency gives rise to a memory of a class called “Life Skills,” which ironically underscores the fact that the lessons he learned in “Life Skills” are of no use to him now that his survival is in question. There is no more money, no contracts, and ostensibly no other human beings with which Snowman could interact with—the “Life Skills” he now needs are completely different.



The voice calling Snowman “honey,” though unidentified, sounds motherly—offering compassion his own mother never did. Snowman’s body is again revealed to be poorly adapted, compared to the better-evolved Crakers, whose beauty and perfection alienates Jimmy. Jimmy once again turns to a vision of Oryx to comfort himself, but the ominous feeling he gets when he does so foreshadows the ill-fatedness of his relationship with her.



The harshness and loneliness of the environment is again emphasized. The beer bottles indicate that alcohol had previously been a comfort for Snowman, but now as society has collapsed alcohol has been replaced by runoff water. Where the bottles once helped Snowman cope with depression and loneliness, they now help him merely survive.



The full force of the collapse of human culture and society is felt by Snowman. The child’s voice, and Snowman’s disdain for it, suggest guilt and self-loathing. Yet another self-help book pops up in his head, offering prepackaged sound bites and false solutions. He sees the past, as it manifests in his mind, as full of deception, manipulation, and dishonesty.



In the absence of human companionship, Jimmy wonders if he can find comfort from animal companionship. Oryx’s devastating comment essentially amounts to the question of whether or not Jimmy has ever made a real human connection in his life.



On Jimmy's tenth birthday his father gives him a pet rakunk. Jimmy wants to name it Bandit, but when his mother suggests that name he changes his mind and names it Killer. His tenth birthday is the only one he can ever remember—his birthdays were usually stressful occasions or completely forgotten. But on his tenth birthday Jimmy's father had brought this animal. Rakunks were designed by OrganInc as a kind of casual project. They are a genetic splice of raccoons and skunks designed for docility and cleanliness, and are popular pets for families living in the compound.

Shortly after Killer arrives, Jimmy's father finds a better job at NooSkins, a subsidiary of HelthWyzer, and the family moves to the HelthWyzer compound. Jimmy's father has Ramona transferred over with him. Jimmy's mother is unhappy about the move. She especially dislikes the HelthWyzer guards, and suspects that they perform strip searches on women because they get a kick out of it. She feels like a prisoner and believes she is being spied on. Jimmy's father rejects all of these notions.

Jimmy attends HelthWyzer Public School. Jimmy is old enough that he no longer has to eat lunch at home with his mom or at work with his dad. He is happy about this, and begins to put on weight and branch out more socially. In his free time he watches educational videos in the library, and especially likes one in which a host called Alex the Parrot talks about animal behavior. Jimmy also develops his first crush, on a classmate named Wakulla Price.

Jimmy's father begins spending more time at work, but rarely talks about his work to Jimmy or Sharon. Nooskins is trying to develop a new kind of skin that could regenerate quickly and prevent signs of aging. One night he comes home drunk and tries to toast with Sharon to his most recent accomplishment: human neo-cortex tissue growing in a pigoon. This disgusts Jimmy's mom, who believes NooSkin basically steals money from those less fortunate by charging exorbitant amounts for their medicines and making false promises. Jimmy's father can't believe his ears, and remarks that there's nothing sacred about cells and tissue. Sharon is unmoved by this remark, and insists that she is depressed because she is plagued by disillusionment and guilt. Jimmy's father dismissively tells her to take pills if she is depressed.

Jimmy hears the whole fight via a series of small microphones he has set up through the house. This fight reminds him of many others—he often overhears his parents talking about him as though he is stupid or inferior. When he hears one of his parents coming up the stairs, Jimmy rolls over and pretends to be asleep. He is upset, but Killer's nose tickles him under the covers and he begins to giggle uncontrollably.

The same scientific haphazardness and corporate power that is driving apart Jimmy's parents brings Killer into the picture. What's more, Killer is a birthday present—and birthdays are, for Jimmy, a constant reminder of his family's failures to communicate and bond appropriately. Killer thus represents Jimmy's failure to forge meaningful bonds with his (human) family members.



Jimmy's father's professional success corresponds to an increase in his mother's unhappiness and disillusionment with the entire compound system. Ramona's closeness with Jimmy's father further emphasizes the rift in their marriage. The guards' apparent abuse of their power underscores the moral bankruptcy of the current corporate culture and its larger abuse of its power.



Jimmy's escape from home and his life at school help to normalize him. He makes friends, develops a crush, and demonstrates intellectual curiosity (though notably he is curious about ecology and nature, two displaced and undervalued things in this world.) The rest of the book will confirm the utter fragility of this kind of human bonding and intellectual curiosity free from ambition.



The moral divide between Jimmy's parents is fully articulated in this scene. Jimmy's father has given Pigoons human brain tissue, further complicating the line between man and animal (this animal experiment is beginning to seem more like a human experiment). He sees no problem with this, and finds Sharon's moral concerns to be unscientific and therefore without merit. Sharon explicitly identifies the reason for her depression, yet this doesn't make Jimmy's father take it any more seriously. He has completely forsaken ethical or moral concerns in his scientific and professional advancement



Jimmy's estrangement from his own parents is clear here. He turns to an animal for comfort and pleasure. It is also significant that Jimmy is not nearly as clueless as his parents suspect—his surveillance of their conversations and fights allows him to observe and understand what's happening between them.



Hammer. The following years are a blur. Jimmy begins to think about girls more and more, and though he is not unpopular at school, he doesn't have many friends. Killer is his only source of true companionship—she is the only one he can talk to. He stops talking to his parents. At school, he entertains his classmates by acting out his parents' fights by drawing little faces on each of his hands and staging arguments with them. He often makes crude jokes about them, and feels especially guilty about some of the things he says about his mother.

One day Jimmy comes home from school and there is a note from his mother on the table. She writes that her conscience has driven her to leave, that she will always love him, and that she has taken Killer with her so the animal can be set free. Jimmy wonders if his mother ever loved him and is enraged at the fact that she took his pet. Before she left Jimmy's mother had also taken a hammer to both the computers in the house, suggesting that she'd taken secret information with her.

The CorpSeCorps men begin questioning Jimmy frequently about his mother. Jimmy doesn't understand many of their questions, and doesn't have much to tell them about his mother's behavior. Jimmy's father was obviously rattled, and was taken away for a period of time. Jimmy was left with two CorpSeCorps agents, who irritate him with their constant questioning.

When Jimmy's dad returns he goes to counseling, and eventually begins to seem happier. Ramona moves in, and Jimmy is made uncomfortable by their frequent and immodest lovemaking. When Snowman thinks about it, he concludes that Ramona and his father probably did not make their affair physical until after his mother left. He ruminates on the fact that he knows enough about life and sex to be sure of this.

Ramona tries her best to be there for Jimmy, and Jimmy appreciates the attention, though he is still sad and misses Killer dearly. He occasionally receives cards, with stamps from faraway places like England and Argentina, that are signed "Aunt Monica." Jimmy knows these cards are from his mother, but feigns ignorance when the CorpSeCorps men ask about them.

Jimmy's dysfunctional approach to human bonding begins to take shape. His only friend is a pet, his increasing preoccupation with women will ultimately lead to sex addiction, and he distances himself from the trouble at home by making cruel and humiliating jokes about his parents. He does have a sense that this is wrong, however, and notably feels worse about betraying his mother than his father.



Sharon's defection from the compound is evidence of her commitment to her own moral code, but leaving Jimmy behind rightly causes Jimmy to question whether his mother ever thought of his welfare before her own. The fact that she absconds with Killer suggests that her devotion to nature is greater than her devotion to her son.



Though Jimmy doesn't necessarily understand the reach of corporate enterprise in this universe, the persistence of the CorpSeCorps men in asking a young child to give incriminating information against his mother once again demonstrates that the corporations are driven by self-interest alone. Moral reasoning is absent.



Jimmy's father recovers relatively quickly from Sharon's departure. His actions once again betray an ignorance of Jimmy's needs. Snowman's interest in when the affair started shows he still maintains a desire to understand and accurately describe human relationships, at least from the outside.



Though Ramona's presence is not easy for Jimmy, he appreciates the effort she makes to try to connect to him. He continues to suffer more, seemingly, from the loss of his pet than from the loss of his mother. He remains loyal to her, however, when the CorpSeCorps question him.



The section ends with Snowman reminding himself “I am not my childhood.” He tells himself he must hold onto words, odd words, old words, rare words. When he forgets these words, they will be gone forever—it is up to him to keep them alive.

Crake. Shortly before Jimmy’s mother leaves, Crake arrives at HelthWyzer High. Jimmy’s mother likes Crake, more than the rest of Jimmy’s friends. She finds him thoughtful and mature—“intellectually honorable.” Crake’s given name is Glenn, but Snowman asserts that Crake is his true name.

When Crake first arrives at HelthWyzer, Jimmy is apprehensive of him. He is threatened by Crake’s coolness and detects self-importance in him. Crake’s nonchalance makes Jimmy want to get a reaction out of him, so he asks Crake to the mall after school. They end up having a good time, and Jimmy begins to come around to Crake, though he worries a little that Crake will be better liked than him at school.

Brainfrizz. Wakulla Price leaves HelthWyzer high, leaving Jimmy without a lab partner. Crake is assigned to be his partner and Jimmy realizes Crake is an unusually gifted scientist. They become closer and begin to hang out after school, usually in Crake’s room watching videos or playing computer games. They often play a digital version of chess. Once Jimmy suggests getting a real set—but Crake responds that neither a plastic set nor a digital set is “real”: “The real set is in your head.” Jimmy responds by shouting “bogus!” This is a word he’d heard on an old DVD. He uses it to mean Crake is being pompous.

They play other computer games: *Barbarian Stomp* involves pitting the “barbarian” side against the “cities” side, and whoever loses gets stomped. Many of the names of cities and barbarian hordes listed in the game are unfamiliar. *Blood and Roses* is a trading game, where one player (on the “Blood” side) trades with atrocities, and the other (“Roses”) trades with human achievements like artworks, scientific breakthroughs, etc. Each event is assigned a value. A sidebar briefly explains about the various historical events catalogued by the game (so, for example, if Jimmy didn’t know what [Madame Bovary](#) was, he could read a short blurb about it before trying to trade it). Snowman recites the names he learned in these games—randomly, and in no coherent order—to himself when he is feeling lonely or scared.

Snowman tries to overcome the dysfunction of his past. He believes his salvation is in the preservation of language. In this book, the extinction of not only various animal species but of language itself is at stake.



Crake enters Jimmy’s life shortly before Jimmy’s mother leaves, and will re-enter shortly after his mother dies. His “intellectual honorability” will be thrown in question by the end of the book, when his wielding of scientific knowledge leads to death and destruction on a global scale.



Jimmy and Crake’s friendship is borne out of Jimmy’s insecurity and jealousy. Little does Jimmy know that Crake’s “self-importance” is so pathological it will lead him to play God, all while denying anyone should believe in God. These initial (ultimately trivial) worries about Crake serve to ironically illustrate Jimmy’s underestimation of him.



Wakulla is replaced by Crake, and an innocent crush is replaced by the disastrous relationship that results in death and destruction. They spend more and more time together. Once again Jimmy’s playful ribbing of Crake for being “pompous” is darkly ironic—Jimmy is unknowingly understating the issue. But “bogus” is also the beginning of Jimmy’s word collection, which will bring him much comfort in the future. That they bond over chess is interesting—Jimmy will eventually learn he is a pawn in Crake’s strategy.



These games reduce history itself to cheap entertainment. Violence and horror as well as beauty and enlightenment are merely things to be traded. Major events are reduced to blurbs on a screen. They demonstrate the damaging effect consumer culture has had on history as a discipline and humanity’s connection to its past. Nevertheless, even Snowman’s cursory knowledge of human history, much of which he gets from these games, is a great source of comfort to him. It is as though even the act of preserving the names of great achievements, the places and dates of major events, reminds Snowman that he is not alone—that humanity did exist once.



Crake becomes particularly obsessed with a game called “Extinctathon” monitored by someone called MaddAddam. The game tests players’ knowledge of extinct species. Certain players are grandmasters, and Jimmy suspects Crake is trying to achieve grandmaster status. Crake adopts his name from the game: the extinct Red-necked Crake. Jimmy’s game name is Thickney (after an extinct Australian bird that “used to hang out in cemeteries”) but the name doesn’t stick.

When Crake and Jimmy aren’t playing games they are surfing the internet. Some sites feature live streaming videos of open-heart surgeries, some depict animal torture, some show live feeds of executions in Asia or the Middle East. They particularly enjoy watching channels (such as “Brainfrizz”) that depict American executions. Crake is also amused by a channel where people commit suicide on live television, but Jimmy is troubled by this and prefers not to watch. Jimmy likes a show called “At Home with Anna K,” which features a naked performance artist reciting Shakespeare in her home.

Sometimes Crake is able to hack into his stepfather Uncle Pete’s account using something he calls a “lily pad labyrinth” that prevents his searches from being detected. This enables Crake and Jimmy to watch especially disturbing or disgusting violent snuff films or pornography. Often Jimmy and Crake smoke marijuana (also stolen from Uncle Pete) and spend hours watching this kind of depraved content. Jimmy notes that the violent videos and the sexual ones are often hard to tell apart.

HottTotts. Jimmy and Crake always watch these channels when its late afternoon, and no one but Crake’s mother is home. She respects Crake’s privacy and never bothers them or enters his room. On one particular afternoon in March, they go on a site called “HottTotts,” and here they see Oryx for the first time. She is about eight years old performing sexual acts on a grown man. Jimmy is startled by her, and is unable to think of her as simply another girl on a porn site. There is one moment in the video where Oryx turns around and looks straight at the camera. Crake freezes the frame there and asks Jimmy if he wants a print copy (this is something they do with certain frames from time to time). Jimmy says yes, and hopes Crake hasn’t noticed him acting differently.

Extinctathon catalogues the species wiped out by the overreach of mankind and science in his world. That Crake and other Extinctathon players are named for extinct animals foreshadows the future near-extinction of the human race. The game is a way of preserving and remembering species erased from the earth. Crake’s eventual goal (we learn) is not only to become grandmaster, but also to add humans to this list.



The depraved side of humanity also has an exchange value—it is now packed and sold as entertainment. Crake’s interest in the channel depicting suicide, and Jimmy’s disgust with this website, it yet again foreshadowing. Jimmy will fight to preserve himself and humanity while Crake works to end it. Jimmy’s preferred program involves a performance artist who revives Shakespearean texts—Jimmy chooses art, sex, and humanity over self-destruction.



We see an even darker side of pervasive commodification. Jimmy and Crake take advantage of this proliferation of depraved content and spend whole afternoons watching it. Their friendship is less based on humanity and honest connection than it is on the shared experience, via a television screen, of the absence or degradation of humanity.



Crake and Jimmy encounter Oryx, whom we know Jimmy loved dearly, via one of these sites—she somehow stands out among the others as a human, as opposed to an object for viewing consumption. That Crake and Jimmy are both interested in her foreshadows their eventual love triangle, but also begs the question: why is Oryx the one thing that Jimmy and Crake seem to have in common? She (or whatever she represents) is somehow the link between Crake’s arrogant, cool, scientific mind, and Jimmy’s afflicted, emotional humanistic mind.



When Jimmy shows this picture to Oryx years later, when she's in his bed, she tells him she doesn't believe it's her. Jimmy insists it must be, and Oryx finally agrees, but Jimmy knows she is only saying so to make him happy. Jimmy asks her questions about how she felt, and what she'd been thinking, but Oryx finds these questions silly. She entertains them though, telling Jimmy, "I was thinking...that if I ever got the chance, it would not be me down on my knees."

We are for the first time introduced to the idea that the character referred to as "Oryx" is actually more than one woman. Oryx is in many ways created by Jimmy—she good-naturedly conforms to his idea of her, though it seems clear that she only does so out of benevolence. This calls on the reader to wonder about the nature of their bond—with whom does Jimmy have a relationship? A woman or an image of one?



CHAPTER 5

Toast. Snowman has told the Crakers the story of their origin. He has told them that the Crakers themselves are the Children of Crake, and animals are the Children of Oryx. Snowman works to maintain internal consistency in his stories, and the Crakers trust and believe his stories. However, he regrets telling the Crakers certain things; like that Rabbits and other creatures were sacred to Oryx, because now he can't eat them.

The Crakers wonder where they and other creatures came from – they yearn for stories that give them a sense of their place in the world; they yearn for a mythology – and Snowman becomes a kind of prophet. That Snowman gets caught having to follow the rules of those stories suggests that initially he didn't understand their power; but they do have power. Interestingly, Snowman again makes Oryx into an image or icon. The story about Crake creating the Crakers is based on truth, but Oryx did not create the animals. Snowman is still constructing Oryx even after her death.



The first star of the night appears in the sky, and Snowman begins singing "Star Light Star Bright" to himself. Craker children hear him and ask him why he is talking to himself. He tells them he is talking to Crake, and that if they don't go away, they'll be toast. They ask him what toast is, and Snowman realizes he's made an error. Metaphors do not work with the Crakers. He tells them to go away. Once he is alone, he imagines explaining toast to the Crakers and realizes it would be impossible. They have never heard of bread, flour, milk, electricity—the list goes on. Snowman becomes depressed again, and leaves off thinking "I am toast."

The divide between Snowman and the Crakers is made clearer. They are completely severed from whole categories of words and their meanings. They represent not only the destruction and extinction of man but the destruction and extinction of words and linguistic structures like metaphors. Though the Crakers have language, they are not people with whom Snowman can really communicate. When Snowman says, "I am toast," he is saying he is something the Crakers could never understand either actually (they can't make toast) or metaphorically (they don't understand metaphors).



Fish. Snowman looks at the night sky and names all of the colors, remarking to himself that humans were once so ingenious with naming colors, with language, and in fact with everything they did. Crake believed human ingenuity was no different than "monkey curiosity" and disdained the human "monkey brain." Crake had a very low opinion of human creativity and ingenuity, even though he possessed a great deal of it himself.

Jimmy's love of language, art and human creativity is contrasted with Crake's values: Crake seems to think anything unnecessary for survival – for simply continuing to live – is superfluous and inelegant—even though this includes his own genius and ingenuity.



Snowman hears the voices of the Crakers coming toward him. They are bringing him his weekly fish. He's taught them to grill the fish and wrap it in leaves. A Craker called Abraham Lincoln (Crake had named the Crakers after historical figures, because he found it amusing) presents the fish to Snowman, who eats it greedily. The Crakers find the spectacle disgusting. Nevertheless, some of them sneak looks. Snowman notes that depravity is of interest even to them.

When Snowman is finished the Crakers gather around him and ask to hear about the deeds of Crake. Snowman explains that in the beginning there was chaos. He stirs water into the mud to help the Crakers picture chaos. They initially struggled with pictures—the difference between a representation and the real thing confused them. But now they understand. He explains Crake got rid of chaos, making the “Great Emptiness” so there would be room for his children, and the children of Oryx. The Crakers respond with adulation, thanking Crake for his kindness and generosity. Snowman hates to hear these words, but spitefully notes that Crake was against the notion of God, and would hate to know he'd been made into one.

After Snowman finishes this story, one of the Craker women asks him a new question: How was Crake born? Snowman knows he must give them an answer that won't lead to too many more questions, so he answers that Crake came down out of the sky, like thunder. Then he tells the Crakers that he is too tired to talk anymore, and asks them to go away.

Bottle. Snowman is too disturbed and lonely to fall asleep. He goes to his cement storage unit and retrieves the last of a bottle of scotch. He goes back up the tree and curses Crake, bitterly noting that he'd fulfilled Crake's vision by saving the Crakers. He hears wolvogs (deadly creatures that appear friendly like dogs but are lethal as wolves) howling near his tree. He fights the various voices in his head as he continues to get drunker. Just as he is about to pass out, he tries to conjure up an image of Oryx, but she fails to come to him.

CHAPTER 6

Oryx. Snowman wakes up in the middle of the night suddenly. He feels Oryx near him. He knows if he tries to touch her, she'll vanish. He tries to tell her that he really loved her, and that what they had was more than sexual. He regrets that he'd used this line as a tool to get close to many women before Oryx.

Snowman has made the Crakers' feeding of him part of their ritual or religion. The Crakers are vegetarian, and are disgusted by Snowman's consumption of fish, but it seems that they, too, are fascinated and entertained by what disgusts them. This constitutes a substantive link between the Crakers and humanity (as opposed to the superficial and ironic link created by their historical names.)



Snowman has turned the story of the Crakers origin (the actual story of which we will learn in this novel) into a myth that gives the Crakers a sense of their place in the world. That Snowman hates to hear the Crakers praise Crake suggests that the real story isn't nearly as simple or pretty as what Snowman gives the Crakers. At the same time, it's worth noting the significance of Snowman's spiteful revenge on Crake: if giving the Crakers a sense of history and a kind of faith, by encouraging their reverence, and even helping them understand the word “picture”—in other words, art—is revenge, then these must have been things the scientifically minded Crake was opposed to.



Snowman must simplify his stories so that the Crakers do not ask him endless kinds of questions. He must therefore tell them Crake was not born but descended from the sky, like thunder. This enhances Crake's godlike status.



Snowman must get drunk to cope with his own fear, anger and sorrow. He tries to connect with absent figures from his past—he screams at Crake and does his best to visualize or hallucinate Oryx. In his loneliness, he is surrounded by the products of unrestrained scientific experimentation—they now pose a great threat to him. The wolvogs, though a product of scientific control of nature, are now in control of Snowman.



Once again we are aware of Snowman's regret surrounding his relationship with Oryx. He continues to insist that their connection was genuine and their love real, but his insistence betrays a certain amount of doubt.



Jimmy pieces together Oryx's story, but he imagines the story is different according to every person who's met her. Oryx tells Jimmy, one day as they eat pizza in Jimmy's bed, that she grew up in a small village, in a country with a name she could not remember. She was bought by a man named Uncle En. Her mother sold her brother to Uncle En as well, and Oryx believes this means her mother loved her and did not want her to be alone. This story makes Jimmy furious, but Oryx doesn't understand his anger, and knows that people were simply doing what they needed to in order to survive. When Jimmy vents about it to Crake, Crake remarks that this kind of suffering is the result of overpopulation because humanity has never learned to limit reproduction.

Birdcall. Uncle En led Oryx and her brother, along with other children, out of the village. Oryx was scared walking through the jungle, but she found comfort in the sounds of the birds, and believes her mother was sending her messages and love through birdsong. After a night in the jungle and more walking, they reached Uncle En's car, and he drove them away. When they are stopped at a checkpoint, Uncle En tells the soldiers the children in his car are his nieces and nephews. The soldiers remark that he has very many nieces and nephews. Uncle En slips them money and they laugh knowingly as they let Uncle En through the checkpoint.

Roses. Oryx and the other children were brought to a big city. It was very chaotic and unfamiliar but Uncle En was gentle with them and slowly they grew used to it. They were told to sell flowers on the street—Oryx is particularly successful because she is so pretty, but her brother has very little luck, because he is antisocial and has a black tooth. Uncle En tells him he will have to find him another job. The other children say that he will most likely do dangerous messenger work for gamblers or be prostituted. Oryx's brother escapes and Oryx never hears from him again.

Uncle En tells the children that if a man tries to take their hand they should refuse to go. One day a man does try to grab Oryx. She escapes and tells Uncle En. He sits down with her and says that the next time a man asks her to go to a hotel, she should say yes. It is not long before an old man does exactly this. Oryx lets the man take her to a hotel room. She takes off her clothes and the man takes his pants off before Uncle En bursts through the door exclaiming disgust and demanding money. The old man is frightened and gives Uncle En all of the money in his wallet. Uncle En is very pleased with Oryx afterwards and says he wishes he could marry her. This is the closest thing to love Oryx has available to her at the time, and so she is grateful for it.

The idea that Oryx's story is written by everyone who has ever met her is crucial. She is not the author of her own story—she exists as a reflection of those who know her. Perhaps this is why she is so infatuating. Oryx's past is tragic in Jimmy's eyes, but for Oryx it is simply her life, and she doesn't understand Jimmy's rage. Their experiences have been so different—Jimmy has led a privileged life and Oryx has not—that they cannot relate to one another. Crake, in a typical fashion, reduces the problem to an evolutionary, biological one—we begin to see his rejection of love and sex taking shape.



Oryx's life is in many ways a demonstration of the damaging effects of commodification on a global scale. Even though this country is not literally governed by corporate enterprises, money, bribes, and exchange value still dominate the lives of the people living there. Oryx herself has become a commodity. Oryx nevertheless finds comfort in nature and in the love (perhaps misplaced) of her mother; she, unlike the other characters, seems to see glimmers of love where others see only the more shallow motivations of survival or economic exchange.



This passage again emphasizes Oryx's status as a commodity. Her value—and therefore her fate, her life—is determined by the amount she can sell every day. Conversely, when her brother's value is called into doubt, it is suggested he might be commodified in a different way. If he cannot make money selling roses he will make money performing sexual favors or doing dangerous messenger work—so he runs away to an unknown fate.



Under these conditions, love and connection are hard to find. Oryx is glad to feel appreciated by Uncle En, even if she must earn that appreciation by setting up men who want to engage sexually with her. Though Oryx does not want to "marry" Uncle En, as he suggests, the mere mention of love, union, and mutual care, even in this context is something for which she can be grateful. This is a striking portrait of what becomes of love and affection in a world dominated by money and exchange rates, where people must demonstrate their monetary value to survive.



Pixieland Jazz. One day a man comes to the children's house and tells them Uncle En had sold his flower business and the children are going to be taken elsewhere. Later, Oryx would hear that Uncle En's throat was cut and he was thrown in the river. Oryx tells Jimmy she cried when she heard this news, which angers Jimmy. Oryx gently tells him he worries too much.

Oryx and the children are loaded into a truck and taken to a wealthy looking building where they are fed good food. They rarely leave the building and instead make pornographic movies in a walled-off area on the roof. Oryx observed men coming in and paying to have their movies filmed, attaching a price to every detail. Oryx says this is when she learned that "Everything has a price." Being in a movie is easy for her, because it only requires doing what you are told. The man with the camera is an American named Jack and he sometimes asks Oryx to perform sexual favors for him in private.

This is unwelcome news to Jimmy, who calls Jack pathetic. Oryx wonders why Jimmy dislikes Jack, and notes that she and Jimmy have done far more for each other sexually than she and Jack ever did. Jimmy points out that they do not have sex against Oryx's will, which makes her laugh and ask "what is my will?" She notices how badly this upsets Jimmy, and explains that Jack gave her lessons in English in return for their private sexual sessions. Jimmy is still angry, and rudely asks Oryx about the specifics of her sexual favors. She tells him Crake is correct in saying he doesn't have "an elegant mind." Jimmy apologizes, but maintains that he does not buy "all this sweetness and acceptance and crap."

The building where Oryx films her movies is called "Pixieland." As Oryx learns English she begins to sing English songs. Jack encourages this, requesting that she perform more of her "Pixieland Jazz." Jimmy demands to know if Oryx was raped during her time at Pixieland, and Oryx wonders why he always wants to talk about ugly things. Jimmy rephrases and asks her if the sex was real. Oryx replies that all sex is real.

Jimmy, who has not yet experienced the kind of brutal commodification Oryx has, does not understand her appreciation of Uncle En's affection. Ironically, though Oryx tells Jimmy he "worries too much," Jimmy will be totally blindsided by Crake and his plan.



The next phase of Oryx's life as a sexual commodity teach her that not only does she have a price, an assigned value, but everything does. Objects, actions, identities, relationships—all are assigned a specific monetary value. Tellingly, she learns this while working for Jack, an American. When she says being in a movie is easy, we imagine it is so in the sense that she easily demonstrates her value, because she is obedient, and perhaps because there is no threat of physical harm.



Oryx's status as an independent character with her own will and agency is again challenged. She suggests she is still acting as a commodity, and is confused by the notion of will. Perhaps she is ultimately governed by others' desire; perhaps this is how her value and character are determined. However, she knows enough to know that this idea upsets Jimmy, who doesn't want their relationship to boil down to a transaction. Jimmy is ultimately baffled by and disbelieving of Oryx's acceptance of her fate.



Oryx, rather like the Crakers, struggles to understand ugly or evil concepts, or else refuses to engage them. In many ways, Jimmy's conversations with Oryx mirror those he has with the Crakers—he must constantly rephrase, and Oryx often finds him fascinating but also grotesque (as the Crakers see Snowman). This casts more doubt on the nature of their love and connection.



CHAPTER 7

Sveltana. Snowman wakes up with a hangover and wishes he hadn't drunk the scotch the night before. He climbs down from the tree to get some water from his beer bottles. He sees a flock of birds and resents them because they are free and among their own kind. He sits down and tries to remember the meanings of old words floating through his head. After a while he knows he must eat and retrieves a package of Sveltana No-Meat Sausages. They are not enough to get him through the day. Snowman recognizes that he is slowly starving to death. He decides he must go to the RejoovenEsence compound. It is a long way away, but Crake's old bubble dome is there. It had been called "Paradice," it was full of food and weaponry, and Snowman remembers how to get there.

A voice in his head tells Snowman he doesn't want to go back to RejoovenEsence. Snowman insists he's forgotten about what happened there, but the voice says he's forgotten nothing. He reminds himself that if he does not eat he will die, and must stick to these essential truths.

Before Snowman leaves he must explain his departure to the Crakers. He does not want them to worry that he's missing and put themselves in danger by coming to find him. Though he finds their naïve optimism, friendliness, and calmness endlessly irritating, he feels protective of them. He makes his way toward their camp whistling, so they are able to hear him coming.

Purring. When Snowman arrives, the men are performing their morning ritual where they urinate along the invisible line that marks their territory. Crake designed the Crakers so that the smell of their urine would ward off predators. He gave the ability only to the men, because they needed something important to do that wasn't childbearing so that they didn't feel left out.

The Craker called Abraham Lincoln welcomes snowman, and asks him to come across the line. Snowman notes that Abraham has become a kind of leader, and recalls Crake saying to watch out for leadership—it leads to tyranny, slavery, and massacre.

Snowman's journey back to the RejoovenEsence compound is also one into the past, and we can infer that much of Snowman's hesitation comes from his fear of facing the past again. But the drive to stay alive convinces him he must go back. The name of Crake's dome, "Paradice," sounds like Paradise but also suggests the phrase "pair of dice." It calls to mind gameplay and gambling—and this is what science in the novel appears to be doing with human and animal life. The re-spelling of the word also suggests its artificiality: perhaps the goal is to create some kind of paradise, but whatever it will be it will be a man-made thing.



Snowman's regret, shame, and sorrow regarding what happened at RejoovenEsence are at odds with his will to survive. Ultimately his desire to avoid starvation—to go on living, and for mankind to go on living—wins out.



Snowman's care of the Crakers, though it often inspires horrible feelings in him, comes from a place of genuine concern. He handles them gently, anticipates their feelings, and acts in their best interests (even though their relentlessly good natures put him off.)



This adaptation of the Crakers shows that Crake boiled down even such things as purpose and fulfillment into evolutionary advantages and disadvantages. The act of marking territory with urine is also a distinctly animal trait, further emphasizing their not-quite-human status.



Yet another of Crake's attempts to breed certain kinds of thinking out of the Crakers is failing—they have fallen under leadership. It remains to be seen if this will actually corrupt them or threaten their survival.



Inside the circle, three women are tending to a hurt child by kneeling over him and purring. The purring was bred into them by Crake, who made them able to purr at the same frequency as the ultrasound technology that was used to heal wounds and broken bones. The women tell Snowman the child was bitten by a bobkitten (another manmade genetic splice), and they were forced to throw rocks at the animal. They say they will apologize to Oryx tonight for harming the animal, and ask her to prevent bites in the future. Snowman is satisfied by the fact that Crake failed to breed religion out of the Crakers, eliminate “the cluster of neurons” where he believed God resided—the Crakers have clearly developed a kind of reverence.

Snowman takes in the scene inside the Craker circle. Women are tending a fire. They never eat cooked food and the fire is purely for warmth. Children roam around—Snowman still has not grown used to the Craker children’s rapid growth rate (Crake believed far too much time was wasted in childrearing). He sees “caecotrophs” (clumps of semi-digested excrement) and is revolted. The Crakers pass food through their digestive system sometimes more than once, rather like a rabbit, in order to maximize nutrition. Jimmy had objected that Crake was making the Crakers “eat their own shit.” Crake dismissed it as an “aesthetic objection.”

Snowman tells the Crakers he is going to go on a long journey, to see Crake. Children beg to come with him, saying they want to see Crake too. The men insist that they should accompany him, so that he has protection. Snowman tells them that they are not allowed to see Crake. The men protest but Snowman says he must go alone, and says that Crake will be watching over them. One of the women tells Snowman to tell Crake they are very grateful.

As Snowman leaves the Craker camp, he again feels anger towards Crake. The voice of his father tells him he must stop whining. Snowman points out to his father that he had never set a very good example.

The purring is another animal trait that Crake made use of in creating or designing the Crakers, but it is an animal trait finely tuned by science to produce advanced healing – is it therefore primitive or advanced? It’s both. Crake would have no doubt thought that the remorse that the Crakers feel at harming the bobkitten, when they did so to save one of their own children, was useless and inelegant. He would have been disappointed to learn that the Crakers revered an absent being—that they still seemed to have the human capacity and need to understand and worship god. It is part of Snowman’s “revenge” on Crake that he gave the Crakers that god. They might not have felt such remorse had Snowman not given them the story of Oryx.



The Crakers rabbit-like consumption (and re-consumption) of vegetation, never cooked, though evolutionarily advantageous, seems not only inhuman to Snowman but also inhumane. Snowman believes “aesthetic objections”—objections on the grounds of gentility, beauty, appearance, implication—have merit, while Crake finds such objections utterly unconvincing. Crake also tellingly breeds childhood (or most of it) out of the Crakers—he views youth as wasted time, evidence of his scientific belief only in the importance of survival.



Just as Snowman worries about the welfare of the Crakers, the Crakers worry about Snowman’s safety given that he is clearly ill equipped in this environment. They show compassion and concern for Snowman, and gratitude for Crake. The range of their emotions is becoming clearer—they perhaps have more complex inner lives than Snowman believes.



Snowman compares Crake to his father—both gave no thought to the ethical, moral, or humanistic consequences of their scientific efforts. They focused only on results.



Blue. Snowman starts his journey, shoeless and carrying as little as possible. He keeps an eye out for bobkittens and wolfgos. As he wanders away from the beach he can hear laughter, chanting, and singing from the forest. He thinks it must be the Crakers mating. It only occurs once every three years per female, and when she is ready, her backside turns blue (a trait borrowed from baboons) which alerts the males she is ready to be pursued. She selects the male she prefers, and the others leave with no hurt feelings. She and the male do a dance similar to one done by mating crabs, and then copulate for many hours. Crake noted to Jimmy when he first explained this that any adaptation a person could think of would be one that nature had already invented.

Snowman notes the advantages of this sexual system: there was no more rape, no more heartbreak. Sex is no longer mysterious, no longer loathed or hidden, and no longer inspires suicides or murders. It is only an “athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp.”

Crake and Jimmy, in their early twenties, are talking over lunch. Crake wonders at the misery caused by biological mismatches, pheromones and hormones. Jimmy points out to him that without love (and its failures) there wouldn't be art. Crake laughs at this. Jimmy grows flustered, and also points out that when civilizations crumble, all that's left is art and language, or “imaginative structures.” “Human meaning is defined by them” Jimmy insists. Crake notes that bones and pottery are also left over. He then says that art is the equivalent of a male frog making noise to get attention from females, and that female artists are simply biologically confused.

Snowman leans against a tree and listens to the sounds of the Crakers mating. He wonders why, since there is no longer any jealousy or domestic violence, he feels so dejected. He uselessly asks Crake why he's on this earth, why he's alone—where his “Bride of Frankenstein” is. He collects himself and moves on his way.

More animal traits employed by Crake in the creation of the Crakers are explained. Notably the Crakers' mating is infrequent, devoid of attachment, jealousy and unrequited affection. These are afflictions Crake is disdainful of (possibly because he hates to feel them himself), “afflictions’ one might describe as an engine of love, though also of lust, jealousy, etc. Crake’s remark about nature “inventing” any adaptation mankind could think of indicates that Crake thought of his work as an extension of natural forces—he also characterizes nature as an “inventor,” blurring the line between scientific innovation and the work of nature itself.



There are definite advantages to Crake’s new sexual system—he eliminates many of the worst kinds of human abuses. But sex, though drained of its potential for violence, abuse, and hate, is also drained of its significance and meaning other than as an engine of reproduction.



Crake and Jimmy clash over their respective opinions of science versus the humanities. Jimmy believes these structures are the only thing keeping the memories of lost civilizations alive (for Jimmy, art is the solution to “immortality” the problem Crake wants to solve). Crake notes that evolutionary, biological and scientific artifacts, like bones and tools, also last long after civilizations die. He believes our biological, scientific record, is all that matters.



Snowman laments the absence of love, even tumultuous, painful love, in the Craker population. He asks for his “bride of Frankenstein,” comparing himself to the monster in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein that was constructed and then abandoned by Dr. Frankenstein, a monster that wants only to be loved and give love, to be a part of society, and who becomes murderous when that wish is denied to him.



CHAPTER 8

SoYummie. Jimmy and Crake graduate from HelthWyzer High. Crake graduates at the top of the class, and has earned a spot at the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute. Jimmy will be attending the much less important Martha Graham Academy, an arts-oriented school. Ramona (now his stepmother officially) and his father attend the graduation and offer Jimmy congratulations, but all Jimmy can think about is what his real mother would have thought. He concludes she wouldn't have cared about his graduation at all. Jimmy resorts to getting very drunk to alleviate his sorrow.

After the ceremony, Crake approaches Jimmy and brings up the subject of his own mother, who we learn passed away suddenly only a month ago. Crake explains what happened in a remarkably glib manner. His mother had died of a terrible disease, and had been incoherent at the end. Before she died she had “frothed”—Crake compares her to a salted slug. Jimmy assumes it's just an act, and that Crake is hiding his grief to maintain his coolness.

Happicuppa. After graduation, Jimmy goes on vacation with Crake and Uncle Pete. Instead of watching their usual TV programming, they tune into news about the “coffee wars.” HelthWyzer has created a new bean that could be picked mechanically, and a global resistance movement has broken out against the new “Happicuppa” bean, because it is putting small growers and laborers out of business. Crake tells Jimmy he is against Happicuppa because they are “nuking” cloud forests to plant their new beans, but also maintains he is not on the side of the “peasants” who are revolting.

Sometimes Jimmy and Crake watch the coffee wars coverage with Uncle Pete, who has stock in Happicuppa and says disparaging things about the rebels. While watching this coverage, Jimmy sees his mother on the screen, wearing a **green** bandana over her mouth and shouting at CorpSeCorps men. He asks Uncle Pete to freeze the frame, but Uncle Pete has already changed the channel. Jimmy thinks he shouldn't have said anything, and hopes Uncle Pete didn't notice—he doesn't want to betray his mother.

Fittingly, Jimmy goes to a school for the humanities, not held in high esteem, and Crake goes to a celebrated school for the sciences. The cultural decline of the humanities in this society is evident in the shabbiness of Jimmy's new school. This major transitional moment in Jimmy's life makes him miss his mother, whose absence, both physical and emotional, troubles him and forces him to seek comfort not in meaningful human interaction (for he can find none) but in chemical self-abuse.



Crake's unfazed, scientific demeanor when discussing the horrifying death of his own mother is dismissed by Jimmy as an act—but this is a moment of dark foreshadowing. Crake's disregard for human life will only become more and more clear—in fact Jimmy will eventually conclude Crake not only failed to mourn his mother appropriately but in fact infected her with the virus that killed her.



Crake does not side with the rich or the poor, the corporations or the individual. Rather he sides with the “cloud forests,” with nature, with the survival of species. This is not evidence of his compassion, but rather of his scientific interest in the survival of “elegant” life forms—he clearly believes there is elegance in the cloud forests, an elegance of simplicity that does not include higher-order human thinking, which he disdains. He therefore opposes the Happicuppa bean and the peasants. To him, they are two sides of the same human coin, and he rejects the coin entirely.



The reappearance of Jimmy's mother alongside rebels in the coffee wars confirms that she left to join groups fighting against the corporations. Jimmy's outburst upon seeing her worries him—he hopes he did not accidentally betray her, showing that he still cares deeply about his mother even if he is bitter about her departure.



When Crake and Jimmy are alone again, they talk about what Jimmy saw. Crake says he guessed it was Jimmy's mother, and assures Jimmy he can be trusted. Seemingly to make Jimmy feel better, Crake tells him that Crake's own father had also left under similar circumstances, and died after going over a highway overpass. Crake says that everyone talked about it as though it was a suicide, but he doesn't believe it was. Jimmy asks him if his father had simply fallen by accident. Crake tells him "he was kind of uncoordinated" and smiles.

When Snowman thinks about this event years later, he is furious with himself. He thinks, "How could I have missed it?" and realizes Crake had been trying to tell him something. Jimmy had been willfully ignorant.

Applied Rhetoric. Jimmy and Crake part ways to go to their separate academies. Martha Graham has fallen into a state of disrepair, and the facilities are unimpressive. The school is named after the 20th century dancer, Martha Graham, and puts special emphasis on the humanities and performing arts in particular. As the importance of the arts has waned, Martha Graham has shifted its emphasis. The school now focuses on "contemporary arenas" and more employable skills, like writing advertising copy and pamphlets, or manipulating images, or writing for web-based games.

Jimmy studies "problematics" (which would prepare him for a job writing descriptions of new products.) He lives across the hall from a "fundamentalist" vegan named Bernice whom he finds very unattractive. Bernice antagonizes Jimmy about everything from his faux-leather sandals to his string of overnight female guests, and Jimmy manages to change rooms.

Jimmy realizes at Martha Graham that he is interested in damaged, artistic women, because he finds them easy to manipulate, and finds satisfaction in listening to others' vulnerabilities. The relationships never last long, because Jimmy gets bored rather quickly. Jimmy often likes to use the story of his mother to draw women in—it works on everyone except Oryx.

We will eventually learn that Crake's father was killed for trying to resist the increasingly unethical corporations. When Crake calls him uncoordinated, Jimmy here assumes Crake means physically, But we can understand that Crake's father was "uncoordinated" in the sense that he did not move in line with corporate enterprise. He did not act according to plan; he did not behave.



Jimmy eventually realizes what Crake had been saying, and Snowman is left punishing himself for being naïve and missing the signs, for failing to realize what the corporate system was really doing.



Martha Graham is in many ways a physical manifestation of the cultural rejection of the importance of the arts and humanities. It is literally dilapidated, and though it still technically teaches language, visual, and performing arts, it has been forced by cultural demand to teach not the humanities but what might instead be described as the "applied humanities": how to use language above all else to serve the sciences and the corporations' best interests. Humanities are no longer studied for their own sake.



Bernice, who will later be executed by CorpSeCorps men, arguably has much more integrity than Jimmy, though he paints her as foolish and extreme. He chooses to use his love of and talent with language to train himself to write advertisements for corporate products.



Jimmy's twisted view of love, sex, and relationships continues to develop at Martha Graham. He prefers women he can manipulate, and doesn't commit seriously to any of these women, though he leads them to believe he will. Oryx, though she does have a relationship with Jimmy, is not manipulated by him in this way.



Asperger's U. Jimmy and Crake correspond by email. Crake tells Jimmy that people call Watson-Crick "Asperger's U" because there so many strange, socially inept geniuses there. Crake says there are absolutely no "neurotypicals" there—in other words, people who lack the genius gene.

Though Jimmy could easily purchase papers instead of writing them, he applies himself at Martha Graham and spends long hours in the library looking for the most obscure, arcane books he can find. He also begins compiling lists of old, unusual words, occasionally tossing them into conversation. For his Applied Rhetoric course, he writes a term paper on self-help books of the 20th century. He enjoys quoting these texts to his friends, who find them hilarious. His senior dissertation is an extension of his self-help term paper—he earns an A.

Crake invites Jimmy to visit Watson-Crick over the holidays and Jimmy accepts. At Watson Crick, Jimmy is stopped by Watson-Crick security, who question him yet again about his mother. When Jimmy tells the guards he has come to see Crake, the guards look impressed and let him through. Jimmy is so pleased to see Crake he almost cries.

Watson-Crick's campus is modern and beautiful, decked out in high-tech genetically modified plants in a wide array of colors. The climate is carefully controlled and the air is clear and pleasant. Jimmy asks Crake if the large butterflies are "real" and Crake responds by saying that things created by science are as real as things created by nature.

Crake takes Jimmy on a tour of the campus, frequently introducing him to others as "Jimmy, the neurotypical." Jimmy is especially thrown by a lab that is growing a new kind of chicken, with no head, feathers, or feet. It is just a lump of muscle with a feeding tube. Crake explains that these chickens are so cost-effective that the resulting food product ("Chickienobs") will be able to undercut the cost of all similar products.

Watson and Crick is a place where science has superseded everything: no one has relationships or normal social interactions, and no one there is less than a genius. It is an institution representing the inordinate power the sciences have over the rest of culture.



Jimmy continues to develop his love of language and language arts. He builds his vocabulary even though, in this world, there is no reason to do so. He continues to have a sense of humor, and enjoys making his classmates laugh with his comedy. At the same time, his thesis is on self-help books—a commodified form of "literature" that sells easy fixes to human problems. These self help books will often appear in Snowman's head later, much to his chagrin, and perhaps indicate a regret on Jimmy's part that he didn't devote his time to more meaningful texts.



The disappearance of his mother is still having a tangible effect on Jimmy, as evidenced by the maintained interest of the CorpSeCorps in her whereabouts. Crake has already started to achieve status and recognition—the security forces now know and respect his name.



Watson Crick is a demonstration of both the power and the freedom of scientific institutions to produce and modify whatever they wish. The effect is pleasant but the implications are troubling—Crake's belief that there is no difference between science and nature is ominous—just as one might say that there is no morality in nature, Crake then seems to believe that there is no morality in what science creates.



Jimmy is out of place on this campus, where the only valued intelligence is scientific intelligence. Watson-Crick is a hotbed of ethically dubious scientific activity and profit-driven research. Crake and his peers are completely unfazed by the thought of growing headless, motionless, only sort-of-alive chickens, and focus only on their cost-effectiveness.



Next Crake shows Jimmy the wolvog pen. It is a CorpSeCorps-funded project that has designed a dog that looks friendly but is irreversibly vicious. The CorpSeCorps is thinking of building moats around protected areas and filling them with wolvogs. Jimmy feels ill—seeing all of this has made him uncomfortable, and he wonders if a line is being crossed. Crake remarks offhand that mankind has always built walls to keep nature and God confined—animals are kept in zoos, and God is kept in churches. He clarifies, however, that he does not believe in God or Nature.

Hypothetical. A few days into his visit Jimmy asks Crake about the dating prospects at Watson-Crick. Crake explains that “pair-bonding” is not encouraged, and that if you really need it, you can arrange to get a prostitute through student services. Crake thinks this service is a good idea, because it allows you to fulfill whatever desires you have without getting distracted from your work.

Crake and Jimmy hang out in much the same way they used to. They play computer games, or make funny sentences out of the fridge-magnet words Crake has on his fridge. Jimmy finds it relaxing to simply sit and listen to Crake talk. One day Crake tells Jimmy that HelthWyzer and similar companies have been producing viruses and releasing them into the population in order to sell the cures—because “illness isn’t productive.” Crake’s father, Crake then reveals, was pushed off an overpass because he had found out about this practice. Jimmy is shocked. Crake says that Uncle Pete or his mother must have turned his father in. Then he suggests that Jimmy’s mother must have known, and that’s why she was so disappointed in Jimmy’s father, and ultimately why she ran away.

On the last evening of Jimmy’s visit, Crake asks him to play Extinctathon. Jimmy agrees, and when Crake logs on Jimmy realizes that Crake has become a grandmaster. MaddAddam instructs grandmaster Crake (via a screen pop-up) to “find his playroom.” In order to do so Crake brings up a picture of 8-year-old Oryx, from the screenshot taken years ago, and clicks on her eye. It opens the playroom. Jimmy is jealous and furious, but doesn’t know why he feels so strongly and says nothing.

Wolvogs are an instance of corporate self-interest directing scientific progress and in fact evolution itself. Jimmy’s discomfort is understandable—the things being done at Watson-Crick are clearly violating moral and ethical boundaries. But this is of no interest to Crake, who believes that such questions are not just pointless but ridiculous. He reduces religion and nature to manmade structures, and confirms our suspicion that he has no reverence for either God or nature.



Watson-Crick even goes so far as to eliminate romance and dating from the lives of its students. Jimmy finds this unfathomably strange but Crake likes the idea, claiming it reduces distractions. Crake resents his own sexual desires and believes them to be an impediment.



Though Jimmy and Crake revert to old habits, their conversation has changed dramatically. Crake opens up to Jimmy about things he knows about the corporations, about their reach, about the fates of his parents and Jimmy’s. That Jimmy has never even thought of these possibilities is evidence of his naiveté—the same naiveté that prevents him from seeing Crake for what he really is. The moral differences between Jimmy’s parents, and between Crake’s father and his mother and Uncle Pete, demonstrate the extent to which greed and arrogance can corrupt people in this system.



Crake still plays Extinctathon, and has achieved the status of grandmaster, which Jimmy suspected he wanted all along. The name MaddAddam seems to refer the first man (Adam) but is a mysterious figure in this novel (though he is explored more fully in the full trilogy of novels of which Oryx and Crake is just the first.) The love triangle between Crake, Oryx, and Jimmy begins to take shape and immediately leads to jealousy, a very human emotion.



A string of e-bulletins pops up on the screen. They all describe events where mysterious hostile bioforms attacked the animals and products created by major corporations. Then MaddAddam asks for “new initiatives.” Jimmy gets nervous and asks Crake what’s going on. Crake explains MaddAddam runs a subversive, rebellious operation, and that the MaddAddam group wants to tear the whole corporate system down. Crake says he doesn’t know much about who they are, except that they are doing very advanced work and must have been trained in the compound. Jimmy tells Crake he shouldn’t be messing around with this stuff, as he could be caught, but really the thing on his mind is the picture of Oryx, and why Crake had chosen it for his gateway.

Crake has found his way into an organization that uses scientific knowledge produced by the compounds to fight the compounds—they fight science with science, because perhaps there is no other way. Jimmy, who wants to avoid this kind of conflict for fear of the consequences, wishes Crake would stop telling him all of this. Though what Crake is showing him is of the utmost importance, is in fact a massive revelation about the forces at work in this world, all Jimmy can think about is Oryx, and his own jealousy.



During this visit, Crake often wakes Jimmy up by screaming, horribly, in the middle of the night. When Jimmy asks him about it, Crake responds that he never remembers his dreams. When Snowman thinks about this later, he realizes that, while Crake could never remember his dreams, Snowman worse than remembers them—he’s trapped in Crake’s dreams. He no longer wonders why Crake screamed so much.

Snowman believes he is, in some sense, living in one of Crake’s nightmares—for he is in the world Crake “dreamed” up, one in which humanity has been cleared out to make way for the Crakers. That Crake was afflicted by horrible nightmares perhaps suggests he did have a sense of the atrocity of his ambitions, but repressed it.



CHAPTER 9

Hike. Snowman continues to make his way toward the Paradise dome in the RejoovenEsense compound. He regards the ruins of old buildings being taken over by vegetation and wonders if there are any humans left, and if someday future generations might wonder about these structures. He remembers that Crake told him it only takes the elimination of one generation to bring civilization to an end.

Snowman is unsure of his place in history, and in fact of humanity’s place in history. He is one of the last living members of his own species, and he wonders about the legacy this civilization has left behind—laboratory compounds overgrown by nature might be all that’s left.



Snowman eventually reaches the compounds. He passes some smaller ones, and comes to RejoovenEsense, the biggest compound of them all. He steps over the skeleton of a dead guard at the gate, and prepares to cross the long barren field between the outer gate and the compound entrance.

RejoovenEsense looms larger than any of the other compounds, and death is more present here (the body of the guard is the first plague victim we’ve actually encountered). It stands as the biggest and most ominous scientific and corporate enterprise.



He walks through the gate, where once he would have been required to scan his iris (eyeball) to gain entry. He must first find food, so he heads to the residential section. He walks into a house, and nervously looks through the kitchen cabinets. They have been picked through mostly. He goes upstairs and finds a dead man in the bathroom, and surmises that the man had probably crawled in there in his dying moments, looking desperately through the cabinet for a pill that would save him. The mirror has been shattered.

The reality of the plague’s devastation is found inside the compound. The security forces and barriers dividing the compound from the outside are gone. Inside are the remains of people who even in their last moments believed a pill (a purchased product, a scientific solution) might save them. The horror of this scene impresses upon the reader the utter devastation of Crake’s actions.



He goes to the bedroom, where the body of the lady of the house lays in bed in a nightie. Snowman thinks that she was probably attractive when she was alive. He takes this opportunity to look in the mirror, and sees how ugly he has become—with a sunken face, covered in scabs.

He goes to the child's room, but there is no body in it. The child must have died somewhere else. He continues on, and finds an office with a flashlight, some bourbon, a tin of soy sardines, and some packets of cashews in it. He also sees the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, and realizes the man must have been a words person, like himself, and written pamphlets for RejoovenEsense products. He is suddenly reminded of his own childhood, and feels chilled.

Snowman leaves the house and is unhappy to see a group of Pigoons approaching him. He realizes they are probably very smart, and maybe even growing human neo-cortex tissue. They are omnivorous and appear to be hunting him. Suddenly the skies darken, and Snowman realizes a tornado is coming. The Pigoons flee. He hopes the Crakers will be safe, and seeks cover in the security tower. He drinks some bourbon and eats some cashews. The lights go out, and Snowman hunkers down and prepares for dreams of Oryx.

CHAPTER 10

Vulturizing. Jimmy graduates in four years from Martha Graham university with his degree in Problematics. After graduation he moves in with his girlfriend, Amanda Payne. They live in one of the modules (A kind of suburban middle-ground between the pleebland cities and the compounds) with two other men. Amanda and the two men had grown up in the pleeblands, and look down on Jimmy for being a compound brat. Amanda believes Jimmy lacks integrity, and he often disappoints her, as when he brought home a bucket of ChickieNobs for dinner once. Jimmy likes to antagonize Amanda and her friends when they discuss everything that's gone wrong with society, asking them comically what their perfect solutions are.

Snowman's longing for human contact is so severe even the sight of a dead body arouses in him questions about beauty and sexual attraction. This gives way to his recognition of his own physical decline.



The home of this family suddenly begins to resemble the fate Snowman could have met. The dead man in the bathroom did the same kind of work Jimmy did—he was a “words person” who used his talent to sell “innovations” and products. Jimmy suddenly thinks of his childhood, and feels chilled perhaps because he recognizes how early his troubles began.



The pigoons, perhaps sporting genetic modifications that Jimmy's father himself had devised, are now, because of those modifications, an immediate threat to Jimmy's survival. The tornado drives the pigoons away but is itself a threat—however once Jimmy has secured cover for himself, his first thought is of the Crakers—he continues to care for them. He then prepares for his lonely mind to generate visions of Oryx in its sleep.



Amanda is another character whose integrity seems to outshine Jimmy's. She has lived outside of the compounds and is less sheltered than he is. She is disgusted that Jimmy can eat ChickieNobs—and the reader should be surprised, too, that Jimmy can eat them even after seeing, and being horrified by, the genetically altered chickens from which they came. That he can demonstrate Jimmy's own moral failing, his ability to overlook or not act upon his disgust. Jimmy laughs at others for complaining without having a “perfect solution” in mind. This is ironic given that Crake's “solution” ultimately demonstrates the danger that emphasis on “perfect solutions” poses to society.



Amanda receives a grant to do her artwork, installation projects called “vulture sculptures” where she spells out words using the carcasses of dead animals, and lets vultures feed on them, taking a photo from a helicopter above. She says “vulturizing” words both brings them to life and kills them. When Jimmy gets a job with AnooYoo, Amanda is sickened by his decision to work in the compounds. She breaks up with him, and next vulturizes the word “love.”

AnooYoo. Jimmy moves to the AnooYoo compound and works writing pamphlets for various cosmetic treatments. For the first time in his adult life he cannot find a girlfriend—he is too low in the company to seem impressive to anyone. But eventually he gets the hang of his work—he likes inventing new and ridiculous words, and his bosses seem to love it—and is granted a promotion, at which point he begins secretly seeing a series of married women.

Garage. Jimmy often feels his life is inferior. He is getting fatter, and starting to go bald. He knows Crake ended up at RejoovenEsense, a top-notch company on the cutting edge. They email occasionally, and Crake tells him Uncle Pete has died suddenly of a virus. When Jimmy asks Crake if he was there when Uncle Pete died, Crake responds “in a manner of speaking.” Jimmy realizes he and Crake are growing apart, and he is beginning to think of Crake as someone he used to know.

Jimmy falls into a kind of depression. Even sex doesn’t bring him the comfort it used to, and he starts avoiding his lovers and watching the news. One night they are airing coverage of a scandal in San Francisco—several girls had been discovered locked in garages, kept as sexual slaves. Oryx’s face appears on the screen, now about 18 or 19 years old. She is calm and friendly, and says she bears no ill will toward the man who was keeping her. Jimmy is overwhelmed by the sight of her.

Amanda has an interest in words similar to Jimmy. She is aware of the need to keep language alive, and she is aware of its continued death in this culture. However, even though Jimmy and Amanda have the same love of and interest in language, Jimmy chooses comfort and starts to work for a compound, and thereby becomes complicit in the system that is responsible for the decline of language.



Jimmy continues to compromise himself. He makes up new words instead of protecting old words, and conducts affairs with multiple married women, giving up even on the illusion of commitment and faithfulness. His time at AnooYoo marks a time of personal decline—in his morals, relationships, and convictions.



Jimmy recognizes that he is sad and unfulfilled, and attributes this feeling to his lack of professional success and physical attractiveness—the culture of commodification has caused him to think this way. He is vaguely jealous of Crake, and wishes he knew more about his life or was involved in some way. This wish will be granted—and ironically the outcome will be horrible. Crake’s odd “in a manner of speaking” comment suggests (in a way Jimmy doesn’t catch) that Crake may have played some part in Uncle Pete’s death.



Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Jimmy believes he sees Oryx when he is feeling his lowest—both Crake and Jimmy see Oryx as a kind of salvation from suffering. It is again unclear if the woman Jimmy sees onscreen is really Oryx, but his belief that she is indicates his longing for connection with her, with what she represents to him.



Gripless. The CorpSeCorps continue to bother Jimmy from time to time about his mother's whereabouts. One day they come over to show him photos and ask him if he recognizes anyone in them (while he is hooked up to a lie detector). Jimmy is used to this, but is always nervous he will see his mother in the photos. He recognizes the body of Bernice in a photo of executed prisoners. Then he is shown a video of his mother, who is about to be executed. She looks at the camera and says "Goodbye. Remember Killer. I love You. Don't let me down." Jimmy claims he knows nothing about the person in the video but the monitors tracking his heartbeat give him away. They ask him who "Killer" was, and Jimmy begins laughing. He explains that Killer was a pet rakunk—not a person. The CorpSeCorps men are satisfied and leave.

Jimmy falls into a deep depression. He cuts off contact with his lovers completely. He begins drinking heavily, alone in his house. He feels as though he wants revenge, but doesn't know what kind of revenge, or against whom.

Even after all this time corporate security forces continue to pursue Jimmy's mother and harass Jimmy with questions. What's more, they employ technologies that force family members to betray each other. Bernice's body stands out to Jimmy—perhaps he remembers her integrity and feels guilty for her sacrifice. Jimmy's mother's dying words, before she is executed for "treason" against the corporations, are "don't let me down"—arguably, by working for a corporation and allowing himself to sink into the compound system, as Jimmy already has.



Jimmy feels anger, regret, and vengefulness but doesn't know where he ought to direct these feelings. To the reader it seems clear that the corporations are responsible for Jimmy's troubles—their deeply unethical behavior drove his mother away and killed her—but he doesn't have the clarity to recognize this, and continues to isolate himself.



CHAPTER 11

Pigeons. Snowman wakes from a nightmare about his childhood home—one in which he is trying to eat one of his mother's sandwiches but hears a loud scratching at the walls. He collects himself, searches for his belongings, and leaves the security tower, but he cuts his foot on a shard of glass from the bourbon bottle. He must have broken it while sleeping. As he heads across the clearing, he sees Pigeons—he thinks the same group from yesterday—and they are clearly pursuing him. He quickly retreats back to the security tower. The door closes, but the electronic lock no longer functions. He runs to a back room and closes that door. He hears the pigeons breaking down the first door, and they begin slamming against the second, inner door.

Radio. Snowman is at a loss for what to do. He begins trying random doors along the back wall of the inner room. One of them opens to a flight of stairs. Pigeons are too large and awkward to climb stairs. He quickly escapes up them as the Pigeons break in. The stairs lead to security watchtower. There are no bodies up here—Snowman realizes the guards must have tried to flee RejoovenEsense with everyone else.

Snowman's childhood continues to haunt his dreams, and, in a sense, his waking hours—the Pigeons of his childhood are now breaking the door down and trying to kill him. The electronic locks no longer function, and the pigeons have the upper hand. This scene reads almost like a reversal of man and animal—Snowman is cornered and isolated, while the Pigeons are grouped, systematic, and have the upper hand. The cut foot is also an ominous sign—the inside of his body is now opened up to infection.



Snowman luckily manages to get to the higher ground. The absence of bodies in the security tower tells us that at the end, even the security forces, from whom Jimmy, Jimmy's mother, and countless other had to flee, were themselves driven out by the virus, which tore apart the compound system the way it tore apart the body,



Snowman finds a good deal of supplies in the watchtower. He finds water, cigarettes and beer, as well as a collection of food. In one cupboard he finds a windup radio that still works. He turns it on and tries to see if he can pick up a signal. He hears another human voice, and is momentarily elated, until he realizes the voice is speaking something that sounds like Russian—this person is too far away to be of use to him. Then he realizes he can use a feature on the radio to limit reception only to radio broadcasts in the immediate area. He hears a man's voice faintly, asking if anyone's out there. Jimmy responds, "I'm here! I'm here!" but receives no response. Nevertheless, he feels hopeful.

Rampart. Snowman remembers his injured foot. He inspects it and finds a shard of glass in the wound. He pours some alcohol on it and applies some expired antibiotic ointment. He wishes he had something stronger but must hope for the best. He suspects that the foot may already be infected. There's nothing more to do but sit and wait. He decides to spend the night on one of the guard's cots. He continues smoking, and thinks, "If I'd killed Crake earlier...would it have made any difference?" He dreams of his mother and wakes up missing her terribly.

In the morning Snowman calculates that this is the third day he's been away from the Crakers. He gathers all of his new supplies into a sack and manages to squeeze himself out through an air vent, so that he can drop onto a rampart that circles the compound and connects the watchtowers. When he lands on the rampart, he realizes he's forgotten the radio—but there's no going back now, so he forges ahead. He needs to head to the Paradise dome, where there are guns and ammunition. He remembers how to get there. As he makes his way along the rampart, near the third watchtower, he sees a plume of smoke off in the distance. It is too large a plume to belong to the Crakers' fire—he wonders if a lightning strike has started a forest fire. He keeps checking on it as he goes—it never spreads or gets bigger. The smoke keeps rising.

CHAPTER 12

Pleebcrawl. Snowman is limping because of his injured foot, and is making poor time. At the height of day he must find shade and rest until the heat breaks. His own voice speaks in his head. "Why didn't he leave me alone?" He reassures himself that he'd never really meant to hurt anyone.

Though this first moment of contact with another human being is thrilling for Snowman, he quickly realizes that—absent any functioning infrastructure of advanced technologies—people who live far away from him may as well not exist. This is a striking picture of the fall of the book's civilization, Fortunately, Snowman hears a voice from close by—he does not know if he has made contact, but it is finally confirmed he is not the last of his species.



Snowman is now at the mercy of the various bacteria and microbial organisms that have no doubt invaded his foot. He can do nothing about the invasion, except wait and hope for the best—he is basically helpless. It is also revealed to us that Snowman is the one who killed Crake—however in this moment Snowman is wondering if his actions had any effect—if he is in fact as helpless with respect to Crake's plan as he is with respect to the infection in his foot.



Snowman once again thinks diligently about the Crakers. He leaves behind the radio—and in doing so, he leaves behind the only brief contact he'd managed to achieve with another member of his species. He must keep moving though, and does not mourn the loss. Nor should he—the smoke he sees, though he does not explicitly recognize it as such, is a controlled fire that does not belong to the Crakers—we can assume it is man made. Snowman's actions take on a new meaning given this information. He no longer exists solely to look after the Crakers—it is entirely possible he is not alone.



Snowman's infection appears to be worsening. In a kind of delirium, he once again expresses regret and guilt over his participation in whatever horrors Crake committed. Yet in blaming Crake he also disavows his own responsibility in what happened. He is being passive now even as he was when allowing himself to work for the corporations in the past.



One Saturday, Jimmy is lying in his bed in the AnooYoo compound. He is unmotivated and depressed. Someone rings his doorbell and he tells whomever it is to go away. Crake responds—Jimmy realizes Crake is the only person he wanted to see. Crake has passes to visit the Pleeblands, which means he must be very important. He tells Jimmy he wants to go out bar hopping in the pleeblands with him. Before they leave Crake injects Jimmy with a cocktail of medicines that are meant to immunize Jimmy against diseases common in the pleeblands.

Jimmy has only ever seen the pleeblands from the window of a bullet train and is nervous at first. He is comforted when he realizes the inhabitants of the pleeblands are not the mentally deficient criminals compounders make them out to be. Jimmy and Crake wander around “New New York” and notice all of the RejoovenEsense products for sale. Crake tells Jimmy the whole trip is on him. They get drinks, dinner, and buy services from various prostitutes. The next morning Jimmy vaguely remembers Crake telling him about a job for Jimmy at RejoovenEsense, and thinks he must have accepted.

BlyssPluss. When Jimmy returns to AnooYoo on Monday, several higher-ups congratulate him on his new job. His mistresses have already been informed of his departure, and have sent him sorrowful goodbye emails. Jimmy realizes Crake has a long reach and must be quite powerful.

The RejoovenEsense compound is the most beautiful compound Jimmy has ever seen. Crake gives him a tour of the facilities and takes him out to lunch. Crake tells Jimmy he’s been working on a product called “Paradise”—and that the product is immortality. Jimmy asks for more detail. Apparently it doesn’t involve cryogenics or any kind of deep freezing. Crake says the research budget is many millions of dollars.

Crake appears shortly after Jimmy’s mother’s death (coincidentally—or maybe not so coincidentally—he arrived in Jimmy’s life just before her disappearance) and Jimmy is so grateful for the presence of someone he believes to be a true friend he willingly goes out with Crake. The injection Crake gives Jimmy seems a precaution against diseases found outside the compounds—but in fact it will save him from a more dangerous virus made inside in the compound.



We finally get to see what the pleeblands are really like. Even outside of the compounds, the corporate presence is undeniable. Many of Crake’s company’s products are on the shelves. Jimmy accepts a job from Crake, but can barely remember doing so. This again suggests that Jimmy has very little agency or control—that he is at the mercy of Crake’s manipulation (a manipulation that relies on Crake’s genius and his ability to sell ideas), though it also certainly says something about Jimmy’s knack for finding ways to avoid responsibility.



The power of Crake and his corporation begin to sink in. Jimmy’s bosses, previously ambivalent about him, come out of the woodwork to congratulate him. Crake has obviously been keeping tabs on Jimmy.



Selling immortality is not a new concept in this world—other corporations have already tried various methods of offering people longer life (even infinitely longer) through science. Crake has managed to get virtually unlimited funding for his project—immortality is worth a great deal of money.



Within Paradise, Crake explains, there are two initiatives. One is the BlyssPlus pill, which is designed to eliminate most causes of unnecessary death by protecting the user from sexually transmitted infections, increasing stamina and libido to end sexual frustration and therefore (in Crake's belief) put a stop to all violent crime, and, finally, prolong youth. The pill would also be a contraceptive, depriving men and women of their fertility, but this would not be advertised. The sterilization would solve the problem of overpopulation, and lead to greater freedom and happiness, says Crake. Jimmy says this is sterilizing people without their consent, and Crake calls that a "crude way of putting it."

The more Jimmy thinks about it the more he thinks he could use a pill like this one, but stops short of saying so to Crake. He agrees with Crake that the pill would become a must-have all over the world; that it would be irresistible. Jimmy asks where Crake is going to get his test subjects, and Crake smiles as he tells him they will test it in poorer countries. "Pay them a few dollars, they don't even know what they're taking." He will distribute the drug to sex clinics, whorehouses, prisons, and anywhere there was a good supply of desperate people. When Jimmy asks how he fits into this project, Crake tells him that he is in charge of the advertising campaign.

MaddAddam. After lunch Crake and Jimmy go to Paradise. It is located in an air-locked dome that is basically impenetrable. The employees are wearing nametags with the names of extinct animals on them. Crake explains that everyone who works in Paradise is an Extinctathon grand master. They are geniuses with genetic splicing, and had previously been using their skills to introduce damaging microbes and viruses into corporate biological products. Crake had won them over by explaining they'd be much safer working inside a corporation than outside, where the CorpSeCorps men would be looking for them. Crake intimates that certain employees had failed to integrate smoothly, and had been eliminated. Jimmy doesn't ask him to explain.

Paradise. They stop at Crake's office. Jimmy notices he still has the word magnets on his refrigerator, only now they form a strange kind of verse about God, Man, and human limitation. Jimmy asks Crake what he's really up to, and Crake asks him "what is really?" Jimmy laughs playfully but is thrown by this answer.

We learn Crake's justification for his work. He believes the BlyssPlus pill is a solution to human suffering—and it does seem to offer some pretty great benefits! Yet it also essentially involves a tremendous secret scientific experiment on a large and unknowing swath of the population. It is a case of Crake, through science, playing god—determining what is best for other people, for the rest of the world. Crake doesn't think this is a problem. In his view, mass sterilization will solve overpopulation, and is therefore a good thing despite it being done to people without their knowledge. He rejects Jimmy's ethical questions as "crude"—which we can assume he means "unscientific."



Not only is Crake selling the pill without disclosing all of its effects, he is testing it on communities who are too poor, desperate, or troubled to think twice about accepting money to test a new drug. We see Jimmy's conviction wane, though—he acknowledges the pill will be wildly popular, and even feels like he wants to try it for himself. What's more, Jimmy finds out he will be complicit in Crake's unethical distribution of the pill—he will in fact write the advertisements for it.



Crake has absorbed members of a rebellious, anti corporate group into his project—taking advantage of their skill and intelligence while at the same time neutralizing the threat that they pose. He has consolidated his power in a big way. The irony of their being named after extinct animals, while (unknowingly) working towards the extinction of humankind, is painfully deep. What's more, Crake suggests he has killed or harmed employees who have opposed him—this is a startling and horrifying suggestion, but Jimmy once again refuses to engage in any moral way.



More signs that Crake's arrogance has taken a dark turn. It's becoming obvious to Jimmy that he doesn't have the whole story, but he still can't find it in himself to really confront Crake about what he's selling, and what he's creating, in Paradise.



Crake tells Jimmy he will now see Crake's life work. He takes him to a watch room that overlooks a central area through a one-way mirror. Inside is a simulation of a natural habitat, with large trees and lots of vegetation. This is Jimmy's first view of the Crakers. They are naked, but betray no self-consciousness. They are strikingly beautiful, with bright **green** eyes. Each one had a different skin color. Crake asks Jimmy if he is familiar with the concept of a "floor model"—then says the Crakers are the floor models.

Crake explains that the Crakers started as modifications of stolen human embryos. But now the Crakers are reproducing themselves. He says they grow rapidly, but are programed to die suddenly and painlessly at age 30—before they experience the pain of old age. He explains that they are immortal, however, because they have no concept of mortality. And when knowledge of mortality is removed, all that's left is immortality. Crake explains that his full initiative is split in two: the pill and the project. BlyssPluss will stop unnecessary reproduction, and the project (the genetic adaptations being modeled by the Crakers) will usher in a superior era of human existence.

Crake expands upon the different features modeled by the Crakers (these features, could, theoretically, be chosen one by one by prospective parents looking to design their child). They did not perceive skin color, thus racism was impossible. They were not constantly sexual, and came into heat at very regular intervals, so sexual torment was absent. They were not capable of inventing harmful symbolisms, like kings or gods or money, and they were able to digest food like a rabbit, by consuming their own excrement. Jimmy interrupts to say that these no longer sounded like features that could be sold to parents. Crake brushes him off by saying he's done his market research. Jimmy feebly asks if the Crakers have the power of language—Crake says of course. Jimmy wonders if they can make jokes, and Crake says they do not have enough malice to make a joke, and he thinks he's managed to "do away with" jokes.

The artificial habitat in which the Crakers live when Jimmy first sees them resembles very notably the Garden of Eden—it is lush and primal, and the inhabitants are not aware of their own nakedness. The suggestion that Crake is using money and scientific knowledge to "play God" becomes basically undeniable in this moment.



It becomes clear that Crake is deceiving his financial backers, his customers, and almost everyone else. He is not selling infinite life—he is selling genetically manipulated humans who simply don't know death, but who will nevertheless die, and die very young. What's more, these people are reproducing on their own—he has created a self-sustaining population of what he believes to be superior versions of "humanity." His ambitions become even clearer. Crake's comments about mortality are interesting: he claims that mortality isn't connected to dying; it's connected to thinking about dying. It seems as if Crake's ideal human is one focuses solely on survival, but does not even have the capacity to think about the "bigger" things of love, death, religion, etc.—all the things one might say the humanities explore and depict.



Some of the improvements Crake suggests seem valuable—no one would argue, for example, that the elimination of racism is a bad thing. But Crake has eliminated racism in the same way he has eliminated mortality—by removing the comprehension of such things altogether. Racism, rather than being overcome by understanding, is "overcome" by the absence of it. The rest of the features are suspicious—they no longer seem like sellable products, and Jimmy's (and our) skepticism about the purpose for which Crake truly created these beings rises. Crake has eliminated from these beings so much of what makes a human, even humor..



Crake in Love. As a storm rages, Snowman is in turmoil thinking of Oryx—of her laugh, her optimism, her belief in Crake. He wonders if Oryx is the same person whose face he saw in the child porn, and on the news. “Was there only one Oryx, or was she legion?”

A few days after Jimmy arrives in Paradise, Crake is showing him how to use the various viewing screens in the Craker observation tower. On the screen Jimmy sees a woman in with the Crakers, naked like them, but human. She is holding a rakunk and talking to a Craker man. Jimmy asks who she is, and Crake says he hired her as a teacher for the Crakers, to show them what to eat and how to live. Jimmy recognizes her, in shock, as Oryx, from the screen shot and from the news, but says nothing to Crake. Crake explains she’s perfect for the job and that the Crakers trust her.

Jimmy asks Crake where he found this woman, and Crake explains he met her through the escort service provided by Watson-Crick student services. He had shown them the freeze-frame of the kiddie porn, and asked for a woman who looked like the girl in the picture. Then after their first meeting, Crake had arranged to see her again. Once he ascended to his position in RejoovenEsense, he was able to give her a position. As Crake talks, Jimmy realizes Crake is in love with Oryx.

Jimmy and Crake wait for Oryx to join them for lunch. Jimmy asks questions mostly as an excuse to stare at Oryx while she answers. He asks if the Crakers ever wonder where they came from. Crake responds curtly that he’s bred that out of them. Oryx chimes in that they actually did ask, today, who made them. She says she told them the truth, that Crake made them, and smiles admiringly at Crake.

Snowman’s continuing questions about the realness of his relationship with Oryx, and the realness of Oryx herself again highlights the role Oryx plays in the novel. She’s not just a woman; she’s an idealized woman. She’s nurturing, beautiful, accepting, sexual. Her very being offers healing to all these men who feel some profound lack. And yet at the same time the men seem not even to see her, to know her—what they crave is the healing. She’s a woman imagined by men, and any such woman is more a reflection of the men than a person herself. She is both super-real, and not real at all.



Oryx’s similarity with the Crakers is remarkable—Jimmy doesn’t even recognize her in there for days. The fact that Oryx has been working for Crake all this time—while Jimmy has been pining for her, despite not knowing her—emphasizes Jimmy’s loneliness and isolation, as well as Crake’s charisma and confidence. It is also notable that Jimmy yet again first sees Oryx on a screen—not in real life.



Crake also notes the resemblance between Oryx and the child in the video, but doesn’t appear to believe they are the same person. His love for Oryx is apparent to Jimmy—which shocks him, given that Crake has never seemed capable of loving anyone. Ironically Crake met Oryx through a program meant to prevent this kind of emotional attachment.



Already we can see that Crake’s vision of what the Crakers will be like—uncreative, unquestioning, basically unthinking—isn’t coming to fruition. They wonder about their origins. Oryx clearly admires Crake’s power and believes in his vision—Crake has clearly sold her on it, though Jimmy remains more skeptical.



Jimmy spends his days longing for Oryx. He knows he can't touch her, because Crake is his friend, but nevertheless he can't stop thinking about her. Meanwhile, Jimmy's work isn't difficult: BlyssPluss will basically sell itself, he's sure. One day, however, Oryx arrives at his house and seduces him. He protests at first, saying Crake will be upset. Oryx explains that Crake wouldn't want Jimmy to be unhappy, and she knows he is unhappy without her. Jimmy asks her if she is Crake's girlfriend, and she responds that Crake lives in a higher world, a world of ideas. And that Crake is her boss, but Jimmy is for fun. She promises Crake won't know and Jimmy submits.

They carry on their affair, and it appears Crake doesn't know. Oryx explains she is useful to Crake because she has contacts at sex clinics and warehouses because of her history. She assures Jimmy she would never test BlyssPluss on herself, because Crake warned her not to do so. Jimmy misses Oryx deeply when she goes away on these trips, but their reunions are always happy. Oryx explains that Crake's sexual needs are very direct and simple. But with Jimmy sex is intriguing and fun—it doesn't feel like work.

Jimmy asks Oryx what happened to her in the garage in San Francisco. She asks what garage, and Jimmy reminds her that she'd been trapped in a garage in San Francisco as a teenager. She asks Jimmy where he dreams up such things. Jimmy persists, asking her if the man who put her there made her have sex. Oryx relents and tells Jimmy about the man, though he suspects she might only be improvising to humor Jimmy. Oryx explains the man was kind, and his wife was "very spiritual," and she believes they both wanted the best for her. Jimmy angrily tells her she's wrong, and Oryx wonders how Jimmy can be upset about something that happened so long ago.

Takeout. Snowman is now coming to the darkest part of his memory. "What if" questions fly through his mind. He imagines telling Oryx "Don't go. Stay here." He imagines that he told her he had a gut feeling that she should stay.

Jimmy will not betray his friend Crake by pursuing Oryx, and throws himself into his work, even though the work is easy. When Oryx seduces him, however, Jimmy cannot resist. We are able to see how Oryx thinks of Crake—as emotionally unattached, brilliant, elegant, and somehow above the inner turmoil that plagues most of the rest of humanity. She believes in Crake's image of himself. Oryx's trust of Crake is naïve—and so is, perhaps, Jimmy's love for Oryx. He seems to trust her account too readily.



Oryx is being used to distribute BlyssPluss in much the same way Jimmy is being used to advertise it. We also learn that Oryx's sexual life with Crake is dispassionate and mechanical—we can recall that sex between Crakers is also like this. Crake's lack of interest in humans extends even into his sex life. But Jimmy, who is better with language and with abstract concepts, who is almost more human than Crake, is still capable of passionate love, and Oryx appreciates that in him.



Once again we are asked to wonder how much of Oryx's history is real, and how much of it is invented. Is Jimmy inventing Oryx's past in the same way that Snowman invents the Crakers' past? Or is Oryx the one rewriting her own history to make it more tolerable, more humane, and more loving? This disconnect frustrates Jimmy just as it later tortures Snowman—he believes Oryx is trying to artificially erase pain from her life—perhaps in the same way Crake is trying to artificially erase pain from human experience.



"Takeout," the title of this part of Chapter 12, refers to food, but also gestures to the murders that occur in this section. Snowman is wishing the past had been different—he is inventing new details and re-writing history. But he is a lover of humanities; he can't rewrite his own history.



But Jimmy, in fact, has no gut feeling this happy evening when Oryx is at his house. Jimmy asks her if she loves him, and she laughs. After they sleep together, she gets out of bed and says she is going to get a pizza, and will be right back. Jimmy suggests that they run away together. Oryx doesn't understand why Jimmy would want to leave Paradise. Jimmy says he doesn't want to sneak around anymore, and that he's been worried Crake has found out about them.

Oryx does not tell Jimmy whether or not she loves him. In fact, she seems to reject the question altogether. Jimmy is beginning to realize Paradise and Crake are not as perfect as Oryx has made them out to be—despite her reassurances, Jimmy still feels that Crake knows of their affair, though it's entirely unclear whether Crake would be upset about it if he did know. Jimmy's desire to run away shows he is no longer invested in Crake's project; he's invested in Oryx, and wishes she would make that same choice.



Snowman is thinking that he should have seen the signs. Crake had asked him once if he would kill someone he loved in order to spare them pain. Jimmy didn't really understand the question, but Crake had then asked him to take care of the Crakers if anything bad happened to him. Snowman curses himself for not taking this seriously. Crake had also suggested that if he died, Oryx would die too. Jimmy had laughed this off, and found Crake's ego remarkable.

Jimmy's blindness to Crake's plan continues to haunt him. The suggestion in Crake's question about killing in order to save someone pain is that Crake would be willing to do this, in fact is thinking of doing this. Jimmy didn't realize that Crake's arrogance was completely unchecked—or that Crake seemed to connect being human with feeling pain. In Crake's mind, to kill any human would be to spare them pain. Jimmy can't comprehend any of this.



Jimmy is insisting to Oryx that Crake knows about their affair—he's not sure why. Perhaps to scare her into running away with him. Oryx explains that Crake doesn't believe in jealousy, and Jimmy protests that Crake can feel jealousy regardless of whether he believes in it. Just before she leaves to get the pizza, Oryx asks Jimmy, if she and Crake were to ever go away, to take care of the Crakers. Oryx looks emphatic so Jimmy promises. She tells him she's very happy, and says she'll be right back with the pizzas.

The question of Crake's jealousy is brought up—Oryx apparently doesn't believe Crake is even capable of jealousy—she believes his scientific mind is “elegant” and therefore void of basic human emotions. Jimmy doesn't buy it—he notes that a belief in such “elegance” is not the same as actually being “elegant.” And the novel never answers the question of what motivates Crake, whether his worldview is the product of some response to his past, or if it is simply how he came to see the world without any associated trauma. Oryx's request is ominous, but Jimmy doesn't seem to realize its significance.



Airlock. Jimmy waits for Oryx for a long time. He becomes increasingly uneasy and then feels panicked. Meanwhile, he receives a news alert about the spread of some infection and thinks it will be another minor instance of a contained epidemic or bioterrorism, somewhere far away. But when he goes to the monitor screens, which display maps of infected areas, he sees red splotches all over the globe, spreading fast. He calls Crake but gets no answer. His phone finally rings, but it is Oryx. She is crying and apologizing—she says that the disease was in the BlyssPluss pills she flew around the globe. She says she didn't know. She says she only wanted to help people, but then the connection breaks off.

Crake's plan is finally revealed—an infection tears through the human population, and it was located in the very pills that Jimmy willingly advertised and that Oryx distributed around the globe. Crake was secretly sterilizing people, in a sense, but by killing them! Up to this point Oryx has never shown or seemed to feel negative emotions—her reaction here is telling. The version of events she naively bought from Crake is not the reality, and now she is complicit in a horrifying plot to wipe out humanity. She believed she was helping people, because Crake told her she was—but now her credulous demeanor has involved her in a terrible crime.



By midnight every major American city has been hit by the disease, which causes people to bleed profusely from every orifice. The three other staff members inside Paradise are growing nervous. Jimmy tells them to stay calm. Suddenly Crake rings the bell to enter the airlock. Jimmy yells at him through the intercom. Crake sounds drunk, which is unusual. Jimmy asks him about the BlyssPluss pills, and Crake snidely asks him where he'd heard about that.

What happens next appears to Jimmy as if it is in slow motion. He retrieves a gun from the storage rooms, and tells the other staff members that he has spoken to CorpSeCorps and Crake, who assured him that everything was under control. He tells the staff they should go back to their houses and rest. They appear relieved, and when they turn their back on Jimmy, he shoots and kills all three. Jimmy is now the only one in the airlock except for the Crakers—he killed the staff because he feels that it is imperative that he not fall victim to someone else's panic. The men had to die in order for him to maintain control.

Jimmy drinks and watches news of the spreading plague as he waits for word from Oryx, but it never comes. Jimmy hears beeping at the door. Crake is trying to punch in the code to enter. Jimmy walks up to the door and says through the intercom that he's changed the code, according to regulation he must let no one in. Crake says that rule doesn't apply to him. Jimmy tells Crake he might be infected, and Crake tells him they are both immune. The immunization had been snuck into the vaccinations Crake and Jimmy used to go to the pleeblands.

Jimmy is startled by this information, but agrees to let Crake in. When Crake enters, Jimmy sees that Crake has Oryx draped over his arm and that Crake is carrying a jackknife. Oryx seems to be asleep or unconscious. Crake lets Oryx's head fall back, and Jimmy watches in disbelief. Crake tells Jimmy, "I'm counting on you," then slits Oryx's throat. Jimmy shoots him.

Crake has also been selling a version of himself—cool, calm, collected. His drunken, angry sarcasm reveals he is not what he made himself out to be. Crake's snide question suggests he'd known about Jimmy and Oryx—we are asked to wonder if part of his motivation in releasing the plague was revenge against Jimmy for having a more passionate, loving relationship with Oryx than he did, if his hatred for the "complexities" of humanity stemmed from his own inability to access or enjoy those complexities.



Having already been tricked into promoting a deadly and profoundly violent disease, Jimmy believes he is now forced to commit three additional murders. Already he knows he is fighting for his own survival, and is taking steps to secure his own safety. Yet those murders in their suddenness and the lack of certainty of the complicity of the now dead staffers, is shocking. Jimmy shifts to survival mode very quickly. Perhaps he is already thinking of his duty to the Crakers, of his promise to Oryx that he would do his best to look after them and keep them alive, or perhaps the pure need to survive really does make one give up on any complex morality.



Crake has created an antidote to the virus, but has only given it to Jimmy, himself, and perhaps Oryx—he is in utter control over everything in their bodies. He has manipulated their very cells without their knowledge. His power over them is grotesque and undeniable, and he has been exercising it for quite some time. Jimmy is once again being used as a prop in a larger plan.



The devastating endgame of Crake's plan is carried out. He kills Oryx, knowing Jimmy will kill him once he does. This leaves Jimmy in charge of raising a new race of humans. Crake has manipulated everything—from science to friendship to romance—so that his plan may be carried out—he has wiped out humanity, cleared the way for his "superior humanity", and gotten revenge (perhaps) on Jimmy both by killing Oryx and leaving Jimmy as the last person alive.



CHAPTER 13

Bubble. After the afternoon storm, the air is cooler, and Snowman is able to continue along the rampart. His foot is swollen and painful, and he moves slowly. He thinks there might be antibiotics in Crake's storeroom. When he comes to the area outside Paradise, he must jump down from the rampart. The impact hurts his foot even more. When he comes to the entrance of Paradise, the bodies of Crake and Oryx are still there, in each other's arms. Crake's skeletal face looks like it's grinning, and the ribbon in Oryx's hair is still pink.

Snowman finds antibiotics in the storerooms and applies them to his foot, and gives himself a dose of the pleebland injection cocktail for good measure. He then crawls to his old house and passes out on his bed. He dreams that Alex the Parrot from his childhood is leaving him forever.

Scribble. In the morning Snowman gives himself another shot of Crake's superdrug. He roams around his house, feeling disconnected from all of the memories there.

After Jimmy has shot Crake, he locks himself in his house. A Corpsmen calls once on the phone, asking for Crake, but Jimmy says Crake has fled to Bermuda. The Corpsmen curses him but gets off the phone, and after that no one calls. Jimmy guesses they must have tried to flee RejoovenEsense, mistaking the outside for freedom.

Jimmy checks on the Crakers three times a day. They don't seem to know that anything has changed. Occasionally they gather up and talk in groups, and Jimmy can hear through the hidden microphones that they are wondering where Oryx has gone. They comfort themselves by remembering that Oryx had once told them that she is always teaching them, even when she is gone.

The two storylines intersect here—we left Jimmy in the last chapter in the exact same place Snowman is now standing, over the bodies of Oryx and Crake. Crake's grin reflects his sinister and deadly arrogance, and the ultimate success of his plan. Oryx's still pink ribbon seems to have resisted the effects of time, decay, and degradation, much like Oryx herself did as a kind of ideal of womanhood to both Jimmy and Crake. It is as though, like Oryx, the ribbon is able to exist outside of history.



Snowman injects himself with the injection that saved him from the plague and left him here alone, hoping it can save him from the infection in his foot. He still believes he might be able to depend on Crake's products.



This surreal scene puts Snowman in contact with his material history—he cannot connect to it though, and feels displaced.



Jimmy waits safely inside the dome, while the rest of humanity fights for survival—Jimmy knows this fight is futile, and that already the protection offered by the compound has been destroyed.



The Crakers remain blissfully unaware of the circumstances that are essentially enabling their own evolutionary supremacy. They show concern for Oryx, and appear to miss her—this is no doubt something Crake would not have approved of.



When Jimmy is not watching the Crakers he wanders around aimlessly, eating, drinking, and watching the news. It is chaos out there—animal rights groups are freeing the pigeons and wolfgos. There is widespread crime and looting. The newscasters eventually name the virus JUVE (Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary). Jimmy watches as city after city is declared a lost cause. Communication with foreign nations is cut off. Jimmy watches the coverage and thinks only of Oryx and Crake—whether Crake knew, whether Oryx loved Jimmy at all. Had Crake been intellectually honorable? Or just a lunatic? Jimmy realizes *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* will soon have to be added to MaddAddam’s list of extinct animals. There are fewer and fewer newscasters alive to report on events. The last two Jimmy sees turn the cameras on themselves as they die of the virus.

Jimmy knows he cannot stay in the dome much longer—once the electricity goes out, the airflow will stop and he and the Crakers will suffocate. Jimmy sits down at his desk and writes a note that begins “To whom it may concern,” and details the events that have transpired. He writes that Crake unleashed the JUVE virus and explains how. He then says he can only speculate as to Crake’s motives... and the handwriting trails off. When Snowman finds the note, he crumples it up and throws it to the floor, for bugs to eat.

Remnant. Jimmy finally shows himself to the Crakers. They marvel at his appearance and at the fabric draped over his body. Jimmy decides to shed his past identity, and tells the Crakers that his name is Snowman. He explains that Oryx and Crake have sent him, and that Oryx and Crake are busy doing many things and cannot be seen. He tells the Crakers that they must travel somewhere new, because Oryx and Crake want them to live in a better place. The Crakers are grateful for this goodwill. They accept everything Snowman says without question.

Jimmy watches helplessly as the virus brings down society, culture, and humanity itself. The image of the newscasters filming their own deaths is a poignant metaphor for the implosion of culture that caused this disaster—obsessive consumption and a desperate desire to advance scientific knowledge at all costs. Jimmy is already beginning to think of himself as the last of his species. He obsesses over Oryx’s love, and wonders if his mother was correct in saying Crake had been intellectually honorable, or simply crazy. Ironically, Jimmy could have avoided this mess by engaging these questions earlier—but he had been blinded by Crake’s genius and charisma, and perhaps by his own unwillingness to truly act.



Even then Jimmy had not been able to understand much less record Crake’s motives, though he had thought it possible that the events recorded here might be read at some point by future civilizations. Snowman no longer has even this hope—history and language have no place in the Crakers’ lives, and his account is therefore meaningless in this new world, so he discards it.



Jimmy transforms into “Snowman”—a word which bears a significant phonetic resemblance to “no man”—but will later also be phonetically compared to the religious “Amen”—Jimmy’s identity as both a failure and a savior are articulated by this name. He is gentle with the Crakers, and tells them the story in a way that will make it easier for them to understand—he again re-writes history. And he begins to build a kind of gentle revenge of his own by starting to build the mythology that would turn Crake into a god (which Crake would hate) and immortalize Oryx.



He leads the Crakers out of the dome. On the way they pass Oryx and Crake's bodies, crumpled and already decayed. The Crakers ask what those forms are and Snowman says it is an object of no importance. They accept this and keep moving. Outside the smell is rank. Snowman explains that it is chaos out here, and that chaos smells bad. But he adds that Crake is watching over them, and soon there will not be chaos. A woman who is still alive screams for help, and Snowman shoots her. They ask Snowman about this and he says that it was only a dream. They understand dreams because Crake was unable to breed it out of them. They were hard-wired for dreams. Snowman explains all of the horrible sights to them in gentle terms, so that they do not get frightened, and they finally arrive at the seashore. They tell Snowman they find this place beautiful, and ask him what it is called. He answers, "home."

Snowman leads the Crakers out from Paradise, through "chaos"—the dilapidated ruins of this advanced civilization—and to the shore where they now live. Some victims of the plague are still living—Snowman must kill them, some of the last living humans, but presumably this fate is better than their continued suffering. Note the resonance with Crake's question about whether he would kill someone to spare them pain: here Jimmy does. He spares these victims pain through death, and spares the Crakers pain through stories. He takes care of Crakers as though they are children, explaining unpleasant truths to them gently and euphemistically. The reference to the world existing as a dream reminds us of the moment where Snowman realizes he is trapped in Crake's nightmare—only he cannot wake up screaming, as Crake was fortunate enough to do.



CHAPTER 14

Idol. Snowman packs up the old food he has found in the storage area in Paradise, and makes his way back towards the Crakers, out of RejoovenEsense. He scans the horizon for signs of smoke but sees nothing. His journey is long and painful, and he is relieved to make it back to the seashore. As he approaches their village, he hears a strange kind of chanting. He thinks he hears the Crakers chanting "Amen."

Snowman makes it back to the Crakers as he promised them—in his delirium, he thinks he hears the Crakers saying "amen"—a word they could not possibly know. For a moment we wonder if Crake was unable to breed "amen" out of his redesigned humanity, if "amen" is more fundamentally innate than he Crake touch.



He reaches their camp and finds them chanting around a strange statue. When they see him they are elated. They tell him they've made a picture of him, and point to the statue. They say they thought it would help him find his way home. Snowman realizes they were chanting "Snowman," not Amen. He also notes that they have made art, though Crake said they would not.

The phonetic resemblance between Snowman's name and "amen," a word of prayer is revealed, and in fact they were in a way praying to the "picture"—the art—representing Snowman that they had made. Snowman here is established as a kind of savior—not only of the Crakers, but of language, humanity, and mythology, and art—the Crakers have constructed a statue of him. They not only understand images and artistic representations; they are also capable of creating them.



The Crakers ask about Crake's whereabouts, and Snowman tells them Crake is in Paradise, and that they cannot go see him. They accept this. When they notice his foot they are very concerned, and insist he must let them purr so that it may heal faster. Snowman is delirious with pain and submits. They see he is very exhausted and suggest bringing him a fish to make him feel better. Snowman is grateful for this and accepts and eats the fish.

The Crakers take care of Snowman just as he took care of them. This reciprocation is tender, and seems to reveal real compassion. They are capable of understanding and catering to Snowman's needs, and they do care deeply, it seems about his health, happiness, and welfare.



Sermon. After his meal, the Crakers tell Snowman that others like him have passed through the area. Snowman is shocked and asks them to explain. They say that a day earlier, two men and a woman, all of whom looked very unhappy, had passed through. The Crakers had smelled pheromones on the woman and had initiated sexual courting, but this made the three strangers flee. Snowman says he will go find them in the morning. The Crakers worry that he is not well enough, but Snowman insists. They agree that he can go but say he must have more purring first. Snowman agrees, and wonders if purring will actually work on his flesh. He lets his mind wander to Blood vs. Roses—major historical events trail through his mind.

As Snowman prepares to leave in the morning, he imagines giving a sermon to the Crakers about what they should do if these new people mistreat them. He wonders how he could explain to them the risks—of violence, slavery, rape, theft—and realizes they could never understand. He decides he will just tell them, “Crake is watching over you. Oryx loves you.”

The plume of smoke Snowman observed from the rampart was in fact a man-made fire. Snowman’s hopes that other humans have survived has been confirmed. As if this realization resurrects human history itself, the events recorded in Blood and Roses trail through his mind. All the while the Crakers purr into his wound—Snowman wonders if this animal remedy will actually work on his flesh, but lets his mind turn instead to history, to the history of his own species, to humanity,



The dark side of humanity and of human history rears its head. Crake cannot imagine explaining to the Crakers the kinds of atrocities that humans are capable of committing—he does not know how to protect them from it. He decides he could not make them understand, he could only try to comfort them with the knowledge that Oryx loves them. And so Oryx serves for the Crakers a similar kind of nurturing, protecting, loving role that she played for Jimmy. She was an idealized woman for Jimmy. She is an idealized goddess for the Crakers.



CHAPTER 15

Footprint. Snowman wakes up before dawn. He pees on the grasshoppers, returning to his old routine. He dips his foot in the ocean, feeling that something had burst overnight and the wound had expanded. He hears a voice in his head, saying, “oh honey, you’re my only hope.” He follows the shore northward, and suddenly comes upon a human footprint. He continues, and can smell smoke and hear voices. He begins to shiver—he has a fever. He smells roast meat.

He imagines how they may react to him. They could accept him or attack him, ask him questions or give him no chance to speak. He wonders if they will kill him, or if he will kill them. He whispers, “what do you want me to do” to the empty air. A voice says “oh Jimmy, you were so funny.” Another says “Don’t let me down.” He looks at his watch, out of habit, even though the face has long been blank. The book ends with Snowman thinking, “time to go.”

Snowman’s wound seems to have worsened, and as it seems like he will die he hears a female voice (perhaps his mother, perhaps Oryx, perhaps all of humanity) urging him on, to survive. And in this moment he sees the footprint (recalling also a moment in Robinson Crusoe when the stranded Crusoe sees a footprint on the beach signaling that he is not in fact alone).



Snowman knows that, though these people represent hope, they also pose a threat—they could react to him with hostility. He is unsure what to do, and asks the voices in his head to give him answers. They respond, but give no clear indication of the right choice. The ending is ambiguous. His words could mean that its time to go and meet these people, or time to leave them entirely. The ending is both a cliffhanger (this is the first book of a trilogy, if not your normal trilogy) and also captures the indecision he must face as he ponders both the possible joy of not being alone and safety from extinction, and the potential horror of what humans have shown they can do.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Winner, Kathryn. "Oryx and Crake." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 17 Jun 2015. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Winner, Kathryn. "Oryx and Crake." LitCharts LLC, June 17, 2015. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/oryx-and-crake>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Oryx and Crake* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. Anchor Books. 2004.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. New York: Anchor Books. 2004.