

The Long Rain



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RAY BRADBURY

As a child, Ray Bradbury was a voracious reader. When his family moved to Los Angeles in 1934, the teenaged Bradbury began writing short stories—a hobby that soon turned into a life passion. Unable to afford to college, he went to the library instead—visiting three days a week for ten years straight. At the beginning of his literary career, Bradbury’s work appeared only in niche magazines centered on fantasy and the supernatural. However, after one of his stories was included in *The Best American Short Stories* in 1946, Bradbury began to garner public attention. He’s best known for his 1953 novel, [Fahrenheit 451](#). All eleven of Bradbury’s novels grew out of existing short stories—a genre he loved dearly. By the time of his death, at age 91, Bradbury had penned hundreds of short stories, many of which are beloved literary classics. He received many honors during his lifetime, including a National Medal of the Arts, a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation, an Oscar nomination, and an Emmy Award. Bradbury married his first love, Marguerite McClure, in 1947, and the pair had four daughters together, Susan, Ramona, Bettina, and Alexandra.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

World War II ended in 1945, just five years prior to the original publication of Bradbury’s “The Long Rain.” After the bloodiest war in history, peace was a welcome change, but widespread tension remained. In 1947, the Cold War began, and the Korean War began in 1950. This atmosphere of animosity and political strife is reflected in “The Long Rain,” as it’s clear that the Venusians do not want the Earth people on their territory and are willing to use violence to make this known. The protagonists of the story, all American military men, struggle to navigate and survive in an unfamiliar territory—an experience that echoes wartime difficulties. The late 1940s also brought extraordinary technological advances, including GPS tracking, helicopters, computers, and of course, nuclear weapons. This feeling of boundless innovation appears throughout the pages of “The Long Rain.” The men travel to Venus in a rocket ship, their lifeboat automatically folds up into the size of a cigarette box, and in the center of each Sun Dome (luxurious American-made shelters scattered all around Venus) hovers a massive mechanical sun as a heater. The Space Age was also about to begin, and for the first time in human history, travel beyond Earth seemed possible. Although no human had yet left Earth’s atmosphere when “The Long Rain” was originally published in 1950, Sputnik, the first manmade satellite, launched less than ten years later. NASA was founded in 1958, and in 1969, Neil

Armstrong stepped out of a rocket and onto the moon—an event that Bradbury would later deem the most important moment of his life.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Bradbury’s “The Long Rain” thematically resembles several of his short stories, including “Zero Hour,” which is also featured in *The Illustrated Man*. In “Zero Hour,” aliens invade Earth, while in “The Long Rain,” the Earth people are the ones infringing on the Venusians’ territory. Both stories also have undertones of political criticism: “Zero Hour” depicts the dangers of getting too comfortable and complacent in times of political peace, while “The Long Rain” contains overt criticisms of Congress’ sluggishness, American imperialism, and the government’s interventionist foreign policy. Bradbury’s “The Other Foot” also depicts Earth people trying to settle on another planet—in this case, Mars—though the so-called Martians are actually Earth people who left the planet decades ago due to racism. Like “The Long Rain,” C.S. Lewis’s *Perelandra* (also titled *Voyage to Venus*) takes place on the planet Venus. Instead of the foreboding, dangerous jungle that appears in “The Long Rain,” C.S. Lewis’s version of Venus is paradisaical. However, both versions of Venus depict it as a watery planet—in *Perelandra*, Venus is completely made up of ocean (with floating clumps of vegetation), while in “The Long Rain,” the planet has a large Single Ocean and is constantly drenched in torrential downpour.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** “The Long Rain”
- **When Written:** 1950
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles
- **When Published:** “The Long Rain” was originally published in 1950 (with the title “Death-by-Rain”). It was republished in 1951 in Bradbury’s *The Illustrated Man*, which consists of eighteen loosely-strung-together short stories.
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Science fiction short story
- **Setting:** Venus
- **Climax:** The lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard finally reach the Sun Dome (an American-made shelter), only to discover that it’s in shambles and does not have any edible food.
- **Antagonist:** The constant Venusian rain, which drives the men insane.
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Failed Film. The 1989 film adaptation of *The Illustrated Man* includes the plots from three of Bradbury's short stories, including "The Long Rain." Critics considered the film "both a critical and financial failure."



PLOT SUMMARY

The lieutenant and his comrades are trudging through the soggy Venusian jungle in search of a **Sun Dome**, one of 126 American-made shelters peppered among Venus' single continent. The constant rain is maddening. The men's fingers are pruned, their foreheads are sore from the pelting raindrops, and their entire bodies are turning pasty white—including their eyes, hair, and uniforms.

Thirty days ago, their rocket crashed on Venus, killing two of their comrades on impact. Since then, the surviving men have been navigating the waterlogged planet with difficulty, searching desperately for a Sun Dome so that they can finally eat, sleep, and dry off. The Domes are said to be filled with luxuries, like leather-bound books, hot chocolate "crowned with marshmallow dollops," soft beds, and an artificial sun suspended in the ceiling, which warms the entire building.

As they tromp through the jungle, Simmons thinks he sees something in a clearing and runs ahead. His companions take off after him, hoping that they've finally found a Sun Dome. Instead, the men come face to face with their abandoned rocket—and realize they've somehow circled back around to it in the last month. They feel dejected, but the lieutenant reminds them that they still have two days' worth of food left.

Suddenly, a monster rips through the jungle. The monster is bright blue, complete with a thousand lightning bolts for legs, and burns everything in its path. The lieutenant orders all of his comrades to lie down in the mud, but one of them—an unnamed man—runs away screaming. The monster zaps him instantly, and the jungle smells of burning flesh.

The remaining men—the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard—have no choice but to carry on. They make their way across milky white rivers and through the pale jungle. Finally, they see a sheer yellow glow in the distance. The men excitedly run toward it, buoyed by the sight of the Sun Dome. However, when they arrive, the Sun Dome is completely abandoned. Rain pours down from a thousand holes in the ceiling (the handiwork of the Venusians, who don't want Earth people on their planet), and all of the food is covered with green fur. The men consider waiting for a rescue team but decide to move on to the next Dome, which is about eight hours away.

After several more hours of travel, the men decide to rest—they haven't slept in thirty days, because the rain makes it impossible to do so. After lying down for only a few moments, however, Pickard suddenly starts screaming and shoots his rifle in the air repeatedly. The lieutenant fumbles for his hand lamp

and shines it on Pickard's face—his pupils are dilated and his mouth is wide open, filling with water. The lieutenant yells at Pickard and tries slapping his face, but Simmons says it's no use: Pickard has gone insane and is now trying to drown himself. Simmons shoots Pickard to put him out of his misery.

The lieutenant and Simmons carry on, but soon Simmons starts showing signs of insanity himself. Simmons declares that he doesn't want to die of insanity and drowning—he plans to shoot himself as soon as the lieutenant is out of sight. Unable to reason with his companion, the lieutenant is forced to carry on alone.

The lieutenant miserably tells himself that he'll keep walking for just five more minutes. After that, he'll drown himself in the ocean. Within moments, however, the lieutenant sees a bright yellow glow in the distance and realizes he's reached the Sun Dome. He takes off at a run, crashing and tripping through the jungle.

He finally stumbles inside the Dome and is overwhelmed by the sight. The tables are laden with steaming pots of coffee and platters of sandwiches. On a nearby chair sits a stack of fluffy Turkish towels and a fresh uniform. Gazing up at the ceiling, he sees the glorious yellow sun. He vaguely notices other men coming toward him, but he ignores them, instead pulling off his soggy clothes and walking wordlessly toward the sun.



CHARACTERS

Lieutenant – The lieutenant is the leader of the American military men whose rocket crashes on Venus. Two of his comrades are killed in the crash, and an unnamed man in their group dies in the monster's attack, leaving only the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard to fight for survival in the Venusian jungle. Although the lieutenant is the authority figure of the group, he appears to have little understanding of Venus' landscape, the physiological effects of the rain, or the Venusians' animosity toward Earth people. He often gives the men directions with false certainty and admits that he's only pretending to know where they're going just to keep his men happy. More often than not, the lieutenant learns about Venus through Simmons and heeds to his advice and decisions, suggesting that perhaps Simmons is the one who has lived on Venus for ten years (at the beginning of the story, one of the men in the group tells the lieutenant that he has lived on Venus for a decade, but it's unclear who says this). Even though he's not the strongest leader, the lieutenant proves smart and tenacious. He cautions the men to lie flat in the mud to avoid the monster's attack, for instance—a decision that saves all those who follow his advice. By the end of the story, the lieutenant is the only one who has not died of insanity or suicide, and he is the only one to reach the functioning **Sun Dome**. He shows more grit and resolve than any of the men,

but it's clear that he's also just lucky—considering the number of times the men have unknowingly walked in circles, he very well could have ended up back at the destroyed Sun Dome and died of insanity like his companions.

Simmons – Simmons is an American military man who survives the rocket crash and the monster's attack with the lieutenant and Pickard. Despite his misery in the constant downpour, he's talkative and fairly upbeat, as he daydreams aloud about reaching the **Sun Dome**, where he'll enjoy "a pan of cinnamon buns" and bask in the warm sunlight. He also appears to be the most knowledgeable of the three men about Venus; he recounts several stories of people going insane or killing themselves in the Venusian jungle (something that the other two men seem unaware of until Pickard himself goes insane). He also explains the political animosity between the Venusians and Earth people, and knows both the history of the Venusians' attacks on Sun Domes and the special eight-hour drowning procedure the Venusians use on their enemies. This keen understanding of Venus and its inhabitants may suggest that Simmons is the one who has lived on Venus for ten years (as an unnamed member of their group claims at the opening of the story). If this is the case, though, it's unclear why he doesn't have a better sense of direction regarding how to get to the next Sun Dome, and it's also unclear why he was in the rocket in the first place. Though the lieutenant appears to be the group's authority figure, Simmons is the one who decides to abandon the destroyed Sun Dome in search of another one, and, later, to shoot Pickard after he's gone insane in order to put him out of his misery. Near the end of the story, Simmons loses his hearing and knows he's on the verge of going insane, just like Pickard did. Once the lieutenant is out of earshot, Simmons commits suicide by shooting himself.

Pickard – Pickard is one of the three American military men who survives the rocket crash and the monster's attack. Pickard and his remaining companions—the lieutenant and Simmons—miserably trample through the Venusian jungle in search of a **Sun Dome**. Pickard is the most pessimistic of the three men, and his sharp comments and dark, chilling laughter increase until it's clear that he's slipped into insanity. Just before he does so, though, he recounts a childhood memory of a bully in his class pinching him every five minutes, all day long, every school day. The intermittent pinching, which he now likens to the rhythmic and persistent raindrops on his head, eventually made him so agitated that he brutally attacked and almost killed the bully. This bubbling up of nearly inhuman madness mirrors his mental breakdown in the jungle. Unable to handle the incessant raindrops anymore, he screams and fires his gun six times into the sky, but then goes quiet. When the lieutenant and Simmons shine their hand lamp onto him, they see that his pupils are dilated and that his mouth is open and turned upwards, filling with water. He proves unresponsive, and Simmons realize that Pickard has gone insane and is now

drowning himself by breathing in the rain, just like General Mendt did. To put Pickard out of his misery, Simmons shoots him.

Unnamed Man – The unnamed man is one of the four American men who initially survives the rocket crash on Venus, along with the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard. He disobeys the lieutenant's orders to lie still when the monster begins its attack, and his choice to run away in terror is what gets him killed. The story describes his electrocuted body in gruesome detail, emphasizing humankind's frailty and powerlessness in the face of nature and death.

The Monster – The bright blue electrical monster that attacks the group of American men and kills the unnamed man. Bradbury leaves it ambiguous as to if the monster is real—yet another terrifying aspect of the foreign, "cartoonish nightmare" of a planet—or if the monster is purely a metaphor for a massive electrical storm. Bradbury describes the monster as being half a mile wide and mile tall. It has a thousand electric legs, which fall out of its body and electrocute anything in their path. While the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard escape the monster unscathed by lying down in the mud (the monster is so high up, it doesn't notice things on the ground), the other man gets scared and runs at the last moment. The monster kills him instantly with a dozen lightning bolts.

The Venusians – The inhabitants of Venus, who live in Venus' Single Sea. Although they never physically appear in the story, the Venusians have destroyed one of the **Sun Domes** the men find. Simmons, who knows the most about Venus and its people, believes that the Venusians captured the inhabitants of that Sun Dome and carried them off to the sea to be tortured and killed in a special eight-hour drowning procedure. Simmons explains to the lieutenant and Pickard that the Venusians hate Earth people and seek to destroy them by destroying Sun Domes. However, this particular Sun Dome was the first one they destroyed in five years, clearly waiting for the Earth people to grow complacent and unalert before striking.

General Mendt – An American military general who drowned in the rain on Venus before the start of the story. He was found perched on a rock, head tilted back, mouth open, and lungs filled with water. Simmons explains the details of General Mendt's death to the lieutenant as support for his decision to shoot Pickard, as he's gone insane and is now trying to drown himself by breathing in the rain just like General Mendt did.



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.



MAN VS. NATURE

In Ray Bradbury's "The Long Rain," a group of American military men find themselves stranded on Venus after their rocket crashes. Four men are forced to traverse through the wild Venusian jungles and thick sheets of rain in search of a **Sun Dome**—one of 126 luxurious American-built shelters that are peppered among Venus' vast, single continent. As the men struggle to survive in the soaking-wet wilderness for an entire month, the story highlights how mankind is ultimately helpless in the face of nature's sheer power. Over the course of the story, the group of four tragically dissolves into just one lone survivor, the lieutenant, illustrating nature's ability to destroy humans mentally, emotionally, and physically.

The men's struggle to survive in this wild, water-logged world shows how humans are ultimately at the mercy of nature. The opening of the story, for instance, depicts how the never-ending rain "shrank men's hands into the hands of wrinkled apes." The word "shrank," coupled with the invocation of apes, gives the passage Darwinian undertones, as if the rain is so powerful that it makes the humans regress into their primal ancestors. Bradbury also compares Venus' never-ending rain to the biblical story of the flood. One of the men laments, "How many nights *have* we slept? Thirty nights, thirty days! Who can sleep with rain slamming their head, banging away." Unlike Noah, however, the four men are currently in a small inflatable life raft, and there's no indication of any sort of God who is on their side, urging them to build an ark. By comparing the rain to a flood sent by God (which, according to Genesis, lasted forty nights and forty days, a strikingly similar duration to the men's time on Venus), Bradbury imbues nature with otherworldly power and omnipotence, emphasizing how small and helpless the humans are.

The men consider themselves victims of Chinese water torture, further underscoring nature as a powerful authority figure. One of the men states, "Chinese water cure. Remember the old torture? Rope you against a wall. Drop one drop of water on your head every half hour. You go crazy waiting for the next one. Well, that's Venus, but on a big scale." By comparing themselves to prisoners roped against a wall and subjected to physical torture, the men highlight their helplessness in the face of nature's dominance.

Part of nature's overwhelming power stems from its ability to destroy humans on several different levels—mentally, emotionally, and physically. The rain's power is visually apparent, as it wipes the men clean of all signs of vitality: the lieutenant "had a face that once had been brown and now the rain had washed it pale, and the rain had washed the color from his eyes and they were white, as were his teeth, and as was his hair. He was all white. Even his uniform was beginning to turn white." It seems impossible that even the heaviest of rains could strip the color from a person's hair and eyes, but on Venus, this

is case. Later, when an unnamed man in the group dies after a massive electrical monster pelts him with lightning bolts, his comrades examine his destroyed body: "The body was twisted steel, wrapped in burned leather. It looked like a wax dummy that had been thrown into an incinerator and pulled out after the wax had sunk to the charcoal skeleton." In gruesome detail, Bradbury shows the extent to which nature can physically destroy human beings.

In addition, the comparison between the rain and Chinese water torture also shows how nature can destroy a person mentally. Likewise, as Pickard later slips into insanity, he cries, "If only the rain wouldn't hit my head, just for a few minutes. If I could only remember what it's like not to be bothered." He likens the rhythmic, pounding rain to the way that his childhood bully pinched him every five minutes during school, noting that one day, Pickard snapped and almost killed the bully in retaliation. In the present, he wildly exclaims, "But what do I do *now*? Who do I hit, who do I tell to lay off, stop bothering me, this damn rain, like the pinching, always *on* you, that's all you hear, that's all you feel!" Clearly, the rain is doing more than physically bothering Pickard—he's being tortured mentally, too. Throughout the story, Bradbury contrasts nature's overwhelming power with humankind's helplessness, ultimately encouraging readers to view nature with humility, awe, and respect.



DETERMINATION AND LUCK

Ray Bradbury's "The Long Rain" follows four American military men as they struggle to survive after their rocket crashes on Venus, killing two of their comrades on impact. Venus is smothered by a constant, torrential rain that leeches vitality—and sanity—from the men stuck beneath it. In a desperate effort to survive, the men spend a month searching determinedly for one of many American-made shelters on Venus called **Sun Domes**, where they will finally be able to eat, sleep, dry off, and get warm. However, as the story unfolds, and three of the four men die, Bradbury warns that tenacity isn't necessarily rewarded by default. Although the lone survivor, the lieutenant, shows extraordinary determination that outweighs that of his dead comrades, true success—in this case, survival by means of finding the Sun Dome—depends on a combination of perseverance and luck.

Bradbury cautions that, though determination is required for success, it doesn't guarantee it. After enduring the rain for thirty days in search of a Sun Dome, the men are "wet and tired and slumped like clay that was melting." Still, they press on. When they finally see something in the clearing, they dejectedly realize that they've somehow circled back to their crashed rocket ship, and that a nearby electrical storm must have toyed with their compasses. After enduring another miserable day, they finally come across the Sun Dome, and it seems as if their

efforts are finally being rewarded. When he reaches the door of the Sun Dome, Simmons yells excitedly, “Bring on the coffee and [cinnamon] buns!” However, when the men thrust open the doors, they’re met with shock and crushing disappointment: the Sun Dome is abandoned, and water rushes through thousands of “newly punctured” holes in the ceiling. Once again, the men’s determination does not necessarily ensure their success. Unluckily, they’ve stumbled across the one Sun Dome (out of 126) that the Venusians have just destroyed in their first attack in five years.

Though the men clearly cannot always control the world around them, they can set themselves up for the best chance for success. The lieutenant, the only man in his group who survives, is more persistent and tenacious than his comrades, which certainly works in his favor. Even though by the end of the story he’s on the brink of insanity and has lost all five of his companions (two from the rocket crash, one from the monster, one from insanity, and one from suicide), the lieutenant repeats to himself that he will press on for five more minutes before committing suicide: “Another five minutes and then I’ll walk into the sea and keep walking.” His determination to continue leads to a stroke of luck when he quickly notices a Sun Dome in the distance. As he frantically runs toward it, he slips and falls, and his inner voice tells him to quit: “Lie here, he thought; it’s the wrong [Sun Dome]. Lie here. It’s no use.” Yet, in another moment of extraordinary perseverance, he finds the will to get back on his feet and keep running toward the Sun Dome. This Dome does indeed turn out to be a functioning one, and the lieutenant’s incredible persistence is rewarded with plush Turkish towels, steaming hot chocolate, dry clothes, and a fluffy bed.

The lieutenant’s refusal to give up is partially what propels him to safety, but given the number of times the men’s determination proved fruitless in the story—when they accidentally circled back to their rocket, or when they came across a newly-destroyed Sun Dome—the lieutenant could easily have failed. Indeed, through the fallen unnamed man, Pickard, and Simmons, Bradbury paints a dark but realistic picture of how one can be incredibly determined but still come up short. Thus, even as Bradbury encourages his readers to persevere, “The Long Rain” resists the clean, easy takeaway that such perseverance guarantees anything at all. Instead, the story ultimately suggests that while human beings aren’t necessarily the masters of their fate, personal will remains an invaluable virtue: determination may not guarantee success and survival, but, without it, they are nearly impossible.



THE POWER OF MEMORY

When the “The Long Rain” opens, a group of military men are trampling through Venus’ wet jungles and enduring its never-ending downpour in search of an American-made structure called a **Sun Dome**,

where they will be able to find food and shelter. For each of the men, the grueling search for the Sun Dome unearths several memories, some of which are pleasant and some of which are decidedly not. Memories help the men make sense of their distinctly alien situation, yet with such clarity often comes increased anguish at their circumstances. As they grapple with the past in the midst of their torturous present, the men learn that memories can at once be a significant source of resilience and also make one’s present all the more painful.

Through Simmons and the lieutenant, Bradbury illustrates the power of memory to comfort and strengthen. Simmons is no stranger to Sun Domes, as he implies several times that he’s spent a great deal of time on Venus. Thus, while the men are miserably trampling through the Venusian jungle, Simmons prods himself along with warm memories of the Sun Dome: “‘Brother, that puts muscle in me [...] A big pot of coffee for me,’ panted Simmons, smiling. ‘And a pan of cinnamon buns, by God! And just lie there and let the old sun hit you.’”

At another point in the story, when the unnamed man in the group jumps up in terror and tries to outrun the monster, he is killed instantly. Facedown in the mud, all the lieutenant can hear is “the sound a fly makes when landing upon the grill wires of an exterminator.” The narrator continues, “The lieutenant remembered this from his childhood on a farm. And there was a smell of a man burned to a cinder.” Sandwiched between two gruesome details regarding his comrade’s tragic death, it seems that the lieutenant’s childhood memory is a way of grasping for comfort, or at least understanding, in the midst of incomprehensible horror; shortly after this moment, the men walk towards the body filled with the disbelief of those “who have not accepted death until they have touched it.” Perhaps, for the lieutenant, thinking briefly of his childhood on a farm softens the blow of his friend being killed in front of him, yet it also creates a renewed sense of hopelessness of finding a Sun Dome.

Indeed, the power of memory in the story means that not only can recollections be comforting, but they can also make situations more painful. After finally locating a Sun Dome only to discover that it’s recently been destroyed by the Venusians, for example, Pickard shares a memory with his comrades that may help him contextualize what the men are going through, but ultimately only serves to intensify the pain he’s feeling. He explains that when he was in grade school, there was a bully who sat behind him and pinched him every five minutes, all day long, every single day. After many months of enduring the pinching, Pickard snapped: “I turned around and took a metal trisquare I used in mechanical drawing and I almost killed that bastard. I almost cut his lousy head off. I almost took his eye out before they dragged me out of the room, and I kept yelling, ‘Why don’t he leave me alone? Why don’t he leave me alone?’” Recounting this memory gets Pickard increasingly worked up. Likening the constant pinching to the constant raindrops, he

exclaims, “But what do I do *now*? Who do I hit, who do I tell to lay off, stop bothering me, this damn rain, like the pinching, always on you, that’s all you hear, that’s all you feel!” Pickard’s festering anger at his childhood bully melds with his frustration and agony over the rain, which only makes his present circumstances all the more unbearable.

Similarly, Simmons recounts two memories of people going insane in the Venusian rain, which further emphasizes the gravity of the men’s current situation. First, he recounts a memory from years ago, when he found one of his friends wandering aimlessly in the rain. His friend had clearly gone mad, and wouldn’t stop repeating, “Don’t know enough, to come in, outta the rain. Don’t know enough, to come in, outta the rain. Don’t know enough.” Later, Simmons explains that General Mendt was found “sitting on a rock with his head back, breathing the rain. His lungs were full of water.” Both of these memories underscore that the men’s reaction to their predicament is understandable, yet also make the men’s present situation all the more distressing. Indeed, it soon becomes clear that Pickard is slipping into the same sort of madness and is attempting to drown himself by breathing in the rain. Besides explaining what’s happening to Pickard, Simmons’ memories also emphasize how dangerous it is for Simmons and the lieutenant to continue traversing through the rain, as they too could go insane at any given moment.

At the end of the story, when the lieutenant finally finds an operating Sun Dome, he is dried almost instantly the second he walks inside, and “the rain [becomes] only a memory to his tingling body.” This is nearly the last line of the story, and thus feels like Bradbury gesturing to the twofold power of memory that appears throughout “The Long Rain.” Perhaps, going forward, the lieutenant will use the memory of being trapped in the Venusian rain as a way to buoy himself in other difficult situations. Or, perhaps the memory of the rain will be haunting and traumatizing like that of the pinching bully, heightening painful experiences for the rest of his life.



GOVERNMENT, POLITICS, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ray Bradbury’s “The Long Rain” follows a group of American military men as they fight to survive after their rocket crashes unexpectedly in the Venusian jungle, which is soaked with the endless rain. As they trample through this pale, soggy world in search of an American-made shelter called a **Sun Dome**, the men repeatedly grumble about their government back on Earth. Through these complaints, Bradbury criticizes the government for being both misguided and slow to act, which can have catastrophic consequences for its citizens. The story’s political undertones ultimately suggest that part of this lag stems from how the government has lost sight of helping its individual citizens. Instead, the government is preoccupied with sticking its nose in other territories—like

Venus—even when doing so makes little sense.

Bradbury clearly illustrates the danger of the government’s failure—or refusal—to understand the urgency of the situation it has left its Venus-bound citizens in. When the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard are faced with the devastating discovery that the first Sun Dome they’ve come across in a month is in ruins, the lieutenant suggests that they stay put and wait for a rescue mission. Always the realist, Simmons replies, “They’ll send a crew to repair this place in about six months, when they get the money from Congress. I don’t think we’d better wait.” Simmons’ comments suggest a certain inhumanity within the government’s priorities; even though swiftly repairing the Sun Dome could save several lives, Congress will fail to release the funds promptly. Such sluggish bureaucracy has devastating effects even millions of miles away, as both Pickard and Simmons go insane mere hours after encountering the destroyed Sun Dome. Given that Bradbury wrote this story shortly after World War II, this could thus be read as a broader condemnation of high-level, detached policy decisions that fail to adequately consider the immediate consequences for individuals representing the country abroad.

Bradbury in fact directly suggests that the government is slow to act because it’s lost sight of the importance of helping individual citizens. One of the men, probably Simmons due to his other politically charged comments, explains that there are “one hundred and twenty-six [Sun Domes], as of last month. They tried to push a bill through Congress back on Earth a year ago to provide for a couple dozen more, but oh no, you know how *that* is. They’d rather a few men went crazy with the rain.” Simmons gestures to the way that the American government is particularly slow—or entirely ineffectual—about things that would only help a relatively small number of people.

Through the men’s complaints, Bradbury implies that the government is too caught up with inserting itself in foreign territories, even when doing so makes little sense and comes at the cost of human life. Simmons explains the hostile dynamic between the Venusians and the Earth people (specifically Americans, whose government funds and maintains the Domes), stating, “Every once in a while the Venusians come up out of the sea and attack a Sun Dome. They know if they ruin the Sun Domes they can ruin us. [...] But it’s been five years since the Venusians tried anything. Defense relaxes. They caught this Dome unaware.” The Venusians make their discontent with America’s presence even clearer by also capturing (and presumably killing) those who were in the Sun Dome in question. Simmons muses, “The Venusians took them all down into the sea. I hear they have a delightful way of drowning you. It takes about eight hours to drown the way they work it. Really delightful.”

Bradbury points out that America’s decision to colonize Venus (or at least set roots down in some capacity) also makes little sense in the first place due to the planet’s environment. In the

story, the humans repeatedly voice that they are out of their element on Venus. One of the men even likens enduring the foreign climate to enduring foreign torture tactics (further positioning the story as a commentary on the experience of soldiers in wartime). After comparing the rain to Chinese water torture, the man affirms, “We’re not made for water. You can’t sleep, you can’t breathe right, and you’re crazy from just being soggy.” The man highlights how the perpetual downpour keeps humans from ensuring their basic needs are met. Similarly, moments away from going insane, the lieutenant tells himself, “We weren’t made for this; no Earthman was or ever will be able to take it.” Bradbury clearly shows how the Venusians don’t want humans there, and the humans themselves don’t want to be there, consequently casting the American government’s preoccupation with Venus as absurd and even fatal.



SYMBOLS

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



SUN DOME

Sun Domes, which are American-made shelters on Venus, symbolize the American government’s ability—and, more pressingly, its inability—to protect and care for its people. The Domes could be simple shelters without any frills that contain only the resources one needs to survive. Instead, the expansive Sun Domes are brimming with luxuries, including fluffy towels, leather-bound books, rich hot chocolate, and an artificial sun. This lavishness seems to indicate how the American government cares deeply for at least some of its citizens on Venus and wants to provide for them.

However, the Sun Domes also emphasize the American government’s shortcomings and its inability to effectively care for all of its people at all times. Although there are over one hundred Sun Domes on the planet, Venus’ single continent is three thousand miles long by three thousand miles wide. With Venus’ size in mind, 126 Sun Domes sounds meager. Illustrating this point, the lieutenant and his comrades search for over a month in the jungle before they even find one Sun Dome, and even then, it’s in shambles. One of the men, probably Simmons, explains that “they tried to push a bill through Congress back on Earth a year ago to provide for a couple dozen more [Sun Domes], but oh no, you know how *that* is. They’d rather a few men went crazy with the rain.” Simmons points directly to the way that the American government is slow to act and cares little for its individual citizens, and how the Sun Domes symbolize these shortcomings. What’s more, the lack of adequate Sun Domes further suggests that the American government is distinctly out of its depth in its attempt to establish a presence on Venus and serves as a specific critique

of the government’s ability to adequately provide for its military personnel. Given that Bradbury was writing in the wake of World War II and at the start of the Cold War, the Domes thus further suggest the limit of American imperialism and interventionism.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *The Illustrated Man* published in 1981.

The Long Rain Quotes

☹️ The two men sat together in the rain. Behind them sat two other men who were wet and tired and slumped like clay that was melting.

Related Characters: Unnamed Man, Pickard, Simmons, Lieutenant

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the lieutenant and his comrades rest briefly in the rain after having trampled through the Venusian forest for an entire month in search of a shelter called a Sun Dome. This moment has biblical undertones, as the men sit two-by-two, just like the animals that enter Noah’s ark from the book of Genesis. Later, one of the men laments that they’ve been stuck in the torrential downpour for “thirty days, [and] thirty nights,” a possible nod to the biblical flood, which, according to Genesis, lasted forty nights and forty days. Of course, unlike Noah and his animals, the men can’t take refuge in a massive ark and don’t appear to have any sort of God figure looking out for them.

The depiction of men “slumped like clay that was melting” may also have biblical underpinnings. Also according to Genesis, God created Adam out of clay. In this passage, the men look like they’re made out of melting clay, suggesting the rain is so powerful that it can revert man back to their most primitive state. This imbues nature with an otherworldly, god-like power, and also emphasizes humankind’s frailty and helplessness.

“Who could [sleep]? Who has? When? How many nights have we slept? Thirty nights, thirty days! Who can sleep with rain slamming their head, banging away... I'd give just anything for a hat. Anything at all, just so it wouldn't hit my head any more.”

Related Characters: Unnamed Man, Simmons, Pickard, Lieutenant

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, one of the men chides the lieutenant for complaining about not getting any sleep the previous night because of the never-ending rain. Although the story doesn't clarify who says this, it seems like it comes from Pickard; later in the story, Pickard clutches his skull and cries for the rain to stop hitting his forehead, likening the constant drops to the constant pinches that his childhood bully used to administer. Pickard ends his impassioned monologue with a series of rhetorical questions, just as he does here, further suggesting that he's the one who makes these particular comments about sleep deprivation.

Notably, instead of wishing for the rain to stop, to find a Sun Dome, or to be off of Venus altogether, the man simply wishes for a hat. This comment, though a bit absurd, points to the humans' utter helplessness. The man recognizes nature's overwhelming power, and thus knows he can't realistically wish for the rain to stop. All he can really do is wish for a hat—a slightly better means to protect his forehead—to cope with his situation.

“Chinese water cure. Remember the old torture? Rope you against a wall. Drop one drop of water on your head every half hour. You go crazy waiting for the next one. Well, that's Venus, but on a big scale. We're not made for water. You can't sleep, you can't breathe right, and you're crazy from just being soggy.”

Related Characters: Unnamed Man, Pickard, Simmons, Lieutenant

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, one of the men likens Venus to China and the Venusian rain to Chinese water torture. Although raindrops—or occasional water drops falling on one's forehead in water torture—seems relatively benign, the man points out how humans aren't “made for water.” This idea of humans being out of their element on Venus appears several times in the story, each time giving credence to the underlying political criticism that the American government never should have meddled in Venusian affairs in the first place.

The comparison between the Venusian raindrops and Chinese water torture also suggests that the Americans on Venus are like prisoners of war who are being tortured to the point of insanity. The man's complaints further emphasize how frail humans are: because of the constant rain, the men can't do the basic things they need to do to survive—sleep, breathe, and think clearly.

“A yellow house, round and bright as the sun. A house fifteen feet high by one hundred feet in diameter, in which was warmth and quiet and hot food and freedom from rain. And in the center of the Sun Dome, of course, was a sun. A small floating free globe of yellow fire, drifting in a space at the top of the building where you could look at it from where you sat, smoking or reading a book or drinking your hot chocolate crowned with marshmallow dollops. There it would be, the yellow sun, just the size of the Earth sun, and it was warm and continuous, and the rain world of Venus would be forgotten as long as they stayed in that house and idled their time.”

Related Characters: Unnamed Man, Pickard, Simmons, Lieutenant

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 80-81

Explanation and Analysis

This passage provides the story's first explanation as to what the Sun Dome is and why the men are so desperate to find it. The Sun Dome defies the mental picture of a shelter on foreign territory presumably meant for military men (all of the characters referenced in the story are men, and all of them are tied to the military). Instead of simple shelters containing basic resources, the Sun Domes are positively palatial, stuffed with luxuries big and small, all the way down to “hot chocolate crowned with marshmallow dollops.”

The Sun Domes' opulence indicates the American government's attempt to take care of their citizens abroad—even if those citizens are 162 million miles away. More than a means for survival, the Sun Dome is a place for the military men to “idle their time” like gentlemen and forget the Venusian environment outside thanks to their country's generous provisions. However, this description subtly calls into question why the American government would want to put roots down in a place where humans have to stay inside a single building at all times. The Domes' extravagance will further seem a questionable choice when the men reveal that the government has not bothered to construct an adequate number of such shelters across the foreign planet, perhaps due to the cost and labor required.

They walked over to the body, thinking that perhaps they could still save the man's life. They couldn't believe that there wasn't some way to help the man. It was the natural act of men who have not accepted death until they have touched it and turned it over and made plans to bury it or leave it there for the jungle to bury in an hour of quick growth.

Related Characters: The Monster, Unnamed Man, Pickard, Simmons, Lieutenant

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

The unnamed man has just been killed by an electrical monster's formidable lightning bolts, leaving only the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard remaining in the group. The unnamed man is clearly no match for the giant electrical monster (which may in fact be an extended metaphor for an electrical storm), and yet the lieutenant and his comrades believe “that perhaps they could still save the man's life.” This deep sense of denial shows that humans think of themselves as being powerful and even invincible. In reality, nature (represented by the monster) is overwhelmingly the more powerful force, killing the unnamed man with ease.

The men's debate over whether or not to bury their comrade's body further reflects nature's power, as they contemplate leaving the body where it is “for the jungle to bury in an hour of quick growth.” Burying the body would likely be laborious for the physically and emotionally exhausted men, but the jungle can do the job quickly and effortlessly.

They walked over to the body, thinking that perhaps they could still save the man's life. There was no synthetic yellow sun floating in a high gaseous whisper at the center of the blue ceiling. There was no food waiting. It was cold as a vault. And through a thousand holes which had been newly punctured in the ceiling water streamed, the rain fell down, soaking into the thick rugs and the heavy modern furniture and splashing on the glass tables. The jungle was growing up like a moss in the room, on top of the bookcases and the divans. The rain slashed through the holes and fell upon the three men's faces.

Related Characters: The Venusians, Pickard, Simmons, Lieutenant

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

The lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard finally locate a Sun Dome, but it's completely destroyed. This passage is emblematic of the story's overall stance on success: it takes determination, but it also takes a great deal of luck. Even though the men have toiled for an entire month in the Venusian jungle, relentlessly searching for a Sun Dome, those efforts don't necessarily guarantee that they'll be successful. Here, they face crushing disappointment, as the Sun Dome they stumble upon happens to be the one that has been recently destroyed.

The men later deduce that the Venusians are responsible for the “thousand holes which had been newly punctured in the ceiling.” In this way, the passage also has political undertones, as it emphasizes that the Venusians don't want the Earth people infiltrating their planet and, as such, calls attention to the American government's perhaps unwise decision to set down roots there. The ruined state of the Sun Dome further reveals shows how the American government's attempt at protecting its people and military abroad (through the comfort, safety, and luxury of the Domes) from the hostile Venusians has failed. The manmade structure has also failed to protect the men from nature, as rain pours through the ceiling, and the jungle grows over the bookcases and couches. Nature's ability to take over the Sun Dome yet again highlights its dominance over frail, powerless humans.

“I remember when I was in school a bully used to sit in back of me and pinch me and pinch me and pinch me every five minutes, all day long. He did that for weeks and months. My arms were sore and black and blue all the time. And I thought I’d go crazy from being pinched. One day I must have gone a little mad from being hurt and hurt, and I turned around and took a metal trisquare I used in mechanical drawing and I almost killed that bastard. [...] I kept yelling, ‘Why don’t he leave me alone? Why don’t he leave me alone?’ [...] But what do I do *now*? Who do I hit, who do I tell to lay off, stop bothering me, this damn rain, like the pinching, always *on* you, that’s all you hear, that’s all you feel!”

Related Characters: Pickard (speaker), Simmons, Lieutenant

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Pickard recalls a painful childhood memory that has apparently haunted him throughout his life. He likens the incessant rain to the constant pinches from his childhood bully. Like raindrops, the pinches were also rhythmic, as they happened every five minutes. The intervals between pinches also point back to one of the men’s earlier statements that the rain is like Chinese water torture, where a person receives a single water droplet on their forehead every half an hour. After a while, the person goes crazy in anticipation of the next drop, just as Pickard thought he’d “go crazy from being pinched.” Water droplets and pinches seem small and benign, but both have the power to make people go insane, underscoring humankind’s fragility.

Pickard’s mental breakdown in his childhood—nearly killing his bully with a “metal trisquare”—foreshadows the way he will soon snap from the rain. This time, however, he’ll use a rifle instead of a trisquare to try to “kill” his bully (the rain). This parallel suggests that Pickard’s painful childhood recollection makes his present circumstances all the more agonizing, illustrating the potentially harmful effects of memory.

“Stop it, stop it!” Pickard screamed. He fired off his gun six times at the night sky. In the flashes of powdery illumination they could see armies of raindrops, suspended as in a vast motionless amber, for an instant, hesitating as if shocked by the explosion, fifteen billion droplets, fifteen billion tears, fifteen billion ornaments, jewels standing out against a white velvet viewing board. And then, with the light gone, the drops which had waited to have their pictures taken, which had suspended their downward rush, fell upon them, stinging, in an insect cloud of coldness and pain.

Related Characters: Pickard (speaker), Simmons, Lieutenant

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Pickard finally goes insane from being in the rain, as he fires his gun at the raindrops as if to kill them. His repeated cry for the rain to “stop it” points back to his childhood memory of being relentlessly pinched by a bully in grade school. Pickard’s agitation in this passage reveals that memories can make the present feel all the more painful—here, Pickard seems to be grappling with the haunting memory of his bully *and* the antagonizing raindrops.

When the raindrops are in the air, Bradbury describes them as “droplets,” “tears,” “ornaments,” and “jewels,” illustrating the dazzling beauty of the rain. In contrast, when the rain descends upon the men, the drops are like a “stinging [...] insect cloud of coldness and pain.” Here, Bradbury emphasizes that the rain drops are much more dangerous and agonizing than they look, contrasting nature’s beauty with its power.

“He slipped and fell. Lie here, he thought; it’s the wrong one. Lie here. It’s no use. Drink all you want.

But he managed to climb to his feet again and crossed several creeks, and the yellow light grew very bright, and he began to run again, his feet crashing into mirrors and glass, his arms flailing at diamonds and precious stones.

Related Characters: Lieutenant (speaker), Simmons, Pickard, General Mendt

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the lieutenant has just caught a glance of the second Sun Dome and runs wildly through the jungle toward it. His inner voice attempts to convince him to give up, encouraging him to fill his lungs with water and drown himself in the rain. This was the way that General Mendt died and almost the way that Pickard died (Simmons shot him to put him out of his misery). Instead of giving into this voice, however, the lieutenant musters the energy and determination to continue.

It seems that the story rewards the lieutenant's tenacity by allowing him to reach a functioning Sun Dome. However, the story also reveals that luck has a lot to do with the lieutenant's success. Earlier, when the lieutenant, Pickard, and Simmons stumbled across the first Sun Dome (before realizing that it had been destroyed), the lieutenant attributed their success to sheer luck. Pickard and Simmons' bitter comments prior to their respective deaths further shows the importance of luck—both men emphasize that the next Sun Dome could very well be destroyed like the last one. It was a stroke of particularly bad fortune that the one Sun Dome the three men stumbled upon was one that the Venusians destroyed in their first attack in five years. Thus, it takes both determination and a stroke of good luck for the lieutenant to stumble upon another Sun Dome, let alone one that's fully functioning.

☛ Behind him the rain whirled at the door. Ahead of him, upon a low table, stood a silver pot of hot chocolate, steaming, and a cup, full, with a marshmallow in it. And beside that, on another tray, stood thick sandwiches of rich chicken meat and fresh-cut tomatoes and green onions. And on a rod just before his eyes was a thick green Turkish towel, and a bin in which to throw wet clothes [...] And upon a chair, a fresh change of uniform, waiting for anyone—himself, or any lost one—to make use of it. And farther over, coffee in steaming copper urns, and a phonograph from which music was playing quietly, and books bound in red and brown leather. And near the books a cot, a soft deep cot upon which one might lie, exposed and bare, to drink in the rays of the one great bright thing which dominated the long room.

Related Characters: Lieutenant (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

The lieutenant, teetering on the brink of death, finally arrives at a functioning Sun Dome, which is filled with all of the comforts and luxuries the men have been pining for throughout the story. Given the lieutenant's physical and mental deterioration, the Dome's lavishness feels potentially like a mirage. However, the passage's specificity suggests that this is a real sight that the lieutenant is drinking in, making note of every little detail. Bradbury invites the reader to come to his or her own conclusion regarding whether this is all too good to be true (perhaps the lieutenant is dreaming, hallucinating out of madness, or is dying), or if the lieutenant really did make it to safety at the very last moment.

Independent of this, the mention of "a fresh change of uniform" waiting on a chair suggests that the humans on Venus and living in the Sun Domes are, in fact, just military personnel. Furthermore, they are perhaps just military *men*, as the story doesn't include any female characters—this may be a nod back the gender roles present at the time of the story's publication in 1950. These details further reflect the political overtones of the story, likening these missions to Venus to those of American invasions or colonization of countries on Earth.



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.

THE LONG RAIN

It's *still* raining. The rain is “a mizzle, a downpour, a fountain, a whipping at the eyes, an undertow at the ankles,” and it makes the men's look pruned, wrinkly and ape-like. The sheets of rain slash through the jungle, turn the soil into swamp lands, and shred the grass like razor blades.

One of the men asks the lieutenant how much farther they have to travel to get to a place called the **Sun Dome**. The lieutenant says that they only have another hour or two until they get there, but one of the men calls his bluff. The lieutenant admits that he's lying to keep the men in good spirits and tersely tells them to shut up. The men pause to rest in the rain, sitting in groups of two—two in the front, two in the back—“slumped like clay that was melting.”

The lieutenant's face, which used to be tan, is now pasty white. Even his eyes, hair, and uniform have turned white. He asks the other men if it's ever stopped raining here on Venus. One says no—he's lived here for ten years, and he's never seen even a second when the rain wasn't pummeling down on the soggy planet. The lieutenant compares living on Venus to living underwater.

The lieutenant tells the men they need to get moving if they want to find the **Sun Dome**. He reaffirms that they're just an hour away—and admits that he's still lying, but this time for his own benefit, because “this is one of those times when you've got to lie. I can't take much more of this.”

The men continue tromping through the soggy jungle, eyes glued to their compasses. Somewhere behind them lies their destroyed rocket, “in which they had ridden and fallen. A rocket in which lay two of their friends, dead and dripping rain.” The men reach a river, and the lieutenant nods at Simmons knowingly. Simmons procures a small packet, which instantly swells into a large boat. The men quickly fashion a pair of paddles out of wood, and climb aboard.

The opening lines of the story emphasize nature's power, which will resonate throughout the story. That the rain makes the men's hands look ape-like has Darwinian undertones, implying that nature is so powerful that it can make humans regress to their primitive state.



The introduction of the lieutenant suggests that there is some sort of military operation going on, and since the men don't know how much farther they have to travel, it seems that they're in foreign territory. Once again, the rain has the power to make the men regress—this time drawing upon the biblical story of Adam, whom God fashioned out of clay.



The detail of the man who claims to have lived on Venus for ten years is odd, as all of the men seem like strangers on this planet. However, later in the story, Simmons recounts a time that he found one of his friends wandering in the Venusian jungle, which means he's at least been on Venus before—perhaps he's the one who's lived here for a decade. Meanwhile, the rain is not only draining the men of their vitality but also of their physical coloring. The rain is so powerful that it even wipes the color from the men's eyes and hair—a seemingly impossible feat.



The lieutenant is so determined to get to a Sun Dome—which the reader later learns is one of 126 American-made shelters on Venus—that he's willing to openly lie to himself and his comrades just to maintain his determination and energy.



Although the rocket is a product of human innovation, this passage makes it sound feeble; Bradbury describes it as the “rocket in which they had ridden and fallen,” as if it were a poorly constructed paper airplane that soared up into the sky only to float back down again. This implies that human innovation—and, by extension, humankind—is not all that powerful or resilient.



As the men row, the lieutenant laments that he didn't sleep at all the previous night. One of the men scoffs, reminding him that none of them have slept. He says it's been impossible, for "thirty nights, thirty days," to sleep with the rain pounding into their foreheads. The man says he'd do anything to have a hat just to protect his forehead from the pelting raindrops.

One of the other men says he regrets ever coming to China. The other men find this comment odd, but he explains that being on Venus is just like enduring Chinese water torture—a method of torture in which a prisoner is roped against a wall, and a single drop of water hits their forehead every thirty minutes. After a while, the prisoner goes crazy in anticipation for the next drop. The man declares that humans aren't "made for water." In this kind of rain, humans can't sleep or breathe properly, and they go "crazy from just being soggy."

Somewhere in the distance is the **Sun Dome**—a massive yellow house that boasts of warmth, hot meals, and a reprieve from the rain. At the center of the Sun Dome hovers a "small floating free globe of yellow fire," and residents can watch it while they read or smoke or sip thick hot chocolates "crowned with marshmallow dollops." The Sun Dome's sun is "just the size of the Earth sun" (when looking at it from Earth), and it warms every inch of the Dome, making those inside forget about the surrounding torrential downpour.

The lieutenant watches the men as they row. They're "white as mushrooms," just like the rest of the Venusian jungle, which is like an "immense cartoon nightmare." Deprived of sunlight but drenched with constant rain, the jungle is lush but pasty and white. Its "cheese-colored leaves" barely stand out against "the earth carved of wet Camembert."

The men reach the shore and continue their trek through the waterlogged jungle. The lieutenant thinks he sees something in the distance, and Simmons runs ahead, hoping desperately that it's the **Sun Dome**. The other men rush after him and finally find him in a small clearing. Looming in front of them is not the Sun Dome—it's their abandoned rocket. The bodies of their two dead comrades are still sprawled among the rubble, their open mouths filled with moss and fungus.

That the men have endured the torrential downpour for thirty nights and thirty days may be a nod to the biblical story of Noah's ark and the great flood, which went on for forty nights and forty days. Unlike Noah, however, the men are in a flimsy inflatable boat—not a giant, substantial ark.



This is one of many instances in which the men assert that they are out of their element, implying that humans shouldn't even be on Venus in the first place. This comment, coupled with the men's status as military men (and the later revelation that they're American), reveals the story's political underpinnings. Here and elsewhere, the men's grumbling about the American government suggests that America is biting off more than it can chew by intervening in foreign affairs that are 162 million miles away from Earth.



Later, the story reveals that the American government funds and maintains the Domes. It seems, then, that the plush, comfortable Domes are a way for the American government to care for its citizens (at least those who end up on Venus).



This passage underscores that Venus looks bizarre and unfamiliar to humans, and consequently implies that they don't belong there. In addition, the repeated comparison to cheese makes Venus seem all the more absurd, and perhaps is a wink to the centuries-old idea that the moon is made of cheese.



Even though the men have been dutifully following their compasses for the past month, determined to find a Sun Dome, this tenacity hasn't guaranteed that they will be successful in their quest. Instead, Bradbury paints a considerably bleaker, but more realistic, picture of coming up short even when one puts in extraordinary effort.



The men realize that they've accidentally circled back around to their starting point, and that there must be an electrical storm nearby that threw off their compasses. Simmons cries out that they're no closer to the **Sun Dome**, but the lieutenant tells him to remain calm—they still have two days' worth of food.

Suddenly, a massive roar echoes in the distance, and a monster emerges through the rain. The monster has a thousand legs, each made of electric blue lightning bolts. Every time the monster takes a step, a tree plunges to the ground, scorched and smoking. "Great whiffs of ozone" drift through the air, and the raindrops cut through the curls of smoke. The monster, who is half a mile wide and a full mile tall, stumbles through the jungle like it's blind. Sometimes it tumbles to the ground and lands in a heap, its legs disappearing for an instant under the rest of its body. But then, "a thousand whips would fall out of its belly, blue-white whips, to sting the jungle."

The lieutenant instructs his comrades to lie flat in the mud, noticing that the monster "hits the highest points" in the jungle. Faces buried in the soggy soil, the men track the monster's movement just by listening. Suddenly, the monster looms over them. Its lightning bolts slam against the crashed rocket, ringing like a metal gong.

Overcome by terror, an unnamed man in the group jumps up, screaming, "No, no!" The lieutenant yells at him to get down, but the man takes off running through the jungle, dodging crumpling trees and stinging lightning bolts. Suddenly, the lieutenant hears "the sound a fly makes when landing upon the grill wires of an exterminator," which he remembers from his childhood on a farm. He can smell burning flesh.

The lieutenant appears to be the most determined of the men, as he refuses to wallow in his misery and is committed to keeping his comrades' spirits up. Although the lieutenant means to be encouraging in assuring the men that they still have two days' worth of food, this comment also illustrates the gravity (and, perhaps, futility) of the situation: they've been searching for the Sun Dome unsuccessfully for thirty days but now must find it within two days, or they will starve.



It's unclear if the monster is really a tangible monster—yet another manifestation of the "cartoonish nightmare" that is the planet Venus—or if it is an extended metaphor for a particularly massive electrical storm. The description of the electrical monster's size and blindness is reminiscent of the giant cyclops in the Odyssey, who bumbles around his cave blindly and destructively after Odysseus and his men drive a stake into his eye.



The detail about the monster only hitting the "highest points" in the jungle connects with the common misconception that lightning only strikes the tallest object in a given landscape. This may be Bradbury implying that the monster is actually just an electrical storm after all—not a physical, cyclops-like monster. Regardless, the fact that the men have to lie face down in the mud speaks to their powerlessness and humility in the face of nature's overwhelming strength.



Here, the lieutenant's childhood memory both softens and intensifies the situation at hand. In likening the sound of his comrade being electrocuted to the sound of a fly "landing upon the grill wires of an exterminator," the lieutenant illustrates humankind's frailty and helplessness. However, perhaps thinking of his childhood on a farm serves as a momentary mental escape for the lieutenant, easing the emotional blow of hearing his comrade's death.



The lieutenant orders the other men (later revealed as Simmons and Pickard) to stay put until the monster departs. When the coast is clear, the shaken-up comrades locate the unnamed man, believing that they might be able to save his life. Although this is hopeless, “they couldn’t believe that there wasn’t some way to help the man.” The narrator remarks that this is the “natural” response of men who haven’t come to terms with death until they’ve seen it with their own eyes and felt it with their own hands. The man looks “like a wax dummy that had been thrown into an incinerator and pulled out after the wax had sunk to the charcoal skeleton.” The men peer down at the body, watching as it disappears. Tangled masses of vegetation crawl over the body, swallowing it in one leafy gulp.

The lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard continue onward, crossing milky creeks, streams, and rivers. Venus’ single continent, which floats like an island in the middle of its Single Sea, is three thousand miles long by three thousand miles wide. Soon, the men arrive at the Single Sea, which lies “upon the pallid shore with little motion.” The lieutenant beckons his men southward, remembering that there are two **Sun Domes** in this direction. The men talk about why there aren’t more Sun Domes, and one of the men explains that there are currently 126 of them. He explains that “they tried to push a bill through Congress back on Earth a year ago to provide for a couple dozen more, but oh no, you know how *that* is. They’d rather a few men went crazy with the rain.”

As the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard carry on southward, Simmons suddenly exclaims that he sees something. Sure enough, far in the distance is a sheer yellow glow—a **Sun Dome**. One of the men commends the lieutenant for leading them there, but the lieutenant attributes their success to pure luck.

Simmons takes off at a run, heartened by the sight of the **Sun Dome**. Panting, he dreams aloud of the hot coffee and cinnamon buns waiting for them inside, and claims that whoever invented the Sun Dome “should have got a medal.” Out of breath, he says, “Guess a lot of men went crazy before they figured out the cure. Think it’d be obvious!” He recounts the time that he found one of his friends wandering through the Venusian jungle, repeating the same crazed phrase, “Don’t know enough, to come in, outta the rain.” The men laugh.

The men are forced to come to terms with human frailty and mortality, as their comrade is instantly turned into nothing more than a distorted “wax dummy.” Bradbury describes the unnamed man’s body in gruesome detail to emphasize nature’s extraordinary power and dominance over small, helpless humans. The vegetation that grows instantly over the body seems to consume it as food, depicting nature as a fearsome predator and humans as its vulnerable prey.



Bradbury’s (fictitious) dimensions of Venus provide some explanation as to how the men have been traveling for thirty days without coming across a single Sun Dome. The 126 Sun Domes are extremely spread out over several thousand square miles, so finding just one Dome would be an incredible feat. One of the men—probably Simmons, given his later comments about Congress—explains that Congress is reticent to fund more Sun Domes, even though they’re sorely needed. This moment is one of political criticism, as Bradbury makes a jab at the American government for its failure to do everything in its power to provide for its citizens.



The lieutenant points to the story’s realistic attitude toward success—although achieving success takes determination, it also takes a good bit of luck. If pure determination were enough to guarantee success, the men would have likely found a Sun Dome a long time ago.



In bringing up the time that he found one of his friends wandering around Venus, Simmons implies that he’s been here before—and perhaps is the man in the group who claimed to have lived on Venus for ten years. This begs the question as to why he doesn’t have a better idea of where he’s going, and why he left the safety of a Sun Dome in the first place. In any case, the men treat Simmons’ story as a joke (including Simmons himself), which is a moment of dark foreshadowing.



Simmons, Pickard, and the lieutenant reach the **Sun Dome**. Simmons flings open the doors, yelling, "Bring on the coffee and buns!" The Sun Dome is silent. The men walk inside and are shocked at what they find: there is no hot food, no luxurious warmth, no beautiful sun hovering in the ceiling. The Sun Dome is cold, dark, and sopping wet, with rain rushing down from a thousand "newly punctured" holes in the ceiling. The plush rugs and modern furniture are soaked, and the bookcase is coated with moss. Pickard laughs sarcastically, but one of the men tersely tells him to shut up.

One of the men blames the Venusians. Simmons explains that the Venusians live in the sea but periodically come out to attack a **Sun Dome**, because "they know if they ruin the Sun Domes they can ruin us." One of the other men (either the lieutenant or Pickard) asks how this is possible, since all of the Sun Domes are heavily protected with guns. Simmons says this is true, but since it's been five years since the Venusians' last attack, the Sun Domes have relaxed their defenses. The Venusians caught the residents of this particular Dome off guard.

One of the men asks where the bodies of the Earth people are who used to live in this **Dome**, but Simmons answers that the Venusians must have brought them down to the sea—"I hear they have a delightful way of drowning you. It takes about eight hours to drown the way they work it. Really delightful." Pickard laughs bitterly and says that there's probably no food left at this Sun Dome. Simmons and the lieutenant exchange a look. The men wander into the kitchen, which is full of furry green loaves of bread.

Simmons says they should try to make it to the next **Sun Dome**, but the lieutenant thinks if they just stay put, a rescue mission may come find them. Simmons reminds him that the rescue mission has probably already come and gone, and it will take at least six months for Congress to release the funds for a crew to come out and repair the Sun Dome.

After searching for a Sun Dome for thirty days, the men have finally found one—but it's in shambles, and appears to have been destroyed recently, given the "newly punctured" holes in the ceiling. Earlier, the lieutenant reminded his men that they still have two days of food left. With this detail in mind, coupled with the fact that it took a whole month to find just one Sun Dome, the men's situation appears increasingly dire.



Simmons' knowledge about the Venusians further suggests that he's the one who has lived on Venus for ten years. His comment reveals that the Venusians don't want Earth people on their planet and are willing to use violence to make this known. With this, the story suggests that the American government's decision to meddle in this particular foreign territory is unwise and dangerous for American citizens like the lieutenant and his comrades. One of the men's earlier comments about Congress being unwilling to fund more Sun Domes also shows that the government is too preoccupied with establishing new territories to care adequately for its own people.



It's unclear why Simmons and the lieutenant exchange a look after Pickard's bitter comment, but it may suggest that they know Pickard is the weakest link among them—surely enough, Pickard is only hours away from going insane and dying. Simmons' explanation of the Venusians' drowning tactics connect back to the idea that the Venusian rain is like Chinese water torture; in both instances, water is used to torture (and even kill) humans, underscoring that the men are out of their element and do not belong on Venus in the first place.



Simmons' remark that it will take at least six months for Congress to release the funds for a clean-up crew to take care of the Dome implies that the American government is sluggish and slow to act, even when the stakes are high (had they cleaned up the Dome right away, the men wouldn't be in this dire situation). Simmons' comment about Congress also suggests that he's the one who explained Congress' unwillingness to fund additional Domes earlier in the story.



Clutching his skull, Pickard cries that the constant rain reminds him of how a bully in grade school used to pinch him every five minutes, all day long, every day. After enduring the pinching for several months, Pickard's arms were black and blue. One day, he finally cracked: he grabbed the metal trisquare he used for mechanical drawing and attacked the bully with it, nearly killing the boy. Now, Pickard says, he longs to attack the rain in the same way, "but what do I do *now*? Who do I hit? Who do I tell to lay off, stop bothering me, this damn rain, like the pinching, always on you, that's all you hear, that's all you feel!"

The lieutenant tells Pickard that they'll be at the next **Sun Dome** in just eight hours. Pickard asks what they're going to do if all the Sun Domes are destroyed, and says he's "tired of chancing it." The lieutenant tells him to "hold on" for just eight more hours. Pickard agrees, but he laughs flatly and avoids eye contact. Simmons watches him closely.

Four hours later, the lieutenant, Simmons, and Pickard are halfway to the next **Sun Dome**. Pickard declares that he can't go any farther—he has to sleep, and hasn't for four weeks. It's nighttime, and the sky is so black that it's "dangerous to move," so the men agree to rest. The lieutenant cautions that they've tried this before, and it hasn't worked. They lie down carefully, propping their chins up enough that the water can't pool in their mouths.

The lieutenant tries to sleep, but the vines are climbing over his body, and the raindrops won't stop pestering him. He jumps up wildly, unable to tolerate the "thousand hands [that] were touching him." Suddenly, Pickard begins to scream and run around frantically. Pickard shoots his gun in the air six times, and the brief flashes of light illuminate fifteen billion raindrops, which look like tears, ornaments, and jewels. The droplets descend on the men like a thick cloud of insects.

Pickard suddenly goes quiet, and the lieutenant turns shines his hand lamp on Pickard's face. To his horror, he sees that Pickard's pupils are dilated, his mouth is agape, and his chin is turned upwards so that his mouth is filling with water. Pickard is unresponsive, standing there with "manacles of rain and jewels dripping from his wrists and his neck." Simmons tells the lieutenant that Pickard is already gone. They can't carry him along with them, and if they leave him, he'll drown.

Pickard's traumatic childhood memory heightens the pain he feels in this moment—instead of just coping with the aggravating rain, he's also reliving the emotional and physical pain of the bullying and pinching he received as a child. Pickard's frantic and impassioned rhetorical questions imply that he's slipping into insanity—a process that will be complete in a mere matter of hours.



Since the lieutenant is known to lie about how much longer they have to walk until the next Sun Dome, it's possible that he's lying here, too. Meanwhile, the detail of Simmons watching Pickard closely suggests that Simmons knows Pickard is on the brink of insanity.



The men take care to prop their heads in certain angles so their mouths don't fill with water, implying that it's possible to drown from the rain. Once again, this emphasizes nature's power and humankind's frailty, as seemingly innocent, tiny raindrops have the power to kill humans.



The lieutenant's inability to remain still with the creeping, crawling vines and constant pattering of raindrops provides some explanation to why men go insane in this kind of environment. Pickard's overblown reaction suggests that he's gone fully insane at this point, as he tries to shoot the raindrops with his gun to keep them from bothering him. This reaction echoes the time he lost control as a child and attacked his childhood bully.



Bradbury depicts the raindrops as being "manacles" on Pickard's wrists and neck. In this way, the tiny drops of water are like shackles that oppress, torture, and subdue Pickard, stressing nature's authority and humankind's helplessness. The raindrops are also like "jewels," highlighting that nature is beautiful even while it's terrifying. This is a moment in which Bradbury urges his readers to look upon nature with awe, reverence, respect, and healthy dose of fear.



Startled, the lieutenant asks Simmons what he means by drown. Simmons can't believe that the lieutenant doesn't know the story of how General Mendt died. They found him "sitting on a rock with his head back, breathing the rain. His lungs were full of water." The lieutenant turns his attention back to Pickard, and slaps him across the face. Simmons warns that Pickard can no longer feel his body. The lieutenant realizes his own limbs are starting to go numb, too.

The lieutenant says they can't just leave Pickard here to drown, so Simmons turns around and swiftly shoots Pickard, who crumples to the ground. Simmons tells the lieutenant that if he makes a fuss, Simmons will shoot him too. He reminds the lieutenant that Pickard had gone insane and would have been a burden. The lieutenant is quiet, but finally agrees, and the pair continue to make their way to the **Sun Dome**.

After a half an hour, Simmons declares that they've "miscalculated" the location of the next **Dome**. The lieutenant affirms that they only have one more hour to go. Simmons asks him to speak up but then smiles suddenly, yelling that his ears have gone out because of the numbing rain. He yells to the lieutenant to go on without him. The lieutenant objects (which Simmons can't hear), but Simmons yells that he's tired and doesn't think the Sun Dome is in this direction. Even if it is nearby, it's probably destroyed just like the last one.

Simmons says he knows he's on the brink of insanity but doesn't want to die that way. He has a gun, and as soon as the lieutenant is out of sight, Simmons will kill himself. Reading the lieutenant's lips, Simmons knows he's protesting. Simmons explains that he'll either die now or in a few hours. He asks the lieutenant to imagine the feeling of getting to the next **Dome** and finding it in shambles—"Won't that be nice?" Unable to sway Simmons, the lieutenant leaves uneasily.

The lieutenant's realization that his own limbs are going numb heightens his sense of urgency to find a Sun Dome, as he could be just hours away from experiencing Pickard's same fate. Meanwhile, it's surprising that the lieutenant didn't know about the tragic death of one of his superiors (a general is a higher rank than a lieutenant). This moment also has political undertones, suggesting that the government is failing to properly care for its citizens who go to Venus—even high-ranking officials who are dedicated to serving the country.



This moment shows Simmons' incredible decisiveness. Since Simmons doesn't have a special title and often takes orders from the lieutenant throughout the story, it seems that the lieutenant is his authority figure. Thus, it's shocking that he threatens to shoot the lieutenant if he doesn't go along with Simmons' plan. Perhaps Simmons' more substantial knowledge of Venus and the psychological effects of the rain means that he knows the men must keep moving no matter what.



When Simmons realizes his ears have gone out, he smiles, suggesting that he's relieved this arduous journey is about to come to an end. However, his decision to stay behind reveals that he is considerably less determined to find a Sun Dome than the lieutenant.



Simmons recognizes his helplessness in the face of nature, as he knows he's about to die. Instead of dying strictly on nature's terms, though, he decides to die on his own by shooting himself. In support of his plan, he draws upon the recent memory of the men's crushing disappointment after reaching the destroyed Sun Dome. In this case, the power of memory is negative, as it makes Simmons less resolved to carry on and pushes him to commit suicide.



Miserable and alone, the lieutenant tells himself to tough it out for just five more minutes—“Another five minutes and then I’ll walk into the sea and keep walking.” He thinks about how Earth people weren’t made for the harsh Venusian environment.

Having lost five of his companions in the last month (two from the rocket crash, one from the electrical monster, one from insanity, and one from suicide), it’s understandable why the lieutenant would rather give up. However, his decision to continue on—at least for five more minutes—demonstrates his extraordinary determination. His reflection on humans being ill-suited for Venus once again suggests that the American government’s decision to put down roots there was misguided.



Trudging through the leafy slush, the lieutenant comes to a small hill. There, in the distance, is the faint, sheer yellow glow of the next **Sun Dome**. Swaying unsteadily with exhaustion and hunger, the lieutenant just stands there staring at it. Then, he takes off at a run, crashing through the jungle. When he slips and falls, his inner voice tries to persuade him to stay put: “Lie here, he thought; it’s the wrong [Sun Dome]. Lie here. It’s no use. Drink all you want.” With great exertion, the lieutenant struggles to his feet and begins to run again, “his feet crashing into mirrors and glass, his arms flailing at diamonds and precious stones.”

Bradbury again conflates the deathly raindrops with jewels, simultaneously pointing to nature’s beauty and power. Meanwhile, the lieutenant’s persuasive inner voice reveals that he’s only moments away from descending into insanity. This moment also provides a glimpse into what was perhaps going on in Pickard and General Mendt’s minds when they went insane. Once again, the lieutenant shows extraordinary determination when he resolves to keep running despite his crippling exhaustion.



The lieutenant reaches the door of the **Sun Dome** and stumbles inside. He immediately feels paralyzed. On the table is a steaming pot of hot chocolate and several platters of chicken sandwiches. There are stacks of plush Turkish towels, a dry uniform, copper urns filled with coffee, and leather-bound books. The lieutenant covers his eyes with his hands and, after a moment, looks around the room again. He sees other men approaching him, but he ignores them.

The Sun Dome is lavish and warm, forming a stark contrast to the cold, bleak, deadly Venusian environment outside. The description of the Dome is so perfect, however, that it almost seems like the lieutenant is dreaming or that he’s hallucinating as he’s dying. Bradbury leaves this moment up to interpretation.



The lieutenant stares at the warm, yellow sun hovering in the “blue sky of the room.” Everything is silent, the door to the outside world is shut, and the rain is “only a memory to [the lieutenant’s] tingling body.” Pulling off his soggy uniform, the lieutenant walks toward the sun.

The rain, which pestered and prodded the lieutenant for the past month, is now “only a memory,” gesturing to the way that memories helped and hurt him and his comrades throughout their journey. The lieutenant’s walk toward the sun may reflect his overwhelming desire to finally get dry and warm, but it’s also possible that this is all a hallucination, and he is walking toward the light in a figurative sense—that is, approaching death.





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