

The Wasp Factory



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF IAIN BANKS

Iain Banks was born in Scotland, where he lived for the majority of his life. He wanted to be a writer from an early age, and after a series of unpublished attempts at science fiction in the late 1970s, he published his first novel, *The Wasp Factory*, at the age of thirty. Banks wrote twenty-seven novels during his lifetime, the last of which was published posthumously. He also wrote short stories, multiple books of nonfiction, and a posthumously published collection of poetry.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In a 2008 interview with *The Guardian*, Iain Banks explained that he looked to his own childhood for inspiration for *The Wasp Factory*. Although he saw the novel as an exaggeration and satirization of the more run-of-the-mill violence of childhood, he too spent his early years making bombs, flamethrowers, and giant catapults.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Wasp Factory was initially met with shock and acclaim, as there had never been a work quite like it. Still, it follows in a tradition of other novels dealing with the confusion and violence of childhood, like William Golding's [Lord of the Flies](#) or Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. A distinctly Scottish novel, *The Wasp Factory* is also related to the work of other novelists who lived in and wrote about Scotland, like Irvine Welsh, known for *Trainspotting*. As a kind of confessional of a murderer, *The Wasp Factory* resembles Brett Easton Elli's [American Psycho](#), or Shirley Jackson's [We Have Always Lived in the Castle](#).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Wasp Factory
- **When Written:** 1980s
- **Where Written:** The United Kingdom
- **When Published:** 1984
- **Literary Period:** 20th Century Realistic Fiction
- **Genre:** Contemporary Fiction
- **Setting:** Scotland
- **Climax:** Eric's return to the island
- **Antagonist:** Eric, Angus, Frank's own dark impulses
- **Point of View:** Frank, first person narration

EXTRA CREDIT

Two Careers. Iain Banks published over a dozen novels under the name Iain "M." Banks, to distinguish his science fiction from his realistic fiction. He had originally planned to publish all his novels under the name Iain M. Banks, but his publisher initially encouraged him to drop the middle initial because they worried it would confuse readers.

Early Jobs. Before Iain Banks found success as a novelist, he had a variety of odd jobs—working for IBM, as a technician helping to construct oil rigs, and as a clerk for a law firm.



PLOT SUMMARY

Frank Cauldhame lives with his father, Angus, on a small island in Scotland. They are easily connected to the mainland by a bridge, but Frank is nonetheless cut off from the outside world. Angus claims Frank has no birth certificate, and as a result, Frank has spent his entire life on the island in relative isolation—his father homeschooled him and addressed all of his medical concerns.

Frank's brother, Eric, was hospitalized several years earlier after a mental breakdown that caused him to become violent and dangerous. The book opens with the news that Eric has just escaped from the hospital, and is making his way back home. The novel takes place over the course of several days, both in the present, as Frank prepares for Eric's return, and in the past, as Frank provides glimpses at his and Eric's lives, and how they came to be the way they are.

Frank believes that when he was three years old he was attacked and castrated by the family dog, Old Saul. His castration has shaped his entire life, causing him to feel unmanly and forcing him to overcompensate for this with murder and violence. His need to get back at Old Saul causes Frank to kill his little brother, Paul, who he sees as a reincarnation of the dog, and later provokes Eric, after his breakdown, to set dogs on fire as a kind of retribution against the long-deceased family pet.

In addition to Paul, Frank has murdered two other children. He killed his cousin Blyth, as revenge, after Blyth set Frank and Eric's pet rabbits on fire. Frank also killed his cousin Esmerelda, not out of any particular dislike for her, but because he felt he had killed too many male children, and felt it essential to help restore balance to the world by killing a girl.

Although Frank hasn't killed anyone in many years, he remains violent and superstitious. He has set up a series of Sacrifice Poles around the island that act as sentinels, and for most

major decisions he looks to a contraption he has built called the Wasp Factory. The Factory is an old town clock that Frank has placed on the floor of his loft. He has attached twelve death traps to the twelve numerals. When he has a question, he will release a wasp into the Factory, and depending on how it dies, he draws a different conclusion.

Over the course of a week Eric calls Frank from locations across Scotland, coming closer and closer. He eventually arrives on the island to Frank's excitement and dismay—he is happy to see his older brother, but he is also afraid of being on the receiving end of the destruction and violence he knows his brother is capable of.

On the same night Eric arrives, Frank discovers a secret about his past. Frank was actually born a girl named Frances, and was not castrated by Old Saul. In reality, Frances had never had any male genitalia. Although Frances was attacked by Old Saul as a child, the damage was minimal. Nonetheless, Angus took this as an opportunity to conduct an experiment on his child. Angus fed Frances male hormones, and raised Frances as a boy. Frances is shocked by this, but quickly comes to terms with this new identity, greeting Eric the next morning as his new sister.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame

– The protagonist and narrator. Frank is the child of Angus and Agnes, the brother of Paul and the half-brother of Eric. Frank sees himself as abnormal but essentially sane. He believes he is governed by logic and reason, even as readers see that many of his decisions are the result of obsessive-compulsive tendencies, psychopathy, or superstition. Still, Frank is bright and manipulative, and is therefore able to conceal his true self from almost everyone in his life. On the outside Frank seems to be a strange, antisocial teen. However, he is secretly obsessed with ritual and sacrifice, and is also incredibly violent—over the course of his short life has murdered three children and countless animals. Frank only truly cares for two people in his life (other than himself): his friend Jamie, and his brother, Eric. Frank loved Eric before his accident, and continues to love him after, although his love is now tainted by fear. In the final chapters of the novel Frank discovers that he was born a girl named Frances. Angus has been feeding Frances male hormones as an experiment since Old Saul mauled Frances at the age of three. After this revelation, Frances begins to consider how she used violence to assert her perceived lost masculinity, and how she killed because she believed she could never procreate. However, once she fully understands who she is and what happened to her, Frances is able to move forward as a woman.

Eric Cauldhame – Frank's half-brother; the son of Angus and

Mary. Once a sweet, bright, sensitive child, he suffered a mental breakdown in medical school that completely changed his personality. Eric has been incarcerated for "disturbing the peace," specifically for setting dogs on fire and trying to feed worms and maggots to local children. He and Frank were, and remain, very close. Frank killed Blyth because Blyth had upset Eric, and Eric, after his breakdown, sets dogs on fire because a dog once mutilated Frank. Eric breaks out of his institution and travels home to meet Frank and Angus again. He evades capture and eventually makes it home. Although he first tries to set his house on fire, the next morning he is calmer, and happy to greet his family.

Angus Cauldhame – Angus is father to Frank, Eric, and Paul. He is around forty-five years old. Frank describes him as tall and slim, almost feminine. Agnes broke his left leg almost fourteen years ago, and he poorly reset it himself, and now must walk with a cane. Most of the reader's information about Angus comes secondhand from Frank, who knows his father was some kind of doctor, either of chemistry or biochemistry. Now Angus lives off residual patent money, and the remaining wealth of his family. Angus is in many ways a mystery—he shares very little information with Frank, and in fact delights in feeding him misinformation. He maintains power over his son through physical control of the home and island (locking doors and homeschooling Frank), and through frequent verbal abuse. In the book's final chapters it is revealed that Angus has also been controlling Frank's body. Angus has been feeding Frank/Frances male hormones since the accident with Old Saul, raising Frances, who was born a girl, as a boy. Angus seems to see this as a kind of experiment, the kind he did as a scientist, as opposed to a violation of Frances's basic human rights.

Agnes – Frank and Paul's mother. She is in their lives only briefly. Frank meets her twice, once when he is born, and once when she returns to give birth to Paul. Agnes, like Angus was in his youth, is a free spirit. She doesn't particularly like children, which is why she leaves them with Angus. Rather than stay with her family, after giving birth to Paul she takes off on her motorcycle. When Angus tries to block her way, she runs him over. Frank blames much of the misfortune in his life on Agnes, whose presence provided a distraction during which Old Saul was able to castrate him. As a result, Frank sees Agnes as the root of his own violent tendencies.

Paul Cauldhame – Frank's little brother, and the son of Agnes and an unknown man. Paul was born on the same day that Old Saul supposedly castrated Frank, and Frank believes that he is a reincarnation of the dog. Because of this, although Paul gives no indication that he is anything other than a happy, healthy, human child, Frank is compelled to murder him and free himself from the dog's evil shadow.

Esmerelda Stove – Frank's little cousin, the daughter of Harmsworth and Morag. A sweet, trusting, easygoing child, Frank kills her because he feels he has killed too many boys and

needs a girl to balance it out. Frank ties her to an enormous kite that carries her away across the sea, and she is never seen again.

Blyth Cauldham – Frank and Eric’s cousin. Blyth would spend the summers visiting and terrorizing the island. Rude and violent, one year Blyth used a flamethrower to massacre Frank and Eric’s pet rabbits. This devastated Eric and enraged Frank, who vowed to take revenge. The next summer, Blyth returned. He had lost his leg in a car accident and now wore a prosthetic, and was even more aggressive than before. Frank hid an adder in Blyth’s hollow leg while his cousin slept, swiftly killing him.

Jamie – Frank’s best and only friend. Jamie is kind and ordinary, a stark contrast to Frank, who does not divulge any of his darkest secrets or strangest behavior to his friend. Jamie genuinely cares about Frank and his wellbeing, keeping up to date on his life and family, and helping him when he gets too drunk. On the flipside, Frank genuinely cares about Jamie, carrying the man, who has dwarfism, on his shoulders at music concerts, and even overcoming his own aversion to women if Jamie wants to talk or dance with one.

Old Saul – The old Cauldham family bulldog who supposedly castrated three-year-old Frank. Old Saul was always mean and combative, but his attack on Frank was the final straw—afterwards Angus strangled the dog and buried him behind the house. Frank sees Old Saul as the source of his misery, but also believes he can reclaim his power from the dog. Many years later, Frank excavates Old Saul’s **skull** and uses it for rituals, and kills his little brother, Paul, who was born the same day that Old Saul castrated him, and who he sees as a reincarnation of the animal.

Mrs. Clamp – A local woman and family friend comes to the island every week to deliver supplies to Angus and Frank. She cares about the wellbeing of the family, but is not privy to any details about their private lives. Still, she is friendly enough with Angus and Frank to occasionally stay for lunch, and she was present many years earlier during Paul’s birth and Frank’s simultaneous castration.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Diggs – The local policeman. He and Angus have a friendly relationship, but Diggs does not trust Frank, who he suspects was involved in the deaths of Blyth, Esmerelda, and Paul.

Mary Cauldham – Eric’s mother and Angus’s first wife. Frank knows very little about her, other than that she died in childbirth.

Duncan – The barkeep at the Cauldham Arms. He and Angus are friends, and he calls Angus to keep him updated on Frank’s whereabouts and drinking habits.

Harmsworth Stove – Esmerelda’s father, and Morag’s husband. He and his wife looked after Eric during his early childhood

because they were concerned with how Angus was raising their nephew. Harmsworth committed suicide the year after Frank murdered his daughter.

Morag Stove – Esmerelda’s mother, and Harmsworth’s wife. She and her husband looked after Eric during his early childhood because they were concerned with how Angus was raising their nephew.

Mackenzie – The owner of the local gun and tackle shop.

Mrs. Stuart – The owner of the local café.

Colin Cauldham – Angus’s father and Frank’s grandfather.

TERMS

Sacrifice Pole – A series of poles **Frank** has set up around the island. He gives them power by urinating on them and decorating them with pieces of dead animals. He believes they act as guard posts and form a protective barrier.

Wasp Factory – A contraption **Frank** has created that answers questions about the world. Frank releases a wasp into the factory when he needs an answer, and depending on how it moves through the contraption, he infers a different conclusion. The factory itself is an enormous clock face, with twelve corridors attaching to each of the twelve numerals. At the end of each corridor is a different chamber that will kill the wasp in a different way—by electrocution, by carnivorous plant, by poison, fire, or spider.

Catapult – A slingshot. **Frank**’s first catapult, which is broken in a fight with a buck, is the Black Destroyer.

Black Destroyer – **Frank**’s catapult. The Black Destroyer itself is destroyed in a fight with a rabbit early in the novel.

War Bag – **Frank**’s bag of supplies. It generally contains weapons and bombs, but depending on the occasion he will also add food, medicine, or his camera.

Rabbit Grounds – A patch of hillside in which rabbits burrow.

Buck – A male rabbit.

Adder – A poisonous snake.

The Killer – A young tree that **Frank** has converted into an enormous catapult. He primarily uses it to kill small rodents by firing them across the river to the mainland.

The Bunker – An old concrete pillbox guard post, which formerly housed a machine gun. **Frank** has repaired the rusted door and converted it into a kind of shrine. Inside, he has filled it with candles and the **skull** of Old Saul. This is a safe and sacred space for Frank, and he often retreats here in times of chaos or confusion.

Cordite – A type of explosive. Used by the British Army instead of gunpowder.

The Skull Grounds – The hills behind **Frank**’s home where **Old**

Saul was buried. It has since become an all-purpose pet graveyard.

KBr/Bromide – A chemical compound. Taken orally, it reduces a person's sex drive.



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.



RITUAL AND SUPERSTITION

Rituals help Frank Cauldhame, *The Wasp Factory's* protagonist and narrator, navigate the world. Frank believes that he has no birth certificate, and as a result he does not legally exist. Because of this he is unable to go to school or integrate himself into the local community. Additionally, Frank believes he was castrated as a child, and feels himself to be unlike many of the local boys. This sense of distance, in addition to public ostracization of his family after his brother Eric's institutionalization, causes Frank to feel cut off, both legally and socially, from the outside world. Given the loneliness and turmoil of his home life, Frank turns to rituals and superstition, which give him a sense of power and strength. However, while rituals help him with his day-to-day life, they also have led him to commit horrific acts of violence, even murdering three children because he feels a superstitious compulsion to do so. In the end, rituals and superstition restrict Frank's ability to interact normally with the outside world, as his actions are governed not by a moral compass or any set of societal laws, but by his own invented rituals, and the wisdom of the Wasp Factory.

At the center of Frank's world is a device he calls "the Wasp Factory." He uses it to answer questions about the future. Frank's entire life is centered around this factory, as well as around related shrines he calls Poles and the Bunker. The factory gives him a purpose, and his days are filled either preparing himself to ask it new questions, or attempting to uncover the meaning in its vague responses. The factory itself is an old, giant clock-face on which Frank periodically releases living wasps. The wasp wanders the face before eventually getting trapped in one of twelve chambers attached to the clock face, each of which can kill the insect in a unique way. Depending on which chamber the wasp chooses, and how the wasp dies, Frank can then make an inference about his future. For example, the wasp dies by fire multiple times in the novel, leading him to believe that there will be some kind of fire in his future—either one he must set, or one he must cautiously look out for. Frank explains that "The Wasp Factory is part of the

pattern" of life and death. "Like life itself it is complicated," and as a result Frank believes it "can answer every question because every question is a start looking for an end, and the Factory is about the End — death, no less." Frank dismisses other forms of divination, remarking, "Keep your entrails and sticks and dice and books and birds and voices and pendants and all the rest of that crap; I have the Factory, and it's about now and the future; not the past." Ironically, Frank believes his method of fortune telling to be logical and rational, whereas he rejects other methods, like rolling dice or examining the entrails of animals. However, to the reader, Frank's reliance on the Wasp Factory seems just as illogical and irrational as other, more common, acts of prophecy.

Frank uses his rituals around the Wasp Factory to structure his life, but he also uses rituals and superstition as a justification for committing violent acts against the people, animals, and landscapes around him. Although Frank commits his first murder, that of his cousin Blyth, to get back at the boy for killing his pet rabbits, the rest of his murders are born out of an obsessive need for order and symmetry. Frank kills his little brother Paul because he thinks that "Paul, of course, was Saul," the old family dog he believes castrated him. He explains, "That enemy was—must have been—cunning enough to transfer to the boy. That was why my father chose such a name for my new brother. It was just lucky that I spotted it at such an early age, or God knows what the child might have turned into, with Saul's soul possessing him. But luck, the storm and I introduced him to the Bomb, and that settled his game." Frank murders Paul by having his little brother hit an old bomb they find on the beach, which explodes and kills the child. Frank sees this act as rational and necessary, as he believes Paul is evil incarnate. Frank kills his little cousin Esmerelda for similarly convoluted reasons. Frank explains, "I killed little Esmerelda because I felt I owed it to myself and to the world in general. I had, after all, accounted for two male children and thus done womankind something of a statistical favour. If I really had the courage of my convictions, I reasoned, I ought to redress the balance at least slightly. My cousin was simply the easiest and most obvious target." In his mind, the murder is entirely justified, although readers will still be shocked and confused by his twisted logic. Frank feels that his murders have unbalanced the world, and since he hates women, he feels obligated to right that wrong. Frank cannot stand imbalances of any kind, and so this murder is a kind of obsessive compulsion—a need for ritual and order more than it is a need to kill for killing's sake.

Frank believes that "all our lives are symbols. Everything we do is part of a pattern that we have at least some say in. The strong make their own patterns and influence other people's, the weak have their courses mapped out for them. The weak and the unlucky, and the stupid." Ironically, by creating his own rituals and his own patterns of thought and behavior, Frank feels as though he is taking greater control of his life. However, as the

reader follows Frank through days and weeks of his life, it becomes clear that he is governed by his patterns as much as he governs them. What was initially a useful tool for freeing himself from a repressive society instead became its own complex and repressive belief system that traps him in a cycle of violent acts.



CONTROL, VIOLENCE, AND POWER

Throughout *The Wasp Factory*, members of the central Cauldhame family attempt to exert control over each other and over the wider world. Angus attempts to control his children through the strict rules he imposes on them, and the limitations he places on where they are allowed to go in his household, whereas Eric and Frank both enjoy exerting their power through acts of violence on the landscape, nearby animals, and other children. However, although Frank spends much of the novel setting off bombs, building dams, torturing rabbits, and generally causing mayhem, in the book's final pages Frank realizes that he has been using violence to compensate for his (perceived) castration, attempting to destroy because he felt he would never be able to (pro)create. Violence, then, is an ineffective means to an end—the end being a sense of personal fulfillment and self-control. Although author Iain Banks spends much of the novel describing violent acts committed by his protagonists, the novel is intended to be an indictment of such behavior. In a 2008 essay in the *Guardian*, Banks notes that he intends the book to be an “antimilitarist work,” that nonetheless says “something about the stated and real reasons for brutality.” Considering this, although the novel graphically portrays various acts of both physical and emotional violence, it does so with the intention of showing the futility of such methods of control. As Frank eventually realizes, violence and power are not so closely linked, and his own self-confidence and sense of self-worth cannot only come from destroying other people, places, and things.

Frank, Eric, and Angus all have different types of violence that they use to control the world around them, and each uses violence for different reasons. They are all trying to gain some kind of control and personal power, but their methods and motivations vary widely. Frank and Angus both engage in various methods of non-violent control—most notably through controlling information and names. Angus controlled Frank as a child by home schooling him, and intentionally feeding him misinformation that, until Frank had access to outside resources, kept the child reliant on his father for any and all new information about the world. Additionally, Angus lied to Frank and told him he didn't have a birth certificate, preventing him from going to school or ever fully integrating into the outside world. Most damning, however, is Angus' control of Frank's gender—Angus has fed Frank, who was born Frances, male hormones for the past thirteen years, secretly treating his

daughter as a son. Frank, meanwhile, gains power from giving (often secret) names to objects and places. He ritualistically names his new catapult, for example, but does not reveal the name, explaining, “the catapult ought to be safe so long as nobody knew its name,” believing that the ritual of imbuing it with a personality gives it, and him by extension, additional violent power. Similarly, Frank names the landscape after violent acts he has committed there, claiming the land he lives upon through the death of others who formerly shared it with him. The “Bomb Circle” is where he blew up his little brother Paul with a bomb. “Black Destroyer Hill” is where a rabbit broke his slingshot, Black Destroyer, and where he massacred a family of rabbits in retaliation. Frank often complains that he is not allowed into his father's study, or the basement of their home. Angus locks the door to both rooms in an attempt to control Frank's access to the explosives locked in the basement, and the knowledge about Frank's past (specifically the secret that Frank was not castrated, but instead born female) hidden in the study.

Frank and Eric both enjoy manipulating the world around them physically. This behavior runs the gamut from digging dams to murdering animals and people. Frank particularly enjoys manipulating the landscape by building dams. Although this isn't an explicitly aggressive behavior, it is nonetheless about control. Early in the novel, Frank decides that, instead of playing war, he will build a dam. That this is an alternative to an explicitly violent game suggests it is also about a kind of violence. Frank likes building dams as a way to temporarily subvert the power of nature. Frank understands that “You can never really win against the water,” but enjoys “the elegance of the compromise you strike between where the water wants to go...and what you want to do with it.” Still, as mature as this philosophy sounds, Frank also likes to build miniature villages below the dam, which will eventually be destroyed when the dam breaks. When this occurs, Frank has “a gorgeous feeling of excitement” in his stomach “as I thrilled to the watery havoc about me,” reveling in the violence and destruction of these model cities and imaginary people.

Eric enjoys setting dogs on fire, as well as harassing children and attempting to feed them maggots. Frank believes Eric hates dogs because Eric is attempting to get back at Old Saul, the family dog that both brothers believe castrated Frank as a child. Eric's violence, then, is an attempt to control, or rewrite the past. Frank, meanwhile, most frequently turns to violence as an act of direct retaliation. One of the most shocking acts of violence Frank commits is the massacre of a warren of rabbits. He wipes out the colony with bombs and fire after one rabbit attacks him and breaks his precious slingshot. Similarly, his first murder is an act of retaliation. He murders his cousin Blyth after Blyth kills his and Eric's pet rabbits. Frank's other murders—of children and of animals—are more related to ritual or superstition. He believes Paul was a reincarnation of the

family dog, Old Saul, and therefore must die. He felt obligated to kill Esmerelda because she was a girl, and her death was necessary to help correct the gender imbalance of the previous murders. Many of his animal murders are seen in similarly “practical” terms. When Angus remarks one day “I hope you weren’t out killing any of God’s creatures,” Frank thinks to himself, “Of course I was killing things. How the hell am I supposed to get heads and bodies for the Poles and the Bunker if I don’t kill things?” In addition to the Wasp Factory, Frank has several other shrines set up across the island where he lives, all of which require the parts of dead animals to function. He sees their maintenance as essential to his survival, and therefore the murder of animals is merely a practical, necessary task.

Although violence plays such a large role in *The Wasp Factory*, it rarely has its desired effect long-term. Angus, Frank, and Eric often experience momentary control or peace, but they are unable to permanently alter each other’s behaviors, or the events of the past. Frank’s castration cannot be undone by the murder of dogs, or by the murder of Paul, who Frank believes to be a reincarnation of Old Saul. Angus’s attempts to control his children, specifically Frank, by limiting his access to knowledge and by feeding him male hormones, eventually backfires. Frank finds out the truth, but not before he has lost much of his faith and trust in his father, permanently damaging their relationship. Frank believes that the Wasp Factory, the Bunker, and the Poles, all elements of his complicated fortune-telling philosophy, can tell him about the future and protect him if he sacrifices enough animals to the cause. However, it is never clear that his rituals are anything other than superstition. As a result, dozens if not hundreds of animals have died for nothing.

The Wasp Factory spends many pages outlining the struggles for control and power in which its protagonists are engaged. Sometimes those struggles are bloody and violent, while other times they are primarily psychological. Almost always, however, they backfire or are in vain. By showing violent controlling act after violent controlling act, most ending without the desired outcome, Banks argues that violence, whether physical or psychological, committed against other people, animals, or the landscape itself is an ineffective method of control. In fact, the whole idea of trying to control someone or something else through violence is generally demonstrated to be ineffective. The best relationships in the novel are instead those that rely on communication, such as the one between Jamie and Frank, and on mutual trust and respect, as opposed to a constant desire to dominate and control.



FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

The protagonists of *The Wasp Factory*, half-siblings Frank and Eric, and their father, Angus, are part of a tight family unit. Although Eric has been locked away in a mental institution for many years, he casts a shadow over Frank and Angus, and much of their lives are centered on

memories of him and anxiety around his recent escape. Although Angus and Eric’s internal lives do not receive much space in the novel, Frank, the narrator, is shown to also have a single important friend, Jamie, a man with dwarfism who lives in the nearby town. Frank’s relationships with these three men are the center of his emotional and social life, and although in many ways he is antisocial and arguably sociopathic—as seen in his treatment of women, animals, and strangers—these few close relationships provide him with stability and comfort. [The Wasp Factory](#) argues that even the strangest, most violent people are capable of giving and receiving love and affection, and in fact often rely upon these close relationships to retain any sense of normalcy.

The bonds of family and friendship are important to the novel’s central characters. When their relationships are going well, the protagonists look out for each other, and improve the quality of one another’s lives. Frank has a single friend, Jamie, and although Frank is rarely seen making sacrifices for other people, he genuinely cares for Jamie, and often takes steps to help his friend. For example, they often go to music concerts together, and Frank always lets Jamie sit on his shoulders. Additionally, although Frank hates talking to and interacting with women, he will stand near them for Jamie’s sake, letting his friend remain on his shoulders so he can talk to girls face to face. Jamie often returns the favor. In one particular scene Frank becomes incredibly drunk, and Jamie helps take care of him, leaving a conversation with a woman he is interested in to chase Frank down, and holding him as he vomits on a city street. Frank also discusses his relationship with his brother, Eric. Although Eric is violent and insane, in the end, Frank continues to love and support him. He explains, “he was my brother, and I still loved him in a way. I loved him despite his alternation the way, I suppose, he had loved me despite my disability. That feeling of wanting to protect, I suppose, which women are supposed to feel for the young and men are meant to feel for women.” Frank appreciates that his family and single friend love and care for him in spite of his castration, which he sees as a disability. In turn, he loves them, despite what he sees as their imperfections.

Love between family members is also not always a positive thing. It can be a source of anxiety, or it can lead to dangerous behavior, as individuals attempt to get each other to prove their love, or else act irrationally, ostensibly in the best interests of their loved ones. For example, although Frank loves Eric, Eric cannot always tell. After he has escaped from the asylum where he was imprisoned, he calls home to talk to his brother. He frequently questions their relationship, complaining that their father no longer loves him, but asking Frank to prove his loyalty. In one phone call home Eric complains, “He [Angus] doesn’t love me. You love me, though, don’t you, h’m?” The idea that his brother has somehow moved on or forgotten about him is incredibly stressful to Eric, and further unhinges the already

unstable young man. Similarly, although Angus loved his sons, his love is toxic. He cares for them, but he also controls and manipulates them. Late in the novel, when Frank realizes that he was born a girl named Frances, he sees that his father has been experimenting on him his entire life. This behavior is essentially abusive, but it stems from a desire to keep Frank close to him, and reliant on him.

Although Frank does have a handful of close relationships with people that he genuinely cares about and actively makes sacrifices for, just because someone is related to him does not mean that he will give them any special treatment. Physical or biological proximity are not enough to guarantee that Frank will care for any given person. Instead, Frank has a hierarchy of people that he cares about, and will protect those in his inner circle from anyone he perceives as an outsider, even if that outsider is technically his relative. Significantly, the three children Frank murdered were all related to him. However, in each case he had a justification. Frank kills his cousin Blyth after Blyth sets his and Eric's pet rabbits on fire. This upsets Eric especially, and Frank recalls, "He cried like a girl. I wanted to kill Blyth there and then" for what "he'd done to Eric, *my brother*." Frank cares more about Eric's feelings than about Blyth's life, and, therefore, Blyth must die. Frank also murders his little brother, Paul. Although Frank understands that Paul is his brother, he feels none of the love for him that he feels for Eric. Instead, Frank associates Paul with his castration (because he believes Paul is the incarnation of Old Saul, the family dog) and so Frank thinks that, if he is to move on with his life, Paul has to die. Frank also hates his mother, Agnes. This is related to a more general hatred of women, but also his belief that she indirectly caused both his castration (by giving birth and distracting his father, therefore giving Old Saul time to bite him) and injured his father for life (by running over his leg on her motorbike).

Even the disturbed protagonists of *The Wasp Factory* need love and affection. Though Frank and Eric exhibit sociopathic behavior, they enjoy the company of their friends and family, and require the help and attention of the ones they love. Although Banks never implies that a more robust social network would prevent Eric and Frank from committing such violent acts, it is clear that they are soothed by certain interpersonal connections, and that their violence is often a tool used in service of protecting or avenging each other, a twisted way of demonstrating their love and care.



SANITY AND INSANITY

Brothers Frank and Eric Cauldhame both exhibit behaviors far beyond the bounds of acceptable human conduct. Frank has murdered three children, frequently tortures animals, and believes he can tell the future through interactions with wasps, while Eric likes to set dogs on fire, and was once institutionalized for trying to

feed maggots to local children. Their behavior is objectively abnormal, when not actively criminal, but Frank's unreliable though unemotional and rational narration depicts his behavior especially as sane and reasonable. He provides context for his and Eric's actions, and can point to the root causes for many of their strangest behaviors, causing the reader to wonder about the boundaries of sanity versus insanity, and who is truly sane or insane. In a 2008 reflection on his novel in the *Guardian*, author Ian Banks notes that he began writing the book as "something resembling [science fiction]. The island could be envisaged as a planet, and Frank, the protagonist, almost as an alien." The book was written in the "write-what-you-know school but with a dose of...hyperbole," by which he meant that violence and horror were exaggerated, but born out of the more recognizable violence and experimentation of childhood. As a result, the novel calls into question the definition and spectrum of madness, asking what behavior truly qualifies as insane, and who has the right to apply that definition to another person.

Frank, the narrator, makes himself out to be entirely sane. It is up to the reader to interpret his actions as normal or abnormal, because Frank always frames himself as logical and rational. Much of Frank's behavior is clearly insane. He believes that a system of Poles (animal skulls mounted on sticks), his Bunker (a room full of animal skulls and candles where he holds soothsaying rituals), and the Wasp Factory (a maze-like clock that tells the future based on how the wasps who navigate its surface die) can help him tell the future. He has murdered three of his relatives. He enjoys torturing animals. Still, he offers the reader justifications for his actions, and the book acts as a kind of explanation, if not apology, for a lifetime of aberrant behavior. Frank sees the fact that he has never been institutionalized as a sign that he is less disturbed than his brother. Early in the novel he notes, "I'm not Eric; I'm me and I'm here and that's all there is to it. I don't bother people and they had best not bother me if they know what's good for them. I don't go giving people presents of burning dogs, or frighten the local toddlers with handfuls of maggots and mouthfuls of worms. The people in the town say 'Oh, he's not all there, you know,' but that's just their little joke...I don't mind." However, Frank has murdered three people, whereas Eric, although clearly disturbed, primarily killed animals and only tormented the living. Still, it is important for Frank to juxtapose himself with his brother and ignore outside indications that they might be equally insane, even if Frank has more self-control and discretion.

Eric does not have the benefit of explaining his behavior to readers as a first-person narrator. Instead, his life is relayed via Frank, who is also possibly insane, and who is also interested in making himself look rational in contrast to Eric, who he believes has entirely lost his mind. Eric is as interesting a foil to Frank as he is a character on his own. Many of the descriptions of his

madness are set in contrast to either Eric's own sane childhood, or else Frank's self-perceived sanity. Unlike Frank, Eric spent most of his life as an ordinary, non-violent child. Frank remembers him as the "clever, kind, excitable boy he had been," contrasting him to who he is now, "a force of fire and disruption...like a mad angel, head swarming with echoing screams of madness and delusion." Eric, who was once an ordinary child turned doctor in training, faced a series of setbacks in medical school. Already struggling with drinking and a recent heartbreak, Eric was completely broken by the death of a toddler under his care, whose brain, he discovered, had been eaten by maggots. After this, Frank reports, Eric was sent "flying back out to something else: an amalgam of both his earlier self (but satanically reversed) and a more worldly-wise man, an adult damaged and dangerous, confused and pathetic and manic all at once. He reminded me of a hologram, shattered; with the whole image contained within one spear-like shard, at once splinter and entirety." Although Frank presents Eric's breakdown in different ways, this description suggests that this kind of collapse could happen to anyone—the seeds of his insanity were in him all along, and were released by repeated emotional trauma, which created not a new personality, but an inverse of his existing one. Later in the novel Frank tries to literally get into Eric's mind, projecting himself telepathically into the head of his brother. While there, Frank senses "a lunatic strength of total commitment...which only the mad are continually capable of." He believes "no normal brain...could match that marshaling of forces," and though he acknowledges that his own brain is "far from normal," he still sees himself as far removed from Eric's lunacy. Yet even as Frank calls his own brother insane, he also defends him from attacks by the public. He explains Eric to Jamie one evening, relating, "he's crazy but he's very cunning. He's not *stupid*. He was always very bright, right from the start. He was reading early..." Jamie responds, "But he is insane, all the same," and Frank counters, "That's what *they* say, but I don't know." Although his behavior "looks pretty crazy...sometimes I think maybe he's up to something, maybe he's not really crazy at all. Perhaps he just got fed up acting normal and decided to act crazy instead, and they locked him up because he went too far." In contrast to other theories regarding Eric's madness, here Frank suggests that Eric was never truly crazy at all. He seems to define insanity as a lack of control, and argues that Eric remained sane because he remained in control of his behavior, deciding to act out as a choice. This idea likely appeals to Frank because he feels that his own abnormal actions are also choices, not compulsions, which would allow him to continue to conceptualize himself as merely strange, and not insane.

By investigating the idea of sanity and insanity, Banks first calls into question the rigidity of those categories. He shows how Eric transformed from a kind, altruistic child and doctor to a violent sadist, and how in that transformation he retained some aspects of his personality, as well as his core devotion to his

family, and specifically his brother, Frank. Additionally, by setting up Frank and Eric as foils, the reader is deprived of any objectively sane characters who can function as a litmus test for sanity. Instead, Frank and Eric are both seen to act rationally occasionally and irrationally occasionally, blurring the borders of the traditional sane/insane dichotomy.



SEXISM AND GENDER ROLES

Francis Leslie Cauldhame, known as Frank to his family and friends, believes himself to be a teenage boy who was accidentally castrated by the family dog, Old Saul, at age three. Frank identifies as male, although his missing male genitalia, and the resultant lack of male sex characteristics (like facial hair or muscle tone), are sources of anxiety and frustration. Because he doesn't feel himself to be fully masculine, Frank spends much of his time considering the difference between men and women. In his mind, he has developed a strict hierarchy, where men are superior and women are inferior. Although he acknowledges that no one is exclusively masculine or feminine, and everyone has some masculine qualities and some feminine qualities, Frank has cultivated a hatred for the feminine. However, although Frank is the narrator, and often writes about his sexist views, author Iain Banks makes his protagonist's speech so extreme as to be satire. This satirization of misogynist speech, combined with a last-minute revelation regarding his own gender, which makes Frank realize the holes in his misogynist worldview, lends itself to a reading of *The Wasp Factory* as a feminist (or at least anti-sexist) novel, in which Banks argues that men and women are in fact equally capable, and deserve equal treatment.

Frank's sense of his own masculinity is complicated. He believes that the family dog, Old Saul, accidentally castrated him when he was a toddler, and now he has no male genitalia. Many of his ideas of gender come from his own tenuous sex—he believes himself to be male but lacks many of the male sex characteristics that he would use to define his own masculinity. Frank thinks of himself as a man, noting, "I consider myself an honorary man." However, the "honorary" implies that he feels he is missing out on some essential aspect of maleness. Frank also remarks at another point in the novel, "I am not a full man, and nothing can ever alter that; but I am me, and I regard that as compensation enough." Although he feels like less than a man, he still feels like a complete human being, and has begun to separate himself from strict ideas about gender and sex. Still, Frank compensates for his castration through violence, and through a calculated hatred of women. He sees violence as the domain of men, which he can claim through action if not biology. At one point he lays out his philosophy: "Both sexes can do one thing especially well; women can give birth and men can kill. We—I consider myself an honorary man—are the harder sex. We strike out, push through, thrust and take. The fact that it is only an analogue of all this sexual terminology I am capable

of does not discourage me. I can feel it in my bones, in my uncastrated genes.”

Frank has a complex philosophy regarding the differences between men and women. Early in the novel Frank announces, “my greatest enemies are Women and the Sea. These things I hate. Women because they are weak and stupid and live in the shadow of men and are nothing compared to them...” Although he has interacted with very few women, he nonetheless believes them to be inferior. This likely comes from a desire to separate himself from women abstractly, as, lacking male genitalia, he has difficulty separating himself from them physically. His view of women also likely comes from resentment towards his mother, Agnes. “I can’t remember my mother, because if I did I’d hate her. As it is, I hate her name, the idea of her.” He hates that she let Eric stay with relatives during his early childhood, and he blames her for returning to the island where she gave birth to his little brother Paul, during which time his father, Angus, was distracted and Frank was bitten by Old Saul. Even as Frank draws strict distinctions between men and women, he acknowledges that men can have feminine traits and women can have masculine traits. He discusses this in regard to Eric, who he believes was too fragile, and too feminine. Frank believes that women “cannot withstand really major things happening to them; they get raped or their loved one dies, and they go to pieces, go crazy and commit suicide, or just pine away until they die. Of course, I realise not all of them will react that way, but obviously it’s the rule, and the ones who don’t obey it are in the minority.” Frank sees in Eric “a weakness, a fundamental flaw that a real man should not have had,” which allowed him to have the breakdown that eventually led to his institutionalization.

In the book’s final chapter, Frank is revealed to have been born a biological woman. Here, it becomes clear that much of Frank’s resentment of women stemmed from Frank’s own insecurity regarding his gender. Frank breaks into Angus’s office and finds male hormones and tampons. Initially confused, Frank confronts Angus, who explains that Frank was born as Frances. Old Saul did attack Frances (who uses female pronouns after her discovery), but the dog did not castrate her, as she always had female genitals. Angus nevertheless took the accident as an opportunity to experiment. He began feeding Frances male hormones, and raising his daughter as a son. Surprisingly, Frances’s revelation does not dramatically change her identity. For someone who had engaged in such misogynist thinking, Frances feels that she is “the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done, the same (small) achievements, the same (appalling) crimes to *my* name.” In fact, Frances is relieved to understand her true identity, and the root of her various obsessions. Frances realizes that the desire to murder and commit acts of violence came from a belief that she had experienced a “great hurt,” a “literal cutting off from society’s mainland.” Unable to create life (by giving birth, as

many female bodied people can), Frances instead became obsessed with death. Now that Frances fully understands the past, she feels that finally the “journey begins.” The novel ends with Frances cheerily anticipating Eric’s surprise at coming home to meet his brother, but instead finding he has a sister instead.

Although Frank spends much of the novel disparaging women, his misogynistic ideas are never particularly convincing. Following the climax, where Frances finally understands that her aggression and violence was not due to some inherent masculinity, but instead overcompensation for perceived femininity, her entire philosophy falls apart. Men are not inherently better or stronger, and women are not inherently weaker and more fragile. Instead, women and men can both have traditionally feminine or masculine traits, which is what makes them complex, interesting individuals. Frank/Frances, the novel’s protagonist and narrator, becomes the poster child for complex individuals with male and female characteristics. Frances is able to see herself clearly for who she is—a woman forced to be a man—instead of who Angus claimed she was — a man whose masculinity was stolen from him. This self-knowledge is, in the end, more important than any reductive ideas of masculinity or femininity. Frances is happy to drop any theories about the superiority of men. Instead, she is pleased to understand who she is and why she’s behaved the way she has, and to admit that she, like all men and women, contains both violence and softness within her.



SYMBOLS

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



OLD SAUL'S SKULL

Old Saul, the family’s dog, attacked Frank when Frank was a small child, and supposedly castrated him. Angus immediately killed Old Saul and buried him in the Skull Grounds. Ten years later, Frank excavated Old Saul’s skull, and now he uses it as a tool in his rituals. To him, the skull represents the power taken from him when he lost his genitals and, in his mind, his ability to grow into an adult man. By physically claiming the object, Frank can reclaim some of his lost power. In general, then, Old Saul’s skull symbolizes Frank’s obsessive need to use rituals and objects he sees as powerful to gain a sense of control over his life, and to claim some of the potential he feels was stolen from him.



THE SPECIMEN JAR

In the book’s final chapters, Frank breaks into Angus’s office and discovers what he thinks are his

genitals preserved in a jar. Seeing what he believes to be his own testicles preserved like this presents Frank with the fullness of his loss. The missing genitals represent more than a physical injury—to Frank, they represent a stolen future. His vision of himself as a man is different than who he currently is, and has the potential to be. However, in the final chapters Angus smashes the jar, revealing the genitals to be clay. Frank was born Frances and never had any male genitals to begin with. The destruction of the jar then becomes the end of the lie that was Frances's life, freeing Frances to live a life as a woman if she chooses to.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *The Wasp Factory* published in 1998.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ ‘I hope you weren’t out killing any of God’s creatures.’

I shrugged at him again. Of course I was out killing things. How the hell am I supposed to get heads and bodies for the Poles and the Bunker if I don’t kill things? There just aren’t enough natural deaths. You can’t explain that sort of thing to people, though.

‘Sometimes I think you’re the one who should be in the hospital, not Eric.’ He was looking at me from under his dark brows, his voice low. Once, that sort of talk would have scared me, but not now. I’m nearly seventeen, and not a child. Here in Scotland I’m old enough to get married without my parent’s permission, and have been for a year. There wouldn’t be much point to me getting married perhaps — I’ll admit that — but the principle is there.

Besides, I’m not Eric; I’m me and I’m here and that’s all there is to it. I don’t bother people and they had best not bother me if they know what’s good for them. I don’t go giving people presents of burning dogs, or frighten the local toddlers with handfuls of maggots and mouthfuls of worms. The people in the town may say ‘Oh, he’s not all there, you know,’ but that’s just their little joke (and sometimes, to rub it in, they don’t point to their heads as they say it); I don’t mind. I’ve learned to live with my disability, and learned to live without other people, so it’s no skin off my nose.

Related Characters: Angus Cauldhame, Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Frank spends much of his time terrorizing the local animals on his island home. He believes he needs their skulls and corpses in order to give power to the Sacrifice Poles, which guard the island, and the Bunker, which is a site of ritual for him. Although Frank has been killing animals for years, his father Angus is only aware enough of the behavior to chastise his son, but not involved enough to take any action or dole out any punishment.

Angus’s comment is as much an attempt to control Frank as it is a genuine expression of sentiment. Just like his comment that Frank, not Eric, should be hospitalized, Angus is less concerned with Frank’s behavior than he is with keeping his son in line and in fear. Unfortunately for Angus, Frank sees through his manipulative games. Although once the idea of being hospitalized would have scared him, he now feels confident that he can hide any of his more troubling behaviors from the outside world.

Frank makes a clear distinction between himself and Eric. Although at other points he’ll argue that he is sane while Eric is insane here, he simply argues that he is able to control his behavior, whereas Eric is not. He argues that Eric was hospitalized not because what he did was unacceptable, but because he did it publically, likely understanding that if his own carefully concealed actions came to light, Frank would be treated as just as unhinged as his brother.

Note also Frank’s oblique reference to his own (supposed) castration, which people in the town seem to mock him for by saying “he’s not all there” and then pointing to their genitals.

●● I thought again of the Sacrifice Poles; more deliberately this time, picturing each one in turn, remembering their positions and their components, seeing in my mind what those sightless eyes looked out to, and flickering through each view like a security guard changing cameras on a monitor screen. I felt nothing amiss; all seemed well. My dead sentries, those extensions of me which came under my power through the simple but ultimate surrender of death, sensed nothing to harm me or the island.

I opened my eyes and put the bedside light back on. I looked at myself in the mirror on the dressing-table over on the other side of the room. I was lying on top of the bed-covers, naked apart from my underpants.

I'm too fat. It isn't that bad, and it isn't my fault – but, all the same, I don't like the way I'd like to look. Chubby, that's me. Strong and fit, but still too plump. I want to look dark and menacing; the way I ought to look, the way I should look, the way I might have looked if I hadn't had my little accident. Looking at me, you'd never guess I'd killed three people. It isn't fair.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Old Saul

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Frank maintains power (or the belief of his own power) over the island through his network of ritual objects and locations, including the Sacrifice Poles, the Bunker, and the Wasp Factory. Not only does he believe the Poles offer some kind of spiritual protection to the island, but Frank almost magically uses them as a surveillance system. Although the novel primarily engages with realism as opposed to fantasy, the reader can see Frank's web of protection as his own private superstitious fantasy.

In the second half of the quote Frank remarks upon his own body. Frank believes the family dog, Old Saul, castrated him when he was a child, which affected his normal physical and sexual development. Because he was unable to produce testosterone, the male hormone responsible for male sexual development, Frank feels his body is softer and, although he does not say it explicitly here, more feminine than he feels it was meant to be, and certainly less masculine than had he grown up with his testicles intact. Frank associates a masculine appearance with violence and death. As a result, he feels his innocuous, sexless appearance is at odds with his status as a murderer.

Chapter 2 Quotes

●● I realise that you can never really win against the water; it will always triumph in the end, seeping and soaking and building up and undermining and overflowing. All you can really do is construct something that will divert it or block its way for a while; persuade it to do something it doesn't really want to do. The pleasure comes from the elegance of the compromise you strike between where the water wants to go (guided by gravity and the medium it's moving over) and what you want to do with it.

Actually I think life has few pleasures to compare with dam-building. Give me a good broad beach with a reasonable slope and not too much seaweed, and a fair-sized stream, and I'll be happy all day, any day.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Much of Frank's time is spent exerting control over the world around him. Relatively powerless in his day to day life – Frank has no birth certificate, which traps him on his island home, prevents him from getting a job, and from going to school – he instead enjoys ruling nature. He frequently kills and tortures animals, and has set up machines, specifically the Wasp Factory, that he believes give him power over time, and a window into the future. Although Frank understands the limits of his power, and that water is a force greater than he is, he nonetheless receives joy from temporarily exerting his own control over it, and instilling in himself a sense of great power.

...it was a Sign. I was sure of that. The whole fraught episode must signify something. My automatic response might just have had something to do with the fire that the Factory had predicted, but deep inside I knew that that wasn't all there was to it, and that there was more to come. The sign was in the whole thing, not just the unexpected ferocity of the buck I'd killed, but also in my furious, almost unthinking response and the fate of the innocent rabbits who took the brunt of my wrath.

It also meant something looking back as well as forward. The first time I murdered it was because of rabbits meeting a fiery death, and meeting that fiery death from the nozzle of a Flame-thrower virtually identical to the one I had used to exact my revenge on the warren. It was all too close and perfect. Events were shaping up faster and worse than I could have expected. I was in danger of losing control of the situation. The Rabbit Grounds – that supposed happy hunting-ground – had shown it could happen.

From the smaller to the greater, the patterns always hold true, and the Factory has taught me to watch out for them and respect them.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

After a male rabbit attacks Frank, he decides to destroy the entire Rabbit Grounds. Using a flamethrower, he forces rabbits out from underground, and then lights them on fire. The massacre of the rabbit warren is a direct act of retaliation against the first rabbit for charging him and for breaking his beloved slingshot, The Black Destroyer. However, Frank believes that his outsized reaction means something more, and turns to the Wasp Factory to find meaning in his behavior.

Frank lives his life as though everything has a symbolic meaning, which likely comes from his need to keep his world in perfect order. Frank has a need to make sure that everything in his life is ordered and symmetrical, maintaining a careful morning and evening ritual, and, as he notes later in the novel, scuffing his right shoe if he accidentally scuffs his left. This is a kind of obsessive-compulsive behavior, which also inspires him to look for meaning in anything in his life that is out of order. Frank loves being in control, and by seeking to explain anything anomalous in his own behavior or in the world around him, he is able to maintain his feeling of power.

Eric in particular was very upset. He cried like a girl. I wanted to kill Blyth there and then; the hiding he got from his father, my dad's brother James, was not enough as far as I was concerned, not for what he'd done to Eric, *my brother*. Eric was inconsolable, desperate with grief because he had made the thing Blyth had used to destroy our beloved pets. He always was a bit sentimental, always the sensitive one, the bright one; until his nasty experience everybody was sure he would go far. Anyway, that was the start of the Skull Grounds, the area of the big, old, partially earthed-over dune behind the house where all our pets went when they died. The burned rabbits started that. Old Saul was before them, but that was just a one-off thing.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Old Saul, Blyth Cauldhame, Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

When Eric and Frank were children, their cousin, Blyth, killed their pet rabbits using a flamethrower that Eric himself had made. Afterwards, Frank remembers how devastated Eric was by the deaths. This moment and this memory were hugely important to Frank's development. It was the beginning of the Skull Grounds – the pet graveyard behind his home where Old Saul was buried, and from where Old Saul would eventually be exhumed – and it was also the beginning of his murder streak, as Frank made up his mind to kill Blyth because of how his cousin had hurt his brother.

This passage illustrates the close but complicated relationship between Frank and Eric. Although Eric was the older brother, he was more sensitive (as Frank often notes, more “feminine”) and more likely to be upset and hurt by the world around him. As a result, Frank felt protective of Eric, and felt that it was his responsibility to hurt anyone who hurt his big brother.

Chapter 3 Quotes

●● My greatest enemies are Women and the Sea. These things I hate. Women because they are weak and stupid and live in the shadow of men and are nothing compared to them, and the Sea because it has always frustrated me, destroying what I have built, washing away what I have left, wiping clean the marks I have made. And I'm not at all sure the Wind is blameless, either.

The Sea is a sort of mythological enemy, and I make what you might call sacrifices to it in my soul, fearing it a little, respecting it as you're supposed to, but in many ways treating it as an equal. It does things to the world, and so do I; we should both be feared. Women...well, women are a bit too close for comfort as far as I'm concerned. I don't even like having them on the island, not even Mrs Clump, who comes every week on a Saturday to clean the house and deliver our supplies. She's ancient, and sexless the way the very old and the very young are, but she'll still *been* a woman, and I resent that, for my own good reason.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Agnes, Mrs. Clump

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the first instances of Frank's hatred of women coming to the surface. Frank hates women because, as he alludes to later in the quote, they are "too close for comfort." Because Frank believes he has been castrated and has no male genitalia, he feels insecure about his status as a man. As a result, he feels the need to actively separate himself from women, and he does this by othering them in his mind, and turning them into a foreign enemy.

Frank hates the sea for a different reason. Whereas women are almost too similar, but something he feels he can dominate, the sea is something strange and alien that he feels is more powerful than he is. Frank loves to be in control, but it is impossible to fight against the ocean for long. Frank's love of building dams is a manifestation of his desire to fight the unstoppable, inevitable flow of water to the ocean. By building dams, he is able to control the water for a while, although he understands he can never stop its movement for long.

●● I went into town that day, bought an extra plastic model of a Jaguar, made the kit up that afternoon and ceremonially blew it to pieces on the roof of the Bunker with a small pipe-bomb. Two weeks later a Jaguar crashed into the sea of Nairn, though the pilot ejected in time. I'd like to think the Power was working then, but I suspect it was coincidence; high-performance jets crash so often it was no real surprise my symbolic and their real destruction came within a fortnight of each other.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

After two Jaguar fighter jets surprise Frank, causing a wasp to sting him, he makes this voodoo doll as retribution. He's at once superstitious, believing in the power of will and mystical coincidence, but also proud of his intelligence, rationality, and sanity. So although he will happily buy the plastic model and destroy it, half believing it has some real world influence, he also knows in the back of his mind that he likely had no control over the actual Jaguar accidents.

This mirrors a similar incident later in the novel. As he bikes home from a late night at the pub, Frank sees mysterious lights over the ocean. At first transfixed by them, he wonders if they're something magical or alien, but then realizes they're the gas-flares of oil-rigs in the North Sea. He prides himself on solving the mystery, noting "somebody both less logical and less imaginative would have jumped to the conclusion that what they had seen were UFOs." In this moment, as in the situation with the Jaguar, Frank tries to see himself at once as intellectually flexible, but too smart to be fooled by the idea of magic or superstition.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛☛ The rocks of the Bomb Circle usually get me thinking and this time was no exception, especially considering the way I'd lain down inside them like some Christ or something, opened to the sky dreaming of death. Well, Paul went about as quickly as you can go; I was certainly humane that time. Blyth had lots of time to realise what was happening, jumping about the Snake Park screaming as the frantic and enraged snake bit his stump repeatedly, and little Esmerelda must have had some inkling what was going to happen to her as she was slowly blown away. My brother Paul was five when I killed him. I was eight. It was over two years after I had subtracted Blyth with an adder that I found an opportunity to get rid of Paul. Not that I bore him any personal ill-will; it was simply that I knew he couldn't stay. I knew I'd never be free of the dog until he was gone (Eric, poor well-meaning bright but ignorant Eric, thought I still wasn't, and I just couldn't tell him why I was).

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Blyth Cauldhame, Old Saul, Paul Cauldhame, Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel Frank explains exactly how, and why, he committed each of his murders. Frank kills Paul because he believes that Paul is a reincarnation of the family dog Old Saul, who castrated him as a child. Frank states this more explicitly later in the novel, but this is one of the first instances where he makes this connection clear.

Frank believes that the fact that Paul was born the day Old Saul died, and the fact that Paul and Saul have similar names is evidence enough that Paul is a reincarnation of the dog. As a result, Frank believes it is only logical to kill Paul, thereby killing Saul and finally enacting revenge on the creature he believes took his manhood from him. In this moment Frank also implies what he will later make more explicit — that Eric is also trying to enact revenge on Old Saul for what he did to Frank. However, Eric has turned his revenge upon all dogs, which is why he so enthusiastically tortures them. Frank believes Eric to be "well-meaning" but "ignorant." His own superstition, which led to the death of his little brother is, in his mind, totally logical. In contrast, Eric's ritual dog murders are insane and unnecessary. Still, Frank appreciates that Eric is thinking of him, even if Eric's desire to avenge and retroactively protect his little brother are futile.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☛☛ I killed little Esmerelda because I felt I owed it to myself and to the world in general. I had, after all, accounted for two male children and thus done womankind something of a statistical favour. If I really had the courage of my convictions, I reasoned, I ought to redress the balance at least slightly. My cousin was simply the easiest and most obvious target.

Again, I bore her no personal ill-will. Children aren't real people, in the sense that they are not small males and females but a separate species which will (probably) grow into one or the other in due time.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Esmerelda Stove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Frank's third murder was the direct result of his interest in patterns, and his obsession with keeping the world orderly and balanced. Because he had murdered two male children, he felt he had thrown the world out of balance, and needed to correct this wrong. Likely related to this is his hatred of women. Frank is especially concerned about having killed two male children because he believes men are inherently better than women, and so he has accidentally left the world with more women, who he despises, than men, who he respects.

Frank's hatred of women comes from many places. Partially he resents his mother, who he believes is partially responsible for his castration, because she distracted his father while Old Saul mauled him. He also feels that because he has no male genitalia, he is anatomically similar to women, and therefore must distance himself in other ways — in this case, by drawing a rigid distinction between men and women and setting up a dichotomy that places him on the more powerful, masculine side.

●● I had decided I would try to murder Esmerelda before she and her parents even arrived for their holiday. Eric was away on a school cruise, so there would only be me and her. It would be risky, so soon after Paul's death, but I had to do something to even up the balance. I could feel it in my guts, in my bones; I *had* to. It was like an itch, something I had no way of resisting, like when I walk along a pavement in Porteneil and I accidentally scuff one heel on a paving stone. I *have* to scuff the other foot as well, with near as possible the same weight, to feel good again... In a whole range of ways like that I try to keep balanced, though I have no idea why. It is simply something that must be done; and, in the same way, I had to get rid of *some* woman, tip the scales back in the other direction.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Blyth Cauldhame, Paul Cauldhame, Eric Cauldhame, Esmerelda Stove

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

As Frank has explained earlier in the chapter, and continues to explain in this quotation, he felt the need to murder Esmerelda to correct the gender imbalance of his murders. After killing two boys (Paul and Blyth), he feels the need to kill a girl to help balance the world out. As Frank explains, he has a sort of obsessive-compulsive need to keep his world symmetrical, scuffing one shoe if he scuffs the other, and his need to murder symmetrically is just an extension of this need. What's especially disturbing is that the need to have even sensations on one's body is a relatively common and innocuous compulsion, but Frank twists this quirk and monstrously exaggerates it.

●● I lay in bed. Soon I would have to try some long-range fixing of this problem. It was the only way. I'd have to try to influence things through the root cause of it all: Old Saul himself. Some heavy medicine was required if Eric wasn't to wreck single-handedly the entire Scottish telephone network and decimate the country's canine population. First, though, I would have to consult the Factory again.

It wasn't exactly my fault, but I was totally involved, and I might just be able to do something about it, with the skull of the ancient hound, the Factory's help and a little luck. How susceptible my brother would be to whatever vibes I could send out was a question I didn't like too much to think about, given the state of his head, but I had to do something.

I hoped the little puppy *had* got well away. Dammit, *I* didn't hold all dogs to blame for what happened. Old Saul was the culprit, Old Saul had gone down in our history and my personal mythology as the Castrator, but thanks to the little creatures who flew the creek I had him in my power now.

Eric was crazy all right, even if he was my brother. He was lucky to have somebody sane who still liked him.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Paul Cauldhame, Old Saul, Eric Cauldhame

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

After Eric calls Frank at home, Frank is left to mull over the strange phone call. Eric seemed to have had a dog with him in the phone booth, which he had planned to kill, but had maybe escaped. Frank and Eric both blame Old Saul for Frank's castration, and both sought to take revenge. Frank took revenge by killing his little brother, Paul, who he believed was a reincarnation of Old Saul. Eric, meanwhile, kills dogs indiscriminately, seeing each one as a representation of his long-deceased childhood pet.

In a darkly humorous irony, Frank sees Eric's behavior as "crazy." He believes that he has taken all the revenge he can on Old Saul, both by murdering Paul and by excavating Old Saul's skull and using it in his rituals, thereby taking Old Saul's power from him and harnessing it. Frank condescendingly reflects that Eric is wasting his time killing dogs, and believes that if he were to explain to Frank how he murdered Paul/Old Saul years ago, Eric would understand and stop.

Frank often compares his own sanity to Eric's. He sees Eric as insane, and himself as sane in contrast. However, Frank is also a murderer who believes the spirit of his dog inhabited

his little brother. He is only saner than Eric because he is able to control, or conceal his impulses. However, he enjoys the superiority and freedom that comes with appearing to be the sane brother, at least to the outside world.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛ Before I realised the birds were my occasional allies, I used to do unkind things to them: fish for them, shoot them, tie them to stakes at low tide, put electrically detonated bombs under their nests, and so on.

My favourite game was capturing two using bait and a net, then tying them together. Usually they were gulls and I tied thick orange nylon fishing-line to a leg each, then sat on a dune and watched. Sometimes I would have a gull and a crow but, whether they were the same species or not, they quickly found out they couldn't fly properly – though the twine was long enough in theory – and ended up (after a few hilariously clumsy aerobatics) fighting.

With one dead, though, the survivor – usually injured – wasn't really any better off, attached to a heavy corpse instead of a live opponent. I have seen a couple of determined ones peck the leg off their defeated adversary, but most were unable, or didn't think of it, and got caught by the rats during the night.

I had other games, but that one always struck me as one of my more mature inventions; symbolic somehow, and with a nice blend of callousness and irony.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

The author Iain Banks has noted that he saw the violence enacted by Frank and Eric as extreme extensions of the violence enacted by young children and teens all over the world. This brief reflection by Frank, where he describes the various ways used to torture birds before realizing they could be useful for his schemes, is an extrapolation on more normalized childhood violence. For example, many children will collect insects and put them in jars, and occasionally the insects will fight with each other. Other times, the insects will die from lack of food or air. Kids will squish ants, or else burn them with magnifying glasses. Other kids will harass family pets. (This is not to say that this kind of low-grade animal abuse is acceptable, but merely that it is common.)

By exaggerating a more widespread cruelty to animals, Frank's violent behavior is made to seem horrific, but not unfamiliar.

☛ ‘I’ve told you; he’s crazy but he’s very cunning. He’s not *stupid*. He was always very bright, right from the start. He was reading early and getting all his relations and uncles and aunts to say “Och, they’re old so young these days” and things like that before I was even born.’

‘But he is insane, all the same.’

‘That’s what *they* say, but I don’t know.’

‘What about the dogs? And the maggots?’

‘OK, that looks pretty crazy, I’ll admit, but sometimes I think maybe he’s up to something, maybe he’s not really crazy after all. Perhaps he just got fed up acting normal and decided to act crazy instead, and they locked him up because he went too far.’

‘And he’s mad at them,’ Jamie grinned, drinking his pint as I annihilated various dodging, multi-coloured spacecraft on the screen. I laughed. ‘Yeah, if you like. Oh, I don’t know. Maybe he really is crazy. Maybe I am. Maybe everybody is. Or at least all of my family.’

‘Now you’re talking.’

I looked up at him for a second, then smiled. ‘It does occur to me sometimes. My dad’s an eccentric...I suppose I am, too.’ I shrugged, concentrated on the space battle again. ‘But it doesn’t bother me. There are a lot madder people about the place.’

Related Characters: Jamie, Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Angus Cauldhame, Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Frank and his friend Jamie discuss Eric. Although Angus has been keeping Eric's escape a secret, Frank feels the need to talk about his brother with his closest (and only) friend. Even as they discuss his brother's insanity, Frank remains loyal to his kin. He reminds Jamie that Eric is crazy but “cunning,” a brilliant man in spite of everything.

Frank also plays the devil's advocate, hypothesizing that Eric isn't so crazy after all. In the previous chapters Eric has called Frank several times, each call stranger than the last. Frank has first-hand experience of how unhinged his

brother is, and so it's unlikely that he is serious here when he makes a case for his brother's sanity. Alternately, Frank fully recognizes Eric's insane actions, but also recognizes that he engages in similar behaviors. Logically, if Eric is insane for killing dogs and torturing children with maggots, Frank must also be insane for murdering children and torturing animals. Therefore, it is in his best interest to argue that Eric is sane, because then it means he must be too.

Still, towards the end of the quote, Frank jokes that perhaps his whole family is "eccentric." He clearly recognizes his father's, and his own, abnormal behaviors, but understands that the difference between being punished for one's deviance and being allowed to live one's life is not acting out and not getting caught.

☛ 'The madder people. A lot of them seem to be leaders of countries or religions or armies. The real loonies.'

'Aye, I suppose.' I said thoughtfully, watching the battle on the screen upside down. 'Or maybe they're the only sane ones. After all, they're the ones with all the power and riches. They're the ones who get everybody else to do what they want them to do... So, given things being the way they are, who's to say they're the loonies because they don't do things the way Joe Punter thinks they ought to be done? If they thought the same way as Joe Punter, they'd *be* Joe Punter, and somebody else would be having all the fun.'

'Survival of the fittest.'

Related Characters: Jamie, Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Jamie and Frank discuss Frank's brother Eric, and the idea of what it means to be sane or insane. Although it's unclear if either man fully believes their argument, they treat it earnestly as a thought experiment. Jamie proposes that the craziest people are the people who are in charge — presidents, generals, prime ministers — as high-profile jobs often require outsized confidence and creative, outside-the-box thinking. Frank pushes back that perhaps the people in power are the only people who are truly sane. He equates a lack of sanity with a lack of control, and a lack

of control with a lack of power. By this logic, the common people are powerless because they are insane, and the powerful sane enough to gain power and control. This perhaps partially explains Frank's periodic insistence that he's not as crazy as his brother. By insisting that he is sane, he remains in control of his life and destiny, something very important to him.

☛ All our lives are symbols. Everything we do is part of a pattern we have at least some say in. The strong make their own patterns and influence other people's, the weak have their courses mapped out for them. The weak and the unlucky, and the stupid. The Wasp Factory is part of the pattern because it is a part of life and — even more so — part of death. Like life it is complicated, so all the components are there. The reason it can answer questions is because every question is a start looking for an end, and the Factory is about the End — death, no less. Keep your entrails and sticks and dice and books and birds and voices and pendants and all the rest of that crap; I have the Factory, and it's about now and the future; not the past.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Jamie

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is a reflection on a conversation Frank and Jamie had earlier in the chapter. The two argued about who in society was insane, with Jamie wondering if the most powerful people are craziest, and Frank suggesting that the powerful are the only truly sane ones, with common people being crazy, and unable to gain power or control over their lives.

Here, Frank draws a parallel between power and patterns. He sees signs and symbols in everything, and reveals that he feels the need to pay attention to these patterns because he believes that the man who masters them will be in control of his own life and potentially the lives of others. Much of Frank's behavior is driven by a desire to gain power and influence over his little slice of the world, and in this moment he explicitly reveals how his personal mythology feeds back into his quest for power and control.

He believes the Wasp Factory to be all knowing because it is an instrument of death, and all questions are looking for an End, and death is always the end. Frank contrasts his

Factory with more primitive, superstitious methods of fortune telling like dice, acting as though his Factory is based on science and logic, while these other devices are obviously untrustworthy. However, to the outside observer, Frank's Factory seems just as fantastic, superstitious, and, perhaps, insane, as these other fortunetelling techniques.

... I would try to contact Eric through the skull of Old Saul. We are brothers, after all, even if only half so, and we are both men, even if I am only half so. At some deep level we understand each other, even though he is mad and I am sane. We even had that link I had not thought of until recently, but which might come in useful now: we have both killed, and used our heads to do it.

It occurred to me then, as it has before, that that is what men are really *for*. Both sexes can do one thing specially well; women can give birth and men can kill. We – I consider myself an honorary man – are the harder sex. We strike out, push through, thrust and take. The fact that it is only an analogue of all this sexual terminology I am capable of does not discourage me. I can feel it in my bones, in my uncastrated genes. Eric must respond to that.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Frank plans to reach out to Eric by harnessing the power of Old Saul's Skull. He believes that, because he and Eric are brothers, because they are both men, and because they have a childhood connection to Old Saul and his skull, the artifact will act as a kind of mystical radio between them.

In this moment Frank also takes a minute to consider his philosophy regarding gender and men and women. He believes that women are best at giving and creating life, while men are best at taking and ending it. Frank identifies as a man although he does not have male genitalia, feeling in his “uncastrated genes” a deep, violent masculinity. As he demonstrates throughout the novel, he has made it his life's mission to enact violence and take lives to reassert that he is a man in the ways that matter to him – he has a man's power, and a man's ability to bring about death.

Chapter 8 Quotes

...[Eric] had been too much for me. The conflagration in his head was just too strong for anybody sane to cope with. It had a lunatic strength of total commitment about it which only the profoundly mad are continually capable of, and the most ferocious soldiers and most aggressive sportsmen able to emulate for a while. Every particle of Eric's brain was concentrated on his mission of returning and setting fire, and no normal brain – not even mine, which was far from normal and more powerful than most – could match that marshaling of forces. Eric was committed to total War, a Jihad; he was riding the Divine Wind to at least his own destruction, and there was nothing I could do about it this way.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

Frank attempts to psychically reach out to Eric by harnessing the power of Old Saul's skull. Although he believes he has entered Eric's mind for a moment, he is pushed back out by Eric's “lunatic strength.” This moment is significant for two reasons. Firstly, Frank rarely admits that other people are more powerful than he is. However, in this moment he must admit defeat. Secondly, Frank uses this moment to contrast his sanity against Eric's insanity. Although he recognizes that his brain is “far from normal and more powerful than most” (including some self-aggrandizement as well), he still sets himself up in opposition to Eric, who seems to be almost supernaturally insane.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☛☛ We played some stories out: brave soldiers in the dunes and fighting, winning and fighting and fighting and sometimes dying. Those were the only times he deliberately hurt me, when his stories required his own heroic death and I would take it all too seriously as he lay expiring on the grass or the sands, having just blown up the bridge or the dam or the enemy convoy and like as not saved me from death, too; I would choke back tears and punch him lightly as I tried to change the story myself and he refused, slipping away from me and dying; too often dying.

When he had his migraines – sometimes lasting days – I lived on the edge, taking cool drinks and some food up to the darkened room on the second floor, creeping in, standing and shaking sometimes if he moaned and shifted on the bed. I was wretched while he suffered, and nothing meant anything; the games and the stories seemed stupid and pointless, and only throwing stones at bottles or seagulls made much sense. I went out fishing for gulls, determined things other than Eric should suffer: when he recovered it was like him coming back for the summer all over again, and I was irrepressible.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Esmerelda Stove, Paul Cauldhame, Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

Frank often alludes to his deep connection with Eric, and this memory is a clear illustration of how close the brothers were as children. As a narrator Frank has displayed little emotion, and little care for people other than himself. However, he does genuinely care about his brother, to the point where he could not, as a child, even play-act his brother’s death. Eric was so important to him that the thought of something bad happening to him was enough to bring Frank to tears. Frank, who play-acted regret and shock after he murdered his brother and cousin, felt genuine sadness when Eric was sick. Although Frank rarely shows that he is capable of empathy, he clearly is – suffering in solidarity with the brother he loved, and continues to care for.

☛☛ I remember I used to despise sheep for being so profoundly stupid. I’d seen them eat and eat and eat, I’d watched dogs outsmart whole flocks of them, I’d chased them and laughed at the stupid way they ran, watched them get themselves into all sorts of stupid, tangled situations, and I’d thought they quite deserved to end up as mutton, and that being used as wool-making machines was too good for them. It was years, and a long slow process, before I eventually realised just what sheep really represented: not their own stupidity, but our power, our avarice and egotism.

After I’d come to understand evolution and know a little about history and farming, I saw that the thick white animals I laughed at for following each other around and getting caught in bushes were the product of generations of farmers as much as generations of sheep; we made them, we moulded them from the wild, smart survivors that were their ancestors so that they would become docile, frightened, stupid, tasty wool-producers. We didn’t want them to be smart, and to some extent their aggression and their intelligence went together. Of course, the rams are brighter, but even they are demeaned by the idiotic females they have to associate with and inseminate.

The same principle applies to chickens and cows and almost anything we’ve been able to get our greedy, hungry hands on for long enough. It occasionally occurs to me that something the same might have happened to women but, attractive though the theory might be, I suspect I’m wrong.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Although many of Frank’s ideas regarding violence or superstition are hard for the reader to fully understand or get behind, Frank is nonetheless an intelligent person, capable of thinking deeply about the world around him, and formulating theories to explain why life is the way it is. As someone obsessed with power and control, Frank often sees questions of dominance and submission as being at the heart of every decision in the world. Although he had formerly despised sheep for their perceived stupidity and inferiority, he sees now that it isn’t their fault – they have been bred that way by the humans in power. Although he rarely investigates the dark side of control and authority, he sees now how the subjugation of one species by another caused the first to suffer.

Frank is also able to incorporate some of his sexism into his philosophy regarding domestication. Although he thinks all

sheep are stupid, he argues the rams are less stupid than the ewes, but offspring suffer because of their stupid mothers. This isn't based in any actual scientific observation, which Frank admits when he tries to apply the theory to humans, remarking that although it's "attractive," and would confirm some of his sexist biases, he's probably wrong.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ It always annoyed me that Eric went crazy. Although it wasn't an on-off thing, sane one minute, mad the next, I don't think there is much doubt that the incident with the smiling child triggered something in Eric that led, almost inevitably, to his fall. Something in him could not accept what had happened, could not fit in what he had seen with the way he thought things ought to be...

Whatever it was that disintegrated in Eric then, it was a weakness, a fundamental flaw that a real man should not have had. Women, I know from watching hundreds – maybe thousands – of films and television programmes, cannot withstand really major things happening to them; they get raped or their loved one dies, and they go to pieces, go crazy and commit suicide, or just pine away until they die. Of course, I realise that not all of them will react that way, but obviously it's the rule, and the ones who don't obey it are in the minority.

There must be a few strong women, women with more man in their character than most, and I suspect that Eric was the victim of a self with just a little too much of the woman in it. That sensitivity, that desire not to hurt people, that delicate, mindful brilliance – these things were his partly because he thought too much like a woman. Up until his nasty experience it never really bothered him, but just at that moment, in that extremity of circumstance, it was enough to break him.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Eric Cauldhame

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Frank hates that Eric has gone crazy because he feels it demonstrates some weakness in his brother, who he has idolized his entire life. Frank believes that women are weaker than men, and that Eric only went insane because he had certain feminine characteristics. He believes that Eric's femininity weakened him, and made him unable to handle the trauma that eventually broke him. Frank observed Eric's sensitive side, which he codes as feminine, throughout their

childhood (specifically when Blyth killed their pet rabbits and Eric was inconsolable). However, it is only in adulthood, when Eric is at university and at the hospital, that his sensitivity makes him dangerously susceptible to stress and shock.

Even as Frank puts forth a simplistic, sexist view of men and women, he admits that there is room in all people for fluid gender roles. Some women *can* be strong, and some men *can* be weak. Although he sees these women as having masculine qualities, and these men as having feminine qualities, which is still extremely essentialist, it's nonetheless a step towards a more open worldview in which he could accept that men and women can behave in any way they want, and not be less of a man or less of a woman because of it.

Note also Banks' critique of sexism in the media here. Frank has never really interacted with women other than his mother, and then only briefly, so he learns everything about them from Angus—and from watching thousands of TV shows. The fact that he could form such essentialist and misogynistic views from TV is a clear indictment of the sexism perpetuated by popular culture.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ I want to laugh or cry or both, as I sit here, thinking about my own life, my three deaths. Four deaths now, in a way, now that my father's truth has murdered what I was.

But I *am* still me; I *am* the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done, the same (small) achievements, the same (appalling) crimes to *my* name.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker), Old Saul, Angus Cauldhame

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter, Frank (who refers to herself as Frances and with female pronouns until the end of the novel) discovers that she was born female, and that her father, Angus, has been feeding her male hormones since she was three years old. Old Saul did not castrate her as she had believed. Instead, Old Saul had mauled her female genitalia, and her father used the accident as an excuse to perform an experiment on his child — a kind of power play that dictated

he would always hold this secret over her, and control her very body.

Frances's identity has been incredibly tied both to her maleness and to her perceived castration, but when she is forced to reevaluate who she is, she is easily able to slip into this new role as a woman. She realizes that she is the same person regardless of her sex or gender. She exclaims, "I am still me." After a novel spent criticizing women and calling them out as inferior, Frances is surprisingly willing to dismiss her previous prejudices. Knowing that she is a woman doesn't make her less of a person, she is the same as she ever was, but now has the ability to live her life with full knowledge of her body and history.

●● Perhaps I murdered for revenge in each case, jealously exacting – through the only potency at my command – a toll from those who passed within my range; my peers who each would otherwise have grown into the one thing I could never become: an adult.

Lacking, as one might say, one will, I forged another; to lick my own wound, I cut *them* off, reciprocating in my angry innocence the emasculation I could not then fully appreciate, but somehow – through the attitudes of others perhaps – sensed as an unfair, irrecoverable loss. Having no purpose in life or procreation, I invested all my worth in that grim opposite, and so found a negative and a negation of the fecundity only others could lay claim to... I would find or make my own weapons, and my victims would be those most recently produced by the one act I was incapable of; my equals in that, while they possessed the potential for generation, they were at that point no more able to perform the required act than I was. Talk about penis envy.

Now it turns out to have been for nothing. There was no revenge that needed taking, only a lie, a trick that should have been exposed, a disguise which even from the inside I should have seen through, but in the end did not want to. I was proud; eunuch but unique; a fierce and noble presence in my lands, a crippled warrior, a fallen prince...

Now I find I was the fool all along.

Related Characters: Francis "Frank" Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter Frank (who refers to herself as Frances and with female pronouns until the end of the novel) discovers that she was born female. This causes her to reassess her previous closely held beliefs about gender, and causes her to examine her own behavior. Frances realizes that her perceived castration caused her to feel like less of a man than she wanted to be. As a result, she overcompensated with what she thought was "masculine" behavior – which she believed to be violent, life-ending behavior.

Additionally, because she believed she had no genitals, Frances thought she could not reproduce. This made her angry, and so she killed children, who were recently born and therefore, in her mind, most closely tied to reproduction. These child murders were then a kind of revenge against a world that (she believed) had left her sterile.

Although Frances had been insecure about her castration, she leaned into her identity as "eunuch but unique," "a fierce and noble presence" on the island where she lived. Her life had been shaped by a quest for revenge, a desire to reclaim, through violence, the penis that had been stolen from her. Now, she realizes that "there was no revenge that needed taking." The drives that had previously ruled her life have suddenly shut off. She must rethink who she is, and how to behave, now that she is not actively trying to prove her worth as a man and take revenge on the world.

●● Believing in my great hurt, my literal cutting off from society's mainland, it seems to me that I took life in a sense too seriously, and the lives of others, for the same reason, too lightly. The murders were my own conception; my sex. The Factory was my attempt to construct life, to replace the involvement which otherwise I did not want.

Well, it is always easier to succeed at death.

Inside this greater machine, things are not quite so cut and dried (or cut and pickled) as they have appeared in my experience. Each of us, in our own personal Factory, may believe we have stumbled down one corridor, and that our fate is sealed and certain (dream or nightmare, humdrum or bizarre, good or bad), but a word, a glance, a slip – anything can change that, alter it entirely, and our marble hall becomes a gutter, our rat-maze a golden path. Our destination is the same in the end, but our journey – part chosen, part determined – is different for us all, and changes even as we live and grow. I thought one door had snicked shut behind me years ago; in fact I was still crawling about the face. Now the door closes, and my journey begins.

Related Characters: Francis “Frank” Leslie Cauldhame / Frances Lesley Cauldhame (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter Frank (who refers to herself as Frances and with female pronouns until the end of the novel) discovers that she was born female, and was not castrated as a toddler. Although this information drastically disrupts her worldview, it also allows her to better understand her behavior, and better understand how her ideas of the differences between men and women formed. Because she

believed something had been taken from her through castration, Frances felt that she needed to take the lives of others to right the wrong. She understands now that even building the Wasp Factory was an attempt to create life, which, believing she had no reproductive organs, she thought she could not do.

Frances had believed that the course of her life was set for her when she was castrated. However, now that she knows the truth, Frances realizes that her new life in fact begins today. She finally understands the truth about her past, and about her body. This gives her a newfound control over herself, and her future. Instead of being angry that time was stolen from her, she is grateful and excited that a new life lies ahead.



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: THE SACRIFICE POLES

The book opens on the day that Frank and his father, Angus, are informed that Eric, Frank's brother, has escaped from the mental hospital. Frank has spent the day surveying and maintaining his Sacrifice Poles, superstitious totems that he has set up around the island on which he lives.

Frank sees the town policeman, Diggs, cross the bridge from the mainland to Frank's island. He spies on Diggs with his binoculars, watching him disappear down the path towards the house Frank shares with Angus.

Frank uses a catapult to fire a ball bearing across the river separating his island from the mainland. He hits a sign, which he sees as a good omen. He notes that the Wasp Factory had sent him a vague, but likely important warning. Frank decides he will consult the Factory again tomorrow.

Frank wonders if, when he returns home, Angus will tell him the truth about his interaction with Diggs.

Frank returns home in the early evening. He notices that Angus looks worried, but thinks he might be trying to manipulate him. Angus tells Frank that something has happened with Eric, and Frank immediately understands that his brother has escaped from the mental institution where he had been incarcerated. Angus adds that the authorities suspect Eric will try to come home, but are sure they will capture him soon. Frank is sure Eric will make it to the island; he doesn't even feel compelled to ask the Factory about it.

Frank believes that his Sacrifice Poles protect the island and give him power over it. By maintaining them he maintains his control of the land.



In Frank's life, knowledge is often power. Although he does not know why Diggs is visiting, he does his best to gather as much information as possible, as he suspects his father will withhold information in order to manipulate him.



Frank has a host of superstitious beliefs that govern his life. The firing of a ball bearing and his reliance on the Wasp Factory, are just two examples.



Angus often withholds information from Frank in order to control him. Frank knows this, however, making Angus's strategy less effective.



Although Frank often feels the need to consult the Factory, or one of the other locations on his island used for rituals, sometimes he has intuitions that he trusts completely. While Frank believes his superstitious objects and tools can help him tell the future, he can also just sense that Eric will make his way home on his own.



Angus serves Frank soup and sits at the far end of the kitchen table. Frank observes his father, noting his delicate face “like a woman’s,” and his stiff left leg, which requires him to walk with a walking stick. Frank explains how his father’s walking stick prevents him from going into the loft above the house where Frank has set up the Wasp Factory. Angus has never told Frank his real age, but Frank guesses he’s around 45.

Frank and Angus both try their best to gain power in the household, and carve out private personal spaces. Because Angus cannot climb the ladder into the loft, Frank controls that space. Because Angus, as the father, is older than Frank, he is able to withhold certain information from his son. Frank will later reveal some of his sexist biases, so his observation that his father looks feminine can be seen as an insult and a sign of disrespect.



Angus asks Frank how tall the table is. Frank answers it is thirty inches, and Angus corrects him, arguing it’s “two foot six.” Angus has obsessively asked Frank about measurements in the house all his life. Angus was once “genuinely afraid” of these attacks, but now sees them as “idiotic.”

Angus compulsively asks Frank about measurements—obsessive behaviors clearly run in the family. However, this particular habit is also a way for Angus to control Frank—forcing him to learn essentially useless facts, and to remain constantly alert in case he is called upon to recite them.



Frank was homeschooled by Angus, who taught him a mixture of facts and total lies. Only when Frank grew older and was able to go to the library on his own was he able to begin to distinguish fact from fiction.

Angus has done his best to control Frank in every possible way. By teaching him essentially everything he knows, Angus was able to carefully restrict and manipulate Frank’s worldview.



Angus says he hopes Frank wasn’t out killing animals. Frank doesn’t answer, but thinks to himself that of course he must kill animals, because how else is he supposed to get bodies for “the Poles and the Bunker if I don’t kill things?”

Angus seems to have little concern for his son’s wellbeing, or the wellbeing of the animals on the island. Like most of his comments, this is an attempt to restrict the actions of his son, not a genuine inquiry. However, it is ineffective, as Frank will stop at nothing to make sure his rituals go as planned.



Angus remarks that sometimes he thinks Frank, not Eric, should be in the hospital. Frank thinks that this once would have scared him, but not anymore. He understands that people in town consider him strange, but he knows better than to make his obsessions and deviancies public.

Angus recognizes that Frank has some abnormal behaviors, but it’s unlikely he would report him to the police. Once again, Angus is simply trying to threaten and intimidate Frank. Frank understands that the biggest difference between him and his brother is that his brother made his insanity public, whereas Frank keeps it private.



Frank knows Angus is also nervous about Eric coming home, because any police investigations into the family might lead to “The Truth About Frank” coming out. The truth is that Frank has no birth certificate. He believes this is because his father was a “hippy-anarchist” back in the day. As a result, Angus educated Frank himself, and provided all of his early essential medical care.

Frank’s lack of birth certificate is just one more way that Angus controls his son’s life. Because Frank does not legally exist, he cannot go to school or work, and so is totally reliant on his father for food and housing, education, and medical care.



Angus goes to bed. Frank thinks about his father’s study — the one room in the house he’s never been in because his father carefully locks it whenever he leaves. Frank suspects there is a secret in the study, but knows he cannot ask. Frank recognizes that his father holds “little bits of bogus power” in the form of secrets and locked doors, to control “what he sees as the correct father-son relationship.”

Just like Frank has his private room in the loft above the house, Angus has his private study. Frank recognizes the patterns in Angus’s behavior—almost everything he does is to hold “little bits of bogus power” over his son.



Frank hears the phone ring, and answers it. It’s Eric. At first, Eric repeats everything Frank says, but eventually the two begin to have a conversation. Eric won’t tell Frank where he is, but remarks that he’s still “mad, of course.” Eric says he’s coming home to check in on Frank and Angus, but refuses to say how close he is. Frank cautions Eric not to “annoy people,” and especially not to torment their pets or burn their dogs. Furious, Eric denies ever having done such a thing, and hangs up the phone.

Frank loves his brother, even though he has committed horrible crimes. Eric, too, loves Frank, and seems to have broken out just to visit his brother. Unlike Frank, who is careful to maintain a “normal” exterior, Eric happily embraces his own madness. However, as Frank cautions Eric to stay safe and not call attention to himself, Eric denies having engaged in some of the most extreme behavior he has been accused of.



Frank goes to bed. He reviews the Sacrifice Poles in his mind, examining each “like a security guard changing cameras on a monitor screen.” He believes the sentries, “which came under my power” through the murder of various small animals, say that all is well, and nothing will harm him.

To Frank, the Sacrifice Poles are more than just symbolic totems. He truly believes he has a kind of psychic connection with them that allows him to use them to survey the island.



Frank looks in the mirror. He’s naked aside from his underwear. He wishes he were “strong and fit,” but explains that because of his accident he is chubby instead. He reveals, “looking at me, you’d never guess I’d killed three people.”

Frank associates masculinity with violence and power. However, although he has exerted power over three people by murdering them, he is upset that he still does not look more traditionally masculine, which, in his mind, he associates with strength.



CHAPTER 2: THE SNAKE PARK

The next morning Frank visits the Poles. Most are in good condition. He plants the burned remains of a wasp from the Factory between two important Poles. Then he climbs a tower on the mainland from which he can survey the island. He cuts his thumb and rubs the blood on the tower.

Much of Frank’s day, and much of his life, is dictated by regular maintenance of his sites of ritual. Because he does not go to school or leave the island, his routine is essentially all he has.



Frank provides a history of Mary Cauldhame, Eric’s mother. She died in childbirth, because Eric’s head was too big. Eric had migraines the rest of his life, and Frank wonders if Mary’s death, Eric’s migraines, and “What Happened to Eric” are somehow related. Frank also considers that perhaps disaster befalls anyone who leaves the island, and that’s why something bad happened to his brother.

Frank loves to search for coincidences and patterns in his life and the lives of others. Although not revealed until later, the incident that fully pushed Eric over the edge was also related to heads and babies, a pattern Frank can’t ignore.



Frank remembers “the Factory said something about fire.” Although the obvious answer seems to be that Eric will set some dogs on fire, Frank believes the message is more complex.

Frank looks to the Factory for guidance, and uses its perceived wisdom to unpack anything complicated in his life.



Frank is partially upset that Eric is coming back. Frank had wanted to have a make-believe war — a game he plays with his toy soldiers and real explosives — but will have to postpone it to deal with the “real world.” Frank instead spends the morning building a dam. He loves to build dams, and explains that he enjoys how “you can never really win against the water; it will always triumph in the end.” Instead, you can only “divert it or block its way for a while; persuade it to do something it doesn’t really want to do. The pleasure comes from the elegance of the compromise.” He builds a dam, and downstream builds a little village. He enjoys watching the dam burst and kill all the tiny, imaginary people.

Frank loves violence. Even when he is not killing children or animals he is enacting make-believe death. Although dam building is ostensibly less violent, it is similarly about power and control. Frank recognizes that water is more powerful than he is, or will ever be, but he still gets a thrill from momentarily diverting it. Additionally, Frank’s construction of miniature villages fulfills the same violent, sadistic urges that cause him to blow up toy soldiers when playing war.



Frank returns home for lunch. Angus is going out, but Frank knows better than to ask where—Angus never gives him a straight answer. After Angus leaves, Frank checks the door to the study. It’s locked, as always.

Frank and Angus are constantly engaged in a power struggle. Each keeps secrets from the other, which gives them some amount of control over their adversary.



Frank eats lunch, and then goes out to the Rabbit Grounds. He brings his gun, although he notes that he prefers a catapult to a gun. The catapult requires more skill and effort—it is an “Inside thing” that fires differently depending on how he is feeling. In contrast, the gun is an “Outside” thing, accurate regardless of his mood.

For Frank, not all violence is created equal. He doesn’t often kill for the sake of killing. Instead, he enjoys killing as a demonstration of his mood and skill, or for some ritualistic purpose he perceives as being necessary.



As he walks to the rabbit grounds, Frank reflects on various relatives of his who have died: Leviticus Cauldhame, who was crushed by a man committing suicide, and Athelwald Trapley, who tried to poison himself with a leaky gas stove, but accidentally set himself on fire.

Although much of Frank’s behavior and many of his thoughts might strike readers as strange, his lack of emotion when recounting the violent deaths of his relatives is especially shocking, and reveals that there is likely something very wrong with him emotionally.



Frank arrives at the Rabbit Grounds. He notes that local boys used to set snares there, but he would tear them up or put them on walking paths so the snares would instead trip the teens who had placed them. Now, the boys no longer set snares. Frank suspects they’re off “spraying slogans on walls, sniffing glue or trying to get laid.”

Frank has never had many friends, or gotten along with boys his own age. He has little regard for his peers, tormenting them until they leave him alone. It is not a regard for the rabbits’ wellbeing that inspired him, but instead a desire to be left alone to torment rabbits in peace.



Frank spots a huge male rabbit, or buck, and aims his gun. He accidentally startles it and the buck runs at him. He must take a shot quickly, and only manages to hit its back leg. The buck continues towards Frank and attacks him. It wrestles with Frank in the grass, gnashing its teeth at him and biting his finger. Frank eventually strangles it with his catapult, although the Black Destroyer is broken in the process. Sitting back and catching his breath, Frank knows what he must do. He thinks, "There was no time to waste. There's only one way to react after something like this"—he must retaliate.

Frank returns home, trades his rifle for his War Bag, and jogs back to the Rabbit Grounds. He plants bombs in many of the rabbit holes, and shoves a larger one inside the corpse of the buck he had previously killed. He lights the fuses and smiles as the bombs explode. Any rabbits uninjured by the initial blasts Frank lights on fire with his petrol flamethrower.

Satisfied that his catapult is "avenged," Frank re-christens the hill Black Destroyer Hill. Frank has a "lovely sated feeling," and returns home, wondering "what lessons were to be learned, what signs to be read in it all."

Frank emotionlessly recalls another dead relative—his uncle Harmsworth Stove, who killed himself after Frank killed his daughter, Frank's cousin, Esmerelda.

Back at home in bed that night, Frank wonders what the events of the day meant. The Factory has taught him to observe patterns, "from the smaller to the greater," and so he looks for meanings in his massacre of the rabbits. Frank is sure the buck was a "Sign," but believes the sign was not only the animal, but also Frank's "furious, almost unthinking" violent response.

Frank recalls the first time he killed another person. This act of violence was also related to rabbits—one summer his cousin, Blyth, was visiting and murdered Frank and Eric's pet rabbits with a flamethrower that Eric had invented. Eric, a sensitive child, was inconsolably upset. Frank, in retaliation for both the death of the rabbits and the grief of his brother, decided to kill Blyth.

Although Frank was the one to instigate the fight with the buck, he had expected to win easily. Having been injured, and having lost his catapult, he becomes very angry. He doesn't see the ways in which his own actions enraged the buck—instead he only sees the wrong that has been committed against him, and feels that it must be righted.



Although Frank occasionally engages in violence for the sake of violence, this massacre is, in his mind, justifiable retribution. However, the violence is so extreme that readers will see it as a brutal, unnecessary overreaction, which only highlights Frank's own mental instability.



By renaming the hill, as well as massacring the rabbits, Frank feels he has regained control he lost in the fight with the buck. As he often does, he looks for signs in the violence, and wonders if he can somehow see the future through the actions of the present.



Although Frank loves his brother, in most cases family means nothing to him. He does not care about someone simply because they are a relative.



Frank looks for patterns and signs in the world around him. It is essentially the only way that he finds meaning in his life. Often, the search for meaning comes from violence, as the Factory and the Sacrifice Poles (as their name implies) require the death of animals to work.



Frank is more easily spurred to violence than the average child or teen, which is especially clear when his childhood behavior is contrasted with Eric's. Eric was an especially gentle child, while Frank was violent from the start. Although family means nothing to Frank, he loves Eric, and will do anything for him, including enacting revenge on anyone who hurts him.



The next summer Blyth returned. Still unpleasant, he was now missing his left leg below the knee (replaced with a prosthetic), having lost it in a road accident. One day Blyth, Eric, and Paul, Frank's little brother, were relaxing in a meadow. Blyth had taken off his prosthetic leg and fallen asleep. Frank was wandering the island and found an adder. He immediately knew what he wanted to do with it, catching it and stuffing it into Blyth's hollow leg. When Blyth woke from his nap and put on the leg, the snake bit him, and he died quickly but painfully. Frank feigned ignorance, and didn't tell anyone—not even Eric—about his involvement in Paul's death.

In the present, Frank wakes from his reveries. He observes that Angus hasn't returned home, but he isn't concerned. Frank notes his own "ambivalent attitude" towards his father's wellbeing. He finds the idea of death exciting, but admits that he would miss Angus. Additionally, he doesn't know what would happen to him legally if Angus died.

As he falls asleep, Frank thinks about the three murders he's committed in his life: Blyth, then Paul, two years later, and then his little cousin Esmerelda the year after that. Frank remarks that he doesn't "intend to [kill] ever again. It was just a stage I was going through."

CHAPTER 3: IN THE BUNKER

Frank's "greatest enemies are Women and the Sea." He hates women because he believes them to be "weak and stupid" and inferior to men. He hates the sea because it always destroys what he has built, "wiping clean the marks" he has made. The sea is a "mythological enemy"—both feared and respected. Women, in contrast, are a more domestic enemy, because they "are a bit too close for comfort."

Frank prepares for the day. He goes through his daily ritual of cleaning himself. He notes that all of his "ablutions" follow "a definite and predetermined pattern." He dresses himself with similar precision.

Frank decided to kill Blyth less because he was upset that Blyth had killed his rabbits, and more because he hated how upset Blyth had made Eric, who Frank loves more than anything else. Although, of all the murders he commits, this one is the easiest for a reader to understand or rationalize, Frank's immediate decision to murder his cousin nonetheless seems like an extreme response.



While Frank definitely loves his brother and has no emotional attachment to much of his extended family, his relationship to Angus is more complicated. He does not love his father simply because he is his father, but the time they've spent together and the effort Angus has put into raising his son have left some kind of positive, if not loving, impression.



Frank's emotionless reflections upon the murders in his past paint him as a kind of sociopath. Still, he doesn't see himself as a cold-blooded, out-of-control killer, as he's satisfied with the death he's inflicted and doesn't plan to kill again.



Because Frank believes he has been castrated and has no male genitalia, he also believes he is physically close to women. As a result, he must separate himself from them somehow — which is why he created these strict, sexist ideas of the differences between the genders. Frank's hatred of the sea is related to a hatred of feeling powerless.



Frank's rituals extend beyond the Poles and the Factory to his daily routine and hygienic maintenance. He exercises strict control over every aspect of his life.



Frank leaves the house, and as he walks across the island a few jets fly overhead. He recalls how once a jet made him jump, and in retribution he built a plastic model of a jet and blew it up. Two weeks later a jet crashed into the ocean. Frank likes to think “the Power was working,” but suspects “it was a coincidence.”

Frank goes to visit a sapling he has named the Killer. He recalls using it to fire hamsters, mice, and gerbils across the creek. He explains that this destruction “was all for a purpose...I was looking for Old Saul’s **skull**.”

Frank visits the Bunker. The Bunker is an old concrete pillbox guard post, which formerly housed a machine gun. Frank has repaired the rusted door and converted it into a kind of shrine. Inside he has filled it with candles and the **skull** of Old Saul. He has placed a candle in the dog’s skull, and lights it.

As the candle burns, Frank reflects on the past few days. He then imagines an alternative version of himself, “a tall slim man, strong and determined and making his way in the world, assured and purposeful.”

Frank then begins a ritual—taking the cadaver of a wasp which has been through the Factory, and lighting it on a pyre of sugar and weed killer. He inspects the patterns of the incinerated wasp, but sees nothing.

After his ritual, Frank returns home. Angus has returned and is chopping wood in the garden. Frank offers to make lunch, but Angus volunteers to do it instead.

That afternoon, Frank rides into town on his bike. He buys some air-gun pellets and a new catapult. Then he goes to the café, where he looks at movie posters on the walls and considers his relationship with Angus. Frank and his father have an “unspoken agreement,” that as long as Frank stays out of trouble Angus will buy him almost anything he wants. Frank isn’t sure if he loves his father, or if his father loves him. Frank had hoped to see someone he knew in town, but only sees the storekeepers—Mackenzie who sold him the catapult, and Mrs. Stuart in the café. He explains that he doesn’t know many people his own age. His only real friend is a man named Jamie.

Frank at once believes in the power of superstition and magical connections, while also feeling that he is too smart to believe in the power of coincidence. In the end, he believes in it enough to engage in rituals and create voodoo dolls, but he does not believe in it enough to think that his actions had any impact on the wider world.



Frank believed he could reclaim the power Old Saul took from him when he castrated Frank if he could be in possession of Old Saul’s skull.



Frank’s Bunker is a site for ritual. He has imbued it with a kind of magical, spiritual purpose, and filled it with objects, like Old Saul’s skull, that give power to both him and the space.



Frank equates masculinity with strength. He believes that had he not been castrated and denied male hormones he would look like a powerful man.



Frank continually looks for clues to the future in his ritual objects. Here, he hopes the Factory will provide him some clues as to what is in store for him. However, even when he finds nothing, his faith is not diminished.



Angus almost always prepares food for his son, which is nurturing but also another way of controlling his behavior and his body.



Frank often reflects upon his relationship with his father. He doesn’t care about many people — just himself, his brother Eric, and his friend, Jamie. That his father is related to him is not enough to guarantee that he will care, but he has spent his entire life with Angus, and understands that Angus has worked to educate him and keep him alive, which means he isn’t totally uninterested in Frank’s wellbeing.



Frank continues, explaining that after “Eric went crazy” it was harder to socialize in town. He became associated with his brother, or else mistaken for Eric altogether. Plus, Frank suspects that many parents guessed about his connection to the deaths of Blyth, Paul, and Esmerelda.

Frank doesn't mind that his family has been ostracized and rejected by the town because of Eric. He also understands that his own actions have turned people against him. Frank has never needed human connection to thrive, and so barely sees his family's reputation as a burden.



Frank returns home, and makes some bombs from his mixture of sugar and weed killer. He wishes he could use some of the cordite his father keeps locked in the cellar, but it is off limits. The explosive was discovered in an old warship by Frank's grandfather, Colin Cauldhame. Colin used it domestically to light fires, and Angus did too for a while, but now he just watches over the stash. Frank believes that Angus is so careful with the cordite because of nervousness born out of the explosion with the Bomb Circle, and because of his own “little superstition...something about a link with the past, or an evil demon we have lurking, a symbol for all our family misdeeds.”

Always thinking about violence and destruction, once again Frank's desires are restricted by his father's control over the house where the two of them live. Angus's nervousness about the cordite reveals two things — one, that superstition runs in the family, and two, that Angus suspects that Frank has dark secrets, but is uninterested in exploring them, instead settling for denying Frank access to truly powerful weapons.



Over dinner, Angus tells Frank that the police are searching for Eric on the moors. Angus asks Frank if he has any requests for food to order from town. Frank wants mostly junk food, which Angus criticizes but permits. Angus wonders if Frank is going to town that evening. Frank says he plans to go out tomorrow, instead, and Angus warns him not to get too drunk. Angus claims he can tell how drunk Frank has gotten, and what he has had to drink, based on the quality of his farts. Frank thinks this is nonsense, but admits that Angus is generally correct in his fart-based inferences.

Once again, Angus and Frank's interaction is a struggle for power and control. Although Angus rarely chooses to restrict Frank's movements or choices, his criticisms are meant to hurt Frank and break him down. However, after a lifetime of digs like these, Frank is essentially immune to his father's attacks.



After dinner, Frank watches television and amends his maps to include the newly named Black Destroyer Hill. He thinks back to a fight he had with local boys from the mainland, which led to him beginning to cache weapons. Although he notes that he doesn't “want to kill anybody now,” having a secret stash of bombs, as well as his “Defence Manual” full of maps and tactics, makes him feel “secure.”

Once again, Frank demonstrates how poorly he gets along with everyone, especially boys his own age. He also shows how even the anticipation of violence (like organizing his stash of weapons) gives him a sense of power and control.



Frank stays up until almost eleven, and is surprised to hear the phone ring. It's Eric. Angus comes out of his room and watches Frank take the phone call. Frank pretends Eric is his friend Jamie. Angus accepts this and returns to bed.

Although both Eric and Angus are family, Frank easily prioritizes his brother over his father, suspecting Angus will call the police or turn Eric in if he finds out he has been calling.



Frank checks in on Eric—is he eating right, how is he getting around? Eric insists he no longer has to sleep. Eric also says he’s mostly eating dogs, which upsets and disgusts Frank. Eric says he shoplifts, but only things he cannot eat. Frank wonders why he doesn’t just shoplift food, and stop eating dogs. Eric responds angrily, “Are you crazy?...These are dogs, aren’t they?” He continues to shout, getting out of control and smashing the receiver until the line goes dead. Frank goes to bed, all the while considering how to better handle Eric over the phone.

Frank cares about Eric and makes his concern with his brother’s wellbeing known. Eric, meanwhile, is seemingly not concerned with his own wellbeing. Although Frank’s behavior frequently reads as insane, in comparison to Eric, who literally eats dogs and cannot control his anger, Frank seems rather reserved and normal.



CHAPTER 4: THE BOMB CIRCLE

Frank thinks of himself as “a state; a country or, at the very least, a city.” His moods frequently change, as though different mental political parties are coming into power. Because sometimes Frank has contradicting thoughts and feelings, it is easier for him to conceptualize his emotions as “lots of different people inside my brain.” Frank feels a little guilty about having killed Blyth, Paul and Esmerelda. Similarly, a part of him feels guilty for massacring the rabbits.

Frank often appears as callous and emotionless, but he is more complicated than his many murders would make him appear. Although he doesn’t consciously regret having killed his brother and cousins, part of his mind is still guilty. He isn’t entirely emotionless or psychopathic, but is capable of selective empathy and kindness.



Frank admits that there was no *need* to murder the rabbits. “Like the death penalty, you want it because it makes you feel better, not because it’s a deterrent or any nonsense like that.” Frank admits to himself that killing and violence are for the sake of his own pride and pleasure.

Frank’s violence often has a ritualistic or spiritual motivation, but sometimes, he kills just for the sake of killing. Frank feels pleasure and power when he is committing acts of violence.



Frank conducts a naming ceremony for his catapult, smearing it with “earwax, snot, blood, urine, belly-button fluff and toenail cheese.” He also crumples an old photograph of Paul around a ball bearing, and fires it into the ocean. He admits, “parts of me thought this was nonsense, but they were in a tiny minority. The rest of me knew this sort of thing *worked*. It gave me power.”

Frank uses rituals to make himself feel powerful and in control. Although he thinks of himself as smart and rational, almost too reserved for behavior like this, he also genuinely believes it works, and is unwilling to give up his superstitions.



Frank goes for a run. He jogs, then springs to the Bomb Circle, where he collapses in the sand. As he rests, he considers how the Bomb Circle, Angus’s injured leg, and Frank’s many dead pets are all the fault of Agnes, his mother, who disliked children, sent Eric away to Belfast when he was a toddler, and only came to the island twice, once to give birth to Frank and once to give birth to Paul.

Frank rarely takes responsibility for his own actions. He instead blames compulsions, or superstitions, or women, who he hates more than anything. Frank’s hatred of his mother is somewhat justified — she abandoned him and his brother as a child — although his extrapolation that all women are thus deserving of hatred is unfair.



Frank reflects on Paul’s death. Frank was eight when he killed Paul, who was only five. Frank held no grudge against Paul, but knew he’d “never be free of the dog [Old Saul] until” Paul was gone. Frank notes that Eric, who doesn’t know Frank killed Paul, believes that Frank is still not free of Old Saul.

Frank believed that Old Saul was reincarnated in Paul. Since Old Saul had castrated him and taken his power, Frank believed the only way to reclaim some of his power was to kill Old Saul once again.



Frank always treated Paul well (perhaps, Frank thinks in hindsight, because he knew he would kill Paul young). One day, the two of them were at the beach, and Frank spotted an old bomb, half submerged in the sand. Although he had no plans to kill Paul that day, he couldn't pass up the opportunity. Frank convinced Paul it was an old bell, and told him to hit it with a piece of wood to ring it. Frank walked far away, and gave Paul the signal. Paul hit the bomb with a piece of wood until it exploded, killing him.

Frank pretended to be distraught over Paul's death. He didn't mind play-acting, but did feel guilty about deceiving Eric, who he is sure wouldn't have understood. Frank thinks Diggs suspected him, but was unable to prove anything.

That night, Frank goes into town. He meets his only friend, Jamie, at the Cauldham Arms, a hotel and music venue. He lets Jamie sit on his shoulders so he can see the stage more clearly.

Frank tells Jamie about Eric's escape. Jamie is surprised that Frank isn't more panicked. Frank explains that he hopes Eric isn't captured and makes it home. He wants to see his brother.

Once the music has started, Frank and Jamie dance. Jamie is still on Frank's shoulders, and although Frank doesn't like girls, he'll dance with them if Jamie wants to.

Frank is unhappy at the end of the night when Jamie finds a girl to talk to. Frank is also very drunk, and worries that he'll vomit. Jamie asks to get down from Frank's shoulders, and together with the girl the pair of them help support Frank out of the pub. Although the girl is genuinely being kind to Frank, he thinks unkind thoughts about her. He thinks, "I expected she would just let me crack my skull on the pavement because women like to see men helpless."

Although Paul was his little brother, Frank did not see this as a reason to preserve or protect his life. In Frank's mind, Paul was a reincarnation of Old Saul, and Old Saul had stolen power from Frank by castrating him, and so, logically, Paul had to die.



Frank keeps few secrets from Eric, but he does hide all of his murders from his brother. While he keeps the secret from Diggs and his father so that he won't be locked away, he keeps secrets from his brother because he worries Eric would hate him.



Frank cares about very few people, but Jamie is his only friend. Often selfish, Frank goes out of his way to be kind and helpful to his friend.



Eric and Jamie are the only two people Frank truly cares about. Although he knows Eric is dangerous and insane, he still loves him and wants to see him.



Jamie is also one of two people in the world Frank will make concessions for. Because he cares about his friend, he will even interact with women, who usually disgust him.



Although Frank thinks of himself as incredibly intelligent and perceptive, he has a blind spot when it comes to women. Although the girl from the pub, along with Jamie, is helping him and attempting to care for him, he ignores this evidence and instead thinks cruel thoughts about the callousness and selfishness of women.



The girl asks if Jamie always sits on Frank's shoulders. Jamie says yes, and jokes that in the bathroom he pees into the tank on the back of the toilet, while Frank pees into the bowl. Frank is upset by this, as he can only pee on the toilet sitting down because of his accident, and he is insecure about this.

Frank, in addition to being nauseated, also needs to pee. He doesn't want to pee in front of the girl, but is too drunk to explain what he needs. Instead, he bolts down a side street, running until Jamie and the girl are out of sight. Jamie runs after him, and catches Frank as he squats to pee in front of a garage.

Frank starts to vomit, and Jamie helps support him, holding him in his arms when it's over, and wiping Frank's mouth with paper towels. Jamie then takes Frank to his house, where Jamie's mother makes the pair tea. Frank doesn't mind her so much, even though she is a woman.

Frank sobers up at Jamie's house, and then walks home around one in the morning. As he walks he remembers walking home another night a few years ago. Out on the ocean that night he saw strange lights flickering in the air. He realized that they must be "gas-flares of oil-rigs maybe hundreds of kilometres away, out in the North Sea." He was happy to have come to this conclusion, as he suspects "somebody less logical and less imaginative would have jumped to the conclusion that what they had seen were UFOs."

CHAPTER 5: A BUNCH OF FLOWERS

Frank explains that he killed Esmerelda because, after killing two boys, he felt he had to do his part to correct the resultant gender imbalance. Esmerelda was an easy target.

Frank sensed that Esmerelda's parents were suspicious of him, but they let Esmerelda visit the island one summer anyway. He knew it was risky to kill another child only a year after killing Paul, but he felt compelled to. Frank describes the feelings as "an itch, something I had no way of resisting." He feels the need to "keep balanced" in his daily life—if he scuffs one shoe on accident, he must then scuff the other—and so in this he feels the need to "get rid of some woman, tip the scales back."

Although Frank and Jamie are close friends, they are still capable of accidentally hurting one another. Frank is insecure about his genitals because of his castration, and doesn't like to discuss his lack of a penis, which prevents him from peeing in the way he thinks a man should always pee.



Jamie cares about Frank, and is the only character in the entire novel who goes out of his way to help his friend. Angus rarely makes compromises for Frank, and although Eric has escaped from prison, it is unclear why.



Jamie is a good friend to Frank, who, earlier in the night, was a good friend to Jamie. It's one of Frank's only reciprocally kind relationships.



Frank thinks of himself as smart and perceptive, although also with an affinity for the supernatural and strange. Seeing the lights over the ocean, he is proud of himself for being creative enough to consider that they might be alien spacecraft, but logical enough to identify their true cause.



Esmerelda's murder was motivated only by Frank's hatred of women, and a compulsion to make the gender breakdown of his murders more symmetrical.



Frank didn't want to kill Esmerelda in the same way he wanted to kill Paul or Blyth. Instead, he feels compelled to. He seems to have obsessive-compulsive tendencies related to order and control (which can also be seen in his morning rituals and the Wasp Factory), which have spilled over into his ritualistic acts of violence.



That summer Frank made many kites, and took Esmerelda with him. This gave him his fatal idea. Secretly, he constructed a giant kite out of tent poles and tent fabric, so powerful that Frank himself could barely control it. The day he finished the kite he gave it to Esmerelda to fly. He tied her wrists to it, telling her it was so she “wouldn’t lose her grip.” Then he helped her catch a breeze, and let the kite carry her off.

Frank knew that the fact of three nearby deaths was suspicious, so he planned out his response to Esmerelda’s disappearance. He acted nearly catatonic, refusing to speak to anyone, alternately feigning sleep and then waking with (fake) nightmares. For a week Frank pretended to recover, letting slip pieces of the truth to Angus and Diggs—Esmerelda was tangled up in a big kite, he tried to save her and failed. Frank gleefully recalls the murder. He relates, “I got to even up the score and have a wonderful, if demanding, week of fun acting.”

Hung-over, Frank spends Sunday in bed. When he eventually comes downstairs, Angus criticizes him for drinking. That night the phone rings, and Frank eagerly answers. It’s Eric. Dissatisfied with how Frank answered the phone, Eric hangs up. Then he calls back, forcing Frank to try again.

Eric pretends to be Frank, frustrating his brother. In turn, Eric is frustrated that Frank isn’t playing his game, and becomes agitated when Angus wakes up and listens to the phone call, causing Frank to pretend he is talking to Jamie. Eric angrily responds to this, asking Frank if he has forgotten his own brother’s name. Eventually, Angus goes back upstairs.

Frank thinks he can hear a dog in the phone booth from which Eric is calling. Alarmed by this, Frank yells at Eric, who accidentally lets the dog escape. He blames Frank for distracting him. Frank hangs up on his brother. In bed the night Frank decides he will have to “try to influence things through the root cause of it all: Old Saul himself.” He hopes he can somehow use the Factory, and **Old Saul’s skull** to send “vibes” out to Eric. Frank explains that he doesn’t “hold all dogs to blame for what had happened.” In Frank’s mind, Old Saul “had gone down in our history and my personal mythology as the Castrator,” but believes to have “him in my power now.”

Frank believes Eric to be crazy, but still cares for him, and remarks Eric is “lucky to have somebody sane who still liked him.”

Frank nonchalantly recounts the murder of his young cousin. Her relation to him did not make him feel any kind of obligation to her. He felt compelled to kill someone female, and she was the easiest target.



Frank’s memory of Esmerelda’s murder is one of the most disturbing recollections of violence in the novel. His total lack of motivation, and his total lack of remorse, make Frank seem callous, cruel, and potentially sociopathic. Not only does he feel no guilt or shame, but the murder brought him joy, and he loves the game of deceiving the adults in his life.



Although Angus has little control over Frank, his criticisms attempt to take back some power from his son.



Sometimes Eric sounds almost sane on the phone, but tonight is not one of those nights. Frank is frustrated by Eric, but loves and cares about him, and does his best to protect him from their eavesdropping father.



Both Frank and Eric blame Old Saul for Frank’s castration, and have tried to take revenge upon the dog. Frank believes that by killing Paul, who he thinks was the reincarnation of Old Saul, and by exhuming Old Saul’s skull, he now has the dog totally in his power. Eric, meanwhile, sees all dogs as representatives of Old Saul, and so kills them indiscriminately to take revenge upon the deceased family pet. Frank, ironically, sees Eric’s behavior as crazy and futile.



Frank’s bond with his brother cannot be broken by anything — Frank now just sees Eric’s insane behavior as part of him, another aspect to love.



CHAPTER 6: THE SKULL GROUNDS

When Frank was three his mother, Agnes, who had been absent his entire life, returned to the island on her motorcycle. She was pregnant with some other man's child, but expected Angus to care for her and deliver her baby. Initially resistant, Angus spent the next three weeks caring for the mother of his second son. Frank enjoyed terrorizing Old Saul, and one afternoon, as Agnes went into labor, attended by Angus and Mrs Clamp, the pair heard barks and a scream from outside. Angus rushed downstairs to find Frank bloody and unconscious, and Old Saul hiding with blood on his jaws. Angus strangled Old Saul, just as, upstairs, Agnes gave birth to Paul.

Two days later, Agnes left on her motorcycle, leaving Paul behind. Angus tried to stop her, but she ran over his leg and took off. Frank remarks sourly that after only two weeks on the island Agnes "left one dead, one born, and two crippled for life...not a bad score."

Old Saul's **skull** was buried on a hill behind the house, which Frank eventually named the Skull Grounds. Angus claimed to have cut Old Saul open and retrieved Frank's genitals, but Frank has never seen them.

Frank believes "Paul, of course, was Saul." The spirit of the dog "transferred" to the boy. That's why Paul was named partially after the dog. Frank thinks it is lucky that he found this out and killed Paul because he could grow older and more evil.

Frank had to kill his pet gerbils, mice, and hamsters so he could find Old Saul's **skull**. He wasn't allowed to dig up the pet graveyard; instead, he killed dozens of rodents by firing them into the creek with the Killer so he would have an excuse to excavate gravesites. After thirty-seven "flight experiments," and thirty-seven graves dug, Frank finally uncovered Old Saul's bones. Frank was happy to have "my old enemy in my power." He excavated Old Saul's **skull** and put it in the Bunker, surrounded by "heavy magic" and "important things."

Still, Frank notes that his "enemy is twice dead," and yet he remains less than "a full man." However, he considers Eric's dog burning to be "just nonsense."

Much of Frank's hatred of women likely stems from his mother. She was not present in his life, and he holds her responsible for a series of disasters that befell his family, one of those being Frank's castration. Although Old Saul was always around, Frank was only allowed to be unsupervised with the dog because Agnes had taken both Angus and Mrs Clamp's attention.



Although Frank doesn't care about Paul at all, he nonetheless includes his abandonment on the list of reasons why he hates Agnes, and women in general.



Because Old Saul took his masculine power from him, Frank believes he can reclaim some of it by taking control of the skull.



Paul was born the day Old Saul died, and so in Frank's mind, Paul is a reincarnation of Old Saul. Additionally, their similar names suggest some deep connection.



Again it's reinforced that Frank finds a sense of control in possessing certain objects. He believes that, by reclaiming the skull of the animal that castrated him, he will reclaim some of the masculine power that was stolen from him. Because his father forbids him to dig up the skull, he buys and kills pets so he can have an excuse to search the hill for the remains of his dog.



Ironically, although Frank's attachment to Old Saul's skull is purely superstitious, he believes Eric's dog-killing to be irrational.



CHAPTER 7: SPACE INVADERS

Frank recalls how he used to play horrible games with birds — shooting them, blowing them up, or tying two together and forcing them to fight to the death.

Tuesday morning Frank bikes into town to meet with Jamie. Jamie doesn't understand, if Eric is so crazy, why no one has caught him yet. Frank hypothesizes that, although his behavior with dogs and maggots "looks pretty crazy," maybe Eric isn't "really crazy after all. Perhaps he just got fed up acting normal and decided to act crazy instead." Frank also theorizes that maybe his whole family is crazy.

Jamie and Frank play the arcade game Space Invaders and continue to talk. Frank remarks that there are people crazier than him or Angus is, who he sees as eccentrics. Jamie agrees, and suggests many of them are political or religious leaders. Frank counters maybe the powerfully are the only truly sane people, as they've figured out how to game the system.

Frank bikes back to the island. He spends the afternoon tidying up the loft that holds the Wasp Factory. He decides to consult it tomorrow, making sure to get more information before Eric arrives.

Frank catches a wasp to use in the Factory. Then he builds a dam in a nearby river. It is huge and complicated, with the potential to devastate two tiny villages. He blows it up with a tiny homemade electrical bomb. As the little cities flood Frank experiences "a gorgeous feeling of excitement" in his stomach and throat. Frank waits for the stream to settle down, and then collects the husk of the bomb.

Frank explains, "all our lives are symbols. Everything we do is part of a pattern we have at least some say in." The strong are able to make their own patterns, while the weak act according to other's patterns. Frank relates this to the Wasp Factor. The Factory, as part of life, and part of death, is part of the pattern. Because, he believes, "every question is a start looking for an end" the Factory, which is about death, can answer them.

Much of Frank's violence has a purpose, but this is death for the sake of entertainment only.



Frank understands that if Eric is crazy, then he is probably crazy too, as he engages in similarly strange and violent behaviors. It benefits him then, to pretend that Eric isn't, crazy, which would make Frank also sane by extension. Still, Frank recognizes that both of them act strangely, which is why he suggests that maybe his whole family is insane.



It's unclear how serious either Frank or Jamie is during this conversation. It's one of the only opportunities the reader gets to see Frank interacting in a friendly, sober way with another human being, and it humanizes him more—but the normalcy of these interactions also highlights the bizarreness and brutality of Frank's life on the island.



Frank turns to the Factory for strength, control, and reassurance. Eric makes him nervous, and so he hopes the Factory will help him.



Frank is nervous about his brother's imminent arrival, and so builds a dam to give himself some sense of control. It is initially unclear whether Frank is using the bomb for ritualistic purposes, or merely for his own entertainment.



Frank believes that the Wasp Factory can help both decode the future and untangle the present. He believes life is made up of symbols, and the Wasp Factory merely helps him become better at reading them. Implicitly, reading these symbols gives him insight into the workings of the world, which makes him powerful.



Frank is certain the Wasp Factory will give him a sense of the future. Then he will contact Eric using Old Saul's **skull**. Frank believes that "at some deep level" he and Eric "understand each other, even though he is mad and I am sane."

Although Frank genuinely believes the Wasp Factory can help him tell the future, and Old Saul's skull can function as a walkie-talkie, he still thinks of himself as sane and Eric as crazy.



Frank has a theory that "both sexes can do one thing specially well; women can give birth, and men can kill." Frank considers himself "an honorary man," and feels death in his "uncastrated genes." He believes this connection with Eric will be enough to telepathically reach out to him.

Frank's theories of gender are directly based on his own sense of his lacking masculine power. Although he does not have male genitalia he identifies as a man, and as a result he is excessively violent in order to prove himself.



CHAPTER 8: THE WASP FACTORY

The next day, early in the morning, Frank does his morning ritual and goes upstairs to the Factory. He sets the jar with the previously captured wasp on an altar decorated with other powerful objects — the skull of the snake that killed Blyth, a fragment of the bomb that killed Paul, a piece of fabric from the kite that killed Esmerelda, some of Old Saul's teeth. Frank begins his ritual. He holds his crotch and chants — telling the truth about who he is, what he wants, and who he has killed.

Frank's daily life is governed by habit and ritual. It is unclear if his adherence to the ritual of the Wasp Factory bled into his domestic routines, or his need for organization and control led to the creation of the Wasp Factory's rituals. The ritual requires various powerful objects, all of which have acquired their power through violence or death.



Frank describes the Wasp Factory. It is the face of an old enormous public clock, a meter across. In the center is a hole where the hands formerly attached, which is where the wasp is let into the factory. Attached to the face, one at each numeral, are twelve corridors. Each leads the wasp to certain death — by electrocution, spider, poison, etc. — but depending on which corridor it selects Frank is taught a different lesson.

Unsurprisingly, as violence plays such an important role in Frank's daily life, death and torture play a role in the Wasp Factory as well. Actually seeing the Wasp Factory, as opposed to simply hearing it referenced, helps underscore how truly strange (even insane) Frank is.



Today, Frank's wasp dies by petrol fire. He takes its charred body and puts it in a matchbox, performing a series of rituals with the corpse — including holding it to his forehead before his altar — before he allows himself to leave. He takes a photo of Eric formerly situated on the altar with him as he goes. Frank walks to the Bunker. Usually, the Factory is not specific. It makes him nervous that it has given him the same answer — fire — twice.

Although Frank has great faith in the Wasp Factory, it never gives him a clear answer. Even now, giving him fire twice in a row clarifies very little — he doesn't know whether he should use fire to his advantage, should be cautious of fire, or should expect one. Still, Frank trusts it totally.



In the Bunker, Frank thinks of Eric. He remembers who he was as a child — once "clever" and "kind," now he is "a mad angel," a "force of fire and disruption," "madness and delusion."

Frank loved and continues to love his brother, even though Eric's insanity turned him into an almost entirely new person.



Frank places one hand on Old Saul's **skull**, closes his eyes, and pictures Eric's face. He feels himself transported into Eric's mind and body. He feels Eric's tired feet, the taste of meat and fur on his tongue. But before Frank can get any more information, a blast shocks him out of his trance. Frank feels confident he had almost succeeded. However, he believes Eric's "lunatic strength" was too strong for a "sane" person to cope with. Even Frank's brain, which he believes to be "far from normal and more powerful than most," was unable to match Eric's passion and drive to destroy and to make it home.

Frank he hopes Old Saul's skull can somehow connect him telepathically to Eric. He believes that this works, briefly, but Eric is too insane, and too powerful, for Frank to stay in his mind for long. Frank is far from normal, and so it is ironic that he sees Eric as so much crazier than he is that the two could not occupy the same mental space.



Frank falls asleep watching television. The phone wakes him some time later. He's disappointed to find it's Jamie calling, not Eric. Jamie has hurt his foot and is off work for the week. Frank says he'll come around to see him. Jamie wonders if Frank has heard from Eric. He hasn't, but discloses that he wants to see Eric, but doesn't want Eric to do all the "daft things he did before." Frank knows it is impossible to want both things.

Frank understands that the Eric he misses the most is the Eric that is gone — his sane brother. Still, he'll settle for whatever version of his brother eventually arrives on the island, understanding his desire is impossible.



Frank hangs up the phone and it rings again. He picks it up, assuming it's Jamie, but this time it is Eric. Eric is immediately angry that Frank mistook him for someone else. Eric is especially angry that Frank mistook him for Jamie, who he calls, "That dwarf." Frank pushes back, asking, "What do you mean, 'that dwarf', in that tone? He's my friend. It isn't his fault he's small."

Although Frank often goes out of his way not to offend or upset Eric, he cares enough about Jamie that he will risk setting Eric off in order to defend his friend.



Eric argues back for a minute shouting into the phone, and then switches into a calmer voice. He tells Frank he's almost there, but won't say where he is, only that he's broken into somebody's cottage for the night. Frank wonders if Eric felt anything strange that morning (when Frank tried to connect with him psychically). Eric tells him he was sleeping. Eric becomes bored with the phone call and hangs up, leaving Frank "fuming and belligerent."

Frank likes to feel as though he is powerful and in control, which is easier when Eric is acting obviously crazy. Here, however, Eric flips the script, acting rational while Frank gets increasingly frustrated.



CHAPTER 9: WHAT HAPPENED TO ERIC

The next day Frank visits his injured friend, Jamie. Frank then walks into the hills behind the town, where he eats lunch alone.

Frank's friendship with Jamie is genuinely sweet and selfless.



Although Frank loves the island, he likes getting away from it sometimes to gain a sense of perspective. Still, he has no desire to every be out of sight of his home. Frank explains "I know my limitations," and readily admits his "need for reassurance and safety in a world which just so happened to treat me very cruelly at an age before I had any real chance of affecting it." Additionally, Frank saw Eric leave the island and lose his mind, and treats this as a cautionary tale.

One of Frank's governing rules and superstitions is that the island is the only safe place in the world. As a child without a birth certificate. Angus likely told Frank to stay close to home, but seeing Eric leave the island and lose his mind likely cemented in Frank's mind the danger of the wider world.



Although Eric has undergone an “alternation” Frank still loves him. He compares this to how Eric loves him despite his “disability.” Frank sees this as a desire to protect someone weaker “which women are supposed to feel for the young and men are meant to feel for women.”

Eric primarily lived on the mainland until Frank was three, at which point he returned full time. Frank loved it when Eric was home, and was upset when he was old enough to leave the island again for private school. The brothers spent every summer together, playing, building, and inventing. Eric was always kind to Frank. The only times he upset his little brother were when they would play a game and Eric would play dead, killed in some make-believe war. Frank hated to imagine his brother dying. When Eric was occasionally bedridden because of a migraine Frank suffered too. Everything seemed “pointless” to him when Eric was ill.

When Eric left the island to train to become a doctor Frank was upset, but couldn’t blame his brother. He explains, “he was my brother, he was doing what he had to do.” Additionally, Eric never suspected or blamed Frank for the murders of their relatives, and so Frank feels he owes him a kind of reciprocal courtesy.

When Eric returned after his first year away at school Frank could feel he had changed. He was now an adult playing with Frank, a child. Frank felt this loss acutely. He believed his castration would keep him “in my adolescent state for ever.” He believes he will never “grow up and be a real man, able to make my way in the world” in the way that Eric has. To cope with his loss of Eric, and his newfound realization that he would never grow up in the way his brother has, Frank made himself “unchallenged lord of the island.”

During Eric’s second year he had his “unfortunate experience.” Frank describes this as a complete reinvention of Eric’s personality — he was “satanically reversed,” “an adult damaged and dangerous, confused and pathetic and manic all at once.”

Frank’s love for his brother often manifests in a desire to protect him. Frank sees Eric as weaker and more feminine (two qualities he believes go hand in hand), and as someone stronger and masculine he much watch out for him.



Eric and Frank’s relationship has always been loving. Although they are half brothers, and didn’t live together until Eric was six and Frank was three, they quickly made up for lost time. Throughout the novel Frank often seems incapable of sadness or emotion, but he clearly is capable of some empathy, as demonstrated by how upset he would become when Eric would play-dead, or get truly sick.



Frank strangely equates his forgiveness of Eric for growing up and leaving the island as similar to the courtesy Eric paid him by never suspecting him for the murder of their brother and cousins.



Frank often thinks about his castration, but Eric’s transition to adulthood revealed to him an entirely new loss — the impossibility of (hormonally at least) ever being an adult man. Frank sees adulthood as tied to sexual development, which he will never have. To make up for the lack of control he has over his own body, Frank instead decides to work on controlling his homeland.



Unlike Frank, who was born insane, or else altered at a young age by his castration and has never been any other way, Eric’s switch from sanity to insanity was sudden and severe.



Eric was already struggling at school romantically and academically. However, the incident occurred at a local hospital where he helped nurses on the late shift. He watched over one ward for very young, very sick children, many of whom were born with deformities. One night he was feeding a child with severe disabilities, who, on the best days, was barely responsive. This child had to wear a metal hat over the thin skin on its head where its brain plates had failed to grow together. The child was especially unresponsive on this particular evening, and Eric, seeing something strange on its head, lifted the metal hat to discover maggots had made their way under the plate to consume the child's brain.

Seeing this, Eric was immediately devastated. Already unstable, he was discovered in a corner screaming, the child laying on the floor with a spoon stuck into its open head. Eric was sedated and cared for as a patient for a few days. He was eventually sent back to school, but could not recover — drinking, missing class, and eventually, when the school suggested he take time off, setting his books on fire in front of his tutor's office. Eric returned to the island but was not the same as before. Frank was suddenly frightened of him. At first, Eric would start fights in public or else lock himself in his room. Eventually he started trying to feed local kids worms and maggots. Additionally, local dogs had been disappearing, and Eric was spotted lighting one on fire.

Soon after that Diggs came to arrest Eric, but Eric hid out, first for three days, and then, when he returned, for another week. He was eventually caught, imprisoned, and certified as insane. His threats and violence towards the staff at the institutions guaranteed he was moved into increasingly secure facilities. But for a while he was calm, and now he has escaped. Frank suspects Eric was purposefully trying to “lull his keepers into a false sense of security.”

From his perch on the mainland Frank looks out with his binoculars. He feels that Eric is nearby, but does not spot him. Frank begins to walk across the hills.

Frank passes some sheep, and reflects that he used to hate sheep for their “profound stupid[ity].” Now, he sees that sheep represent, “not their own stupidity, but [humankind's] power, our avarice and egotism.” Humans bred sheep to be “docile, frightened, tasty wool-producers.” Frank believes this theory applies to other domesticated animals. He wonders if it can be applied to women, too, but admits it probably cannot be.

Earlier in the novel Frank implied that there was a connection between Eric's migraines, the fact that his mother died in childbirth because of Eric's large head, and “What Happened to Eric.” He thinks there is significance in the fact that all these aspects of Eric's life involve heads. Frank loves patterns, but in reality, Eric was likely worn down by the stress of school and work, and pushed over the edge by his truly horrible discovery.



The spoon in the child's head was probably to clean out the maggots. Just as Eric's entire personality was reconfigured by this trauma, so was the trauma reconfigured in his mind. He went from trying to save a child from maggots, to trying to feed children maggots. Although he was unable to save Frank from castration when they were children, now Eric sets dogs on fire in some attempt to undo, or take revenge for, his little brother's mutilation.



Although much of Eric's behavior was clearly insane (burning dogs, feeding maggots to children), he maintained enough of his faculties to evade capture. Frank even suspects that Eric has been plotting his escape for months, behaving well so that he would be monitored less carefully, and would have an opportunity to escape again.



Frank continues to love his brother and feel connected to him, even sensing that he is close — a hunch that feels almost mystical.



Frank sees, for maybe the first time, a downside of absolute power and absolute control. It can corrupt the object, animal, or person upon which power is being enacted. Frank tries to tie this newfound revelation into his theory of sex and gender, trying to justify scientifically or philosophically why women are inferior, but he fails.



CHAPTER 10: RUNNING DOG

Frank is annoyed that Eric lost his mind. He sees it as a “weakness, a fundamental flaw that a real man should not have had.” To fall apart in the face of trauma seems, to Frank, to be a feminine characteristic. However, he admits there must be “a few strong women” who could endure hardship, and, on the flipside, a few weaker men who could not. Frank believes that Eric’s childhood sensitivity and delicacy are indications that he had “just a little too much...woman” in him.

Frank resents Agnes for having Eric sent away during his early years. He also blames his father for dressing Eric in both dresses and pants as a child. He hopes his father blames himself as well.

That night Frank goes to bed early. The next day, restless, Frank patrols the island. The day is hot but he walks all over, crossing to the mainland, exploring the town dump, and eventually resting by a cabin, where he hears what he thinks is the wail of a dog being tortured. He takes out his binoculars in time to see a dog on fire, running down a nearby hill. Frank runs towards where the dog had been. He follows patches of burning grass down to a stream, where the dog has laid down. Frank kills the dog, shooting it through the eye with his slingshot and a steel ball. He whispers, “Frank’ll get you.” Frank buries the dog and returns home. He and Angus have dinner, but do not discuss Eric. Frank notices a headline in the paper saying a cottage in nearby Inverness mysterious caught fire.

That night the phone rings. It’s Eric, acting manic, joking and playing word games. Frank isn’t interested in playing along. He tells Eric he saw the burning dog. He asked Eric to stop torturing animals and children, threatening him. Eric either doesn’t understand, or pretends not to understand what Frank means. Frank hangs up the phone, pretending it was Jamie when his father asks. That night he sleeps fitfully.

CHAPTER 11: THE PRODIGAL

In the morning, Frank cleans himself and visits the loft. He dusts the altar, and adjusts the factory. He makes a circuit of the island, repairing the Sacrifice Poles as needed. He then engages in some target practice, shooting ball bearings and throwing his knife at a tree. Mrs. Clamp visits for lunch. She reports that a dog is missing in town. Frank jokes it’s lucky Eric isn’t around to take the blame.

Frank loves his brother and feels he must protect him because he believes Eric is naturally weaker. Frank equates weakness and femininity, and therefore describes Eric’s flaw as being due to having feminine qualities. Still, Frank’s ideas of gender are shifting somewhat, as he acknowledges that women can have masculine characteristics just as men can have feminine ones.



Frank is always quick to blame Agnes for anything because he hates her. He also blames his father, because he feels that letting Eric wear dresses made him more feminine as an adult. This also shows Angus experimenting on his children’s gender presentation, something that will be important later.



Frank understands that the burning dog means Eric is nearby. This moment shows a key difference between Eric and Frank. Although in the past Frank has killed indiscriminately (specifically the male rabbit and his memories of torturing birds), he generally likes to kill only for a reason, without excessively torturing the animals. In this moment, he puts the dog out of its misery, an act of kindness that seems almost out of place, and one that Eric likely would not bestow upon a dying animal.



Although frustrated by his brother and disturbed by his actions, Frank nonetheless tries to protect him. Once again, Eric is acting insane, and Frank seems logical and put-together in contrast.



Frank continues to live his life according to a strict routine, which makes him feel in control and powerful. Frank implies that Eric was falsely accused of lighting dogs on fire previously, but Eric was definitely burning dogs before his arrest.



After lunch, Frank feels cheerful and energetic. That night he continues to patrol the island, looking out with his binoculars. He sees some smoke, but doubts Eric has generated it. He watches Angus leave home and walk to town unsteadily. Frank suspects he is drunk. This is unusual, and Frank returns home to investigate.

Inside, the phone is hanging off the hook. Frank suspects Angus got a phone call, was surprised by it, and got drunk. Frank debates what Eric's next move will be. He decides that Eric will definitely get in touch. In that case, Frank will remain at home, in the "center of my power and strength."

Frank sits in his kitchen, waiting. In the early evening Angus calls incredibly drunk. He tells Frank Eric has been caught, and asks Frank to come into town. Frank agrees to join him, but as he walks into town he notices a patch of telephone wire where birds are not sitting. He gets up to investigate, discovering the telephone wire leading from the mainland to his house has been cut. On a nearby telephone pole someone has nailed a dog's ear. Suddenly reinvigorated, Frank turns around and runs back to the island. Back at home, Frank is ecstatic to know Eric is still out there. He's angry at Angus, who he realizes lied to him to try and lure out of the house "just because he was too frightened to face Eric."

Frank has fallen asleep waiting for Eric. He wakes up to the sound of someone moving around downstairs. He hopes it's Eric, but it's just Angus, staggering drunkenly to bed. Angus yells for Frank but Frank doesn't respond. After his father has gone to bed, Frank goes downstairs. He finds Angus's coat, with keys in the pocket. Frank will finally be able to unlock his father's study.

Inside the study Frank finds a **specimen jar** that holds a "tiny, torn set of male genitalia." Seeing them, Frank cries at his loss.

As part of his compulsive and ritualistic nature, Frank is good at recognizing patterns, and breaks in patterns. Angus's drunkenness strikes Frank as abnormal behavior, which causes him to investigate further.



Faced with an unfamiliar, stressful situation, Frank does his best to stay in control. He feels safest on the island, near his weapons and his ritual sites and objects — the Bunker, the Poles, the Factory.



Frank understands that Angus likely got a phone call from Eric, was scared, and got drunk. Suspecting that Eric would come to the house, Angus tried to lure Frank away to protect him. Angus does genuinely care about Frank's wellbeing, but Frank doesn't appreciate the gesture. Instead he sees Angus as cowardly (a trait he often associates with women, and therefore dislikes). Additionally, even though he is scared of his brother, Frank misses him and is excited to see him again.



Angus has denied Frank access to the study for his entire life. However, Angus has finally let his guard down. For once, Frank has the upper hand in their relationship and is in a position of power and control.



The specimen jar and the testicles within them represent, to Frank, all of his wasted potential — a life he could have lived.



Frank eventually regains his composure and looks around more carefully. Most of the items in the room are “junk and chemicals,” but he continues to investigate. Frank unlocks a drawer using his father’s key and is shocked by what he finds: inside is a box of tampons, a box of male hormones, and a box labeled KBr. Confronted with this puzzle, Frank begins to work through it. He comes to the conclusion that Angus is, in fact, Agnes, and has been taking male hormones and passing himself off as Frank’s father. Frank realizes he’s never his father without a shirt, and has noticed his arms have very little hair. He takes the tampons, the hormones, and his knife, goes to visit Angus.

Angus is sleeping in bed. Frank wakes him with two slaps to the face. Frank shows him the tampons and the hormones, demanding some kind of explanation Angus is too drunk to explain anything, and instead tries to escape his violent son. Frank threatens Angus with a knife until he lays still, and then removes his father’s pants. As he does so Angus tries to apologize, explaining drunkenly, “Was an experimen, sall. Juss an expermen...” Frank cuts Angus off by calling him a bitch. Frank pulls Angus’s pants all the way off, revealing his penis.

Frank is interrupted by screams and bleats outside, accompanied by a strange orange light. Looking out the window, he sees a herd of sheep, all set on fire, charging over the hill. Behind them comes Eric, holding a torch and dancing. Frank runs out to greet him.

Frank arrives outside to find Eric hacking at the cellar door with an axe. Frank yells to Angus to get out of the house. Eric makes it through the door, but drops the torch, changing direction and charging at Frank instead. Frank ducks, and Eric runs into the night. Frank retrieves the torch, which managed not to light any of the cordite in the cellar on fire. However, a burning sheep has collided with the shed where Frank has hidden his bombs, which explodes deafeningly.

Frank goes back inside. The sheep have all died or burned out. Eric has disappeared. Angus is at the sink with a bucket of water and a carving knife. Frank explains the danger is over. Frank asks Angus to sit down and explain some things to him. Angus had brought the **specimen jar** downstairs with him, and now reaches for it. He knocks it to the ground where it smashes. He takes the specimen from it, closing his fist around it. Opening his hand again, he reveals a pink ball, like “a lump of plasticine, or wax.”

Frank’s immediate assumption is that Angus is not his father, but his mother. He realizes that Agnes sounds similar to Angus, and therefore assumes his father has been lying to him his entire life. Frank’s evidence is weak — not every man has a lot of body hair — but, in his defense, it is hard to imagine why his father would need a many-month supply of male hormones. Frank is angry at the deception, but also at the idea that a man he had some respect for was once the member of a gender he distrusts and despises.



Any affection Frank once felt for his father is totally destroyed by his suspicion that Angus is a transgender man. Although Angus struggles to explain the truth, he sees how upset his son is, and gives up all control, letting Frank do what he needs to do. However, when Frank pulls off Angus’ pants, looking for a vagina, he is confused to see that his father is at least anatomically male.



Although Eric’s entrance makes it clear that he is still both crazy and dangerous, Frank doesn’t mind. He still loves and misses his brother.



Although moments ago Frank was furious at his father, he doesn’t want him to die. Throughout the novel Frank has appeared questionably sane, but here, seeing Eric in the middle of the action, Frank looks reasonable in contrast.



The testicles in the specimen jar are not real. Instead, they are tiny sculptures made of wax. The specimen jar had represented Frank’s lost (or stolen) future, holding within it his ability to reproduce and his ability to grow into the kind of man he’s always fantasized about. However, by crushing the specimens, Angus reveals that many of the restrictions Frank believed had been placed on him by his castration have been a lie.



CHAPTER 12: WHAT HAPPENED TO ME

Sunday morning, Frank recalls a dream he had the previous night. The dream was based on a scene he had observed years earlier: two horses lived in a field together. One day, men came and took one of the horses. The other was distraught, crying and running in circles, but later in the day it had returned to normal, quietly eating grass.

The previous night Angus told Frank the truth. Then the pair barricaded the cellar, looked around for Eric, and went to bed. Now, Frank can see Diggs coming to talk to Angus. Frank leaves home to wander the island. He finds Eric sleeping on a dune, and wakes him up. Eric smiles when he sees, Frank, and Frank sits, letting Eric place his head in his lap and return to sleep.

Frank repeats what Angus explained last night. Frank is not Francis Leslie Cauldhame. Instead, Frank is Frances Lesley Cauldhame. After Frances's accident, Angus saw it as an opportunity to raise his daughter as a son, and began dosing Frances with male hormones.

This is why Angus always cooked, and why Frances had a beard and no periods. Angus also added bromide to the food to keep Frances from getting aroused by the extra androgen. Angus made fake genitals in case Frances ever asked too many questions. Angus even confessed to being friends with the barman, Duncan, who would report on Frances's drinking habits. This, not Frances's farts, is how Angus always knew what his child had been drinking.

Frances explains "part of me still wants to believe it's just his latest lie, but really I know the truth. I'm a woman." Only Frances's labia was chewed up by Old Saul. Frances still has fully working female genitalia and reproductive organs. Still, Frances has no present desire to have sex or give birth. Frances considers "my one life, my three deaths," amending it to my "four deaths now, in a way, now that my father's truth has murdered what I was." Still, Frances feels "I am still me," "the same person, with the same memories and deeds done."

Frances considers the crimes of the past. Frances wonders if killing peers was a way to take revenge on those "who each would otherwise have grown into the one thing I could never become: an adult." Frances wonders if the false memory of castration had led to a kind of "penis envy," a desire to "out-man" everyone nearby by acting as a "killer," a "ruthless," masculine, "soldier-hero."

Frank's dream is a kind of metaphor for his life and trauma. Frank understands that something unforgivable was done to him, but over time he forgot the details, and went on to live a (relatively) normal life.



Angus has been withholding the truth of Frank's past from him. By withholding the truth, and sealing off the study, Angus would always have the power. Finally, however, Angus tells Frank the truth, thus giving up that form of control over his son.



Frank was not born Frank. Instead, Frank was born female, as Frances. (In the novel, Frances refers to herself as female from here on, so this chart will as well).



Angus's control of Frances began with her gender presentation, but extended to all areas of her life. The experiment was more than seeing if he could raise a daughter as a son; it was an exercise in total control of a child, as evidenced by the controlling way Angus ran her life, from educating her himself to checking in on her at the pub.



Although Frances's world has been turned upside down, she is able to adjust shockingly quickly. She sees her past, male self, as having died, but still feels like the same person as before. After all, she has the same memories, the same behaviors, the same relationships and desires. Because she had so deeply hated women and tied her identity to her lost masculinity, it's difficult to believe at first, but Frances understands intuitively that Angus is telling her the truth.



Frances sees that her violent, sometimes murderous behavior was a desire to right the wrong she believed had been done to her. Because she believed she was sterile and could not reproduce, she killed instead. She fixated on children because they, she mistakenly believed, would grow into adults, something she thought she could not do without her genitals.



Frances now feels the actions of the past were “for nothing. There was no revenge that needed taking.” Frances believed sex was impossible, and so killed instead, as a kind of “conception.” The Factory, meanwhile, was another attempt to create life.

Frances explains that each person lives their life in his or her own personal Factory, and although they might believe they have “stumbled down one corridor, and that [their] fate is sealed,” anything can alter a person’s life path. Even though everyone dies in the end, everyone has a unique journey “part chosen, part determined,” which “changes even as we live and grow.” Frances “thought one door had snicked shut behind me,” but in fact, Frances has been “crawling about the face.” It is only now that Frances’s life truly begins.

Frances looks down at Eric, and thinks how funny that Eric has come home to see his brother, but will instead discover he has a sister.

Also stemming from her belief that she couldn’t reproduce was Frances’ desire to create in other ways. This is why she created the Wasp Factory, which served, in her mind, as a kind of surrogate child.



Frances had believed that the most important thing that would ever happen to her was her castration at age three. Now, however, she sees the most important thing as this realization: that she is not a castrated man, but a biological woman. There are no physical limitations place on her, and likely no legal ones either (although never discussed explicitly, Frances probably does have a birth certificate, it just shows that she is female). Frances is surprisingly forgiving and open when discussing the years of confusion behind her. She is just grateful that she has a new life ahead.



Francis easily mentally transitions from male to female. It doesn’t affect who she is, or who she cares about. She still feels like herself, and still loves her brother. How Eric will react to this information, though, is of course unknowable.





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