

The Chrysalids



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN WYNDHAM

Wyndham grew up outside of Birmingham and attended prep schools from the age of eight. After graduating, Wyndham began writing short stories and serial fiction pieces. During World War II, Wyndham served as a censor in the Ministry of Information and a cipher in the Royal Corps of Signals. He returned to writing after the war. Wyndham's brother, Vivian Beynon Harris, was also a successful writer. Wyndham married Grace Wilson in 1963 and moved to Petersfield, Hampshire, where he died. Wyndham is best known for pioneering a type of science fiction called "logical fantasy" (or "speculative fiction") that is based on extrapolating from current trends to imagine future realities and is more realistic than other forms of science fiction. *The Day of Triffids* is Wyndham's most well-known book, but *The Chrysalids* is often considered to be his best.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Chrysalids is a novel that is deeply intertwined in historical events. Written not long after World War II and in the midst of the Cold War, the book looks at what might happen in a world that has been irreparably damaged by nuclear warfare. The ethnic cleansing favored by the Waknukians is similar to the Holocaust, during which Nazis ordered the murders of millions of Jews and non-Aryans. This cleansing is also similar to the Great Purge that occurred in the 1930s in the Soviet Union, during which the Communist Party imprisoned and killed dissenters. Much of the ideology represented by the woman from Zealander is related to Communist ideas—specifically, the belief that history is a series of struggles between different races or classes and the idea that communal action is preferable to individual action. Finally, the persecution of people for their physical appearance in *The Chrysalids* is similar to the racism prevalent throughout the American South in the years leading up to and during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Wyndham was known to be a fan of the science fiction writer H.G. Wells, who wrote, among other things, *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Invisible Man* (1897). Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), written during the same period, is similar to Wyndham's novel in that it explores censorship in an extremely intolerant society. Further, just as Wyndham's novel is set on a semi-familiar version of Earth, Bradbury's vision for society is

one that readers would recognize as a logical extension of society today. *The Chrysalids* is also similar to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) in that both share a dystopian vision of the future in which societies discourage original thought. Finally, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* similarly explores what might happen in a society dominated by an intolerant religion.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Chrysalids*
- **When Written:** Mid-twentieth Century
- **Where Written:** United Kingdom
- **When Published:** 1955
- **Literary Period:** Golden Age of Science Fiction
- **Genre:** Science fiction
- **Setting:** Waknuk, Labrador (which likely correlates with present-day Wabush, Canada) in the distant future
- **Climax:** The convergence of the group in the forest after Petra's call
- **Antagonist:** Joseph Storm, and, more broadly, the Waknukian system of beliefs
- **Point of View:** First person, from David's perspective (sometimes retrospectively and sometimes in the moment of the event)

EXTRA CREDIT

Many pen names. John Wyndham published under a variety of pen names, including John Benyon, Johnson Harris, Lucas Parkes, and Wyndham Parkes.

Rocking out. *The Chrysalids* was the inspiration for the Jefferson Airplane song "Crown of Creation."



PLOT SUMMARY

The Chrysalids begins with a conversation between David and his sister Mary Storm about David's **dream** of a city he has never seen before. Mary warns him not to tell anyone about the dream because in Waknuk, the town where they live, it is best not to stand out. This proves to be good advice when David meets Sophie, who has six toes. According to the Waknukian religion, anyone whose body does not comply with the Definition of Man is a Blasphemy, and must be sterilized and banished from the community. This belief is based on the idea that God makes man in the image of himself, and God does not make mistakes, so anyone who does not look like the Image of

God must not be a man, and consequently, must be the work of the devil.

While David has been taught this definition, he has not internalized it, and he sees no problem with the fact that Sophie has six toes. He does his best to protect her, but eventually a boy named Alan sees her six-toed footprint and reports it to the authorities. Sophie and her family are forced to flee, and David learns to take deviations from the norm seriously.

Although David is physically normal, he, too, is a Blasphemy. David, along with a group of eight other people, has the ability to communicate telepathically, or through “thought-pictures.” When David is young, he is not aware of how dangerous this ability could be, but conversations with his Uncle Axel reveal that David would be persecuted for this gift. Uncle Axel is a kind and reasonable man who disagrees with many aspects of the Waknukian religion and supports David, even though it is illegal to do so. David’s father, Joseph, on the other hand, is an orthodox believer and is very willing to persecute anyone, family included, who deviates from the norm.

Years later, David’s mother, Emily, gives birth to a daughter, Petra, who is granted a Certificate of Normalcy. Her sister, Harriet, gives birth around the same time, but her child has a mutation. When Harriet asks Emily if she could switch her child with Petra for a few days in order to obtain a Certificate, Emily and Joseph refuse and throw her out of their home. She commits suicide the next day.

As David and the other telepaths grow older, they learn each others names and develop relationships with another. David and his half-cousin, Rosalind, are involved romantically. Another in their group, Anne, decides that she wants to marry Alan, a non-telepath and the same person who turned Sophie in for her deviation. Much to the protestations of the group, Anne goes through with the marriage. When Uncle Axel realizes that she has told Alan about the ability of everyone in the group, he kills Alan to stop him from telling anyone else. Anne kills herself when she hears the news of her husband’s death.

These two deaths make David nervous about his ability, but he is only forced to take action to protect himself because of his sister, Petra. Petra has extraordinarily powerful telepathic capabilities, but she is too young to be able to control them or even use them consciously. One day, Petra rides her **pony** into the forest and is attacked by a wild animal. She unknowingly sends incredibly strong distress signals to everyone in the group and forces them to come running to her. The group knows that it is a bad idea to be seen together, but before they can disperse, a man named Jerome Skinner catches David, Rosalind, Katherine, and Sally surrounding Petra. He becomes suspicious about how they all could have known she was hurt.

Soon after, Katherine and Sally are captured by the government, and David, Rosalind, and Petra are forced to flee to the Fringes, the area outside of Waknuk where Blasphemies

and Deviations are allowed to live. Michael, Mark, and Rachel, three more telepaths who have not been identified by the government, stay back to pass information on to the fugitives to help them escape. Petra, who has an extraordinary range, makes contact with a woman who is very far away in a land called Zealand (sometimes Sealand). She tells them that she is coming to rescue them, and that Petra must be kept safe at all costs.

As Rosalind, David, and Petra venture deeper into the Fringes, they are captured by a group of men who bring them to their leader, Gordon. Gordon turns out to be Joseph Storm’s brother and David’s uncle. He is bitter over having been exiled for his overly-long limbs, and wants revenge on Joseph and on Waknuk. Fortunately, Sophie, whom David has not seen in years, is in a relationship with Gordon and helps Rosalind, David, and Petra escape from his camp. Sophie lets the fugitives stay in her cave and hide from the Waknukian forces that are pursuing them.

Eventually, the Waknukians and the Fringe people, led by Gordon, meet in battle. Gordon kills Joseph Storm. He and Sophie are both then killed in battle. As the battle unfolds, the woman from Zealand arrives in a spaceship that casts thin strands of plastic onto the battlefield below. These strands contract when resisted against, and freeze everyone on the ground in place. The Zealander woman frees Rosalind, David, Petra, and Michael, who has come to help, from the plastic, but allows it to suffocate everyone else on the battlefield. She explains to the group that it is natural for one species to rise up and overpower another, and that she does not feel guilty for killing these people because change is the nature of life. Michael decides to return to Waknuk to find Rachel, and the woman takes Rosalind, David, and Petra back to Zealand, where as it turns out everyone can communicate telepathically.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

David Storm – David is the main character and narrator of the novel. His ability to communicate telepathically, or through “thought pictures,” with others makes him abnormal within the town of Waknuk, where he lives. As a result, David and the other telepathic Waknukians he meets must flee Waknuk – which sterilizes and banishes anyone who is different – when their secret ability is discovered. Throughout the novel, David refuses to adhere to the traditional and prejudiced beliefs supported by the Waknukian religion and government. He befriends and cares for people based on their character, rather than whether they adhere to The Definition of Man.

Petra Storm – Petra is David’s youngest sister. She is thought to be a normal child, until she endangers the other telepathic Waknukians with her extraordinarily strong telepathic powers.

The Zealand woman suspects that Petra is the most powerful telepath in the world, and she comes to rescue David, Rosalind, and Petra from the Fringes of Waknuk because of Petra's powers.

Rosalind Morton – Rosalind is David's half cousin, and later his girlfriend. Uncle Axel finds out about David's secret ability when he hears him having a conversation with Rosalind, who can also communicate telepathically. Rosalind's ability is exposed when she and David run toward Petra's silent calls for help, and she escapes with David and Petra when they are forced to flee Waknuk. She is kind, thoughtful, and a good planner.

Uncle Axel – David's Uncle Axel, the husband of his mother's late sister, is his primary confidant until he flees Waknuk and is no longer able to communicate with him. Unlike David's parents, Uncle Axel does not see David as a Mutant because of his abilities and spends a great deal of the book questioning the traditional beliefs of the Waknukians. Uncle Axel used to be a sailor until he went on a voyage that resulted in the death of his wife and left him a cripple. He tells David as much as he knows about the world beyond the town. He is particularly concerned with epistemology, or how we know what we know. He warns David to keep his ability secret and protects the group of Waknukian telepaths whenever possible.

Sophie Wender – Sophie was born with six toes on each foot—a mutation that classifies her as a Blasphemy in Waknuk. David meets Sophie as a young child, and does not understand why Sophie would want to hide her feet. Later, when Alan sees her six-toed footprint, Sophie and her parents are forced to flee Waknuk. When David leaves Waknuk years later, Sophie helps Petra and Rosalind escape from Gordon's camp, and provides them and David with shelter in her cave. She loves Gordon and dies while fleeing with him from the battle between the Waknukians and the Fringe people.

Joseph Storm – Joseph is David's father and a strict believer in the Waknukian faith. He ruthlessly beats David when he lies about Sophie's mutation, and he persecutes and targets anyone in town who he believes is not behaving morally. Joseph and the Inspector have a tense relationship, and Joseph uses his position as a preacher to speak out against the Inspector's decisions. He banishes Aunt Harriet when she asks for help, and joins the hunt for David, Petra, and Rosalind when he learns of his children's deviations. He is killed in battle by his outcast brother, Gordon.

Michael – Michael also has the ability to communicate telepathically. He argues with Anne about her decision to get married to the non-telepath Alan, and goes to great lengths to protect his fellow telepaths. When David, Rosalind, and Petra are discovered, Michael joins an army looking for them so he can keep them up-to-date and plant false information about their whereabouts. When the Zealander woman offers to take him back to Zealand, he decides to return to Waknuk to rescue

Rachel so that the two of them can find their way to Zealand together.

Woman from Zealand – The woman from Zealand (which David and Rosalind call "Sealand") discovers the group in Waknuk when she hears Petra's thoughts. In Zealand, everyone can communicate through thought images, but Petra has the largest known range of any telepath, so the Zealander woman organizes a ship to come and rescue Petra, Rosalind, and David. The woman believes strongly in the power of communal thought and a cyclical version of history in which a lower class overthrows a higher class, only to be overthrown by another class. These beliefs are very similar to those held in the real world by Marxists. The woman shows no remorse in killing an entire battlefield of people in order to save Petra, Rosalind, and David because she feels that the people who died are of an inferior species.

The Inspector – The Inspector is in charge of granting Certificates of Normalcy to newborn Waknukians and determining what is and is not made in the Image of God. He and Joseph Storm disagree about whether **great-horses** should be classified as Mutations. The Inspector is not as uncompromising in his beliefs as is Joseph, and, unlike Joseph, he is kind to David when he finds out that David has concealed Sophie's mutation. He grants Petra a Certificate of Normalcy because she looks like a normal child.

Gordon Storm – Gordon resembles his brother, Joseph, except that Gordon has extremely long arms and legs. At one point he is described as "the spidery man." As a result, he was banished from Waknuk and cast out into the Fringes. Gordon believes that, as the first-born Storm, he should be in charge of Waknuk instead of Joseph. David first meets Gordon as a young child, when Gordon is taken hostage in a Fringe attack on Waknuk. Later, when David escapes to the Fringes, Gordon captures David, Rosalind, and Petra, and holds them hostage to provoke an attack by the Waknukians. Gordon wants to have children with Rosalind, but he is in a relationship with Sophie. Gordon is extremely vengeful and bitter and kills his own brother in battle.

Aunt Harriet – David's Aunt Harriet comes to David's house to plead for help from her sister, Emily Storm. Harriet's child has a mutation, and she wants Emily to lend her Petra for a few days so that she can pretend Petra is her daughter and obtain a Certificate of Normalcy. Harriet has given birth to two other Blasphemies, and she fears that her husband will throw her out of the house when he finds out about the third. Emily and Joseph refuse to help Harriet and kick her out of their home. The next day, Harriet's body is found floating in the river. David is unable to forget Aunt Harriet's suicide, and her death helps motivate him to flee Waknuk.

Anne – Anne is a member of the group of Waknukians that can communicate telepathically. She realizes that there are an

unequal number of girls and boys in the group, and that some of the girls will have to marry outside of the group, or not marry at all. Despite the protests of the other group members, she falls in love with and decides to marry Alan. To make the marriage easier, she cuts off all communication with the group. But when it becomes clear that Anne told Alan about her and the other's telepathy, Uncle Axel kills Alan. When Alan is found dead, Anne kills herself, leaving behind a note that exposes and blames the rest of the group.

Alan – Alan, a boy with whom David goes to school, sees Sophie's six-toed footprint and reports her to the authorities, an act that forces Sophie and her family to flee their home. Later in the novel, he marries Anne. Uncle Axel kills Alan when he learns that Alan knows about David and the other telepath's abilities.

Rachel – Rachel is Anne's sister, and another telepath. When an illiterate neighbor finds Anne's suicide note, which is addressed to the Inspector, Rachel lies and says that it is meant for her so that she can destroy the note and protect the others in the group. Petra reads from Rachel's thoughts that she is in love with Michael, who eventually goes back to rescue Rachel and take her to Zealand.

Emily Storm – Emily Storm is David and Petra's mother and Joseph's wife. Like Joseph, she believes strongly in the Waknukian faith, and she decorates her homes with sayings from the holy book *Repentences*. She turns her sister, Harriet, away when Harriet asks for help hiding her abnormal-looking baby, but cries once Harriet leaves.

John Wender – John Wender is Sophie's father. He is a kind man, but he initially does not trust David to keep his daughter's secret. Once he sees the strength of David and Sophie's friendship, however, he grows fond of David. He entrusts David to stay at their home while they escape to give them extra time.

Sally – Sally, another telepath, responds to Petra's cry for help in the forest, and is captured by government officials who torture her into confirming that Rosalind, David, and Petra are Blasphemies. She feels a great deal of guilt because of this, but manages to protect the identities of Rachel, Michael, and Mark. The group fears that Sally may have gone insane as a result of the torture inflicted upon her.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Old People – Old People is the term used to describe the people who lived before Tribulation. Very little is known about them, but the Waknukian religion holds that Waknukians should model their lives after the Old People.

Jerome Skinner – Jerome catches Sally, Katherine, David, Rosalind, and Petra in the woods and questions them about how they all knew that Petra was hurt. He reports them to officials who then capture Sally and Katherine and hunt David, Rosalind, and Petra.

Katherine – Katherine is another telepath who, like Sally, is caught by the government and tortured. She is the first to reveal Rosalind, David, and Petra's names, and eventually dies at the hand of her torturers.

Nicholson – Nicholson wrote *Repentences* many years after Tribulation.

Mary Storm – Mary is David's sister. She warns him not to tell anyone about his **dreams** about the city, and takes care of him when their father beats him.

The Fringes Man – This man captures David, Rosalind, Petra, and their **great-horses** and brings them to Gordon. He speaks with David about the nature of life.

New People – New People is the term the Zealander woman uses for people who are able to think-together.

Mary Wender – Mrs. Wender is Sophie's mother. While she cannot communicate telepathically, David is able to read her feelings before she communicates them out loud.

Mark – Mark is another telepath. He stops communicating with the others after Rosalind, David, and Petra flee, and his fate remains unknown to the rest of the group.

Angus Morton – Angus Morton is Rosalind's father and Joseph Storm's enemy. The two disagree about the moral status of Angus' **great-horses**, on which Rosalind, David, and Petra later escape.

Jacob – Jacob is an old farmer who believes that Blasphemies should be burned instead of banished.

Marther – Uncle Axel tells David about Marther's controversial journals from his sailing trips.

Elias Storm – Elias is David's grandfather and Joseph's and Gordon's father. He held strict moral principles, but married a woman who was a bit less orthodox.

Walter Brent – Walter is another telepath. Early in the novel, before the members of the group learn each other's names, one member disappears. Uncle Axel finds out for David that Walter died in an accident.

Sheba – Sheba is David's **horse**.

Elias's wife – The unnamed wife of Elias Storm. She was less orthodox than her husband, and was described as being "**coltish**."



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.



WORDS

Words and language are at the heart of *The Chrysalids* because it is David's ability to communicate wordlessly that makes him a

Blasphemy. This ability frightens the leaders of Waknuk not only because David might be able to plan a secret uprising against them, but also because David's existence challenges the authority of the words on which the leaders' power is based. By classifying David as a Blasphemy, however, the leaders of Waknuk contradict the very words that they so strongly espouse. Up until this point, a Blasphemy was described as someone who did not *look* like the Image of God and differed from the Definition of Man. David, on the other hand, fits perfectly within the Definition, as his telepathic powers don't affect how he looks and are unmentioned in the Definition. His existence proves that the words contained within *Repentences* are not perfect or all-encompassing, and that the ideas promoted within them are opinions rather than facts.

The adages from the *Repentences* that fill the houses of Waknukians are meant to be powerful statements of the importance of conformity, but Uncle Axel points out that they are not powerful because they are not backed up by any sort of introspection. Waknukians memorize and repeat these proverbs, but they hear them so often that they never think about what they actually mean. Indeed, David often points out that even though he knows these maxims by heart, he has not internalized their meaning. David generally finds words to be much less effective tools for communication than thought-images, which are more immediate and nuanced units of communication.

While the novel clearly questions the power of language by contrasting it with telepathy, it also suggests that there are benefits to language that thought-images cannot claim. Indeed, the physical and aural manifestations of language keep David safe in situations that invisible and inaudible thought-images could not, like when Rachel saves the group by destroying the words of her sister. Further, Wyndham, the novelist, must himself rely on words to communicate his story to his readers. Although he imagines many benefits of collective thinking and telepathy, it is not at all clear from his novel that this is truly a superior way of operating.



WAYS OF KNOWING

The citizens of Waknuk rely mostly on tradition and religious texts as sources of knowledge about the world. Myths about the dangers of the Fringes and

the Badlands proliferate, but Uncle Axel tells David that when explorers went to these areas, they found that these myths were not always true. Unlike most people in Waknuk, Uncle Axel frequently questions statements that are presented as fact. He points out that there is no way of being certain about

the way the Old People lived or what the true Image of God really is because *Repentences* was written many years after the Tribulation. The correctness of the Definition of Man is not something that people in Waknuk challenge, but Uncle Axel encourages David to think not only about what is correct, but also about how one **knows** what is correct.

While the fact that Waknukians are living in the Image of God is widely taken for granted by the Waknukians, David learns that this fact might actually be an opinion when he meets other people, the Zealanders, who also consider themselves to be a superior race. He becomes increasingly skeptical of traditional sources of knowledge over the course of the novel, and is particularly wary of taking images and the words of authority figures as absolute truths. Rather than accepting things at face value, he comes to depend on personal experience as the only incontrovertible source of information. He also trusts the thoughts and feelings of his friends because he has experienced those thoughts and emotions.

Wyndham questions the primacy of vision and the statements of authority by creating characters, like Sophie, who look deviant, but are in fact much better people than many who look like the Image. Further, he challenges the credibility of appearances through David, who looks normal but is in fact very different from most people around him. The book clearly argues that there is a great deal of difference between appearance and reality. Wyndham also suggests that individual thought and experience is the only true source of knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of questioning authority and tradition.



TIME AND PROGRESS

The title of Wyndham's book introduces time as an important theme in the novel because the word "chrysalid" implies a specific sense of time. The word can either mean "a shell that has been discarded" or "a preparatory or transitional state"—it is either something in the past or something preparing for the future. Because Wyndham never uses the word anywhere in the text of the novel, however, it is not clear precisely to what or whom "the chrysalids" refers.

In Waknuk, people believe that time progresses in a linear fashion toward a better and more moral future. The Waknukians' goal is to rebuild the society that was lost in the Tribulation and live according to God's Word by ridding society of any mutations. The forward motion of time is very important to the Waknukians, and only those who align with the Definition are allowed to contribute to this progression. Reproduction is encouraged and valued among those who fit the Definition, while those deemed Blasphemies are sterilized before being cast out into the Fringes. The people in the Fringes, on the other hand, as well as those from Zealand, believe in a more cyclical version of time in which history

constantly repeats itself. People from both places believe that “life is change,” and they are not nearly as concerned with moving forward down a direct path to perfection.

The Chrysalids calls into question the idea that society can be manipulated into moving in a certain direction. Instead, it suggests, or perhaps even warns, that history repeats itself. Indeed, although the Waknukians conceive of time as moving forward, they want to move forward by replicating the past. The title, then, expresses the repetitive and cyclical nature of time through its two definitions. If David and the others who can think-together are “chrysalids” transitioning into a new society, they are also leaving a chrysalid of their previous society behind. Meanwhile, the supremacist ideas expressed by the Zealanders suggest that even though David and the group are transitioning to a new place and future, this society, too, will turn into an empty shell of the past.



MORALITY

While Wyndham’s novel is not necessarily optimistic about the future of this post-apocalyptic world, the book does not take an entirely negative stance on the future of society. Instead, the book argues that even within societies that are morally corrupt, individuals have the power and responsibility to make their own moral choices. Indeed, while the actions of the Waknukians and Zealanders are morally reprehensible due to their racist and violent nature, certain people within these societies are able to behave differently, despite having been taught to conform. The group of friends to which David belongs, for example, decides not to kill Anne even though she puts all of their lives in danger by getting married, and Michael gives up the opportunity to go to Zealand because he does not want to leave Rachel alone in Waknuk. In many ways, the morals of the group separate them from Waknuk much more than does any physical or mental difference. The fact that David, Petra, Rosalind, Michael, and Sophie are much better people than the typical Waknukian, yet are all classified as mutants, shows the hypocrisy of the moral code prescribed by the *Repentances*, and by repressive and totalitarian societies more generally.



RACISM AND FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Waknuk operates under a set of laws and beliefs that discriminates against anyone or anything that does not look “normal.” Those who appear different in any way from the Image of God as prescribed by the Definition of Man are segregated from society and sterilized, so that they cannot produce more Deviations. *The Chrysalids* exposes the hypocrisy and ludicrousness of any society that kills its members in an attempt to be more pure and moral. This is, of course, a morally reprehensible act, and a deeply misguided one. The people who are the targets of this moralistic racism prove to be those with the highest moral

standards, and the novel makes a clear statement about the impossibility of determining someone’s character from their appearance.

While much of the racism in the novel is driven by religious doctrine, this doctrine is fueled by a fear of the unknown. Rather than explore the world, the Waknukians isolate themselves to an extreme extent—so much so that they will go to extraordinary lengths to keep out the rest of the world. The Zealanders show a greater willingness to travel and explore, but they exhibit supremacist and xenophobic (a fear of foreigners) tendencies as well. Although the Waknukians actively seek out Offenses, while the Zealanders are more tolerant of difference, the Zealanders also show no compunction over killing those who they deem to be racially and intellectually inferior.

The fact that Waknukians would classify Zealanders as Deviations, while Zealanders consider Waknukians to be an inferior race deserving of death because they lack the ability to telepathically think-together, demonstrates the highly arbitrary nature of racism. This discrimination has nothing to do with truth, but rather is based on characteristics that are detested in one culture, but valued in another. Wyndham also forces the reader to think about this racism in a critical and personal way. Like the Waknukians killed by the Zealanders, the *reader* is not capable of think-together, and thus must wonder how he or she would fare in this world.



REAL WORLD ALLEGORY

Wyndham wrote *The Chrysalids* in the 1950s, after the atrocities of World War II and in the midst of the Cold War, and the ideologies espoused by the Waknukians and the Zealanders are similar to those of real-world groups at that time. The Waknukian’s insistence on racial purity is similar to that of the Nazis, while the decision to segregate Blasphemies into a specific area is reminiscent of both Nazi concentration camps and the racially-driven segregation occurring in the American South at the time. Indeed, like the sterilization of Blasphemies by the Waknukians, the disenfranchisement of African Americans in the South was largely based on the physical appearance of those who were attacked. David and the others with the ability to think-together, however, are persecuted for their thoughts and beliefs—an oppression similar to that suffered by the Jews during the Holocaust. Wyndham’s novel is a clear denunciation of this kind of persecution; the mindset it cultivates leads the Waknukians to try to kill the best and kindest members of their society.

While *The Chrysalids* clearly condemns the atrocities of the past, it also provides a warning for the future. Although the Zealanders may not actively seek out people to kill and do not discriminate against people based on their physical appearance, they show no remorse in killing a large group of people with

“inferior” abilities in order to promote their own world view. The beliefs of the Zealanders can be read as an allegory for Soviet ideologies. For example, their promotion of think-together and belief that history is a series of struggles in which one group overthrows another have strongly Marxist undertones. At the same time, within the context of the Cold War, one could also interpret the Zealanders as a stand-in for the United States, which was ready to bomb the Soviet Union in order to promote democratic ideals.

Ultimately, *The Chrysalids* warns against the blind espousal of any rigid belief, no matter how innocent it might seem. The novel is a testament to the importance of thinking critically and independently and evaluating ones own beliefs and actions, rather than thoughtlessly conforming to the norm.



SYMBOLS

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



HORSES

Horses appear in almost every chapter of *The Chrysalids*. David, Rosalind, Petra, and the Wenders all use horses as quick and convenient means of escape. Angus Morton’s great-horses are a source of concern for Joseph Storm, who believes that they are Deviations, and when Joseph punishes David for concealing Sophie’s mutation, he does so with a horse whip. Horses are also used by those pursuing David, Rosalind, and Petra. Unencumbered horses—the Wenders’ cartless horse, for example, or Sheba, whom David and Rosalind ride bareback to flee from their home—are symbols of freedom in the novel. When horses are restrained, however, they come to symbolize restraints on freedom. For example, when David and Rosalind are leaving their home, they hear the synchronized footsteps of the patrols coming to search for them. Further, when Petra ventures into the forest, her pony is injured, and it is the injury to the pony that catalyzes the search for the telepaths.



DREAMS

In *The Chrysalids*, David’s relationship with his **dreams** mirrors his relationship with his telepathy. Of course, his dreams are also likely the product of his telepathy. At the beginning of the novel, David hides his dreams much like he hides his ability. For example, he tells Sophie about neither, even though he trusts her a great deal. At this phase in his life, both his dreams and his ability bring him great pleasure—they have not yet been tarnished by his relationship with Waknukian beliefs. After David comes to understand why Sophie had to flee, his dreams become increasingly violent and

his ability becomes increasingly burdensome. By the end of the novel, however, David has found a way to the place in his dreams, where he can be open about his ability.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the NYRB Classics edition of *The Chrysalids* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ “Dreams were funny things and there was no accounting for them; so it might be that what I was seeing was a bit of the world as it had been once upon a time—the wonderful world that the Old People had lived in; as it had been before God sent Tribulation.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker), Old People, Mary Storm

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

The protagonist of the novel, David Storm, is immediately depicted as a dreamer—he has vivid dreams about a faraway (whether in time or in physical distance) place. He’s something of an audience stand-in, because unlike the majority of the people in his community, he’s curious about the outside world, and refuses to accept what he can see and touch as the be-all, end-all.

The novel as establishes a clear contrast between the Old and New worlds. The Old People, we’re told, were evil—that’s why they were punished by God. Clearly, David lives in a severe, religious society that hypocritically contrasts its own virtue with the evils of the past—a society not unlike Hitler’s Germany or even the American South during the years of segregation.

☞ “And God created man in His own image. And God decreed that man should have one body, one head, two arms and two legs: that each arm should be jointed in two places and end in one hand: that each hand should have four fingers and one thumb: that each finger should bear a flat finger-nail.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker), Nicholson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 10-11

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to the guiding ideology of the Waknukians. In David's society, people subscribe to the belief that God created man in his own image--however, people then go on to interpret these words in the most literal manner possible. They believe that God creates human beings to look just like him; therefore, anybody who doesn't look a perfectly "normal" human is somehow imperfect or evil.

The novel shows the ways that religious ideas can be misinterpreted or twisted to fuel racism or create a totalitarian society. The Bible, from which the passage is excerpted, says only that "God created man in His own image"--the Waknukians have clearly added on all the subsequent details to support their hatred and fear of the unknown. This kind of misinterpretation of ambiguous statements is a common aspect of fundamentalist, repressive societies.

☞ “And any creature that shall seem to be human, but is not formed thus is not human. It is neither man nor woman. It is a blasphemy against the true Image of God, and hateful in the sight of God.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker), Nicholson

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Here we learn more about the "dark side" of David's society. Because David's people believe that humans are made to look like God, it follows (supposedly) that anybody who's abnormal in any way must be inhuman--the creation of the Devil. Therefore, abnormal people must be cast out of society as punishment for their innate evil.

The passage is cited again and again throughout the novel as a justification for the Waknukian society's vicious apartheid--its heartless persecution of those who are "different" in even the smallest ways. People with extra toes or unusual arms are banished from society, supposedly because they're evil and not actually human. It's possible that David's society celebrates the importance of conformity in order to strengthen its community ties--like

Hitler's Fascists, they need a scapegoat to feel good about themselves. (One could certainly argue that the novel is a science-fiction riff on Hitler's Germany, mixed with Stalinist Russia and segregationist America--i.e., an indictment of all societies that celebrate one kind of person at the expense of all others.)

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ “The nearest approach to decoration was a number of wooden panels with sayings, mostly from *Repentances*, artistically burnt into them. The one on the left of the fireplace read: ONLY THE IMAGE OF GOD IS MAN. On the opposite wall two more said: BLESSED IS THE NORM, and IN PURITY OUR SALVATION. The largest was the one on the back wall, hung to face the door which led to the yard. It reminded everyone who came in: WATCH THOU FOR THE MUTANT!”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker), Emily Storm, Nicholson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Here David describes the "decorations" that hang in his house. David is just a child, meaning that he's grown up looking at these phrases, and assumes that they are totally normal. They all offer different variations on the same theme: sameness is good, difference is bad. Some of the panels argue that mutants (i.e., people who don't have entirely "normal" bodies and minds) are wicked. Notice that the panels use (King James) Biblical language--words like "purity" and "thou." The implication again is that religion can be manipulated to persecute "undesirable" groups of people.

The passage is important because it shows how the twisted religion of David's society perpetuates itself over time: children like David are conditioned to believe in the Waknukian religion from the time they can read.

☞ “So I learnt quite early to know what Offences were. They were things which did not look *right*--that is to say, did not look like their parents, or parent-plants. Usually there was only some small thing wrong, but however much or little was wrong it was an Offence, and if it happened among people it was called a Blasphemy--at least, that was the technical term, though commonly both kinds were called Deviations.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David further explains how his society works. Children, plants, and animals are constantly being measured against their parents for deviations or "imperfections" of any kind. If the offspring are in any way different from their parents (or the Waknukian ideal of "normal") then they're sterilized and banished from Waknuk altogether. In such a way, Waknuk remains exactly the same over time.

David shows us how Waknuk subverts the role of the family: instead of just loving and taking care of their children, a parents' job is now also to root out any children who aren't just like them, and turn these "evil" children over to the authorities. It's also worth noting that the fictional society in the novel seems designed to resist Darwinian evolution. Animals develop over time precisely *because* offspring develop mutations that allow them to respond to their environment. David's society, however, seems hell-bent on resisting such evolutionary progressions.

“I only meant *if*,” I protested. I was alarmed, and too confused to explain that I had only happened to use one way of expressing a difficulty which might have been put in several ways.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis


In this chapter, David absent-mindedly says that he sometimes wishes he had a third hand. David isn't speaking literally--he's using a familiar idiom, expressing the idea that he sometimes feels clumsy. And yet David's family is shocked by his outburst: in a society that celebrates sameness, the desire for a third hand, even when expressed comically, is a very serious matter indeed. Here, David tries to defend his statements, but has difficulty expressing his intention.


The passage shows David maturing--gradually, he's learning that his society celebrates homogeneity to the point where any difference is persecuted. At the same time, David is also

learning the limits of language, as well as just how powerful (or dangerous) language can be.

“If John and Mary Wender had been there when I woke up struggling and crying, and then lay in the dark trying to convince myself that the terrible picture was nothing more than a dream, they would, I think, have felt quite a lot easier in their minds.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker), Mary Wender, Sophie Wender, John Wender

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the chapter, David has a vivid dream in which he sees Sophie being slaughtered like an animal for the "crime" of having an extra toe on her foot. David is beginning to understand how dangerous difference is in his society--and his dream reflects his awareness that different people can be hurt and even killed for their supposed "evil."

The way David expresses his feelings about Sophie is worth mentioning. Previously, Sophie's parents, John and Mary, have asked David to remain quiet about Sophie's abnormality--they figure that, so long as Sophie's toe remains a secret, she'll be able to remain living in the community. But especially since having this horrifying dream, David doesn't need any reminders from John and Mary about keeping the secret: he now knows full-well that if he tells anybody what he knows, Sophie will be hurt. David's sympathies for Sophie greatly outweigh his loyalty to the religion of Waknuk, even in his subconscious, sleeping self.

Chapter 4 Quotes

“There was only one true trail, and by following it we should, with God's help and in His own good time, regain all that had been lost. But so faint was the trail, so set with traps and deceits, that every step must be taken with caution, and it was too dangerous for a man to rely on his own judgment. Only the authorities, ecclesiastical and lay, were in a position to judge whether the next step was a rediscovery, and so, safe to take; or whether it deviated from the true re-ascent, and so was sinful.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Here David attends an ethics class at school. During the class, he gets another stern reminder of the importance of sameness, but framed in historical and metaphorical language. Supposedly, humanity has been destroyed before because it was too diverse and complex--the only way to ensure that humanity doesn't die out again is to control all social deviations, no matter how small.

One can see, pretty easily, how the "lesson" (propaganda) David receives here can be used to tyrannize human beings. Though the ideas presented here might seem harmless on the surface, when actually put into action they allow for those with power to totally control the "direction" society is to take. This means that the supposed "authorities" mentioned here use the religion of Waknuk to dominate the people of their communities.

“Most of the numerous precepts, arguments, and examples in Ethics were condensed for us into this: the duty and purpose of man in this world is to fight unceasingly against the evils that Tribulation loosed upon it. Above all, he must see that the human form is kept true to the divine pattern in order that one day it may be permitted to regain the high place in which, as the image of God, it was set.”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

David lives in a strict, ascetic society, in which man has one purpose and one purpose alone: to return to the "right path" that was supposedly lost during the Tribulation. The only way to get back on this path, it's said, is to be pure and imitate God in all ways. The passage shows how easy it is to use religion--if manipulated by skillful leaders--to manipulate people into doing anything. Because the leaders of the Waknukian religion have God on their side, they can justify anything they command. Even mothers and fathers can be convinced to throw their own children out into the wilderness--as the stakes (the future of all society, supposedly) are too high for loyalty to one's individual

children.

Chapter 6 Quotes

“Well, every part of the definition is as important as any other; and if a child doesn't come within it, then it isn't human, and that means it doesn't have a soul. It is not in the image of God, it is an imitation, and in the imitations there is always some mistake. Only God produces perfection, so although deviations may look like us in many ways, they cannot be really human. They are something quite different.”

Related Characters: The Inspector (speaker), Sophie Wender

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David talks to the Inspector--a local figure whose job is to track down those who "deviate" from the proper path of God. By this point in the book, the Inspector has learned that Sophie has six toes, and he wants to know why David, Sophie's friend, didn't alert the authorities to Sophie's supposed evil.

David tries to justify his behavior by saying the obvious: Sophie isn't an evil person and therefore shouldn't be punished. The Inspector retaliates by referring back to the definition of a human being, as outlined in the holy book of the Waknuk religion. There is, of course, no way for David to argue with such a definition. On the surface of things, it's perfectly silly for anybody to say that it's "right" that beings should have exactly five toes--five is a totally random number, the product of millennia of evolution, nothing more. But because David is young (and probably ignorant of evolution), he has no way of arguing with the Inspector, who's essentially using circular logic (this idea is true because it's in the definition of "normal," which is true because it says it's true). Humans in the Waknuk community are so desperate to maintain order that they punish anybody who's the slightest bit unusual, and will use pedantic interpretations of phrases to ruin real people's lives.

“But when people are used to believing a thing is such-and-such a way, *and* the preachers want them to believe that that's the way it is; it's trouble you get, not thanks, for upsetting their ideas.”

Related Characters: Uncle Axel (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 57


Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David decides to run away from his society--he's upset at the authorities (including his own father) for punishing innocent people like Sophie. David turns to his trustworthy uncle, Axel, for help. Axel shares David's disgust with many elements of Waknuk society, and yet he doesn't want David to run off into the wilderness. Here, Axel sums up everything David has learned about his society in the last few weeks: the authorities don't want people contradicting their ideas, and even the people themselves don't like being told that everything they've been raised to believe is false.

Another implication of Axel's statement is that figures like priests and politicians don't like dissenters because dissenters challenge their *authority*, not just the validity of their ideas. The best way for powerful people to maintain their power is to maintain the current statue of society--it's even possible that the tyrants who run Waknuk invented the Waknuk religion as a means of cementing their control.

“But what’s more worrying is that most of them...think that their type is the true pattern of the Old People, and anything different is a Deviation. That seems silly at first, but when you find more and more kinds just as convinced of it as we are ourselves—well you begin to wonder a bit. You start asking yourself: well, what real evidence have we got about the true image?”

Related Characters: Uncle Axel (speaker), Old People

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Uncle Axel points out the arbitrariness of the idea of perfection. While the people of Waknuk are convinced that being a perfect human being entails being a certain height, weight, and skin color, and having a certain number of limbs and digits, there are other people around the world who probably have an entirely different idea of what it means to be perfect.

The book alludes to some of the racially-based acts of

violence that occurred during the middle of the 20th century--such as the Holocaust and lynchings in the United States. Such atrocities were motivated by the foolish belief that one kind of human being was superior to the others--even if these beliefs contradicted each other. If one were to put all the bigots and racists in the world in a room together, Axel speculates, they might better be able to see how absurd their beliefs really are.

“Perhaps the Old People were the image: very well then, one of the things they say about them is that they could talk to one another over long distances. Now we can't do that—but you and Rosalind can. Just think that over, Davie. You two *may* be nearer to the image than we are.”

Related Characters: Uncle Axel (speaker), Rosalind Morton, David Storm

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Uncle Axel raises an interesting possibility. Axel knows that David is considered a "mutant" because he has psychic powers. Yet Axel doesn't condemn David for being different from the other people in his society. On the contrary, Axel speculates that in reality, David could be more "perfect" than the other Waknukians. There's no rule that says that perfection correlates with what is most common; in other words, just because David is one of the only people in the community with ESP doesn't mean that he's the mutant. The only relevant factor, according to the Waknuk religion, is whether or not David resembles the "Old People." Axel suggests that David is more like the Old People than his peers--it's rumored that long ago, the Old People could communicate across vast distances, just like David.

The passage reinforces the arbitrariness of the Waknuk definition of perfection. Furthermore, it suggests a number of things: it's possible that the "Old People" Axel refers to are the readers of *The Chrysalids* itself--people living in the 20th century (when the novel was written) who could communicate using telephones and radios. Although Axel tries to inspire David by telling him that he's perfect, the truth (we recognize) is very different: there *is* no such thing as human perfection, and anybody who says so is deluded.

Chapter 7 Quotes

“You have sinned, woman, search your heart, and you will know that you have sinned. Your sin has weakened our defenses, and the enemy has struck through you. You wear the cross on your dress to protect you, but you have not worn it always in your heart. You have not kept constant vigilance for impurity. So there has been a Deviation; and deviation, *any* deviation from the true image is blasphemy—no less. You have produced a defilement!”

Related Characters: Joseph Storm (speaker), Aunt Harriet

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

In this disturbing scene, Harriet, David's aunt, brings her new "mutant" child into the house. Harriet wants her relatives to help her ensure that her child can receive a "Certificate of Normalcy." Instead of helping his own relative, Joseph Storm yells at her for being evil and abusing the rules of the community. Joseph isn't much of a family man: he's so slavishly loyal to the Waknuk religion that he ignores his innate sympathies for his sister-in-law.

The passage shows how easily religions can be manipulated to suit a given agenda. Furthermore, it shows how strong religiously-motivated hatred can be. Joseph refuses to extend his help to anybody harboring "deviant" human beings—even his own family. He's a religious fanatic, at least by readers' standards, and yet he seems to be pretty normal (and even admirable) by the standards of the novel's society.

“I shall pray God to send charity into this hideous world, and sympathy for the weak, and love for the unhappy and unfortunate. I shall ask Him if it is indeed His will that a child should suffer and its soul be damned for a little blemish of the body....And I shall pray Him, too, that the hearts of the self-righteous may be broken.”

Related Characters: Aunt Harriet (speaker), Emily Storm, Joseph Storm

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Aunt Harriet bravely stands up to Joseph Storm when Joseph yells at her to pray for forgiveness from God. Joseph

is furious at her for bringing a "deviant" child into their house--Harriet has given birth to a baby that, she knows very well, will be banished for being different.

Harriet makes it clear that, while she's still religious, she no longer believes in the hateful, bigoted aspects of the religion of the Waknuk community. She believes that God is a loving, merciful figure who wouldn't punish little children for their supposed imperfections. In all, Harriet seems like one of the sanest and most moral characters in the novel, a voice of reason in a world of institutionalized insanity.

“A word...a rusted mirror, reflecting nothing. It'd do the preachers good to see it for themselves. They'd not understand, but they might begin to think. They might begin to ask themselves...Are we right? For it is clear, boy, that however wonderful the Old People were, they were not too wonderful to make mistakes—and nobody knows, or is ever likely to know, where they were wise and where they were mistaken.”

Related Characters: Uncle Axel (speaker), David Storm

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Uncle Axel and David discuss some of the paradoxes and inconsistencies in the Waknuk religion. The Waknuk religion is based on worship of God as measured through the Old People; those who lived years ago, before God punished the human race. The Waknuk people believe that anybody who doesn't resemble the Old People is "imperfect," and should be banished from the land. And yet the Old People themselves clearly weren't perfect either--if they were, then God wouldn't have punished them so brutally.

Uncle Axel's observations are perfectly obvious, when you think about them, and yet he seems to be one of the only people in the community to have done so. In all, the passage underscores the reality that religion is more important as an "organizing force" in Waknuk than it is as a source of morality or truth. Religion helps keep the people of Waknuk in line, but if they were to turn to religion for moral support, they'd be disappointed by the muddle of contradictions they'd find.

“Of course they should be burnt like they used to be. But what happened? The sentimentalists in Rigo who never have to deal with them themselves said: ‘Even though they aren’t human, they *look* nearly human, therefore extermination *looks* like murder, or execution, and that troubles some people’s minds.’”

Related Characters: Jacob (speaker), David Storm

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, we're introduced to Jacob, an old, mean farmer who sincerely believes that deviants and undesirables should be burnt to death as punishment for their sins. Jacob explains that until quite recently, the Waknuk society *did* burn deviants--but recently, a group of so-called sentimentalists convinced the authorities to merely sterilize and banish the deviants instead. This new "leniency," Jacob believes, is the reason for the latest batch of bad crops in the community.

Jacob believes that his beliefs are perfectly sensible--he's so confident that the deviants in his community aren't human that he doesn't attribute any human feeling whatsoever to them. Thus, he believes that they should be burnt, and condemns those who are too sympathetic to do so as weak and cowardly. Jacob sneers at the natural human sympathy that leads most people to refrain from such acts of violence--thus behavior, Jacob smugly insists, is just a form of weakness, and goes against the difficult morality of the "truth."

“It wouldn’t be just murder, Uncle Axel. It’d be something worse, as well; like violating part of ourselves for ever.... We couldn’t do it...”

Related Characters: David Storm (speaker), Anne, Uncle Axel

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Axel and David debate the morality of murder. Axel and David know that Anne--a fellow psychic--is going to marry a non-psychic named Alan. They're afraid that Anne is going to give up important information about the other psychics, endangering the entire group. Axel

suggests (although obliquely) that they should kill Anne for the good of the group. But David adamantly disagrees with his uncle--he explains that it would be a horrible crime to kill "one of our own." David believes that groups should stick together no matter what, even if the act of sticking together causes danger to the group as a whole.

David's version of right and wrong sets him apart from many of the other characters in the novel. Most of the characters we've met believe in a form of the "greater good." Thus, most of the characters believe that it's all right to banish their neighbors from the land, provided that the neighbors are deviants in some capacity. In other words, the Waknukians are willing to turn on each other at any moment. David, however, genuinely believes that he owes it to his fellow psychics to be loyal and protective. He puts his faith in individual human connection, rather than lofty ideas of the "greater good"--ideas which can easily be twisted to justify atrocities.

Chapter 12 Quotes

“But what’s got them so agitated about us is that nothing shows. We’ve been living among them for nearly twenty years and they didn’t suspect it. We could pass for normal anywhere. So a proclamation has been posted describing the three of you and officially classifying you as deviants. That means that you are non-human and therefore not entitled to any of the rights or protections of human society.”

Related Characters: Michael (speaker), Petra Storm, Rosalind Morton, David Storm

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Michael, a fellow psychic, informs Rosalind and David that they're been found out and placed on a "wanted" list. The list establishes that David and his peers aren't human beings at all--they're non-human deviants who can be arrested or even killed on sight.

As Michael acknowledges, the authorities in Waknuk don't just want David and his friends dead because they're different--they're personally outraged that psychics have managed to survive undetected for so many years. There seems to be a personal animosity in the authorities' vendetta against the psychics, one that won't be satisfied until David and the others are dead. The scene establishes how easily the community of Waknuk can deprive people of



their rights--one piece of paper, and David is suddenly no longer human.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ “Why should they be afraid of us? We aren’t hurting them,” she broke in.

‘I’m not sure that I know why,’ I told her. ‘But they are. It’s a feeling not a think-thing. And the more stupid they are, the more like everyone else they think everyone ought to be. And once they get afraid they become cruel and want to hurt people who are different.’”

Related Characters: David Storm, Petra Storm (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 144


Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, David and Petra sum up their community's culture. As David points out, the Waknukians don't like anybody who's different because the Waknukians themselves are too foolish and close-minded to tolerate difference of any kind. It takes a conscious effort to embrace people who are different--and ultimately, it's easier to be intolerant.

While the people of Waknuk wrap their bigotry in pious words and church gatherings, their hatred for undesirables is no different from a lyncher's hatred for a black man, or a Nazi's hatred for a Jew. Intolerance takes many different forms, and yet it always boils down to the same thing: willful ignorance of the complex realities of the world.

☞ “God doesn’t have any last word. If He did, He’d be dead. But He isn’t dead; and He changes and grows, like everything else that’s alive. So when they were doing their best to get everything fixed and tidy on some kind of eternal lines they’d thought up for themselves, He sent along Tribulation to bust it up and remind ‘em that life is change.”

Related Characters: The Fringes Man (speaker), Old People

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter we're introduced to the anonymous "Fringes


man," the figure who works for Gordon Storm and who captures David, Rosalind, and Petra. The Fringes man makes a couple interesting points about the nature of the world here, which stand in stark contrast to the dogmas of the Waknukians. Unlike the people of Waknuk, the people of the Fringes believe that life is a process of constant change, like it or not--therefore, the Waknukians' desire to maintain the *status quo* is willfully blind to the realities of life.

Furthermore, the Fringes man maintains that evil shouldn't be condemned or expunged from history--even the greatest acts of evil have some useful purpose. Even the Tribulation (the disaster that destroyed the old world) had a silver lining: its purpose was to help mankind learn from its mistakes. Where the Waknukians see everything as rigidly black-and-white, good-and-evil, the people of the Fringes at least embrace a more openminded, reasonable view of history and progress.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ “Your work is to survive. Neither his kind, nor his kind of thinking will survive long. They are the crown of creation, they are ambition fulfilled—they have nowhere more to go. But life is change, that is how it differs from the rocks, change is its very nature. Who, then, were the recent lords of creation, that they should expect to remain unchanged?”

Related Characters: Woman from Zealand (speaker), David Storm, Joseph Storm

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, the mysterious woman from Zealand has come to rescue the psychics, including David and Petra. David is dismayed when he learns that his father is about to be killed in the Zealanders' coming invasion of Waknuk. When David expresses his dismay, the woman of Zealand tries to console him by saying, much like the Fringes man did, that life is change, and to resist change is to be delusional. It is inevitable, then, that David's father will die anyway, and that David would have to totally "break free" from his father at some point—thus, there's no point in David being upset about his father's passing.

The woman from Zealand's advice is rather callous, since she's essentially telling David to forget about his own father for another version of the "greater good." Joseph isn't a remotely likable or sympathetic character, and yet the

woman from Zealand's indifference to his death seems a far cry from the behavior of a supposedly more "enlightened" being. *The Chrysalids* resists easy moralizing--just because the woman from Zealand seems to be working on David's side doesn't mean we have to agree with her philosophy. In fact, it's suggested that David has just left one racist, fundamentalist society for another one.

“The Old People brought down Tribulation, and were broken into fragments by it. Your father and his kind are a part of those fragments. They have become history without being aware of it. They are determined still that there is a final form to defend: soon they will attain the stability they strive for, in the only form it is granted—a place among the fossils.”

Related Characters: Woman from Zealand (speaker), David Storm, Joseph Storm, Old People

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the woman from Zealand continues to give David her interpretation of history. She argues that humans are always a part of history, whether they like it or not, and the only way to achieve real "purity" or stasis is through death. In this way she justifies the murder of the Waknukians, because they always wanted to become "fossils" anyway. In essence, the Woman of Zealand seems to be offering David another strict, deterministic model of the universe—the opposite and yet the equal of the one on which David was raised. Where the Waknukians worship stability in the sense of imitating the past, the woman of Zealand worships an ideal of progress, one that feels no qualms about eliminating anything that might hold it back.

Related Characters: Woman from Zealand (speaker), Old People

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

In this surprising passage, the woman from Zealand reveals her own powerlessness even as she asserts her society's triumph. While she supports her society's ideas about history, she acknowledges that at some point in the future, the Zealanders will probably act like the Waknukians and try to reverse the inevitable "flow" of the universe, becoming a tyrannical, backwards regime that resists change and evolution. The idea here is that all tyrannies consists of authorities trying to undo the inevitable. For example, the tyrants of Waknuk try to undo the inevitable genetic diversity of the human species by banishing so-called mutants. By the same token, the woman from Zealand argues, her own civilization will one day (presumably when it starts to lose power or authority) become harsh and repressive, and then it will be destroyed by the next generation of "New People."

The Woman from Zealand assumes, as an unspoken premise of her argument, that existence is a constant process of evolution and decay. At the same time, she doesn't really seem to accept the real-world implications of her beliefs, as she is currently using them to justify mass murder. She also admits that right now, the Zealanders are still on the rise--it will be a long time before they become like the Waknukians. (And thus, presumably, she herself is immune from the harsher implications of her philosophy.)

“The essential quality of life is living; the essential quality of living is change; change is evolution: and we are part of it.”

Chapter 17 Quotes

“Sometime there will come a day when we ourselves shall have to give place to a new thing. Very certainly we shall struggle against the inevitable just as these remnants of the Old People do. We shall try with all our strength to grind it back into the earth from which it is emerging, for treachery to one's own species must always seem a crime. We shall force it to prove itself, and when it does, we shall go; as, by the same process, these are going.”

Related Characters: Woman from Zealand (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

The woman from Zealand continues to explain her society's peculiar view of life. Where the people of Waknuk believed that an idealized version of man was the center of the universe, the woman from Zealand seems to believe that change itself is the center—albeit an unstable center. She

takes a dialectical view of history, arguing that everything in history is part of a massive, larger-than-life cycle of change and evolution. (Note that the ideas expressed in the passage reflect some of the tenets of Marxism, the governing ideology of the Soviet Union at the time of Wyndham's writing.)

The novel ends before we're exposed to many details of the woman from Zealand's culture—thus, we're left to guess how admirable her civilization ultimately is. It's possible that

the novel intends for us to see the woman from Zealand as an angelic figure, rescuing David from Waknuk. It's also possible (and more subversive) to imagine that the woman from Zealand merely rescues David from one corrupt regime and places him in another. The Waknukians killed people for the "greater good" of normalcy and religion, while the Zealanders kill people for the "greater good" of evolution and progress.



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 book begins with David, the young narrator, telling us that when he was young, he sometimes **dreamed** of a city with “carts running with no horses to pull them” and “shiny, fish-shaped things” in the sky. David had never seen any of these things before, and when he asked his sister, Mary, about them, she told him he might be dreaming about the Old People, whose civilization was destroyed hundreds of years ago by the Tribulation. She also warned him not to talk to anyone else about the dream. David tells the reader that this ended up being important advice because it taught him to keep secret anything that was unusual or odd.

While David felt like a normal child at the time of the **dream**, he tells us that he can now pinpoint the day when he realized he was unusual. At age 10, he met a girl named Sophie while he was playing at the edge of town. When he meets her, he is shocked to encounter a stranger, because he knows everyone in the town. Sophie and David play together until Sophie’s shoe gets stuck between two rocks.

When David tells Sophie that she’ll have to take off her shoe to get free, Sophie becomes upset and adamantly tells David she has to keep her shoe on her foot, even though she is in a great deal of pain. Finally she agrees to remove it, but makes David promise to look away. He doesn’t, and when he sees her foot, Sophie says that he “musn’t ever tell,” but he doesn’t understand what she’s talking about. David tells the reader that at the time he didn’t notice that she had an extra toe. David and Sophie go to her house, where Sophie apologizes to her mother for letting David see her foot.

David tells the reader that at the time, he did not connect Sophie’s foot to the rules he learned in church, because he learned those rules by mechanically memorizing them, and had not thought about what they meant. These rules specify that man is the image of God and should have a head, a body, two legs, two arms, ten fingers, and ten toes. While reminders of the rules hang in most houses, David does not see them on the walls of Sophie’s home.

David’s dream of an Old People city with cars and planes sounds familiar to the reader, but is unfamiliar to David, which immediately shows that this book is set on a future version of Earth. Mary’s warning that he should not reveal this unusual dream to anyone else foreshadows the secrets David must keep later in the novel, and the intolerance his community has for anything it considers out of the ordinary.



So far David just seems like a normal, curious child, so as Wyndham reveals more details about his world we are surprised that David is somehow “unusual.” Only once we learn what the town considers normal can we identify David as strange. At the time of meeting Sophie, David himself has not yet internalized these norms.



Sophie’s extra toe does not stand out to David because he sees Sophie as a friend, and as a child he isn’t focused on her physical appearance. The reader does not yet understand why Sophie must conceal this toe, but the vehemence of her attempt to hide it hints at something sinister in their society. By withholding an explanation for Sophie’s actions, Wyndham enables the reader to experience David’s confusion.



The incident with Sophie’s toe should have provoked a response in David because he has been taught that human beings do not have extra toes. The fact that the sight of her toe does not trigger thoughts of the rules he has memorized shows how easy it is to repeat something without fully understanding it.



David can feel that Sophie's mother is anxious before she speaks to him, and he tries to send comforting thoughts back to her, but they don't go through. She asks him to promise never to tell anyone about what he has seen, but David finds her thoughts more persuasive than her words. He decides to keep what he has seen from everyone, even his cousin, Rosalind. As he leaves the house, he finally realizes that Sophie's body does not match the body described in the Definition of Man, which means that Sophie is a Blasphemy. This is confusing to David, because he has been taught that Blasphemies are evil, yet he firmly believes that Sophie is good.

In this scene, Wyndham introduces David's telepathic capabilities, but does not explain them. The fact that David finds Sophie's mother's thoughts more convincing than her words sets up a pattern that will repeat itself throughout the rest of the novel, in which thoughts are often portrayed more meaningful than words. Indeed, David's belief that Sophie is a good person is more powerful than the words he has memorized which suggest that she is evil.



CHAPTER 2

David walks home with his knife in his hand, because the woods where Sophie lives are said to be dangerous. He sneaks back into his house, which was built by his grandfather, Elias Storm. His house is the largest in Waknuk, the village where he lives. David tells the reader that he has since learned more about Elias, including the fact that he left his childhood home for Waknuk because he believed the people around him were immoral. Elias' wife, described as "**coltish**," was not as firm a believer as her husband. David tells us that his own father, Joseph, inherited Elias' beliefs, and has dedicated himself to punishing those who break religious rules.

The fact that the reader doesn't learn the name of David's town until Chapter 2 demonstrates how small David's world is. He does not need to explain that he lives in Waknuk because Waknuk is everything he knows. Horses are used throughout the book as symbols of freedom, and the fact that Elias' wife is described as "coltish" suggests that there may have been others in David's family who diverged from the norm. Meanwhile, the origin story of the town establishes it as a place that focuses on a strict interpretation of what is and isn't moral.



David's parents consider their well-built house to be a symbol of their strong morals, and his mother has decorated the house with proverbs from a book called *Repentances*. The quotes encourage conformity and emphasize the importance of purity. The largest and most prominent saying reads "Watch thou for the mutant!" David's father and the rest of the town exert a great deal of time destroying these "mutants," or Offenses, which David describes as "things which did not look right." Waknuk has a reputation for Purity, and crops and livestock deemed impure are destroyed.

*David's mother covers the house with sayings from *Repentances* in order to reinforce their importance. These sayings make clear that in Waknuk normalcy is determined by physical appearance, and anything that looks odd should be destroyed. By hanging these proverbs all over the house, however, David's mother unwittingly turns them into decorations that are easy to overlook and ignore.*



According to young David, people who diverge from the norm—known as Deviations—live in the Fringes that surround Waknuk and the Badlands that extend beyond the Fringes. David has never been to these places, but believes that anyone who goes there will die from contact with the mutated crops and people there. Sometimes people from the Fringes raid nearby villages, and the people of Waknuk have formed a militia to protect themselves. David's parents taught him and his two sisters to fear the Fringes by telling them stories of a grotesquely hairy man named Hairy Jack who eats children for supper.

The people of Waknuk feel the need to protect themselves from the Deviations because they are afraid of that which they do not understand. They also associate physical oddities with moral impurities, and believe anyone who does not look normal is therefore evil and frightening. Children are taught from a young age to fear new places and people and anything that looks unusual. It is implied that this fear of mutation stems from past nuclear war and radiation.



CHAPTER 3

After David sees Sophie's foot, the two start playing together regularly. One day they go to see a steam-engine that was left behind by the Old People, which is a source of pride for the people of Waknuk. Sophie tells David that her father, John Wender, thinks that people exaggerate the abilities of the Old People. The two of them discuss whether or not the Old People were able to fly. Sophie insists that if the Old People had been able to fly, she and David would be able to as well, which she takes as evidence that they couldn't. David tells her that there are many things the Old People could do that he and she cannot. He considers telling Sophie about his **dream** of a city with metal fish in the sky, but decides to keep it a secret.

Sophie and David leave the steam-engine and return to Sophie's house. Her father is home, and he is wary of David because he knows about his daughter's foot. David tells the reader that if John Wender had known about something else that had happened a month after David met Sophie, he would have had more faith in David's ability to keep a secret.

David tells us that the incident began when he got a bad splinter and tried to bandage his hand by himself. When his mother scolded him for doing a poor job, he told her that he "could have managed all right by myself if I'd had another hand." This statement shocked his family and his father became enraged. David tells us that at the time, he was not able to explain to his family that he did not actually want a third hand, but rather had simply chosen a clumsy way of expressing frustration over needing his mother's help.

David's father accuses him of asking the Devil for a third hand, and then admonishes him for lying when David protests. Joseph tells David that he has "blasphemed" by wishing his body were different and for finding "fault with the Norm." He makes David repeat phrases that he has learned in Sunday school, like "The Norm is the Image of God," and reminds David that a Mutant is "accursed in the sight of God and man." Then Joseph sends David to his room to pray for forgiveness.

Sophie's insistence that the Old People could not fly because she and David cannot fly stems from the Waknukian belief that as time passes, society is progressing and getting better. It is therefore inconceivable to her that the Old People might have had more advanced technology than the Waknukians do. David, on the other hand, does not take this traditional belief as fact. Rather than putting faith in the stories taught to him, he instead believes what he has observed and experienced in his dream about an Old People city.



David shows an understanding of the fact that verbal reassurance is not enough to convince Sophie's father that he will keep her secret. Instead, David thinks that John might have trusted him more had he had proof based on David's actions.



David struggles to convey his intentions to his father through words. Indeed, words, and the fact that he needed to verbalize his thoughts in order to communicate them (and in doing so muddled them), are the very things that get him into trouble. Even after the incident with Sophie's toe, David has not attached enough meaning to the sayings that decorate his house to know that he should not wish for a third hand out loud.



To Joseph, David's momentary desire for a third hand is a great sin because it suggests that David thinks that the Image of God is inadequate. Unlike David, Joseph puts a great deal of faith in the power of words, making David repeat phrases and sending David to pray for forgiveness.



David lies in bed and thinks about the events of the day. Seeing his father's response to simply thinking about the benefits of having three hands makes him wonder what would happen if to him if he actually had three hands. He falls asleep and **dreams** about the most recent Purification, in which a calf was slaughtered for being hairless. In David's dream version, Sophie is in the place of the calf and his father slits her throat. David tells the reader that the Wenders would not have worried about his ability to keep Sophie's Deviation a secret if they had known how upset he was by this dream.

The severity of Joseph's reaction to David's wish for a third hand shows David how committed his father is to ridding Waknuk of impurities. His dream suggests that his father values purity over life itself, and will not hesitate to kill those who deviate from the norm. That the dream connects Sophie to the calf and upsets David indicates that he instinctively chooses life and friendship over purity. The murder in the dream bears strong resemblances to lynchings of African Americans in the American South, the murder of Jews in the Holocaust, and the killings in the Great Purge in the Soviet Union, all done in the dubious name of preserving "purity".



CHAPTER 4

One day David's Uncle Axel, who lives with David and his family, comes across David, who appears to be talking to himself. Uncle Axel jokingly suggests that it would be more entertaining to talk to other people. Because David trusts Uncle Axel, he tells him that he was actually talking to Rosalind, his cousin. Once Uncle Axel understands that David is able to communicate telepathically to Rosalind, he makes David promise never to tell anyone about his ability. When David explains that he does not need to use words to communicate with Rosalind, but rather can send her wordless images and thoughts, Uncle Axel also suggests that he no longer carry out these conversations out loud. He tells David to have Rosalind promise to do the same.

Having witnessed his father's wrath over the incident with Sophie, it says a great deal that David trusts Uncle Axel enough to tell him about his ability to communicate with people who are not physically present. That he carries out his conversation with Rosalind out loud and in the open, however, is a testament to the fact that David has not fully realized the dangers of being different in his society.



David tells the reader that at the time of this conversation, he does not inform Uncle Axel that there are others (besides Rosalind) with whom he can communicate this way, because he does not want to worry Uncle Axel more. He does, however, tell the other people with whom he can communicate telepathically (but whose names he does not yet know) about his conversation with Uncle Axel. While none of them had agreed to keep their abilities secret, none of them had told anyone else about them either. The gravity of Uncle Axel's warning concerns the group, and they make a pact to keep their ability a secret. David tells the reader that it was this pact that formally made the group a group. He notes that at the time of the decision, they were mostly interested in distributing the burden of their secret, but that in retrospect, this was an important act of "self-preservation."

The discussion among the group in which they decide to keep their ability a secret is an important moment that makes previously unstated things more concrete. First, it defines the group as a group. Second, the discussion of Uncle Axel's reaction solidifies the idea that bad things would occur if anyone else were to find out about their telepathy. They do not, however, fully understand the lengths to which their community would go to persecute them for their abilities if they were made known.



Soon after this, a group from the Fringes launches an invasion of Waknuk. David's father organizes a counter-attack, during which the Waknuk militia captures a few Fringe leaders. A group of soldiers brings the prisoners into town. David expects them to look strange or deformed, but to him they look like unwashed but otherwise ordinary men.

David is surprised to see that people from the Fringes do not look as monstrous as his bedtime stories suggested they would. Like his confusion over Sophie's mutation, David's tendency to see those considered less-than-human as normal is rare in his town.



David is shocked when he realizes that the leader of the captives looks almost exactly like his father. His father notices the man as well, and when the two make eye contact, the Fringe leader returns his gaze with a look of hatred so intense that David does not forget it for the rest of his life. When the leader dismounts from his **horse**, David realizes that he is a foot-and-a-half taller than a normal man. The man motions for David to come closer, and when he does, he asks David who his father is and whether the town is called Waknuk. David replies that his father is Joseph Storm and that this is, indeed, Waknuk. Then the man is taken away. David later learns that the man managed to escape back into the Fringes that night. David is upset by the encounter, but knows better than to ask his father for clarification.

Soon after, Joseph Storm gets into an argument with Angus Morton, with whom he has a long-standing disagreement, over whether or not the “**great-horses**” which Angus has newly acquired constitute an Offense. Joseph complains to the Inspector that the horses look wrong, but the Inspector tells him that the great-horses are Government-sanctioned. Joseph argues that any government that would approve these horses is “immoral,” to which the Inspector responds that while that may be true, Joseph must obey their rulings. The Inspector further explains that the breed was created simply by mating for size, and thus they are still “normal.” Joseph becomes increasingly upset. He believes that by listening to the Government’s ruling, he is betraying God. He asserts that even if the Government cannot properly identify an Offense, he can. At church the next day, Joseph rails against the Inspector, who, in turn, threatens Government sanctions against Joseph.

David’s father is so unpleasant to be around during this time that David spends most of his time teaching Sophie what he learns in school, since her parents have kept her out of school so that no one will discover her extra toe. He tells Sophie that Waknuk is in Labrador, and that when the Old People lived, it was a very cold place. Below Labrador are the Badlands, which are extremely dangerous. David explains to Sophie that no one knows how long ago the Old People lived, nor do they know how many years passed between Tribulation and the beginning of known history. The Bible is the only surviving text from the time of the Old People, as is *Repentances* from Tribulation.

The silent exchange between Joseph and the man that looks like him makes clear to David that his father must know this Fringe leader in some way. The intensity of the man’s hatred is such that David never forgets his expression. This hatred foreshadows the violence that will erupt between the two brothers (for they are brothers) later in the book. That David knows not to ask his dad more about the man demonstrates to the reader how vehemently Joseph Storm despises Mutants. Even Blasphemies that physically resemble him are despicable in his eyes.



The great-horses symbolize something that should be pure, but is now unclean. Joseph hates this impurity so much that he wants them killed, simply because they look incorrect. His belief that the regulating of Offenses is not a legal issue, but a moral one, leads him to speak against the government to a Government official. Further, he believes so profoundly that moral inadequacies manifest themselves physically in living things that he is certain he can tell what is made in the Image of God, even if the Government can’t. He stops at nothing to adhere to his faith.



For the first time in the novel, Wyndham gives the reader a clearer sense of where the book is set. The name “Labrador,” a Canadian province, confirms that the story is taking place on Earth. This is a much-changed Earth, however, because Canada is no longer cold. Much of history is a mystery to the Waknukians because little survived Tribulation. That they take religious texts as facts is not such a surprise, then, as there are no other sources of knowledge to turn to.



In his Ethics class, David learns that civilization is “in the process of climbing back into grace.” There is only one correct path for civilization to follow, and if mankind follows it, the people of Labrador will regain everything they lost in Tribulation. David tells Sophie that this path is difficult to discern, however, and so the people must rely on the decisions of “the authorities” as a guide to how to live. While no one knows why Tribulation occurred, it was the greatest punishment of all time and likely was a response to a period of “irreligious arrogance.” David does not tell Sophie, however, that the purpose of life is to fight against the evils, or Offenses, created by Tribulation so that mankind can return to the good graces of God.

Like Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and many other systems of belief in our present time, the Waknukian religion espouses the idea that following a certain moral path will lead to redemption. This religion, however, also puts forward the dangerous idea that anything that is impure should be destroyed. David’s school entrenches in the mind of its pupils that authority rather than personal experience is the only true source of knowledge and certainty.



CHAPTER 5

David and Sophie spend their summer exploring Waknuk for places they can play freely, without Sophie’s being seen. One day, they are barefoot at the river catching shrimp when a boy from David’s school, Alan, happens upon them. David throws Sophie her shoes and tries to distract Alan with conversation, but he notices Sophie’s six-toed footprint on a rock. Alan demands Sophie’s name, but David will not give it to him. Instead, he tackles Alan to give Sophie time to escape. David buys Sophie a few minutes, but Alan is stronger than David and begins to beat him furiously. Sophie hits Alan in the head with a rock, rendering him unconscious, and Sophie and David flee to Sophie’s house.

David is willing to get in trouble for fighting Alan in order to protect Sophie. He clearly considers her a valuable person, and does not believe that her extra toes make her somehow evil. Alan, on the other hand, has internalized the Definition of Man. That something as ephemeral as a glimpse of a footprint can damn Sophie forever speaks to how terrified the people of Waknuk are of even the slightest abnormality.



Sophie and David tell John Wender that Alan saw Sophie’s foot, and John decides that it is time for his family to leave Waknuk. While he and Mrs. Wender get ready to leave, Sophie explains to David that they must leave forever. The Wenders have always kept bags packed and **horses** ready for a moment like this, when someone they could not trust found out about Sophie. David asks the Wenders if he can join them. Mr. and Mrs. Wender leave to discuss his request in private, but David can access Mrs. Wender’s thoughts, so knows that he must stay behind even before they tell him their decision. They explain to David that they want him to come, but that it will be safer for Sophie if he stays behind. Before they leave, however, they ask David to spend the night in their house to give them a bit more time to escape. Sophie gives David a lock of her hair to remember her, and the family rides away on their horses.

Horses are an important symbol throughout the book, although their meaning is not always consistent. Here, they represent hope and a potential path to freedom. Rather than fearing the unknown, the Wenders have been preparing for it. The fact that Mr. and Mrs. Wender ask David to stay behind in their house demonstrates that, although Mr. Wender once may have been suspicious of David, he now trusts him completely. David has proved through his actions that he truly cares for Sophie. When she leaves, Sophie gives David a piece of her body to remember her by, even though it is her body that has gotten her into so much trouble.



This is the first time David has spent the night in a house other than his own, and he is frightened by the noises he hears coming from outside. He is so scared that he wants to return home, but he stays in the house for Sophie's sake. When he does return home the next morning, he is met by the Inspector and his father, who is livid. The Inspector tells David that he could go to jail for "the concealment of a Blasphemy," and asks if his friend at the river had six toes. David denies this, but his father asserts that he is lying. He takes the Inspector's **horse whip**, and, despite the Inspector's protests, ferociously beats David.

In this scene, the whip that might be used to propel a horse toward a place without such harsh rules is now used to enforce those rules. While the Inspector interrogates David to find out more about Sophie, David's father is keen to punish him physically for his transgressions. That the Inspector is kinder to David than is his own father demonstrates how orthodox and aggressive Joseph Storm is in his beliefs.



CHAPTER 6

David tells the others in his group of telepaths about Sophie, and while they struggle with the notion that a Blasphemy might not be evil, they also know that it is impossible to lie in one's thoughts, and that David must be telling the truth. That night, David **dreams** once again of his father killing Sophie and of the city with the fish in the sky—dreams he hasn't had in years. His sister Mary tends to his wounds when he awakes and he comes up with a plan to flee Waknuk.

David's dreams tend to appear in moments at which David should keep something to himself. He does, however, tell the others about what happened with Sophie. They cannot deny the authenticity of David's thoughts, and are forced to question the ideas about mutations that they are taught in church and at school.



The Inspector visits David at home and asks him more about Sophie. David tells him that Sophie didn't seem like the Deviations he learned about in church, and the Inspector reminds him of the part of the Definition that says that "each foot shall have five toes." He explains to David that God does not produce anything imperfect, and that by being imperfect, Sophie proves she is not a creation of God. When he asks David why he didn't tell his father about Sophie, David tells him about his **dream** in which his father kills her. The Inspector assures him that Blasphemies are not dealt with in this way, and tells David that he won't prosecute him for lying about Sophie.

The Definition of Man is very specific about the fact that humans must have five toes on each foot, but David struggles to connect this definition with his knowledge of Sophie. According to the words of Repentences, she should be evil, but according to his experiences with her, she is anything but.



David finds it difficult to promise the Inspector that he will report future Blasphemies, because he cannot convince himself that Sophie is truly evil. The Inspector tells him that while fidelity to friends is important, maintaining "the Purity of the Race" is more so. David's father interrupts him to announce that the Wenders have been caught. David is so overwhelmed with guilt that he cannot breathe, but the Inspector assures him that it is not his fault that the Wenders were caught.

David's father is gleeful over the capture of the Wenders, while David feels out of breath with guilt. This is one of many clear examples of how differently David and Joseph Storm view the world, as well as a demonstration of David's willingness to deviate from the examples made by authority figures. The emphasis on "Purity of Race" echoes the ideology of many corrupt governments in our own time.



A few days later, David announces to Uncle Axel that he is going to run away. Uncle Axel cautions him against it, telling him that there is nowhere to go and that staying is preferable to running away, where he would only be caught and brought back. David asks him about the territories outside of Labrador, and Uncle Axel promises to tell him about them as long as he doesn't tell anyone else. He says to David that when people want to believe something, you only cause problems by contradicting them, even if what they believe is untrue. To Uncle Axel, the fact that the people of Waknuk do not know the truth about the rest of the world means that Waknuk is a more peaceful place than it otherwise might be.

Uncle Axel explains to David at great length what he knows about the rest of the world. Much of this knowledge is based more on rumor than fact. He tells David of sailors who visited the Badlands to the south and were shocked to find an abundance of mutated crops because they had been taught to believe that nothing could grow outside of Labrador at all. He calls the area “a jungle of Deviations,” and says that it is proof of the necessity of Purity Laws. Further south are areas that are thought to be entirely desolate, although one ship reported seeing the remains of an Old People city. Everyone on this ship became sick, however, so no one else was willing to venture to the area to confirm the presence of an Old People city. Instead, they chose to believe that the area south of Labrador was devoid of life—a belief that pleased the authorities because it discouraged further exploration.

Later on, Uncle Axel says, people became curious again, and an explorer named Marther headed south. His journals argue that the views of the church are wrong, and these areas could actually sustain life. Marther was tried for heresy and the authorities considered banning voyages south. During the controversy, a ship thought to be lost returned to Labrador bearing rare metals and spices. It was impossible to determine the purity of the spices, as they were not previously known to the authorities. Orthodox believers abstained from eating them, while others argued that they were the spices mentioned in the Bible. The desire for spices prompted more southward exploration.

Although Uncle Axel does not take a wholly negative view of the Waknukian religion, he is willing to be skeptical of it in a way that few others are. Uncle Axel understands that people often believe in things out of a desire for comfort and stability rather than for truth. For this community, ignorance truly is bliss. The Waknukians have no desire to learn of anything, true or not, that might upset their established ways of life.



Uncle Axel has a great deal more experience with the wider world than does anyone else with whom David interacts, but even he takes rumors and legends as sources of knowledge about the land outside of Labrador. He is, however, aware that the authorities want people to believe that no other pure life exists anywhere else in the world. The less people believe exists, the less likely they are to explore it and, in doing so, challenge the church and government's intellectual authority. The story of an ancient city that makes everyone sick implies radiation poisoning from a past nuclear war.



Not having been to these areas himself, Uncle Axel relies on Marther's words for proof of what exists outside Waknuk's borders. These words, however, document Marther's experiences, while the words of the church have nothing to back them up. This highlights Wyndham's point that the best way of knowing is through one's own experience, rather than blindly believing an authority's words. The people of Waknuk, too, must rely on words—those of traders, authorities, and the Bible—to determine if the spices they so desire are pure.



Uncle Axel tells David that these lands are now known to be inhabited by people who either do not abide by Purity Laws or have a different understanding of what a Mutant is. Indeed, in other places, people who would be classified as Blasphemies in Waknuk consider themselves to be made in the Image of God, and think that the Waknukians are Mutants. These communities have in common the stories of the Old People, and the people in each place believe them to be their true ancestors. Uncle Axel tells David that while this is hard to fathom, there is really no proof that Waknukians are made in the Image of God. Their Definition of what is normal comes from *Repentences*, which was written long after Tribulation, and thus might not present an accurate picture of what Old People were like.

While David finds what Uncle Axel has to say vaguely interesting, he is mostly concerned with whether there are any cities outside of Labrador. Uncle Axel says that there are not, and when David presses him, he assures David that if there were any, they would know about them. Uncle Axel then reasserts that it is impossible to know what the true Image of God really is. In fact, he says, David and Rosalind, with their ability to communicate without words, might be closer to the true image, even though in Waknuk he would be persecuted for this Deviation. David takes this opportunity to tell Uncle Axel that he can communicate with others in this way as well, although he does not know their names because names aren't necessary in telepathic communication. Uncle Axel responds by emphasizing again that it is impossible to prove what the true image really is.

CHAPTER 7

One night, David hears a baby cry in his house. He is surprised because he had not noticed that his mother was pregnant, and there was no baby in his house earlier that same night. No one mentions the cry the next day because a baby cannot be called a baby until it is issued a Certificate of Normalcy by the Inspector. The Inspector delays his house call as long as possible to anger Mr. Storm, and as a result, everyone in the Storm house must pretend that Mrs. Storm has not just given birth. The wait is stressful for the family, particularly because the last two times David's mother has given birth, the children were not deemed normal. According to Waknukian law, a husband may cast out a wife that bears three abnormal children. Eventually, however, the child is deemed normal by the Inspector, and she is named Petra. David tells the reader that no one could blame the inspector for his decision, because Petra indeed looked like she would be normal.

Uncle Axel spends a great deal of time thinking and talking with David about proof. Although David doesn't always understand him, Uncle Axel introduces him to the idea that Waknukians might not actually be made in the true Image of God because it is impossible to know what that Image was. He explains to David that although David might think a community with different physical features is deviant, that community might consider actually David a Blasphemy. Objective norms do not exist because norms are created to match the image of those who create them.



Even Uncle Axel occasionally holds beliefs without proof, and he insists to David that no cities with horseless carts exist because he has never heard of any cities with horseless carts. Earlier in the novel, Sophie makes a similar statement about the Old People's planes. Both are certain that, in these situations at least, the absence of proof or knowledge about a thing can be taken as proof that that thing does not exist. Overall, however, Uncle Axel encourages David to challenge what he is told and to remember that no one can be certain whether he or she is or is not made in the Image of God.



That the birth of a baby must go unremarked upon until the child is verified by an Inspector shows how pervasive the cult of normalcy in Waknuk really is: it affects even the earliest moments of a person's life. Giving birth is not a joyous occasion, but rather a terrifying one because the child might be deemed abnormal and taken away, presumably to die. The system for determining and confirming normalcy, however, is overly reliant on physical appearance and written words. Despite the fact that Petra looks normal and is recorded as being normal, she is not, as we will later find out.



A few days later, David's Aunt Harriet, his mother's sister, arrives at his house. David is hiding to escape having to work in the room adjacent to his mother's, and he overhears Harriet's with her sister. Harriet has brought a baby with her, and she tells David's mother, Emily, that the news of the birth of Petra was "like God answering a prayer." It becomes clear that Harriet has been unable to obtain a Certificate for her own child, and she hopes that she might trade the child with Petra for a day in order to trick the Inspector and acquire a Certificate.

David's mother is furious at Harriet for bringing a Blasphemy into her house. Harriet asserts that the baby is lovely, other than her Offense. Like Emily, Harriet has given birth to two abnormal children, and she tells her sister that she could not bear to have another child taken away. She also fears that her husband will banish her. Emily shows no compassion toward her sister and asks Joseph to throw her out. Joseph rails against Harriet for her sin and tells her to pray for forgiveness. Harriet asserts that she is not ashamed and that she will only pray for more "charity," "sympathy," and "love" in the world.

Harriet rides away on a **horse**. Joseph is dismayed that she was so arrogant as to not be ashamed of her sins. He is furious that she would dare to "speak heresy" in his house. Emily begins to cry—something that David has never heard before. David, unable to see into the room, wonders what the child's Offense was. The next day, he learns that Aunt Harriet's body, as well as the body of her child, has been found in the river. No one mentions her baby again.

CHAPTER 8

David tells the reader that Aunt Harriet's suicide was the most disturbing event in his life so far. He **dreams** of her lying in the river, holding her baby. The fact that even the slightest abnormality could result in death frightens David, and he prays to God to make him normal. The next morning, however, he is still able to communicate with Rosalind. David was so young when Sophie had to flee that he did not fully understand what was happening, but he is now terrified that someone will find out about his ability.

Like Elias' Storm's wife and Uncle Axel, Aunt Harriet is a further example of the fact that a willingness to question authority runs in David's family. The fact that she turns to her sister for help suggests that family bonds are typically important in Waknuk—potentially more so than religion.



Wyndham challenges the reader to examine his or her own convictions by creating a scene that is clearly immoral to the reader and righteous to the characters. This moment is also an example of how easily religion and the greater good can be manipulated and perverted into serving as a justification for a horrible action.



Aunt Harriet's death speaks to the severity of the Waknukian religion. The shame of bearing a deformed child is so great that suicide is preferable to anyone finding out. She does not want her child to live as an outcast in the Fringes, and believes that death is a better option for both of them.



David is deeply disturbed by Aunt Harriet's death because it forces him to think critically about himself. For the first time, he realizes that his abnormalities could put him in mortal danger. Even though he has been taught that Deviations are godless, he turns to God and prays that He will rid him of his ability.



David tells Uncle Axel about the conversation he overheard between his mother and Aunt Harriet. Uncle Axel responds, once again, that no one can be certain of what is normal. He questions why the people of Waknuk spend so much time trying to emulate the Old People if they were destroyed by Tribulation. He cannot understand why God might want to punish a people for sinning, but also cannot understand how the resulting deviations fit into that plan. To him, the rampant mutations are “beneath the wisdom of God.” David quotes back to Uncle Axel the sayings he has heard at church, but Uncle Axel tells him that these are meaningless and empty words, and that even the preachers themselves do not understand them.

Uncle Axel asks a lot of philosophical questions about whether there is any point in trying to be like the Old People in a world that is totally different from theirs, and one that might just end in another Tribulation. David does not understand most of what he is saying. Uncle Axel, knowingly speaking heresy, tells David that it is not the Definition that defines a man, but rather his mind. He does not take issue with the church’s insistence on getting rid of deviations—not because he believes deviations to be impure, but rather unhelpful. He tells David that no one needs multiple arms and legs. He believes that man’s mind is more important than his body, and that David and Rosalind have reached a new level of the mind that they should value rather than wish away.

David tells the reader that he only starts to understand what Uncle Axel was saying when Michael (a member of the group of telepaths) goes to school. One of the others in the group, Walter, had stopped communicating, and everyone feared that his ability may have been found out. Uncle Axel discovers, however, that this was due to an accident rather than someone’s finding out the group’s ability. They decide to learn each other’s names—Michael, Sally, Katherine, Mark, Anne, Rachel, and Rosalind—to avoid any future stress or confusion.

Michael’s parents decide to send him to school in a neighboring town, and Michael shares what he learns with the others in the group. When the group thinks about his lessons together, everyone in it is able to understand the lessons better than they could on their own. David enjoys his increased access to knowledge, but notes that it also poses a problem for the group. Everyone needed to remember how much he or she was supposed to know and to pretend to know less than they did. Although there are a few slip-ups, they live for six years without being caught, until another person joins their group.

Just as Uncle Axel questions traditional ways of knowing in Waknuk, he also challenges the town’s leaders’ obsession with history and tradition. He does not understand why the authorities would want to return to a way of life that brought about Tribulation. Although David often does not understand the sayings he learns in church, he still mechanically quotes them when faced with the unknown. The ideas he has been taught stay with David, even if he does not believe in them or internalize them. Axel voices Wyndham’s idea that words are empty without personal experience or proof.



Uncle Axel takes a Cartesian perspective on what makes a man. Like the philosopher Descartes, who famously said, “I think, therefore I am,” Uncle Axel locates the essence of a human not in a body that looks human but in the presence of a mind. The quality of a person’s mind, he suggests, determines the quality of a person. David should not wish away his ability, but rather value it for all that it makes available to him. His telepathy is not a Deviation, but in fact a sign of progress and evolution.



Just as the incident with Sophie prompted the think-togethers to become a real group, the disappearance of one of their members forces them to learn each other’s names. It takes a number of events like these for the group to realize just how much they will need to work together to stay alive.



David only sees the value of his ability when it becomes clear to him that multiple minds thinking about a problem are more powerful than a single mind thinking about the same thing. Over and over again, his experiences convince David of things he does not understand or believe when learned through words. But, just as the Waknukian’s ignorance of the world makes them happy, David’s increased knowledge leads to greater responsibility.



CHAPTER 9

David tells the reader that his sister Petra always seemed completely normal. One year during a harvest, however, David is overwhelmed by the feeling of being struck in the head, and he is compelled to run toward the source of the feeling. As he runs, he meets Rosalind, who is also running to the source. The two find Petra, who is caught in the river and holding onto a bush to stay afloat. When David exclaims that he hadn't realized Petra was telepathic, Rosalind tells him that she is different from them, and much more powerful. While she and David can communicate wordlessly, they cannot command or compel action from others like Petra seemingly can.

Eventually people from the town catch up to Rosalind and David to see what they were running toward. No one understands how they could have known that Petra was in danger, and Rosalind and David must lie and say that they heard her screaming. That night, David dreams his old **dream** in which his father kills Sophie, only this time he is killing Petra.

David tries to communicate through thought-shapes with Petra to tell her to conceal her ability, but he is not able to reach her. He wants to talk to her about it, but Rosalind tells him that she is probably not aware of her ability and that it would be dangerous to trust a six-year-old with such an important secret. Their ability has now come to feel more like a burden than a gift. They must constantly hide and lie to maintain the semblance of normalcy.

The crops in Waknuk have a particularly bad year, and many are deemed Offenses and destroyed. Jacob, a farmer, tells David that the failed crops are a punishment for the fact that people have become lazy about destroying deviations. He complains that the Government is not giving out punishments harsh enough to deter people from sinning. When he was growing up, he says, deviations were burnt. David is horrified, but Jacob tells him that Blasphemies are no longer burnt, although he wishes they were because they are not human. Instead, they are stripped of their ability to reproduce and cast out into the Fringes.

David asks Uncle Axel if other people, like Jacob, feel that the Government is too lax about punishing people for failing to report Offenses. Uncle Axel assures him that the increase in deviation rates this year is because of the weather, not the moral fortitude of Waknuk. He warns David, however, that people will be looking for something or someone to blame for the bad season. The group feels relatively safe, however, until Anne announces that she will get married.

Up until this point, think-together is used only as a form of communication, but Petra, however unwittingly, uses her ability as a form of coercion. While innocent, her sway over the others and ability to convince them to do what she wants is reminiscent of the cults of personality surrounding 20th century dictators like Lenin and Hitler, who had the ability—through their words or influence—to convince large numbers of people to commit atrocious acts.



For the first time Rosalind and David's ability puts them in real danger. David knows that he must guard his secret carefully, and once again his recurring dreams are associated with stress about discretion. In his semiconscious state he can foresee that Petra is in danger.



The limitations of words prevent David from being able to explain to Petra what he she has done. Were he able to communicate with her through thoughts, he would be able to fully explain all of the urgency and risks associated with using her ability, but it is not safe to do so through normal language because of her youth.



To Jacob, the crop failure is proof that the Waknukians have regressed on their path toward righteousness. He so firmly believes that Blasphemies are not human that he feels no qualms about burning them to death rather than allowing them to keep living in "sin." This is a horrifying idea to David, but he is glad to finally know what happens to Blasphemies when they are discovered.



As usual, Uncle Axel does not adhere to traditional Waknukian beliefs. He does, however, understand Waknukians, and he knows that they will be looking for a sin on which to blame their poor crops so that they do not have to look inward and question themselves. In typical Wyndham fashion, the chapter ends with a cliffhanger.



CHAPTER 10

Anne forms the group that she will marry Alan—the same person who reported Sophie for her Offense. The group protests, saying that it will be too difficult for her to feign normalcy. To them, marriage to a norm seems impossible because it would mean relying on words for communication. Anne is unbothered by this, and points out that the numbers in the group work out so that two girls would have no one to marry. She argues that it is unfair for two girls to be denied the happiness that comes with marriage simply because there are not enough boys in the group. Rosalind and David, she claims, are the only others who know what it is like to be in love, so the others cannot understand how badly she wants to be with Alan. In order to be with him more easily, she decides to stop using thought-images altogether.

David tells Uncle Axel, who knows about the wedding, that Anne is capable of think-together. David, having had access to Anne's feelings, explains to Uncle Axel that Anne wants to be with Alan so badly that she is willing to jeopardize the safety of the group and give up, or at least ignore, her ability. David likens this to the difficulty of "taking a vow of silence." Uncle Axel tells David that a woman in love is dangerous because she will sacrifice anything for her relationship. He asks David whether it is ethically acceptable for Anne to endanger seven lives for the sake of romantic love.

Uncle Axel tells David about a sailor he once knew who was thrown overboard so that the rest of the sailors would have enough food and water. David, catching his implication, is adamant that the members of the group will not use force against Anne, even in order to save themselves. When Uncle Axel questions his will to survive, David tells him that while he and the others would be willing to murder a norm in order to survive, they cannot harm one of their own. They are simply too close to one another. David says that he would rather be killed himself than have a hand in killing Anne.

Anne's relationship with Alan prompts David to reflect on his relationship with Rosalind, a relationship he has had to keep secret because Rosalind is the daughter of Joseph Storm's enemy, Angus Morton. The idea that they might be allowed to be together openly seems impossible, and David is not even certain that he would be able to marry Rosalind if he were to get her pregnant.

The group experiences its first disagreement—something they have long been spared by the fact that they can communicate with one another so easily and honestly. While the drawbacks of a life spent pretending to be normal are clear to almost everyone in the group, Anne is so blinded by her feelings for Alan that she will not listen. This is also the first time the reader learns that David and Rosalind are romantically involved.



To David, Anne's decision to give up her ability is unfathomable, but to Uncle Axel it is frightening. He worries that she will sacrifice anything, even her friends, in the name of love. The conversation foreshadows what will come to pass, and, although David does not yet know it, it also gives Uncle Axel the information he needs to save David's life.



Even in the face of a great moral injustice, David is absolutely certain that no one in the group would be willing to kill Anne to save themselves. The morality David espouses is in sharp contrast to the morals held by most Waknukians, who fear everything unusual and are happy to destroy anything with even the slightest potential to be dangerous.



We learn that for some time Rosalind and David have been conducting a romance in secret. David's father is so stuck in his ways that Rosalind and David are not sure he would allow them to marry, even if Waknukian custom necessitated that they do so—because pregnancy outside of marriage is considered sinful.



Rachel, Anne's telepathic sister, tells the group that Alan has been found dead with an arrow in his neck. Anne believes one of the group is responsible for Alan's death, and she refuses to speak to Rachel about what has occurred. Michael suggests that everyone make preparations so that they can flee if Anne decides to report them. The next morning, Rachel goes to her sister's house, only to find Anne dead, hanging from the rafters.

Anne leaves behind a suicide note outing everyone in the group, even Petra, and suggesting that they killed Alan. Fortunately, Anne's illiterate neighbor finds the note and, thinking it is meant for a family member, gives it to Rachel rather than to the Inspector. Rachel does not tell the neighbor she has read the address on the note incorrectly (it was meant to go to the Inspector), and when she reads its contents, she immediately burns it. Alan's death remains a puzzle to both the group and the rest of the town.

CHAPTER 11

David and the other members of the group receive a compelling call from Petra, who has ridden a **pony** into the sometimes-dangerous forest that separates Waknuk from the Fringes. While not as strong as her call when she fell into the water, this summons still carries with it so much feeling that it blocks the group's communication channels. Consequently, David has no way of telling the others that he will go after Petra and that they needn't heed her call.

David rides his **horse** into the forest until he reaches Petra, whose **pony** is being attacked by a mutated cat. Rosalind and Michael, who have also rushed to her aid, shoot the animal with arrows and then try to comfort Petra before the others respond to her call. Petra has no idea that she is emitting this signal, however, so they struggle to calm her down. Before they are able to do so, most of the group arrives in the forest. Michael is able to get away, but a stranger arrives at the scene before Sally, Katherine, David, and Rosalind can separate. The stranger questions them about how they could have all known Petra was in distress. Katherine and Sally say that they heard Petra and her pony screaming, but the stranger responds that he was right behind them and heard nothing. The man does not seem to believe their story.

Anne turns her back on her friends, even when she has the ability to look into their minds and know their true thoughts. Instead, like normal Waknukians, she decides to believe what she wants to believe, whether or not it is true to her personal experience.



While written and spoken language often makes things more difficult for the group, the fact that Anne writes her suicide note means that Rachel can lie to intercept it and destroy it. Here, Wyndham draws attention to some of the potential benefits of words: in writing they are physically manifested and can be manipulated.



Once again, the strength of Petra's ability endangers the lives of everyone else in the group. This incident is in sharp contrast with Anne's suicide. While Petra exposes the group unknowingly, Anne does so with the full knowledge of what will happen if the group is discovered.



The attack on Petra's pony by a mutated animal can be read as symbolic of the destruction of Petra's innocence and freedom by a monstrous society. While the pony is proof to the stranger that Petra truly was in danger, he seems much more concerned with figuring out how the group knew to find her than with her safety and well-being.



David takes Petra home and the group discusses what to do about the stranger who saw them, now identified as Jerome Skinner. Michael tells the others that people have an idea that “telepathy” might be possible. He says there’s a chance that think-together might not be considered an Offense because God has the ability to see into people’s minds, and thus it would be in his image to be able to do the same. The group decides that they can never meet in person again, and that if Petra emits another call, everyone but David and Rosalind will do their best to ignore it.

David talks to Petra about thought-shapes and tries to teach her to control them. She struggles to moderate their intensity, but makes progress over time. Petra complains to David about the difficulty of understanding what the far away voices are saying. David thinks she is referring to Katherine and Sally, but it soon becomes clear that Petra has a much larger range than anyone else, and, as a result, can hear voices that no one else in the group can access.

A few days later, Uncle Axel tells David that a friend of the Inspector has been asking about him and Rosalind. He suspects that Petra might be to blame. David is shocked because he hasn’t told Uncle Axel about Petra, but Uncle Axel explains that before she died, Anne told Alan about everyone in the group. When Uncle Axel figured this out, he shot and killed Alan to prevent him from talking. He cannot figure out, however, how to account for the recent questions about David if Alan was killed weeks ago. David tells him about Jerome Skinner and the events with Petra’s pony. Michael realizes that Skinner only saw Petra, Rosalind, David, Sally, and Katherine, so the other members of the group are still in the clear. The group decides to start preparing so that everyone can escape quickly if necessary.

CHAPTER 12

David makes a few preparations that night, but decides to leave the rest for the morning. When he wakes up, Michael and Rosalind tell him that Katherine and Sally have been taken and he and Petra need to flee immediately. As they leave the house, they hear the sound of **horse** hooves approaching. They do not have time to saddle their own horse, Sheba, so they ride her bareback into the forest to meet Rosalind.

Despite the fact that the group has something legitimate to fear, they stay as calm and rational as possible and do not rush to action. Wyndham contrasts this fear with the fear of the unknown that might motivate Skinner to report them. This juxtaposition makes it seem especially absurd that a grown man would be willing to endanger the lives of multiple people simply because he isn’t sure how they learned their friend was in danger.



For the first time, the group learns that Petra’s powers go both ways. Not only can she send thought-images in a way that no one else can, but she can also receive them. With this realization the group learns that they might not be entirely alone in the world.



Instead of convincing the group to kill Anne, Uncle Axel went ahead and killed Alan instead. His willingness to kill to protect his family is entirely different from Joseph Storm’s willingness to kill his family to protect his beliefs. Michael realizes that the fact that their deviation does not manifest itself physically is a great advantage, and means that some of them are not yet in danger.



Here, horses represent both freedom and captivity. The unbridled, bareback horse is a means to escape, while the regimented and tamed trot of the authorities’ horses signals the loss of that freedom. Further, the tamed horses symbolize the Waknukian desire to tame and control nature whenever possible.



Katherine and Sally shut their minds to the rest of the group so that they can better pretend to be normal. Rosalind has taken her father Angus's **great-horses**, so David and Petra send their horse Sheba back home. They ride away from Waknuk in "paniers" (baskets) strapped to either side of the horse, and go to great lengths to conceal their tracks. Rosalind tells David that she and her mother, who had suspected something was going on and wanted to help, were up all night making preparations. David knows that his own mother would never do the same. While Rosalind, David, and Petra escape, Michael, Mark, and Rachel monitor the situation at home and tell the three fugitives about the authorities' plans to come after them. Michael and Mark plan to join search teams and feed them false information.

David goes to sleep, and when he wakes up, he learns that Rosalind has had to kill a person who was following them. She is extremely distressed and unable to control her thought-images. Later that day, a sharp pain floods the minds of the group, and they realize that Katherine has been tortured into confessing. Sally, not wanting to be tortured for nothing, confesses as well. They are forced into confirming the Inspector's suspicions about Rosalind, David, and Petra, but no one yet suspects Michael, Mark, and Rachel. The anguish that Sally feels overwhelms the group.

Michael warns Rosalind and David that the authorities are furious over their escape. Most Deviations can be seen with the eye, but theirs cannot be, and the leaders of the town are upset that they lived with Mutants for so long without knowing. They issue a statement classifying the three fugitives as non-human, meaning anyone can shoot them at any time. The authorities, however, hope to capture the three rather than kill them, so they can learn more about how they communicate. Michael explains that the leaders are particularly concerned because Rosalind and David would be able to coordinate a counterattack wordlessly.

Petra impedes Rosalind and David's progress when she becomes afraid of Hairy Jack (the Mutant boogeyman used to frighten children) and refuses to go further into the Fringes. Michael explains to her that the people in the Fringes are not scary, just different, and that they should be pitied rather than feared. Petra struggles to hear him, however, because someone else's thought-pictures are getting mixed in with Michael's.

While the ability to think-together gets Rosalind, David, and Petra into trouble in the first place, it also helps get them out of it. Because they can use an untraceable form of communication, they are able to coordinate with those who have not yet been discovered. Indeed, while the Waknukian authorities must rely on language to help them chase an invisible Mutation, those with the ability to think-together have many more resources and much more knowledge at their disposal. Rosalind's mother, unlike David's, puts family and love ahead of dogma.



Because the group can see into Sally's true thoughts, they know that Katherine and Sally did not give them up without a fight, so they can continue to trust their friends. Again we see that the Waknukians have no qualms about using violence in their fight against the unknown.



Because their deviation cannot be seen with the eye, the Government must issue a written statement declaring David, Rosalind, and Petra sub-human. This piece of writing fundamentally changes their status in the world, although David, Rosalind, and Petra remain the same people. The authorities in Waknuk are terrified of the fugitives, not only because they are deviant, but also, and more importantly, because no one understands their deviation.



While Petra is young enough to still be under the influence of the bedtime stories told to her by her parents, Michael has enough experience with the world to convince her that they are not true. Once again the telepaths' thought-images are more convincing than spoken or written words.



A woman from far away asks Petra for her name and location. The person responds with her own location, but Petra is not familiar with the name and is unable to read it when she spells it out. By transmitting the woman's thought-images of letters to the rest of the group, Petra is able to communicate that the woman is in a place called Zealand, although there is much confusion over whether Petra might actually mean Sealand. In the Waknukian language, Zs do not exist, so David and Rosalind believe Petra has confused a Z for an S, even though Petra insists it is a Z. Petra explains that in Zealand it is daytime and people travel around a city in horseless carts. David asks her to ask the woman if there are fish-shaped things in the sky and Petra confirms that there are. David is excited to learn that the city of which he has **dreamed** is not necessarily an Old People city, but one that might actually still exist.

Here Wyndham asserts that words are not without value. Indeed, were Petra only able to communicate through thought-images, she would not be able to explain her conversation in a way that is comprehensible to David and Petra. There are, however, barriers to being able to effectively communicate with words. Petra is too young to know how to read, but she can communicate through thought-images with little training. David learns for the first time that he was not dreaming of a city from the past, but one in the present. Zealand bears a strong resemblance to modern-day New Zealand.



CHAPTER 13

That night, a “**horseman**” finds the fugitives and shoots arrows at them. He misses, but Rosalind shoots his horse and he is thrown to the ground. The injured horse runs away, while Rosalind, David, and Petra venture into the Wild Country. As they ride, the woman from Zealand contacts Petra, who translates her thoughts to the rest of the group. The woman says that Petra is extremely important and must be kept safe at all costs. The woman expresses surprise that Petra lives in a “primitive” community—a sentiment that angers and confuses the rest of the group. The woman also promises to send help.

As open-minded as the members of the group are compared to other Waknukians, it is still a shock to them that they might be considered primitive by other societies, and they are offended by the idea. Notably, the horseman is only dangerous when he and his horse are united under his control. When they are separated and the horse is freed, he no longer poses a threat to Rosalind and David.



The next day, Michael warns the fugitives that the search teams have found their trail. Everyone in the group is also worried about the safety of Katherine and Sally, because no one can get in touch with them. They fear that Katherine and Sally might have been tortured to the point of death or insanity. Michael interprets this to mean that the authorities are terrified by the ability to think-talk, and are willing to do anything to understand and control it. He tells David that it would be better for him to kill Petra and Rosalind than let them fall into the hands of their enemies.

Life outside of Waknuk tests the morals of the group. While earlier they never would have considered killing Anne, Michael and David now realize that they might have to kill Rosalind and Petra just to save them from torture and suffering.



Petra overhears Michael's message to David and does not understand why anyone would want to hurt her when she is not hurting anyone else. David explains to her that fear makes people angry and violent, and that their enemies are motivated by a “feel-thing not a think-thing.”

Petra, still a young child, does not yet understand the fear of the unknown that permeates Waknukian culture. David explains to her that this fear is not rational, but rather emotional.



While Rosalind and David sleep, Petra talks to the woman from Zealand and learns that almost everyone there can think-together. The woman tells Petra that she believes Petra can make more powerful think-pictures than anyone else in the world. She also tells Petra that people in Zealand feel sorry for those who cannot think-together because they will forever be “one-at-a-times.” David remembers his conversation with Uncle Axel about the impossibility of knowing what the true Image of God really is. That night, David, Petra, and Rosalind are discovered and shot at. Their **horses** bolt, taking them into the forest. Something falls from a tree and crushes David in his basket.

As Petra talks more to the woman from Zealand, the woman reveals herself to have a very low opinion of those who cannot communicate with thought images. In many ways, her feelings toward those without this ability mimic the Waknukian’s feelings about those able to do it. Racism and fear of the unknown often appear even in more “advanced” societies.



CHAPTER 14

Rosalind calls to David who, semiconscious, begins meditating on his love for Rosalind. He tells the reader that there are “no words” to describe his feelings for her, because words cannot adequately capture the intensity and nuances of his emotion. Love, he says, renders time meaningless.

David is forced to express his love of Rosalind to the reader through words. He speaks in metaphorical language but says that poetics fail to truly capture his emotions.



When David fully comes to, Rosalind is explaining to Michael that men from the Fringes dropped from the trees onto their great-horses and they are not sure where they are being taken. The men are friendly, however, and David talks to one of them about what it’s like to live in the Fringes. The man explains that over time, God turns the Fringes into Wild Country and then into civilized land. David tells him that he thought the Devil ruled the Fringes, but the man explains that the influence of the Devil is actually more present in Waknuk.

As David ventures deeper into the wilderness, he learns that more and more of the things he was taught as a child are not true. His experience with Sophie taught him that having a Deviation does not necessarily make a person evil. He now realizes that she was not an exception, and many people who Deviate are actually very kind.



The Fringes man goes on to explain that the Old People thought that they were made in the Image of God, and then God destroyed them in Tribulation. He questions why the people of Waknuk would want to emulate a population that was punished and destroyed. God, he says, never dies, and consequently is always changing things. To him, “life is change,” and God sent Tribulation as a reminder that nothing can stay the same forever. He also asserts that it is impossible for the authorities in Waknuk to truly know what is a Deviation and what is normal. They believe that they have this knowledge only out of arrogance and a desire to control life, which is inherently not under human control.

The man’s statements about the pointlessness of trying to follow in the Old People’s footsteps are similar to those made by Uncle Axel earlier in the book. This man presents an understanding of time that differs greatly from the one with which David has grown up. Instead of thinking of time as a constant march toward redemption, the man believes that life is made up of a series of changes that humans cannot control. He is much more comfortable with uncertainty than anyone else David knows.



Meanwhile, Petra gets in touch with the woman from Zealand. The woman is finally close enough for Rosalind and David to be able to communicate with her as well. She advises them to emphasize to their captors that they are as Deviant as those with mutations that can be seen. The woman also explains that she is one of the New People, who are united by an ability to think-together and plan to rebuild the world that the Old People destroyed. She is unconcerned with molding herself to God's image, but rather believes strongly in the power and superiority of communal thought. She likens those without this ability to animals.

The woman's pride and disrespectful attitude toward God and the Old People make David uncomfortable. Rosalind is curious about Zealand, however, so she asks about the history of the Zealanders. The woman explains that people with think-together are often oppressed, but now that her society has the "machines" necessary to travel long distances, they make a point of rescuing anyone with this ability whom they can find.

The woman from Zealand ceases communicating, and Rosalind, David, Petra, and the **great-horses** on which they are riding stop. The men put the fugitives on the ground, and Rosalind and David are relieved to find that the Fringes are not as monstrous as they expected. They are taken to meet a man whom David recognizes immediately as the Fringe leader who was taken hostage many years ago. In the years between, David has learned that his father once had an older brother who was found to be Deviant when he was a toddler. The man, whom David calls "the spidery man," tells David that his mother, Elias Storm's wife, loved him so much that she hid him away instead of allowing him to be captured. The spidery man asserts that, since he is the eldest son, control of Waknuk should actually go to him, not to his brother.

The spidery man suggests that David has lost Waknuk as well, and questions why he is not fighting for what is his "by right." David explains that he would rather live freely, without needing to pretend constantly, than live in Waknuk. The spidery man is happy to hear that an army is pursuing the fugitives, and he wonders whether David's father is with them. David does not want to know the answer and avoids asking Michael to find out.

Rosalind catches the spidery man's eye and he looks her over for a long time. David, angry, attacks him, but the man's guards drag him away. The spidery man explains that there are very few women in the Fringes, and even fewer who can reproduce. He hopes to have children and implies that he will do so with Rosalind. This infuriates David and he tries to attack the man once more, but a group of men beat him up and throw him into the forest.

The Zealander woman presents an irreligious understanding of the world in which certain races are superior to others. She considers those without the ability to think-together to be less than human and intends for people of her ability to take over the world. This view is similar to those held by many in the twentieth century who believed that certain races and religions were inferior to others, and thus could or should be eradicated.



The Zealander woman's belief that an oppressed race will rise up and overpower its oppressors is similar to beliefs espoused by Karl Marx, who claimed that the proletariat, or working classes, would rise up and usurp power from the bourgeoisie, or the wealthy classes.



David and the others want to escape from the intolerance in Waknuk, but the spidery man wants to punish Waknuk for it. He feels that what is rightfully his has been stolen from him by David's father, and he wants revenge. Even though Joseph Storm and the spidery man would self-identify as being very different from one another, they are actually quite similar in personality. Both are willing to turn on their own family in the pursuit of their goals, to which they hold unwaveringly. This is further proof that physical appearance is not good indication of a person's character.



David, not motivated by hatred or vengeance, has no desire to return to a place where he is oppressed. Despite the dangers of living in the Fringes, he is happy to be able finally to be himself. The spidery man, however, interprets David's desire to escape intolerance as weakness.



Although David avoids violence whenever possible, he is fiercely protective of Rosalind. The fact that David finally becomes aggressive helps humanize him. David is not so morally righteous that he does not ever have a violent thought. He can be aggressive, but only when truly antagonized.



CHAPTER 15

David awakes to a woman dragging him along the forest floor. He is shocked to see that she does not wear a protective cross stitched into her clothing, as all of the women in Waknuk do. After a few moments, David realizes that the woman is Sophie. Sophie tells David that Rosalind is safe, but she seems wary of Rosalind when speaking about her. Sophie is upset over Rosalind's arrival because she is in love with the spidery man, whose name is Gordon, and does not want him to be with Rosalind. Sophie tells David that she wished the authorities had killed her because it would have been more kind than sterilizing her. David promises her that nothing will ever happen between Rosalind and Gordon because he "knows" Rosalind will stop it. Sophie is skeptical, but David tells her that, through think-talk, he can know things for certain about Rosalind.

David follows Sophie to her cave, where he gets in touch with Rosalind and learns that she and Petra are being kept in a tent near Gordon's. He enlists Sophie's help in retrieving them before Gordon returns. Sophie goes to Gordon's tent alone, but not without asking David to make Rosalind and Petra promise to be absolutely silent. She returns a while later with Rosalind and Petra in tow and begins washing blood from her knife.

CHAPTER 16

Sophie tells Rosalind and Petra to get rid of their embroidered crosses, as this is a dangerous symbol within the Fringe. She also explains that they must stay in her cave for several days. When the town discovers that someone is dead, they will search everywhere for David, but will never think to look in her cave. When Rosalind asks Sophie why she is helping them, Sophie turns to her and snarls, "Damn you... Go on, laugh at me... Laugh at me because I do want him." Everyone is shocked and no one responds. After a period of silence, Petra goes to Sophie, now hiding in the corner, and comforts her.

The next morning, Michael tells David that the Waknukians are getting ready to attack, and the woman from Zealand promises she will arrive within nine hours. She tells the group that she has never seen Badlands so wretched before and suspects that "an entire race" must have gone "insane" to deserve such a punishment.

David's conversation with Sophie reveals the difficulty of trying to explain thinking-together through words. Of course, Wyndham has already filled a book with words trying to explain this, so we are familiar with the theme of words as often being inadequate. The type of certainty David expresses over Rosalind's intentions is something that Sophie cannot fathom. Her own feelings toward the spidery man also force the reader to question whether Gordon is entirely evil. If Sophie loves him, perhaps he has some redeeming qualities.



There is a great deal of death in Wyndham's novel, but it occurs for a wide variety of reasons. It is not clear to the reader if Sophie kills in order to help David and Rosalind, or if her actions are motivated by a desire to keep Gordon for herself.



Sophie, once curious and kind, has changed during her time in the Fringes. She does not trust others and is embarrassed that she loves Gordon, who disgusts Rosalind. While Sophie thinks that Rosalind is mocking her, Rosalind and David are actually completely dependent on the skills Sophie has developed in the Fringes for survival. She knows that symbols considered to be protective within Waknuk are dangerous outside of it.



The Zealander woman continues to expose herself as someone harboring racist thoughts. In some ways, David and Rosalind are escaping one intolerant society only to be saved by another one.



Michael tells David, Rosalind, and Petra that the troops are about three hours away, and without warning, Petra asks if her father is with them. Michael, unable to lie through his thoughts, reports that he is. Petra is not bothered by this news, but it is deeply upsetting to David. He does not know whether to try to kill or forgive his father, but the woman from Zealand interrupts and tells him that keeping Petra safe should be his utmost priority. Echoing the sentiments of the man who brought David to Gordon, she says that “life is change” and anyone who fights that change will be destroyed. The only stability in life comes with death. Realizing that this is not a comfort to David, she tells him that, no matter what, one day he was going to have to break free from his father. “Fear,” she says, is the “enemy of life,” and David must cut himself off from those that act in fear.

Sophie leaves the cave to find out Gordon’s plan of attack, which she relays to David, who in turn passes it on to Michael so that he can protect himself. Michael then tells David the Waknukian army’s plan, and suggests that he pass the knowledge on to Sophie, so that the people of the Fringes can better protect themselves. Before David is able to do so, shots are fired and the battle begins. David watches Gordon shoot his brother (David’s father) in the chest. The spidery man then flees, taking Sophie with him, but Sophie is shot with multiple arrows as they run.

A strange noise fills the cave and the woman from Zealand announces that they are almost there. A “fish-shaped craft” like those in David’s **dreams** appears in the sky. As it approaches, it begins to drop thin strings, “like cobwebs,” onto the ground below it. The battle stops as people stare at the machine in awe. Michael tries to run to the group, but finds it more difficult to move each time a thread touches him. The woman from Zealand tells him not to struggle and to lie down so the threads can’t surround him. The threads encircle the men from both armies and they struggle to break free. This only intensifies the threads’ grip, and soon even horses are brought to the ground. A piece of thread touches David in the face, gluing his eyes shut.

David is deeply conflicted about his father’s role in the conflict. Unlike his Uncle Gordon or his father, he does not feel comfortable turning on his own family. The woman from Zealand tries to comfort him by telling David that they would have needed to separate anyway. His father, she says, is fighting out of fear of change, but life is change, and he will only find the stability he seeks in death.



Because David cannot think-together with Sophie, he cannot warn her of the Waknukian’s plans, and she is killed by their arrows. In the heat of battle, it becomes clear that Gordon only cares about killing his brother, and after he does this, he flees the battle scene. His actions are motivated by hatred rather than by a desire to right the wrongs being committed in Waknuk.



Throughout the novel, machines are points of connections with other times and societies. The arrival of this machine represents what David hopes will be a move to a new and much freer place. However, the web the machine casts traps people and freezes them in place. Wyndham suggests that the arrival of this new society is not an entirely positive thing.



CHAPTER 17

Soon the wind blows threads into the cave and Rosalind, David, and Petra are covered in them. Following the instructions of the woman, they lie as still as possible. The Zealander's machine lands and the woman frees Michael, who leads her to Sophie's cave. She sprays David and the others with something that loosens the grip of the threads, and they are finally able to move again. David looks out from the cave onto the fields of petrified people and horses. Trees, pulled down by the force of the threads, start falling around them. Once Rosalind and Petra are free, they turn to look at the Zealander woman, who is extremely pale and has shockingly short hair. Her beauty is transfixing.

The woman looks at Petra with an expression of awe, and the two communicate on a level that David and Rosalind cannot understand. The woman tells the group that it was extremely difficult and expensive to find them, but that the journey was "worthwhile" to meet someone with Petra's ability. She then announces that it is time to leave.

Michael wants to return to Waknuk to retrieve Rachel before they go, but the woman says that her machine does not have enough fuel to carry any extra weight. In the silence that follows this statement, Rosalind realizes with horror that everyone covered by the threads is now dead. The woman matter-of-factly confirms her suspicions, and tells them that although no one likes killing other living beings, it is a necessity of life. She says that the New People must act in self-preservation against those who seek their demise.

The Zealander woman goes on to explain that the people of the Fringes are "condemned" not by anything they have done, but by their inability to think-together. In time, she says, the New People will be surpassed by another and more powerful species, at which time the New People will fight but fail to survive. For now, however, the New People are only beginning their rise to power. In doing so, they participate in and propel the cycles of change that define life.

Just as the group has powers and abilities that the Waknukians do not understand, the Zealander brings with her technologies that are incomprehensible to Rosalind and David. The two have never seen anyone like her. Wyndham does not make it clear whether everyone else in Zealand looks this way. The reader is left to wonder if the New People are more diverse in their physical appearance, or if David and Rosalind will look different from everyone else and come to suffer for it.



The Zealander woman's excitement and devotion for someone with Petra's ability resembles the "cults of personality" that developed around single powerful figures in the twentieth century. This phenomenon occurred in the same regimes that were most concerned with racial purity.



At this point, it is entirely unclear to the reader whether the arrival of the Zealander is a good thing. Just like the Waknukians, the Zealander is willing to kill large groups of people with whom they have little in common. While the Waknukians do this for religious reasons, the Zealander justifies her action by saying that it is the way of life. She shows no remorse for her actions.



The woman's belief in a cyclical version of history, as well as her commitment to a society in which people cooperate and work together, continue to echo Marxist ideas. Her willingness to kill an entire race of people is also strikingly similar to Lenin's Great Purge. Her musings on the nature of change and cycles also connects to the title of the novel itself: chrysalids ready to hatch into butterflies.



While David is not yet ready to think of himself as a species different from those who cannot think-together, he feels immensely relieved that Petra will not meet Aunt Harriet's or Katherine's or Anne's fate. Michael asks Petra to tell Rachel that if she will wait for him, he will come find her. Michael explains that because Rosalind and David are still considered fugitives in Waknuk, only he can return to keep Rachel company. He promises to find a way to bring her to Zealand, even if the journey is difficult. "Knowing" that there is somewhere to go, he says, makes life worth living.

Rosalind, David, and Petra board the machine with the woman and go with her to Zealand. There, David finds the city of his **dreams**. The sound of the thoughts of thousands of people fills the air, and David and Rosalind remark on its beauty. Petra's excitement is too intense, and it momentarily blinds Rosalind and David. Rosalind tells her that, this time, her enthusiasm is warranted.

David is too overwhelmed by relief to fully consider and understand everything the Zealander woman is saying. Just as Anne sacrifices her friends for Alan and David is willing to sacrifice his body by fighting for Rosalind, Michael decides that he will sacrifice his escape route from Waknuk to keep Rachel company. Seeing the Zealander woman gives him the proof he needs that there is something worth living for; a potentially more morally advanced society.



We must hope that Petra and Rosalind's excitement about Zealand is warranted. Wyndham provides no answers about whether or not this will really be a better place than Waknuk. We have already seen glimpses of a similar racist and xenophobic attitude among the Zealanders, but the ending is supposedly a "happy" one because David is no longer a member of the oppressed class—the telepaths have come out on top. This makes the conclusion deeply ambivalent, and seems to undercut some of the themes embraced by the rest of the novel. Wyndham's imagery comes full circle, as the story opened with David's dream and now ends with the dream becoming reality.





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