

Watership Down



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RICHARD ADAMS

Richard Adams was born in the English countryside—an evocative, lush place he would later use as the setting for his most famous novel, *Watership Down*. The son of a well-to-do doctor, Adams attended the prestigious Oxford University, though his education was interrupted when he was called to serve in the British Army during World War II. After leaving the army in 1946, Adams finished his degree at Oxford and went on to join the British Civil Service, eventually working in the Department of the Environment. He had a love for storytelling, and when he began telling a story about a group of rabbits to his two young daughters, they urged him to write the tale down. Adams wrote *Watership Down* and began sending it to agents and publishers; it was rejected several times before at last being acquired by a publisher named Rex Collins. The book sold a million copies worldwide in its first few years in print and has gone on to become recognized as a modern classic. Adams was the writer-in-residence at universities in England and the U.S. and also became active in the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Adams continued writing all his life. He died in December of 2016 in Oxford at the age of 96.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though *Watership Down* was published in the early 1970s, its most direct historical influence seems to be World War II—which Adams himself fought in as part of the British army. Set in England, Adams’s rabbits must battle threats of encroaching totalitarianism which directly challenges the idealistic democracy they are working to build. The spread of fascism across Europe and the feelings of suspicion, fear, and doom which seized much of the world during the 1930s and 1940s are palpable within the pages of *Watership Down*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Other classic novels which feature animal protagonists—and often use their journeys to comment metaphorically upon the larger struggles of the human world—include George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, Margery Williams’s *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and even Brian Jacques’s epic fantasy series *Redwall*. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell, like Adams, examines the effects of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes on those forced to suffer under them. In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a toy rabbit is forced to leave behind the world he knows when he is taken from the nursery of the child he loves and made real, at which point he goes to live in the forest with other rabbits. Like the rabbits in *Watership Down*,

the Velveteen Rabbit must leave behind the familiar in search of a life of deeper meaning. *Redwall*, also set in a forest land similar to the English countryside, follows a large group of anthropomorphic woodland animals (many of whom have visions like Fiver) as they battle evil, power-hungry adversaries and confront threats both natural and societal.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Watership Down*
- **When Written:** Early 1972
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** November 1972
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** England
- **Climax:** Bigwig, with the help of Kehaar the gull and several other rabbits from *Watership Down*, successfully breaks several rabbit does out of Efrafa, avoiding the dreaded General Woundwort and his army of dangerous rabbits.
- **Antagonist:** General Woundwort
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Storytime. Richard Adams first conceived of the characters from *Watership Down* when his two daughters asked him to tell them a story they had never heard while on a long car ride. The titular hill, *Watership Down*, is a real hill in north Hampshire, England, about six miles southwest of the town where Adams was born and raised.

Adaptable. *Watership Down* has been adapted for television, theater, radio, and even a role-playing game entitled *Bunnies and Burrows*. Perhaps its most famous adaptation is that of a 1978 animated film, featuring the voices of legends of stage and screen such as John Hurt and Zero Mostel.



PLOT SUMMARY

Hazel and Fiver are rabbits—and brothers—who live in a warren in Sandleford, in the English countryside. Their warren is a generally happy place, though Hazel and Fiver, who often has strange visions of the future, occasionally have to contend with condescending treatment from their warren’s Owsla, or police-like protectorate. When Fiver sees that a notice has been put up by humans at the edge of the field which houses their warren, he has a vision of the burrow’s destruction. Fiver

says that they need to evacuate, but the warren's Chief Rabbit, the Thearah, dismisses the rabbits out of hand.

That evening, Hazel and Fiver make a plan to leave the warren with couple of friends, including Blackberry and Dandelion. A fearsome member of the Owsla, a rabbit named Bigwig, approaches Hazel and Fiver at their evening meal and tells them he wants to go with them. That night, the rabbits set off along with some new additions—Buckthorn, Silver, Hawkbit, Speedwell, Pipkin, and Acorn—but the captain of the Owsla, Holly, attempts to arrest them. Bigwig fights Holly off, and Hazel offers the rabbit one last chance to come with them. Holly rejects the offer.

The rabbits set out on their journey, frightened by every strange sight, smell, and sound. Hazel falls into the role of leader, and no one contests his natural ability to guide the rabbits to safety. As they travel, the rabbits comfort one another on their journey with tales of the rabbit trickster folk hero, **El-ahrairah**, and his triumphs against the enemies of rabbits throughout the ages. One afternoon, the rabbits are approached by a stranger named Cowslip who tells the group that he has a warren nearby and invites them to stay for as long as they want. Hazel, knowing the group is in need of a safe place to stay, accepts Cowslip's invitation, and their group follows him down to his burrow.

Fiver has a bad feeling about the place, but Hazel ignores him. There is something strange about the rabbits in Cowslip's warren, though—they are all large and healthy-looking but seem sad and fearful. However, Hazel and the others are enticed to remain in the warren after they realize that the rabbits there eat flayrah—delicious food such as lettuces, carrots, and roots—left out by a nearby farmer for nearly every meal.

Fiver again attempts to warn Hazel that something is very wrong, but Hazel continues to ignore his brother's warnings. Soon Fiver leaves the burrow, planning to run away. Bigwig and Hazel follow him, and Bigwig yells at Fiver for putting his visions above everyone else's safety. As Bigwig heads back to the warren, he becomes caught in a snare. Fiver goes for help, and together their band of rabbits frees Bigwig. Fiver explains that the rabbits in Cowslip's warren are fed by the farmer, who only keeps the rabbits big and healthy so that they will be more valuable as pelts and meat. Realizing at last how dire their situation is, Hazel and the others leave—one member of Cowslip's warren, the kindly Strawberry, joins them.

The following evening, the rabbits arrive at the safe refuge Fiver has seen for them in one of his visions: the tall, verdant hill of **Watership Down**. Over the next few days rabbits constructed their big, happy warren, even building a large common room known as the Honeycomb so that they can spend time together and tell stories in the evening.

One night, at silflay—feeding time—the rabbits hear something

coming. They are shocked when they find themselves face to face with the injured Captain Holly and another rabbit from Sandleford, Bluebell. Holly and Bluebell share the story of Sandleford's destruction, which happened just as Fiver said it would. Men filled in the tunnels with dirt and pumped gas into the burrow before using large machines to dig up the earth. Holly and Bluebell escaped, but not before being traumatized by the carnage all around them. They wandered in the fields for days, following Hazel's tracks and encountering all manner of elil (predators). Hazel and the others tend to Holly and Bluebell's wounds and welcome to Watership Down.

The following day, Bigwig and Hazel spot a large white gull in the fields. The bird is wounded, and though he barely speaks the rabbit's language, Lapine, the rabbits communicate to the bird that he is welcome to stay and rest for as long as he wants. Hazel secretly hopes that he will win the bird's affection and will be able to ask the bird for a large favor once he's healed. Hazel knows that because there are no does, or female rabbits, in their group, their warren will cease to exist in just a few years; he wants the bird to fly around and scout out another warren to which they might be able to venture and ask about taking some does back to Watership Down.

Sure enough, as soon as the bird, whose name is Kehaar, has healed up, he offers to help the rabbits find "mudders" to mate with, even though he longs to get back to his own flock. Kehaar flies out and returns a couple of days later, reporting that there is a farm nearby where some rabbits live in a hutch, and also a large warren a two-days' journey away. Hazel sends Holly, Silver, Buckthorn, and Strawberry out to the other warren, and he himself gets together a band of rabbits to raid the farm. The raid, however, is a disaster. The hutch rabbits barely make it off the farm into the field beyond, and when the owners of the farm see the rabbits loose in the yard, they go after them with torches and guns. Hazel is shot, and the rest of the rabbits are forced to return to Watership Down believing their leader dead. When they get there, they learn that the other search party has returned from the nearby warren with a terrible tale to tell.

Holly tells the story of the journey to **Efrafa**—an authoritarian, militaristic warren run by the fearsome General Woundwort. Rabbits at Efrafa are bitten at birth on different parts of their bodies, and based on this Mark, are forced to keep to a tight schedule which only allows them above ground once a day. A large Owsla, a Council of officers, and several groups of Mark leaders and sentries—plus Wide Patrol officers which lead scouting missions throughout the fields nearby—see to it that no one ever escapes. Holly and the others barely managed to do so by running away during an evening silflay. They were pursued by a Wide Patrol, but as they crossed an "iron road"—train tracks—they were saved when a train came along and killed the Efrafan officers. After the story is over, the rabbits learn that Fiver and Blackberry have gone to retrieve

Hazel after Fiver saw his brother alive but wounded in a vision.

Hazel recovers, though his leg has been weakened considerably. He is grateful to see that the hutch rabbits are settling in nicely, but knows that they will need more does—otherwise, during mating season, there will be fighting. Though Holly has filled Hazel in on the horrors of Efrafa, Hazel knows their group must return there to rescue some does.

Hazel, Blackberry, Bluebell, Dandelion, Pipkin, Fiver, Silver, and Bigwig carefully make their way towards Efrafa. Along the way, rabbits narrowly dodge a fox when Bigwig draws it off into the nearby woods. After several days they make their way to a river. There, the rabbits discuss how best to escape from the Wide Patrol's clutches after the plan to get does out of Efrafa—which involves Bigwig infiltrating the warren on his own and posing as a wandering hlessi, or wild field rabbit—is complete. Blackberry suggests they use a small wooden boat which is tied up by a rope to the riverbank to float down the river and escape the patrol. Bigwig sets off for Efrafa at once.

In Efrafa, General Woundwort is summoned to meet with a hlessi who has appeared nearby and asked to join the warren. The warren is overcrowded, a group of does have recently asked to leave, and several officers have recently been killed in an encounter with a fox. Feeling his control slipping, Woundwort sees his meeting with the rabbit—who has a tuft of fur on his head and introduces himself as Thlayli, or Bigwig—as a chance to bring in someone strong and new. The Council members appoint Bigwig to the Owsla immediately and give him a Mark to initiate him as an Efracan.

As Bigwig meets with the other officers and Council members including Chervil, Champion, Aven, and Vervain, he learns how things work in Efrafa and is overwhelmed by the amount of danger he faces. Bigwig learns that a group of does led by the intrepid Hyzenthlay have recently shown signs of rebellion. Taking advantage of his “privileges” as an Officer, Bigwig orders a sentry to bring Hyzenthlay to his burrow one night. Once she's there, he tells her that he wants her help in staging a breakout of several does, plus a badly-mutilated rabbit named Blackavar, who has been made into an example for the other rabbits after a recent escape attempt of his own. Hyzenthlay knows the risks, but dreams of a better life and agrees to help Bigwig. He tells her that tomorrow at the evening silflay, they will make a break for it—a bird, he says, will aid in their escape, and they will meet with the rest of Bigwig's group at a nearby river.

The following morning, Bigwig finds that a thunderstorm is approaching. At silflay, Bigwig spots Kehaar nearby and tells him that the plan is to be executed that night. When Chervil sees Bigwig standing so near the gull, however, he insists its sighting must be reported, as it isn't the season for gulls and everything even slightly unusual in Efrafa must be reported at once. After silflay, Bigwig tells Hyzenthlay that the breakout is going to happen at sunset. When Bigwig returns to the field at sunset, though, he is approached by General Woundwort, who

asks him about his proximity to the bird earlier and whether he was involved in drawing a fox into a group of Wide Patrol earlier in the week. Bigwig apologizes for his role in the attack, insisting he was simply trying to save his own life. The plan is delayed until the next day, since Bigwig has missed his chance while talking to Woundwort.

The next morning, Bigwig manages both to signal that the plan has been rescheduled for the evening to Kehaar and to warn Blackavar to be ready. That afternoon, Hyzenthlay tells Bigwig that a doe named Nelthilta has been arrested. Hyzenthlay is worried that Nelthilta will give their plan away, and Bigwig hurries to put things into motion early. He manages to deceive the guards, sneak Blackavar away from his captors, and herd the does into the field beyond Efrafa, but soon a group led by Champion catches up to him. Word of Bigwig's dissent has made it back to Woundwort, and he and several other officers are on their way. When Woundwort at last approaches, Bigwig curses him and his Owsla—at that moment, a great bolt of lightning comes down from the sky, and Kehaar swoops in from nowhere, startling the Efracan rabbits while Bigwig and the others make their way to the river and onto the boat. Woundwort and the rest of the Efracans catch up to them, but having never seen a boat before, are not able to stop them.

The rabbits drift downriver on the boat, stunned and traumatized. Soon, they become caught in a bridge's culvert, and are forced to abandon ship and swim to shore. Having successfully outstripped the Efracans, the rabbits rest for the night before heading onward the next morning. Over the course of their journey back they are forced to say goodbye to Kehaar, who is returning to his own flock now that his favor to them is complete, and lose a couple of does in run-ins with foxes and other forces of nature. The rabbits are pursued by Champion and a few other Efracans, but Hazel confronts them and tells them they're outnumbered. The Efracans appear to turn around and head back, but in reality, they follow Hazel's band all the way back to the foot of Watership Down before returning to Efrafa to gather more troops.

Unaware that the Efracans are plotting against them, Hazel, Bigwig and the others look forward to the birth of new litters and the prosperity of their warren. They share stories of El-ahrairah's deception of a farmyard dog in pursuit of some cabbages, and marvel at how far their scrappy little band has come. One afternoon, though, a mouse brings news that other rabbits have been spotted in the field. Hazel sends a patrol out, and the rabbits return with word that Champion, Woundwort, and the rest of the Efracan Council and Owsla are planning to storm Watership Down. Hazel meets with them to beg for peace, but Woundwort will not have it. The rabbits ready Watership Down for a siege, closing up all of the tunnels and runs. When the Efracans start digging down into the center of the Honeycomb, Hazel has an important “vision” of his own. He scurries from the warren with Dandelion and Blackberry in

tow, leaving Bigwig in charge of the defense while he readies one final trick.

Down at Nuthanger Farm, Hazel frees the farmyard dog from his kennel and has Blackberry and Dandelion lead it back to Watership Down—Hazel himself, though, is attacked by a cat. Back at the Down, the Efrafans infiltrate the Honeycomb. Woundwort and Bigwig have a violent confrontation in which Bigwig severely weakens the Efrafan leader. Woundwort retreats above ground and orders his Owsla to dig into the burrows from all sides. Soon, though, a dog rushes up the hill, chases the Efrafans away, and confronts Woundwort, who meets its attack head-on.

The next morning, Hazel is found by a little girl, Lucy, who lives at Nuthanger Farm. She saves him from her cat and nurses him back to health with the help of a country doctor. The two humans drive Hazel out to the fields and release him right at the foot of Watership Down. The Efrafans have retreated, though a couple of them, having surrendered to Bigwig, peacefully begin integrating into life at Watership Down.

Six weeks later, in mid-October, Bigwig and Hyzenthlay have mated, as have Fiver and a doe named Vilthuril. The warren is thriving, new litters are being born all the time, and the rabbits' days and nights are peaceful. Even the approach of winter does not worry them. They have received news that Efrafa has been reformed under the leadership of Captain Champion, and there is even talk of establishing a new warren at the midway point between the two. In an epilogue, Hazel dies peacefully after a long, happy life, and is summoned from his deathbed to the next world to join the Owsla of his hero, the trickster El-ahrairah.

security, and, inspired by the folktales of the trickster rabbit hero El-ahrairah, uses the help of other animals—even those considered to be evil—in pursuit of ensuring a safe, successful future for his friends. When Hazel is wounded in a raid on a nearby farm in pursuit of some does to add to the warren, he is not strong enough to carry out the mission to infiltrate Efrafa, and turns the reins over to Bigwig—but when the angry Efrafans follow the escaped does back to Watership Down and attack the burrow Hazel and his friends have worked hard to build, Hazel once again rises to the occasion and delivers a clever, El-ahrairah-inspired deus ex machina to win the fight for Watership Down—and, symbolically, for freedom, democracy, and equality between rabbits.

Fiver – A small, nervous rabbit and Hazel's brother. The runt of his litter, Fiver has been blessed—or cursed—all his life with a series of visions that allow him to sense or even see the future. When he experiences a vision of blood spreading across the fields of the Sandleford warren early on in the story, his brother Hazel takes him at his word despite their Chief Rabbit's skepticism, and organizes a group of rabbits who decide to flee. It is later revealed that Fiver's vision came true, if not literally: the Sandleford warren was destroyed, gassed, and torn to shreds when new construction on a building began directly atop it. Fiver's recurrent visions often cause him both emotional and physical pain and distress. Sometimes he's not sure what a vision means—other times, he finds himself succumbing to a fit when a vision seizes him strongly. Throughout the novel, Fiver does his best to use his "gift" to help Hazel and the others in pursuit of a safe place they can call home and feel free. Fiver's sacrifices on behalf of Hazel and the others, however unwitting, allow him to help his and Hazel's band of hlessil to make their way, eventually, to their new home at **Watership Down**. Though Fiver, due to his small size and sensitive nature, is often in need of extra help throughout the journey, he ultimately proves himself fearless and even powerful: at a crucial moment during the siege of Watership Down, Fiver faces off against a fearsome **Efrafan** officer and successfully transmutes to him a "vision" which inspires horror and dread, causing him to flee the warren. Though the full potential of Fiver's powers are only ever hinted at, Adams portrays him as a special rabbit whose strengths are not intellectual like Hazel's or physical like Bigwig's, but rather emotional and psychological. Together, the three of them represent a triumvirate of important traits and gifts, and demonstrate how the healthiest, happiest communities form when those of different strengths and backgrounds work hard together in pursuit of a common goal.

Bigwig – A large, gruff, and brave rabbit and a former member of the Sandleford Owsla who becomes Hazel's right-hand man on their journey across the English countryside in search of a new place to call home. Though brash, often surly, and almost always ready for a fight, Bigwig is able to keep a cool head when



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hazel – Hazel is the primary protagonist of the novel, and the intrepid leader of a band of rabbits who flee their home at Sandleford after Hazel's brother Fiver experiences a vision of their warren's destruction. Though at the start of the journey, Hazel is just as timid and frightened as the rest of the group he leads out of Sandleford, he quickly rises to the role his fellow rabbits have urged him into, even drawing comparisons between his own intrepid and tricky nature and that of the rabbits' folk-hero idol, **El-ahrairah**. Hazel successfully navigates a band of Sandleford rabbits through terror and tumult as they traverse the English countryside and encounter predators, new kinds of terrain, and other strange rabbits who threaten their newfound freedom. As a leader, Hazel is democratic and open—he genuinely wants the best for all his followers, and never attempts to extort, manipulate, or otherwise control them. Though occasionally insecure about whether he is truly worthy, intelligent, or strong enough to lead, he uses his wiles and cunning to secure his new warren's

it counts—when he isn't able to, though his formidable size and strength help him secure his friends' safety against all manner of threats, dangers, and evil. Bigwig, unlike Hazel and Fiver, is rarely given to nerves our doubt—he is always ready to soldier onward, and his bottomless courage makes him an increasingly important member of the group as the challenges they face move from the existential to the practical. The fearless Bigwig is the one to ultimately venture alone to the militaristic warren **Efrafa** after Hazel and the others realize that in order for **Watership Down** to thrive, they are in need to does to produce new kits. Though he faces the threat of physical, psychological, and emotional violence in Efrafa, Bigwig uses his size, strength, quick wits, and passion to successfully infiltrate Efrafa and make his way into the Owsla there, where he successfully smuggles Hyzenthlay, Blackavar, and a number of does out of Efrafa and leads them to safety through a mix of cunning, physical bravery, and strategic manipulation of the Efracan leaders. Bigwig puts his life on the line for the good of his friends and the dream they share for a safer, brighter future built on mutual trust and the pursuit of freedom.

Kehaar – A “foreign” gull who migrates inland from the “Peeg Vater” (Big Water, or the ocean) and, while nursing a wing injury, is discovered by Hazel's band of rabbits. The rabbits help nurse Kehaar back to health, knowing that his help may come in handy during their journey. Kehaar becomes a good friend to the rabbits, and is instrumental in helping them scout out paths through the countryside, keep tabs on their surroundings, survive their conflicts with the Efracans, and successfully rescue a group of does from the militaristic, dangerous warren.

General Woundwort – The fearsome, twisted, violent leader of **Efrafa**. Woundwort demands blind allegiance from his fellow rabbits and exerts total control over every aspect of their lives. He grew up “very wild”—already the strongest of his litter from birth, Woundwort developed “savage” predilections which allowed him to survive in the wild and seize control over other rabbits. Woundwort is cruel, calculating, and desperate to avoid showing any weakness at any time; indeed, after Bigwig successfully infiltrates Efrafa in disguise as a hlessi, escapes with several Efracan rabbits, and returns to Watership Down, Woundwort refuses to give up, and attempts to attack Watership Down, take back his does, and kill Hazel, Bigwig, and their comrades. When Hazel sics a large dog on Woundwort, Woundwort chooses to stay and fight instead of flee—this is the last any rabbit sees of him, though his body is never found and it is implied that he may have survived after all and gone on to start another warren somewhere else.

Cowslip – The de facto leader of a countryside warren. Though wild rabbits live in the warren, they are tended by a local farmer who leaves them fresh vegetables and roots to eat. The rabbits live in apparent harmony—but secretly know that any one of them could be captured at any time by the farmer and killed for their meat or pelt. Cowslip's willingness to sacrifice a few

members of his warren for the prosperity of the greater good shows that there are many types of violence in the rabbit world—not all of them obvious at first glance, and some much more insidious than others.

Holly – At the start of the novel, Holly is the captain of the Sandleford Owsla, and opposes Hazel, Fiver, and their band of rabbits' decision to leave the warren. Later in the novel, Holly, having been driven out of the Sandleford warren, joins up with Hazel and his group, and helps them on their adventures.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Hyzenthlay – A confident, knowledgeable, rebellious doe from **Efrafa** who joins Bigwig in the attempt to break several rabbits—most of them does—out of the Efracan warren. She later becomes Bigwig's mate.

Pipkin – A small, nervous, but loyal rabbit who braves his fear and anxiety about leaving the Sandleford warren to follow Hazel.

Dandelion – The natural storyteller of Hazel's group of rabbits, Dandelion is both physically and mentally quick. Dandelion's tales of **El-ahrairah** comfort and excite the other rabbits.

Blackberry – An “alert and intelligent” rabbit with tipped ears who leaves the Sandleford warren with Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, and the others. He becomes one of Hazel's most trusted friends and an important strategist throughout the rabbits' long journey.

Hawkbit – One of Hazel's followers. He briefly questions Hazel's leadership at a difficult point in the journey to **Watership Down**.

Speedwell – One of Hazel's followers. A nervous rabbit.

Acorn – An empathetic, helpful rabbit.

Buckthorn – A “decent, straightforward” rabbit.

Silver – A former member of the Sandleford Owsla and a loyal, intrepid rabbit.

Threarah – The leader of the Sandleford warren.

Strawberry – A rabbit from Cowslip's warren who begs to join Hazel and his group of rabbits when they depart from their stay at Cowslip's burrow. Strawberry becomes a hardworking and important member of Hazel's band of rabbits and is instrumental in the construction of **Watership Down**.

Silverweed – A “poet” and storyteller from Cowslip's warren.

Bluebell – A funny rabbit who often attempts to tell jokes to lighten the mood in difficult times. Despite his comic demeanor, Bluebell can put up a fight when push comes to shove.

Boxwood – A black and white Himalayan rabbit raised in captivity on a farm in the countryside. Hazel, Bigwig, and Dandelion “rescue” Boxwood and his hutchmates Laurel, Clover, and Haystack from their hutch in hopes of bringing

them back to **Watership Down**.

Laurel – A short-haired black Angora buck raised in captivity on a farm in the countryside. Laurel does not make it away from the farm though, as his owners catch him and return him to the hutch.

Clover – A “strong, active” short-haired black Angora doe raised in captivity on a farm in the countryside.

Haystack – A black and white Himalayan doe rabbit who was raised in captivity on a farm in the countryside. Boxwood’s mate.

Captain Chervil – An **Efrafan** Mark officer.

Avens – An **Efrafan** Mark officer.

Captain Campion – A captain in the **Efrafan** Owsla, loyal to Woundwort.

Blackavar – An **Efrafan** rabbit who is “dreadfully mutilated” due to his record of rebellion, insubordination, and escape attempts. He joins Bigwig’s escape mission, assisting Bigwig in breaking several does out of Efrafa.

Nelthilta – A gossipy **Efrafan** doe with a reputation for being “young and silly.”

Thethuthinnang – An **Efrafan** doe.

Vervain – The head of the **Efrafan** Owsla.

Groundsel – A member of the **Efrafan** Owsla. After the struggle between **Efrafa** and Watership down has ended, Groundsel becomes the Chief Rabbit of a new warren at the halfway point between the two burrows.

Vilthuril – An **Efrafan** doe who becomes Fiver’s mate.

Lucy – A young girl who rescues Hazel from her family’s cat towards the end of the novel.

Doctor Adams – A country doctor who helps Lucy return Hazel to the countryside.

Lord Frith – The sun, and the rabbits’ god. He figures prominently in a great deal of rabbit mythology.

Prince Rainbow – Lord Frith’s helper and an antagonist of **El-ahrairah**.

King Darzin – The ruler of a large city of animals and a frequent antagonist of **El-ahrairah**.

Hufsa – One of Prince Rainbow’s spies.

Rabscuttle – The captain of **El-ahrairah’s** Owsla and his constant companion.

Black Rabbit of Inlé – A legendary rabbit and death personified.

Rowsby Woof – A legendary dog and an antagonist of **El-ahrairah**.

Yona A hedgehog who appears in some of the stories told by the rabbits.

TERMS

Lapine – The rabbit language. Most terms found in *Watership Down* are Lapine words.

Bob-stones – A rabbit game played with stones of various sizes, colors, and textures.

Elil – Enemies of rabbits, or things which pose a danger to rabbits.

Flay – Basic rabbit food such as grass, shoots, and flowers.

Flayrah – Rare, delicious food such as carrots, lettuces, and roots.

Frith – The rabbits’ name for their sun-god. They see the sun as the literal manifestation of this god.

Fu Inlé – Any time after moonrise.

Hlessi – A wandering rabbit who lives in the open. Plural: Hlessil.

Homba – A fox.

Hraka – Droppings or excrement.

Hrududu – A tractor or car.

Inlé – The moon; also a word denoting darkness, fear, or death.

Lendri – A badger.

Marli – A doe.

Ni-Frith – Noon.

Owsla – The ruling clique of a warren usually comprised of its strongest, most fearsome rabbits. The Owsla keep order and enforce rabbit rules and law.

Mark – The Efrafan rabbits are assigned sectors of the warren and schedules for eating and sleeping based on Marks they are branded with by being bitten at birth on different parts of their bodies.

Pfeffa – A cat.

Rah – An honorific suffix used to signify a rabbit’s status as chief or leader.

Scrape – A shallow hole dug for temporary shelter.

Silflay – To go above ground to feed. Both a noun and a verb (like “supper”).

Tharn – The rabbit-state of being paralyzed or hypnotized by fear. Brought on by intense nerves or staring directly into the lights of a hrududu.

White Blindness – A disease that affects rabbits’ vision and slowly kills them.

Yona – A hedgehog.



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.



THE EPIC JOURNEY

Though set in the world of humans, the plot of Richard Adams's *Watership Down* borrows from classic epics and "hero's journey" tales such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and even, in a meta-textual turn, the rabbit world's own folk hero, **El-ahairah**. When Hazel and a small group of likeminded rabbits leave their home in the Sandleford warren after Hazel's brother Fiver experiences a disturbing vision about their home's fate, they spend months traversing field and down, river and stream. Along the way they encounter diversions, obstacles, and threats that alternately throw them off-course and lead them to exciting new places and alliances. In invoking the rubric of an "epic journey" unfolding in the "smaller" arena of the animal world, Adams deconstructs the stereotypes of the hero's tale and ultimately suggests that it is not distance or scope but emotion that dictates the stakes of any "epic" tale.

In order to highlight the separate parts of the classic epic or hero's tale, Adams breaks his novel down into four distinct sections—each of which has a micronarrative of its own and represents an emotional leg of the rabbits' larger journey. In the novel's first part, "The Journey," the rabbits set out from their home warren, Sandleford, after Fiver has a vision of destruction coming to the warren. Fiver's vision of blood spreading over the hill above the warren is eventually brought to fruition after the rabbits escape: construction on a new housing development decimates their former home, and the workmen's cruel and unusual methods of emptying the warren leaves most of Hazel and Fiver's former friends dead. The novel opens with calamity and destruction, launching the rabbits onto a vulnerable and dangerous quest for survival. The emotional and physical stakes are enormous, even if the intensity of the rabbits' early journey is marked by simple challenges—ones that humans might consider nonthreatening—like rain, foxes, and tractors.

In the novel's second part, "On **Watership Down**," the rabbits arrive at the titular hill and at last find the place they mean to settle and go about constructing a warren from scratch—but soon realize that without any does to mate with, their group will die out within a few years. In this section of the novel, the rabbits must navigate a more existential fear. Having navigated the terrain of the English countryside and at last found shelter,

the rabbits must now confront the finality of life and the need for community—a small but epic reckoning in and of itself.

In the novel's third part, "**Efrafa**," Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, and several other rabbits—along with the help of their gull friend, Kehaar—concoct a plan to infiltrate the nearby police-state warren Efrafa, rescue several does, and bring them back to Watership Down. This part of the novel contains the bloodiest battles, the trickiest schemes, and the most dramatic twists of the novel. Many rabbits, occasionally modeling their actions on ancient lore about the trickster and rabbit folk hero El-ahairah, prove themselves heroes—the fearsome Bigwig, who goes undercover in the dangerous Efrafa in order to carry out the rabbits' plan, most of all. As Bigwig navigates the new warren and struggles to make sure that he and the does are able to make it out alive, Adams crafts a high-stakes showdown for his characters. Again, though the physical journey they must make is a short one, all kinds of challenges crop up—such as how to maneuver a boat down a raging river—each time testing the characters' resolve and their commitment to pursuing the utopian life they want on Watership Down.

In the novel's fourth part, "Hazel-Rah," the struggle with the Efracans has ended—or so the rabbits think. As they settle into a peaceful life on Watership Down, they are unaware that General Woundwort has designs on destroying their new warren, and that they will have to face off against him and some of the core members of his military again. As the rabbits undertake one final battle—recruiting the unwitting help of a nearby dog—and emerge victorious, they reflect on the long journey they've been on, and the full emotional force of the novel settles in. The rabbits have traversed a very small spit of land and have spent a lot of time locked in repetitious conflicts with the Efracans—and yet though the scope of their journey has been small, the emotional toll it has taken (and the things the rabbits have learned through their epic adventure) have changed the rabbits' lives forever.

Adams's "epic" is set in the small, underfoot world of rabbits and unfolds over a relatively small period of time (one summer) and a relatively small distance (throughout their harrowing journey, the rabbits traverse a distance of just about ten miles.) And yet in spite of the small scope of their journey, Adams imbues the trek with references to classics of the genre in order to show how far the rabbits have come emotionally, and how much they have changed. Just as in *Moby-Dick*, the rabbits have wrestled with things larger than themselves—both predators they have wrangled into their service (in the case of the gull Kehaar and the dog from Nuthanger Farm) and existential threats including the fear of death and the idea of legacy. The rabbits, like the characters in the Greek myths of Odysseus and Agamemnon, have contended with accursed visions, violent adversaries, a sense of statelessness, and the search for belonging. In sending his characters off on a journey that tests their physical and emotional strength and their

relationships to one another, Adams engages the epic hallmarks of classic hero tales and transmutes them to the quiet, damp fields of England, showing that the most epic journeys are those rooted in the emotional rather than the physical.



VIOLENCE AND POWER

Though Richard Adams originally conceived of *Watership Down* as a fanciful tale about rabbits meant to entertain his two young daughters on a long car ride, the finished text is rife with violence, cruelty, and brutality, both physical and emotional. In highlighting the viciousness of the rabbit world in unsparing, often gory detail, Adams argues that though violence is indeed a part of nature, all too often, creatures both human and nonhuman use amplified, targeted violence—or the threat of it—to subdue rather than protect one another in the scrabble for dominance and power.

In each place the rabbits visit on their journey to establish a new warren on **Watership Down**, a large hill in the English countryside, they encounter rabbits who seek to use unnatural violence against one another as a means to power. When Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, and their companions initially attempt to leave Sandleford, they meet with Holly, the captain of their warren's Owsla, or "ruling clique"—essentially, the law enforcement outfit. Holly threatens the rabbits with violence if they attempt to leave—and when Bigwig attempts to push past Holly, the two end up scrapping until Hazel threatens Holly with death. Hazel is determined to secure freedom and autonomy for himself, his brother, and his friends—and in this moment, as he turns the threat of violence on a rabbit he once shared a home with, Hazel begins playing into the mechanisms of violence and threats that allow him to take the power in the situation.

After a treacherous journey along the heath outside of Sandleford, the rabbits unknowingly walk into violence of a more sinister nature when they encounter a rabbit from another warren—Cowslip—who brings them all to his home for shelter. The rabbits are showered with hospitality and kindness, but soon begin to realize that something in this new warren is not right. They eventually learn that the rabbits, though well fed because a local farmer leaves carrots, roots, and lettuce above-ground for them to eat, live in constant fear of being captured by the farmer and skinned or cooked. The farmer allows the rabbits to stay on his property because he occasionally kills them and uses them for his own gain; Cowslip and his companions were prepared to bring Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, and the others into this fold without giving them any warning about the reality of the situation. This, too, is a kind of violence, though it's far more underhanded and menacing than what the rabbits experienced with Holly. The rabbits in Cowslip's warren allow one another to be systemically picked off and killed in exchange for the hope that those who survive will be able to live lives of abundance. They shove down the

knowledge of what's truly going on because they know that to leave would be to abandon stability and that to demand better lives for themselves would be to open themselves up to disappointment. To stay in this miserable, fraught situation—in spite of its violence—is to remain in control to at least some extent, and thus, in their minds, in power over their own lives. Hazel, Fiver, and the others—recognizing that any of them could be sacrificed at any time—flee, deciding that they cannot abide such a cruel, violent way of life.

After Hazel and the others begin settling Watership Down, they realize that they will need doe rabbits to survive. The rabbits learn of **Efrafa**—a large but militaristic warren not far from Watership Down—and decide to infiltrate the burrow to rescue does who are essentially living in a police state. Once Bigwig infiltrates Efrafa, he bears witness to the kind of violence that goes on there—including the fact that rabbits are branded with horrible bite marks at birth which, for the rest of their lives, keep them assigned to a Mark and thus a regimented pattern of work, sleep, eating, and relieving themselves. Any rabbits who step out of line in Efrafa face physical consequences, and many rabbits Bigwig encounters have horribly mangled ears or noses.

Bearing witness to the violence in Efrafa—the most outwardly opportunistic, power-hungry use of violence he's seen yet—Bigwig understands at last, in full, just how mechanisms of fear, violence, and power work. He is not intimidated, though, by the threat of the Efracan's violence, and neither are the does he gathers to help escape. All of them have reached the point where they would rather die than spend another day in the fearsome Efracan leader General Woundwort's sick cycle of intimidation, cruelty, and brutality. In escaping Efrafa, Bigwig, Hazel, Fiver, and the others must—as they did at the start of the novel to escape Sandleford—use violence against other rabbits, but this time they do not threaten death or physical harm: they use the elements of nature and allies from the animal world, such as the bird Kehaar and a large dog from a nearby farm, to attack Woundwort and his lackeys. This shows that Hazel and the others do not want to manufacture violence as a means of power; they have learned to use nature and the elements to take back power rather than relying on fear, intimidation, and targeted brutality.

As Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, and the others traverse the countryside and encounter the natural violence of the world—the circle of life, the food chain, and the threat of the elements—they come to understand that manufactured or weaponized violence that pits rabbit against rabbit only serves to weaken the ties that bind them to one another and create even more suspicion, fear, and mistrust. Though Adams has stated that *Watership Down* is not a metaphor or an allegory, it is easy to see how the violence that permeates the rabbit world mirrors the violence of the human world—and how the mechanisms of fear, manipulation, and both physical and emotional cruelty that Hazel and his

friends face are the same which humans must, unfortunately and often, face off against themselves.



AUTHORITARIANISM VS. DEMOCRACY

Throughout the course of the novel, Hazel and his comrades continually find themselves in conflict with authoritarian regimes and power structures.

From the strict Sandlesford warren, to the ominous home of the rabbit Cowslip and his fellow rabbits, to the fascistic **Efrafa** (where rabbits are branded at birth and forced to eat, work, and relieve themselves in shifts), Hazel and his friends keep coming up against strict, sinister, or downright despotic establishments. Their search for home is also the search for a place where democracy can thrive, and where they can each be free. As Adams tracks the rabbits' journey, he argues that authoritarian regimes and power structures are almost always built on fear, and use that fear as a means of maintaining power—while democratic structures and societies use hope in the place of fear to inspire rather than demoralize their denizens.

The authoritarian structures and regimes throughout *Watership Down* are all quite different, yet at their core, they are the same: their only purpose is to inspire fear in the rabbits they are sworn to protect and use that fear as a means of distracting and preoccupying the other rabbits in order to maintain control over the warrens. In Cowslip's warren, the burrow seems prosperous at first—the rabbits who live there are all large and healthy, and feast daily on delicious roots and vegetables rather than grass. The longer Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, and their group stays, though, the more sensitive they become to a tense, sinister atmosphere in the warren. They soon learn that the reason the rabbits eat so well is that a local farmer feeds them—but every once in a while, kills one of them for their pelt or their meat. Unlike the militaristic Efrafa—which the rabbits will soon discover—this warren is not a fascistic place dominated by one cruel rabbit. Rather, the rabbits who live here submit to another kind of authoritarianism—the “rule” of an individual not even of their species, to whose whims they are entirely vulnerable. The pervasive atmosphere of terror and uncertainty in this warren keeps them focused on doing their best to avoid notice—or to altogether ignore the precarious, weakening threads which hold their society together.

In Efrafa, the regimented nature of the society and General Woundwort's all-encompassing power are tools meant to inspire fear in the rabbits and keep them focused only on playing by the rules in order to avoid the threat of violence. Woundwort uses fear not only of retribution to keep his rabbits in line, but also uses fear of change, of the outside world, and of deviating from the norm in order to keep his subjects down. Unaware that any other way of life is possible, many of the Efracans submit to these fears and succumb to authoritarian rule, never dreaming of a way out. A select few, having heard

tales of the outside or simply developed the desire to break from the mold, are willing to follow Bigwig into the world beyond, resisting for the first time in their lives the autocratic regime which has dictated every aspect of their being. Bigwig's arrival gives these rabbits—most of them does—hope that there is another way to live, and that freedom can be attained.

The democratic society Hazel and his fellow rabbits envision—and, ultimately, achieve—is based on hope and freedom, and Hazel's can-do mindset and readiness for any challenge show how democracy begets open-mindedness while authoritarianism leaves room for only small-minded fear and focus on survival. At **Watership Down**, Hazel and his fellow rabbits set to work creating a society unlike the one they came from—and unlike one any of them have imagined. They create a large communal room called the Honeycomb, a place where they can gather to spend time together, tell stories, and share warmth on cold nights. They forage for food whenever they please and become the first buck (male) rabbits they've heard of to construct a new warren from scratch. *Watership Down* is a place where each rabbit is free to be himself—no longer will Fiver feel afraid to share his prophetic visions, the rabbits will not have to live under the rule of the strong and powerful Owsla, and every rabbit's concerns, needs, and desires will carry equal weight. Unlike Cowslip's warren or Efrafa, *Watership Down* is a place founded upon the idea of all the things it could be, or might be, rather than a place founded upon the fear of the social growth or forces of nature that stand to threaten it.

In creating a place whose potential for growth doesn't seem to have a limit, Hazel and the others establish a democratic environment of trust, openness, and good faith. There is no need to keep one another down through fear—rather, Hazel uses the rabbits' common fears to unite them as they figure out solutions to the threats of predators, men, weather, and other rabbits who would seek to decimate their home.

Ultimately, Adams uses the fictional rabbit world to highlight many of the pitfalls of the human world—namely, the threat of authoritarianism. Though written in the mid-1970s, long after the fall of the Axis powers and the encroaching threat of Nazism across Europe, Adams uses *Watership Down* to indict fascistic regimes and highlight the power of communities forged in hope, trust, truth, and transparency to better the world.



HOME AND BELONGING

The story of *Watership Down* is the story of a group of rabbits and their search for their forever home—a place where they will be free from oppression and fear, and able to live as they please in harmony with both nature and with one another. Through the rabbits' story, Adams crafts a larger narrative metaphor about the importance of belonging—not just in the animal world, but in

the human one as well, ultimately arguing that the need for physical refuge and belonging is mirrored by the need for an emotional “home” and a deeper, more soulful sense of belonging.

The rabbits’ journey and their search for a place to make their homes is as much an emotional journey as it is a physical one. The rabbits are motivated to leave the Sandleford warren by fear—but as they set out and see the wide world for the first time, they understand that it is larger and filled with more surprise, danger, and opportunity than they’d imagined. As the rabbits traverse the dangerous and yet beautiful physical world, their journey takes them inward, too, as the things they thought they knew about themselves and one another are tested and their true inner strengths are revealed.

The rabbits’ journey begins as one borne of a need for a place to stay once their own warren, according to Fiver’s vision, is threatened with becoming uninhabitable and dangerous. Many of the rabbits who set out with Hazel and Fiver have never known life beyond the Sandleford warren and are frightened of what it will mean to leave the place they have called home. Out on the heath, as the rabbits encounter—and escape—threats from predators, weather, men, tractors, other strange rabbits, and physical exhaustion, they understand that they are capable of pushing themselves to their limits and still emerging triumphant. The rabbits begin to wonder if, having conquered the physical aspect of their journey and found a new place to call “home” was only the beginning—and whether there is more to be gained from life.

As the rabbits fulfill their physical needs—for food, shelter, water, and refuge from predators and the elements—they discover that there are emotional needs to be met as well if they are to find home and belonging in the fullest sense. Throughout their journey in search of a home, the rabbits have done their best to stay together—and in so doing have discovered the joys of communal living, the importance of having someone to lean on both physically and emotionally in times of trouble, and the perils of living only for survival. They have witnessed the pain of the rabbits’ lives at Cowslip’s warren, and have heard tales of the despotic, violent warren at **Efrafa**. Hazel and his band of rabbits set out in search of the bare minimum—survival—but now, after all they’ve been through, they long not just to live, but to perpetuate the lives they’re making in **Watership Down** and desire the company of does who will keep their burrow full and carry on their bloodlines. The rabbits want to enjoy life, and to secure that same kind of enjoyment for their future progeny, as well.

In the end, the rabbits are at last able to secure both the physical and more “spiritual” things they have discovered they need out of life. They have a warm place to live and have also ensured that it allows them a communal space to connect with one another—an innovation few if any other warrens have. They have secured mates as well, and in so doing have secured

both the proliferation of their warren and the emotional stability of friendship and partnership. They have eliminated the Efrafa threat and absorbed several Efrafa rabbits into their own burrow, making their land safe and their territory free of enemies but also exploring the possibility of redemption and community in the face of prior instances of violence and mistrust.

The rabbits have thus found a home and sense of belonging—not just a physical one, but an emotional one as well. They have embraced their quest not just for physical safety but for emotional security and spiritual happiness. Drawing upon the tales of the rabbit folk hero **El-ahrairah**, their experiences in Efrafa and the lands beyond it, and the triumph of having settled a new burrow, the rabbits have realized that they can want more from life than just survival—they can seek enjoyment, fulfillment, and a true sense of belonging that extends beyond having a place to lay their heads at night.

In sending his rabbits out on a quest that proves just as spiritually taxing as it is physically demanding, Adams highlights the inextricable relationship between journeys made on foot across vast distances and journeys that are equally vast but lead inward. Adams shows that as the rabbits’ need for physical safety and comfort expands, they develop a set of emotional needs as well—and strive to meet them with the same faith, daring, and dedication they harnessed in trying to establish a physical sense of well-being and belonging.



SYMBOLS

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



EL-AHRAIRAH

El-ahrairah, the trickster rabbit folk hero of legend, is invoked several times throughout the novel as various groups of rabbits in different warrens gather to tell tales of his bravery, trickery, and wisdom. In the stories told about him, El-ahrairah is often shown outsmarting other rabbits—often kings and rulers who seek to subjugate their people or withhold the best food for themselves—and even elil. Throughout the novel, El-ahrairah is a symbol of hope and the possibility that rabbits, though small and vulnerable, can together rise to greatness. Many of the difficult schemes Hazel and his band of rabbits pull off are inspired by the schemes of El-ahrairah himself, and as they wrangle creatures who were formerly elil (such as the gull Kehaar) or even pose a direct threat (such as cats and dogs), they draw comfort and inspiration from their folk hero and convince themselves that together, they can do anything they put their minds and paws to.



WATERSHIP DOWN

Watership Down is the name of the hill which houses the warren Hazel, Bigwig, Fiver, and the other rabbits who managed to escape from Sandleford eventually build together. Watership Down, a warren in which all rabbits are equal and free to live by their own rules, on their own schedules, and without influence from any Chief Rabbit or Owsla, is symbolic of democracy and democratic systems the world over. Though Richard Adams has denied that *Watership Down* is allegoric or symbolic of anything, Watership Down and the militaristic neighboring warren of **Efrafa** can be read as symbols of democracy and totalitarianism, and as they enter into conflict with one another, the new utopian world of Watership Down is threatened by the fascistic regime in Efrafa.



EFRAFA

While **Watership Down** is symbolic of democracy in action, Efrafa, a neighboring warren run by the cruel and violent General Woundwort, is symbolic of authoritarianism and fascism. In Efrafa, rabbits are marked at birth through horrible bites, and the mark they bear dictates how every moment of every day of their entire lives will be spent. The militaristic Owsla which rules Efrafa is one of the largest and most organized around, and any rebellion or attempts at escape are met with swift, decisive force—as shown by the rebellious Blackavar's mutilated face and ears. When Bigwig infiltrates Efrafa in order to rescue some does and bring them to Watership Down, Adams creates an enormous measure of dramatic tension by creating a conflict between democracy and fascism—powerful forces which have torn apart even the human world more than once.

Related Characters: Buckthorn, Hawkbit, Acorn, Silver, Pipkin, Blackberry, Fiver, Bigwig, Hazel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hazel and several of his fellow Sandleford warren rabbits have left their home and struck out on their own after Hazel's brother Fiver had a terrible vision of destruction, violence, and death coming to the warren. As they start out on their epic journey, the rabbits hope to find a new place to call home—but they have never been out of the warren before and are easily spooked by their new surroundings. Over the course of the novel, the rabbits will learn not just how to survive the natural world, but how to actually thrive within it and use the new, unexpected resources all around them to their advantage. The rabbits' long epic journey has a timid, nervous start—but soon, they will become brave, intrepid, capable rabbits who barely resemble the frightened bunnies who first left the warren.

Chapter 6 Quotes

●● 'I will bless your bottom as it sticks out of the hole. Bottom, be strength and warning and speed forever and save the life of your master. Be it so!' And as he spoke, El-ahrairah's tail grew shining white and flashed like a star: and his back legs grew long and powerful and he thumped the hillside until the very beetles fell off the grass stems. He came out of the hole and tore across the hill faster than any creature in the world. And Frith called after him, 'El-ahrairah, your people cannot rule the world, for I will not have it so. All the world will be your enemy, Prince with a Thousand Enemies, and whenever they catch you, they will kill you. But first they must catch you, digger, listener, runner, prince with the swift warning. Be cunning and full of tricks and your people shall never be destroyed.'

Related Characters: Lord Frith (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 28-29

Explanation and Analysis

As the rabbits travel through the fields and woods, they comfort one another by sharing tales of their trickster folk hero, the rabbit El-ahrairah. As they recall his origin story



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scribner edition of *Watership Down* published in 1972.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● To rabbits, everything unknown is dangerous. The first reaction is to startle, the second to bolt. Again and again they startled, until they were close to exhaustion. But what did these sounds mean and where, in this wilderness, could they bolt to? The rabbits crept closer together. Their progress grew slower. Before long they lost the course of the brook, slipping across the moonlit patches as fugitives and halting in the bushes with raised ears and staring eyes. The moon was low now and the light, wherever it slanted through the trees, seemed thicker, older and more yellow.

fondly, they take comfort in the fact that though their sun-god, Lord Frith, cursed the cocky El-ahrairah with a thousand enemies, he also blessed him with an advantage against the “Thousand Enemies” that would forever pursue him: extreme speed. Frith stacked the deck against El-ahrairah, and by extension all rabbits, but also harbored a soft spot for the trickster and gave him a way to escape difficult situations and certain danger.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☞ “One day the farmer thought, ‘I could increase those rabbits: make them part of my farm—their meat, their skins. [...] He began to shoot all elil—lendri, homba, stoat, owl. He put out food for the rabbits, but not too near the warren. For his purpose they had to become accustomed to going about in the fields and the wood. And then he snared them—not too many: as many as he wanted and not as many as would frighten them all away or destroy the warren. They grew big and strong and healthy, for he saw to it that they had all of the best, particularly in winter, and nothing to fear—except the running knot in the hedge gap and the wood path. So they lived as he wanted them to live and all the time there were a few who disappeared. The rabbits became strange in many ways, different from other rabbits. They knew well enough what was happening. But even to themselves they pretended that all was well, for the food was good, they were protected, they had nothing to fear but the one fear; and that struck here and there, never enough at a time to drive them away.’”

Related Characters: Fiver (speaker), Strawberry, Cowslip

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 115-116

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the rabbits have been staying in the warren of a rabbit named Cowslip. Though populated by large, healthy rabbits who eat flayrah—delicious rare vegetables—for every meal, there is a sad energy to the burrow, and Fiver senses that something there is horribly wrong. When Bigwig is caught in a snare above ground one day, Fiver puts the pieces of the puzzle together—and explains them all to the others. The farmer uses the threat of violence to control Cowslip and his fellow rabbits, and as Hazel, Fiver, and the others catch wise to this horrific arrangement which Cowslip’s group submits to every day of their lives, they want no more part in it.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☞ Since leaving the warren of the snares they had become warier, shrewder, a tenacious band who understood each other and worked together. There was no more quarreling. The truth about the warren had been a grim shock. They had come closer together, relying on and valuing each other’s capacities. They knew now that it was on these and on nothing else that their lives depended, and they were not going to waste anything they possessed between them.

Related Characters: Strawberry, Buckthorn, Hawkbit, Acorn, Silver, Pipkin, Blackberry, Fiver, Bigwig, Hazel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in their epic journey through the English countryside, the rabbits have reached the place which will be their new home—Watership Down. They have accomplished what they set out to do, but have gained much, much more along the way. All of the rabbits have learned more about the world around them, each other, and most importantly themselves. They have come to realize that though a safe, warm place to sleep is nice, the realest homes their kind can have are the homes they find within the kindness, solidarity, and patience they show and offer one another. Anywhere will be home for this bunch as long as they are together.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ “The four of us went wandering away and we must have gone almost in a half-circle, because after a long time we came to the brook, below what had been our field. We followed it down into a big wood; and that night, while we were still in the wood, Toadflax died. He was clear-headed for a short time before and I remember something he said. Bluebell had been saying that he knew the men hated us for raiding their crops and gardens, and Toadflax answered, ‘That wasn’t why they destroyed the warren. It was just because we were in their way. They killed us to suit themselves.’ Soon after that he went to sleep, and a little later, when we were alarmed by some noise or other, we tried to wake him and realized he was dead.

Related Characters: Holly (speaker), Bluebell

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

As Holly recounts the miserable tale of the violent destruction of the Sandleford warren—and his narrow escape alongside Bluebell and two since-deceased rabbits named Pimpernel and Toadflax—he reflects on something one of the unlucky other rabbits said on their first night out in the wild. As Toadflax remarked that the men who gassed their warren, killed their friends, and dug up their land did it “to suit themselves,” the larger mechanisms of violence and power which rule the world beyond the rabbits’ purview come into play. The violence Hazel and his friends have encountered so far has only occasionally been at the hands of men—their biggest fears have been elil, or predators, and betrayals by other strange rabbits. As Holly reflects on the careless, cruel way the men dispatched with the Sandelford rabbits, though, all of the rabbits have a grave moment of understand in which they see that men, as the most violent force in the vast world they inhabit, are truly the most powerful creatures of all.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☞ Things had not looked better since they had first set out from Sandleford.

A spirit of happy mischief entered into Hazel. He felt as he had on the morning when they crossed the Enborne and he had set out alone and found the beanfield. He was confident and ready for adventure. But what adventure? Something worth telling to Holly and Silver on their return. Something to—well, not to diminish what they were going to do. No, of course not—but just to show them that their Chief Rabbit was up to anything that they were up to.

Related Characters: Silver, Holly, Hazel

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 197-198

Explanation and Analysis

For the entirety of the novel up to this point, Hazel’s only mission and goal has been to get his people to the safety of a new home after leaving the Sandleford warren. Now that he has accomplished that goal, however, he finds that he is struck with a restless spirit and a desire for mischief. Hazel has grown more accustomed—perhaps even more attached—to the feeling of being in the wild, ready for a problem or attack at any moment than he has to the

sensation of safety and domesticity. Hazel longs to set out again and prove his worth as a leader through trickery and bravery rather than by sitting idly by in the warren and attending to the less-exciting duties as Chief and leader.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☞ “But surely it alters them very much, living like that?” asked Dandelion.

“Very much indeed,” replied Holly. “Most of them can’t do anything but what they’re told. They’ve never been out of Efrafa and never smelled an enemy. The one aim of every rabbit in Efrafa is to get into the Owsla, because of the privileges: and the one aim of everyone in the Owsla is to get into the Council. The Council have the best of everything. But the Owsla have to keep very strong and tough. They take it in turn to do what they call Wide Patrol. They go out over the country—all round the place—living in the open for days at a time. It’s partly to find out anything they can, and partly to train them and make them tough and cunning. Any hlessil they find they pick up and bring back to Efrafa. If they won’t come, they kill them. They reckon hlessil a danger, because they may attract the attention of men.”

Related Characters: Holly, Dandelion (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

As Holly tells the rabbits at Watership Down all about the miserable place that is Efrafa, he discusses the intricate patterns of authoritarianism, violence, and power which keep the victims of the Efracan Owsla’s cruelty locked in repetitive, never-ending routines. The rabbits’ only incentive in life is to learn to emulate the violence which is done unto them so that they can become the arbiters of such violence and power within the warren, and so the power structures which enable the worst rabbits to become the most influential are never dismantled or even questioned.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☞ “We can’t go on with nothing but these two does.”

“But what else can we do?”

“I know what we’ve got to do,” said Hazel, “but I still can’t see how. We’ve got to go back and get some does out of Efrafa.”

“You might as well say you were going to get them out of Inlé, Hazel-rah. I’m afraid I can’t have given you a very clear description of Efrafa.”

“Oh, yes, you have—the whole idea scares me stiff. But we’re going to do it.”

“It can’t be done.”

“It can’t be done by fighting or fair words, no. So it will have to be done by means of a trick.”

Related Characters: Holly, Hazel (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hazel—who has recently been injured in a raid on a nearby farm in search for some does to populate Watership Down—has just heard Holly’s violent tale of misery and imprisonment in Efrafa. Despite the grisly story, Hazel realizes that the only way to secure more does for his own warren is to break them out of the militaristic, authoritarian Efrafa. Though Holly insists this can’t be done, Hazel—who idolizes the trickster folk hero El-ahrairah—believes that while any attempts at either making peace with or fighting against the Efracans will fail, a trick might be just the ticket.

Chapter 32 Quotes

☞ “I’m angry with you,” [Hazel] said. “You’re the one rabbit we’re not going to be able to do without and you have to go and run a silly risk like that. It wasn’t necessary and it wasn’t even clever. What were you up to?”

“I’m afraid I just lost my head, Hazel,” replied Bigwig. “I’ve been strung up all day, thinking about this business at Efrafa—got me really on edge. When I feel like that I have to do something—you know, fight or run a risk. I thought if I could make that fox look a fool I wouldn’t feel so worried about the other thing. What’s more, it worked—I feel a lot better now.”

Related Characters: Bigwig, Hazel (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bigwig has just drawn a fox into the woods, away from the rest of the group, recklessly risking his life in the process. When he returns, Hazel reprimands him, but Bigwig states that he was feeling restless, on edge, and in need of a surge of power and confidence. For Bigwig—kind and gracious rabbit though he is—the quickest means to that feeling was an act bordering on violence against himself, and which actually led to violence against other rabbits as he drew the fox, quite by accident, onto an Efracan Wide Patrol. This moment will come back to haunt Bigwig after he has infiltrated Efrafa and is eventually recognized as the rabbit who led the fox onto the patrol.

Chapter 34 Quotes

☞ As the warren grew, so Woundwort developed his system to keep it under control. Crowds of rabbits feeding at morning and evening were likely to attract attention. He devised the Marks, each controlled by its own officers and sentries, with feeding times changed regularly to give all a share of early morning and sunset—the favorite hours for silflay. All signs of rabbit life were concealed as closely as possible. The Owsla had privileges in regard to feeding, mating and freedom of movement. Any failure of duty on their part was liable to be punished by demotion and loss of privileges. For ordinary rabbits, the punishments were more severe.

Related Characters: General Woundwort

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 305

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Adams provides some backstory about General Woundwort’s early years. After watching his whole family being killed at the hands of a man, Woundwort began a campaign of violence throughout the English countryside, eventually coming to power as the leader of a powerful warren. This, Adams suggests, is the reason why Woundwort fears and hates men so much—and the reason

that he has enacted violent, authoritarian measures of concealment and punishment as the leader of Efrafa. In attempting to explain the motivation for Woundwort's actions, Adams falls shy of excusing them—he condemns the ways in which Woundwort has allowed his life to become ruled by fear and resentment, and how he has enacted a campaign of cruelty and violence against the rabbits he has, as their Chief, sworn to protect.

Chapter 35 Quotes

☛☛ “Thlayli, you are very brave. Are you cunning, too? All our lives will depend on you tomorrow.”

“Well, can you see anything wrong with the plan?”

“No, but I am only a doe who has never been out of Efrafa. Suppose something unexpected happens?”

“Risk is risk. Don't you want to get out and come and live on the high downs with us? Think of it!”

“Oh, Thlayli! Shall we mate with whom we choose and dig our own burrows and bear our litters alive?”

“You shall: and tell stories in the Honeycomb and silflay whenever you feel like it. It's a fine life, I promise you.”

“I'll come! I'll run any risk.”

Related Characters: Bigwig, Hyzenthlay (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bigwig confides in his new ally in Efrafa, Hyzenthlay, a doe with a history of rebelling against the status quo. He tells her about his plans to help her and her fellow does—along with a put-upon prisoner called Blackavar—escape from the authoritarian police state that is Efrafa. Hyzenthlay, who has longed for life in the wild since she can remember, becomes emotional and excited at the prospect of getting to live a truly free existence. To Hyzenthlay, who has never known real freedom, even the fleeting chance at it is worth “any risk” at all. Her hopeful spirit even in the darkest of times represents one of the novel's central themes of the struggle between authoritarianism and democracy.

Chapter 38 Quotes

☛☛ “You dirty little beast,” said Woundwort. “I hear you've attacked one of the Council police and broken his leg. We'll settle with you here. There's no need to take you back to Efrafa.”

“You crack-brained slave-driver,” answered Bigwig. “I'd like to see you try.”

“All right,” said Woundwort, “that's enough. Who have we got? Vervain, Campion, put him down. The rest of you, start getting these does back to the warren. The prisoner you can leave to me.”

“Frith sees you!” cried Bigwig. “You're not fit to be called a rabbit! May Frith blast you and your foul Owsla full of bullies!”

At that instant a dazzling claw of lightning streaked down the length of the sky. The hedge and the distant trees seemed to leap forward in the brilliance of the flash. Immediately upon it came the thunder: a high, tearing noise, as though some huge thing were being ripped to pieces close above, which deepened and turned to enormous blows of dissolution. Then the rain fell like a waterfall. In a few seconds the ground was covered with water and over it, to a height of inches, rose a haze formed of a myriad minute splashes. Stupefied with the shock, unable even to move, the sodden rabbits crouched inert, almost pinned to the earth by the rain.

A small voice spoke in Bigwig's mind. “Your storm, Thlayli-rah. Use it.”

Related Characters: Bigwig, General Woundwort (speaker), Captain Campion, Lord Frith, Vervain

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Woundwort and his powerful Owsla catch up with Bigwig and the rabbits he has helped to escape from Efrafa. The escape plan has gone horribly wrong, and Bigwig finds himself up against the terrifying Efrafa Chief and the full force of his personal police protectorate. Bigwig knows that if he must fight them, he will lose, but decides not to go down without speaking his mind and declaring himself a now and forever enemy of the “crack-brained slave-driver.” At a crucial moment, as Bigwig curses Woundwort and his Owsla, a sign which seems to come straight from Lord Frith himself falls out of the sky. As the terrifying Efrafa freeze in fear, Bigwig—addressing himself by his Lapine name and

adding the honorific suffix -rah—pushes himself onwards, knowing that his hard fight for freedom is not yet over.

☛ Sights and feelings swirled through Bigwig as though in a dream. The things that were happening no longer seemed connected by anything except his own dazed senses. He heard Kehaar screaming as he dived again to attack Vervain. He felt the rain pouring cold into the open gash in his shoulder. Through the curtain of rain he glimpsed Woundwort dodging among his officers and urging them back into the ditch on the edge of the field. He saw Blackavar striking at Campion and Campion turning to run. Then someone beside him was saying, “Hullo, Bigwig. Bigwig! Bigwig! What do you want us to do?”

Related Characters: Captain Campion, Blackavar, General Woundwort, Vervain, Kehaar, Bigwig

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 360

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bigwig, Kehaar, and his fellow rabbits face off against Woundwort and his most trusted Efrafa officers. Bigwig—who has been through several days of constant stress as he’s painstakingly planned his and the does’ escape, and who has witnessed the brutal torture and cruel mistreatment of countless rabbits in the meantime—begins to dissociate and retreat into himself. He is hyperconscious of certain aspects of his surroundings—the rain, his wound—but as the fighting swirls all around him, it is almost as if his brain is unable to take any more violence, and he momentarily (and perhaps involuntarily) tunes it all out. He must overcome his natural rabbit instinct to go “tharn,” or essentially paralyzed by fear, in order to lead the group to safety. This ultimately underscores Bigwig’s immense courage.

Chapter 39 Quotes

☛ Most of the rabbits had very little idea of what was happening. The Efrafa does had never seen a river and it would certainly have been beyond Pipkin or Hawkbit to explain to them that they were on a boat. They—and nearly all the others—had simply trusted Hazel and done as they were told. But all—bucks and does alike—realized that Woundwort and his followers had vanished. Wounded by all they had gone through, the sodden rabbits crouched without talking, incapable of any feeling but a dull relief and without even the energy to wonder what was going to happen next.

That they should feel any relief—dull or otherwise—was remarkable in the circumstances and showed both how little they understood their situation and how much fear Woundwort could inspire, for their escape from him seemed to be their only good fortune.

Related Characters: General Woundwort, Hazel, Hawkbit, Pipkin

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 369-370

Explanation and Analysis

After escaping Efrafa by clambering onto a wooden boat and alighting down a swift-moving river, the rabbits in Hazel’s group are so overwhelmed by what they have been through that in spite of their heroic escape from certain death, they can hardly feel anything at all. The rabbits’ emotions—or lack thereof—in this passage show just how traumatized they have been by the violence and cruelty they have witnessed. Though their epic journey through the countryside continues, they are forever changed by what they’ve seen in and around Efrafa. The fact that they escaped is the “only good fortune” they have—but even as they float down the river, they are unable to conceive of any happy thoughts, any bright visions of the future, or any way of coming together and beginning to process the great pain they’ve all been through recently.

Chapter 40 Quotes

☞☞ As Blackavar came up with Hyzenthlay, Bigwig said, “You told us how it would be, didn’t you? And I was the one who wouldn’t listen.”

“Told you?” said Blackavar. “I don’t understand.”

“That there was likely to be a fox.”

“I don’t remember, I’m afraid. But I don’t see that any of us could possibly have known. Anyway, what’s a doe more or less?”

Bigwig looked at him in astonishment, but Blackavar, apparently unconcerned either to stress what he had said or to break off the talk, simply began to nibble the grass. Bigwig, puzzled, moved away and himself began to feed a little distance off, with Hyzenthlay and Hazel. [...]

“In Efrafa,” said Hyzenthlay, “if a rabbit gave advice and the advice wasn’t accepted, he immediately forgot it and so did everyone else. Blackavar thought what Hazel decided; and whether it turned out later to be right or wrong was all the same. His own advice had never been given.”

Related Characters: Hyzenthlay, Blackavar, Bigwig (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 389

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bigwig apologizes to Blackavar in the wake of a fox attack which resulted in the loss of one of the Efrafan does. The day before, as the rabbits settled in to rest in the middle of a copse Blackavar called part of “fox country,” Bigwig had ridiculed Blackavar’s attempts to seem superior and knowledgeable. Now, though, as he apologizes for his cruelty, which led to a violent death, Bigwig is shocked to find that Blackavar doesn’t even seem to remember the exchange of which Bigwig speaks. When Hyzenthlay, though, reveals that in Efrafa, any rabbits’ opinion which was not accepted was quickly forgotten, Bigwig understands just how deeply the violence, authoritarianism, and cruelty of Blackavar’s former warren has changed the rabbit over the years. Even though he is free now, Blackavar cannot erase the patterns of behavior which defined his life back in Efrafa.

Chapter 43 Quotes

☞☞ When the punt floated down the river in the rain, part of General Woundwort’s authority went with it. He could not have appeared more openly and completely at a loss if Hazel and his companions had flown away over the trees. [...] They had suddenly shown their own cunning greater than his, and left him bewildered on the bank. He had overheard the very word—tharn— spoken by one of his officers to another as they returned to Efrafa through the rain. Thlayli, Blackavar and the does of the Near Hind [Mark] had vanished. He had tried to stop them and he had conspicuously failed.

Related Characters: Blackavar, Bigwig, Hazel, General Woundwort

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 414-415

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Adams shows how General Woundwort has, in the wake of his defeat at the river beyond Efrafa, suffered a loss in pride and influence back at his own warren. The systems Woundwort created painstakingly over the years to keep his people under control—and under his thumb—are beginning to fail as the Efracans gossip about how their fearsome and fearless leader went tharn at a crucial moment and “failed” to prove Efrafa’s power and dominance. This crucial loss of influence provides Woundwort with all the ammunition he needs to launch a full-out offensive on Watership Down—he hopes to best the rabbits once and for all and regain the power he has lost through a great show of violence and cruelty.

“Rabbits have enough enemies as it is. They ought not to make more among themselves. A mating between free, independent warrens—what do you say?”

At that moment, in the sunset on Watership Down, there was offered to General Woundwort the opportunity to show whether he was really the leader of vision and genius which he believed himself to be, or whether he was no more than a tyrant with the courage and cunning of a pirate. For one beat of his pulse the lame rabbit's idea shone clearly before him. He grasped it and realized what it meant. The next, he had pushed it away from him. The sun dipped into the cloud bank and now he could see clearly the track along the ridge, leading to the beech hanger and the bloodshed for which he had prepared with so much energy and care.

“I haven't time to sit here talking nonsense,” said Woundwort. “You're in no position to bargain with us. [...] Go and tell Thlayli that if the does aren't waiting outside your warren, with him and Blackavar, by the time I get down there, I'll tear the throat out of every buck in the place by ni-Frith tomorrow.”

Related Characters: General Woundwort, Hazel (speaker), Blackavar, Bigwig

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 421

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hazel, having discovered that the Efracans have come to Watership Down to start a battle, approaches Woundwort before the fighting begins and tries to create a peace between their warrens. Woundwort, not realizing that the small, lame Hazel is the warren's Chief, dismisses his request out of hand. Woundwort, having already lost to the Watership Down rabbits once, is desperate to show his people that he can beat them once and for all as a way of regaining clout and power over them. The only way he knows how is to enact violence upon another tribe—and he has no interest in even considering peace when he himself has so much to gain by inciting violence.

Chapter 47 Quotes

“Vervain advanced slowly across the floor. Even he could derive little satisfaction from the prospect of killing a tharn rabbit half his own size, in obedience to a contemptuous taunt. The small rabbit made no move whatever, either to retreat or to defend himself, but only stared at him from great eyes which, though troubled, were certainly not those of a beaten enemy or a victim. Before his gaze, Vervain stopped in uncertainty and for long moments the two faced each other in the dim light. Then, very quietly and with no trace of fear, the strange rabbit said, “I am sorry for you with all my heart. But you cannot blame us, for you came to kill us if you could.”

“Blame you?” answered Vervain. “Blame you for what?”

“For your death. Believe me, I am sorry for your death.” [...]

As [Vervain] continued to meet the eyes of this unaccountable enemy—the only one he had faced in all the long night's search for bloodshed—horror came upon him and he was filled with a sudden fear of his words, gentle and inexorable as the falling of bitter snow in a land without refuge. The shadowy recesses of the strange burrow seemed full of whispering, malignant ghosts and he recognized the forgotten voices of rabbits done to death months since in the ditches of Efrafa.

Related Characters: Vervain, Fiver (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 452-453

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Vervain approaches Fiver—whom the Efracans had earlier found unconscious on the floor of the Honeycomb and believed to be dead—and prepares to kill him. As he advances on the small rabbit, whom he believes has gone tharn, he is surprised when the little one speaks up. Fiver's words strike fear into the heart of Vervain, who is, though unaware of Fiver's ability to see or sense the future, seemingly immediately attuned to the fact that there is something dark and even mystical about the small rabbit before him. In this passage, Fiver enacts a kind of psychological violence upon Vervain, striking back in the only way he can against the rabbit who has been working tirelessly all day to frighten and kill his people.

Chapter 50 Quotes

☛☛ Woundwort alone stood his ground. As the rest fled in all directions he remained where he was, bristling and snarling, bloody-fanged and bloody-clawed. The dog, coming suddenly upon him face to face among the rough tussocks, recoiled a moment, startled and confused. Then it sprang forward; and even as they ran, his Owsla could hear the General's raging, squealing cry, "Come back, you fools! Dogs aren't dangerous! Come back and fight!"

Related Characters: General Woundwort (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 454

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, after a long and bloody struggle deep in the burrows of Watership Down, General Woundwort meets his end as he faces off against a dog which Hazel, inspired by El-ahrairah's tales of trickery, has loosed from a nearby farm and sent to aid in the effort against the Efrafans. Woundwort's reputation for being willing to face off against any predator other than a fox is tested. Having suffered a psychological defeat if not a physical one down in the Honeycomb, Woundwort possibly knows, on some level, that the fight against the Watership Down rabbits is over, and chooses to throw himself at a predator very far out of his league as a way of refusing to accept defeat at the hands of another rabbit.

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Woundwort's body is never found after the struggle with the dog, making it unclear whether he was consumed or whether he survived and went on to start a new warren elsewhere—as the rumors that swirl throughout the countryside even after his "death" suggest. Woundwort's larger-than-life death and the way his legend endures even after his defeat show just how terrifying he was to the rabbits of Efrafa and beyond.

Epilogue Quotes

☛☛ [Hazel] raised his head and said, "Do you want to talk to me?"

"Yes, that's what I've come for," replied the other. "You know me, don't you?"

"Yes, of course," said Hazel, hoping he would be able to remember his name in a moment. Then he saw that in the darkness of the burrow the stranger's ears were shining with a faint silver light. "Yes, my lord," he said. "Yes, I know you."

"You've been feeling tired," said the stranger, "but I can do something about that. I've come to ask whether you'd care to join my Owsla. We shall be glad to have you and you'll enjoy it. If you're ready, we might go along now."

They went out past the young sentry, who paid the visitor no attention. The sun was shining and in spite of the cold there were a few bucks and does at silflay, keeping out of the wind as they nibbled the shoots of spring grass. It seemed to Hazel that he would not be needing his body anymore, so he left it lying on the edge of the ditch, but stopped for a moment to watch his rabbits and to try to get used to the extraordinary feeling that strength and speed were flowing inexhaustibly out of him into their sleek young bodies and healthy senses.

"You needn't worry about them," said his companion. "They'll be all right—and thousands like them. If you'll come along, I'll show you what I mean."

He reached the top of the bank in a single, powerful leap. Hazel followed; and together they slipped away, running easily down through the wood, where the first primroses were beginning to bloom.

Related Characters: Hazel (speaker), Lord Frith, Black Rabbit of Inlé

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 474

Explanation and Analysis

The ending of *Watership Down* has been hotly debated by readers and fans for decades. In this passage, the elderly Hazel is visited by a rabbit-spirit with shining ears who leads the tired Chief away from his body and brings him into the next realm. The rabbit-spirit who comes for Hazel, though most likely his hero and idol El-ahrairah, could also be the Black Rabbit of Inlé, or Lord Frith in disguise as a shiny-eared rabbit. No matter who the spirit is, though, it offers Hazel an honored position in a heavenly Owsla at the end of his life as a reward for all of his hard work in bringing his

people to Watership Down and securing their safety, belonging, health, happiness, and prosperity for generations to come. This underscores the lasting abundance and

goodwill Hazel has created through his establishment of a peaceful, democratic, and welcoming burrow.



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 NOTICE BOARD

It is a May evening in the lush English countryside. Several rabbits nibble at the grass and flowers which grow on the hill outside their warren. All is calm, quiet, and tranquil. Two smallish, ordinary rabbits—both yearlings—make their way over the sloping hill. The larger of the rabbits has a “shrewd, buoyant air” about him; his companion is a good deal smaller and “less at ease” in the world, and has wide, nervous eyes. As the two rabbits prance by, two other rabbits gossip about them: the small, nervous rabbit, Fiver, was the runt of his litter; the larger rabbit is his brother Hazel.

Fiver suggests to Hazel that the two of them go down to the brook. He senses a “queer” energy about the warren this evening. Hazel agrees, excited to look for cowslips, a “delicacy” among rabbits. At the brook, the two happen upon some cowslips and begin eating them when two members of their warren’s Owsla, a police-like guardian force made up of the strongest rabbits in the warren, approach and remind them that good food and flowers like cowslips are for the consumption of Owsla only.

As Hazel and Fiver hop away, Hazel expresses his dissatisfaction with life in the Sandleford warren. He swears that if he ever joins the Owsla, he will treat his fellow rabbits with decency. The two head across a culvert to the other side of the brook and look for some food there. Hazel sees that two heavy posts have been erected on the other side of the brook—at its foot is a stamped-out cigarette. Fiver begins whimpering with fear, telling Hazel that he knows now what his “queer” bad feeling has been—something terrible is coming, and this sign proves it. Fiver looks out at the field and declares that it is covered with blood. Hazel assures Fiver it is only the light of the sunset and urges Fiver to pull himself together.

Hazel suggests they head back to the burrow, but Fiver is afraid to. Hazel promises Fiver that he will protect him from any danger. The two return home and head underground as the sun sets. Though they could not read the sign, the narrator reveals what it said: a construction company is soon developing six acres of land surrounding the Sandleford warren into “high class modern residences.”

The novel opens on a tranquil note as the lush English countryside is vibrantly described. This creates a sense of peace and safety—a feeling soon to be interrupted as the catalyst for the rabbits’ grand journey into the unfamiliar is set in motion.



This passage establishes that despite the tranquil appearance of things, there are parts of life in this warren that are harsh and even disagreeable. There is a hierarchy of rabbits, and dynamics of violence and power are on the periphery of all their interactions with one another.



Things are not as peaceful and perfect as they seemed just moments ago—Hazel reveals that he has long been dissatisfied with the way things operate within the warren, and the sensitive Fiver is deeply disturbed by a new, horrible vision of violence and destruction.



A sense of foreboding which directly contrasts with the sense of peace and harmony established at the start of the chapter warns readers that this will be a book about the underbelly of things, hidden appearances, secret mechanisms of violence and authority, and the search for a place free from danger.



CHAPTER 2: THE CHIEF RABBIT

That evening, Hazel is awoken by Fiver kicking and whimpering. He wakes Fiver up; Fiver reveals he was having a terrible nightmare in which the two of them were crossing a river atop a board made of “bones and wire,” but were separated when Hazel floated away. Hazel dismisses Fiver’s dream, but Fiver insists that his bad feeling hasn’t gone away. Fiver says they need to leave the warren “before it’s too late” and to convince the others to go with them. Hazel warns Fiver that no one will believe him, but when Fiver insists that “something very bad is close upon [them,]” Hazel wonders if they might be able to go talk to the chief rabbit about Fiver’s vision.

It is slightly after ni-Frith, or noon, when Hazel and Fiver depart their burrow and head to the Chief Rabbit’s. Down in the Chief’s burrow, a large member of the Owsla with a “curious, heavy growth of fur on the crown of his head” stops them from going any further. This rabbit’s name is Thlayli, or Bigwig. When Hazel tells Bigwig that they want to see the Chief, Bigwig is reluctant to let them pass, but knows Hazel to be a “sensible fellow,” and agrees to bring them down to meet the Chief, or the Threarah, a calm and often detached leader. Though the Threarah’s decisions as Chief have sometimes been seemingly coldhearted, he has kept their warren thriving in the face of many dangers.

Hazel and Fiver are led back to the Threarah’s burrow, and Hazel reminds the chief of who they are. He explains that last year, Fiver correctly predicted the arrival of a dangerous flood, and has now predicted a terrible danger coming to the warren once again. When Fiver cannot describe the specifics of what he sees coming, however, the Threarah loses his patience, and refuses to entertain Fiver’s request to evacuate the warren. Fiver begs the Threarah to reconsider and begins having a fit in which he collapses, feeling danger “like a wire round [his] neck.” The Threarah orders the two from his burrow, suggesting Hazel take Fiver home to rest. As they leave, they hear the Threarah reprimanding Bigwig for allowing them back to his chambers.

This passage establishes that rabbits in the Sandleford warren who have a concern or complaint are free to air it. Though the last chapter showed the mechanisms of power which are hidden but enforced at Sandleford, this chapter suggests that there is, at least in theory, a democratic system in place.



Adams continues exploring the intricate mechanisms of power within the warren. The Owsla are intimidating, but there are good rabbits within it. At the same time, the Threarah has gained a reputation for being somewhat calculating, devoted to the survival of the group rather than the happiness of individuals. Such a system is efficient but lacking in many ways, and the journey Hazel and Fiver will soon set out on will in part be a journey towards finding a system which better serves individuals.



For all the warren’s show of democracy, openness, and freedom, when push comes to shove, Hazel and Fiver’s desperate pleas are ignored by the person in charge of keeping them safe. The Threarah, hesitant to uproot his whole community based on the hunch of one small rabbit, dismisses Fiver’s claims as insignificant ramblings and shows no empathy even when Fiver is in distress.



CHAPTER 3: HAZEL'S DECISION

That evening, Hazel, Fiver, and their friends Blackberry and Dandelion are feeding near the woods. Hazel expresses his disappointment in the Threarah's indifference to Fiver's plea, and when Dandelion and Blackberry ask whether there is a real threat to their warren, Hazel assures them that Fiver's visions are never wrong. Bigwig walks up and tells them he's left the Owsla. He asks Fiver if he's planning to leave the warren, and Hazel answers for his brother: they're both leaving tonight. Bigwig says he'll go with them. Hazel is shocked but grateful—having a strong rabbit such as Bigwig on their side is an advantage. Blackberry says he'll come, too, and, feeling bolstered by the support of his friends, Hazel suggests they quietly, without arousing the ire of the Owsla or Threarah, try to get some other rabbits to join them, too, before they head out at fu Inlé—moonrise.

Though Hazel and Fiver, despondent after their visit with the Threarah, are worried that no one will take them seriously, they find that their friends extend them empathy and solidarity—and even those they'd felt threatened or overpowered by, such as Bigwig, seem to share their frustrations and dissatisfactions. This passage establishes the sense of camaraderie born out of the hope for something better that will emerge between these rabbits as the novel progresses.



CHAPTER 4: THE DEPARTURE

Just after moonrise, Hazel, Fiver, and their friend Pipkin, a small and timid rabbit, quietly leave their burrow and take cover in a ditch. Another rabbit, Hawkbit, approaches them and says he heard from Dandelion that a group was leaving—he says he wants to come. Dandelion appears to join the group, and suggests they hurry, as he believes the Owsla is onto their plan.

The rabbits are sure in their hearts about their desire to leave Sandleford—but they know that their departure will not be well-received. This shows that the rabbits have, all along, known how fragile things are at the warren, and how any imbalance of power threatens the entire burrow.



Hazel wants to wait a little longer for some others to join. Soon, Blackberry and Buckthorn, along with two other rabbits, Speedwell and Acorn, emerge from a nearby burrow and join the others in the ditch. Bigwig and a quiet, older rabbit called Silver come too. Hazel looks around their small group and worries that they aren't enough in numbers to defend themselves in the wild. At that moment, three rabbits approach, and Hazel believes more have joined their cause—but as the rabbits get closer, he and the others see that they are members of the Owsla.

As Hazel and Fiver's plan becomes a reality, they are forced to contend with the fact that they are going to be alone in the world without leaders or social structures for the first time in their lives. The fear of the dangers they might encounter, and how they will deal with them, begins to set in.



Holly, the captain of the Owsla, tells the rabbits they're under arrest for "spreading dissension and inciting to mutiny." Bigwig leaps upon Holly, scratching and kicking him, and though Holly fights back, he and his guards are outnumbered. The fight breaks up and Hazel tells Holly to take his guard back to the burrow, or "be killed." Holly warns Hazel that it is he and his band of rabbits who will be killed before turning and returning to the burrow. Dandelion warns Hazel that the officers will soon return with backup, and, together, the rabbits head out of the ditch and into the night.

Though the Owsla at Sandleford is powerful and attempts to exert control over the rabbits it "protects," Hazel, in this passage, reveals that they are not as strong as they purport to be. This further establishes the solidarity and power Hazel and his friends have, despite their individual weaknesses.



CHAPTER 5: IN THE WOODS

The rabbits have gone about half a mile—farther than any rabbit from their warren has ever gone—when they enter a small wood. Though rabbits usually avoid close woodlands, Hazel urges them onward, wanting to put as much distance between them and their warren as possible before stopping to rest. As the rabbits enter the woods they become nervous and frightened—to them, “everything unknown is dangerous.”

As the rabbits approach a bend in the path, Hazel decides to go ahead alone while the others wait behind, in case of any danger. After determining that the coast is clear, Hazel thumps his foot to signal to the others that it’s safe, and they follow him deeper into the woods. Dandelion cheers Hazel for being brave and intrepid as **El-ahrairah**—the rabbits’ trickster folk hero. Hazel is happy—this comparison is high praise.

Bigwig suggests they stop for the night, pointing out that Fiver and Pipkin, the smallest of the bunch, are exhausted. Hazel agrees that they all deserve a rest. It will be safer in the long run if everyone is at their best. As they settle in among some ferns, Hazel urges Dandelion to tell them all a story.

The rabbits, in the early stages of their journey, are almost like newborns: everything frightens them, because everything is new. At the same time, with every step they take, they are learning more about the world than any of them has ever known before and travelling farther than any of them had dared to dream.



Hazel has been the de facto leader of the mission the whole time, but to be recognized by one of his peers as having the strength and smarts of their folk hero El-ahrairah makes him feel worthy of his position for the first time.



The rabbits seek comfort in one another and in tales from their people’s past in a time of fear and uncertainty. In the midst of one epic journey, they stop to draw strength from tales about another rabbit’s epic quests.



CHAPTER 6: THE STORY OF THE BLESSING OF EL-AHRAIRAH

Dandelion begins the story of **El-ahrairah**. Long ago, Frith, the sun-god, made the world and the animals that would inhabit it. El-ahrairah, a rabbit, had uncountable wives and children, and his vast, sprawling brood ate so much grass that it grew thin the world over. Frith urged El-ahrairah to find a way to control his people—otherwise the sun-god himself would intervene. El-ahrairah countered that his people were the “strongest in the world” and should not be hindered. In response, Frith called a meeting of all the other animals and turned hawks, cows, foxes, stoats, weasels, and others against the rabbits, giving them a hunger to kill all of El-ahrairah’s brood.

This introduction to El-ahrairah, the rabbits’ trickster folk hero, shows that he is represented as arrogant, self-interested, and ignorant—all things that none of the rabbits in the “real” story, such as Hazel, Fiver, and Bigwig, seem to be. How rabbits evolved from the creatures of El-ahrairah’s brood to the creatures of the Sandleford warren will be shown throughout these stories of epic journeys, trickery, and evolution.



When **El-ahrairah** heard that all the other animals had received blessings, he was embarrassed that he had been too busy to attend the meeting and receive his. As Frith approached El-ahrairah dug a hole, hoping to avoid the god. El-ahrairah's rump stuck out of the hole, though, and when Frith offered him his blessing, El-ahrairah told him to bless his bottom. Frith blessed El-ahrairah's bottom, giving him a shining white tail and long, powerful back legs which enabled him to run faster than any other creature. In a kindhearted warning, Frith explained that though "all the world" would be the rabbits' enemy, anyone who sought to harm El-ahrairah and his children would first have to face the daunting task of actually catching them.

This origin story shows that though rabbits were punished for El-ahrairah's foolishness, they were also in some ways the favorite creatures of Frith. Though he cursed them with many enemies, he blessed them with resourcefulness, swiftness, and the ability to outrun and outsmart those who would seek to hurt them.



CHAPTER 7: THE LENDRI AND THE RIVER

As Dandelion finishes his tale, Acorn catches the scent of something strange. Suddenly, the ferns part, and an animal's face peers through them—it is a lendri, or badger. Bigwig urges the rabbits to hurry and flee, and they follow him through the fern and onto a new path. The rabbits streak through the woods until they come upon a river—though it is only twelve feet wide and a couple of feet deep, to the rabbits, it seems immense and appears to be a dead end. Fiver states that they shall all have to cross the river, but Bigwig is deeply skeptical. Though rabbits can swim if they have to, they are not strong swimmers—and all of them are exhausted to boot. Hazel knows, though, that if Fiver thinks they should cross the river, his intuition must have told him that it will be okay to do so.

The rabbits' journey intensifies as they encounter threats both animal and physical. Everything around the rabbits seems designed to test them—just, perhaps, as Frith intended. Hazel and his group soldier forth, though, in the face of fear and danger, relying on their intuition and the gifts they possess to see them through.



CHAPTER 8: THE CROSSING

Hazel notices that dawn is near and suggests they all feed before attempting to cross the river. While they're eating, Hazel approaches Fiver and asks if he's absolutely certain they need to make the crossing—Fiver says they must, in order to reach the kind of place they want to make their new home—a "high, lonely place with dry soil, where rabbits can see and hear all round and men hardly ever come."

Though physically among the weakest of the group, it is perhaps Fiver who has the strongest resolve and intuition. He is determined to get the group to safety just as intensely as Hazel is, and dreams of the perfect home for them all.



Hazel and Fiver rejoin the others, and Bigwig suggests they begin the crossing. Blackberry speaks up, urging Bigwig to swim across first and check out the other side. Bigwig reluctantly agrees and makes his way across. He pulls himself up onto the opposite bank and takes off onto the gently sloping hill on the other side. When he comes back down, he states that everyone needs to cross immediately—from higher up, he has seen a dog loose in the woods behind them.

As the largest and strongest, Bigwig is here volunteered for a difficult and dangerous task. This dynamic will repeat later on in the novel, as Bigwig—reluctant to place himself in harm's way but perhaps secretly proud that the others see him as the bravest and most capable—shoulders larger and more dangerous burdens on behalf of the group.



Hazel knows that Fiver and Pipkin are still feeling weak and says he'll stay behind with them while the others cross. Bigwig tells Hazel that his idea is stupid. Feeling overwhelmed by indecision and the desire to meet everyone's needs at once, Hazel begins looking around wildly. He notices that Blackberry is nosing at something large and flat on the waterline—a piece of wood. Blackberry suggests that Fiver and Pipkin ride across on the board while the others swim. Fiver is excited by the idea, and he and Blackberry help and exhausted Pipkin.

Blackberry pushes the board into the stream, and Pipkin and Fiver begin drifting across. Hazel's head clears, and he urges the others to begin swimming. Dandelion, Silver, Blackberry, and all the others drop into the river and make their way across. Once they reach the other side, they realize that Bigwig has gotten back into the water to help push the board carrying Pipkin and Fiver across. Once safely on the opposite bank, Fiver thanks Blackberry for saving him and Pipkin with his ingenious idea about the board. Blackberry suggests they all remember how well the plan went off, as "it might come in handy again sometime."

CHAPTER 9: THE CROW AND THE BEANFIELD

As the sun rises, the rabbits take shelter in a thorn patch in the middle of a field and Hazel takes stock of the group's surroundings. As he traverses the field he smells a strange new scent and decides to go see what it is. Hazel runs through the meadow and up a hill. On the other side, he spots a field of beans in full flower. Though he knows rabbits can't eat these plants, their strong scent and lush greenery will provide cover, and they can stay there as long as they please.

Hazel returns and tells the group he has found a place for them to rest. As they begin drowsily traversing the field, Silver and Bigwig lead the way while the others go slowly behind them. Soon, a crow sets upon their group and begins attacking Fiver and Pipkin. Hazel distracts the crow as Silver and Bigwig set upon it. It takes off, and the group continues on their way.

The rabbits arrive in the bean field and take shelter beneath the plants, but Pipkin is breathing heavily and seems to be in pain. Hazel takes a look at the rabbit's foot and sees that he has a thorn embedded in his paw. Hazel carefully works the thorn out, then urges Pipkin to lick his paw and sleep, sheltered as they are in their new hiding place.

This passage shows how the rabbits—thrust out of their comfort zone and into a harsh world—must use their wits, just as El-ahrairah and his brood were forced to do. The rabbits may be vulnerable, but their smarts pull them through—and when they work together, they can bring almost any scheme to fruition.



This passage focuses on the creation—and then the release—of a significant moment of tension. The novel will proceed much in this way, as the rabbits face off against challenges small and large, physical and intellectual, and struggle to come out the other side in one piece. This passage also foreshadows that the rabbits are going to find themselves in a high-pressure situation like this again, in which they must use their collective smarts to save one another.



Hazel is intrepid and brave, putting his own safety on the line to try and find the safest, best conditions for the larger group.



Everywhere the rabbits go, there is danger—even when they seem on the verge of finding a safe place to rest and recuperate, the natural world does not pause for them.



Even though Hazel knows that there are uncountable threats all around them, he does his best to help soothe and comfort his fellow rabbits, urging them to ease their minds. Hazel knows that however stressful or dangerous things are now, there is still a long way to go.



CHAPTER 10: THE ROAD AND THE COMMON

The rabbits take turns sleeping and keeping watch throughout the day. After his shift, Hazel falls asleep and then wakes at sunset to find Pipkin still nursing his wound. Pipkin says he's feeling better but admits that he's worried the rest of the group will leave him behind. Hazel reassures Pipkin that no one is ever going to be left behind.

The sound of a shot frightens and scatters the rabbits—instinct takes over and they begin running in search of burrows, though they haven't dug any. Hazel waits in the middle of the field for everyone to slowly make their way back and thinks about how despite the cover in the field, they are not truly safe anywhere that isn't a burrow. As soon as the rabbits have regrouped, Hazel leads them through the fields. When Hazel hears the sound of what he thinks is a hrududu—a tractor—he stops, but Bigwig tells Hazel that on the other side of the field there is a road where hrududus often speed by. He knows about roads and cars based on the food-gathering missions he'd often undertake on behalf of Threarah.

Bigwig leads Hazel to the road and shows him that it's easy for rabbits to cross—hrududus take no notice of them. Bigwig steps into the road a little to demonstrate the fact that the hrududus are not dangerous—but when Hazel spots a flattened, bloody hegdehog, or yona, he knows that the hrududus must be powerful. Hazel tells the group to cross quickly.

By moonrise the rabbits have arrived in a bog-like heath full of spiders, lizards, and insects. They make their way through the treacherous ground, but late that night, Hawkbit pulls Hazel aside and tells him that he and a couple of the others have had enough of the dangerous journey—they want to return to Sandleford. Hazel is trying to mitigate their concerns when Fiver says he wants to talk to him. As they separate from the group, they hear Bigwig chiding Hawkbit, Acorn, and Speedwell for even thinking about deserting the group.

Fiver leads Hazel up a ridge and the two of them look out upon the fields and downs. Pointing out a group of high, lonely hills, Fiver says confidently that they've found their new home—if they can just make it. Hazel expresses concern that the others won't like the idea of still having so much ground to cover, but Fiver seems not to be listening. He announces that there is indeed a "thick mist" between their group and the hills—but that they must go through it, even at risk of "being deceived and losing [their] way." Looking around, Hazel sees no mist, but understands that Fiver must mean a mist of a different kind.

Hazel cuts off any fears that his friends have of being abandoned or left alone—he wants them all to know that they are each valued, and that when they stand strong together as a team, they are much more powerful and capable than they are alone.



It's not just nature that poses a threat to the rabbits—the world of humans is dangerous, too, and in close proximity to their own. Bigwig, the bravest of them all, has a somewhat cavalier attitude towards the presence of humans and their contraptions—he wants to show the others that he can handle anything that comes their way.



This passage complicates Bigwig's bravado a bit, as Hazel wonders whether Bigwig is proud enough to truly see no threat in the road and the hrududus, or whether he is simply putting on a brave face in order to maintain his air of authority and fearlessness.



Tensions in the group have ebbed and flowed over the course of the journey so far—now, though, they reach a breaking point, and several rabbits admit they do not have the confidence or drive to go any further. Hazel knows, though, that without a sense of confidence and solidarity, the journey will fall apart, and the safety of all the rabbits he is leading will be compromised.



The "mist" Fiver talks about in this passage is not literal—there is no fog in the air or on the ground. The mist is symbolic and suggests that there are many more hardships—physical, emotional, and psychological—standing between the rabbits and their forever home.



CHAPTER 11: HARD GOING

Hazel and Fiver return to the group to find that there has been a “fearful row” between Bigwig, Hawkbit, and Speedwell regarding who, exactly, is Chief Rabbit. Hazel concedes that though he doesn’t know who the Chief is; Bigwig is the strongest, but he worries that Bigwig will intimidate the others into following along rather than inspiring them to do so out of their own volition. Hazel, frustrated, remarks that there’s enough danger already on their long journey—fighting will only make things worse.

Hazel rounds up the others, telling them it’s time to move on. As they make their way over the heather, the rabbits have trouble keeping up with one another, and are distracted repeatedly by nerves and alarm at the strange noises all around. The night’s journey feels like a “bad dream,” and Hazel finds himself on the edge of falling asleep upright more than once.

As the sun begins to rise, Hazel can see that they’ve made it through the heather and are nearer to the hills than they were before. The rabbits, overjoyed, apologize for having quarreled earlier and doubted Hazel’s strength as a leader. They hurry into the field, grateful to be safe in the tranquil meadow.

The journey is beginning to wear on the rabbits. First, they were questioning whether they wanted to move on—now, desperate for some direction, they squabble over who should be named their leader, or what it would mean to create a warren where each rabbit is in charge of his own destiny.



The perilous, dreamlike journey through the heather represents the rabbits’ collective state of mind: they are confused, overwhelmed, bewildered, and unsure of what lies ahead.



As terrible as their morale has been, the rabbits receive this first bit of good news in a long while with overwhelming gratitude and happiness.



CHAPTER 12: THE STRANGER IN THE FIELD

The rabbits feel the one kind of joy known to every living creature: that of having “come to the end of a time of anxiety and fear.” After regaining their strength, they decide to dig scrapes—short, shallow burrows meant to “give [them] shelter in a pinch.” Hazel suggests they canvas the area before digging and make sure they set up their scrapes in the best possible location. Bigwig volunteers to take Silver and Buckthorn to run around the surrounding fields to get a better lay of the land and check for elil.

Hazel, Blackberry, and Dandelion find a good spot to dig. Soon Bigwig returns and reports that though there are signs of men traversing the area, there are no other elil—and, he reasons, the humans’ presence will keep predators at bay. The rabbits agree they’d rather dodge a man than a weasel or fox.

Even in a moment of relief and tranquility, Hazel and Bigwig—as co-leaders, more or less, of this expedition—know that there’s never any time to waste, and that danger might lurk around every corner. They tirelessly work to protect their group.



The rabbits’ encounters with the dangers of the animal world have made the dangers of the human world seem tame in comparison.



Though buck rabbits rarely do any serious digging—the job of a doe—they now set to digging out their scrapes. Hazel supervises the “construction.” After a while he hears Fiver stamp out a warning—he follows Fiver’s gaze and sees a strange rabbit sitting a ways away, staring at them all. Hazel and Blackberry decide to talk to the rabbit, feeling cautious but eager not to frighten the stranger. As they approach the rabbit, they sense a “curious, rather unnatural gentleness” about him, and once they get close, detect a scent of health, denoting good eating and prosperity.

As the rabbits begin conversing, Hazel learns that the other rabbit and his warren saw Hazel and his group approaching over the heather. The other rabbit tells Hazel that he and his friends are welcome at their large, already-established warren, but that there’s no pressure to come. He asks if he can go with Hazel and Blackberry to meet the rest of their group, and Hazel and Blackberry agree. Hazel can’t stop thinking about this strange new rabbit’s “great, firm body and shining pelt.”

Back at the scrapes, the strange rabbit introduces himself as Cowslip. He tells the others that rain is on the way and that their scrapes may not provide them good enough shelter. Fiver asks Cowslip outright if they can trust him. Cowslip replies that his invitation is made in good faith, but he admits that he would like it if his own group were larger in numbers. Hazel apologizes on Fiver’s behalf, explaining that their group has been through a lot and that “everything new seems like danger” now. Cowslip blithely states that if the others would like to join him, his warren is just inside a wood nearby, and then takes his leave.

Later on, when the rain arrives and the air fills with a chill, Hazel realizes that Cowslip was right: their scrapes are rough and do not have any of the feel of a proper warren. Hazel proposes going to Cowslip’s warren to seek shelter there and maybe even meet some does. Blackberry is nervous and unsure of what Cowslip and his group “stand to get” from having newcomers join their warren, while Bigwig suggests that Cowslip wants to teach Hazel’s group the lay of the land so that they don’t act foolishly and attract elil. Fiver suggests they have nothing at all to do with Cowslip and instead leave this place at once.

As the rabbits begin to get frustrated with having to undertake an unprecedented amount of work, the arrival of a hale and hearty-seeming stranger piques their interest. The rabbits’ dissatisfaction with the work they have to do in the absence of does primes them to take the stranger up on what he is about to offer them.



Though the presence of the stranger is intimidating, he seems well-meaning, and isn’t attempting to control or threaten Hazel and his friends. He looks to be in such good shape that they feel his warren must be thriving and successful, and so assume he can’t have any reason to want to harm their little band of Sandleford escapees.



Cowslip is transparent enough, revealing that he does want to increase the size of his own warren. It is this “transparency” which makes him seem trustworthy to Hazel and some of the other rabbits—even if Fiver senses something the others don’t.



Even as the rabbits consider taking Cowslip up on his offer, they admit that there is something strange about him and his invitation. Fiver, as always, senses doom and misery—but considering how hard Fiver’s visions have made things for everyone else, the rabbits are less and less likely to take him at his word.



Hazel worries that Fiver is letting their group down. He feels that Blackberry and Bigwig's arguments were well thought out and rational, but that Fiver, as usual, is falling prey to fear. Silver and Dandelion, back from digging another scrape next door, suggest visiting Cowslip in order to make a show of friendship—they worry that rejecting Cowslip's invitation could make him suspicious or angry. Silver suggests they all go together, and Hazel agrees; they set out once again. As they make their way across the field, Hazel silently begs the spirit of **El-ahrairah** to protect them on this new adventure.

Hazel has always trusted his brother and has, often, been Fiver's only supporter. Now, though, in the face of once again choosing the more difficult option as a result of Fiver's intuition, Hazel breaks from tradition and ignores Fiver's warning, making a choice that will impact their group in unforeseen ways.



CHAPTER 13: HOSPITALITY

As Hazel and the others approach Cowslip's warren, they are surprised by how visible it is even from above ground. They encounter two rabbits who make an odd, dance-like gesture in greeting and then welcome them down to the warren. Hazel is surprised that it seems like their warren has a room big enough for both large groups of rabbits to congregate, but excited to see what it is like down there.

There are some strange things that stick out about Cowslip's warren right from the start—but the rabbits are so hungry for shelter and belonging that they choose to ignore these things and focus instead on their excitement.



Underground, Hazel and the others find themselves in the largest burrow they have ever been in. The roof is made of tree roots, which help to support the vast space. Hazel asks Cowslip why he was modest about his warren's numbers, as their burrow seems to be huge. He then worries he has made a misstep, wondering if disease or some other tragedy has wiped out a large part of the warren—though the rabbits that are there are the healthiest he's seen.

Something is off here—though the rabbits that populate the warren are large and healthy, there are very few of them, and they all seem to be recovering from a collective trauma or some other setback.



As the two groups of rabbits grow accustomed to one another by playing together and nuzzling one another, Fiver stands apart. Hazel asks who the Chief Rabbit is, but one of the other rabbits answers that they have no Chief—every rabbit is in charge of his own destiny. Hazel asks what they do about elil, but the other rabbit replies that elil rarely come around because a man who comes through the fields shoots at them with his gun.

The rabbits seem to have nothing to worry about—they have a free, democratic society and enjoy the protection of a nearby human—and yet still there is a pervasive atmosphere of strangeness and suspicion.



A rabbit named Strawberry introduces himself to Hazel and offers to show him around the warren. Hazel follows him through the sizable burrow. They stop at a wall where stones have been pushed into the surface in a pattern—Strawberry explains it is a kind of shrine to **El-ahrairah**, and then suggests they return to the main room. On the way back Strawberry chatters relentlessly, and Hazel begins to realize he is doing so to keep Hazel from asking any questions.

As Hazel "learns" more and more about Cowslip's warren, he finds he's actually learning nothing at all—he's only seeing what the others want him to see, and there is no room for questions.



CHAPTER 14: “LIKE TREES IN NOVEMBER”

Back in the main burrow, Hazel begins gathering his group to go above ground to silflay so that they can talk privately. He remarks on how strange these rabbits are—he mentions the stones in the wall and some “singing” he overheard. Pipkin agrees that the rabbits all seem “terribly sad.” Blackberry wonders why their numbers are so few and whether they’ve had any trouble that has left them sad. The confused but tired rabbits head back down and sleep.

In the morning, Hazel wakes up to a dangerous and unpleasant smell—smoke. He remembers Bigwig having mentioned seeing the little white sticks men smoke above ground. He becomes aware of a man walking around above the warren, but feels secure in the deep burrow. Hazel then hears Strawberry shouting “Flayrah!” over and over again.

As Hazel heads up with Strawberry and several of the others to silflay, he feels a camaraderie with Strawberry. When Hazel pauses at the mouth of the burrow to look around, Cowslip tells him that there’s no need to worry about foes or elil. Hazel heads out to the field, where he learns that flayrah—which rabbits usually must steal from gardens—is left out almost daily for these rabbits.

Hazel speeds towards the vegetables, hungry and excited. He begins munching on a carrot and is overcome with a sense of well-being. When he’s done, Cowslip comes over and offers to help him carry some back to the warren for storage. Rabbits don’t usually carry food, and Hazel struggles as he makes his way back at first, but soon gets the hang of it. He runs into Pipkin, who asks where Fiver is, and Hazel realizes he hasn’t seen Fiver all morning. Hazel asks Cowslip if he’s seen him, but Cowslip does not answer, and hurries back to get more flayrah.

Hazel spots Fiver sitting far away beneath a tree. He asks Fiver if he’s going to come eat some flayrah and learn to carry it, but Fiver tells Hazel he wants nothing to do with the roots and sees them all as “dogs carrying sticks.” Fiver accuses Hazel of refusing to listen to his advice—he says that Hazel knows something is wrong at this warren but is blinded by the presence of good food. Hazel asks if Fiver will at least come inside, but Fiver says there’s something “unnatural and evil” about the place, and that he’d rather go back across the heather than go back down into the burrow—the roof, Fiver says, is made of bones. Hazel, frustrated, leaves Fiver underneath the yew tree and returns to the field.

Everyone knows that something is off about Cowslip and his fellow rabbits, and that something bad has befallen their warren—but they are too grateful for a safe place to rock the boat and give in to their suspicions.



The presence of a man walking about above the warren demonstrates that perhaps the human world and the rabbit world overlap more than usual here—the effects of this trade-off remain to be seen, but, for the moment, Hazel feels unbothered.



This place is almost too good to be true—Hazel doesn’t have to worry about where he’s going to get his food, or about being blindsided by enemies.



Though Hazel has, in Cowslip’s warren, encountered many things that are different from the Sandleford warren, he is almost hypnotized by the presence of such bountiful, good food. Having been through such dire straits recently, Hazel is prepared to ignore everything strange about this new “home” and focus on the feeling of being nourished and “protected.”



Hazel has always trusted Fiver’s visions up to this point. When Fiver accuses Hazel of actively choosing to ignore the truth in favor of playing dumb and enjoying the flayrah—without questioning the strings that may be attached to it—it becomes clear that Hazel is acting in his own self-interest rather than the interest of the group for the first time, and Fiver knows it. This is not the place they are meant to be, but Hazel is so desperate for comfort that he is willing to pretend he feels at home and ignore Fiver’s warnings.



That evening, Bigwig and Hazel explore the area around the warren. They come across an area where the ground is torn up but find no scent of blood or struggle. They consider asking Crowslip about the disturbed ground, but Bigwig points out that Crowslip won't answer a single question posed to him—neither will Strawberry or any of the others. Sensing more rain, Bigwig and Hazel decide to go back into the burrow, but decide to try and convince Fiver, one last time, to come with them. They succeed, but Fiver is indignant.

In the burrow, Crowslip tells Hazel that the other rabbits are suggesting a story. Blackberry urges Hazel to tell the story of their adventures so far, but the other rabbits don't seem interested. Blackberry quickly suggests Dandelion tell a story of **El-ahrairah** instead, and Crowslip says they'd all enjoy hearing the story of the King's Lettuce.

CHAPTER 15: THE STORY OF THE KING'S LETTUCE

Dandelion begins his tale. Long ago, **El-ahrairah** and his followers were driven by enemies to the marshes of Kelfazin, a dreary place with scarce food and ground unsuitable for digging. El-ahrairah complained to Prince Rainbow, Frith's messenger, but Prince Rainbow replied only that El-ahrairah had made so many enemies that there was nowhere left to live but the marsh. El-ahrairah, desperate for a way out, asked Prince Rainbow if they'd be set free if they could steal lettuces from King Darzin's garden. Prince Rainbow, knowing how difficult the task would be, agreed with a laugh to let El-ahrairah free and "multiply [his] people everywhere" if he pulled the heist off.

A hedgehog, Yona, had overheard this business between Rainbow and **El-ahrairah**, and ran to the palace to warn the King. Darzin ordered the guard doubled. That night, El-ahrairah and his companion Rabscuttle went to the palace, but deterred by the fierce guards, returned emptyhanded to the marshes. Prince Rainbow tauntingly asked where the lettuces were, and El-ahrairah replied that he was having them delivered.

The next day, Rabscuttle infiltrated the palace by posing as the playmate of a young rabbit. He made his way to the storerooms and poisoned the food. That night, when King Darzin and his guests ate of the lettuces, they fell ill; with each meal, they got sicker and sicker. After several days, Rabscuttle escaped from the palace and returned to the marsh—**El-ahrairah**, meanwhile, set to work disguising himself, pretending to be a chief physician from a faraway land. After arriving at the palace, El-ahrairah was allowed to examine the king. He told the king that the sickness came from eating the prize lettuces.

Though Bigwig and Hazel admit to one another that there are some strange things about Crowslip and the other rabbits—and some unsettling things about the area surrounding the warren—they still decide that seeking refuge with the new rabbits is better than being alone out in the rain.



Crowslip and the rest of his warren have no interest in hearing tales of the real world—they want to retreat into fantasy. The reasons for this will become clearer soon enough.



Dandelion's story—which starts in a place of hardship, statelessness, and scarcity—sets up a picture of the world the rabbits move through as one which has always been harsh and unforgiving. In rabbit folklore, rabbits are always being hunted, victimized, and put-upon, often by their creators. In this way, the rabbit mythology mirrors a good deal of human mythology: these stories exist as a kind of guidebook through grief, pain, and suffering.



In this passage, it seems as if El-ahrairah has no way forward—yet, even in the face of defeat, he affects a cool, unbothered exterior and remains, at least outwardly, confident in his ability to outwit anyone.



Camaraderie and solidarity are, in this story as they are in the frame story of Hazel and his friends, vital to the rabbits' survival and ability to keep their families together. By working together, Rabscuttle and El-ahrairah take down a powerful king whose authority is hardly, if ever, questioned.



At that moment, the captain of the guard came in to announce that **El-ahrairah**'s people were preparing for a siege on the palace to steal the lettuces—Darzin ordered a thousand “bad” lettuces from the garden be sent to the marshes to sicken the army. That evening, back at the marsh, El-ahrairah returned home to find a stunned Prince Rainbow, who was shocked that El-ahrairah had indeed had the lettuces delivered after all. In return, Prince Rainbow let the rabbits free, and blessed them with the cunning and trickery to make it into any vegetable garden anywhere in the world.

The tales the rabbits share don't really have morals—instead, they are designed to bolster the often-frightened rabbits' confidence and pride in their abilities: swiftness and trickery. The world is cruel to rabbits, and hearing tales of their folk hero's cunning inspires them to have faith in themselves even in difficult, impossible situations.



CHAPTER 16: SILVERWEED

As Dandelion finishes up the story, Hazel, Bigwig, and the others from their group applaud—they are proud of their storyteller, and hopeful that they have impressed Cowslip, Strawberry, and the others. The new rabbits, though, seem aloof and unimpressed by the story. Hazel, sensing this, quietly reminds Bigwig that they are somewhere new, and that perhaps their own age-old traditions are foreign to these rabbits.

The rabbits, in spite of all the strange happenings and customs at this new warren, are trying to fit in—but are finding again and again that their way of life clashes with the way Cowslip and his fellow rabbits live.



Buckthorn attempts to explain the story to the new rabbits, stating the importance of telling stories about tricks. The new warren's own storyteller, Silverweed, speaks up and explains that what rabbits need is “dignity and, above all, the will to accept their fate.” Cowslip, introducing Silverweed as a great poet and thinker, urges him to take center stage. As he does, Fiver begins trembling, and tells Hazel he is “terrified” of Silverweed.

Fiver's intuition kicks in again as a new rabbit is introduced—the resigned and melancholy Silverweed speaks in dark riddles which only Fiver seems to sense are frightening.



Silverweed begins telling his story with a wild, twitchy urgency. He recites a poem—an original—about rabbits willingly surrendering to the forces of nature such as the wind, the stream, and the leaves, before ultimately surrendering to the will of Lord Frith and turning over to him their breaths and lives. Fiver listens in horror and, at the end of the recitation, becomes hysterical, jumping around the burrow and kicking at anything he can.

Silverweed's dark recitation is too much for Fiver, who reacts fearfully to Silverweed's descriptions of submitting to the whims of nature and fate.



Attempting to cover for Fiver, Hazel hurriedly states that Fiver is something of a “poet” too and is often deeply affected by things without knowing why. One rabbit urges Fiver to get up and share a tale, but Fiver is already scrambling up a tunnel towards the burrow entrance. Hazel and Bigwig go after him. Outside, Fiver states that they are all lost in a “great mist of folly.” Hazel chides Fiver for “endanger[ing their] good start in this warren,” and drags him back down to the burrow to get some sleep.

Hazel and Bigwig are so determined to remain in control of their situation—and to stay in a place where they have food and shelter—that they ignore and even bully poor Fiver.



CHAPTER 17: THE SHINING WIRE

Hazel awakes from a frightening nightmare and is surprised when he looks around the burrow and can't find Fiver. Hazel wakes Bigwig, who tries to calm Hazel down by suggesting that Fiver probably just went up for some food. They hurry up to the mouth of the warren and, because it is dark out, pause to try to sense any nearby elil. They hear the hoot of an owl, but Hazel wants to go out and look for Fiver anyway. Bigwig helps Hazel follow Fiver's tracks, and they come upon him nibbling some grass in a nearby clearing. Hazel's anxiety fades, and he sidles up next to his brother and begins feeding, too.

After a little while, Fiver sadly announces that he has chosen to leave this new warren and seek shelter in the hills. Bigwig warns Fiver he'll never make it alone, but Fiver retorts that if Bigwig chooses to stay in this warren, he'll be closer to death than Fiver will be out in the wild. Bigwig begins speaking roughly to Fiver, but Hazel intervenes, and admits that he has been denying the truth all along: he believes that Fiver is right about this place, and that there is something afoot. He tells Bigwig that he's going to take a walk with Fiver and hear him out in earnest.

Bigwig accuses Fiver of being selfish, and of putting his "visions" above the needs of everyone else. Bigwig scampers off in a huff, back towards the warren, but soon Hazel and Fiver hear a commotion. They run after Bigwig and find that he has been caught in a wire snare attached to a wooden peg which has been driven into the ground. Bigwig is struggling, choking, and bleeding. Hazel tries to explain to Bigwig that he needs to hold still. Exhausted and wounded, Bigwig manages to warn Hazel that chewing the wire will be no good—the peg must be dug out of the ground.

Hazel sends Fiver back to the warren to get help, and within moments Blackberry is at Hazel's side. Silver, Pipkin, and the others approach and reveal that Cowslip wouldn't come to help, and in fact told Fiver to stop talking about Bigwig being in need of help. Together, the rabbits take turns digging out the peg, working together in shifts. They finally get the peg out and tell Bigwig that he's free—but the rabbit lies motionless and not breathing on the ground.

Hazel's uncharacteristically violent and undemocratic behavior at the end of the last chapter weighs on him heavily as he sleeps. He knows that he has done wrong by Fiver, and, knowing he'd never forgive himself if something happened to his brother, sets off in search of him hoping to make things right.



Hazel has been vehemently denying Fiver any attention or validation since they arrived in Cowslip's warren. Now, having realized the error of his ways, he wants to offer his brother the solidarity and empathy he knows their fledgling society is doomed without.



The truth of what is going on begins to emerge. The area around the warren is not safe and has been tampered with by a human—likely the same human who has been feeding the rabbits so luxuriously.



As Hazel realizes that Cowslip and the others ignored Fiver's pleas for help, he begins to understand that they knew this would happen—if not to Bigwig, then to someone else—all along, and did nothing to prevent it.



The rabbits say a sad prayer over Bigwig's body and wonder aloud what they'll do without him. Hazel asks what happened back at the warren, and Pipkin reveals that Cowslip, Strawberry, and the others ignored Fiver's cry for help, pretending not to hear. Suddenly, Bigwig sits up and threatens to kill Cowslip—the rabbits rejoice that he has lived, but when they look at him and see him covered in blood, vomit, and dirt, they feel fresh terror.

Hazel suggests Bigwig rest, but the large rabbit claims he doesn't want to—he longs to kill Cowslip. Silver agrees and believes they should annihilate the others and take the warren for themselves. All the other rabbits begin chanting in agreement, but Fiver speaks up and calls them all "fools" for even thinking about going back to the warren.

Fiver points out that the whole place is snared by the man who lives nearby—this explains why the rabbits are so well-fed, why there are no elil nearby, why the rabbits live in fear of Frith's will, and why there are so few of them. Fiver explains that the reason the rabbits have no Chief is that a Chief's role is to protect his warren from death—but no Chief could protect them from the human with the snares. Fiver accuses Cowslip and his fellow rabbits of living in practiced denial, never asking questions or attempting to change their fate.

Fiver goes on to state that Cowslip brought their group into the warren to increase the odds that one of his own wouldn't be taken next—if one of Hazel's group died, that would mean Cowslip's clan would live to see another day. Bigwig tenderly nuzzles Fiver, thanking him at last for his warnings, and asks him what he thinks they should do. Fiver says they should all leave and run for the hills.

A rabbit from Cowslip's warren approaches their group. Bigwig tells Silver to kill it, but as it gets closer, they see that it is none other than the kindly Strawberry. Strawberry asks if their group is really leaving and begs to be brought along. Silver chastises Strawberry for his role in deceiving them all—but Hazel speaks up and tells Strawberry that he is welcome in their group. Together, they help free Bigwig from the wire and set out once again.

Though Bigwig survives in the end, the other rabbits are horrified when they gaze upon him. His disheveled, dirty state is the physical reflection of the mess they've all gotten themselves into.



For a moment, Hazel's band of rabbits seems hell-bent on repaying one kind of violence with another—an outright raid on the warren. Fiver isn't opposed to the idea of retribution, but warns the others against putting their lives in danger by staying in a place they've learned is out to get them.



As Fiver—either through one of his visions or simply his cunning observational skills—reveals the truth of what has been going on all along at Cowslip's warren, the other rabbits listen in horror. They realize that Cowslip and the others operate through mechanisms of fear as a means to control—they are not a free society and were only ever trying to exploit Hazel and the others' search for home and safety for their own gain.



Bigwig realizes that he should have listened to Fiver all along. In an attempt to repair what he has damaged, Bigwig stops trying to control everyone else, and instead turns the reins over to Fiver.



Hazel and his group show Strawberry not just mercy but indeed empathy as well—they are different from other warrens that seek to punish rabbits who have done wrong, and instead want to offer all who join them a chance at a fresh start.



CHAPTER 18: WATERSHIP DOWN

The following evening, having traveled nearly three miles in a day, the rabbits arrive at the tall, verdant hill that is **Watership Down**. Their journey has been exhausting—since the previous morning they have splashed through brooks, traversed woodlands, and been attacked by rats while seeking shelter in an abandoned barn. The rabbits fared well against all these obstacles, though; their experiences back at Cowslip's warren have made them “warier, shrewder, [more] tenacious.” There is no more quarreling amongst them, and they are more grateful for one another's company than ever before. Even Strawberry, slow and careless at the start of the journey, has proven his worth and his commitment to helping the others.

Now, at the bottom of the hill, Hazel asks Fiver if they are meant to climb to the top, which Fiver says they must. Hazel is daunted by the prospect of the climb and insists on making the journey alone before the others come along. Fiver declares that he'll go with his brother, and Dandelion and Hawkbit offer to come along, too. The climb is difficult—not because of bodily fatigue, but rather the mental strain of having been exposed, open, and vulnerable to all kinds of violence for the better part of a week straight. All of the rabbits are on edge, and as they climb the down they are unable to see very far ahead, so every sound or smell makes them nervous.

Finally, the four rabbits reach the top of **Watership Down**. They can see far in every direction—any man or elil which approaches their new home will be spotted in an instant. Dandelion is overjoyed, and thanks Frith for their good fortune, but Hazel reminds him that Fiver was the one who found this place for them.

Looking around, the rabbits realize that Hawkbit is not with them, and Dandelion worries something has snatched him on the way up, but Hazel says he must have just gotten tired and gone back down. Hazel and Pipkin walk around the down discussing whether they should bring the others up the hill tonight, when they come upon Hawkbit—and three rabbit holes. He tells them he's searched the holes and found no tracks or droppings—the burrows are deserted. The others thank Hawkbit for his hard work and go back down to retrieve the rest of the rabbits.

The rabbits' search for a place to call home has—they believe—ended. What they have found in the process, though, is much more than just a place to lay their heads. They have learned a lot about themselves and their capabilities, and have been brought closer together through the hardships they have endured. Home is not a place, the rabbits are beginning to learn—it is the individuals who support and surround you.



The rabbits' journey is beginning to wear on them. Now that they are so close to the finish line, they feel even more acutely the exhaustion of having been on high alert for days and days. They are ready to settle in and settle down but have more work to do before they can really rest.



Fiver has often been an outcast because of his visions—but now, having brought them all to Watership Down, he is celebrated as a hero.



The rabbits expect calamity around every corner after all they have been through, and are relieved to find that for the moment, at least, their worst fears can be put to rest—they have arrived at their new home.



CHAPTER 19: FEAR IN THE DARK

That night, the rabbits sleep snug in their new temporary burrows. They are so tired that they sleep well past dawn. When Hazel at last awakens, he goes up to pass hraka and nibble at some grass. Looking out over the fields, he is grateful that his band has found their place. Blackberry comes up too after a while, and the two discuss what to do now that their journey is over. Blackberry points out that there are no does to do the digging, but Hazel suggests that their group can overcome their natures and form new traditions. Excited, the two of them scout out a new place on the down to start digging.

After the other rabbits have woken up and silflayed, Hazel leads the group to a wooded part of the down—the place he and Blackberry believe the digging should begin. Fiver and Pipkin are excited, and immediately set to work. Soon the others follow suit. When it's time for a break, Hazel and Bigwig lead a group down the slope to get at some better grass, and Hazel and Bigwig discuss construction. Hazel says he would like to copy one thing from Cowslip's from warren—a great meeting-room in the middle.

When darkness begins to fall, Bigwig suggests they return to the top of the hill. They all set out, but Speedwell signals that he has heard something coming, and they take cover in a ditch. Dandelion says he heard the noise, too, but can't pick up the thing's scent, as it's downwind. Soon, the others hear a wavering wailing—frightened, they believe that the legendary Black Rabbit of Inlé has come for them. As the noise grows closer, they can make out words—"All dead," the voice says, crying, before shouting Bigwig's Lapine name, Thlayli.

Bigwig, believing that the Black Rabbit has indeed come for him, prepares to step out of the ditch to meet his fate. Hazel tells Bigwig to stay put and steps out to see who's there himself. The loyal Dandelion goes with him. It is not the Black Rabbit, though, whom Hazel finds himself face to face with—it is the exhausted, injured Holly, former captain of the Sandleford Owsla.

The rabbits enjoy their first night in their new burrow and catch up on some much-needed rest. The first thing in the morning, though, they discuss the work that it still to be done to truly make the place feel like home. They are enthusiastic and motivated rather than daunted, though, and look forward to establishing a warren in earnest.



This passage shows that though the rabbits have endured scary, traumatic things—such as the close call at Cowslip's warren—they have also learned to take the good with the bad, and find inspiration, knowledge, and experience even in the darkest of times.



This passage shows that many of the rabbits can hardly believe they've managed to survive all the way to their new home, and still believe that the spirit of death is waiting for them around any corner.



Though Bigwig is ready to accept his fate, Hazel—intrepid and contrarian as ever—is determined to face down and question even death itself. The arrival of Holly shows that though the rabbits have physically escaped their past and former home, there is still unfinished business where those they left behind are concerned.



CHAPTER 20: A HONEYCOMB AND A MOUSE

The rabbits are astonished not just to see Holly alive, all the way at **Watership Down**, but to find him in such a miserable state. The reality of seeing Holly so beaten and broken is more frightening for Hazel and his group, in many ways, than encountering the Black Rabbit himself. Hazel tells Dandelion to go back to the ditch and fetch Bigwig, and meanwhile send Speedwell back up the hill to tell the others. Hazel becomes aware of the presence of another rabbit—it is Bluebell, also from Sandleford. Hazel tells Bluebell and Holly that no matter how exhausted they are, they can't stay here for the night—they'll have to come up the hill to the burrow. Holly says he can make it, and Hazel, Bigwig, and Dandelion help the injured rabbits climb the hill.

The next day, Hazel, Blackberry, and Strawberry discuss construction on the new warren and the best way to make a large, stable meeting-room at its center—which they plan to call the Honeycomb. Throughout the rest of the day, Strawberry and the others dig happily in shifts. When a hawk flies overhead the rabbits take cover in their scrapes, but see a field mouse lost in the grass, paralyzed by fear. Hazel calls out to it and offers it shelter in the burrow, and the mouse makes a mad dash inside, narrowly avoiding the hawk. Bigwig reprimands Hazel for offering shelter to a strange animal, but Hazel tells the mouse to stay as long as he pleases.

Dandelion emerges from his burrow to update Hazel on Holly and Bluebell. After a very bad, sleepless night, Holly is finally awake and doing better—Bluebell has taken him up to silflay. Hazel and Bigwig decide to go out and talk to them. Out on the **down**, Holly asks about Hazel and Bigwig's journey, and they proudly state that everyone they left the warren with has made it here today, in spite of some injuries along the way. Strawberry approaches and asks if they can all sleep in the nearly-finished Honeycomb that evening and perhaps hear Holly and Bluebell's tale. Holly agrees to tell his story to everyone but warns the others that "it will strike the frost into the heart of every rabbit that hears it."

Back at the warren, Holly reunites with Silver and thanks Fiver for attempting to warn the Threarah about his vision of Sandleford's destruction. They all head down into the Honeycomb, but the mouse Hazel rescued earlier stops him on the way. He says he plans to leave, but that in exchange for Hazel's help, he will make himself available to Hazel whenever he might need the favor returned.

Holly, back at Sandleford, was a rather intimidating authority figure. Seeing him broken, disoriented, and beaten strikes fear into the rabbits' hearts. Something horrible has happened to their home—and now they must face the reality of what has happened to the community and the rabbits they left behind.



This chapter's subplot concerning Hazel's rescue of a defenseless field mouse does a couple things. It shows that Hazel is genuinely a compassionate leader—and also shows how wily he is, and how his decision to extend sanctuary to the mouse is both an act of empathy and one of self-interest.



Though Hazel is proud of having gotten all of the Sandleford rabbits who left with him all the way across the hills, heathers, and fields, Holly is too haunted by whatever it is he has been through to celebrate this accomplishment.



Hazel knows that rabbits live in a dangerous world and need help from those who share it. By taking the mouse in, he wanted to extend kindness and shelter to it—but was perhaps, on some level, hoping for this outcome: the offering of a favor in return for a favor.



CHAPTER 21: "FOR EL-AHRAIRAH TO CRY"

Holly begins his tale. The day after Hazel, Fiver, and the others left, some rumors about Fiver's visions were swirling through the warren. Some rabbits were distressed, but still the Threarah decided that the best thing to do was to sit tight and "dodge [the] danger underground." Fiver speaks up and says he'll never forget his horrible vision, or the "terrible evil in the world" it showed him. Holly responds that all the evil comes from men, who will "never rest till they've spoiled the earth and destroyed the animals."

Holly resumes his story. The following day, it was raining, and Holly went up from the Sandleford warren to pass hraka. While above ground, he saw some men coming near the warren. They prodded at the mouths of the warren but did little else. Holly did not mention the sighting to the Threarah and instead went down to sleep. The next morning Holly led an expedition to go fetch some flayrah for the Threarah. When he returned, he spotted more men and some hrududil in the field. Holly hid and watched as the men took up spades and began filling in the holes of the warrens. They left a few open, and into these, put long hoses. Holly heard a hissing noise, and the air began to "turn bad." The bewildered Holly went tharn—unable to move, he was forced to sit and watch, and to imagine what was happening below.

Bluebell picks up the story—he was in the warren when the hoses went in and the air turned bad. He describes unimaginable commotion and horror. The runs, blocked by earth, became clogged with dead bodies, and the live rabbits scurrying to get out tore them to pieces. Bluebell still has no idea how he managed to get out—he believes Frith guided him and another rabbit, Pimpernel, down an unpopular, deep run and helped them make it through to the other side, which emptied into the woods beyond the warren.

Holly picks the story back up. He reports that any rabbit who made it up into the field was shot, and their bodies were put on sticks. He watched a contraption attached to a hrududu tear the field to bits. After seeing the destruction, Holly turned and ran into the woods, where he found Bluebell, Pimpernel, and Toadflax, a former member of the Owsla. That night, in the woods, Toadflax died—his final words were "They killed us to suit themselves."

In this passage Adams introduces a kind of environmentalist perspective to the novel: the rabbits are conscious of the destructive effect men have on the natural world, yet are powerless to stop it. Though this thread is not ever fully developed throughout the rest of the novel, he makes it clear that the rabbits live each day in fear of men more than any other elil.



This passage shows how even at Sandleford, a relatively democratic warren, the fear of being ostracized for speaking out against the Threarah's decision had devastating consequences for Holly and the rest of the warren. Fiver attempted to warn the others, but when his vision fell on deaf ears, all the other rabbits became afraid to speak up—even powerful rabbits like Holly.



Bluebell's horrible recollection of what was happening underground during the attack on Sandleford down shows that the rabbits were completely unprepared for such an attack. It also shows the violent self-preservation instincts present in all rabbits, and serves to foreshadow how violence between rabbits will escalate as the novel progresses.



The men's desire not just to get rid of the rabbits painlessly as part of a construction operation but to hurt and humiliate them further demonstrates to the surviving rabbits the relationship between violence and power.



The rabbits crossed the river in the morning, following Hazel's group's tracks, and eventually made it to the heather. They encountered a scratched-up hlessi who told them that a large warren was not far off. Holly and the others made their way in the direction of the rumored warren, stopping to sleep in a ditch. When they awoke the next morning—the day before yesterday—they were face to face with “great, big” rabbits who had an odd smell: Cowslip and his friends. When Holly said they were looking for rabbits by the name of Hazel, Fiver, and Bigwig, Cowslip ordered his fellow rabbits to tear Holly and the others to pieces. Holly and Bluebell escaped, but Pimpernel was killed.

Cowslip pursued Holly and Bluebell, but seeing that Cowslip was a poor fighter, Holly chose to engage him. He managed to get Cowslip down and threatened to kill him in order to get Cowslip to tell him where Hazel and the others had gone. Cowslip pointed them in the direction of the hills, and they made their way towards **Watership Down** in pain and misery. All the way there, Holly says, he was haunted by the ghosts of those he'd seen killed—Toadflax, Pimpernel, and the Threarah. Holly concludes his tale by saying that there is “hardly a living creature” that has been closer to the Black Rabbit—and lived—than himself and Bluebell. Finally, he apologizes to Bigwig and the others for trying to arrest them back at Sandleford, and claims he is a changed rabbit.

As Holly and the others followed in Hazel's group's tracks, they encountered—in different ways—many of the same threats and challenges that Hazel's band did. They too had to cross the frightening boggy heather, and also had a run-in—though one of a very different sort—with Cowslip and his warren.



Holly has in many ways been just as intrepid and fearless a leader as Hazel, though he lost two rabbits on his journey from Sandleford to Watership Down. His guilt over having ignored Fiver's warning, having led two rabbits who trusted him with their lives to their deaths, and having stood by while his home was destroyed is intense, and he has learned a lot about the world and himself along the course of his painful journey.



CHAPTER 22: THE STORY OF THE TRIAL OF EL-AHRAIRAH

After Holly is done telling his story, Hazel begins cleaning the rabbit's mangled ear. Silver helps, and as he does, he and Hazel discuss the advantages and disadvantages of recruiting other creatures to help them, as Hazel did earlier with the mouse. Hazel wishes they could find a bird in need of help and find a way to get him on their side. Silver and Holly both express skepticism, but Bluebell pipes up and says that **El-ahrairah** successfully did something of the sort. Hazel asks for the story, but Holly suggests they silflay first. After grazing in the moonlight for a while, the rabbits listen to Bluebell's tale.

After escaping from the marshes of Kelfazin, **El-ahrairah** and his people went to the meadows of Fenlo and dug a new burrow. Prince Rainbow had his eye on El-ahrairah and wanted to make sure he didn't get up to any more tricks. One evening, Rainbow arrived at El-ahrairah's new burrow, where El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle were sharing a hole. Prince Rainbow separated the two of them, citing their bad influence on one another, and introduced El-ahrairah to a rabbit named Hufsa instead.

As the rabbits consider how to better insulate themselves against the threats of men and elil, they turn to the influence of El-ahrairah and seek to emulate his wiles and trickeries. Hearing stories of his successes emboldens them to try new things, to take advantage of their natural gifts, and to embrace the trickster spirit within all of them.



This story demonstrates how trickery—one of the few defenses rabbits have against the larger world—is something they're vilified for, and have been throughout their species's history. Prince Rainbow attempts to assert his authority over the rabbits in order to further his own agenda.



After a while, **El-ahrairah** noticed that things were always going wrong with his plans and schemes. He believed someone in the warren was leaking information about his tricks, and set up a trap for Hufsa to determine if he was the snitch. After determining that Hufsa was indeed behind the leaks, he felt unsure of what to do. He was afraid to tell Hufsa anything, but at the same time didn't want to kill him, as that would surely draw Rainbow's ire.

Prince Rainbow paid a visit to **El-ahrairah** and commended him on having reformed himself. He invited El-ahrairah, Rabscuttle, and Hufsa to watch him plant a new garden full of carrots, and warned El-ahrairah that anyone caught stealing from the garden would be punished severely by Frith himself. That night, in secret, El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle began devising a plan to get rid of Hufsa once and for all—and to steal the carrots, too.

While **El-ahrairah** enlisted the help of Yona, Rabscuttle befriended a pheasant. They both offered their animal friends favors and food in exchange for their help. That evening, El-ahrairah asked Hufsa to help him steal the carrots. Hufsa agreed and promised to come along the following evening, but El-ahrairah insisted they depart right away. On the way, they came upon Yona singing to the moon. A little while later, they found Rabscuttle's pheasant friend swimming in a pond. After stopping to rest under a tree, they were approached by a strange creature with a red tail and long green ears, smoking a cigarette—it was Rabscuttle in disguise, and he introduced himself as a messenger of Lord Frith.

El-ahrairah at last led Hufsa to the field of carrots, where they stole a great many and returned with them to the burrow. The next afternoon, Hufsa went out, and that evening, Prince Rainbow came to visit, announcing that El-ahrairah was under arrest for stealing the carrots. El-ahrairah demanded a trial by a jury of animals, and Prince Rainbow consented. Rainbow began assembling a jury of elil, knowing a jury of rabbits would acquit El-ahrairah.

That evening, at the trial, Hufsa took the stand as a witness, and **El-ahrairah** began asking him questions about his supposed journey to steal the carrots. As Hufsa began recounting the strange details of the raid—the singing hedgehog, the swimming pheasant, the ghostly rabbit spirit—the jury grew suspicious of Hufsa's fanciful tale (which was of course engineered by El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle themselves). The jury told Prince Rainbow that they couldn't possibly convict El-ahrairah, as Hufsa was obviously lying. In a huff, Prince Rainbow took Hufsa away, and El-ahrairah and his people were restored to a time of peace.

This story is also, perhaps, being told as a cautionary tale, meant to warn the Watership Down rabbits of the pitfalls of disloyalty to the larger group.



Even when silenced and infringed upon, the story suggests, rabbits will always find a way to honor their true natures and to employ the wiles given to them by Frith to come out on top.



El-ahrairah has designed a strange gauntlet of creatures for Hufsa to encounter on their journey to the carrot garden as a means of bewildering and destabilizing the disloyal Hufsa.



El-ahrairah's aims are becoming clear—he knew he would be punished for stealing the carrots and has devised a scheme which will hopefully get him out of the sticky situation.



El-ahrairah's trickery wins out once again. He thwarts Prince Rainbow's attempts to control his and his warren's way of life, and shows his people how devoted he is to their freedom and well-being.



CHAPTER 23: KEHAAR

The next day, early in the morning, Hazel and his group are at silflay when Bigwig and Silver spot a creature with a white back in the grass. They bravely approach the figure, and discover that it is a large, wounded black-headed gull. The bird hisses and squawks at them, and they turn and run back to the burrow to report the sighting to Hazel. Hazel bravely volunteers to go take a look at the bird, and begins talking to it, but realizes it does not speak Lapine very well. As the bird pecks in the dirt, Hazel realizes it needs some food, and he orders the others to search for insects for it to eat.

Hazel brings the bird its food. After it eats, it says it wants to leave, but Hazel urges it to stay and rest, warning it of the many elil surrounding the hill. Silver expresses doubts that their group will ever be able to make a friend of the bird, but Hazel is determined—he knows how valuable the bird’s help in scouting for elil could be to them. Hazel tells the bird that their group will help keep him safe while he recovers—the bird admits that his wing is “no good,” and Hazel helps him slowly walk back towards the burrow.

When Hazel arrives back at the warren with the bird, the other rabbits are skeptical and even cross with Hazel—but he stands his ground and asks them all to help gather up some insects to feed their new companion. By nightfall, the rabbits have scratched out a little shelter for the bird, and they fall asleep as it keeps watch over their hollow. The following day, Bigwig spends some time with the bird, and they converse all day long. Bigwig learns that the bird was injured by a cat, and that he originally comes from an enormous flock who lives where the “earth stops” at a “vast place of water.” The bird’s name, Bigwig says, is Kehaar—the noise the water makes—and he longs to rejoin his flock as soon as he’s healed.

Hazel is disappointed—he gathers Bigwig, Blackberry, Fiver, and Silver for a talk, and tells them that he had been hoping to restore Kehaar to health so that the bird could, one day soon, scout out some neighboring warrens that might have does. Their new warren on **Watership Down** is doing well so far—but it will never thrive without does. As Hazel’s words sink in, the others are quiet—they know he is right. Bigwig tells Hazel to leave everything to him—he will make sure that Hazel’s plan comes to fruition.

The hospitality Hazel showed to the mouse in the earlier chapter, and the fealty the mouse offered him in return, foreshadowed the arrival of another ally whose feeding and sheltering might be repaid by a favor to the warren—now, Hazel has found a really useful animal that could greatly help their group.



Hazel is up for any challenge—he has overcome so much already that befriending a bird and finding a way to get it to serve him and his friends seems well within his capability.



The bird is not just a tool to the rabbits—he is quickly becoming their friend. Bigwig in particular is charmed and entranced by the bird’s stories of the wide world beyond the fields and admires his bravery and worldliness. The rabbits also empathize with Kehaar as he, too, is searching for his home.



Though some doubted Hazel’s plan at first, when he reveals it to them all in earnest, they see the worth in it and decide to do all they can to make it a reality.



Over the next few days, the rabbits work extra-hard at catching insects to feed to Kehaar. One day, Bigwig approaches Hazel and tells him Kehaar would like to speak to him. Hazel goes to Kehaar's scrape, and Kehaar, who seems to have "prepared a short speech," says that though his wing is better and it will soon be time for him to go, he has heard of the rabbits' need for "mudders" from "Mister Pigvig." Kehaar announces that he has thought of a "peeg, fine plan." He will go fly for the rabbits and find them "plenty mudders." Hazel congratulates Kehaar on his splendid idea and promises that the rabbits will do all they can to help him.

Kehaar sets off in flight and is gone for several days. Hazel begins wondering if Kehaar is really going to come back, or whether he's gone off to the Big Water. Fiver, though, says confidently that Kehaar will return. Indeed, late one afternoon a few days later, Bigwig announces that Kehaar has returned. Kehaar reveals that he has found a farm nearby where some rabbits "live in box; live vid men." The only other place where there are rabbits is beyond the river and the "iron road," or train tracks. Kehaar says that the warren is a two-days' journey away.

The next morning, Hazel tells the others that he does not want to leave this warren and join the faraway one Kehaar saw—rather, he wants to go there and bring some does back. Large warrens, he knows, are often overcrowded, and by taking away some does, they could even be doing this neighboring burrow a favor. All the rabbits agree that Hazel, as de facto Chief, should stay behind, and that Holly, Silver, Buckthorn, and Strawberry should go. At first light the next morning, the four start out on yet another journey, while Hazel and Bigwig look forward to the prospect of does and litters of rabbit kits.

CHAPTER 24: NUTHANGER FARM

A few days later, things are looking good. Kehaar has confirmed that Holly and the others are on the right course, and, meanwhile, back at **Watership Down**, the rabbits have been working on enlarging the burrows in anticipation of the does' arrival. Hazel feels a "happy mischief" building inside him, and knows he is ready for a new adventure. He longs to show the others that he is a capable and intrepid Chief and decides that going in search of the "box full of rabbits" Kehaar saw might be just the ticket.

Hazel's plan has worked. He has extended hospitality to Kehaar, made him feel like a welcome and revered guest, and put no pressure on him to do anything for the rabbits right away. As a result, Kehaar has grown attached to the rabbits and his sense of indebtedness to them has grown. His splendid idea was Hazel's plan all along—but Hazel has allowed Kehaar to devise the plan on his own.



The news Kehaar brings back is exciting to the rabbits—there are not one but two separate chances to secure does for the warren. Though it means setting out on another journey, several of them are restless for adventure anyway.



Though the challenge of acquiring does threaten to vex Hazel and the others, Hazel comes up with a plan that will allow Watership Down to thrive while also forming alliances with neighboring warrens. As the group sets out on their journey, no one at Watership Down has the sense that anything could possibly go wrong.



Though Hazel and the others are safe at Watership Down and are working on establishing a comfortable home, Hazel feels a restless energy and the desire to set out on a journey or mission once again. He thought after leaving Sandleford that all he wanted was a place to feel safe again, but now has realized he has a taste for adventure and danger.



Hazel decides to bring Pipkin along with him to the farm just to have a look around. Pipkin is nervous, but Hazel promises that he will protect him. They set off together in the pre-dawn light, and Hazel is buoyed by a lucky feeling. They approach the sprawling old farm just as dawn breaks, and take stock of the place from a nearby slope. They smell nothing dangerous but see a dog in the yard tied to his kennel by a rope. Feeling brave, they make their way down to the farm and follow the scent of other rabbits to a low-roofed shed.

Inside the shed, Hazel has Pipkin keep watch while he approaches the hutch and introduces himself to the rabbits within. One of them, Boxwood, tells Hazel that there are four of them who live there—two bucks and two does. Boxwood tells Hazel to come around to a wire door at the back so that they can talk more easily. There, Hazel meets the other rabbits—Laurel, Clover, and Haystack. Hazel entices the hutch rabbits with tales of his fellow wild rabbits' freedom, and the rabbits are intrigued. Their lives in the hutch are "dull but safe." Though fascinated by Hazel's way of life, they cannot make up their minds about what to do.

Knowing time is running short, Hazel says he'll leave and return one night soon to release the rabbits and bring them back to **Watership Down**. Pipkin announces there is a cat in the yard, and Hazel, wanting to keep the hutch rabbits assured of his capability, tries to stay cool. He joins Pipkin, and both stand still as the cat approaches. Just as it pounces, the rabbits take off. Though the cat chases them it is not fast enough, and soon Hazel and Pipkin are back in the safe, lush fields beyond.

CHAPTER 25: THE RAID

Pipkin and Hazel take their time in getting back to **Watership Down**, and don't return until evening. Hazel urges Pipkin to keep their expedition a secret from the others, but back in the burrow, Fiver catches the scent of a farmyard on Hazel's feet and asks him what he's been up to. Hazel reveals where he and Pipkin have been, and Fiver calls Hazel a "silly show-off." He chides him for risking his own life—and the lives of everyone else—for something that's of barely any value to their group. Hazel brushes Fiver off.

Hazel's choices are never not deliberate, and in bringing the small but loyal Pipkin along, he is both rewarding the little rabbit's loyalty and hoping, perhaps, to strengthen both his endurance and confidence so that he can be a more useful member of the warren.



When Hazel learns that there are does living amongst the hutch rabbits, he knows that he needs to find a way to get the rabbits to come with him—but wants to make them feel it's their idea to leave, and so begins enticing them with romantic descriptions of the wild and the freedom it offers.



Hazel employs a trick worthy of his idol El-ahrairah to avoid a confrontation with the intimidating cat, and narrowly manages to avoid being attacked.



Hazel is the braver rabbit, while Fiver is more cautious, nervous, and timid. This creates a tension between them which is exacerbated by the fact that they love and want to protect each other. Because Hazel sees himself as more capable than Fiver, he often discounts Fiver's advice when it's convenient to do so.



The next morning, during silflay, Hazel tells all the others about the visit to the farm, and Bigwig jumps at the idea of a raid. Hazel assembles a team—Blackberry, Dandelion, Speedwell, and Hawkbit will accompany him back to the farm tonight. That evening it rains, and their plan is thwarted. Before sleep, Fiver begs Hazel not to return to the farm—Hazel asks if Fiver has had a bad vision, and though Fiver admits he hasn't, he says he doesn't want Hazel to go anyway. To mollify Fiver, Hazel says he won't go to the farmyard with the others and will keep watch from the slope above.

The next morning is bright and dry, and Hazel spends much of the day strategizing with the others about their infiltration of the farm. As the rabbits' excitement mounts, Dandelion says he's feeling so brave that he'll be "disappointed" if they don't run into a cat or some other elil on their journey. They decide to set off around sunset so that they can get to the outskirts of the farm before dark and head for the shed once the place has gone quiet for the night.

The rabbits reach the farm around twilight, resting and eating while they wait for the sun to go down. When it's time to head in, Hazel tells the others of his promise to Fiver to stay away from trouble, and Bigwig agrees that Hazel should stay hidden during the raid and take over navigating everyone back to **Watership Down** once the hutch rabbits are free.

Down at the farm, Bigwig and the others encounter a cat almost right away. Rather than running from it, Bigwig attacks it, and though the cat scratches and wounds Bigwig, it is not a particularly "determined assailant" and it skulks off rather quickly. The rabbits make their way inside the shed and Bigwig and Blackberry get to work chewing open the leather straps on the hutch while the others keep watch. After a long struggle, the hutch rabbits are free.

Bigwig tells the rabbits to follow him, but they want to know where Hazel is and are less comfortable without him present. Blackberry and Bigwig assure the rabbits that they will be able to safely make their way to where Hazel is waiting in the lane and tempt them with promises of fresh juicy grass. Halfway across the farmyard, the dog wakes and begins to bark, and the rabbits all dash for the edge of the farm. Haystack and Laurel go tharn, and the others abandon them, making their way up the sloping lane towards Hazel.

Hazel is willing to listen to and believe Fiver whenever Fiver has had one of his prophetic visions—but beyond that, Hazel is more concerned with himself than his brother's opinion. Though Hazel loves Fiver, he doesn't respect him as an advisor the way he should.



The rabbits, having been through an extremely difficult and dangerous journey, seem almost uncomfortable with the peace and quiet at Watership Down, and long for another brush with danger and violence. They want to feel powerful, capable, and invincible.



This passage shows that the others fully accept Hazel as chief. They understand that he is too important to risk his life in dangerous operations and is better suited to strategic or navigational jobs.



Bigwig continues to show off his hotheaded, confrontational nature as he launches into a fight with a cat. His determined, provocative demeanor stands in sharp contrast to that of the quiet, timid, inexperienced hutch rabbits.



The mission at Nuthanger begins to go south when the hutch rabbits, fearful of trusting someone other than Hazel, waste precious time and allow unforeseen challenges to arise. These rabbits are very different from the fearless, intrepid rabbits in Hazel's group, and as such Bigwig and the others are frustrated by their timid natures.



When Hazel realizes that two rabbits have not made it out, he asks Dandelion to go with him to fetch them. Dandelion agrees, and Hazel hurries down to where Haystack and Laurel are sitting tharn in the same position they were moments ago. As Hazel tries to get through to Haystack and Dandelion talks to Laurel, Dandelion senses a kind of terrifying vibration in the air. He turns around to see that there are two cats approaching; beyond them there are two humans with torches, and their lights turn Dandelion tharn as well.

Two humans complain that Lucy's rabbits have gotten out again and hurry to catch them. Hazel urges Dandelion and Haystack to run, and they follow his orders. Laurel is caught by the farmers, while the others run for the lane, pursued by the men.

Hazel, Dandelion, and Haystack take shelter in a ditch and listen for the men's footsteps. Hazel decides to run from the ditch and draw them off while Dandelion and Haystack rejoin the others. Hazel takes off, and sure enough the farmers shine their torchlights in his direction. He runs quickly for another ditch but feels a sharp pain in his hind leg—he has been shot. Hazel crawls through the ditch, dragging his leg behind him, and soon smells a damp, rotten scent—he is at the mouth of a land drain. He crawls into it, taking cover, and hears the humans lamenting that they have lost him. He falls unconscious as blood trickles from his leg.

Bigwig hears the approach of two rabbits—he jumps from the ditch to find Dandelion and Haystack, but no Hazel. They report that they heard Hazel get shot, and saw Laurel get put back in the hutch. Bigwig suggests they all wait a while for Hazel to show up, and meanwhile sets out with Dandelion to try to track him. When they come across a trail of blood, they believe Hazel has been killed, and return to **Watership Down** to deliver the news. They tell Fiver what has happened, but he informs them that he has already seen the bloody, lifeless Hazel in a vision. The rabbits, inconsolable, go off to sleep.

The next morning, Holly comes limping into the warren. Buckthorn, Silver, and Strawberry are with them, but they have not brought back any does. Buckthorn is wounded, Strawberry is ill from exhaustion, and only Silver is unharmed.

Even brave rabbits like Dandelion are helpless against certain environmental—and non-environmental—threats. As Dandelion goes tharn, Adams demonstrates that sometimes instinct takes over, leaving rabbits at the mercy of their surroundings.



Just as Hazel and Bigwig feared, not all of the hutch rabbits have the instincts and drive to successfully escape the comforts of the farm they call home.



Hazel is determined to do anything to ensure the survival of the larger group—even directly endangering his own life. As he selflessly puts himself on the line for two rabbits he hardly knows, he shows how his self-sacrificing disposition is both heroic and foolish—a personality hallmark of any “epic” hero who has a lot to learn about how to be a true leader.



Things seem to have taken a turn for the terrible. Hazel's desire to build a better home for his people has ended in tragedy, and now the other rabbits fear they have lost too much—their hope, their fearless leader, and their sense of direction.



Something has gone horribly wrong on Holly's mission to the neighboring warren, compounding the pain and loss of the botched mission to Nuthanger Farm.



CHAPTER 26: FIVER BEYOND

Fiver sleeps uneasily throughout the day and remembers the loss of Hazel with a sharp pain each time he wakes. In his dreams, he has a conversation with a human man who brags about being able to kill rabbits with impunity as he puts up a notice board which reads “In memory of Hazel-rah! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!” The man tells Fiver that he is going to string Hazel up from the notice board after retrieving his body from “th’ bloody ‘ole.”

Blackberry wakes Fiver to tell him that a bit of the roof elsewhere in the warren has fallen in due to the heat. Blackberry tells Fiver that he was kicking and squealing in his sleep and attempts to console him by telling him that Hazel has gone to be with Lord Frith. He also informs Fiver that Holly and the others have returned, maimed and ill—“everything’s as bad as it could be.”

Fiver asks Blackberry if he will take him to the place where Hazel was shot, as he believes that Hazel is still alive. Blackberry leads Fiver across the fields and to the ditch where Hazel was last seen. Fiver goes down into the ditch and moves along the bottom into the “hole” described in his dream—the drainage hole. Inside, Fiver finds Hazel, alive but weak.

Fiver experiences another one of his visions, and this time, the reader is able to watch it unfold. Fiver’s visions aren’t literal, it seems, but rather atmospheric or metaphorical. His mind seems to both taunt him and give him the answers, as evidenced by this dream which is both painful and informative.



Normally Fiver is the rabbit most attuned to doom, gloom, and bad portents—but now things are so dire that in a rare turn of events, Fiver may be the only one to show any optimism.



Another one of Fiver’s visions proves helpful. Just as Fiver and Hazel made it out of Sandleford just in time, this latest vision has helped Fiver to find Hazel before it became too late to save him.



CHAPTER 27: “YOU CAN’T IMAGINE IT UNLESS YOU’VE BEEN THERE”

Back at **Watership Down**, in the Honeycomb, Bigwig and Holly call the other rabbits to a meeting. The mood in the room is solemn—all are mourning the death of Hazel. Nevertheless, Holly begins to share the tale of his frightful journey. He remembers that the day they set off was uneventful. They never ran into any predators, and soon reached a thick wood where they sheltered for the night. The next day, they spotted a lone hare and asked whether they were on the right path to a warren nearby. The hare asked if they meant **Efrafa**, and Holly answered that they must; the hare asked if they knew the warren, and when Holly answered that they did not, the hare told them to “run, and quickly.”

Three large rabbits approached and asked to see the group’s “marks.” When Holly expressed confusion, the rabbits asked if they were from **Efrafa**. Holly replied that they weren’t but were seeking to go there. The rabbits took Holly and the others to Efrafa—a big warren where a pervasive fear of a disease called the white blindness has resulted in extreme security measures which control every aspect of the rabbits’ lives. To the rabbits within Efrafa, “you can’t call your life your own [but] in return you have safety.”

In the world of the rabbits, every journey they set out on is in some way an “epic” one—the rabbits are small and vulnerable, and even traversing a small amount of land requires enormous physical, psychological, and emotional stamina.



Adams shows how the Efracans use a likely fake, strawman excuse—securing the warren against “white blindness”—to show how authoritarian regimes often use not just physical violence, but psychological violence, to control their subjects.



In **Efrafa**, in addition to the Owsla, there is a governing body called a Council. Each rabbit on the Council has one special thing he looks after: one is in charge of feeding, one is in charge of breeding, and so on. Only a certain number of ordinary rabbits can be above ground at one time, and the Efracans keep track of their rabbits by marking them at birth with a deep bite on various parts of their body.

When Bigwig asks how the Owsla keeps control over the other rabbits, Holly replies that “you can’t imagine it unless you’ve been there.” According to him the Chief Rabbit, General Woundwort, has under him several captains, each in charge of a Mark and several officers of their own. **Efracan** rabbits must bury their hraka and often go days at a time underground, without sight of the sun.

Dandelion asks if living in such a way has “alter[ed]” the **Efracan** rabbits, and Holly says that it has. Most Efracans can’t do anything but what they’re told. The Efracans’ only goal in life is often to get into the Owsla, because of the privileges afforded to its members, and everyone in the Owsla longs to be in the Council. The Owsla also, Holly adds, employ a “wide patrol” which is both meant to toughen up new members and scout for hlessil. When the Efracan Owsla comes upon a lone rabbit, they give him a choice: he can either come back to Efrafa, or be killed, for fear he will draw the attention of men or elil to the warren.

One of the rabbits who took Holly and the others in, Captain Champion, led them down to the burrow and told to make themselves at home. By talking to some of the other rabbits—one of whom was a doe called Hyzenthlay—they learned more about **Efrafa**, and how General Woundwort, when he seized power, was responsible for making it so regimented. Hyzenthlay also revealed that the warren is overcrowded and that many does can’t produce litters due to the conditions—yet no one is allowed to leave. Though the system is “breaking down,” Hyzenthlay said, one cannot be overheard saying such things.

A short while later, Holly and the others were brought to a Council meeting. While waiting, they saw another rabbit who seemed “mad with fear” go in. The rabbit, Blackavar, had been caught trying to run away. When he came out of his Council meeting, his ears had been ripped to shreds.

Though most large, established warrens have some system of organization and control, Efrafa is an all-out military regime, with violence as a means to power being employed at every level of authority.



Efracan rabbits are not free in any sense—in burying their hraka and spending most of their time underground, they are defying nature. Adams uses the contrast between the natural way Hazel’s warren lives and the strict, unnatural way the Efracans live to symbolize how unnatural systems of totalitarianism and fascism are.



The strict, authoritarian atmosphere within Efrafa is like nothing the rabbits have ever heard of. The Sandleford Owsla, though strict and occasionally bullying, ultimately acted in the interest of the warren’s prosperity and peace. In Efrafa, though, the strict rules and violence seem arbitrary and meant only to intimidate and control.



Though the rabbits are frightened, their conversation with Hyzenthlay actually gives them confidence that their plan might not be so off-base. At the same time, Hyzenthlay’s description of the terrible conditions in Efrafa adds to the sense that accomplishing their mission is going to be harder than they thought.



The Efracan guards, captains, and Owsla use terrible violence in order to exert power over the rabbits who live in the warren and to keep the authoritarian regime in place running.



At their own Council meeting, Holly and the others met with General Woundwort, who explained the rules of the warren to them. Holly spoke up to ask if they could take some does back to their own warren, but Woundwort replied that such a proposal was “out of the question.” Holly realized, in that moment, that they were not guests in **Efrafa**, but prisoners.

That night at silflay, Holly and the others realized there was no way to escape—there were sentries stationed everywhere. Over the next several days, the rabbits were forced to live by the **Efracan** rules, coming up to the ground only to eat and then immediately heading back down to their overcrowded burrow. One night, inspired by memories of the tale of **El-ahrairah** and King Darzin’s lettuce, Holly approached one of the Captains at silflay and attempted to deceive him by telling him that he was wanted by the Council at once—Holly told the captain that General Woundwort had put Holly in charge. Though skeptical, the captain was so afraid of disobeying an order from Woundwort that he listened.

Holly and the others took their chance to escape and plowed through the sentries that tried to stop them, scrapping and fighting their way to freedom. As they ran through the fields and woods, they realized they were being pursued by the Owsla. They ran up a slope and found themselves on a strange “road” made of stones, wood, and iron—train tracks. As the Owsla closed in on them, Holly says, they were saved by one of Lord Frith’s messengers—something the size of “a thousand hrududil” came rushing through the night and wiped out the **Efracan** rabbits.

After regaining their wits, Holly and the others resumed their journey, and the next day made it home. As he concludes his tale, Holly states that he feels “dry and empty as an autumn puffball [...] as though the wind could blow [his] fur away.”

CHAPTER 28: AT THE FOOT OF THE HILL

Bigwig commends Holly on being brave and intrepid enough to navigate himself and the others back to safety, but Holly insists that the only reason they made it out of **Efrafa** is that Frith intended for them to do so. Holly helps the hutch rabbits up to silflay, offering to show them a good patch of nice grass.

The rabbits believed, up until this point, that they were merely passing through Efrafa, and were exempt from its violence and authoritarian hierarchy. Now, though, they realize that they are not.



This passage shows how the tales of El-ahrairah that the rabbits have been sharing periodically throughout the books are not just pleasant diversions—they are real sources of both information and inspiration. Having a folk hero to draw strength from can even embolden the rabbits to rise up against oppression and change their fates.



In this passage, the rabbits describe a scene beyond their wildest imaginations—something they don’t even understand has transpired right before their eyes. Readers understand that a train hit the unlucky Efracans, but to the rabbits, the appearance of the “messenger” seems like a blessing or a sign.



Holly and the others have been forever changed by the terrible things they have seen in Efrafa.



Holly’s belief in the power of Frith’s will shows that even though he has been through a nightmare, his faith has not been entirely shaken.



Above ground, Bigwig catches the smell of Blackberry approaching. He bounds up the hill and breathlessly tells Bigwig that Hazel is alive but wounded, and that Fiver is with him at the bottom of the hill. Blackberry explains the extent of Hazel's injury—though the bone is not broken and though Fiver and Blackberry have cleaned it, Hazel is weak from loss of blood. He predicts that Hazel won't be able to manage making his way up the hill tonight.

Bigwig arrives at the bottom of the hill to find the exhausted Hazel sleeping and Fiver feeding. Bigwig spends the night guarding his friend, and in the morning, Kehaar returns. They tell the bird what has happened, and Kehaar volunteers to get the "liddle black stones" out of Hazel's wound. Hazel wakes up and agrees to let Kehaar take a look. Kehaar digs two shotgun pellets out of Hazel's haunch with his beak.

Hazel stays at the foot of the hill for three days, gathering his strength. Fiver stays with him, attending to his wound and keeping him company. The others come to visit, and Holly relays the story of his time in **Efrafa**. Hazel laments that both the excursion to Nuthanger and the journey to Efrafa were calamitous. Though Clover and Haystack are adjusting well to the warren, Holly anticipates fights breaking out over them when the breeding season arrives. Holly asks Hazel what they are supposed to do, and Hazel replies that what they must do is impossible: they must return to Efrafa and get some does out. Though the whole idea "scares [him] stiff," Hazel knows it is the only way to keep their new warren alive—and since it can't be done by "fighting or fair words," it will have to be done "by means of a trick."

Hazel turns to Blackberry and suggests he be the one to devise a great trick which will get the does out of **Efrafa**, dodge a pursuit, and get out of the reach of the Wide Patrol. Blackberry says he'll need Fiver's help. Hazel declares that he'll return to the warren with Fiver the next morning and they'll all set to work on a plan. Holly warns Hazel that returning to Efrafa will get them all killed, but Fiver says he has faith they can pull it off.

CHAPTER 29: RETURN AND DEPARTURE

The next morning at dawn, Hazel and Fiver head up the hill to the warren. When they arrive, they find all the other rabbits excitedly waiting their return, having heard Blackberry's exciting tale of Fiver's vision, and of finding Hazel in the drain. Hazel is limping a bit, but after resting a moment, runs down into the warren rather quickly. The rabbits sniff and nuzzle and tussle with Hazel, delighted to have him back.

The good news that Hazel is alive and will be coming home soon signals renewed hope for the rabbits in a time of total despondency.



Just as Hazel and the others nursed Kehaar back to health and made him feel at home, he now returns the favor for them.



Hazel has gotten his band of rabbits to Watership Down, secured some does, and bounced back from the edge of death itself. Now, though, he and the others are discovering that they need more than they thought they did to feel truly at home. As their needs expand, so too does Hazel's confidence that he can give his people what they need—just as El-ahrairah did for his.



Fiver's role in the warren is a curious one. He is a seer who doesn't seem to have come into his powers yet. His visions are revered as often as they're ignored, and he doesn't seem to have the confidence to declare when something is a hunch versus when it's a vision.



Hazel, through his endless schemes and seemingly infinite inability to avoid death, is becoming more than just a Chief to his band of rabbits—he is becoming a beloved hero, much like El-ahrairah.



In the afternoon, Hazel calls the whole group into the Honeycomb and announces that he is going to journey to **Efrafa** soon to try once more to bring back enough does for the warren. He says that he and Blackberry have a plan—but that he is reluctant to share it, should something go wrong and any others get taken into Efrafa and made to talk.

Holly speaks up. He apologizes for having to speak against Hazel, but states that he cannot imagine a return to **Efrafa** being anything other than a “complete disaster.” The rabbits quarrel amongst themselves for a little bit—some believe “Hazel-rah” is right, while others side with Holly. When it is quiet once again, Hazel says that returning to Efrafa is the only way to ensure the survival of their warren—they have all faced enough danger since leaving Sandleford to prepare them for something like this.

Fiver and Bigwig add their voices in support of Hazel’s plan, as do Silver and Pipkin, citing their loyalty to Hazel. Blackberry scurries down into the Honeycomb—he has been talking with Kehaar, and they have created a plan which will leave General Woundwort looking “remarkably silly.” Bluebell declares that he wants to come to satisfy his curiosity—he wonders if Bigwig is going to “dress up as a hrududu and drive all the does across the field.”

Hazel concludes the meeting and heads up to talk to Kehaar. He asks if Kehaar really means to help them get the does out of **Efrafa**—Kehaar promises to help “get mudders,” even though the instinct to return to “Peeg Vater” is stronger than ever. He says that once the mission is complete, he will go to the ocean and not return until the autumn. Hazel thanks Kehaar for his loyalty and promises the mission will be over soon. Bigwig pokes his head out of the warren to see what Hazel and Kehaar are up to. Hazel tells him to go warn the others that their expedition will leave at daybreak tomorrow—each rabbit is free to stay or go as he pleases.

CHAPTER 30: A NEW JOURNEY

As Hazel and a group of rabbits including Blackberry, Bluebell, Dandelion, Pipkin, Fiver, Silver, and Bigwig set out for **Efrafa**, Holly leads them as far as the edge of the wood to see them off. There, he begs Hazel one last time “not to underrate the danger.” As Silver leads them southward, each rabbit is filled with a sense of dread.

Hazel wants to try again at Efrafa, and though he hasn't experienced the place for himself, he knows that in order to be successful this go-round, their group will have to prepare for the worst and be on the defensive.



As Hazel considers starting yet another perilous journey—just days after a brush with death—his choice can be seen as brave or foolish depending on how one looks at it. His determination and confidence not just in himself but in his fellow rabbits is heartening, and yet his choice to ignore Holly’s wisdom and warnings is slightly foolhardy.



Though the details of the plan are vague, it seems aimed at Woundwort, and an attempt to discredit or expose him. To stamp out authoritarianism, the rabbits know, to some degree, they must start at its root.



Yet another chapter in the rabbits’ epic journey begins. Though they have all been through a lot and have suffered injury, terror, and heartbreak, Hazel is determined to bounce back and do what’s right on behalf of his people. In this way, his resolve in the face of danger and defeat—and to some degree his folly—mirror that of some of literature’s great heroes, such as Odysseus and Captain Ahab.



Whereas on the starts of other parts of their journeys the rabbits have felt a mix of fear and excitement, the mood is decidedly more somber as they make their way towards Efrafa.



Around ni-Frith, the rabbits pause in a thorn patch. They are at the edge of a thick wood, which Holly had previously described to them as strange and dangerous. As the group decides whether or not they should go through the forest, Hazel suggests Bigwig—who has proven himself “King of Cats” back at Nuthanger—go through the trees first and check to see if it’s all right.

As Bigwig heads into the copse, Hazel asks Silver whether they’re within the Wide Patrol’s range yet, which Silver supposes that they are. Hazel reminds him how important it is that they avoid the Wide Patrol—they don’t want to go straight to **Efrafa** just yet, but are instead looking for somewhere very near it where they can hide out. Bigwig emerges from the woods and announces that the coast is clear, and Hazel urges the group onward through the forest.

On the other side of the woods, the rabbits meet up with Kehaar. Hazel asks him to fly on their behalf and seek out a place to hide as near to **Efrafa** as they can get without being caught. Kehaar suggests they go over a nearby river—there is plenty of cover, and the Efracans never cross it on their patrols. Fiver suggests they all head straight there without stopping for the night.

The rabbits pause to feed and rest before they head out again at fu Inlé. Hazel tries to appear confident and cheerful, but he can sense that the group is on edge. At the same time, he knows how far they have all come from their first night out in the fields after leaving Sandleford and is proud of his “tough [...] bunch.” Acorn asks Dandelion to tell a story, and Dandelion, at Bigwig’s request, begins the fearful tale of **El-ahrairah** and the Black Rabbit of Inlé.

CHAPTER 31: THE STORY OF EL-AHRAIRAH AND THE BLACK RABBIT OF INLÉ

Shortly after the conclusion of the story of the King’s lettuce, Darzin himself found out about **El-ahrairah**’s deception. He began quietly scheming as to how he would get back at El-ahrairah, and when word of this reached the trickster himself, he warned all his people to be cautious, especially when they were out alone.

One afternoon, while leading a group of rabbits back from a sojourn away from the warren, Rabsuttle became lost in a fog and was taken in by King Darzin, who forced Rabsuttle to sleep in a prison hole and do hard labor every day. **El-ahrairah** vowed to rescue his friends and set some does to dig a tunnel which would empty in Rabsuttle’s quarters. Soon they were able to rescue El-ahrairah’s companion right out from under the noses of his guards.

Though Hazel is the leader of their clan, he recognizes that other rabbits have skills he doesn’t, and shares the responsibilities of leader with others based on their talents.



This passage shows that the rabbits have a very specific strategy in place, and though they’re planning on infiltrating Efrafa, they don’t want to be brought in on terms that aren’t their own.



There is a sense of urgency and timeliness to this journey that hasn’t been present on several of the group’s other sojourns. They know that their lives depend on their ability to avoid early detection by the Efracans.



Though the rabbits have, up to this point, used stories to soothe and instruct one another, the story Dandelion is about to embark on is a very different kind of tale—one which will force the rabbits to confront existential fears rather than take refuge in heroic tales of trickery.



The opening undertones of the story mirror the feelings the rabbits are having in their real lives: tension, fear, and the threat of attack and assault.



Rabsuttle’s imprisonment, torture, and forced labor mirrors the conditions the rabbits are afraid they will face should they be apprehended by the Efracans.



This infuriated King Darzin, who began planning a war against **El-ahrairah** and his people. Darzin's soldiers could not get into El-ahrairah's warren, but they laid siege to the burrows and attacked any rabbit who went up to silflay. After many rabbits starved and died, El-ahrairah called out in desperation to Lord Frith and stated he would do anything to ensure his people's survival—he would even drive a bargain with the Black Rabbit of Inlé, who is, in the rabbit world, death personified in rabbit form.

El-ahrairah formed a plan to seek out the Black Rabbit—in spite of his fear of the legendary spirit—and offer him his own life in return for the safety of his people. El-ahrairah knew that there would be no cheating the Black Rabbit—his trickery would have no power in its realm. The only way El-ahrairah would return from the Black Rabbit's domain is if he were to fail.

That night, **El-ahrairah's** Owsla attacked King Darzin's forces to create a diversion during which El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle slipped out of the warren and began their "dark journey." They at last came to a desolate, misty place. They hopped into the fog and soon came upon a huge rabbit hole—at the mouth of which stood the Black Rabbit itself.

Pipkin becomes frightened of the story, and he and Fiver head off to eat some grass. Bigwig urges Dandelion to resume his story, and to not leave out a single detail.

El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle fled down the rabbit hole, but at the bottom encountered none other than the Black Rabbit. The Black Rabbit asked El-ahrairah why he had come, and El-ahrairah replied that he had come to give his life in exchange for the lives of his people. The Black rabbit told El-ahrairah he did not make bargains, and El-ahrairah immediately began thinking of ways to trick the Rabbit into taking his life.

The Black Rabbit welcomed **El-ahrairah** as his guest and invited him to play a game of bobstones. El-ahrairah lost, and to pay his stakes, was forced to sacrifice his tail and whiskers to the Black Rabbit's Owsla. El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle returned to their cold, stony burrow, and, despite his fear, El-ahrairah continued thinking of a trick which would serve him.

Darzin's army's siege of the burrow mirrors the real-life attack on Sandleford. Meanwhile, as he watches his people suffer, El-ahrairah declares that he would give anything to help them. Up to this point he has been a trickster more interested than his own exploits than anything else, but here he reveals himself to be, deep down, a selfless leader.



As El-ahrairah considers setting out in search of the Black Rabbit, the rabbits listening to the story no doubt see his apprehension and fear in undertaking such a journey as a reflection of their own sense of dread and anxiety about approaching Efrafa.



As El-ahrairah sets out on his fearful journey, he is not alone—he has his closest companion with him. Similarly, the rabbits listening to the story take refuge in one another. The mist El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle pass through is reminiscent of the "mist" Fiver saw in a vision several chapters ago.



Bigwig wants to hear every word in order to steel himself for what's to come and to gather whatever useful advice the story has to offer.



Though El-ahrairah had steeled himself for the possibility that trickery would not work against the Black Rabbit, now that he is here, he falls back on the familiar and seeks to use the tools he has to do what he set out to do.



The Black Rabbit's game turns violent—though he does not want to take El-ahrairah's life, he seems to want to make him suffer as a way of reminding El-ahrairah who is in charge. Again, the mutilation and torture mirrors the violence that goes on in Efrafa.



The next evening, **El-ahrairah** went back to play another round with the Black Rabbit, but the Black Rabbit said he would rather tell stories than play bobstones. El-ahrairah said that if he could tell a story as good as the Black Rabbit's, the Black Rabbit would have to accept his bargain. The Black Rabbit accepted these terms, and then told a horrible story of fear and darkness to which El-ahrairah could make no response. As payment, El-ahrairah offered up his ears. That night, Rabscuttle begged El-ahrairah to give up, but El-ahrairah continued scheming.

The next evening, the injured **El-ahrairah** dragged himself back towards the Black Rabbit's burrow. A member of the Owsla urged him to return home and give up lest he contract one of the many horrible rabbit diseases which were bred in the tunnels of the Black Rabbit's warren. Rather than leave, though, El-ahrairah crouched in a strange burrow and waited to become ill.

When he again dragged himself from the hole and confronted the Black Rabbit, the Black Rabbit realized the depths of **El-ahrairah's** desperation at last and agreed to save his people. Unbeknownst to El-ahrairah, at that moment, a strange but horrific confusion and terror befell King Darzin and his soldiers and drove them away from El-ahrairah's warren forever.

El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle left the Black Rabbit's warren and began to make their way home, but the journey was difficult and long. They did not return home for three months, but when they got there, they found that all of the rabbits were healthy and happy. Rabscuttle, not recognizing any of his friends, asked to see a fellow member of the Owsla, was told that the rabbit had died in "the fighting" long before he himself was born.

El-ahrairah returned above ground, where he encountered Lord Frith, who had brought him new whiskers, ears, and a tail. Lord Frith adorned El-ahrairah with his new parts and told him that wisdom, sometimes, did not come easily. As Dandelion ends the story, Pipkin interrupts to announce that a fox is coming towards them all.

Despite being defeated twice by the Black Rabbit, El-ahrairah remains determined to find a way of saving his people. His bravery in the face of terror and mutilation is both a warning and a call to arms for the rabbits listening to the story: in Efrafa they will have to face terrible things, but are doing so for the good of their home and their people.



El-ahrairah, unable to defeat the Black Rabbit at his own game, decides to take things one step further and bring himself closer to death as a way to trick the Black Rabbit into taking his life and thus having to save his people.



The Black Rabbit finally relents—he doesn't even take El-ahrairah's life, but simply delivers unto him the salvation of his people. El-ahrairah will soon see that even this grace, though, comes at a cost.



El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle return "home," but find that their journey has taken years rather than months. Their faces have been forgotten to all those who occupy their warren—their people have survived and moved on without them.



El-ahrairah has failed to trick the Black Rabbit—but the Black Rabbit chose to deliver his people anyway. Though he himself was unable to save them, a force greater than himself did. This foreshadows that while things may go wrong in Efrafa, forces beyond what the rabbits can see or understand may intervene on their behalf.



CHAPTER 32: ACROSS THE IRON ROAD

Hazel immediately leaps into action, scouting out the fox in the field. He sees that it is moving in a lazy kind of way; though it can certainly make out the group's scent, it doesn't seem particularly interested in hunting them. Nevertheless, Hazel urges the group to follow him away from the fox, but before they can start moving, Bigwig pushes past him and heads directly for the fox. Bigwig draws the fox off into the woods. All of the other rabbits are nervous as they watch the fox pursue their friend, but within moments, Bigwig emerges again, crying that he's "never [been] better" and urging everyone to head out.

As the rabbits hurry along through the little wood, their spirits begin to clear. Soon they are back in open farmland and moving at a clip. Hazel sidles up to Bigwig and reprimands him for acting recklessly and risking his life when "everything's going to depend on [him]" soon enough. Bigwig tells Hazel that actually, when he drew the fox into the woods, he came upon a group of rabbits. He told them to run the other way, but they didn't listen, and the fox attacked them, killing at least one. Hazel asks Bigwig to stay away from "fancy tricks" for the rest of their journey.

The rest of the night's journey is uneventful, and they group encounters no elil or Wide Patrol rabbits. As dawn begins to rise, they near the iron road. They endeavor to cross it and are nervous that the "thundering angel of Frith" will appear and take their lives, but make it across without difficulty. As they feed in the grass on the other side, Kehaar approaches and warns them that a Wide Patrol is nearby. Hazel urges them all into a nearby wood, and the exhausted rabbits quickly fall asleep.

CHAPTER 33: THE GREAT RIVER

Hazel wakes to the perfume of strange flowers. He feeds in the field and is upset to find his hind leg is troubling him—he has been putting a great strain on it. He hopes it is not too much further to the river. He asks Pipkin where Kehaar has gone, and Pipkin replies that Kehaar has gone out on a scouting mission to check for Wide Patrols. Hazel is tense and nervous as he waits for Kehaar to return—he cannot see and guard against everything, but the threats against their group are increasing by the hour.

This passage sets up a fairly major narrative turn the novel is about to take. Hazel has been the leader and protagonist thus far—but it is Bigwig who will be going into Efrafa undercover, and as such he is shouldering more responsibilities and becoming even more invested in the survival of the group.



The group of rabbits Bigwig encountered in the woods have not been seen for the last time—and what the fox did to them will have devastating consequences for Bigwig's upcoming mission.



The rabbits are absolutely exhausted, and even though their journey has taken them nearly to Efrafa and they should be on high alert, they cannot resist their natural instincts to sleep and refresh themselves before heading into even more danger.



Hazel knows that the threats to his group will only get more intense as they move forward, and he wishes he could protect his beloved band of rabbits from anything that might come their way—he knows, though, that he is powerless in the face of certain kinds of violence.



Kehaar returns and reports that there are no wide patrols across the train tracks, and that the river is not far off. Relieved, Hazel leads the group out once more. They approach the river in no time at all—it is wide and swift, and the rabbits feel uneasy as they gaze upon it. They explore the banks together, though, and soon discern that there is no danger to the place—no evil are present and though it's a strange environment indeed, "not all strange things are bad." Hazel privately confides in Fiver that he worries he is asking too much of the group—his plan has within it many risks. Fiver assures him that the group is loyal, capable, and prepared for anything.

Kehaar comes over and points out a bridge where the group can cross the river. Though the rabbits don't know what a "bridge" is, they tentatively approach it and begin to move across it—Fiver, surprisingly, is the first to bound across calmly and excitedly. On the far side of the river, the rabbits find a good deal of cover though the ground is marshy. Fiver and Pipkin start digging out some scrapes.

The next morning, Hazel and the group begin exploring their surroundings more carefully. The area is damp, verdant, and full of great cover. As the day goes by, Kehaar asks what the group is waiting for, and why they have not put their plan to infiltrate **Efrafa** in motion. Hazel admits that though he can see how the plan will start, he is unsure of how it'll finish. He worries that after escaping Efrafa with the does, their group will be unable to outrun the Wide Patrol. Blackberry suggests swimming the river, but Hazel says it's too dangerous. Blackberry instead says perhaps they could wander upriver and search for a great, clever hiding place—together he, Hazel, Bigwig, Fiver, and Bluebell set off.

The group comes upon a strange object which they at first believe to be a fallen tree trunk. As they get closer, though, they see that it is "some man thing"—it is lying on top of the water and has within it the scent of flayrah. When the rabbits ask Kehaar what it could be, they tell him it is a "boat"—he has seen many of them at the Big Water. The rabbits explore the boat and find that it is tied up to a post on the riverbank. Hazel, seeing no value in the object, says they should head back, and Bluebell laments that he'll never get the chance to be a "water rabbit." Blackberry, struck by an idea, says they should use the boat to escape the **Efracan** wide patrol after the breakout by gnawing at the rope and setting it free.

Though the rabbits are used to seeing everything new and different as a threat, in this passage, they come to an important turning point in their journey. They realize that just because something is strange, it is not necessarily evil—this will make their journey, and ultimately their return to Watership Down, even richer and more freeing in the long run.



The discovery of the bridge—a foreign object to the rabbits whose use is not immediately apparent—foreshadows the discovery of another pivotal object which will aid them in their quest.



Hazel, as a leader, is able to admit when he is lost and needs help. He does not pretend he knows more than his fellow rabbits or seek to control them by claiming to have absolute knowledge and power. He actively wants their help, and knows he is stronger because of all of them.



Though the rabbits don't really understand what the boat is, it jogs their memory of the board Fiver and Pipkin used to get across the small brook so many days ago. Hazel's plan is impacted by his environment, and by what he and his friends discover together. In this way, every aspect of their homemaking, planning, and decision-making is purely democratic.



Realizing a man could come back for the boat at any moment, Hazel says there's no time to waste. He tells Bigwig to head for **Efrafa** and reminds him to send word by Kehaar of what he needs them to do—they will be ready to back him up at a moment's notice. Bigwig is surprised by how sudden his departure will be but admits that he has hated waiting around for things to get started. He bids everyone goodbye, nuzzling Hazel briefly, and then follows Kehaar across the pasture north of the river towards Efrafa.

Though Bigwig's journey gets off to a more sudden start than he'd envisioned, and he does not have the chance to say a proper goodbye to all, he springs into action at a moment's notice, ready to put his life on the line for the good of Watership Down and the world he and his friends are creating there.



CHAPTER 34: GENERAL WOUNDWORT

Dusk is falling on **Efrafa**, and General Woundwort comes above ground to watch the Near Hind Mark at silflay. One of the Mark officers, Captain Chervil, subserviently greets the General—a “singular rabbit” who was born the strongest of a litter of five. Woundwort was raised in the countryside, and after his whole family was killed before his eyes when he was still young, he escaped from the home of a schoolmaster who took him in from the wild and went on to insert himself into a nearby warren. He soon rose to Chief Rabbit after killing the previous chief—Woundwort was, and is, terrifying in combat. He will fight any elil, even puppies, weasels, and stoats.

As Adams provides some background on the novel's great villain and main antagonist, he is if not humanizing the horrible creature at least giving some context as to the things that made Woundwort who he is. He reveals that Woundwort's past was marked by terrible violence against his family—in return, he became a violent creature himself, learning that the strength and ability to fight and kill something provided one with ultimate power



Woundwort founded **Efrafa** not all that long ago, and from the start ran it with an iron fist. No rabbits were allowed to leave the warren, and many were forced to work around the clock digging burrows. Woundwort developed the Mark system to control the other rabbits and devised severe punishment for any who stepped out of line. He created the Council and Wide Patrol to be his eyes and ears throughout the warren and the countryside alike, and used the privileges allotted to those groups and the Owsla to incentivize young rabbits to toe the line in hopes of one day being promoted to one of the forces.

Woundwort has created a closed-circuit system in Efrafa, in which the only way to have any kind of life is to become one of the arbiters of power and perpetrators of violence. In this way, Woundwort teaches countless rabbits that strength and violence are a means to power, and that having power is the only way to go through life.



Now, as he greets Chervil, General Woundwort is feeling “seriously concerned about several things.” The warren is overcrowded, and he fears losing control of his people. Already, a group of does has asked to leave the warren, and the Council has had to take “strong measures” to contain them. A group of four hlessil who'd joined the Right Hind Mark have recently escaped, and Woundwort is short on good officers. Moreover, a Wide Patrol has recently picked up the scent of a large band of rabbits heading towards **Efrafa**, though their tracks have since been lost—and most concerning of all, a hlessi recently drew a fox onto a patrol, killing an important Captain.

This passage makes it clear that there are already several threats against General Woundwort and his Council's control of Efrafa at the time of Bigwig's infiltration. They have suffered several blows recently—including Bigwig's maneuver with the fox.



Woundwort now tells Chervil that he wants to replace some Council members by drawing on the best sentries from each Mark. Chervil is about to introduce Woundwort to some when Campion approaches to inform Woundwort that the Wide Patrol has picked up a hlessi—who has stated that he has come a long way to join **Efrafa**. Woundwort is puzzled by the appearance of a rabbit who actually wants to join Efrafa but agrees to meet him.

Woundwort arrives at a nearby lane to find his officers with a large rabbit. The rabbit has a strange tuft of hair on his head, and he introduces himself as Thlayli, or Bigwig. Thlayli announces he has come to join **Efrafa**—when Woundwort asks why, Thlayli inquires if there is anything “odd” about someone wanting to join the warren. Thlayli brags that he can run and fight, and has previously been an officer in an Owsla. Thlayli claims that his warren was destroyed by men, and he has been wandering for a long time. Woundwort considers the rabbit, and then states that he might be able to find some use for him. The next morning, Thlayli is brought before the Council, and made an officer in the Near Hind Mark, under the instruction of Captain Chervil. Thlayli receives his Mark, and, still bleeding, begins his duties.

CHAPTER 35: GROPING

Chervil and Aven give Bigwig the lay of the land and offer him tips about being on-duty and living in **Efrafa** more generally. They tell him of Efrafa’s recent difficulties, including the four runaways from Right Flank Mark. They warn him that if the General finds any hraka in the fields, he’ll punish even the Captains—the “little beasts” in each Mark, though, are always trying to “be natural” and leave their waste unburied. As Chervil outlines the high standards and strict rules even Mark Officers and Council members are held to, Bigwig is slightly overwhelmed, but assures his new superiors that he’ll get the hang of things soon.

As Bigwig prepares to take his Mark up for evening silflay, he looks forward to being in the open air. He wonders how his friends are doing, and privately reflects on how lonely he feels and how hard it is to carry such a big secret.

Outside, Bigwig spots a “dreadfully mutilated” rabbit who is being paraded around as an example to the others. When Bigwig approaches the rabbit, who introduces himself as Blackavar, he asks why he’s being punished. Blackavar reveals he tried to leave the warren—and yet, he insists, the Council was “merciful” in letting him live. Bigwig walks away and rejoins Chervil, who reveals that Blackavar has been forced outside at each and every silflay for the better part of a month.

Woundwort knows something is suspicious about Bigwig's arrival from the beginning, before he's even met the rabbit. He knows Efrafa's reputation in the wild, and is shocked that a free, wild hlessi would actually want to join his regimented warren.



The Efracans know Bigwig by his Lapine name, and not a nickname—this symbolizes several things. Bigwig is ignoring the name his friends have given him in order to lessen the pain of leaving them and commit more entirely to his “undercover” identity. Though abandoning his nickname is surely painful, there is no doubt a power in returning to his roots and reminding himself of the wild freedom of the open field and the natural world of rabbits as he prepares to enter the terrifying authoritarian police state that is Efrafa.



As Bigwig gets his introduction to Efrafa, he learns that a large part of the mechanism of violence and power here is the subjugation of rabbits' natural instincts. Wild rabbits never bury their droppings, but in Efrafa, remaining out of sight of predators and men is of such importance that rabbits are forced to interrupt the behaviors that are coded into them from birth. Efrafa is literally altering not just the outward behaviors but the internal wiring of the poor rabbits who live there.



Bigwig feels the strain of his mission—and it's only just begun.



The Efracans are actively, repeatedly torturing Blackavar and pushing him towards the brink of death in order to remind all of the other rabbits that attempting to flee Efrafa is all but a capital offense. Woundwort is afraid of losing control of the warren and is using violence against Blackavar to reassert his power over all the rabbits under his command.



Chervil engages a doe named Nelthilta in conversation. She says she's getting on well and hopes that Chervil is "getting on" too—just as the recently-deceased Captain Mallow, killed by a homba, "got on." After she hops away, Chervil tells Bigwig that he's nervous about a group of cheeky does and wants Bigwig to "get to know" them and keep watch on them. Chervil tells Bigwig that if he wants to mate with a doe, he can have his pick of any doe in the Mark—they're "not officers for nothing."

Bigwig goes off to silflay, feeling perplexed and overwhelmed as to how he will ever accomplish his dangerous tasks. He knows **Efrafa** is surely full of spies, and decides he'll just have to trust his instincts. He vows to himself that if he does manage to succeed in getting the does out, he'll get Blackavar out as well, no matter how dangerous it might be. Before long, he comes upon a small group of does, and believes he overhears one of them telling a story. As he listens, though, he realizes she is reciting a poem lamenting the loss of her freedom.

Though Bigwig has always prided himself on having a tough spirit, he is overwhelmed by the suffering in **Efrafa**. At the same time, he realizes that in wishing for freedom, these does have not yet reached the edge of despair and might be incited to hope—and flight—if he can get through to them. Bigwig begins talking to the does—he already knows Nelthilta, and learns the names of the others. One is Thethuthinnang, and the other—the one who recited the poem—is called Hyzenthlay. He longs to talk with them some more, but the does are brusque and quickly excuse themselves from his company.

Towards the end of silflay, Captain Champion returns from a patrol and meets with Chervil. Bigwig listens to their conversation and discerns that Champion has not been past the iron road. Bigwig asks if they ever go beyond it, and they admit that they don't—it's too wet. Champion also informs Bigwig that in two or three days' time, once Bigwig has settled in, the General is going to take him out on patrol and show him how things are done.

Bigwig goes down to his burrow, thinking about all the obstacles that lie ahead of him. He determines that he'll need to make a break for it during the day, when Chervil is asleep and off-duty. The challenge of sneaking Blackavar out too, though, worries Bigwig. He thinks in circles until he falls asleep, and when he wakes a while later, he wonders if perhaps he can use the does' expertise to aid in the plan. He leaves his burrow and asks a sentry posted nearby to go find Hyzenthlay and bring her to him. Assuming Bigwig wants to mate, the young sentry runs off to fetch her.

Just as fascism in the human world subjugates and devalues women, fascism in the rabbit world does so too. The only weapon Nelthilta and her fellow does have against their superiors is wordplay, and even that is enough to get them in trouble.



Bigwig has only been in Efrafa a day, yet has already witnessed enormous suffering and staggering physical, emotional, and psychological violence. It is not just personally affecting, but daunting in terms of the mission that has been laid out for him, and Bigwig finds himself willing to risk even his own personal freedom to secure freedom for the Efracans.



Bigwig reminds himself not to lose hope yet, as even the Efracan rabbits who are suffering under such violence every single day have managed to retain some hope, at least.



Bigwig is collecting information from the Efracans in order to better craft an escape plan. They willingly give him information about their routines and patrols, unsuspecting of his true motives.



Again, as Bigwig calls for a sentry to fetch Hyzenthlay, he is working the system that is already in place for his own devices, managing to the avoid detection of his true motives by the others all around him.



When Hyzenthlay comes to his burrow, Bigwig calls her close to him. He can tell that she is tense and angry. He asks her if she remembers the four rabbits who came to **Efrafa** many days ago, and if she recalls talking to their leader, Holly. Bigwig tells Hyzenthlay that he is from their warren, and explains their whole journey and mission, including Kehaar's role in it. At the end of his tale, Hyzenthlay tells Bigwig that she believes him and knows he is not a spy. He asks if she will join him, and after a long while, she answers.

Hyzenthlay says that escape from **Efrafa** is possible, but beyond that, she cannot "see." She foretells confusion and fear and speaks madly about "a dog—a rope that snaps like a dry branch [and] a rabbit that rides in a hrududu." She admits that her sight is not as good as it once was. Reminded of Fiver's visions, Bigwig trusts Hyzenthlay's wisdom and asks if he can rely on her to get the other does on board. She admits there's a complication: she was one of the does who asked to leave, and now she and her friends have been separated into different Marks and placed under increased surveillance.

Hyzenthlay warns Bigwig that no one can be told of the plan ahead of time except perhaps Thethuthinnang. Nelthilta is young and gossipy, and hardly anyone in **Efrafa** can keep a secret for long. Bigwig is grateful to have made a "strong, sensible friend" who will "help to bear his burden." He tells Hyzenthlay to pick some does and have them ready to run at his signal during sunset silflay tomorrow. A bird will fight for them, he says, and even if the General and the Council come after them, they won't have to run far before they arrive at the meeting-point at a nearby river, where he and his friends have devised a trick that **El-ahrairah** himself would be proud of.

Bigwig tells Hyzenthlay of his plan to break Blackavar out as well, and Hyzenthlay admires his bravery. Bigwig asks if she can see any holes in the plan, and she replies that she cannot, but is afraid of the unexpected. Bigwig tells her that she must take a risk if she wants to be free. At the prospect of digging her own burrow, mating with whom she chooses, and bearing her litters in peace, Hyzenthlay says she'll "run any risk." Hyzenthlay heads back to her burrow, and Bigwig comforts himself in his sudden loneliness that tomorrow, he'll be back with his friends.

Bigwig knows that securing the help and confidence of Hyzenthlay—the doe who seems to have the most yearning to see the wild—is crucial to his mission, and that winning her trust may make or break the plans that are already in motion.



Hyzenthlay is committed to helping Bigwig but is worried because she and her friends' rebelliousness has already brought them under close watch. The mission will be more complicated than it would be if the does had remained complacent. This is how violence and power work in Efrafa: by making escape or dissent so difficult that many just give up rather than risk more punishment or surveillance.



Though Bigwig has made a friend and found a confidant, he has to be careful about who else he brings into his circle of trust. Still, his worry and anxiety are replaced by excitement and newfound motivation as a result of Hyzenthlay's enthusiasm and support.



This passage shows that even for a rabbit like Hyzenthlay, who has been beaten down and subjected to unimaginable violence, the prospect of freedom is worth any risk, any pain, any punishment.



CHAPTER 36: APPROACHING THUNDER

Bigwig wakes up to find Avens standing over him. The officer tells him it's time for silflay and asks who Fiver is. Bigwig asks what Avens is talking about, and Avens replies that Bigwig was saying the name in his sleep. Bigwig says that Fiver was a rabbit he knew once who could foretell the weather. Avens asks if Bigwig himself can tell what's coming on the wind now—Bigwig sniffs and picks up the scent of bad weather approaching.

Above ground, Chervil greets Bigwig and asks if the weather worries him. Bigwig admits that it does, but Chervil says it shouldn't break until tomorrow evening. Chervil and Avens cheekily ask Bigwig about having brought Hyzenthlay to his burrow—they ask if he got any information out of her, and Bigwig replies that he'll need to “keep at it.”

Bigwig spends the rest of the silflay looking around the yard and trying to find the best way to attack Blackavar's escort and make it away with the poor rabbit in tow. As he looks around he spots Kehaar in the grass, and slowly, inconspicuously makes his way over to the bird. They converse quietly with their backs to one another so as not to draw any attention. Bigwig tells Kehaar that tonight at sunset he is breaking out with the does. Kehaar tells Bigwig that the boat is still in the river, and ready to go. Bigwig points out the sentries and orders Kehaar to attack them as soon as he sees Bigwig go into the burrow to retrieve Blackavar. Kehaar promises to fly at the sentries and make sure they don't stop Bigwig, Blackavar, or the does.

Chervil approaches, and as he does, Kehaar flies away. Chervil asks why Bigwig was taking a risk getting so close to a dangerous gull—in answer, Bigwig gives Chervil a playful cuff and remarks that he can defend himself. Chervil remarks that though Bigwig can take care of himself, it's odd for a gull to be in the countryside out of season, and says he's going to report the sighting—everything unusual in **Efrafa** must be reported at once.

After Chervil leaves, Bigwig goes back to the hollow to find Hyzenthlay. She is with Thethuthinnang, and he informs them of the plan he's made with Kehaar. He urges them to get the does together at the start of silflay later in the evening—they will run for a stone arch in an embankment several hundred yards away at Bigwig's signal. Bigwig spends the rest of the day exploring the burrow and, with Chervil's permission, the fields above ground. When it is time for evening silflay, Bigwig steels himself and heads out with the rest of the Mark. As he returns to the field he sees Kehaar flying across the grass but is startled when a rabbit comes up behind him and asks for a word. The rabbit is none other than General Woundwort.

Bigwig's subconscious is worried about the other rabbits, and as Avens catches him dreaming, he is forced to make up a quick excuse. This is the first real moment of fear of being discovered Bigwig has had, and to symbolize this threat, Adams incorporates the simultaneous threat of slowly-approaching bad weather.



Bigwig is doing his best to affect the demeanor of a typical Efrafan officer on the outside—but on the inside, he is growing nervous about the “break” of both the thunder and his secret plan.



Bigwig is grateful to see Kehaar—to be reminded of home, of the rabbits who are still waiting for him, and of the viability of the plan they created together. Kehaar's allegiance to the rabbits and willingness to help them shows how their mission of democracy, openness, and freedom is a symbol of hope to all kinds of animals, not just other rabbits.



Bigwig did not anticipate that even if he were able to explain away Kehaar's presence, the Efracans would be so keen to report it as an unusual occurrence. Bigwig has underestimated the threat to any and all privacy within Efrafa.



Bigwig throws his plan into motion and then spends what he believes is his last day in Efrafa exploring and seeking out any cracks in the warren's security or any possible threats to the plan. At the last minute, though, everything is derailed by the arrival of Woundwort—the most powerful rabbit in the warren, and the most direct threat to Bigwig's survival.



CHAPTER 37: THE THUNDER BUILDS UP

Though Bigwig's first impulse is to turn around and fight Woundwort on the spot, he restrains himself and instead follows the general under the shade of a nearby tree. In the distance, the thunder is building up.

Woundwort asks Bigwig about his activities around the warren. When Bigwig asks why Woundwort is questioning him, Woundwort reveals that a rabbit named Groundsel, a member of the Owsla, recognized Bigwig—by the tuft of hair on his head—from an encounter with a homba in the woods some days ago. Bigwig insists he did not mean to lead the fox onto the patrol—he didn't even know they *were* a patrol—and insists he was just trying to outrun the fox and save himself. Nevertheless, he apologizes for his role in the death of an **Efracan** officer.

Woundwort, though, has more questions. He asks what Bigwig knows about a group of strange rabbits that have been traversing the countryside. Bigwig admits he saw their tracks, but was not travelling with them, and has no idea where they might have gone. Bigwig hopes that his questioning is over, but Woundwort has yet another thing to inquire about: he wants to know why Bigwig wasn't afraid of the bird in the field this morning, and why he went so near it. Bigwig makes up a lie on the spot: he says that he wanted to "impress" Chervil with his bravery. Before letting Bigwig go, Woundwort asks him to keep an eye on Hyzenthlay and to report anything he hears about the does rebelling.

Out in the field, Hazel, Fiver, Kehaar, and the others wonder why Bigwig is not in place for the plan to unfold. They worry he's been captured or killed. Fiver, though, insists Bigwig was probably detained for an inconsequential reason. Hazel sadly admits that they'll need to give the plan up for the night—Pipkin hopes that tomorrow Bigwig will be ready. Hazel says that he will be—but if he isn't, Hazel himself will march into **Efracfa**.

Bigwig and Hyzenthlay snuggle together in Bigwig's burrow—he is exhausted with nerves, having realized how powerful and informed Woundwort truly is. He begins to worry that Woundwort is onto the whole plan and is waiting for an opportune time to make an arrest. Hyzenthlay admits that she is upset, too—she and Thethuthinnang told the other does about the plan, and she is sure by sunset tomorrow it will have leaked. They could all be arrested, she says, by tomorrow morning. As they fall asleep, Bigwig vows that if they are apprehended by the Council, he will fight them with everything he has. He will not let them make another Blackavar out of him.

The thunder builds up more intensely as Bigwig is forced into a truly pressurized situation: a one-on-one with Woundwort.



The discovery of Bigwig's role in the recent fox attack raises suspicion about who he really is, and whether he is really a dedicated member of Efracfa. Bigwig assures the General that it was a mistake made in earnest—but is afraid of whether or not the imposing rabbit truly believes him.



Bigwig is good at lying on the spot and keeping his undercover identity well-protected. Woundwort, though, is growing suspicious, and Bigwig knows that he cannot hold off such a powerful, well-informed adversary for too much longer.



A hitch in the plan creates nerves and anxiety on the other side, too, and Hazel begins preparing to take drastic measures if need be.



Bigwig and Hyzenthlay, concerned though they are about being discovered any moment, decide to take their chances on the original plan for escape. They know, though, that if caught, they will need to fight tooth and nail—and even surrender their own lives—to avoid being trapped in Efracfa in a never-ending cycle of violence and humiliation for the rest of their lives.



Bigwig wakes alone around dawn and heads out to the entrance of the warren. He talks with the sentry about the bad weather—the thunder still has not yet broken. Bigwig wonders if he should take advantage of the oncoming storm and make a break for it but cannot decide what to do. He begs Frith to send him a sign.

At silflay, Nelthilta makes a remark to Chervil about staying sharp in case of a “surprise.” Bigwig attempts to distract the Captain by asking him to look at see if he’s gotten a thorn stuck in his paw, but as Chervil starts to examine Bigwig’s foot, he spots Kehaar again. He orders Bigwig to keep away from the bird. Bigwig tells Chervil that the way to get birds to fly away is to sing a charm: To Kehaar, Bigwig loudly sings the words “O fly away, great bird so white, and don’t come back until tonight.” Kehaar leaves, and Bigwig feeds while Chervil patrols the yard.

Later that morning, Bigwig gets the chance to talk to Blackavar alone in the field. He tells him that he is a secret enemy of **Efrafa**, and that tonight, an escape is happening. He warns Blackavar not to do anything until the time comes, but to be ready. When an officer sees Bigwig talking to Blackavar alone he approaches them and threatens to report Bigwig, but Bigwig blithely returns to the burrow. He misses Hyzenthlay but decides that it would be best if they’re not seen together during the day.

CHAPTER 38: THE THUNDER BREAKS

Back at the riverbank, Hazel tries to imagine what is going on in **Efrafa**. He goes over Bigwig’s report with Kehaar again and again, fretting about how the weather will affect the plan. Silver insists that Efracans don’t change their schedule according to the weather. Hazel wants to get a head start and set off for the iron road, the meeting-point during the escape, but Blackberry says getting there too early could result in their getting caught by a Wide Patrol. Fiver says that Hazel, with his bad leg, should actually stay behind, and get to work gnawing the rope holding the boat in place so that it’s ready to snap in an instant. Anxious, Hazel replies that if Bigwig doesn’t come tonight, he will go into Efrafa himself and find him.

Bigwig is becoming desperate and losing sight of what he should do. The approaching weather, which threatens to break at any moment but will not, directly mirrors Bigwig’s anxiety and indecision.



Several factors threaten to derail Bigwig’s plan entirely, and he is desperate to stay in control of things. He resorts not to violence, as is his usual modus operandi, but instead employs trickery worthy of Hazel or even El-ahrairah himself.



Bigwig, with just hours to go until his escape, is becoming a little bit more reckless—but at the same time, he knows that to draw too much attention to himself would be to ruin his chances. He is sick of being in Efrafa, and longs to return to being his brash, bold self.



By providing glimpses of what’s happening back at the river with the other rabbits, Adams creates a more pressurized, compelling sense of anxiety. He shows how deeply Hazel cares for Bigwig, and how committed they both are to pulling off this mission even if it means risking their own lives.



Bigwig wakes up to Hyzenthlay urgently calling his name—she tells him that Nelthilta has been arrested by Chervil and two other Council members. Bigwig sends her to get Thethuthinnang and the others and bring them to the burrow, then wait quietly for Bigwig to return. Hyzenthlay goes, and Chervil soon approaches from the opposite direction. He says that after his report to the Council member Vervain earlier about Nelthilta's odd remark, she was arrested, and will soon be made to talk. As Chervil has to go to Council, he says, there will be no silflay, and all holes will be double-guarded.

Bigwig, thinking fast, asks if Avens has been informed yet. Chervil says he doesn't have the time and instructs Bigwig to go inform all the sentries himself. Everyone is worried, Chervil says, about a plot to stage a breakout. Bigwig hurries up to the sentries near the entrance and tells them that silflay is to be early tonight on account of the weather, and that they are to get on with it at once. Bigwig orders the sentry to retrieve Blackavar, and then returns to his own burrow, where he retrieves Hyzenthlay, Thethuthinnang, and several other does. He explains the plan and begs them not to go tharn—their lives, he says, depend on it.

Bigwig returns to the entrance, where the guards have brought up Blackavar. Bigwig apologizes, stating that he's brought them up for nothing—silflay has been cancelled due to the weather. As the other rabbits go outside to look, Bigwig slips between them and Blackavar, and then gives the signal. He attacks the sentry and they begin fighting. Meanwhile, Blackavar and the does run up and out of the warren. Bigwig knocks the sentry flat and catches sight of Avens in the burrow, looking on in horror.

Bigwig runs for the edge of the field as thunder sounds in the valley beyond. Bigwig is grateful for the storm—he believes it will help him “defeat **Efrafa**.” As Bigwig and the others make their way across the field they hear alarms being sounded back at the warren. The rain begins to fall, which Bigwig knows will make tracking their group difficult. He and Blackavar lead the does to a nearby hedge—as they approach the meeting-place, Bigwig prays that Hazel and Kehaar will be waiting.

Back in the warren, Nelthilta is being beaten by Vervain and made to reveal all the details of the breakout plan to Woundwort. She tells them about the plan to use a bird in the attack—Woundwort realizes that Bigwig is behind the attack just as Avens comes rushing into the meeting to declare that the new officer has fled with a crowd of does, and Blackavar as well. Woundwort tells Chervil, Vervain, and Avens to follow him, and together they set out to follow Bigwig's trail across the field.

Two major obstacles to Bigwig's plan emerge. The arrest of Nelthilta and the increased security—plus the derailment of silflay—threaten to completely quash Bigwig's last chance at getting everyone out of Efrafa. The “thunder,” the approach of which has mirrored Bigwig's mounting anxiety and momentum, is indeed about to break.



The Efrafan officers don't suspect Bigwig's role in the breakout plot—yet. He has a few precious minutes to set his plan in motion and begs his co-conspirators to remain sharp and confident as the moment of truth approaches.



Bigwig is lying blatantly to everyone he comes across—he knows it is only a matter of time before the truth of what he's up to is revealed and decides to take quick action and set the escape in motion rather than try any more trickery.



Bigwig is grateful for the storm, but nervous about everything else falling into place. The breakout has begun, but there is still a lot of ground to cover—and a lot of room for error—before they all arrive safely at the river.



Nelthilta ultimately broke and revealed Bigwig's secrets, just as Hyzenthlay worried she might—but it is not her fault, as the violence and punishments in Efrafa are fearsome things capable of breaking even the strongest.



Bigwig comes to the iron road but sees no sign of Hazel or Kehaar. He feels troubled and can see that the does—confused that the plan they were informed of has not come to fruition—are getting scared, too. Bigwig orders them to follow him, promising they'll be safe soon, and begins taking them all down the path which leads to the river. Soon, Champion appears beside him and cuts him off. Bigwig tells Champion to go away—he doesn't want to have to hurt him.

Champion points out that Bigwig is bleeding badly from an injury he sustained in his fight with the sentry—when the others catch up, he says, Bigwig is done for. Bigwig tells the others to ignore Champion and keep going—he's only trying to slow them up. Thethuthinnang, though, cries out—she has spotted the general. As Bigwig turns around and spots the giant rabbit, he feels fear in his heart as Woundwort, Chervil, Avens, Groundsel, Vervain, and several more make their approach.

Woundwort calls Bigwig a “dirty little beast” and threatens to kill him. Bigwig says he'd like to see the “crack-brained slave-driver” try. Woundwort tells Vervain and Champion to “put [Bigwig] down” and orders the rest of his officers to get the does back to the warren. Bigwig tells Woundwort he's not fit to be called a rabbit and asks for Frith to curse him and his Owsla. Right at that moment, a huge bolt of lightning comes down from the sky, along with a clap of thunder. The rain begins pouring, and the **Efracfans** stand immobilized in shock and fear. Bigwig takes advantage of the distraction and urges Blackavar and the does to run. Woundwort, though, advances on Bigwig, announcing that he is going to kill him.

At that moment, Bigwig hears the sound of Kehaar's call—within seconds, Kehaar is on Woundwort, striking and wounding him. Bigwig feels dazed and dreamy, and senses all of the commotion happening around him as if it is happening at a great distance. As Bigwig becomes aware of the presence of Silver, Acorn, Dandelion, and the others, he urges them to help get the does to the river. Silver tells Bigwig to go with them—Blackberry and several others have remained at different points along the trail to help the group find their way.

Bigwig dashes for the river, catching up with Blackberry and Bluebell along the way. The **Efracfans** are hot on their tail and are attempting to head them off before they reach the river. Bigwig tells Kehaar to fly ahead and see if he can spot them—he returns quickly to announce they are hiding under the bridge, waiting to surprise Bigwig and the does. Kehaar points out, though, that the Efracfans do not know about the boat.

The plan Bigwig set in motion has not happened the way he thought it would, and he is losing the confidence of the Efracfans, who are used to strictly regimented routines and following direct orders.



Bigwig and the others are surrounded suddenly by the most powerful rabbits in all Efracfa. Bigwig never envisioned something like this happening and is relatively unprepared to do much other than scrap for his life.



In a callback to the story of El-ahrairah and the Black Rabbit of Inlé, a force beyond any of the rabbits' comprehension strikes fear into the hearts of those attempting to oppress and harm them. Whether or not the lightning bolt and accompanying thunderclap were truly sent by Frith himself, forces unseen have combined in the rabbits' favor.



As the violence reaches a fever pitch, Bigwig doesn't exactly go tharn, but nevertheless has a moment of dissociation in which he can hardly comprehend or keep up with the reality of what is happening around him. The plan has gone south quickly, and a mad dash for the river is the group's only chance at survival.



As the rain falls and the rabbits make a mad dash for the river, they are overwhelmed, confused, and desperate to try to stay one step ahead of the Efracfans against all odds.



Bigwig arrives at the boat but finds that his friends are having trouble getting the does to board it. Bigwig tells the does it's okay—but when one of them screams in fear, he sees that Campion, Vervain, Chervil, and Groundsel are closing in. The doe runs for cover in the undergrowth, but Woundwort jumps out and strikes her. She runs onto the boat. Bigwig realizes that Woundwort is indeed a skillful general who has been able to retain control of his officers in the midst of a rainstorm, and simultaneously anticipate Bigwig's every move. In a strange moment of clarity, Bigwig understands why Woundwort's officers are so devoted to him.

Bigwig jumps onto the boat, hoping Woundwort doesn't know what it is and hasn't realized what they're going to use it for. Frightened by the appearance of Woundwort, all the nervous does rush onto the boat at once, as do the **Watership Down** rabbits. The only one missing is Dandelion. Hazel says they'll have to leave him.

Bigwig spots Dandelion crouching in the undergrowth. Woundwort begins giving his men orders. Bigwig distracts them by pretending to catch sight of Kehaar in the sky—when they all look up, Dandelion rushes onto the boat, and Hazel snaps the rope. As the boat flies down the rushing river, Bigwig sees Woundwort's shocked face staring after them.

In this passage, Bigwig expresses for the first time a kind of horrified admiration for what Woundwort is able to do. His regime of violent authoritarianism has given him total control over his people, and even if they are loyal to him for the wrong reasons, their willingness to follow his every command is impressive in a twisted way.



A tense and fraught moment threatens the mission—Woundwort seems ready to attack any second, and Dandelion may have to be left behind.



Despite all of the failures, missteps, and pitfalls, the rabbits have successfully executed their plan. They drift down the river towards home, having—for now—outwitted and outrun the Efrafans.



CHAPTER 39: THE BRIDGES

The ride on the river is relatively smooth, and the boat flies quickly downstream while the rabbits hang on. There is no celebration or joy, though; the rabbits are too traumatized by all they've been through and feel only the dullest measure of relief. Bigwig has collapsed onto his side, exhausted and wounded from his fight with the sentry. Bigwig tells Hazel how difficult and terrible the escape was, and Hazel reassures him that their "children's children will [at least] hear a good story."

Kehaar appears and points out that there is a bridge up ahead—unable to steer the boat, he warns them, they may get stuck. Their little boat barely clears the bottom of the bridge, and a doe is injured when her back scrapes the rough wood. Downstream, they encounter a second bridge. As they approach, the boat, turned sideways, is stopped by one of the central culverts. They have gone about half a mile, and now must find a way to get off and get to shore.

The rabbits are so traumatized by the violence they have both witnessed and been victim to that they can hardly celebrate their victory, and can only vaguely begin thinking about the future of their group.



The boat was effective in getting the rabbits away from the Efrafans quickly and preventing their pursuit, but it is dangerous in other ways, and soon the rabbits are stranded in the middle of the river.



Kehaar urges the rabbits to jump into the river and swim. Though they are afraid, Kehaar shows them that if they pass through the culvert, they will come out the other side where the water is still and smooth. Fiver volunteers to jump first, but as he approaches the prow, the rabbits hear men's voices on the bridge. They freeze, and the voices diminish as the men move along. Hazel urges all the rabbits to jump into the water quickly to avoid being caught by men.

Fiver, Hazel, Pipkin, Blackavar, and the others make their way through the culvert to the pool beyond and decide to rest on the riverbanks. Blackavar and Hazel, realizing that many rabbits are still sitting nervously on the boat, scamper along the riverbank to the other side of the bridge and shout to the rabbits that there's no time to lose. It takes a long time to get the ten frightened does off the boat, under the bridge, and up onto the banks, but all of the rabbits are safely on the other side by nightfall—except Bigwig.

After fu Inlé, the injured Bigwig slowly makes his way downstream with the help of Silver and Fiver. When he arrives exhausted on the bank, he says he needs to sleep, and Hazel helps him find a warm, dry fallen trunk where they can all settle in for the night.

CHAPTER 40: THE WAY BACK

In the morning, Hazel learns that one of the **Efracfan** does—the one who grazed the first bridge—has died in the night. They all lament her death, and Hazel begins to worry about the fate of the group. With Kehaar soon to leave, Bigwig's injury, and his own bad leg, he worries that the burden of shepherding the does back to **Watership Down** will be too much for their group to bear. At the same time, they cannot stay where they are much longer—the does are distraught over their loss, and the sounds of passing hrududil are agitating them even further.

Hazel and Bigwig approach Kehaar, who announces that he is going to take off for the "Peeg Vater." They thank him for his help and his loyalty and tell him that he can find them on **Watership Down** whenever he returns to the hills. As Kehaar spreads his wings and flies away, Bigwig says that he hopes he himself can see the Big Water someday, too.

After saying goodbye to Kehaar, the rabbits begin making their way north. Bigwig and Hazel are both slowed by their injuries, and the does know little of life as a hlessil; they have to be taught how to move, how to catch scents, and how to shelter themselves. Blackavar, a capable and intrepid rabbit "when not crushed by humiliation and ill-treatment," becomes essential to their group's survival during the days-long journey.

The rabbits are beset on all sides by threats. Adams shows how even though the rabbits have confronted one kind of violence, for wild rabbits out in the open, there is always another kind of danger lurking around the corner.



The Efracfan does, having never been outside of their warren and totally unaccustomed to these new threats and dangers, have a difficult time believing that they will be able to overcome the natural obstacles around them.



The rabbits at last are able to relax a bit and get some rest, coming to a brief stopping point in their seemingly endless journey.



There is no rest for the weary, and Hazel, as Chief, hardly ever has more than a moment of respite before the next threat approaches. He knows that he will somehow have to motivate a band of exhausted, tired rabbits to push forward into the unknown, and the task daunts him despite all he has been through.



Kehaar is leaving, and the rabbits will have to make do without him going forward. They will miss their friend, but it is time for him too to return home where he belongs.



As the group begins making their way home, things are difficult, but not impossible, and Hazel and the others are pleasantly surprised by how helpful and useful some of their new Efracfan comrades are.



Late one afternoon, Hazel suggests the rabbits stop to rest for the night. Fiver, though, has an odd feeling, and Blackavar warns Hazel that they are in “fox country”—not even **Efracan** Wide Patrols would dare traverse this territory. Bigwig, surly due to his injury, teases Blackavar for his “Efracan scoutcraft act.” Hazel stops the quarreling and enters a firm decision: they will stop here to rest, as it’s clear that everyone is exhausted on edge. The group sets to work digging scrapes, and after a night of rest, everyone does indeed feel better.

The next morning, the group catches the familiar scent of rabbits—they believe they have gotten Holly’s scent. The rabbits are happily talking about home when suddenly a fox runs up and snatches away one of the does. The rabbits all dash for cover, and lament that the **Efracan** does’ instincts, weakened by life in the Mark rotation, are not able to save them in times of danger.

The rabbits quickly move on. Bigwig apologizes to Blackavar for not listening to him and teasing him. Blackavar insists he doesn’t know what Bigwig is talking about and hops away. Hyzenthlay explains that in **Efracan**, if a rabbit gave advice and it wasn’t accepted, he immediately forgot it and adopted whatever was decided instead.

That afternoon, the rabbits come to a familiar place, and Hazel realizes that if they press onward they will be in the Honeycomb by night. As they stop to forage for food, they suddenly come upon four **Efracans**. One of them is Champion, and though Hazel tells him that their business with Efracan is finished, Champion demands they hand over Hyzenthlay and the other does. Silver—bluffing wildly—approaches Hazel and Champion and informs them that he has “sent for the white bird.” Hazel tells Champion that their band is no match for Hazel’s own large group, and he sees in Champion’s face that Champion knows he is right.

Blackavar approaches Hazel and whispers that they must kill the officers—they must not be allowed to return to Woundwort and make a report. Hazel, though, doesn’t feel he has either the strength or the heart for a fight. He orders Blackberry and Silver to take the does and move on and tells Champion to take his patrol and return to **Efracan**. Surprisingly, Champion and the others relent, and the group moves onward.

Though there is a little bit of tension as the journey reaches a difficult moment, Hazel is, as always, able to settle things calmly and democratically by doing what is best for the group.



The rabbits’ journey home is long and difficult, and for every happy moment of anticipation and relief there is a moment of pain, loss, and harsh reality.



The rabbits from Efracan still bear the psychological scars of their painful past, and it will take a long time for them to heal.



The rabbits are nearly home—but the dangerous part of their journey is not over yet. The Efracans have caught up with them, and remain indignant and angry about the “theft” of the does. At the same time, Hazel and his group, having been victorious back at the river, have the physical and emotional advantage over the beaten Efracans.



Hazel is sick of violence. Even though Blackavar, from experience, knows that swift and merciless violence is the quickest way to power and control, Hazel does not want to fight anymore, and decides, in a show of good faith, to let the Efracans go.



Soon, Blackavar reports that he has seen two strange rabbits nearby—Hazel and Dandelion go off to investigate and are thrilled to find Buckthorn and Strawberry playing at the foot of a hill. The reunion is happy, and Hazel excitedly returns to the group to tell them the coast is clear—they’ve made their way home at last. That night, they all pile into the Honeycomb—unaware that Champion has followed them, tracked them to their down, and is now returning to **Efrafa** to gather more troops.

The Watership Down rabbits at last joyfully return home, believing that their trials and troubles are over. The threat of Efrafa, however, looms in the distance, and there will be more fighting before the novel is over.



CHAPTER 41: THE STORY OF ROWSBY WOOF AND THE FAIRY WOGDOG

The dog days of summer descend, and **Watership Down** is thriving at last. The **Efracan** does have dug out new runs and burrows, and everyone finds themselves bonded more closely together—even in times of brief quarrels or conflicts—by all they have endured and built together.

The free, open, democratic society at Watership Down is thriving, and the rabbits are strong physically, ideologically, and emotionally because of their difficult journeys.



One afternoon, the rabbits gather in the Honeycomb for a story. Bluebell suggests telling stories of their adventures in **Efrafa**, but Dandelion wants to tell a story about **El-ahrairah**. After their encounter with the Black Rabbit, El-ahrairah and Rabsuttle find themselves hlessils, making their way through frosty fields in the middle of winter. While passing through the outskirts of a town, they decide to raid a farmer’s vegetable garden—but find that it is snared all around, and too dangerous for even El-ahriarah’s cunning.

In the final El-ahrairah tale in the novel, El-ahrairah and Rabsuttle have emerged from the clutches of death and are soldiering on, even considering getting up to their old tricks—just like the Watership Down rabbits.



The farmer has a dog: Rowsby Woof, the most “malicious, disgusting brute that ever licked a man’s hand.” Rowsby is in charge of patrolling the garden and is known to kill any animal that comes near it. Nevertheless, **El-ahrairah** and Rabsuttle decide to chance the garden. When they get close, they see the farmer cutting up some cabbages and bringing them inside to avoid the frost. They try to get into the garden while he’s busy, but Rowsby Woof comes barking after them, and they flee.

Even up against a dangerous foe like Rowsby Woof, El-ahrairah and Rabsuttle are so confident in the skills they have honed together throughout their journeys that they choose to challenge him anyway.



The next day, a hrududu loaded with cabbage goes by the place where Rabsuttle and **El-ahrairah** are hiding. When a bag falls off the back of it, the rabbits are excited at the prospect of having a cabbage land in their lap but are saddened to find the bag holds only meat. They decide to take the meat anyway, knowing it’ll be of some use to them. On the way home, they come across a scrap of tire in the road, and gnaw off a lump of that, too, to take back to the warren. Realizing that the tire is the color and texture of a dog’s nose, the two devise a plan.

El-ahrairah realizes that he will have to get up to one of his classic old schemes if he is to infiltrate Rowsby Woof’s territory. He has been through a lot, but his cunning has not been dulled, and neither has his drive for danger and adventure.



That night, they sneak close to the farmer's house. They see that Rowsby Woof has been left out in the cold and is shaking and miserable. **El-ahrairah** crouches on the other side of the fence, sticks the rubber nose through, and, in a strange voice, calls Rowsby Woof's name. El-ahrairah declares himself the Fairy Wogdog, "messenger of the great dog spirit of the East." He begins describing the kingdom to the east in enticing, fanciful terms, and claims that the kingdom's Queen, having heard of Rowsby Woof's bravery, has sent the Fairy Wogdog to honor him.

El-ahrairah tells Rowsby Woof he must complete a test first. He tells the dog that at the other end of the garden there is a long rope of meat—Rowsby Woof must go eat it while the "Fairy Wogdog" guards the house, in order to test the dog's belief. Rowsby Woof hesitates, but then hurries away to eat the meat. When Rowsby Woof returns, El-ahrairah tells him he has passed the test and promises to come back tomorrow night with the Queen herself.

The following night, **El-ahrairah** returns once again and tells Rowsby Woof that the Queen is coming but wishes for Rowsby Woof to go to a nearby crossroads and await her. Rowsby, excited, bounds to the crossroads, and in the meantime, El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle sneak into the house's kitchen to retrieve some vegetables. While they gorge themselves, Rowsby Woof's master, coming home from town, finds him at the crossroads and leads him home. El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle hide, trapped in the house with the man and the dejected dog.

El-ahrairah, hidden behind some boxes, calls out to the dog in the voice of the Fairy Wogdog, and tells him that the Queen was delayed by the need to attend to a plague of "hateful rat goblins" which are coming for the dog and his master. El-ahrairah tells Rowsby Woof that if he runs around the house four times, barking as loud as he can, he will be able to ward off the goblins. Rowsby runs to the door and begins barking like mad. Soon the man comes to the door and lets him out, and he begins running around the house yelping. The man follows him, and El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle make their escape.

El-ahrairah knows that the fastest way to ingratiate himself to Rowsby Woof is through flattery and fancy. He cannot hope to outrun the dog or fight him, but he can entice him by dangling a reward in front of him. The rabbits will soon draw from the skills shared in this story in their own lives, though they don't know it yet.



El-ahrairah is playing the long con here—he does not leap at the chance to raid the garden the second the dog leaves his post, knowing that it is important to first secure the dog's trust. This story also shows the rabbits the virtue of patience and skill—a virtue that will soon be tested.



There is a snag in El-ahrairah's scheme, just as there were several snags in the rabbits' plan back at Efrafa—but just as they overcame unforeseen circumstances, so too will El-ahrairah.



El-ahrairah once again uses his cunning and trickery to outwit those around him and secure his own safety and prosperity. The rabbits will learn from this tale that they can find ways to use the natural world around them—even the dangerous parts of it—to their advantage.



CHAPTER 42: NEWS AT SUNSET

Dandelion finishes his story and heads up above ground to relieve Acorn from his sentry post. Hazel and Bigwig go with him, and on the way, they run into the mouse Hazel saved long ago. The mouse, in its broken Lapine, says something about “a new a rabbits a come, soon is another warren a more.” Hazel asks the mouse what he means, and the mouse quickly begins backpedaling, stating that there are “no other rabbits” around. Hazel gets close to the mouse and tells him not to be afraid and urges him to tell him the truth about whether there are any other rabbits around. The mouse confesses that his brother saw “plenty, plenty rabbits” coming over the hills the other day.

Bigwig dismisses the mouse’s story, but Hazel is determined to get to the bottom of things. He asks Holly and Blackavar to go down and check things out. Speedwell comes over to excitedly announce that Clover has had a litter of kittens. Bigwig is elated, and he and Hazel begin daydreaming about how large and happy their warren will grow to be. Soon, though, Holly and Blackavar return and give the signal to take cover. Holly begins shouting for the others to fill the holes and get everyone underground—he says there isn’t a moment to lose. The hills are full of **Efracfans**. Blackavar suggests they all start running, but Hazel is determined to stand and defend his warren. Bigwig says he plans to do the same. Hazel says they should fill in all the holes and wait the Efracfans out, and immediately the whole group gets to work.

Hazel worries that their warren will not hold against the **Efracfan**’s attack, and knows that as long as Woundwort is alive, the assaults will not stop coming. He wonders if he himself should go talk to Woundwort and try to get the rabbit to see sense and call off his horde. He decides that the plan is worth a shot and to confront Woundwort alone. He tells Bigwig what he’s up to but springs off down the hill before anyone can stop him.

CHAPTER 43: THE GREAT PATROL

Down at the bottom of the hill, Woundwort is stationed with his soldiers. He has lost some authority since Kehaar’s attack and the rabbits’ escape on the boat and has had to fight against his warren’s demoralization in the face of their defeat. The day after Bigwig and the others made their escape, Woundwort called a Council meeting and demanded a strong patrol of several officers and Owsla set out to track them, and though there was some resistance to the plan, Woundwort was determined to see his will done. He had not forgotten his promise to Bigwig—that he would kill the tuft-headed rabbit himself.

The mouse Hazel saved once again proves himself useful as he warns Hazel of a group of rabbits stationed not too far off from Watership Down.



This passage shows that birth and happiness will always be side-by-side with danger and fear for the rabbits as long as the Efracfans are their enemies. They will never know any peace while Woundwort lives—and so rather than run in fear and displace his people, Hazel chooses to stay and fight for all he has worked to build.



Despite his outwardly confident show of solidarity, Hazel is inwardly worried that the rabbits won’t be able to defend themselves against the Efracfans a second time. Believing that peace could be possible, Hazel makes a brave but frightening decision to put his life on the line for his warren and confront Woundwort himself.



Adams reveals what has been going on at Efracfa in the days since the Watership Down rabbits made their successful escape. Woundwort’s reputation has suffered a blow, and his renewed offensive against the rogue rabbits is, Adams suggests, Woundwort’s attempt at restoring the awe, respect, and fear his rabbits showed him before the confrontation at the river.



After an unsuccessful few days, the rabbits at last spotted Bigwig and his group at the copse where he'd unknowingly set a fox on a Wide Patrol many days ago and followed them to their warren. This success "put an end to all opposition," and Efrafa's faith in Woundwort's ability to lead was restored. Woundwort, back at Efrafa, chose a large, intimidating group of nearly thirty rabbits to make the journey to **Watership Down** and take back the does. Though their journey was beset by elil and other obstacles, Woundwort forced his troops onward, and they soon arrived at the foot of the hill.

Now, having been spotted by Blackavar and Holly, Woundwort and his troops wait to see whether the **Watership Down** rabbits will run away or prepare to fight. As Woundwort and Champion travel to a nearby juniper tree to try and get a better look, they are approached by a small, limping rabbit—Hazel. Woundwort warns Hazel that he and the **Efracans** are going to "destroy" him and his warren, but Hazel insists they try to come to terms—if Woundwort attacks, he will lose many of his own rabbits as well. Hazel suggests their warrens live in peace, and even start a new warren at the midway point between them where Efracans and Watership Down rabbits can come together to build something new.

Woundwort rejects Hazel's proposal and denies him the chance to bargain any further. He allows Hazel to return to his warren to deliver a message—if the does aren't waiting outside the warren along with Bigwig and Blackavar by the time Woundwort gets up there, he will "tear the throat out of every buck in the place by ni-Frith tomorrow."

CHAPTER 44: A MESSAGE FROM EL-AHRAIRAH

Hazel returns to the Honeycomb, where all of the **Watership Down** rabbits are crouched in the darkness and all of the runs have been sealed. Woundwort and the others are just above ground, and Hazel and the others can hear them planning to excavate the blocked holes and drag them out. Vervain and Groundsel begin digging out the blocked holes, and Vervain, discovering an open run, sends two officers down. Silver and Buckthorn meet them and attack them—the **Efracans**, mauled, barely escape with their lives. Groundsel begins digging down into the warren and finds himself face to face with Blackavar, who viciously attacks him, and Groundsel scampers away.

Woundwort, determined to regain his warren's trust and respect, pushed his officers through danger, death, and calamity to arrive at Watership Down. He has no love or care for the individual members of his warren—he only wants to prove his own strength.



Surprisingly, Woundwort does not kill Hazel on the spot—in a show of good faith, he allows the rabbit to make his case. Hazel's proposal is wise, democratic, and most of all places trust in the ability of their two warrens to get along—Woundwort, of course, will have none of that, desperate as he is for total control by any means.



Woundwort responds to Hazel's measured, peaceful offer with the only thing he knows: the threat of more violence.



The Watership Down rabbits display force and scrappiness against the first Efracans to descend into the burrow, hoping to prove to their adversaries that they, too, are able to fight and employ violence as a means to power—at least in certain situations.



Woundwort realizes that an attack will be more difficult than he suspected. Champion suggests they lay siege to the warren and starve them out, but the impatient Woundwort rejects this plan. One of his officers suggests they dig straight down into the ground, forming a new run; they will eventually fall through the earth and land in a burrow, where they can infiltrate the warren and begin an assault. Woundwort approves the plan, and soon Hazel and the others hear the sound of scratching above them.

Blackberry worries that the roof will soon give in, even though Hazel is confident that all the digging will tire the Efracans out and dull their claws, making a confrontation easier. Bigwig suggests they evacuate the Honeycomb, get everyone into the sleeping burrows, and block the runs. Hazel knows this is only a temporary solution, but Bigwig says that by the time the exhausted Efracans dig through two enormous swaths of earth and encounter angry rabbits ready to fight on the other side, they might turn tail and go home. Hazel agrees to the plan, and the work begins.

Hazel encounters Fiver, who is not digging but listening for “something the others can’t hear.” Fiver begins going into a trance, muttering about “falling” and “cold.” Suddenly, Fiver lets out a terrible scream, and begins shouting at the others, calling them “dirty little beasts.” Bigwig urges Hazel to control Fiver before he frightens all the others. Fiver falls into a “deep stupor,” and Hazel cannot wake him.

Hazel himself begins to have a strange vision. He remembers coming to the first river with Fiver, and hearing Bigwig tell them all to hurry across as there was a dog loose in the wood. As Hazel comes out of his trance, he realizes what he must do. He tells Bigwig to get Dandelion and Blackberry and bring them to the last open run at the back of the warren. When the rabbits arrive, he tells them he has a plan, but no time to explain. He tells Dandelion and Blackberry that they’re going to follow him out of the warren and down the hill, and asks Bigwig to seal the run after they’ve gone. Bigwig begs Hazel to tell him something of the plan, and Hazel replies that he is returning to the farm “to gnaw another rope.”

Woundwort, in this passage, shows that he actively desires violence—he is too impatient and too bloodthirsty for cunning, strategic solutions, and instead wants to prove his power and strength through a direct and unforgiving show of physical force.



The Watership Down rabbits will not give up even in the face of a direct attack and begin improvising ways to hold off the Efracans and, they hope, wear them out. The Efracans are stronger—but the Watership Down rabbits are cunning and united.



As Fiver is gripped by a horrible vision, his loss of control over his own body threatens the rabbits’ safety. Soon, though, it is the limp, vulnerable Fiver the others must worry about.



Though Hazel has not had any visions like Fiver’s throughout the novel, in this moment, something Fiver sees especially strongly seems to transfer, in a way, to Hazel’s consciousness. The “vision” or memory, whatever it may be, inspires Hazel, who quickly realizes that he may, after all, have a plan to save his warren and best the Efracans for good.



CHAPTER 45: NUTHANGER FARM AGAIN

In the moments after Fiver's scream, the **Efracan** rabbits pause their digging, frightened. They tell Woundwort that there is an animal down in the burrow that is not a rabbit. The Efracans recall the way the **Watership Down** rabbits have used foxes, birds, and a strange animal which "took them away down the river" in fights before, and begin asking to go home. Woundwort, incensed by the dissention, orders his troops to continue digging.

At the edge of the field leading to the farm, Hazel, Blackberry and Dandelion review the plan. Blackberry is going to wait at the edge of the farm and, at the signal, run as fast as he can back to the warren—the plan all depends on Blackberry, Hazel says. Meanwhile, Hazel and Dandelion head down to the farm and approach the dog kennel. The dog is asleep. Hazel orders Dandelion to wait in the grass opposite the kennel. When the rope tying the dog is gnawed and Dandelion sees it fall, he is to make the dog chase him all the way down the road to where Blackberry is waiting. Dandelion says that if they make it out of this alive, they will have the makings of "the best story ever."

Hazel hops up onto the roof of the kennel. As the smell of the dog hits him, he denies his instincts, which urge him to run, and begins gnawing at the rope. It is easier than the rope which tied the boat to the riverbank, and he is nearly through it in no time. When he pauses to take a breath for a moment, he looks up and sees something that terrifies him—behind Dandelion there is a tabby cat which has spotted them both, and it is creeping nearer.

Hazel thumps on the roof to warn Dandelion, who shoots out of the grass and into the lane, narrowly avoiding the cat's pounce. The dog springs out of its kennel and the rope tears, but the kennel is knocked off balance, and Hazel falls to the ground on his bad leg. He slowly gets himself up, but as soon as he is standing he is knocked sideways by the cat, who crouches over him and speaks tauntingly: "Can you run?" it hisses; "I think not."

Woundwort refuses to allow his troops any leeway or opinions of their own. Even in the face of danger and unknown threats, he forces them to keep going in pursuit of power, domination, and a decisive show of force.



Inspired by the tale of Rowsby Woof—and the rabbits' successful use of birds, foxes, and other animals' help throughout their journey—Hazel decides to employ the help of their scariest adversary yet: the Nuthanger farm dog.



A snag in the plan threatens to derail Hazel's entire operation, and he realizes that he needs to act quickly or risk losing both a trusted friend and his warren's last chance at freedom.



As Hazel's plans so often have throughout the novel, his latest attempt at emulate El-ahrairah's trickery goes south due to unexpected events.



CHAPTER 46: BIGWIG STANDS HIS GROUND

When the digging is nearly done, Groundsel approaches Woundwort and tells him that they are about to break through into a burrow. Groundsel expresses fear about the “animal” which might lie beneath the ground. Woundwort, though, is ready for a challenge. He tells Vervain, Groundsel, and a select few others to follow him down into the burrow, where they will set to work opening a run, at which point more **Efracfans** can descend and join the fight. Woundwort jumps into the hole without hesitation and claws his way through, then tumbles into the burrow with his officers.

One of the Owsla spots a dead rabbit on the ground. Woundwort sniffs the small corpse and determines that he hasn't been dead long—he is cold, but not stiff. Woundwort wonders how the rabbit died, as rabbits don't usually die underground. Not wanting to waste time, Woundwort decides to leave the dead rabbit and move on. The burrow is still, but one of the officers detects movement on the other side of a recently-constructed wall, and the **Efracfans** begin digging at it.

On the other side of the wall, Bigwig and Holly, sensing the **Efracfans'** approach, devise a plan. Bigwig tells Holly to bury him in earth—he is going to dig his way into the floor while the other rabbits push further into the tunnels. Bigwig will jump out and surprise him. Pipkin asks what is to become of Fiver, who has been left in the Honeycomb, unconscious but alive—Bigwig laments that they will have to leave him.

Woundwort pushes his way into the run which his officers have dug open and can sense some other rabbits in the tunnel ahead of him. As he makes his way forward, the ground below him shifts—out of nowhere, a rabbit leaps up from the ground and bites him in the leg, hard. Woundwort flails and lashes, but the enemy throws him on his back. Realizing that his assailant is Bigwig, Woundwort reminds the rabbit of his promise to kill him.

Bigwig attacks Woundwort's other leg, but Woundwort throws his weight forward, and Bigwig is crushed. Woundwort collapses, though, as his bad leg gives way, and Bigwig scratches and scrapes at him as the first light of dawn slowly begins filtering through the broken roof of the Honeycomb and into the tunnel.

Though fear threatens to derail the Efracfans' attack, Woundwort himself heads to the front lines to show his officers that fear doesn't matter—all that matters is the push towards power and domination by any means necessary.



The Efracfans' presence in the Honeycomb feels like a violation. As they stand in the giant common room—the symbol of the Watership Down rabbits' desire for community, openness, freedom, and democracy—they can't possibly understand how strong the rabbits' commitment to their ideals and their home truly are, as all they have ever known is violence and fear.



Things are looking bad for the rabbits—the Efracfans are approaching, and they believe that they have lost one of their most beloved comrades. Still, they must soldier on and brave whatever is to come.



The Watership Down rabbits will not stop defending their home even in the face of the most violent, terrible rabbit they have ever known. Their commitment to one another, and to the free, happy lives they have built is intense and not easily shaken.



Even in the darkest moment of the fight between Woundwort and Bigwig, a small spill of light in the Honeycomb signals that there is still hope.



CHAPTER 47: THE SKY SUSPENDED

Dandelion runs, attempting to dodge the dog, who is close behind him, without leading him astray from the path to Blackberry. He briefly hides in a shed, but then runs back out to draw the dog onto the right path. As he runs, he realizes that the dog is getting tired. At last, he arrives at Blackberry's post, and, exhausted, drops into a ditch to hide while Blackberry, relay-style, begins leading the dog towards **Watership Down**. Blackberry too, though, has trouble keeping the dog moving in a straight line, and Dandelion joins the effort so that they can bring the dog up the down at a fast-enough speed to frighten the **Efracans**.

Bigwig defends the tunnel against Woundwort. Holly sees that Bigwig is bleeding and offers to take his place, but Bigwig insists this fight is his. Woundwort urges Bigwig not to throw his life away and offers him the chance to come back to **Efracra** and take command of any Mark he wants. Bigwig curses Woundwort, realizing that the cunning General is trying to lure him above ground to be killed. Woundwort leaps forward onto Bigwig, and Bigwig is unable to push the massive rabbit off. Woundwort bites Bigwig's neck, but as his nose has been injured, he cannot breathe, and releases the hold. Bigwig tries to get up but feels faint. When he stands again, Woundwort is gone.

Out in the Honeycomb, the exhausted Woundwort tells Vervain to finish Bigwig off. Vervain is shocked that Woundwort has been beaten. Woundwort goes to check on how the digging is going. Groundsel and the others nearly have one run open. Vervain approaches Woundwort and admits he is frightened to approach Bigwig. Woundwort calls Vervain a coward and goes off to finish Bigwig himself. Bigwig surprises him from a new vantage point, though; he is severely injured, but ready to fight some more. Woundwort is surprised as he feels fear come over him—he does not want to attack Bigwig again.

Woundwort again tries to lure Bigwig out by warning him that they'll soon have finished digging around the run, but Bigwig states that he will defend this run until his death because his Chief has told him to. Woundwort is shocked—he had assumed that Bigwig was the Chief of **Watership Down** and wonders how big and terrifying their real Chief must be. Woundwort retreats to gather his full forces and bring them down to fight. When he returns to the Honeycomb, though, a small rabbit is standing there. Woundwort tells Vervain to kill him, but as Vervain approaches the small rabbit, the little one speaks up. He says he is sorry. Vervain asks the rabbit what he is sorry for; the small rabbit answers, "For your death." Vervain, filled with horror, flees up a nearby run.

Blackberry and Dandelion have been given a difficult, dangerous task—but they do not let their fear get the better of them, even in the run's most trying moments, because they know that the fate of their warren depends solely, in this moment, upon them.



Bigwig and Woundwort are true adversaries—though Hazel is the leader of Watership Down, Bigwig is its bravest physical defender, and he has a personal bone to pick with Woundwort after witnessing the violence, pain, mutilation, and destruction the rabbit has wrought on his own people. Bigwig is determined to finish Woundwort himself not just because he's been given orders to defend the run, but because he wants to see the evil rabbit stopped.



Though Woundwort has put up a good fight, he is weakening, and even his officers know it. Woundwort himself is aware of having been bested, in earnest, for the first time by Bigwig and the others, and is shocked by his own decimated emotional, physical, and psychological state.



In this passage, the Watership Down rabbits, knowing that they cannot win in a physical fight, try some psychological warfare instead in a last-ditch effort to save their home from the Efracan invaders. Both Bigwig and Fiver—separately, but around the same time—manage to emotionally and psychologically upend their opponents, inspiring fear, doubt, and confusion in the highest-ranking rabbits in all Efracra.



Above ground, Woundwort struggles to contain his troops' fear and desire to retreat. Suddenly, Campion dashes around the corner and tells them all to run for their lives. Two **Watership Down** rabbits streak past—close behind them is a great black dog. The **Efracfans** flee, but Woundwort stands his ground. As it springs upon him, they hear him yelling, "Come back, you fools! Dogs aren't dangerous! Come back and fight!"

The Efracfans have been defeated—both outfought and outwitted—but only Woundwort refuses to see that the end is nigh. His infamous, once even admirable refusal to cower in the face of a threat from elil is, in this passage—at least seemingly—his certain downfall.



CHAPTER 48: DEA EX MACHINA

A little girl named Lucy awakens to a sharp sound from outside. It is Thursday, and Lucy wonders what the day will bring. She knows her father will go to the market, and the Doctor will come to see her mother. Lucy hears another sharp sound and jumps from bed to look out the window. She sees one of the barn cats with something in its mouth—a rat, she assumes. She calls to it, and when it looks up, she sees that the cat has got a rabbit, which kicks and squeals.

In this chapter, Adams provides a glimpse into the human world as the little girl who lives at Nuthanger farm, Lucy, discovers Hazel being accosted by one of her cats.



Lucy runs downstairs and shoos the cat away from the wounded rabbit. She picks the poor thing up and brings it back up to the house. Her father, on his way out, reprimands her for bringing rabbits in the house, and demands she hand the thing over. Lucy begins to cry—she does not want the rabbit to be killed. Lucy begs to bring the rabbit to the Doctor, and her father, frustrated relents. Before Lucy brings the rabbit back up to the house, her father asks her if she's seen Bob the dog—he's slipped his rope and gotten out.

Lucy clearly has a kind heart and is invested in Hazel's survival. She provides a stark contrast to the indifferent or even cruel men the novel has presented thus far. Lucy provides a bit of hope after a long period of darkness, and her kindness suggests that all is not lost in the overlap between the world of rabbits and the world of humans.



Later that morning, when the Doctor arrives, Lucy rushes out to greet him. Bob the dog is coming up the lane—his nose is scratched and his leg is bitten, and Doctor Adams suggests a "big rat" might have gotten to him. Lucy asks the Doctor to look at her rabbit, and he agrees to after visiting her mother. After giving the rabbit a once-over, the Doctor says his injuries aren't all that bad, and suggests Lucy release the wild animal out into the field. He offers Lucy to come along in the car with him and bring the rabbit to a nearby down. Lucy agrees, and together they drive down the road, stop, and release the rabbit into the wild.

The Doctor, too, is a kind man who wants the rabbit—Hazel—to live his best life free in the wild. Lucy and Doctor Adams's compassion shines a beacon of hope after a period of great darkness in the novel and suggests that sometimes the kindness of strangers can allow one to find one's way home in the end.



CHAPTER 49: HAZEL COMES HOME

With their leader gone and the threat of the dog lingering in the air, the **Efracfans** cannot renew their attack on **Watership Down**. None of them have any motivation beyond saving their own lives. Campion leads the rabbits back to Efrafa, though there are only fourteen or fifteen in the group. As they make their way back to their warren, they are set upon by elil, and lose many of their numbers, including Vervain, to foxes and stoats.

Things end poorly for the Efracfans, whose decimated troops make their way back, shell-shocked and exhausted, to a warren with no leader and no purpose. Without the violent systems of control which shaped their lives, the Efracfans have lost their sense of belonging and order.



Groundsel remains at **Watership Down**, having surrendered to Fiver after the dog's attack. A few more **Efracans** followed him in the confusion, and they, too, are welcomed into Watership Down without much fanfare—the Watership Down rabbits are too focused on their own. Bigwig is near death, and Hyzenthlay helps nurse him back to health. Hazel is nowhere to be found, and Pipkin leads a small group to Nuthanger to search for him, but they go only a short distance before running into their leader himself.

Back at the warren, Hazel immediately goes to Bigwig. Though the larger rabbit is weak and hardly conscious, Hazel tells him how proud he is of him. Bigwig jokes, in Kehaar's accent, that he has "finish Meester Voundvort," and Hazel helps him up to silflay. Bigwig, sitting in the grass, announces that he's done with fighting for good. He asks how Hazel got back to the warren, and when Hazel replies that a man drove him back in a hrududu, Bigwig does not believe him. Hyzenthlay, though, appears to corroborate Hazel's story—she reminds Bigwig of her vision back in **Efrafa**.

CHAPTER 50: AND LAST

Six weeks later, it is a fine, clear mid-October evening. Fall has come to the fields. The leaves are changing, and some insects have died off. The rabbits are readying themselves for the "hardship" of winter. Hazel and Fiver are sitting atop the down with Holly, Silver, and Groundsel. The **Efracan** survivors have been allowed to join the warren and have now adjusted to life at **Watership Down** well. Fiver has been spending a lot of time alone, and the others sense that he is now more than ever "governed [...] by the pulse of [a] mysterious world." Fiver has mated with Vilthuril and is deeply attached to her.

Hyzenthlay's new litter is playing in the grass nearby. Though does don't usually mate in high summer, there have been three litters recently as the does from **Efrafa** have begun adjusting to a more natural life. Everything about Efrafa—most notably General Woundwort—was unnatural, Holly reflects. Groundsel speaks up and says that Woundwort—whose body was never found—is not dead. He suspects that Woundwort has gone off to start another warren somewhere else, somewhere he can make a veritable army of brave, cunning rabbits again.

Watership Down is a democracy, and as such welcomes even former enemies, as long as they are committed to taking on the values of the warren. As the Watership Down rabbits recover from their battle, they are scattered and beaten but still motivated to find their leader and fight their way back to normalcy.



The chapter ends on a playful note as Hazel and Bigwig reunite, joking with one another and rejoicing in one another's presence—and the peace they have worked together to bring.



As things have settled down over the last several months, nature and balance have been restored to the warren, and the Efracans and Watership Down rabbits have come together in preparation against a shared hardship. The home they have long fought for is now a thriving community, and home to deep friendships and partnerships both old and new.



In this passage, Adams draws a concrete comparison between Woundwort and Hitler—after the Nazis' defeat, rumors that Hitler had survived and fled proliferated throughout the world.



The rabbits discuss how well **Efrafa** is now doing under Campion—things are different than they used to be, and indeed both warrens are flourishing to the point of being overcrowded. Soon, Hazel says, they ought to start a warren in between their two burrows, made half of rabbits from **Watership Down** and half of Efracans. Though Holly wonders if this will be difficult arrange, Hazel is confident that once Kehaar returns from the Big Water, he will be happy to carry the message quickly.

The rabbits wander around the down and come upon Bigwig—captain of **Watership Down**'s “free-and-easy Owsla”—teaching some young bucks about various elil. The young kits ask Bigwig to tell them tales of his grand adventures. Hazel, Holly, Groundsel, and Silver talk about how much they owe to Bigwig, and how grateful they are for him.

Bluebell and Pipkin come up from the burrows, where they've been working on repairs and construction of new winter tunnels. Pipkin asks Hazel to take a little walk with him over to the other side of the down, and as they make their way there, they reflect on all the good times and adventures they've had here. Over on the other side of the down, Vilthuril is telling her and Fiver's young kits a new **El-ahrairah** tale—one which bears a startling resemblance to the story of the war with **Efrafa**.

When the little rabbits see Hazel approaching, they leap upon him and nuzzle him, shouting “Hazel-rah!” over and over. One of Fiver's children speaks up and says a man on a horse is coming, and wonders if they should hide in the burrow—sure enough, moments later, a man on a horse rides by the bottom of the hill. Vilthuril remarks that the young rabbit often has visions—“It's Fiver's blood,” she says. After a contented look around the hilltop, Hazel spots Fiver on the edge of the hill, and urges the kittens to go get him and head down to the warm burrow so that the story can continue.

EPILOGUE

Hazel lives well past the life expectancy of a wild rabbit, which is two or three years. He sees many summers, fathers countless kits, and oversees a prosperous warren at **Watership Down**. The new warren halfway between Watership Down and **Efrafa** flourishes, too, and Groundsel is the first Chief. He does not Mark any rabbits or order Wide Patrols. Campion and Avens even deliver some Efracan rabbits to the new warren without incident.

Though neither warren will ever forget the grave war fought between them, it seems as if the Watership Down rabbits genuinely hope for the success and happiness of the Efracans and look forward to an alliance that will serve both burrows in the years to come.



The rabbits will never forget the sacrifices their friends and comrades have made for the good of their warren, or the camaraderie and trust this has created throughout their clan.



Hazel and the others' adventures are already, to the next generation, becoming the stuff of legend. Hazel looked up to El-ahrairah for his entire life, and now, his exploits are being shared disguised as the trickster hero's himself.



This passage suggests that the new generation of rabbits born on Watership Down will be blessed with the special skills of their forbears, and will spend their lives learning from the successes, mistakes, triumphs, and failures of all those who came before them as they continue the mission of creating a free, prosperous, inclusive society for all.



Hazel's influence is made clear as democracy and openness thrive throughout the rabbit communities of the countryside, and old nemeses become allies in the long, ongoing pursuit of freedom and prosperity.



General Woundwort is never seen again—but his body is never found. He becomes a legend, rumored to be the cousin to the Black Rabbit himself, and a bogeyman used in stories to scare young rabbits into behaving themselves.

One chilly March morning, Hazel is dozing in his burrow when he wakes to realize another rabbit is lying beside him. The other rabbit asks Hazel if he recognizes him, and Hazel says he does, addressing the new rabbit as “my lord.” The strange rabbit asks Hazel—who he knows has lately been feeling very tired—if he would like to come and join the rabbit’s Owsla. Hazel follows the rabbit from his warren, and leaves his body lying in the burrow. As Hazel takes one last look at **Watership Down**, his companion assures him all of the rabbits there will be all right. Together, they slip away into the woods.

General Woundwort is never forgotten, but though tales of his terror spread throughout the land, he is ultimately reduced to something of a ghost story—he has no power over the rabbits any longer.



In this passage, Hazel is approached by a rabbit spirit—likely the spirit of his idol and hero, El-ahrairah. Hazel has lived a long life and served his people well, and now it is time for him to rest, and take up an honored position defending and guarding the memory of the hero he has held so dear in life.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tanner, Alexandra. "Watership Down." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 7 Feb 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tanner, Alexandra. "Watership Down." LitCharts LLC, February 7, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/watership-down>.

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MLA

Adams, Richard. *Watership Down*. Scribner. 1972.

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Adams, Richard. *Watership Down*. New York: Scribner. 1972.