

# The Peripheral

William Gibson

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ESSAY TOPICS

## Summary

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*The Peripheral* is a 2014 science-fiction novel by William Gibson. Gibson has been writing science fiction works since the 1970s and is considered one of the founding fathers of the cyberpunk genre. His debut novel, *Neuromancer*, is one of the genre's foundational texts and is the only novel to win the *Nebula*, *Hugo*, and *Philip K. Dick* awards. Since then, Gibson has written several bestselling science-fiction trilogies. *The Peripheral* is the first novel of *The Jackpot Trilogy* and was followed by *Agency* in 2020. *The Peripheral* was adapted into a 2022 television series by Scott Smith.

The novel follows two different plot lines, one that takes place in the near future and one that takes place in the distant future. Flynne Fisher, the protagonist finds herself witnessing a crime while filling in for her brother on a security detail for what she thinks at first is a game. Having been an eyewitness to a real murder that takes place in the future, Flynne, her brother, and their friends are thrust into the unique position of communicating with people of the future. As the suspense and mystery build, the characters use what are termed peripherals as a means of time travel; thus, the present and the future worlds collide.

The guide refers to the Kindle edition, published in 2014.

### Plot Summary

The narrative follows two different plot lines and begins in the near future. Flynne Fisher is asked by her brother, Marine veteran Burton Fisher, to sub in for him on a side job at which he has been employed. The job consists of providing security detail in a video game, and since Flynne is an expert gamer, she accepts the offer. After a few shifts, Flynne witnesses a woman graphically and surreally murdered and begins to wonder if what she witnessed is actually part of the game or not.

The concurrent narrative follows Wilf Netherton, a London publicist in the distant future. One of his clients, Daedra West, is sent on a diplomatic mission to a place known as The Great Pacific Garbage Patch. While there, she is attacked by the apparent leader of the place's inhabitants and, in a measure of self-defense, has the boss killed by her security detail. Netherton, along with his colleague Rainey, suspects that this was an intentional act and that Daedra lured the boss into attacking her.

The novel begins to follow a detective story as investigator Ainsley Lowbeer attempts to piece together the disappearance of Aelita West, Daedra's sister, in future London. Having access to unlimited data, Lowbeer comes to understand that there was a witness to the crime, that Aelita was murdered, and that Flynnne is the person who can identify the killer. Lowbeer leads a mission to make contact with Flynnne via the stub, the name given to forks in time created by the transfer of information between dimensions in time. Eventually, Flynnne is contacted and offered an opportunity to interview with Lowbeer in person via a neurological transfer into an existing human-like body known as a peripheral.

As Flynnne becomes further involved in the case, it comes to light that another party has gained access to the same stub and has hired assassins to eliminate Flynnne, which forces Flynnne and Burton to demand more money. Eventually, they receive so much money that they are able to establish a shell corporation known as Coldiron USA, replete with headquarters and a fully armed security force. Their newfound wealth also affects the local economy dramatically and raises the suspicions of the local drug kingpin, Corbell Pickett. Danger becomes omnipresent, and frequent attacks are made against Burton and his gang.

As Flynnne spends more time "up the line" in future London, she and Netherton forge a friendship, which changes Netherton from a hollow figure to one who learns about himself and longs for a different world. The novel frequently alludes to an event known as the jackpot, and it is Netherton who reveals the details of it to Flynnne. Essentially, it was a catastrophic series of events that were caused by climate change. Netherton and the other characters in the future are either survivors or descendants of survivors of the catastrophe, but they are few. Eighty percent of humanity was killed off by the catastrophes.

As the novel meanders and twists toward its resolution, the interaction between the present and future increases to include the transference of Netherton into a peripheral in his past, a device called a wheelie-boy, which resembles a miniature Segway. Netherton's virtual trips to the past expose him to a natural world not evident in his own. His longing grows, and it becomes clear that he wishes for the lost world.

The novel builds toward its climax: Daedra West's party. It is assumed that the assailant who Flynnne witnessed commit murder will be in attendance. The assumption proves correct, as Flynnne, inside of her peripheral, almost immediately sees the killer after arriving at the party. A wild, hectic, and surreal scene ensues in which the villain is killed. Following the penultimate

scene, the novel offers a few chapters of addenda describing what life is like for Flynnne after her experiences with the peripheral. The same is done for Netherton, who, as the story closes, looks forward to seeing Flynnne again soon.

## Background

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### Literary Context: The Cyberpunk Genre

By many critical standards, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was the first cyberpunk novel. Thus, Gibson's work has helped to define the genre. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson pits a renegade young man, an outsider with drug problems, against mega forces that rule the world. His unique expertise in cyberspace enables him to become a kind of chosen one. The world of *Neuromancer* is a dark, hopeless place, one in which corporate control of the masses is near absolute. *Neuromancer* helped establish a lineage of the cyberpunk subgenre of science fiction. Gibson's *The Peripheral* shares many of the same tropes as his seminal cyberpunk novel, with important modifications that help push the subgenre in new directions.

One of the first hallmarks of a cyberpunk novel is that it usually involves marginalized groups of people who are empowered by their technical acumen. Flynn and Burton Fisher fit this description. Burton is a wounded veteran who may or may not suffer from PTSD. He has a short fuse and is prone to violent outbursts. He and his posse of veterans form a kind of non-conformist clique. These are not nihilistic punks in the traditional sense, but their outsider status fits the general description of punk-like characters. His sister Flynn is not the antihero archetype seen in other cyberpunk fiction. She has a clear moral conscience that informs her behavior, and while she finds herself drawn into a series of events that challenges her conception of reality, she does not stray from that code. Flynn is sometimes brash and charismatic, but she is a more developed character than many other heroes in the cyberpunk genre.

Cyberpunk novels generally have a dystopian setting, often taking place in some post-apocalyptic world. In *The Peripheral*, this is certainly the case. The novel takes place in two different worlds and two different eras. In the near future, Gibson portrays the world as sliding toward the dystopian world depicted in future London. Technology has become more than a tool for human life; it is all-encompassing. It is fully integrated into daily life and is overbearing. In the novel's future, technology shapes reality. Detective Lowbeer says at one point that nobody really knows how the algorithms work, suggesting that the singularity has been reached and humans are no longer in control of their environment. The future London portrayed in the novel examines what being human really means when technology becomes so omnipresent.

*The Peripheral* leans on many other cyberpunk tropes as it weaves together two different plots. It explores posthumanism, portrays the limits of cybernetics, and has an old-fashioned detective story at its core. Significantly, the novel also describes the world after climate change has destroyed most life on the planet. The catastrophe that destroys civilization is not a singular, dramatic event, but one that takes place gradually. By the time civilization decides to do something, it is already too late. This creates an inherent tragic undercurrent in the novel, and it is elaborated upon rather than treated cursorily. Generally, *The Peripheral* fits into the cyberpunk subgenre of science fiction and pushes it in new directions.



## Chapter Summaries & Analyses

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### Chapters 1-15

#### Chapter 1 Summary: "The Haptics"

The opening chapter introduces Flynne Fisher and her veteran brother Burton. Flynne is visiting Burton at his home, a 1977 Airstream trailer, the inside of which Burton has embalmed in a polymer that covers over everything. We learn that Burton is a former Marine and a haptic. Burton asks Flynne to sub in for him working security in a video game, a job that he has been working on the side.

#### Chapter 2 Summary: "Death Cookie"

The narrative shifts to the novel's second plot line as it introduces a hungover Wilf Netherton, who is visited by Rainey's sigil. Rainey is Wilf's boss, and the sigil is a kind of video feed that appears before Netherton. Rainey presses Netherton about his interactions with a woman named Daedra West. Both Rainey and Netherton are publicists, and West is one of their clients. Netherton had been involved in a sexual relationship with Daedra, a fact that Rainey clearly sees as a violation. While the text does not explicitly say the year, it is assumed that this plotline takes place in the distant future.

#### Chapter 3 Summary: "Pushing Bugs"

Flynne worries that Burton is planning some kind of revenge against a religious group known as Luke 4:5. She then proceeds to enter, through her phone, into the video game for which she will be working the security detail.

#### Chapter 4 Summary: "Something so Deeply Earned"

Netherton, feeling regret over his liaisons with Daedra, meets with her via a sigil. It is implied that Daedra is some kind of celebrity in this world of the future. Wilf mentions a person named Annie, a fan of Daedra's, to play to her ego.

### Chapter 5 Summary: “Dragonflies”

We learn the nature of the job Flynne is asked to perform for Burton. It involves using a quadcopter to drive away the bugs, which in this case are paparazzi, from someone’s residence on the 56th floor of a skyscraper. As Flynne pushes the bugs away, she sees the backside of a woman pressed up against the window of the building. She sees a man lean over the woman, and then the woman slips out away from him. Burton returns, and Flynne tells him what she saw.

### Chapter 6 Summary: “Patchers”

Through Lorenzo, presumably an omnipresent cameraman, (likely not a man at all but some kind of AI, Rainey and Netherton watch Daedra West’s visit to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. As the name implies, it is a giant garbage dump that has been fashioned into an island on which deformed humans live. Daedra is there to help establish diplomatic relations with the inhabitants.

### Chapter 7 Summary: “Surveillant”

Flynne is back inside the game and returns to keeping the bugs away from the building. She notices that the man and woman from earlier are no longer there. Flynne takes note of the team of robots that appear to be preparing for a party. Eventually, a woman appears and stands looking out the window.

### Chapter 8 Summary: “Double Dickage”

The boss patcher is introduced, and his visible deformities are alluded to in the title of the chapter. Netherton and Rainey watch as Daedra unzips her jumpsuit and reveals her many tattoos. The patchers take offense to her tattoos, and when the “boss patcher” begins to attack her, Daedra’s security detail immediately defends her and kills the patcher and others.

### Chapter 9 Summary: “Protective Custody”

Flynne’s shift ends, and the narrator mentions the differences between real London and the London Flynne experiences in the game. Flynne receives a call from her cousin Leon, who tells her that Burton has been locked up but not arrested by “Homes,” or Homeland Security. He apparently got into it with the religious group Luke 4:5. Leon passes a message from Burton to Flynne, asking her to work the same shift in the game.

### Chapter 10 Summary: “The Maenad’s Crush”

Netherton is at a pub and is visited by Rainey via a child peripheral, which is effectively an animated body that she inhabits to meet with Netherton in London while she is in Toronto. They discuss the fallout of the incident at the Garbage Patch. She mentions that the whole scene was perhaps an assassination, to which Netherton disagrees. Rainey explains the theory, which presumes Daedra provoked the patchers into attacking her so that her defense system could kill them. Rainey orders Netherton to make sure there are no loose ends between him and Daedra left from their sexual relationship.

### Chapter 11 Summary: “The Tarantula”

Flynne meets Shaylene, Burton’s girlfriend. She then sees Connor’s trike blow past, leaves her meeting with Shaylene, and heads to a bar called Jimmy’s. The narrator mentions that Connor is the town’s only other haptic vet and, unlike Burton, he is physically disabled, having lost a leg, a foot, an arm, and a thumb.

### Chapter 12 Summary: “Thylacine”

The narrator reveals that Netherton informed Daedra of how his friend, Lev Zubov, hires people from 2023 and the ways he pays them. He explains how time has been exploited so as not to affect the present. He also mentions the jackpot, which is not elaborated upon but suggests some kind of apocalyptic event. Netherton then finds himself in Lev’s father’s house in Notting Hill. He notices Lev’s thylacines, which have been genetically re-engineered. We learn through Lev that Daedra knows about the continua, the program that allows Flynne to act as a security detail in the future.

### Chapter 13 Summary: “Easy Ice”

Flynne finds out from Leon that Burton will be released from his confinement soon. She enters the game again and follows the same path to the building where she was the first time. This time, she recognizes the city as London, but it looks different. She sees the couple from her previous shift. This time, she is able to get a better look at the man’s face, which reminds her of an SS officer. The narrator then describes how Flynne came by the nickname “Ice,” which involves how she controls herself in the game.

### Chapter 14 Summary: “Mourning Jet”

Netherton is awakened by Ash, who is one of Lev’s security guards. Ash is covered in tattoos that move on her skin. Another guard, Ossian, also arrives. They catch Netherton sleeping in Lev’s father’s land yacht. They bring him to Lev after Ash injects a hangover remedy into Netherton. Through Lev’s sigil, we learn that Netherton was unconscious for 16 hours.

### Chapter 15 Summary: “Anything Nice”

Flynn is inside the game checking things out and notices a gray thing ascending the building, something that reminds her of an aquatic creature called a skate. It is rectangular, and as she inspects it, she notices it breathing and swelling in size. The object releases things that eventually attack the woman in the building through her mouth. As she falls from her balcony, Flynn watches as she is eaten from the inside out and disappears.

### Chapters 1-15 Analysis

Gibson establishes a few significant things in the first section of the book. First, after Chapter 2, we are aware that there are two parallel plotlines. When we are introduced to Flynn and her brother Burton, their world seems somewhat like ours currently. There are signs of invasive technology, such as the omnipresent drones that appear, but the world is not far removed from what it is now. This is especially true for the natural world. This suggests that Flynn’s world is just slightly futuristic, a few years ahead of the real world. By contrast, Netherton’s world is almost entirely artificial, as exemplified later in the chapter with Lev’s two thylacines. These pets are genetically engineered from an extinct species of tiger. Lev Zubov keeps these animals as pets, but they are not natural in any sense of the word as we understand it. Another example of the artifice of the future as portrayed in the novel is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. The real-life Great Pacific Garbage Patch is made up of extensive plastic debris in the Pacific Ocean, but it is not a solid mass. The novel’s Great Pacific Garbage Patch exists far enough in the future that enough debris has accumulated to create a new landmass, one that is inhabited by disabled humans. One more example is the so-called paparazzi that Burton has been hired to fend away inside a game. The paparazzi in the future are bug-like electronic instruments equipped with cameras. The future as portrayed by Gibson in the novel is one almost entirely overtaken by technology and the artificial duplication of the generally extinct natural world.

In addition to the parallel plot structure, Gibson is intentionally obtuse in the early sections of the novel. He does not immediately notify the reader who people are, nor does he immediately define many of the terms he uses. The novel has its own slang, and when readers first experience the slang, it can be disorienting. Context, then, becomes significant, as readers must decode what the words mean or wait for subsequent chapters when definitions appear. The term “sigil” is an example. The narrator uses it as though it’s as common a word as “tree,” saying in Chapter 2: “Netherton woke to Rainey’s sigil, pulsing behind his lids at the rate of a resting heartbeat” (5). Thus far in the novel, the reader does not know who these characters are, nor what time period it is, so this description is somewhat cryptic. Not until later do we get a better sense of what a sigil is: a neurologically embedded visual communication device akin to Zoom or Facetime. Gibson’s narrative strategy in the novel is a balancing act, in which he forces readers to pay close attention to details and only clues them in as the novel unfolds.

## Chapters 16-30

### Chapter 16 Summary: “Lego”

As Lev prepares breakfast, the hungover Netherton watches as two Lego pieces transform into different forms. Lev confronts Wilf about his drinking and suggests cognitive therapy in combination with a medical treatment known as laminates. This makes Netherton feel uneasy. Lev receives a call and informs Netherton that the Met Police have been eavesdropping on their discussions. He is also made aware that Aelita, Daedra’s sister, has been declared missing. We also learn that where she lived before the disappearance is the building for which Flynnne has been providing security detail.

### Chapter 17 Summary: “Cottonwood”

Flynnne goes to Jimmy’s bar once again. She is shaken by what she witnessed in the game, especially by how real it seemed. There is a group of five football players at the bar. Connor arrives on his Tarantula, and things get tense. The drunken football players try to start a fight with Connor, but Flynnne intervenes and gets Connor to not retaliate.

### Chapter 18 Summary: “The God Club”

Netherton and Ash discuss a want ad that was posted on the darknet, which offered an \$8 million reward for an unspecified criminal undertaking. Netherton infers that it is a murder-for-hire plot. Lev then discusses how with each interaction with a stub, future outcomes are

altered. He reveals that the ad is targeting Burton Fisher.

### Chapter 19 Summary: “Aquamarine Duct Tape”

Flynne makes her way home from Jimmy’s and is trailed by a drone. Burton and Leon are there waiting when she arrives. Burton informs Flynne that people from the game, Coldiron, have contacted him, and he asks Flynne what she saw. She tells him, and he mentions that they also told him that a hit was taken out on him. Burton then tells Flynne that Coldiron wants to talk with her.

### Chapter 20 Summary: “Polt”

Lev, Netherton, and Ash contact Burton from a land yacht to discuss Burton’s performance as a security agent. The narrator describes Netherton’s perception of Burton, identified as the polt, after the two have their discussion. A polt is someone from the past that can be contacted from the future.

Burton also responds to the information that a hit has been taken out on him by saying he’s not an easy target for something like this, hinting at his secret military background. Seeing that his intimidation of Burton is not working, Lev instead opts to bribe him by offering his cousin Leon winning lottery numbers. In exchange, he requests a discussion with Flynne.

### Chapter 21 Summary: “Grifter”

A new character appears at the start of the chapter: a man named Reese, who is a friend of Burton’s and a veteran. Reese and a few others are performing security on Burton’s home. Flynne then asks Burton about the people of Coldiron and what they look like. Flynne is skeptical of the whole operation, and Burton evades her questions as to what the whole thing is about. Finally, she talks with Netherton, who asks her to explain what she witnessed. She begins to do so just as the chapter ends.

### Chapter 22 Summary: “Archaism”

Netherton reflects on Flynne, and the narrator once again mentions “the jackpot,” though specifics are once again withheld. The conversation that was interrupted at the end of the previous chapter resumes. Flynne recounts the story in full detail and adds that the man she witnessed in the room seemed to know what was coming.

### Chapter 23 Summary: “Celtic Knot”

After the discussion, Flynne feels even more suspicious of the whole enterprise. Flynne then visits her sick mother before returning home as surveillance drones fly overhead. As she drifts off to sleep, she is haunted by images of the woman in the game’s empty clothes fluttering in the wind.

### Chapter 24 Summary: “Anathema”

Netherton and Lev discuss their perceptions of the meeting with Flynne. They both indicate, as does Ash, that nobody seems to know exactly what happened to the woman they suspect is Aelita. They discuss the mystery surrounding the hit on Burton, and Ash explains further how stubs operate. These are continuums of time through which information can be passed through different time periods.

### Chapter 25 Summary: “Kydex”

Burton arrives at Flynne’s house and asks her if she has seen Connor. She tells him about seeing Connor at Jimmy’s. Burton shows Flynne Leon’s winning lottery ticket. Burton then asks Flynne about her conversation with Netherton. Flynne receives a call from Macon in which he requests a confidential visit. As she rides her bike to Macon’s, she sees Connor fly by on his Tarantula. Flynne arrives at Macon’s, and he is joined by his associate Edward. They discuss Connor and then talk about “builders” (drug manufacturers. All the while, Edward is working on an object virtually. Flynne can see he’s working on it, but what he is making is not yet identified.

### Chapter 26 Summary: “Very Senior”

Netherton, joined by Lev, Ash, and Ossian, is visited by a law enforcement officer by the name of Ainsley Lowbeer. Immediately, it is apparent that Lowbeer knows quite a lot about these figures with whom she is meeting. Lowbeer is technologically enhanced, especially her memory, which can be used as evidence in court. Lowbeer questions Lev about the continua. Lev explains that each time they connect with the past, a new fork of causality which he refers to as a “stub” is created.

Lowbeer implies that the true reason Lev and others exploit the continua is an act of imperialism. Lowbeer then attempts to piece together the details of the boss patcher’s death, whose name we learn is Hamed al-Habib. She also attempts to gather details on the

mysterious circumstances surrounding Aelita's disappearance and finds out that Flynnne was an eyewitness. The reader learns from Ossian that the past world they are communicating with has an economy almost exclusively centered on drug manufacturing.

### **Chapter 27 Summary: "Dead Old Boys"**

Flynnne is awakened in the night by voices, one of them Burton's. He is with the deputy sheriff, Tommy Constantine, who is explaining the circumstances surrounding the killing of four men whose bodies were discovered on the road. Flynnne interrupts the conversation, and eventually, the three of them head to the crime scene. There is a flurry of activity at the scene which involves robots, AI collecting data, and traditional detectives. One CSI explains that the four men appear to have been prepared to kill someone before being killed themselves. It is implied that the dead bodies are those of the football players Flynnne saw at Jimmy's.

### **Chapter 28 Summary: "The House of Love"**

Netherton and Lev are transported to his father's "love house," presumably a place for extramarital affairs. While there, Lev informs Netherton that he had a peripheral sent to the home. Lev shows Netherton the peripheral and asks if it looks like Flynnne. Lev then explains that he sent files in the stub that will explain to Macon how to get Flynnne into the peripheral.

### **Chapter 29 Summary: "Atrium"**

Flynnne receives a call from Netherton. He asks her if the company she works at, Fabulous Fab, prints their own drones, to which she answers yes. He then asks where the printing is done and says that they will need to arrange for some to be printed, and they will provide technical support as implied in the previous chapter. Flynnne asks him if he and his group are "builders."

### **Chapter 30 Summary: "Hermes"**

Netherton remarks that while the peripheral looks like a female, it is not sentient. Netherton has been put in charge of watching over it, much to his dismay. Lev informs Netherton that though it is not sentient, at the cellular level, the peripheral is just like a human. After Lev leaves, Rainey's sigil appears. She informs him that there are suggestions that Aelita's death was revenge for the patcher's death.



## Chapters 16-30 Analysis

In the first part of this section, Gibson once again portrays the future as a place where the inanimate becomes animate. In Chapter 16, as Lev warns Netherton of an impending intervention if he does not slow down his drinking, Netherton watches two Lego pieces transform into various shapes as if alive. Additionally, we see tattoos on Ash's arms transform and move about on her skin. The world of the future here is rife with animation, though it calls into question what is alive and what is a synthetic representation of life. Meanwhile, in the novel's present, one can see the beginnings of this fusion of natural and synthetic in a multitude of ways. For one thing, Flynnne works at the Fabulous Fab, a place that essentially manufactures replicas of existing objects. This includes everything from phones to drones. There is also the example of Connor's trike, called the Tarantula, which illustrates how technology is used to supplement an amputee's ability to move around. Macon and Edward are often inserting or removing their Viz, which goes in the eye and allows the user to see multiple things at once. The world of the present, in comparison to future London, is rather archaic, but it also shows signs of being well on its way toward creating that world.

Gibson's prose style switches as he moves between the future and the present. It is as though the narrator functions in their own history. When narrating the present, oftentimes we see fragmented sentences in which the subject is often missing. Many times, the narrator omits pronouns and articles. One example is when Netherton first communicates with Flynnne: "Miss Fisher?' Just like that. Guy maybe her age, short brown hair, brushed back, expression neutral" (81). This clipped tone is common in the narrative style Gibson employs when the plot is located in the present. By contrast, when in the future, the narrative style is far less fragmented. Considering how artificial the future is, the speaking style can be considered less organic than the slang-infused dialect of Flynnne and her companions. This suggests that language, like just about everything else in the future, is mechanical and not prone to natural, evolutionary alterations as it is in the present.

## Chapters 31-45

### Chapter 31 Summary: "Funny"

Flynnne visits Shaylene, Macon, and Edward. Edward and Macon discuss the complexities of the instructions they have been given and indicate that they are not counterfeiting the device they have been tasked with making, which Edward identifies as "hands-free interface

hardware” (130. Macon adds that it allows the user to “operate things by thinking about it” (130. Edward says that the files they were sent reveal that something like this has never been built before.

### Chapter 32 Summary: “Tipstaff”

Netherton is visited by a man who turns out to be a peripheral for Rainey. They go to a bar called Maenad’s Crush, hoping to find some privacy away from the constant surveillance. Rainey, through her peripheral, informs Netherton that he is suspected of killing Aelita. She then suggests that Daedra may be framing him out of revenge for cutting off their sexual relationship. Out of nowhere, Lowbeer appears and discusses some of what she knows about the case, verifying that there is indeed a campaign afoot to frame Netherton for Aelita’s murder. As Lowbeer is about to escort Netherton out of the bar, she removes her tipstaff, which then morphs into a gun. She fires the gun, but the sound of it comes from a different area. Then, screaming is heard.

### Chapter 33 Summary: “Stupidity Tax”

Flynn and Leon are at Jimmy’s discussing his recent lottery winnings. The narrator reveals that Flynn thinks Connor likely killed the four men. A car arrives to bring them to see Burton at Connor’s place.

### Chapter 34 Summary: “Headless”

The narrator mentions what Netherton saw at the Maenad’s Crush: a man whose head exploded. Lowbeer informs him that this was not a man but a peripheral who had been specifically rented for the purpose of killing him. Lowbeer explains how the peripheral was made for the mission and that it was implanted with an explosive inside its head. When she called in flashbots to provide protection, these triggered the explosion. She mentions that the use of explosives is unusual, which makes determining the responsible party difficult. When asked how she knew that the peripheral would be at the bar, she attributes it to algorithms, or what she refers to as “Aunties.”

### Chapter 35 Summary: “The Stuff in his Yard”

At Connor’s, Flynn and Leon notice that Macon and Edward are there. They are fashioning something for Connor’s Tarantula and playing coy as to what it is supposed to be for. While there, Macon mentions to Flynn that they need a scan of her head for the device they are

printing.

Connor and Burton are inside. Connor is acting totally normal. Burton mentions that Coldiron has devised another payment method in addition to providing Leon with the winning lottery ticket. This one involves a lawyer from a town called Clanton dropping off a load of cash. Burton also provides more specifics on what Macon has been working on. Flynnne is unhappy with Burton, but she goes along and allows Macon and Edward to make a mold of her head for the interface.

### **Chapter 36 Summary: “In Spite of Everything”**

Lev and Netherton are watching the peripheral run on a treadmill. As they are speaking, Lev tells Netherton that assassins showed up in the stub and were executed by Connor before they could kill Burton. He also reveals that the assassination was snuffed out as though it had been expected. Lev says that the payoff (mentioned by Burton in the previous chapter) was made by Ossian through a drug manufacturer, who presumably took a cut.

### **Chapter 37 Summary: “County”**

Flynnne visits Janice and informs her of all that has been going on. Janice then reveals the latest payoff came from a lawyer named Beatty. Janice and Flynnne discuss Corbell Pickett, who at one time owned the last Tesla car dealership. He is also a sort of drug kingpin and tends to be the source of any and all corruption in the county. Janice informs Flynnne that Burton has given some of the payoff money to Pickett as a bribe to make the execution of the four men go away. Janice then discusses how corrupt the county truly is, all because of drug money. Essentially, the county’s economy is almost entirely built on the drug trade.

### **Chapter 38 Summary: “Stub Girl”**

Netherton, Lev, Ash, and Ossian make preparations for Flynnne’s visit in the peripheral. Netherton is clearly uneasy about the whole idea of peripherals and discusses the last time he used one when he was 10. Netherton also seems concerned for Flynnne’s well-being and wants to make sure she knows truthfully what she is there for and that she is welcomed properly.

### Chapter 39 Summary: “The Fairy Shoemakers”

Macon and Edward have exceeded their estimated time for finishing the project. When Flynnne asks about the device, Macon describes it and refers to it as a “Telepresent interface” (165). They bring Flynnne home and prepare to put the device on her. She is informed that she is not allowed to eat because what she is about to experience may make her vomit from nausea. As preparations are made, Flynnne pays a quick visit to Burton and finds out for certain that he has been paying off Pickett so that the whole affair with Connor can be covered up. Macon interrupts the conversation to get Flynnne as they are ready to hook her up to the device.

### Chapter 40 Summary: “Bullshit Artist”

Netherton and Ash talk about the various ways the peripheral was prepared for Flynnne. Netherton maintains that it does not look like her. Netherton wants to be present when Flynnne arrives because he feels responsible for her being in the situation she is in.

### Chapter 41 Summary: “Zero”

After final preparations, Flynnne is ready to don the device and see where it takes her. She is told to close her eyes and count to 15, and when she gets to 15, she opens her eyes in the future, though she is unsure if that is where she really is. She is first greeted by Ash, and Flynnne is disoriented by the intensity of her sensory perception, specifically in seeing colors. Eventually, she acclimates and is greeted by Netherton, whose amazement at the whole thing is apparent.

### Chapter 42 Summary: “Body Language”

Flynnne is increasingly becoming used to controlling the peripheral, especially the facial movements, a fact that makes Netherton feel even more ill at ease. As the trio chats, it is apparent that there are gaps in their vocabularies that Ash has to translate. Flynnne asks to go outside and take a look around. Ash informs Flynnne of the purpose of her visit as the eyewitness to Aelita’s murder.

### Chapter 43 Summary: “Sploding”

Flynnne returns to her present and immediately begins eating. She tells Janice some of what she experienced, including that the Coldiron people insist that it is not a game she is participating in.

### Chapter 44 Summary: “Perversely Difficult”

Ash and Netherton discuss Flynnne, and Ash realizes that Flynnne is strong-willed and likely will not just do whatever she is told. They begin arguing before Lev cuts them off.

### Chapter 45 Summary: “Up There”

Flynnne mentions to Janice that when she returns to her peripheral, she is going to request that they set up another for her to bring with her. Burton shows up, and Flynnne tells him what she experienced. Burton tells her that Coldiron has a lot of money, and they came through with it as asked.

### Chapters 31-45 Analysis

The two parallel plots begin to converge prior to this section, and in Chapter 41, they merge when Flynnne occupies her peripheral. Netherton does not like peripherals because they make him uneasy. When Flynnne first sees Netherton, she notes that he looks as though he has “seen a ghost” (177). After composing himself somewhat, he says aloud, “it’s fine” and is then unsure if he said it to Flynnne or himself (179). The reason for Netherton’s dislike of peripherals is gradually revealed in subsequent chapters; however, much of how Netherton processes the mechanical artifice of his environment shows him being uncomfortable. He does not like the world he lives in. He certainly does not like the idea of hiring people from the past to perform security detail in his present.

Netherton is considered something of a clueless dunce by Ash and Ossian, and this could be because they each sense his contempt for the entire project that Lev participates in. Instinctively, Netherton understands that by going back in time, they inevitably alter the course of Flynnne’s and her compatriots’ stubs. In the novel, a stub is a fork of time that goes off in a different direction from the one Lev has gone. In other words, time is split and does not operate in a linear fashion in which all things are interconnected. Netherton further explains to Flynnne that, “when we made contact, we set your world, your universe, whatever it is[...]on a different course” (181). Interfering with the past by passing on data and information will alter the past, then, but not the present that Netherton and the others are currently in.

Netherton is not a willing participant in any of this, and when he meets Flynnne, he sees beyond her usefulness in helping identify Aelita’s killer. He recognizes her humanity, something that Ash and Ossian tend to overlook. They see her more as a collection of data

points that can be teletransported rather than an organic human being. Netherton also feels obligated to tell Flynnne the truth about why she is there, and what “there” really is. At first, Flynnne is not convinced that what she experiences is not a game. It is Netherton who insists to Lowbeer that Flynnne should be told the truth of her circumstances. As a publicist, Netherton is supposedly good at manipulating people. However, Ash points out that he has “never been able to see it” (188. Ash means this as an insult, implying that Netherton is not good at his work. However, it also exposes a key insight into Netherton’s hidden character. That he is not good at manipulating people demonstrates that he sees people as people instead of things.

## Chapters 46-60

### Chapter 46 Summary: “The Sights”

Flynnne returns to the peripheral. Lev reveals to Flynnne how their phones are installed in their skulls. Flynnne tells Netherton that she is excited to return. They take Flynnne on a tour of the London of the future. Flynnne becomes immediately curious as to why there are not that many people about. They visit a place called Cheapside, which Lev describes as a “cosplay zone” (196 and which Netherton claims is not real. None of the figures Flynnne sees acting out a scene from 1867 are human. Lev informs Flynnne that they are here to visit Lowbeer.

### Chapter 47 Summary: “Power Relationships”

Flynnne is introduced to Lowbeer and asks her if she is the reason she is there. Lowbeer informs Flynnne that she is an eyewitness to a crime and is needed to help try to solve the case. Flynnne then requests an additional peripheral, to which Lowbeer agrees and promises another. The additional peripheral is the one that Lev’s brother Anton used to spar with. This peripheral, like the one Flynnne is using, is also athletic.

### Chapter 48 Summary: “Pavel”

Ossian and Netherton return to Lev’s father’s house and retrieve Pavel from storage. Pavel is the name of Anton’s sparring partner/ peripheral.

### Chapter 49 Summary: “The Sounds He Made”

Pavel is unlike the peripheral Flynnne uses in that it is occupied by an AI that was programmed to box and take a beating. Ash tells Pavel to have the AI removed. Ash speaks with Macon, who has everything ready to go on his end. Flynnne reassures Macon that all is good, and

shortly after, Pavel reanimates and is occupied by Connor. Having the use of limbs again, Connor is thrilled and immediately begins running.

### **Chapter 50 Summary: “While the Getting’s Good”**

Netherton and Ossian are perplexed by Connor’s behavior as he is doing exercises he learned in the Marines. Connor sprains the peripheral’s finger and is treated by Ash’s Medici. Connor tells Flynne that Burton is going to try to pay off the governor, which Ash and Ossian immediately begin to make happen.

### **Chapter 51 Summary: “Tango Hotel Soldier Shit”**

Flynne gets Connor up-to-date on the people with whom they are interacting in the future. Edward then calls Ash, and she puts him through with Flynne. Edward tells her that it is time to return because it appears she needs to urinate. As she returns, she hears gunshots in the distance, and she thinks that it has something to do with the statehouse. She then returns to the peripheral.

### **Chapter 52 Summary: “Boots on the Ground”**

Connor and Netherton are alone awaiting Flynne’s return. When she arrives, she immediately asks Netherton if he has the money to buy the governor yet, to which he says it has likely already happened. Lowbeer appears on the scene, and Flynne informs her of the shooting that she heard in her brief sojourn home. Ossian calls Edward to make sure the situation is under control, which it is. Now that Flynne has been reassured, Lowbeer escorts her to a different room where she can discuss the case and what will transpire. Connor is also invited to the meeting as he represents the “boots on the ground” security support for the plan.

### **Chapter 53 Summary: “Santa Claus’s Headquarters”**

The meeting proceeds with Lowbeer leading the way. Lev, Netherton, Ossian, and Ash are all present. Lowbeer tells Netherton to pursue an invitation to a gathering planned by Daedra West in four days. Once at the party, Netherton is expected to bring Flynne with him so she can see if the man she witnessed in Aelita’s apartment, the suspected guilty person, is at the party. Flynne speaks about how her world is “funny,” which in this context is analogous to fake or artificial. Flynne once again reminds everyone that they need to pay off the governor in her time period. Before departing from the peripheral, Lowbeer informs Flynne that there is a cumulative effect from entering and re-entering the peripheral.

### Chapter 54 Summary: “Impostor Syndrome”

Netherton visits an establishment to get drunk. As he reflects on Lowbeer’s request that he contact Daedra and get himself invited to her gathering, Netherton considers how he does not like peripherals. Lowbeer’s sigil appears and suggests that Netherton uses the ruse of bringing the artist Annie Courrèges as a means of getting Daedra to offer him an invite.

### Chapter 55 Summary: “Complicated”

When Flynnne awakens, Tommy is there. He notifies her that two more young men were killed fairly close to where Flynnne lives, and he is suspicious of her and Burton. Tommy makes it clear to Flynnne that he is not there on official business but more to help them. Tommy tells Flynnne that Corbell Pickett pretty much operates the entire law enforcement system in the county. His concern for Flynnne compels her to tell him the truth about all the things that have been going on.

### Chapter 56 Summary: “The Light in her Voice Mail”

Netherton is now drunk, and he has finally worked up the courage to call Daedra. Daedra wonders if the call is about Aelita, and Netherton, following Lowbeer’s orders, pretends that he does not know anything about the incident in which Aelita disappeared. Daedra then tells Netherton that he is rumored to have been involved in Aelita’s disappearance. He denies involvement and sticks to the plan, using the promise of Annie Courrèges offering her opinion about Daedra’s work. Daedra is intrigued but remains noncommittal toward Netherton and withholds an invitation to her party.

### Chapter 57 Summary: “Good China”

Flynnne leaves Burton’s trailer, and when she arrives home, Pickett is there in her mother’s living room. Burton is also there. Their mother, Ella, evidently does not think highly of Pickett and seems to know that he is a nefarious character.

### Chapter 58 Summary: “Wu”

The same peripheral that Rainey used earlier at Maenad’s Crush appears again. This time, Netherton is unsure who is using it. He pulls out a pendant, inside of which is Lowbeer’s face. Lowbeer communicates with Netherton after his call to Daedra, saying he is in danger. She



tells him to finish his drink, which he does, and he is escorted out of the bar by a peripheral named Fitz-David Wu.

### Chapter 59 Summary: “Adventure Capitalists”

Janice talks with Flynnne while she simultaneously cares for Ella. Like Ella, Janice also distrusts Pickett. She knows more about the man and gives Flynnne more background on him. Pickett is still there talking with Burton. Flynnne only hears snippets of the conversation. Pickett questions Flynnne on who the Coldiron people are and how Flynnne and Burton came to be working for them. Flynnne holds her own with Pickett as he tries to tease out more information from Flynnne, which she does not give. The narrator reveals that Pickett does not like Flynnne.

### Chapter 60 Summary: “Browning In”

The peripheral Wu drives Netherton to Lev’s residence in Notting Hill. It also appears that the peripheral listened in on Netherton’s conversation with Daedra and suggests that Netherton effectively enticed Daedra enough that she will eventually invite him to her party.

### Chapters 46-60 Analysis

The beginning of Chapter 46 gives more insight into the world of the future in the novel. First, as is often the case, the narrative purposely creates ambiguity between real experience and virtual experience. Flynnne’s experience inside the peripheral blurs the line between **Objective versus Artificially Constructed Reality**, creating the possibility that these two states are not wholly separate and different. When Ash gives Flynnne a virtual sightseeing tour of future London, Flynnne has a hard time discerning the reality of the tour. The tour also shows a place called Cheapside, an entirely artificial construct made to look like London of 1867. As Flynnne takes in what she sees, she thinks that everything she sees is real, until finally, Netherton tells her that none of it is. Flynnne’s response belies her amazement: “The horses aren’t real?” (198. Another surprising aspect of future London is that very few people are around, a significant detail that Flynnne notices. The reason for this is explored in a later chapter called “The Jackpot,” but for the moment, Netherton avoids the detail and instead explains that Cheapside is essentially an animated history museum, sometimes visited by tourists and school children learning history.

The lines between subjective and objective reality are further explored in this section. When Flynne meets Lowbeer for the first time, Lowbeer tells her, “Some might think you more real than I am myself” (200). This statement comes after a conversation about what is real and what is not, and Flynne has a difficult time accepting any of it. Lowbeer says that if Flynne were to be killed, there would be no legal consequences because she would not be considered real, an assertion to which Flynne responds by saying, “I’m as real as you are” (199). Flynne also understands that nobody will believe her when she returns home, so she requests another peripheral to show others. When the request is granted, Connor inhabits the new peripheral. Once again, the line between real and virtual is made blurry. Connor, who has one missing leg, a missing foot, a missing arm, and a missing hand is able to use all his appendages when he inhabits the peripheral known as Pavel. For Connor, the experience feels real and he is enthralled by it; however, when he returns from “up the line” he once again inhabits his disabled body. He has a hard time coping with the difference, and he wants to return again to the peripheral so he can instead feel the use of his appendages, even if this experience is technically fake. Despite being an artificially constructed reality, he can feel himself actually running when he inhabits the peripheral, begging the question of whether he is actually running or not. Questions like this one take center stage as Flynne, Connor, and later Burton travel to the future and inhabit peripherals.

## Chapters 61-75

### Chapter 61 Summary: “Timesick”

Flynnne is about to go to bed. She has a quick conversation with Janice after Pickett leaves and informs her of the two men, presumed assassins, who were killed close by. She also tells Janice that Pickett was visiting to help make those dead bodies disappear, which proves the Coldiron group paid off the governor.

### Chapter 62 Summary: “Not Expected”

When Netherton arrives in Notting Hill, he is badly drunk and speaks in a disjointed manner. Ash then proceeds to treat Netherton medically for his drunkenness and preemptively for his hangover. Just as Netherton is about to fall asleep, Flynnn’s peripheral comes alive and mentions that it vomited after this latest transfer. They chat quickly, and it seems as the peripheral talks that it does not know where it is. Ossian suddenly appears and is immediately

kicked and beaten back by Flynnne's peripheral. It is revealed that Burton entered the peripheral and is the one responsible for the assault on Ossian, who is injured during the melee.

### Chapter 63 Summary: "Threw Up"

Janice wakes up Flynnne because Edward called and said she was needed at the trailer. When Flynnne arrives at the trailer, Burton has just returned from occupying the peripheral. He tells Flynnne that he was in the future for three hours. She is not pleased that he entered her peripheral. Burton tells Flynnne that he was given a similar tour as she received, and they discuss how eerily uninhabited London of the future is.

### Chapter 64 Summary: "Sterile"

Netherton goes back to sleep after the commotion of Burton's arrival in Flynnne's peripheral, but not before checking the bar to get another drink. It is locked. When he awakes again, Lowbeer's sigil appears. In her typically cryptic manner, Lowbeer notifies Netherton about a Russian pram that is being assembled, which is a weapon of some sort. She also warns him not to eat, suggesting that he could be entering a peripheral soon himself.

### Chapter 65 Summary: "Backdoor to Now"

Burton drives Flynnne to the strip mall nearby and informs her that it belongs to them now. Coldiron purchased it as a place from which to run their operations. Burton then tells her that a corporation has been created, Coldiron USA, and that it is supposed to be a real estate development corporation. All of that is just a shell, however. Burton tells Flynnne that she is the Chief Communications Officer and that he is the CEO of the company. Macon and Edward also have roles in the company, as do Connor and the other security staff, Carlos and Reese. Burton's girlfriend, Shaylene, is also involved. With the way Coldiron from the future has been handing over money to Burton, Corbell Pickett is no longer the richest man in the county.

### Chapter 66 Summary: "Drop Bears"

Netherton is prepped with a similar U-shaped device to the one Flynnne uses when she transfers to the peripheral. Ash directs him and has him do the same closed-eye countdown from 15. When he opens his eyes, he is in the Garbage Patch, and he is inhabiting an animal somewhat similar to a koala bear.

Lowbeer greets him when he arrives, and she is also using a bear-like peripheral. She explains that these can be used for reconnaissance, which is what she and Netherton do. Lowbeer also explains to Netherton that the Garbage Patch Boss who was killed was actually a peripheral inhabited by al-Habib. Lowbeer contends that he escaped, and it appears that he staged the whole scene with Daedra as a way of faking his own death.

### Chapter 67 Summary: “Black Beauty”

The new corporation’s lawyers are described at the start of this chapter. The firm is called Klein Cruz Vermette. Macon and Flynne talk about the corporation’s board of directors, and then Macon explains to Flynne that Ash has ordered and shipped pills that she says must be taken by Flynne, Burton, and Connor. Inside the pill is a tracking mechanism. The pill stays in the body for 6 months and allows the user’s whereabouts to be monitored from the future.

### Chapter 68 Summary: “Antibody”

Netherton returns from the bear peripheral after the investigative mission led by Lowbeer. Lowbeer and Netherton talk, and during this conversation, the reader learns that Netherton is quite uncomfortable with the world; he longs for a different, more authentic era, and he has this in common with Ash.

Lowbeer then reveals why and how she thinks al-Habib staged his death. Netherton becomes concerned that al-Habib is in London, and Lowbeer does not answer directly but she seems to think he is. Netherton asks Lowbeer why she is collaborating with Lev, and she answers that she wants to know more about the server that enables the continua, which at this point is a mystery to all, even her.

### Chapter 69 Summary: “How it Sounds”

After returning to her mother’s house, Flynne is suddenly tased by Reese, one of Burton’s friends and part of the security detail watching over their property. Reese kidnaps her, puts her in a Jeep, and drives her away. When Flynne presses him on his motivation, he reveals to her that his life has been threatened, and if he did not kidnap her, they would kill him. He does not name who made the threats.

### Chapter 70 Summary: “Asset”

Netherton confronts Lev and reveals that he knows about the agreement between Lev and Lowbeer. He then mentions that Ossian acquired a Bentley, and Lev explains that it will be used to disassemble the pram and the weapons in it. Lev is about to eat when he is notified that Flynnne is missing and that because of the pill, they are able to track where she is. It appears she is heading toward Pickett’s compound.

### Chapter 71 Summary: “McMansion”

Reese takes Flynnne to Pickett’s compound. To prevent tracking, Reese put Flynnne’s phone in a Faraday pouch, though he does not know about the pill she took that enables tracking. Reese apologetically hands off Flynnne to two men, who escort her inside to a room seemingly designed to interrogate prisoners. She is tied even more securely to an interior structure in the room with a dog leash. Pickett eventually enters the holding room. He threatens to break Flynnne’s jaw if she does not reveal who she’s working for. Flynnne sees through Pickett and assumes he’s bluffing. She vaguely answers his questions without revealing too much about Coldiron, and he leaves the room.

### Chapter 72 Summary: “Halfway Posh”

Ossian works on transforming the pram into a weapon as Netherton watches. Meanwhile, Ash and Lev work on Flynnne’s abduction. Ossian, his dislike for Netherton increasingly obvious, suggests that Burton most likely will be the one rescuing Flynnne. Ossian asks Netherton if he knows anything about Lowbeer having someone in the stub, to which Netherton says he knows nothing.

### Chapter 73 Summary: “Red Green Blue”

As Flynnne is held captive, she notices a bug flying around. As she watches it, her eyes are drawn to the door, and she notices points of light that start as red, then become green, and then blue. Eventually, the lights blend into one, and it is aquamarine. From this light, she hears Macon providing instructions. The door then opens, and Macon informs Flynnne that it is a squidsuit, which is a kind of invisibility suit. Burton emerges from the suit with an additional one and has Flynnne put it on. As they exit the holding room, Flynnne notices that the guards have been killed.

### Chapter 74 Summary: “That First Gentle Touch”

As Ossian continues to work on the pram, he learns that Flynne has been rescued by Burton. As Lowbeer arrives, Ossian orders the Bentley to seal its doors, suggesting that he does not want Lowbeer to know what he is doing. Lowbeer’s sigil appears and confirms that Flynne has indeed been rescued, then asks Netherton if he wants to go to Lev’s stub.

### Chapter 75 Summary: “Precursors”

The narrator reveals that the squidsuits are fabbed, meaning made without consent, in this case from Homeland Security (Homes). Burton drives an ATV to a designated spot where Flynne notices a dummy wearing a mask of the president. Burton and one of his men, Carlos, stuff it into a squidsuit and load it onto the ATV Burton used to rescue Flynne. Tommy arrives and takes Flynne and Burton home. Meanwhile, the dummy in the squidsuit arrives at the Pickett compound. Flynne hears Burton give orders to “do it” (310), and a huge explosion follows. Pickett’s compound has been destroyed.

### Chapters 61-75 Analysis

The intrigue begins rising in this section, as do oddities and peculiarities in the narrative. For example, Burton, who stealthily visits Flynne’s peripheral, notices that London in the future is quiet and there are not many people around. After his tour, he notes to Flynne, “I might’ve seen fifty, a hundred people, the whole flight. If they were people. And hardly any vehicles, nothing really like traffic” and then asks Flynne rhetorically, “if it’s not a game, where is everybody?” (263). The absence of people signals something much larger that Flynne and Burton are unable to piece together. At this point in the novel, Flynne is still largely trying to delineate what is real and what is virtual. When Burton poses the question to Flynne, she answers Burton by saying that she asked Ash why there weren’t many people around. Ash gave her a cursory reply, saying simply, “there aren’t as many people” before promptly changing the subject. This kind of narrative strategy is common in the novel. The mysterious happenings in the book are introduced in a subtle way that draws attention to them but leaves the reader reaching for possible explanations. Here, the reader is made to feel as Flynne and Burton do about the absence of people in the future: perplexed and unsettled. The mystery of this depopulated city remains unanswered until later in the novel. Meanwhile, the details of previous mysteries are filled in, which temporarily leads readers away from the clues of this mystery.

The economy of Flynn's present world has been homogenized. In the novel, there is only one mega-corporation, Hefty, that generally owns all legal retail activity. Then there is the second branch of the economy, which is the drug trade controlled exclusively by Corbell Pickett. When Flynn and Burton begin piling up money that comes from Coldiron, Pickett takes notice. Macon explains the economic changes that have transpired in a very brief amount of time. He says of the economy, there are "Macro and micro. Around here's micro. Pickett's not the biggest money in this county anymore" (270). He also says that the macro economy has been affected by the exponential growth of the Coldiron USA corporation. Essentially, Coldiron USA has accumulated so much money that both the micro and macro effects are causing volatility in markets. The astronomical growth of Coldiron USA in such a short amount of time and the homogenization of retail in the form of Hefty symbolizes modern American corporate culture, especially in the technology sector. The larger the corporation, the more likely it is to devour its competition and trend toward the kinds of monopolies that are evident in the novel. With this, Gibson links this type of economic activity to the dystopia we see in the novel.

## Chapters 76-90

### Chapter 76 Summary: "Emulation App"

Lowbeer gives Netherton a headband for transferring to a peripheral. At first, Netherton thinks he will be visiting the Garbage Patch again; however, Lowbeer tells him that this time, he will be visiting Flynn in her time—the past for him.

### Chapter 77 Summary: "Wheelie Boy"

Flynn describes her abduction to Janice. Macon makes her a new phone because she was unable to retrieve hers from the Faraday bag after she was rescued. When she finally returns to her room, she discovers a box with a Wheelie Boy inside. A Wheelie Boy is described as something like a Segway with a boom attached so a camera can be mounted to it. Flynn removes it from the box and sets it up. As soon as she does, she hears Netherton call her name.

### Chapter 78 Summary: "Frontierland"

Flynn speaks with Netherton, who is in the Wheelie Boy. Netherton reveals that the entire Coldiron enterprise is not real; instead, it is just a hobby for Lev. Flynn takes the Wheelie Boy outside. Netherton unintentionally mentions the jackpot, which prompts Flynn to ask him

about it.

### **Chapter 79 Summary: “The Jackpot”**

Netherton describes the jackpot. Essentially, it is an apocalyptic event that takes place over a long period of time and involves gradual, catastrophic environmental damage. Because of climate change, the weather destroys much of life on the planet, and by the time anything is done to reverse course, it is too late. Around 80% of humanity is killed off, and many of those who remain are among the wealthy. These survivors try to artificially reconstruct the past.

### **Chapter 80 Summary: “The Clovis Limit”**

A new character is introduced, Clovis Fearing, a very old friend of Lowbeer’s. Netherton learns that he has been invited to Daedra’s party. As Lowbeer and Clovis talk, both reveal that they had at one time been British spies. Netherton confesses to Lowbeer that he described the jackpot to Flynne. Lowbeer also says that they had Macon design a special phone for Flynne, which allows Lowbeer to track her even more precisely.

### **Chapter 81 Summary: “Alamo”**

Flynnne learns from Janice that Burton installed a satellite and disguised it as a cow. The satellite comes from Griff, a mysterious figure nobody seems to know much about. Macon tells Flynnne that Connor is “up the line” (330, his new code term for using the peripheral. In this case, Connor is not up the line in the same peripheral as before. Instead, he is training on a new one. Macon indicates to Flynnne that Sheriff Jackman was killed in the blast at Pickett’s and that Tommy, as the new acting sheriff, has deputized Burton. He then introduces Flynnne to Clovis Raeburn, who is lying in one of the beds used for sending Flynnne up the line. Connor returns as well, suggesting a lot of back and forth between the different worlds.

### **Chapter 82 Summary: “The Nastiness”**

Netherton is dreaming of Flynnne as the chapter begins. He is awakened by Lowbeer, who gives him directions to take Flynnne’s peripheral to Soho and wait for her to enter it.

### **Chapter 83 Summary: “All the Kingdoms of the World in a Moment in Time”**

Flynnne has been spending considerable time signing paperwork for the army of lawyers that has descended. Macon tells Flynnne that they are increasingly in peril, especially now that their operation is disrupting the economy on a large scale. Flynnne and Macon get some



privacy, and she tells him about the jackpot. Macon then tells Flynnne that Luke 4:5 has been starting to sneak around. The title of the chapter comes from the Bible verse after which this group is named.

### Chapter 84 Summary: “Soho Square”

Lowbeer and Netherton discuss how to prepare Flynnne for Daedra’s party. Flynnne arrives in her peripheral, and Netherton takes her on a stroll through a constructed forest and park. She asks him how everything here was made, and their walk continues toward Hyde Park.

### Chapter 85 Summary: “Future People”

Netherton answers Flynnne’s question from the previous chapter and says that it all was created by “assemblers.” Flynnne makes the connection that these are the things that she saw kill Aelita. Flynnne asks Netherton about Daedra and refers to her as his ex, which Netherton does not like. He then explains to her how Daedra tattoos herself as a way of chronicling her life, then has her skin removed and replaced so she can repeat the process. The skins then are sold, and people can buy one and use it for themselves.

Netherton then tells Flynnne that her role at the party is to act as a neoprimitivist curator, someone who has remained apart from the global system that runs the world in the future. Netherton appears to be taking a liking to Flynnne and even holds her hand during their walk. Toward the end of the chapter, Macon calls Flynnne and tells her she is needed back home. Luke 4:5 is picketing outside the Coldiron USA headquarters, and Burton is not there.

### Chapter 86 Summary: “Chatelaine”

Netherton is where Flynnne left him. He is watching the reproduction in miniature of a historical naval battle. Ash arrives and informs him that Lowbeer wants to see him at Lev’s. When Netherton asks Ash if Flynnne is in danger in her time, Ash indicates that she is indeed, and the danger is posed by entities in their time period. Ash then shows a soft side toward Netherton and tells him that she does not like the idea of Netherton attending Daedra’s party because there could be danger lurking there. Netherton responds by suggesting that he owes it to Flynnne to attend the party as a way of sacrificing on her behalf.

### Chapter 87 Summary: “The Antidote for Party Time”

When Flynnne returns, Clovis Raeburn is there to meet her. She sticks something pink onto Flynnne’s belly and tells her it is an “antidote for party time” (356) but provides no further information about it. Burton returns to the compound, and Flynnne tells him that Luke 4:5 has been purposely planted there to protest by their enemies in the continua, likely as a way of making Burton lose focus.

### Chapter 88 Summary: “Parliament of Birds”

Netherton visits Ash in her teepee. Ash grabs his hand, and one of her virtual spiders crawls over to Netherton’s hand. This allows him to understand Ash’s code talking. In a conversation that moves from European languages to birdsong, Ash reveals that Lowbeer is not to be trusted. They use the code talk because it is the best way to assure that Lowbeer is not able to collect intelligence from the conversation. Lowbeer was working alongside a sadistic continua enthusiast and weapons dealer named Vespasian until he suddenly died of natural causes in Holland. Vespasian had been arming factions in the continua to fight and kill each other, just for his own pleasure. The spider retreats from Netherton’s hand, and the coded conversation comes to a close.

### Chapter 89 Summary: “Strobe”

As Flynnne and others head to Tommy’s car to pay her mother a visit, they are ambushed by invisible figures in squidsuits. Burton is able to recognize some telltale signs and kills one of them with his tomahawk. An all-out gunfight ensues. Clovis and Carlos kill more figures in squidsuits. Flynnne is unharmed, but Burton is injured when a sliver of his body armor nicks his femoral artery.

### Chapter 90 Summary: “Metric of Caution”

Netherton is showering when Rainey’s sigil appears to him. She tells him that she is leaving her government sector employment for something in the private sector. She also expresses concern for him and mentions that whatever it is he is involved with, he should find a way out of it.

## Chapters 76-90 Analysis

Chapter 79 is finally when the reader learns what the jackpot is. As mentioned in the previous analysis section, Gibson provides readers with hints along the way, including the absence of crowds in future London. Netherton describes the jackpot, and what is most noticeable is his insistence that it was not a singular moment in time that caused this apocalyptic catastrophe. Instead, he discusses how the event was gradual and took place over time, and he identifies climate change as the primary cause, saying that “the actual climate, the weather, caused by there being too much carbon, had been the driver for a lot of other things” (319). He also mentions that the jackpot did not happen the way cultural perceptions may have led people to believe it would. He says it was not “the way apocalypse stories liked to have a big event, after which everybody ran around with guns[...]or else were eaten alive by something caused by the big event. Not like that” (319). The indication here is that the jackpot had been happening consistently over the course of time. Eventually, people became increasingly aware that it was happening but were powerless to stop it because it was too late. Gibson’s descriptions of the jackpot and its causes are tragic because, in the novel’s estimation, humans nearly did this to themselves by allowing the crisis to continue for so long without intervention. Here, Gibson draws links to the present-day climate crisis and forecasts a bleak future of **Environmental Degradation and its Effects on Life**.

In any case, those who survived the jackpot were generally wealthy. Netherton claims, perhaps counterintuitively, that the jackpot was good for the wealthy. He says, “the richest had gotten richer, there being fewer to own whatever there was” (321). Netherton also points out that because 80% of the population died off, the survivors benefited from fewer carbon emissions. They also blamed democracy for the jackpot because it allowed people to create lives for themselves that were eventually unsustainable. Netherton is an important figure in all of this. He does not like the world he lives in and would much rather live in a natural world as Flynn does. In Netherton, we see a man wishing the mistakes of history could be prevented from happening in the first place. Netherton, who grows increasingly attached to Flynn as the novel progresses, is at odds with others in his own time. For example, when Lowbeer tells Netherton that Flynn’s time was “quite a vile period” (336, he is with the peripheral and smiles at it pretending it to be Flynn. His reaction here indicates how differently he views things than Lowbeer and others, who look back on the people of history with contempt. In his world, human ingenuity can shape the world through technology according to its whims,

though it can never fully represent the truly natural. Through Netherton, Gibson raises the question as to whether this is preferable to a world in which nature, including human nature, has not been destroyed.

## Chapters 91-105

### Chapter 91 Summary: “Isopod”

Burton is receiving medical care from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center via a drone that looks something like a pill bug. Tommy arrives and explains to Flynne that “party time” is a chemical agent that causes people to become ruthlessly sadistic and homicidal. He claims that using it on Luke 4:5 constitutes a war crime and pleads with Flynne to force her Coldiron people to refrain from using it.

### Chapter 92 Summary: “You Guys”

Flynne meets with Netherton via the Wheelie Boy. She tells him about “party time,” and though she despises Luke 4:5, she is entirely against using the agent on them. She makes an ultimatum, saying that if Lowbeer doesn’t back off from using the chemical, Flynne will not assist in identifying Aelita’s killer.

### Chapter 93 Summary: “Mission Statement”

Griff informs Flynne that they will not be using “party time.” Griff also explains to Flynne that Lowbeer likely knew what her conversation with Netherton was about. Griff also explains Lowbeer’s motives for being a continua enthusiast; Lowbeer’s ultimate goal is to prevent the assassination of Flynne’s president in her next term. Lowbeer sees this assassination as the beginning of the jackpot. By altering this climactic event, she hopes to avert the disaster that follows.

### Chapter 94 Summary: “Apollinaris Water”

Netherton tries to get an alcoholic beverage, but the bar has programmed to deny him. Lowbeer arrives, and Netherton asks if she knows of Flynne’s demand, which she does. Lowbeer says that “party time” was a test to see if Flynne lives by a moral code or not. When asked why Lowbeer would conduct the test, she says that she has a “further role in mind” for Flynne should all go well at Daedra’s party. Netherton then asks Lowbeer if she knows who

killed Aelita, and Lowbeer says she does, but the way she found this out would not be permissible in court, further illustrating the need for Flynnne's identification. Lowbeer also suggests that Netherton is developing feelings for Flynnne.

### **Chapter 95 Summary: "Whole Worlds Falling"**

Flynnne is visited once again by Netherton in the Wheelie Boy peripheral. Netherton explains what Flynnne already knows—that Lowbeer will not encourage the use of "party time" on Luke 4:5. Netherton tells Flynnne about the neoprimitives and how in the future, ailments like colds no longer exist unless one is a neoprimitive and believes that catching a cold is an authentic experience.

### **Chapter 96 Summary: "Disanthropomorphized"**

Flynnne halts the conversation with Netherton to phone her mother. Netherton sees Connor's peripheral playing and wrestling with the thylacines. Lowbeer is on hand and speculates that the motive for Aelita's death is likely garden-variety and not extraordinary. She explains to Netherton that her conclusion is based on what the algorithms reveal.

### **Chapter 97 Summary: "Convoy"**

Flynnne receives a full security detail as she is escorted from the headquarters to her mother's house. A woman named Tacoma Raeburn is introduced. Flynnne has noticed her before around headquarters doing odd jobs. Tacoma is Clovis Raeburn's sister and is primarily in charge of escorting Flynnne to her mother's and keeping a strict watch over her. Tacoma drives Flynnne in a bomb-proof SUV limo. During the transport, Flynnne is again visited by Netherton.

### **Chapter 98 Summary: "Bicentennial"**

At her mother's house now, Flynnne brings the Wheelie Boy inside with her and sets in on the floor. Netherton sees the inside of the house and notices a plastic tray, a commemorative souvenir from the celebration of the town of Clanton's bicentennial. He saw a replica of this very tray inside Clovis Fearing's shop in the future. He also notices a fly buzzing through the house.

### Chapter 99 Summary: “American Antiquities”

Flynne’s mother adamantly refuses to be moved to a safe house in northern Virginia. Coldiron recommended such a measure to protect Ella but also to protect against her being used as collateral in the ongoing tensions surrounding Luke 4:5 and Coldiron. Flynne returns to the Wheelie Boy, and Netherton tells her about the tray that he saw and that Lowbeer has one just like it. When Netherton explains where Lowbeer got the tray, Flynne makes a connection. The Clovis of her present is named Raeburn; this is the maiden name of the Clovis Fearing of Netherton’s present.

### Chapter 100 Summary: “Back Here”

Flynne takes the Wheelie Boy down to Burton’s trailer so that she and Netherton can talk. Flynne presses Netherton into explaining his relationship with Daedra in full detail: How it started, and how it ended.

### Chapter 101 Summary: “Ordinary Sad-Ass Humanness”

The narrator mentions that Flynne has made connections between Lowbeer and Griff, though without providing too much explicit detail. The narrator also summarizes Netherton and Daedra’s relationship. Tacoma brings Flynne back to headquarters.

### Chapter 102 Summary: “Transplant”

Netherton discovers that Ossian has been working on a weapons system designed to look like candy canes in the shape of guns. Except, as Ossian explains, these are not guns in the traditional sense; they do not fire bullets and are swarm weapons that seek soft tissue animals and devour them entirely. Ash then explains that they will be providing Flynne with a cognitive bundle, which she refers to as a “bullshit implant,” so that she will appear to fluently speak the jargon of a neoprimitivist.

### Chapter 103 Summary: “Sushi Barn”

Burton has recovered enough to go back up the line. He is there with Connor as this chapter opens. Griff notifies Flynne that they are creating a special kind of undetectable security compound around her mother’s house. Flynne then confronts Griff and asks whether he is Lowbeer. Griff says that he was but that in his future, he will become someone else. When Lev first communicates with them, Griff, as well as the others, will follow a different stub.

### Chapter 104 Summary: “The Red Medici”

Flynn returns to her peripheral and sees the weapons system. They warn her not to point the weapon at anyone unless she is ready to use it, as it is programmed to lock in on the target as designated. Ash uses her Medici to install the cognitive bundle into Flynn's peripheral.

### Chapter 105 Summary: “Static in Your Bones”

Flynn is in her peripheral and asks Netherton to explain the cognitive bundle that has been implanted into her. She then sees Lowbeer and immediately discloses that she knows that Griff is an earlier version of Lowbeer. Flynn asks Lowbeer if she is in the future the way Lowbeer is, and Lowbeer tells her there is no indication one way or the other. Lowbeer then explains just how much depends on Flynn being able to successfully identify the assailant she saw in the window. This includes preventing the president in her current time from being assassinated.

### Chapters 91-105 Analysis

As a cyberpunk novel, *The Peripheral* has a hard-boiled detective story at its core. Effectively, the plot revolves around Flynn's eyewitness account of a murder and the whodunnit nature of determining the villain. Like many detective stories, clues are implanted in the plot but many rhetorical devices, such as the red herring, prevent readers from discovering the villain too early. This novel follows that strategy, and as it nears its climax, Gibson has kept the suspense high and the identity of the novel's villains undisclosed. Additionally, just when the reader thinks they are onto something, some other hidden feature emerges or a surprise arises. In this section, more is discovered about Lowbeer. For one thing, she is not exactly who she seems to be. Flynn begins piecing things together, and as she gets to know Griff more and more, she instinctively realizes that Lowbeer is the future version of Griff, though not quite exactly. Griff describes it thus: “Our lives were identical, until Lev's first communication was received here. But this is no longer their past, so she isn't who I'll become” (422). Because the stub Lev communicated with had its course in time changed, Lowbeer's young version of herself will have a different future on some other plane of existence.

In any case, Lowbeer has been pulling the strings from future London and using her younger self to bring everything about. This also suggests a personal motive for Lowbeer in not only solving Aelita's murder but also changing the course of history. As a hard-boiled detective

story, her personal motivation is critical. Though her true motive remains a mystery, clues suggest what it could involve. After Flynnne confronts Lowbeer about knowing Griff is an earlier version of herself, Lowbeer explains that she is attempting to prevent the assassination of President Gonzales in Flynnne's time. She explains that it is critical so that Coldiron can regain a foothold against their competitor, Matryoshka. The assassination of the president was the turning point that led civilization toward the jackpot. Preventing the assassination, therefore, could also stop the chain of events that leads to the collapse. All of this, of course, rests on the events that will transpire at Daedra's party and on Flynnne's ability to identify the assailant in the window.

## Chapters 106-124

### Chapter 106 Summary: "Buttholeville"

Netherton appears inside the Wheelie boy ahead of Flynnne. He is greeted by Clovis Raeburn. He sees Flynnne with the headband on as well as Burton and Connor. As he waits for Flynnne, Netherton asks to be placed near a window.

### Chapter 107 Summary: "Little Buddy"

Flynnne returns and offers to take Netherton with her to eat. First, she must travel through the maze of tunnels that have been constructed between headquarters and Sushi Barn. Netherton points out, ironically, how what they have constructed is like some kind of primitive game. Flynnne tells Netherton that Griff and Lowbeer are sort of the same person. Netherton then reveals to Flynnne that he hates the world he lives in.

### Chapter 108 Summary: "Coldiron Morning"

Tommy arrives and visits Flynnne. He notifies her that Homes is sending a contingent force to take apart Coldiron USA. Tommy indicates that Homes has been corrupted, though by whom he does not know.

### Chapter 109 Summary: "Black Silk Frogs"

This is a short chapter in which Netherton tries to sleep and reflects on what Flynnne revealed about Griff and Lowbeer. He is thankful that he is not as old as Lowbeer and has avoided the same kind of disjointed timeline in his own life.



### Chapter 110 Summary: “Nothing Fancy”

Ash prepares the peripheral for Flynnne’s arrival prior to the main event at Daedra’s. Flynnne occupies the peripheral and immediately mentions that Homes is bearing down on the headquarters. She asks Lowbeer, who has called, if there is anything Griff can do. Lowbeer says that, at the moment, there is not much that can be done, but it is possible that it can be averted if all goes well at Daedra’s event. Flynnne then sees Connor and Burton play fighting in their peripherals.

### Chapter 111 Summary: “Zil”

A Zil is a vehicle from 2029, and this is the vehicle in which Ash will drive them to Daedra’s party. Connor will escort Flynnne as her bodyguard. Burton’s peripheral will be placed in the trunk.

### Chapter 112 Summary: “To Farringdon”

On the way to the party, Flynnne asks to call home. Macon provides her an update suggesting that nothing has changed and that in short order, Homes will be arriving to dismantle the operation. As the chapter concludes, they have arrived at Daedra’s.

### Chapter 113 Summary: “Bouncy Castle”

Netherton and Flynnne pass through a complicated and super high-tech security apparatus. Connor also passes through but must keep his distance from Netherton and Flynnne according to the robot’s instructions. They discover that the party is billed as a celebration of Aelita’s life, suggesting that Daedra has accepted that Aelita has been killed. Netherton is not convinced, however.

### Chapter 114 Summary: “A Celebration of Life”

The trio ascends in the elevator. Netherton tells Connor to stay two meters apart from them, double that when they are talking. After they make their entrance, they are soon greeted by Daedra. Netherton introduces Flynnne as Annie Courrèges, and after a few exchanges, the cognitive bundle kicks in. As they are talking, Flynnne sees the assailant she is there to identify. As he walks past, she utters a swear word, and her accent changes.

Daedra then orders her and Netherton to go downstairs and Lowbeer, in Flynn's ear, tells her to follow. Daedra tells Flynn that she has made a huge mistake by allowing Netherton to bring her there. Connor is walled off and apprehended by two robots after Daedra orders them to take apart his peripheral. The man from the balcony appears and explains to Flynn that he is a protean, or "without fixed form" (455, and provides Flynn with a demonstration when he puts his hand through a wall. Netherton and Flynn are rendered immobile.

### **Chapter 115 Summary: "Dissociative State"**

Netherton and Flynn are only able to move when they are commanded to move. Daedra orders them to move toward an elevator, which they take to ground level. They then are ordered to climb inside a vehicle that is waiting for them. Just as they are about to get in, something comes crashing down from above, and there is an explosion of blood.

### **Chapter 116 Summary: "Cannonball"**

Flynn recalls a memory from childhood when Connor, Burton, and Leon did cannonball jumps at a pool. As it turns out, this is what came crashing down from above—Connor and a robot. Connor was attempting to take out the balcony man but only partially caught the man's arm and took out the robot instead.

### **Chapter 117 Summary: "Its Granite Face, Bristling with Iron"**

Netherton and Flynn are driven to Newgate, the site of an infamous former prison that has been reassembled for the purpose of holding Flynn and Netherton. The balcony man, now referred to as the bearded man, after being cared for by a Medici, threatens to injure Netherton in the same way he was injured by the falling Connor.

### **Chapter 118 Summary: "Balcony Man"**

They arrive at Newgate, and the robots escort the hand-tied Flynn and Netherton into the prison. The bearded man explains to Flynn that they are waiting for the City Remembrancer because he wants to see Flynn die. Flynn hears Lowbeer's voice internally imploring her to remain calm. Flynn tries to bargain with the bearded man but is denied and told that very soon, Homes will descend on her family and friends and will kill all of them, including her. The bearded man also threatens Netherton and promises that he will have him continuously beaten, treated by a Medici, and beaten again.

### Chapter 119 Summary: “Sir Henry”

The Remembrancer, named Sir Henry, arrives, and he finally reveals the bearded man’s name. It turns out that he is Hamed al-Habib, the man who faked his own death in the Garbage Patch. Hamed implies that he planned to instigate some kind of catastrophe in the Garbage Patch. Though he does not explicitly say it, it is probably the release of “party time.”

### Chapter 120 Summary: “Vespasian’s Cube”

Flynnne hears Lowbeer’s voice again and responds to it, which prompts Hamed to become suspicious. Just then, the shackles that hold Flynnne’s wrists begin to crumble into dust, just as the candy cane guns appear. She aims at al-Habib, and in no time, he is entirely consumed by the swarming weapon. Then, through a series of odd visuals, which include a red, twisting cube, Burton appears in the homunculus and kills Sir Henry. Meanwhile, Flynnne asks Lowbeer what she needs to do to save her people back in Clanton, and Lowbeer assures her that Homes has been called off as a result of all that has just transpired.

### Chapter 121 Summary: “Notting Hill”

Everyone is escorted back to Notting Hill in the Zil. Lowbeer’s sigil appears to Netherton. They discuss the events at Daedra’s party, and Lowbeer tells him that he did a good job simply by not making any critical mistakes. Also, Lowbeer reveals that Daedra’s father was a coconspirator in the assassination of President Gonzales.

### Chapter 122 Summary: “Coldiron Miracles”

Janice sees Flynnne and comes over to tell her that she has saved everyone, a compliment that Flynnne deflects to Griff and Lowbeer. Pickett is still alive and operating out of Nassau. Connor tells Flynnne that the peripheral he used to dive bomb al-Habib was destroyed, but he had them make a replacement. Tommy arrives at the end of the chapter, smiling and happy to see Flynnne.

### Chapter 123 Summary: “Compound”

Flynnne has made a regular habit of taking walks with Ainsley, aka Griff. Flynnne and her compatriots have taken to making new things look old. Flynnne is pregnant, and it is revealed that she and Tommy have formed a relationship. They are visited by Felicia, who we know

from previous chapters is the president. Connor, meanwhile, has prosthetics that allow him to move around much more easily. He is even able to play squash.

### Chapter 124 Summary: “Putney”

Netherton is now living with Rainey. They live in Soho, where there is no cosplay zone, so things there are somewhat more authentic than the reader has seen previously in the novel. Rainey sends Netherton to a coffee shop. Macon calls and mentions that Netherton’s PR services are needed. Macon asks him if he will attend the barbeque they are having, and he says that he will, along with Rainey. Netherton says to Macon that it is relaxing to visit Clanton, suggesting that it provides an escape from the world he lives in.

### Chapters 106-124 Analysis

The plot of the novel begins to fall into place, and the action rises toward the climax in this section. As discussed in the analysis of the previous section, what transpires at Daedra’s party carries an immense amount of weight, and the suspense heightens as the event draws near. The plot also undergoes an unexpected inversion as Netherton virtually spends more time in Flynnne’s world. When he notices the way Flynnne’s compatriots have constructed a maze so they can still make it to Sushi Barn in case some calamity befalls the headquarters, Netherton remarks, “This is bizarre[...]It looks like some primitive game” (434). The novel begins with Flynnne thinking she is providing security in a game, and she has a similar reaction to Netherton’s in her first forays up the line. Up until this point in the novel, only those visiting from Flynnne’s era have perceived the future as surreal and bizarre, primarily because of the ways that world and so much in it looks manufactured. The tables have turned here, and Netherton’s reaction to what he sees is a commentary on how human ingenuity can create a world that does not quite make sense. Those who create the world do not see the ways in which it is bizarre.

The novel’s penultimate scene brings all its loose ends together neatly, though Gibson’s narrator keeps the reader guessing as to what will happen. When the primary villain is revealed to be Hamed al-Habib, the final puzzle pieces are dropped in and the plot is resolved. The last few chapters read as an addendum detailing what transpires in the aftermath of Daedra’s party. However, one last twist does appear. For much of the second half of the novel, Netherton develops feelings toward Flynnne, and it seems that at some point, the two will form a relationship. This does not happen. Instead, Flynnne ends up with Tommy and is pregnant with his child, while Netherton and Rainey get together. Netherton confesses to Rainey his

feelings for Flynne, a confession that elicits an obvious response from Rainey. All seems set on the coupling of the main characters until the novel's final sentence: "Always nice to see Flynne" (485). Given Netherton's fondness for venturing into the world of the past and his fondness for Flynne, the line suggests further mystery. In a novel where appearances are anything but predictable, the reader is left to ponder the intriguing comment at the end of the novel, setting up a possible plot line for the next book in the trilogy.

## Character Analysis

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### Flynne Fisher

Nicknamed “Easy Ice” for her gaming skills, Flynne Fisher is the protagonist of the novel. Flynne is independent-minded and forceful in her own way but always seems to be on the outside of what she is involved with. Burton, Lowbeer, and Griff all are the novel’s power figures as they make deals and do not often reveal to Flynne what these deals include. Flynne is the novel’s most consistent moral figure. Prior to the turn of events in her life, her primary concern is caring for her ailing mother, Ella. While determined to help catch Aelita West’s killer, Flynne also adamantly opposes the use of the chemical agent known as “party time,” which demonstrates her integrity.

Netherton takes a liking to Flynne, particularly because she represents something unavailable to him. The narrator says that it is Flynne’s “archaic self-determination” that appeals to Netherton: her insistence on being who she wants to be. While the plot generally depends on Flynne being gamed by external forces, she does not participate in anything completely against her will. Instead, she chooses to participate on her own terms, a stark distinguishing feature compared to most of the novel’s other characters.

### Wilf Netherton

Netherton is a publicist by trade, a man who makes a living embellishing the truth or flat-out lying. Early in the novel, we see his penchant for lying brought to light by his colleague, Rainey, when she says, “I’d want to have your baby now[...]except I know it would always lie” (12). How other characters in the novel see him does not tell the whole story, though. Netherton is an internally conflicted character, oftentimes using alcohol as a means of drowning out this inner turmoil.

Netherton’s name gives us an insight into how he views his world. Netherton recalls the “nether” regions such as hell and the sanctum of the dead. He is, therefore, a symbolic representation of the world of the dead. Netherton does not like the world he lives in, and as the novel progresses, he develops a longing for the old world. Netherton is also the one who reveals the details of the jackpot to Flynne. Netherton’s perspective lends the novel one of its primary messages: The old world is worth saving, and it should be appreciated.

## Ainsley Lowbeer

Lowbeer is the wise and omniscient detective of the novel. Along with Burton in the novel's present, Lowbeer is a puppet master. Her character is somewhere between nefarious and kind, and she can tap into both characteristics when necessary. This shows her capacity to manipulate people to achieve desired goals, but it does not make her an evil figure. Lowbeer uses these powers for good, such as investigating Aelita's death. Lowbeer has the authority to spy in an almost unlimited capacity, a fact that she is not boastful about. Instead, she is reticent and embarrassed when confronted about eavesdropping.

Lowbeer was alive before the jackpot, a fact that locates part of her motivation for being involved in the case. She recognizes how the chain of events, beginning with the assassination of a US president, led to the series of catastrophes that ensued. She also is a continua enthusiast, presumably to help try to redirect this chain of events so that her former self, Griff, will follow on a different fork in time. While it is not exactly an act of supreme self-sacrifice, it still shows her as a force for good, despite the ways she goes about achieving her ends.

## Burton Fisher

A former Marine and a veteran of an unidentified war, Burton pulls the strings in his present. Burton is highly secretive and usually acts without letting anyone else know what he is getting into. This is best represented by the way he withholds information from Flynn, even though he involves her in activities before she even knows what she's agreeing to. Burton has many friends, former vets who help provide security for his family and, later, the headquarters for Coldiron USA. Because of his shadowy nature, ascribing a moral value to his character is difficult.

Burton's most notable personality trait is that he is prone to act on his temper. Early in the novel, he is taken by Homes to a location that is not quite a prison but more like a time-out. He has an ongoing feud with a religious cult known as Luke 4:5, and often, Burton reverts to aggressive tactics to beat back the group. Burton is also physically aggressive when he first goes up the line and enters Flynn's peripheral. He attacks Ossian and wounds him severely. Naturally, with his military training and his penchant for violence, he appears in the novel's penultimate scene and delivers the final blow to Sir Henry, one of the novel's primary villains.

## Themes

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### Objective versus Artificially Constructed Reality

*The Peripheral*, like many cyberpunk novels and films, takes reality itself as its central question. In a world where artificial intelligence and virtual reality are so advanced, the characters in both the present and future must contend with the nature of reality, what makes an experience real, how reality is formed, and whether reality can only be experienced or can be shaped. These questions form one of the central themes in the novel, and what often happens is that what the characters think is real is not, and what they think is fake is real.

The narrative does not slowly delve into the issue of the nature of reality. By the time Chapter 9 comes, Flynnne is already trying to decipher if what she is experiencing is a game or if it is real in the typical sense, as she understands reality to be. The narrator says that Flynnne notices a curiosity about the London she sees while she thinks she is playing the game: “Real London didn’t have as many tall ones (buildings and in real London, tall ones were more clustered together, came in more shapes and sizes” (28. Flynnne is using her own memory here to contrast London as it is in her present with the London she witnesses in the game. As we soon learn, it is not a game that she plays; it is real life in the future. Characterizing the London she knows as the “real” one implies that the other is fake or manufactured for the game. This is not the case, as both versions of London here are real. With this, Gibson asserts that reality is based as much on perception as it is on facts. Flynnne’s knowledge of her own present and reality does not rule out future London as real.

Another example along these lines is when Connor first goes up the line into his peripheral. Connor is an amputee and is missing a leg, a foot, an arm, and some digits on his remaining hand. When he uploads into the peripheral, he suddenly has these body parts again, in addition to an impressive athletic ability. Connor is shocked the first time he occupies the peripheral, Pavel. He says, “this better not just be a drug experience” (207 and promptly begins to run, jump, and flip. Connor thinks that he has been given some hallucinatory drug that mimics what it would be like to have his limbs again, except he is sober. While Connor questions what is real and what is artificial—similar to how psychedelics distort the boundaries of reality—the case could be made that the experience inside the peripheral is reality. Connor’s sensory experience is what forms his reality, suggesting that reality comes from how we interact with the world.



Gibson does not impose a definitive answer to the questions he raises in the text about what constitutes reality. However, through his characters' interactions with the worlds he creates in the novel, the reader reflects on the questions raised. If anything, *The Peripheral* shows that reality might not be as clear-cut as we tend to think it is.

### Environmental Degradation and its Effects on Life

For the entire first half of the novel, the catastrophic events that changed the world are only referred to as the jackpot. We can sense that in the myriad descriptions of future London—and the world, for that matter—that something happened that changed life on the planet. One of the early clues is provided in Chapter 6 entitled, “The Patchers.” In it, the narrator describes the Great Pacific Garbage Patch as a floating island weighing “three million tons and growing” (16). Implicit in the description of the island is the problem posed by plastics ending up in the world's oceans. The patch signals to the reader that whatever happened during the jackpot had likely to do with some kind of environmental disaster, especially since there really is a Great Pacific Garbage Patch, although the real patch is densely polluted but still liquid rather than a solid landmass.

The reader's suspicions are confirmed in Chapter 79, which is dedicated to explaining the jackpot, how it happened, and its consequences. First, Netherton tells the story of the jackpot while he is uploaded into the Wheelie Boy in Flynn's time. He is outside under an oak tree and is able to see the world as it was, which lends a remorseful tone to what he says. The narrator relays the breadth of Netherton's comments rather than quoting Netherton directly, suggesting authorial editorializing. Rather than allowing Netherton—a character who is known for lying—to directly describe the catastrophe, Gibson opts to have the narrator—who is, oftentimes, more aligned with the author—describe it. In a nutshell, the jackpot is not a precise definition for the catastrophe in that it implies a one-time calamity that dramatically altered life on the planet. Instead, it was a gradual accumulation of irreversible conditions brought about by climate change, which was caused by too much carbon in the atmosphere. The narrator says, “no comets crashing, nothing you could really call a nuclear war. Just everything else, tangled in the changing climate: droughts, water shortages, crop failures[...]” (321). The real tragedy of the situation is that by the time humanity collaborated to do something about it, it was too late.

It is significant that Netherton increasingly enjoys his forays to the past because it shows his inherent sense of longing for a lost world. At the end of the novel, Netherton tells Macon of his motivation for wanting to spend lots of time in his past, “If you spent more time up here[...]you might start to appreciate that sort of thing. It’s relaxing” (484). From his vantage point of living in a post-apocalyptic world, he finds the current world is superior, and his comment here serves as a call to action both to Macon and to raiders in general: Appreciate what you have before it becomes ruined beyond repair.

### **Dystopian Police State versus Personal Liberty**

In both the near and distant futures of the novel, the surveillance state is seemingly omnipresent. In the near future of Flynn’s time, this takes many forms, most notably the drones that are everywhere. While Burton also uses drones for his own security, it is often difficult to discern if the drones in the novel are his or belong to Homes (Homeland Security). There are also cameras recording every last nook and cranny, even in aerial objects like blimps. Flynn notices one of these, and the narrator says, “One of the blimps was hanging over the lot, pretending to just be advertising next season’s Viz. But the banner with the big close-up of an eye behind a Viz made it look like it was watching everybody, which of course she knew it was” (100). The viz is a piece of tech that one can put in their eye and see multiple things at once. It is something like smart glasses but without the glasses needed. The surveillance here is deceptive and hidden behind an advertisement, but the effect is the same. The citizens of Flynn’s world are under constant surveillance, the watchful eye of Homes. In another scene in which four young men are murdered, investigators use satellites to determine who the killer may have been. In most cases, however, the citizens seem to take it all in stride. They are not overcome by paranoia in any obvious manner, as if knowing they are being watched is just a commonplace fact of life.

In the novel’s distant future, this surveillance is taken magnitudes further. We see in the London of the future a world where algorithms predict what people may or may not do. We also see, embodied by Lowbeer, a police state where the police see everything and have an absolute monopoly of force. For example, when Flynn finds out that “party time” is a chemical agent that causes homicidal impulses, she firmly opposes its use even against her enemies. She levels an ultimatum at Netherton that she will no longer participate in the identification of Aelita’s killer if party time is used. Netherton asks Lowbeer if she knew what Flynn said when Lowbeer visits him later on, and she answers, “I do[...]After all these years I still find it vaguely embarrassing. Though it wasn’t that I specifically asked to hear it. The

aunties fetched it" (381). First, Lowbeer tends to hear so much of what is said that the other characters have evolved mechanisms for speaking in code. This is best exemplified in the way Ossian and Ash communicate with each other when they do not want anyone to understand. Ash also gives Netherton this power, albeit briefly. Second, Lowbeer essentially exonerates herself from spying, even though that is her job. The way she has constructed the sentence, she is simply receiving the intelligence from the aunties, or the algorithms. She is effectively a conduit through which the police state tracks the citizens of future London. Governmental control exercised through technology is nearly absolute, a hallmark of dystopian fiction.

## Symbols & Motifs

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### Hefty Mart

Hefty Mart represents corporate dominance in the near future. It has a monopoly on the entire retail market and is one of the primary sources of economic activity in Flynn's world. One might imagine Amazon joining forces with Walmart and then multiplying their business exponentially—this is analogous to what Hefty Mart is in the novel. Since Hefty Mart has such dominance in the legal economy, knock-off operations are one way for people to make their own money. Flynn works for one such manufacturer of “fabbed” products. With this, Hefty Mart symbolizes the corporatized world common to cyberpunk fiction.

Significantly, in the world of the distant future, Hefty Mart is not mentioned, and none of the characters are aware of what it is. This ties into two of the book's themes: **Objective Reality versus Artificially Constructed Reality** and **Environmental Degradation and its Effects on Life**. Regarding reality, there is a sense for those in the present that reality is concrete and immutable, a concept cast into doubt by future London working with agents in the past to change the course of history. In truth, even objective reality is constantly changing, affected by actions big and small. While Hefty Mart's power is absolute in Flynn's time and no one can imagine an alternate world, it doesn't exist in the future. With this, Gibson implies that even the most powerful institutions can fail.

Likewise, Hefty Mart likely fails due to environmental collapse. Megacorporations that rely on consumption likewise rely on the exploitation of labor and resources. In a world where 80% of the population dies due to environmental degradation, such large-scale production and consumption can no longer exist. Just as natural life could not withstand climate change, neither could companies like Hefty Mart.

### Cybernetic Implants

Another common trope in cyberpunk fiction, many of the characters in the novel have cybernetic implants either permanently implanted or have accessories they can use temporarily that augment their capabilities. The techs Macon and Edward use a device known as a viz, which are contact lenses that function like smart glasses. Macon and Edward also develop a device that Flynn uses to transport to the future virtually. While there, Flynn

occupies a human-like figure known as a peripheral. Connor, who is an amputee in his present, is given the ability to walk, jump, run, and do flips while he occupies his peripheral. The novel has many other examples of cybernetic implants, especially in sections describing the future.

Cybernetic implants underline Gibson's central questions about organic reality vs. artificially constructed reality. In a future where cybernetic implants can create a reality indistinguishable from organic reality, the lines between real and unreal are increasingly blurred. Gibson emphasizes that reality is rooted in perception rather than facts, especially since facts can change in *The Peripheral* thanks to time travel altering timelines. Rather than getting caught up in what is real and what is not, Gibson implies that there is value in the emotional resonance granted by cybernetic implants.

### The Drug Trade and Corruption

Aside from Hefty Mart, the other primary engine on which the Clanton economy runs is the synthetic drug trade. This creates enormous wealth that is centralized and transferred to one man's empire, Corbell Pickett. Clanton is so dependent on the drug trade that its government agencies and officials become subjugated to Pickett. Law enforcement is compromised, as are mayors and governors. Corruption is everywhere, and knowing this truth allows Burton the means to work within it. He uses money received from Coldiron to pay off officials and help keep things quiet when necessary.

As is the case with Hefty Mart, there is not the same level of drug use in the future. People have different ways of escaping, though alcohol still exists. This again calls into question the permanence of any power. By the end of the novel, Burton has received so many payments from Coldiron that Corbell Pickett isn't even the richest man in his own present. Gibson's meditations on power call to mind science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin's 2014 National Book Award speech, in which she said, "We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable—but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings" ("[Ursula K Le Guin's speech at National Book Awards: 'Books aren't just commodities'](#)"). While certain forces make life more precarious for *The Peripheral's* characters, Gibson asserts that they can all be overcome, although other problems like increased state surveillance may rise in their wake.

## Important Quotes

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1. “He imagined her ego swimming up behind them, to peer at him suspiciously, something eel-like, larval, transparently boned.”

([Chapter 4](#), Page 12)

*Gibson uses a metaphor here to describe Daedra’s ego, and by extension, her personality in general. That she is like an eel indicates that she is slimy, and that she is like a larva indicates that she is something less than a fully formed being.*

2. “The square filled with a low moaning, the island’s hallmark soundscape. The patchers had wormed hollow tubes through every structure. Wind blew across their open tops, generating a shifting, composite tonality he’d hated from the moment he’d first heard it.”

([Chapter 6](#), Page 18)

*The sensory description provided here helps establish the dystopian world that is a hallmark of the cyberpunk genre.*

3. “The Notting Hill house had been Lev’s grandfather’s first London real estate, acquired midcentury, just as the jackpot really got going.”

([Chapter 12](#), Page 39)

*This is the second time in the novel that the term jackpot is used, though the reader won’t learn about the jackpot for many more chapters. As is common in the novel, the characters know something that is not obvious to the reader, which helps build suspense.*

4. “Something she’d gotten from Burton and the Corps, that you didn’t do things in the clothes you sat around in. You got yourself squared away, then your intent did too.”

([Chapter 12](#), Page 42)

*This is characterization, as the orderliness describes an aspect of Flynn’s personality. She is nobody’s fool and is not a slacker, though her nickname is “Easy Ice.”*

5. “She remembered the SS officer, when she’d worked for Dwight. Face of the man at the window reminded her.”

([Chapter 13](#), Page 47)

*This shows an example of Gibson's narrative style, especially in the chapters that focus on Flynn's era. The second phrase omits the article "the" before "face." This reveals an evolving language structure in which common syntax is corrupted, presumably by mediated forms of communication such as texting.*

6. "It altered constantly, their encryption, something sounding Spanish morphing into a faux German in the course of a simple statement, perhaps by way of something more like birdsong than speech."

([Chapter 14](#), Page 51)

*The narrator is describing the methods by which Ossian and Ash communicate privately. The need for them to encrypt their language not only excludes Netherton from understanding what they say, but it also enables them to avoid eavesdroppers like the police doing the same.*

7. "He was watching two Lego pieces, one red, one yellow, as they morphed into two small spheres, between the Starck pepper grinder and a bowl of oranges."

([Chapter 16](#), Page 57)

*The Legos that Netherton watches here suggest that even mundane objects are animated with artificial life. This is a direct contrast with the natural life he sees later in the novel when he visits Flynn's world in a peripheral.*

8. "Hefty Mart had to scan your socket before they fabbed you one, so it would fit, and there weren't any funny ones yet."

([Chapter 17](#), Page 62)

*The idiomatic expressions here come across as commonplace as if the reader is expected to just know what these terms mean. The slang here is another one of Gibson's stylistic flourishes. Hefty Mart is a massive retailer, fabbed means to fabricate, and funny means fake.*

9. "'In each instance in which we interact with the stub,' Ash said, 'we ultimately change all of it, the long outcomes.'"

([Chapter 18](#), Page 70)

*The passage shows that shows how Lev's interactions with the stub have consequences that he either does not understand or does not care about.*

10. "Listening to her, Netherton found he lost himself, not unpleasantly. Her accent fascinated him, a voice out of pre-jackpot America."

([Chapter 22](#), Page 84)

*Netherton has an almost immediate fondness for Flynne because she represents the lost world. Once again, the narrator mentions the jackpot without explaining what it is.*

11. "A given interval in the stub is the same interval here, from first instant of contact. We can no more know their future than we can know our own, except to assume that it ultimately isn't going to be history as we know it."

([Chapter 24](#), Page 92)

*Ash says this to Netherton, and it suggests that the future for Flynne has been altered. This opens the door for a possible avoidance of the jackpot happening.*

12. "I've continual access to most things, resulting in a terrible habit of behaving as if I already know everyone I meet."

([Chapter 26](#), Page 102)

*Lowbeer says this and reveals that her access to information is unlimited. That she is a detective suggests that she represents a police state in which nothing is hidden.*

13. "'State AI. Satellite noticed the vehicle hadn't moved for two hours. Also flagged your property for unusual drone activity.'"

([Chapter 27](#), Page 113)

*Drones and satellites are used to investigate the quadruple homicide near Burton's property. It highlights the invasiveness of police apparatus and surveillance systems of the near future.*

14. "London's vast quiet seemed suddenly to press in."

([Chapter 28](#), Page 117)

*The vast quiet of London contrasts sharply with the modern metropolis that it is usually regarded as. The sensory description once again hints at a dystopian setting.*



15. "We call them that. Algorithms. We have a great many, built up over decades. I doubt anyone today knows quite how they work, in any given instance."

([Chapter 34](#), Page 145)

*That nobody knows how the algorithms work suggests that future London has crossed the singularity. The singularity is a theorized point in the future when technological growth surpasses human input, resulting in a totally changed society.*

16. "The county's most viable economy is the molecular synthesis of illicit drugs. The sheriff is in the pay of the most successful local synthesist."

([Chapter 36](#), Page 154)

*The economy of Flynne's world is dependent on the drug trade. Significantly, the drugs are synthetic, calling into question whether naturally occurring drugs that come from plants have been decimated by environmental damage.*

17. "'Wilf,' he said, thinking it sounded less like a name than an awkward cough."

([Chapter 42](#), Page 181)

*The novel is not without some funny moments. This one comes at the expense of Netherton's first name, and his self-conscious reflections characterize him as an insecure person.*

18. "People were so fantastically boring. Flynne, he thought, was the opposite of all of this, whether in her peripheral or not."

([Chapter 52](#), Page 229)

*Netherton thinks this as he watches people acting out inside peripherals. He is put off by the artifice of it all and instead recalls Flynne and how authentic she is.*

19. "'She sees your distaste for the present rooted in the sense of a fall from grace. That some prior order, or perhaps the lack of one, afforded a more authentic existence.'"

([Chapter 68](#), Page 281)

*Lowbeer says this to Netherton. She is referring to Ash, and Ash's diagnosis of Netherton once again highlights his unease at the world he lives in. It also hints at the original fall of Adam and Eve, suggesting that Netherton longs for a kind of Edenic existence that is unattainable for him.*

20. "We carve history from totalities beyond our grasp."

([Chapter 68](#), Page 282)

*Lowbeer's words to Netherton here suggest that history is simply a human mechanism for providing order against a larger backdrop that we can never fully understand.*

21. "Though mainly in how visually banal they generally are, as opposed to the considerable glamor we all seem to imagine they had, as we remember them."

([Chapter 80](#), Page 327)

*Netherton asks Lowbeer if she can tell what Flynnne is dreaming, and this is the end of the response she gives. As an outside observer, dreams are never as eventful and interesting as they are to the people who actually dream them.*

22. "Looking back through this clumsy toy at this strange world, in which worn things weren't meticulously distressed, but actually worn, abraded by their passage through time."

([Chapter 98](#), Page 403)

*Netherton is in his Wheelie-Boy peripheral and notices how even natural wear and tear is preferable to the artificially created distress of his world, in which human technological interference even replicates decay.*

23. "It made her expect Pickett might walk in, and for all she knew, given the way things were going, she felt like he might."

([Chapter 118](#), Page 464)

*As events move fast and furious, Flynnne has found herself unsure as to what will happen next. This unpredictability fosters a sense of the surreal where anything could happen.*

24. "That evil wasn't glamorous, but just the result of ordinary half-assed badness, high school badness, given enough room, however that might happen, to become its bigger self. Bigger, with more horrible results, but never more than the cumulative weight of ordinary human baseness."

([Chapter 123](#), Page 481)

*One of the underlying premises of the book—the philosophy presented here—suggests that ordinary human behavior without forward-thinking can lead to the same level of catastrophe as pure evil.*

25. "Always nice to see Flynnne."

([Chapter 124](#), Page 485)

*The final phrase of the novel is characteristic of Gibson's narrative style in the text as it leaves out the subject of the sentence, thereby creating a fragment. It also implies that there is more to the story that will follow.*

## Essay Topics

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1. How would you describe Flynn Fisher's character? In which ways is she a reluctant heroine?
2. One commonality between the two worlds of the novel is that both seem to accept constant surveillance as a fact of life. What is Gibson implying here?
3. What are some ways that Gibson subverts a typical detective story in this novel?
4. Netherton seems to have a drinking problem in the novel. Where would you locate the source of this problem?
5. Burton is something of a shadowy figure in the novel. He pulls many of the strings behind the scenes, yet he's one of the good guys. Why do you think Gibson would create Burton as this kind of character? Could it be related to the genre? How so?
6. How does the novel treat women in general?
7. How does Netherton's perspective add to the tragedy posed by climate change in the novel?
8. Evaluate the climactic scene. Is it predictable? Does it satisfy, and does it resolve the plot? Is it anticlimactic? How so?
9. Evaluate the chapters that come after the climax. What purpose do these serve? Are they necessary to the plot, or are they forced in to set up the sequel?
10. Does the novel offer any hope regarding climate change? How so?