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Earth Abides: working with various post-apocalyptic novels to enhance close reading skills and foster discussion



## The Comfort of Darkness

**Lisa Rowe Fraustino** is an associate professor of English at Eastern Connecticut State University. Her most recent novel, "The Hole in the Wall," won the 2010 Milkweed Prize for Children's Literature.

We readers and writers of young adult fiction can't seem to get enough of the dark side. By the millions we've followed series like Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials," J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books, and now Suzanne Collins's "The Hunger Games." In recent years we've also gravitated to individual titles like Neil Gaiman's Newbery-winning "The Graveyard Book" and Markus Zusak's "The Book Thief," narrated by Death himself.

We want to read about the child of dystopia who makes us feel hope for humankind.

What's possessing us? The publicity machines of wealthy international publishing corporations? That's a tempting answer, and perhaps partly true. But buzz alone can't keep the readers it attracts. Only a story can do that. As my editor Ben Barnhart says, "It can be comforting, in a strange sort of way, to read a story in which the terrifying struggles and tribulations of the main character force your own problems to fade away."

Anyone who has read "The Chocolate War," "I Am the Cheese," or other books by Robert Cormier knows that darkness is nothing new in young adult literature. Cormier was taking critical flack for the bleakness of his endings back when J.K. Rowling and Suzanne Collins were both too young to read his books.

Like S.E. Hinton in her pathfinding 1967 novel "The Outsiders" and legions of young adult authors who followed her, Cormier gave us gritty contemporary realism about problems of the day. So it actually hasn't been such a huge literary leap into the shadows of fantastical dystopia.

Protagonists like Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen may find it more challenging than Ponyboy Curtis did to "stay gold" — to hold on to his goodness, not to become jaded — but that's still the ultimate goal of young adult fiction and, I think, the source of hunger for dystopian fantasy in a decade dominated by global fears of war, terrorism, climate change, economic hardship, class divides, and a generally uncertain future for many.

No different from that quintessential literary adolescent Holden Caulfield, we want to hold on to the joy in life we felt as children. We want to hold on to our individuality, our humanity, our ability to love and connect to others. We have always wanted to hold on, but in today's global communications network we can't avoid facing overwhelming obstacles. The more we understand how small and powerless we really are against the immense forces that control our existence, the more we yearn to feel meaningful.

And so we read again and again about the child of dystopia who makes us feel hope for humankind, even if, in the case of M.T. Anderson's futuristic "Feed," it turns out that the society is beyond repair. All the protagonist can do in that failed world is begin to understand and care about where we went wrong — which is exactly what the reader needs to do now to prevent a dystopian future.

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/12/26/the-dark-side-of-young-adult-fiction/the-comfort-of-darkness>

## A Role for Children's Literature

**Michelle Ann Abate** is an associate professor of English at Hollins University in Virginia. Her most recent book is "Raising Your Kids Right: Children's Literature and American Political Conservatism."

While the popularity of somber young adult books like “The Hunger Games” trilogy have raised questions about the nature of current narratives for young readers, children’s literature has long engaged with weighty cultural issues, complex sociopolitical concerns, and even graphic violence.

The iconoclastic nature of young adult literature began in the 1960s, with writers tackling subjects once forbidden.

Such elements permeate even the Victorian era, commonly credited with romanticizing children and “sanitizing” children’s literature. “Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland,” “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” and “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” all are loaded with social commentary and sharp political satire.

That said, the tone and content of children’s literature did experience a transformation in the 1960s and 1970s. Fueled by societal beliefs that adults ought to be more honest and open with children, new narratives began pushing the boundaries of acceptable themes and suitable subject matters.

Once-taboo topics like violence in S. E. Hinton’s “The Outsiders” (1967), sexuality in books like Judy Blume’s “Forever” (1975), and death in Katherine Paterson’s “Bridge to Terabithia” (1977) became increasingly acceptable. Because many of these books addressed what were considered “social problems” (juvenile delinquency or adolescent sexuality) they were deemed “problem novels;” and because many were aimed at a teenage audience, they were deemed “young adult” novels. Thus the young adult genre has been linked with social, political, and cultural concerns ever since.

The iconoclastic nature of young adult literature continues to this day. Fueled by boutique presses, the growth of niche markets, and promotion and sales opportunities on the Internet, books for children of all ages — not just those considered “young adult” — now discuss topics which had previously been ignored or even forbidden. With subjects ranging from marijuana use in Ricardo Cortés's picture book “It’s Just a Plant” to oral sex in Alex Sanchez’s novel “Rainbow Boys,” these books push the boundaries of children’s literature in daring directions.

Some parents, teachers and critics praise the steady turn toward realism in children’s literature, celebrating efforts to be more honest with young people. Others, however, are alarmed by it.

As I discuss in “Raising Your Kids Right: Children’s Literature and American Political Conservatism,” a growing sense among many that books for younger readers have become increasingly liberal (in every sense of that word) has sparked a countermovement. And that has given rise to a sub-genre of works ranging from William Bennett’s anthology “The Book of Virtues” to Bill O’Reilly’s “The O’Reilly Factor for Kids” to the “Left Behind” series for kids — which aims to offset what they see as the alarmingly graphic, excessively permissive, and plainly “left-wing” agenda of contemporary children’s books by conveying more “traditional” values and conservative political beliefs.

This struggle over the role of children’s literature is not new. Since the appearance of works for young readers, authors, parents and critics have debated these questions: Is the role of these books to educate young people about the world in which they live, including its unpleasant aspects. Or, is it their responsibility to shield children from such elements? Our answer depends on our social perception of children and the cultural construction of childhood.

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/12/26/the-dark-side-of-young-adult-fiction/a-role-for-childrens-literature>

## Craving Truth-telling

**Paolo Bacigalupi** is the author of "Ship Breaker," a 2010 National Book Award Finalist in Young People's Literature. He has also won the Hugo, Nebula and John W. Campbell Awards.

I suspect that young adults crave stories of broken futures because they themselves are uneasily aware that their world is falling apart.

The truth of the world around us is changing and teens want to read something that isn't a lie.

We might pummel them with advertising that says they should buy a new iPod, or Xbox, or Droid XYZ, and that everything in the world is shiny and delightful -- but whether we're looking at the loss of biodiversity, or the depletion of cheap and easily accessible energy, or the hazards of global warming, our children will inherit a world significantly depleted and damaged in comparison to the one our parents handed down to us. And they know it.

With "Ship Breaker," a novel set in a future when oil has run out and New Orleans has drowned under rising sea levels, I was trying to illuminate the sort of world that we adults are handing off to them. In the story, child laborers tear apart ancient oil tankers and freighters, recycling the last valuable resources from "the Accelerated Age." Quality of life is significantly reduced from our present circumstances, and judging from teenagers' responses, they crave precisely that sort of truth-telling. Which doesn't really surprise me. As a teen, I remember that I craved truth-telling as well, and devoured it wherever I could find it.

Unfortunately, the truth of the world around us is changing, and so the literature is morphing to reflect it. Teens want to read something that isn't a lie; we adults wish we could put our heads under the blankets and hide from the scary story we're writing for our kids.

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## What Poe's Publishers Could Not Imagine

**Andrew Clements** is the author of "Frindle," and most recently the "Benjamin Pratt and the Keepers of the School" series, among many books for younger readers. among many books for younger readers.

Growing up during the 1950s, I read many of the children's books of that period — stories like Thornton Burgess's woodland adventures, all the "Winnie the Pooh" books, "The Wind in the Willows," "The Hardy Boys," the "Tom Swift" series, the Random House Landmark books, Tom Sawyer, "Kon-Tiki" — on and on. But by grade six or so, I was becoming more aware of the world. I began to realize that all was not sweetness and light, and my literary appetite was whetted for stronger meat.

In our media-saturated lives every single awful thing that happens anywhere is pressed upon us in full-color, live-action images instantaneously.

Jack London's "The Call of the Wild" is about as far from "The Adventures of Danny Meadow Mouse" as a young reader can get. The dog in London's Klondike, Buck, devolves into as terrifying a creature as any vampire or werewolf would ever dare to be. And I loved that book, and went on to London's other novels and short stories.

I dove into Edgar Allan Poe. I read all the Sherlock Holmes mysteries, and I devoured all of the seamy Perry Mason mysteries and the outrageous James Bond thrillers — a full menu of dystopia, madness, intrigue, and international mayhem. I enjoyed the sharp contrast between my safe and normal everyday life, and the horrors and the cold-bloodedness in my reading life.

Perhaps the dystopian stories of today are darker because all of us, writers and readers alike, have become more aware of the many awful things that happen in our world. A study of world history shows that truly awful things have always happened. In our current media-saturated lives, however, every single awful thing that happens anywhere is pressed upon us in full-color, live-action images, both instantaneously and repetitively. In order for a book to seem scary today, it has to be very scary indeed.

As to the hunger for today's darker stories, I think scary tales have always had a strong appeal to people both old and young. It's one of the ways we can put the events of our own lives into perspective. And the current popularity of dystopian tales also owes a lot to Internet-age marketing — a degree of consciousness saturation that Poe's publishers could not have imagined.

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### **Breaking Down the 'System'**

**Scott Westerfeld** is the author many bestselling young adult novels, including the "Uglies" trilogy and the "Leviathan" series. He has also written several science fiction novels for adults.

Teenagers are at a stage of life where they must tangle with almost adult responsibilities — school, work, college applications — and yet they haven't been granted many adult powers or respect. They're encouraged to work, but generally at menial jobs, and when they show up to spend their money, they're carefully watched, assumed to be shoplifters and loiterers.

What is the apocalypse but an everlasting snow day? An excuse to tear up all those college applications?

Schools are places where teens are subject to dress codes, have few free speech rights, and are constantly surveilled, where they rise and sit at the sound of a bell. Is it any wonder that dystopian novels speak to them?

Of course, the other side of the boom in dystopian teen novels is a boom in post-apocalyptic tales. The system is asking a lot from teenagers and not giving them much respect in return, so it's no wonder that stories about that system exploding, breaking down under its own contradictions, or simply being overrun by zombies are also beloved of teenagers.

What is the apocalypse but an everlasting snow day? An excuse to tear up all those college applications, which suddenly aren't going to determine the rest of your life?

My last two series are about these two extremes: dystopia and apocalypse. "Uglies" is set in a society based on surveillance and control, which is where our "zero tolerance" schools are headed. And "Leviathan" is set in World War I, the historical moment when it became clear that we didn't need gods to bring about apocalypses anymore, technology would do just fine.

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### **Feeling 'Gamed'**

**Jay Parini**, a poet and novelist, is the author, most recently, of "The Passages of H.M.," a novel about Herman Melville. He is Axinn Professor of English and Creative Writing at Middlebury College.

It does seem there is more interest in dystopian fiction now, especially in high schools. I myself was drawn to novels in this vein as a teenager: George Orwell's "1984," Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" and -- especially -- "A Clockwork Orange" by Anthony Burgess. This last novel appeared when I was in high school, and I remember it vividly as a story that spoke to my own sense of a world where violence was not only prevalent but glorified, turned into a way of life. I felt myself surrounded by kids not unlike the "droogs," and knew several replicas of Dim, the muscular thug who lived only to crush those around him. I could sympathize with Alex, the hero (or anti-hero) of that book. He was gamed by the system.

Dystopian fiction attracts teenagers who feel trapped by high school's world of tests that humiliate and unnerve them.

Many teens feel "gamed" in this way. Like Alex, they can't "get out." The adult world has them in its cross hairs, wishing to separate the sheep from the goats, and they will do so, whatever it takes.

I've watched my three boys come through high school, which always has a brutal aspect. (The last is now in tenth grade.) It may even be more brutal these days, with an excess of testing and the watchfulness not only of parents and teachers but the big eyeball of the system itself, its vision intensified by video surveillance cameras, Facebook and the omnipresent Web, which tracks everyone down, puts every idiotic statement in the virtual concrete of electrons -- forever.

I don't wonder that, with klieg lights trained on kids these days, they resent it, shrinking from the glare. They feel trapped, forced into a world of tests that humiliate and unnerve them. And so we have "The Hunger Games" books by Suzanne Collins, or any number of young adult novels that eerily reflect aspects of our current world -- or the least attractive aspects of this world. Among my favorites is "The Other Side of the Island" by the wonderful Allegra Goodman, who subverts many of the conventions of dystopian fiction in interesting ways.

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/12/26/the-dark-side-of-young-adult-fiction/teenagers-turn-to-books-to-get-away-from-the-system>

### **Pure Escapism**

**Maggie Stiefvater**, a writer, artist and musician, is the author of the "Shiver" trilogy, "Lament: The Faerie Queen's Deception" and "Ballad: A Gathering of Faerie."

Ahh, dystopia. All it takes is a glimpse at upcoming young adult booklists for 2011 and 2012 to see that the dystopian trend is not only big now, but is going to get bigger in the next few years.

In a culture defined by shades of gray, the absolute black and white choices in dark young adult novels are incredibly satisfying for readers.

The question of why these dark novels appeal to teenagers has been around awhile, and there's a pretty standard response. It tends to be some variation of "these are dark, pessimistic times with the economy and culture; the darkness of the subject matter reflects those fears."

My thoughts on that? Ha and double ha. I don't believe it.

In my experience, the teenagers who are loving the dystopian themes are generally the ones who don't have to face it. I don't think they read dark novels because it reflects their world. Would we be so enamored with dystopian fiction if we lived in a culture where violent death was a major concern? It wouldn't be escapism.

Here's my theory: our world is getting increasingly complex. Teenagers face a huge number of choices and an almost paralyzing array of expert opinions on what constitutes right and wrong. In a culture defined by shades of gray, I think the absolute black and white choices in dark young adult novels are incredibly satisfying for readers.

Teenagers want to be able to fight for what's right -- but finding out what's right is now 90 percent of the battle. If only the evil in the world was named Voldemort, we could get down to the business of slaying it. And with the dystopian novels, we know just what we're fighting for.

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If you are neutral about the statement stay in the center of the room, otherwise move to the corner of the room that best expresses your view on that subject. Be prepared to share why you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree.

<b>SA A N D SD</b>	<i>[Y]oung adults crave stories of broken futures because they themselves are uneasily aware that their world is falling apart.</i>
<b>SA A N D SD</b>	<i>[T]eenagers who are loving the dystopian [post apocalyptic] themes are generally the ones who don't have to face it. [...] Would we be so enamored with dystopian fiction if we lived in a culture where violent death was a major concern? It wouldn't be escapism.</i>
<b>SA A N D SD</b>	<i>Schools are places where teens are subject to dress codes, have few free speech rights, and are constantly under surveillance, where they rise and sit at the sound of a bell. Is it any wonder that dystopian [post apocalyptic] novels speak to them?</i>
<b>SA A N D SD</b>	<i>[T]he current popularity of dystopian [post apocalyptic] tales also owes a lot to Internet-age marketing.</i>
<b>SA A N D SD</b>	<i>We want to hold on to our individuality, our humanity, our ability to love and connect to others, [...] but in today's global communications network we can't avoid facing overwhelming obstacles. The more we understand how small and powerless we really are against the immense forces that control our existence, the more we yearn to feel meaningful. And so we read again and again about the child of dystopia [post apocalypse] who makes us feel hope for humankind.</i>

**Group One: Compare/Contrast Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* with Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Look especially for plot similarities, uses of language, style of writing, etc. Which would appeal to your students? Why would they "like" it? Pick one of the passages and decide how you would teach the passage in class.**

**The Scarlet Plague** by Jack London (opening)

The way led along upon what had once been the embankment of a railroad. But no train had run upon it for many years. The forest on either side swelled up the slopes of the embankment and crested across it in a green wave of trees and bushes. The trail was as narrow as a man's body, and was no more than a wild-animal runway.

Occasionally, a piece of rusty iron, showing through the forest-mold, advertised that the rail and the ties still remained. In one place, a ten-inch tree, bursting through at a connection, had lifted the end of a rail clearly into view. The tie had evidently followed the rail, held to it by the spike long enough for its bed to be filled with gravel and rotten leaves, so that now the crumbling, rotten timber thrust itself up at a curious slant. Old as the road was, it was manifest that it had been of the mono-rail type.

An old man and a boy travelled along this runway. They moved slowly, for the old man was very old, a touch of palsy made his movements tremulous, and he leaned heavily upon his staff. A rude skull-cap of goatskin protected his head from the sun. From beneath this fell a scant fringe of stained and dirty-white hair. A visor, ingeniously made from a large leaf, shielded his eyes, and from under this he peered at the way of his feet on the trail. His beard, which should have been snow-white but which showed the same weather-wear and camp-stain as his hair, fell nearly to his waist in a great tangled mass. About his chest and shoulders hung a single, mangy garment of goatskin. His arms and legs, withered and skinny, betokened extreme age, as well as did their sunburn and scars and scratches betoken long years of exposure to the elements.

The boy, who led the way, checking the eagerness of his muscles to the slow progress of the elder, likewise wore a single garment--a ragged-edged piece of bearskin, with a hole in the middle through which he had thrust his head. He could not have been more than twelve years old.

Tucked coquettishly over one ear was the freshly severed tail of a pig. In one hand he carried a medium-sized bow and an arrow. On his back was a quiverful of arrows. From a sheath hanging about his neck on a thong, projected the battered handle of a hunting knife. He was as brown as a berry, and walked softly, with almost a catlike tread. In marked contrast with his sunburned skin were his eyes--blue, deep blue, but keen and sharp as a pair of gimlets. They seemed to bore into all about him in a way that was habitual. As he went along he smelled things, as well, his distended, quivering nostrils carrying to his brain an endless series of messages from the outside world. Also, his hearing was acute, and had been so trained that it operated automatically. Without conscious effort, he heard all the slight sounds in the apparent quiet--heard, and differentiated, and classified these sounds--whether they were of the wind rustling the leaves, of the humming of bees and gnats, of the distant rumble of the sea that drifted to him only in lulls, or of the gopher, just under his foot, shoving a pouchful of earth into the entrance of his hole.

**Ending**

The old man shook his head sadly, and said: "The gunpowder will come. Nothing can stop it—the same old story over and over. Man will increase, and men will fight. The gunpowder will enable men to kill millions of men, and in this way only, by fire and blood, will a new civilization, in some remote day, be evolved. And of what profit will it be? Just as the old civilization passed, so will the new. It may take fifty thousand years to build, but it will pass. All things pass.

"Only remain cosmic force and matter, ever in flux, ever acting and reacting and realizing the eternal types—the priest, the soldier, and the king. Out of the mouths of babes comes the wisdom of all the ages. Some will fight, some will rule, some will pray; and all the rest will toil and suffer sore while on their bleeding carcasses is reared again, and yet again, without end, the amazing beauty and surpassing wonder of the civilized state. It were just as well that I destroyed those cave-stored books—whether they remain or perish, all their old truths will be discovered, their old lies lived and handed down. What is the profit—"

Hare-Lip leaped to his feet, giving a quick glance at the pasturing goats and the afternoon sun.

"Gee!" he muttered to Edwin. "The old geezer gets more long-winded every day. Let's pull for camp."

While the other two, aided by the dogs, assembled the goats and started them for the trail through the forest, Edwin stayed by the old man and guided him in the same direction. When they reached the old right of way, Edwin stopped suddenly and looked back. Hare-Lip and Hoo-Hoo and the dogs and the goats passed on. Edwin was looking at a small herd of wild horses which had come down on the hard sand. There were at least twenty of them, young colts and yearlings and mares, led by a beautiful stallion which stood in the foam at the edge of the surf, with arched neck and bright wild eyes, sniffing the salt air from off the sea.

"What is it?" Granser queried.

"Horses," was the answer. "First time I ever seen 'em on the beach. It's the mountain lions getting thicker and thicker and driving 'em down."

The low sun shot red shafts of light, fanshaped, up from a cloud-tumbled horizon. And close at hand, in the white waste of shore-lashed waters, the sea-lions, bellowing their old primeval chant, hauled up out of the sea on the black rocks and fought and loved.

"Come on, Granser," Edwin prompted.

And old man and boy, skin-clad and barbaric, turned and went along the right of way into the forest in the wake of the goats.

***The Road*** by Cormac McCarthy (opening)

When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him. Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world. His hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath. He pushed away the plastic tarpaulin and raised himself in the stinking robes and blankets and looked toward the east for any light but there was none. In the dream from

which he'd wakened he had wandered in a cave where the child led him by the hand. Their light playing over the wet flowstone walls. Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast. Deep stone flues where the water dripped and sang. Tolling in the silence the minutes of the earth and the hours and the days of it and the years without cease. Until they stood in a great stone room where lay a black and ancient lake. And on the far shore a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rimstone pool and stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders. It swung its head low over the water as if to take the scent of what it could not see. Crouching there pale and naked and translucent, its alabaster bones cast up in shadow on the rocks behind it. Its bowels, its beating heart. The brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell. It swung its head from side to side and then gave out a low moan and turned and lurched away and loped soundlessly into the dark.

With the first gray light he rose and left the boy sleeping and walked out to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasn't sure. He hadn't kept a calendar for years. They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here.

When it was light enough to use the binoculars he glassed the valley below. Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of color. Any movement. Any trace of standing smoke. He lowered the glasses and pulled down the cotton mask from his face and wiped his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again. Then he just sat there holding the binoculars and watching the ashen daylight congeal over the land. He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke.

When he got back the boy was still asleep. He pulled the blue plastic tarp off of him and folded it and carried it out to the grocery cart and packed it and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a plastic bag and a plastic bottle of syrup. He spread the small tarp they used for a table on the ground and laid everything out and he took the pistol from his belt and laid it on the cloth and then he just sat watching the boy sleep. He'd pulled away his mask in the night and it was buried somewhere in the blankets. He watched the boy and he looked out through the trees toward the road. This was not a safe place. They could be seen from the road now it was day. The boy turned in the blankets. Then he opened his eyes. Hi, Papa, he said.

I'm right here.

I know.

An hour later they were on the road. He pushed the cart and both he and the boy carried knapsacks. In the knapsacks were essential things. In case they had to abandon the cart and make a run for it. Clamped to the handle of the cart was a chrome motorcycle mirror that he used to watch the road behind them. He shifted the pack higher on his shoulders and looked out over the wasted country. The road was empty. Below in the little valley the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds. Are you okay? he said. The boy nodded. Then they set out along the blacktop in the gunmetal light, shuffling through the ash, each the other's world entire.

They crossed the river by an old concrete bridge and a few miles on they came upon a roadside gas station. They stood in the road and studied it. I think we should check it out, the man said. Take a look. The weeds they forded fell to dust about them. They crossed the broken asphalt apron and found the

tank for the pumps. The cap was gone and the man dropped to his elbows to smell the pipe but the odor of gas was only a rumor, faint and stale. He stood and looked over the building. The pumps standing with their hoses oddly still in place. The windows intact. The door to the service bay was open and he went in. A standing metal toolbox against one wall. He went through the drawers but there was nothing there that he could use. Good half-inch drive sockets. A ratchet. He stood looking around the garage. A metal barrel full of trash. He went into the office. Dust and ash everywhere. The boy stood in the door. A metal desk, a cashregister. Some old automotive manuals, swollen and sodden. The linoleum was stained and curling from the leaking roof. He crossed to the desk and stood there. Then he picked up the phone and dialed the number of his father's house in that long ago. The boy watched him. What are you doing? he said....

### **Ending of the Novel**

Will you be all right?

Yes.

Go ahead. I'll wait for you.

He walked back into the woods and knelt beside his father. He was wrapped in a blanket as the man had promised and the didnt uncover him but he sat beside him and he was crying and he couldnt stop. He cried for a long time. I'll talk to you every day, he whispered. And I wont forget. No matter what. Then he rose and turned and walked back out to the road.

The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget. The woman said that was all right. She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time.

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patters that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.

**Group Two: Examine *After London* by Richard Jefferies; *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank; and *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute. Do you see any plot similarities? Compare/Contrast the style of the language and the “approach” to the subject material. Which would appeal to your students? Why would they “like” it? Pick one of the passages and decide what you would emphasize in a lesson.**

***After London* – Richard Jefferies - Chapter One**

The old men say their fathers told them that soon after the fields were left to themselves a change began to be visible. It became green everywhere in the first spring, after London ended, so that all the country looked alike.

The meadows were green, and so was the rising wheat which had been sown, but which neither had nor would receive any further care. Such arable fields as had not been sown, but where the last stubble had been ploughed up, were overrun with couch-grass, and where the short stubble had not been ploughed, the weeds hid it. So that there was no place which was not more or less green; the footpaths were the greenest of all, for such is the nature of grass where it has once been trodden on, and by-and-by, as the summer came on, the former roads were thinly covered with the grass that had spread out from the margin.

In the autumn, as the meadows were not mown, the grass withered as it stood, falling this way and that, as the wind had blown it; the seeds dropped, and the bennets became a greyish-white, or, where the docks and sorrel were thick, a brownish-red. The wheat, after it had ripened, there being no one to reap it, also remained standing, and was eaten by clouds of sparrows, rooks, and pigeons, which flocked to it and were undisturbed, feasting at their pleasure. As the winter came on, the crops were beaten down by the storms, soaked with rain, and trodden upon by herds of animals.

.....

Aquatic grasses from the furrows and water-carriers extended in the meadows, and, with the rushes, helped to destroy or take the place of the former sweet herbage. Meanwhile, the brambles, which grew very fast, had pushed forward their prickly runners farther and farther from the hedges till they had now reached ten or fifteen yards. The briars had followed, and the hedges had widened to three or four times their first breadth, the fields being equally contracted. Starting from all sides at once, these brambles and briars in the course of about twenty years met in the centre of the largest fields.

.....

No fields, indeed, remained, for where the ground was dry, the thorns, briars, brambles, and saplings already mentioned filled the space, and these thickets and the young trees had converted most part of the country into an immense forest. Where the ground was naturally moist, and the drains had become choked with willow roots, which, when confined in tubes, grow into a mass like the brush of a fox, sedges and flags and rushes covered it. Thorn bushes were there, too, but not so tall; they were hung with lichen. Besides the flags and reeds, vast quantities of the tallest cow-parsnips or "gicks" rose five or six feet high, and the willow herb with its stout stem, almost as woody as a shrub, filled every approach.

***Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank – Chapter One**

.....Florence awoke at six-thirty, as always, on a Friday in early December. Heavy, stiff and graceless, she pushed herself out of bed and padded through the living room into the kitchen. She stumbled onto the back porch, opened the screen door a crack, and fumbled for the milk carton on the stoop. Not until she straightened did her china-blue eyes begin to discern movement in the hushed gray world around her. A jerky-tailed squirrel darted out on the longest limb of her grapefruit tree. Sir Percy, her enormous yellow cat, rose from his burlap couch behind the hot water heater, arched his back, stretched, and rubbed his shoulders on her flannel robe. The African lovebirds rhythmically swayed, heads pressed together, on the swing in their cage. She addressed the lovebirds: "Good morning, Anthony. Good morning, Cleo."

Their eyes, spectacularly ringed in white, as if embedded in mint Life Savers, blinked at her. Anthony shook his green and yellow plumage and rasped a greeting. Cleo said nothing. Anthony was adventurous, Cleo timid. On occasion Anthony grew raucous and irascible and Florence released him into limitless freedom outside. But always, at dusk, Anthony waited in the Turk's-cap, or atop the frangipani, eager to fly home. So long as Cleo preferred comfortable and sheltered imprisonment, Anthony would remain a domesticated parrot. That's what they'd told her when she bought the birds in Miami a month before, and apparently it was true.

.....

As soon as she saw Dave's face, Florence could sense whether the news was going to be good or bad. On this morning Dave looked troubled, and sure enough, when he began to give the news, it was bad. The Russians had sent up another Sputnik, No. 23, and something sinister was going on in the Middle East. Sputnik No. 23 was the largest yet, according to the Smithsonian Institution, and was radioing continuous and elaborate coded signals. "There is reason to believe," Frank said, "that Sputniks of this size are equipped to observe the terrain of the earth below."

.....

"Senator Holler, of the Armed Services Committee, yesterday joined others of a Midwest bloc in demanding that the Air Force shoot down Sputniks capable of military espionage if they violate U.S. air space. The Kremlin has already had something to say about this. Any such action, the Kremlin says, will be regarded the same as an attack on a Soviet vessel or aircraft. The Kremlin pointed out that the United States has traditionally championed the doctrine of Freedom of the Seas. The same freedom, says the Soviet statement, applies to outer space."

The newsman paused, looked up, and half-smiled in wry amusement at this complexity. He turned a page on his clipboard.

"There is a new crisis in the Middle East. A report from Beirut, via Cairo, says that Syrian tanks of the most modern Russian design have crossed the Jordanian frontier. This is undoubtedly a threat to Israel. At the same time Damascus charges that Turkish troops are mobilizing..."

### ***On the Beach*** by Nevil Shute (opening to chapter two)

Infants take no account of Sundays or of midnight parties; by six o'clock next morning the Holmes were up and done and Peter was on the road pedaling his bicycle with the trailer attached to fetch the milk and cream. He stayed with the farmer for awhile discussing the axle for the new trailer, and the towbar, and making a few sketches for the mechanic to work from. "I've got to report for duty tomorrow," he said. "This is the last time that I'll be coming over for the milk."

"That'll be right," said Mr. Paul. "Leave it to me. Tuesdays and Saturdays. I'll see Mrs. Holmes gets the milk and cream."

He got back to his house at about eight o'clock; he shaved and had a shower, dressed, and began to help Mary with the breakfast. Commander Towers put in an appearance at about a quarter to nine with a fresh, scrubbed look about him. "That was a nice party that you had last night," he said. "I don't know when I enjoyed one so much."

His host said, "There are some very pleasant people living just round here." He glanced at his captain and grinned, "Sorry about Moira. She doesn't usually pass out like that."

"It was the whisky. She isn't up yet?"

"I wouldn't expect to see her just yet, I heard someone being sick about two in the morning. I take it that it wasn't you?"

The American laughed. "No, *sir*."

The breakfast came upon the table, and the three of them sat down. "Like another swim this morning?" Peter asked his guest. "It looks like being another hot day."...

### **End of the Novel**

She smiled faintly, and glanced at her watch. It showed three minutes past eight. At about ten minutes past ten Dwight would be going home, home to the Connecticut village that he loved so well. There was nothing now for her in her own home; if she went back to Harkaway she would find nothing there now but the cattle and sad memories. She could not go with Dwight because of naval discipline, and that she understood. Yet she could be very near him when he started home, only about twelve miles away. If then she turned up by his side with a grin on her face, perhaps he would take her with him, and she could see Helen hopping round upon the Pogo stick.

.....

Out of Geelong upon the fourteen miles of road to Barwon Heads and to the sea. As she passed the flooded common she felt her strength was leaving her, but there was now not far to go. A quarter of an hour later she swung right into the great avenue of macro-carpa that was the main street of the little town. At the end she turned left away from the golf links and the little house where so many happy hours of childhood had been spent, knowing now that she would never see it again. She turned right at the bridge at about twenty minutes to ten and passed through the empty caravan park up on to the headland. The sea lay before her, grey and rough with great rollers coming in from the south on to the rocky beach below.

The ocean was empty and grey beneath the overcast, but away to the east there was a break in the clouds and a shaft of light striking down on to the waters. She parked across the road in full view of the sea, got out of her car, took another drink from her bottle, and scanned the horizon for the submarine. Then as she turned towards the lighthouse on Point Lonsdale and the entrance to Port Phillip Bay she saw the low grey shape appear, barely five miles away and heading southwards from the Heads.

She could not see detail but she knew that Dwight was there upon the bridge, taking his ship out on her last cruise. She knew he could not see her and he could not know that she was watching, but she waved to him. Then she got back into the car because the wind was raw and chilly from south polar regions, and she was feeling very ill, and she could watch him just as well when sitting down in shelter.

She sat there dumbly watching as the low grey shape went forward to the mist on the horizon, holding the bottle on her knee. This was the end of it, the very, very end.

Presently she could see the submarine no longer; it had vanished in the mist. She looked at her little wrist watch; it showed one minute past ten. Her childhood religion came back to her in those last minutes; one ought to do something about that, she thought. A little alcoholically she murmured the Lord's Prayer.

Then she took out the red carton from her bag, and opened the vial, and held the tablets in her hand. Another spasm shook her, and she smiled faintly. "Foxed you this time," she said.

She took the cork out of the bottle. It was ten past ten. She said earnestly, "Dwight, if you're on your way already, wait for me."

Then she put the tablets in her mouth and swallowed them down with a mouthful of brandy, sitting behind the wheel of her big car.

**Group Three:** All of these stories were written with “younger readers” in mind; however, they still hold appeal for the more “mature reader”. Why? As you examine the language of “By the Waters of Babylon” how does it contrast with the selections from *Tomorrow*, *When the War Began* and *The Hunger Games*? Compare/Contrast the three selections. Which would appeal to your students? Why would they “like” it? Pick one of the passages and decide what you would emphasize in a lesson.

***By the Waters of Babylon*** (Short Story) by Stephen Vincent Benét (opening)

The north and the west and the south are good hunting ground, but it is forbidden to go east. It is forbidden to go to any of the Dead Places except to search for metal and then he who touches the metal must be a priest or the son of a priest. Afterwards, both the man and the metal must be purified. These are the rules and the laws; they are well made. It is forbidden to cross the great river and look upon the place that was the Place of the Gods—this is most strictly forbidden. We do not even say its name though we know its name. It is there that spirits live, and demons—it is there that there are the ashes of the Great Burning. These things are forbidden—they have been forbidden since the beginning of time.

My father is a priest; I am the son of a priest. I have been in the Dead Places near us, with my father—at first, I was afraid. When my father went into the house to search for the metal, I stood by the door and my heart felt small and weak. It was a dead man's house, a spirit house. It did not have the smell of man, though there were old bones in a corner. But it is not fitting that a priest's son should show fear. I looked at the bones in the shadow and kept my voice still.

Then my father came out with the metal—good, strong piece. He looked at me with both eyes but I had not run away. He gave me the metal to hold—I took it and did not die. So he knew that I was truly his son and would be a priest in my time. That was when I was very young—nevertheless, my brothers would not have done it, though they are good hunters. After that, they gave me the good piece of meat and the warm corner of the fire. My father watched over me—he was glad that I should be a priest. But when I boasted or wept without a reason, he punished me more strictly than my brothers. That was right.

***Further on in the story:***

All the same, when I came to the Place of the Gods, I was afraid, afraid. The current of the great river is very strong—it gripped my raft with its hands. That was magic, for the river itself is wide and calm. I could feel evil spirits about me, I was swept down the stream. Never have I been so much alone—I tried to think of my knowledge, but it was a squirrel's heap of winter nuts. There was no strength in my knowledge any more and I felt small and naked as a new-hatched bird—alone upon the great river, the servant of the gods.

Yet, after a while, my eyes were opened and I saw. I saw both banks of the river—I saw that once there had been god-roads across it, though now they were broken and fallen like broken vines. Very great they were, and wonderful and broken—broken in the time of the Great Burning when the fire fell out of the sky. And always the current took me nearer to the Place of the Gods, and the huge ruins rose before my eyes.

***End of the story:***

That is all of my story, for then I knew he was a man—I knew then that they had been men, neither gods nor demons. It is a great knowledge, hard to tell and believe. They were men—they went a dark road, but they were men. I had no fear after that—I had no fear going home, though twice I fought off the dogs and once I was hunted for two days by the Forest People. When I saw my father again, I prayed and was purified. He touched my lips and my breast, he said, "You went away a boy. You come back a man and a priest." I said, "Father, they were men! I have been in the Place of the Gods and seen it! Now slay me, if it is the law—but still I know they were men."

He looked at me out of both eyes. He said, "The law is not always the same shape—you have done what you have done. I could not have done it my time, but you come after me. Tell!"

I told and he listened. After that, I wished to tell all the people but he showed me otherwise. He said, "Truth is a hard deer to hunt. If you eat too much truth at once, you may die of the truth. It was not idly that our fathers forbade the Dead Places." He was right—it is better the truth should come little by little. I have learned that, being a priest. Perhaps, in the old days, they ate knowledge too fast.

***Tomorrow, When the War Began*** by John Marsden (at the end of the novel)

...It was nearly dark before any of us showed much life or energy. The only thing that got us going was a desire to get home, to see the other four again. We decided it was safe to use the bikes—we worked out a route that would both take us back to my place, where we'd left the Landrover, and a leapfrog pattern of travelling that would protect us from unwelcome patrols.

It's funny, when I look back on that trip, I wonder why I didn't feel any premonition. We were all too tired, I suppose, and we felt that the worst was over and now we deserved a rest. You're sort of brought up to believe that that's the way life should be.

So, at about ten o'clock we set off. We were careful, we travelled slowly, we were as quiet as possible. It was about midnight when we rode up my familiar driveway, bypassing the house and going straight to the garage. The Landrover was hidden in the bush, but I wanted some more tools from the shed. I switched the bike off and put it on its stand and then turned the corner into the big machinery shed...

... I look around me. There's Homer, making lists and drawing plans. God know what he's got in mind for us. Robyn's reading the Bible. She prays quietly every night. I like Robyn and I like how strong she is in her beliefs. Chris is writing too, probably a poem. I don't understand any of the ones he's shown me so far—I don't know if he understands them himself—but I try to make intelligent comments about them. Fi's putting in some posts for a bigger chookyard. Lee's sitting next to me, trying to make a rabbit trap. It doesn't look as if it'd catch any rabbit with an IQ of more than 10, but who knows? Maybe the rabbits have IQs in single figures. Anyway I like the way Lee stops every few minutes to stoke my leg with his lean brown fingers.

We've got to stick together, that's all I know. We all drive each other crazy at times, but I don't want to end up here alone, like the Hermit. Then this really would be Hell. Humans do such terrible things to each other that sometimes my brain tells me they must be evil. But my heart still isn't convinced.

I just hope we can survive..

***The Hunger Games*** by Suzanne Collins – Chapter one

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the reaping.

I prop myself up on one elbow. There's enough light in the bedroom to see them. My little sister, Prim, curled up on her side, cocooned my mother's body, their cheeks pressed together. In sleep, my mother looks younger, still worn but not so beaten-down. Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named. My mother was very beautiful once too. Or so they tell me.

Sitting at Prim's knees, guarding her, is the world's ugliest cat. Mashed-in nose, half of one ear missing, eyes the color of rotting squash. Prim named him Buttercup, insisting that his muddy yellow coat matched the bright

flower. He hates me. Or at least distrusts me. Even though it was years ago, I think he still remembers how I tried to drown him in a bucket when Prim brought him home. Scrawny kitten, belly swollen with worms, crawling with fleas. The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed. But Prim begged so hard, cried eve, I had to let him stay. It turned out okay. My mother got rid of the vermin and he's a born mouser. Even catches the occasional rat. Sometimes, when I clean a kill, I feed Buttercup the entrails. He has stopped hissing at me.

Entrails. No hissing. This is the closest we will ever come to love....

...Just as the town clock strikes two, the mayor steps up to the podium and begins to read. It's the same story every year. He tells of the history of Panem, the country that rose out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America. He lists the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained. The result was Panem, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games.

The rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor area that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins.

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch—this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. "Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen."

To make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others. The last tribute alive receives a life of ease back home, and their district will be showered with prizes, largely consisting of food. All year, the Capitol will show the winning district gifts of grain and oil and even delicacies like surgar while the rest of us battle starvation...

...There's no sense in putting it off. I take a deep breath, grip the knife handle and bear down as hard as I can. *Back, forth, back, forth!* The tracker jackers begin to buzz and I hear them coming out. *Back, forth, back, forth!* A stabbing pain shoots through my knee and I know one has found me and the others will be honing in. *Back, forth, back, forth.* And just as the knife cuts through, I shove the end of the branch as far away from me as I can. It crashes down through the lower branches, snagging temporarily on a few but then twisting free until it smashes with a thud on the ground. The nest bursts open like an egg, and a furious swarm of tracker jackers takes to the air.

.....It's mayhem. The Careers have woken to a full-scale tracker jacker attack. Peeta and a few others have the sense to drop everything and bolt. I can hear cries of "To the lake! To the lake!" and know they hope to evade the wasps by taking to the water. It must be close if they think they can outdistance the furious insects. Glimmer and another girl, the one from District 4, are not so lucky. They receive multiple stings before they're even out of my view. Glimmer appears to go completely mad, shrieking and trying to bat the wasps off with her bow, which is pointless. She calls to the others for help but, of course, no one returns. The girl from District 4 staggers out of sight, although I wouldn't bet on her making it to the lake. I watch Glimmer fall, twitch hysterically around on the ground for a few minutes, and she goes still.

**Group Four: As you examine *Oryx and Crake: A Novel*, *A Canticle For Liebowitz*, and *Lucifer's Hammer*, pay close attention to point of view. Compare/contrast the point of view in each of the selections. How does the point of view affect the reader? Why? Do you see similarities in the selections? Which would appeal to your students? Why would they "like" it? Pick one of the passages and decide what you would emphasize in a lesson.**

***Oryx and Crake: A Novel*** by Margaret Atwood (Mango – opening)

Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep.

On the eastern horizon there's a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow. Strange how that colour still seems tender. The offshore towers stand out in dark silhouette against it, rising improbably out of the pink and pale blue of the lagoon. The shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound almost like holiday traffic.

Out of habit he looks at his watch – stainless-steel case, burnished aluminum band, still shiny although it no longer works. He wears it now as his only talisman. A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is....

***Voice...***

He listens. The salt water is running down his face again. He never know when that will happen and he can never stop it. His breath is coming in gasps, as if a giant hand is clenching around his chest – clench, release, clench. Senseless panic.

"You did this!" he screams at the ocean.

No answer, which isn't surprising. Only the waves wish-wash, wish-wash. He wipes his fist across his face, across the grime and tears and snot and the derelict's whiskers and sticky mango juice. "Snowman, Snowman," he says. "Get a life."

***Bottle...***

After the Children of Crake have filed away, taking their torches with them, Snowman clammers up his tree and tries to sleep. All around him are noises: the slurping of the waves, insect chirpings and whirrings, bird whistles, amphibious croaks, the rustling of leaves. His ears deceive him: he thinks he can hear a jazz horn, and under that a rhythmic drumming, as if from a muffled nightclub. From somewhere farther along the shore comes a booming, bellowing sound: now what? He can't think of any animal that makes such a noise. Perhaps it's a crocodile, escaped from a defunct Cuban handbag farm and working its way north along the shore. That would be bad news for the kids in swimming. He listens again, but the sound doesn't recur.

There's a distant, peaceful murmur from the village: human voices. If you can call them human. As long as they don't start singing. Their singing is unlike anything he ever heard in his vanished life: it's beyond the human level, or below it. As if crystals are singing; but not that either. More like ferns unscrolling – something old, carboniferous, but at the same time newborn, fragrant, verdant. It reduces him, forces too many unwanted emotions upon him. He feels excluded, as if from a party to which he will never be invited. All he'd have to do is step forward into the firelight and there'd be a ring of suddenly blank faces turned towards him. Silence would fall, as in tragic plays of long ago when the doomed protagonist made an entrance, enveloped in his cloak of contagious bad news. On the same non-conscious level Snowman must serve as a reminder to these people, and

not a pleasant one: he's what they may have been once. *I'm your past*, he might intone. *I'm your ancestor, from from the land of the dead. Now I'm lost, I can't get back, I'm stranded here, I'm all alone. Let me in!*

### **End of Novel**

What next? Advance with a strip of bedsheet tied to a stick, waving a white flag? *I come in peace*. But he doesn't have his bedsheet with him.

Or, *I can show you much treasure*. But no, he has nothing to trade with them, nor they with him. Nothing except themselves. They could listen to him, they could hear his tale, he could hear theirs. They at least would understand something of what he's been through.

Or, *Get the hell off my turf before I blow you off*, as in some old-style Western film. *Hands up. Back away. Leave that spraygun*. That wouldn't be the end of it though. There are three of them and only one of him. They'd do what he'd do in their place: they'd go away, but they'd lurk, they'd spy. They'd sneak up on him in the dark, conk him on the head with a rock. He'd never know when they might come.

He could finish it now, before they see him, while he still has the strength. While he can still stand up. His foot's like a shoeful of liquid fire. But they haven't done anything bad, not to him. Should he kill them in cold blood? Is he able to? And if he starts killing them and then stops, one of them will kill him first. Naturally.

"What do you want me to do?" he whispers to the empty air.

It's hard to know

*Oh Jimmy, you were so funny.*

*Don't let me down.*

From habit he lifts his watch; it shows him its blank face.

Zero hour, Snowman thinks. Time to go.

### **A Canticle For Liebowitz** by Walter M. Miller, Jr. (Part One *Fiat Homo* "let him become man" )

Brother Francis Gerard of Utah might never have discovered the blessed documents, had it not been for the pilgrim with girded loins who appeared during that young novice's Lenten fast in the desert.

Never before had Brother Francis actually seen a pilgrim with girded loins, but this one was the bona fide article he was convinced as soon as he had recovered from the spine-chilling effect of the pilgrim's advent on the far horizon, as a wiggling iota of black caught in a shimmering haze of heat. Legless, but wearing a tiny head, the iota materialized out of the mirror glaze on the broken roadway and seemed more to writhe than to walk into view, causing Brother Francis to clutch the crucifix of his rosary and mutter an Ave or two. The iota suggested a tiny apparition spawned by the heat demons who tortured the land at high noon, when any creature capable of motion on the desert (except the buzzards and a few monastic hermits such as Francis) lay motionless in its burrow or hid beneath a rock from the ferocity of the sun. Only a thing monstrous, a thing preternatural, or a thing with added wits would hike purposefully down the trail at noon this way.

Brother Francis added a hasty prayer to Saint Raul the Cyclopean, patron of the misborn, for protection against the Saint's unhappy protégés. (For who did not then know that there were monsters in the earth in those days? That

which was born alive was, by the law of the Church and the law of Nature, suffered to live, and helped to maturity if possible, by those who had begotten it. The law was not always obeyed, but it was obeyed with sufficient frequency to sustain a scattered population of adult monsters, who often chose the remotest of deserted lands for their wanderings, where they prowled by night around the fires of prairie travelers.) But at least the iota squirmed its way out of the heat risers and into clear air, where it manifestly became a distant pilgrim; Brother Francis released the crucifix with a small Amen....

### **End of *Fiat Homo* section**

There was a dead hog beyond the Valley of the Misborn. The buzzards observed it gaily and glided down for a feast. Later, in the far mountain pass, a cougar licked her chops and left her kill. The buzzards seemed thankful for the chance to finish her meal.

The buzzards laid their eggs in season and lovingly fed their young: a dead snake, and bits of a feral dog.

The younger generation waxed strong, soared high and far on black wings, waiting for the fruitful Earth to yield up her bountiful carrion. Sometimes dinner was only a toad. Once I was a messenger from New Rome.

Their flight carried them over the midwestern plains. They were delighted with the bounty of good things which the nomads left lying on the land during their ride-over toward the south.

The buzzards laid their eggs in season and lovingly fed their young. Earth had nourished them bountifully for centuries. She would nourish them for centuries more....

Pickings were good for a while in the region of the Red River; but then out of the carnage, a city-state arose. For rising city-states, the buzzards had no fondness, although they approved of their eventual fall. They shied away from Texarkana and ranged far over the plain to the west. After the manner of all living things, they replenished the Earth many times with their kind.

Eventually it was the Year of Our Lord 3174

There were rumors of war.

### **Ending**

...There came a blur, a glare of light, a high thin whining sound, and the starship thrust itself heavenward.

The breakers beat monotonously at the shores, casting up driftwood. An abandoned seaplane floated beyond the breakers. After a while the breakers caught the seaplane and threw it on the shore with the driftwood. It tilted and fractured a wing. There were shrimp carousing in the breakers, and the whiting that fed on the shrimp, and the shark that munched the whiting and found them admirable, in the sportive brutality of the sea.

A wind came across the ocean, sweeping with it a pall of fine white ash. The ash fell into the sea and into the breakers. The breakers washed dead shrimp ashore with the driftwood. Then they washed up the whiting. The shark swam out to his deepest waters and brooded in the old clean currents. He was very hungry that season.

***Lucifer's Hammer*** by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (Prologue)

*Before the sun burned, before the planets formed, there were chaos and the comets.*

*Chaos was a local thickening in the interstellar medium. Its mass was great enough to attract itself, to hold itself,*

*and it thickened further. Eddies formed. Particles of dust and frozen gas drifted together, and touched, and clung. Flakes formed, and then loose snowballs of frozen gases. Over the ages a whirlpool pattern developed, a fifth of a light-year across. The center contracted further. Local eddies, whirling frantically near the center of the storm, collapsed to form planets.*

*It formed as a cloud of snow, far from the whirlpool's axis. Ices joined the swarm, but slowly, slowly, a few molecules at a time. Methane, ammonia, carbon dioxide; and sometimes denser objects struck it and embedded themselves, so that it held rocks, and iron. Now it was a single stable mass. Other ices formed, chemicals that could only be stable in the interstellar cold.*

*It was four miles across when the disaster came.*

*The end was sudden. In no more than fifty years, the wink of an eye in its lifetime, the whirlpool's center collapsed. A new sun burned fearfully bright.*

*Myriads of comets flashed to vapor in that hellish flame. Planets lost their atmospheres. A great wind of light pressure stripped the loose gas and dust from the inner system and hurled it at the stars.*

*It hardly noticed. It was two hundred times as far from the sun as the newly formed planet Neptune. The new sun was no more than an uncommonly bright star, gradually dimming now.*

*Down in the maelstrom there was frantic activity. Gases boiled out of the rocks of the inner system. Complex chemicals developed in the seas of the third planet. Endless hurricanes boded across and within the gas-giant worlds. The inner worlds would never know calm.*

*The only real calm was at the edge of interstellar space, in the halo, where millions of thinly spread comets, each as far from its nearest brother as Earth is from Mars, cruise forever through the cold black vacuum. Here its endless quiet sleep could last for billions of years . . . but not forever. Nothing lasts forever.*

## **Chapter One: THE ANVIL**

Against boredom, even the gods themselves struggle in vain.

Nietzsche

January: The Portent

*The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd  
And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;  
The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth  
And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change.  
These signs forerun the death or fall of kings.*

William Shakespeare, Richard II

The blue Mercedes turned into the big circular drive of the Beverly Hills mansion at precisely five after six. Julia Sutter was understandably startled. "Good God, George, it's Tim! And dead on time."

George Sutter joined her at the window. That was Tim's car, yup. He grunted and turned back to the bar. His wife's parties were always important events, so why, after weeks of careful engineering and orchestration, was she terrified that no one would show up? The psychosis was so common there ought to be a name for it.

Tim Hamner, though, and on time. That was strange. Tim's money was third-generation. Old money, by Los Angeles standards, and Tim had a lot of it. He only came to parties when he wanted to.

The Sutters' architect had been in love with concrete. There were square walls and square angles for the house, and softly curving free-form pools in the gardens outside; not unusual for Beverly Hills, but startling to easterners. To their right was a traditional Monterey villa of white stucco and red tile roofs, to the left a Norman chateau

magically transplanted to California. The Sutter place was set well back from the street so that it seemed divorced from the tall palms the city fathers had decreed for this part of Beverly Hills. A great loop of drive ran up to the house itself. On the porch stood eight parking attendants, agile young men in red jackets.

Hamner left the motor running and got out of the car. The "key left" reminder screamed at him. Ordinarily Tim would have snarled a powerful curse upon Ralph Nader's hemorrhoids, but tonight he never noticed. His eyes were dreamy; his hand patted at his coat pocket, then stole inside. The parking attendant hesitated. People didn't usually tip until they were leaving. Hamner kept walking, dreamy-eyed, and the attendant drove away.

### **End of the Novel**

*...The asteroid was a child of the maelstrom: a round nugget of nickel-iron with some stony strata, three miles along its long axis. No man had ever seen a mastodon when the passing of mighty Jupiter plucked the nugget from its orbit and flung it out toward interstellar space.*

*It was on the second lap of its long, narrow elliptical orbit. The iron surface was frosted with strange ices now, as it passed the peak of the curve and began to coast back toward the Sun.*

*And the black giant was there. Its ring of cometary snowballs glowed broad and beautiful in starlight. Infrared light traced bands and whorls in its stormy surface. It was the only major mass out here between the stars, and the asteroid curved toward it and increased speed.*

*Infrared light bathed and thawed the frosted iron. The ringed planet grew huge.*

*The asteroid plunged through the plane of the ring a twelve miles per second. Battered and pocked with glowing craters, it receded, carrying in its own small gravitational field a spray of icy masses from the ring. They came like attendants, ahead and behind, in a pattern like the curved arms of a spiral galaxy.*

*The asteroid and a score of comets pulled free of the black giant and began their long fall into the maelstrom.*