

# Summary

[Environment](#), [Earth](#)



Summary \* Ishmael. He was caught in the jungles of Africa at a young age and has lived his life in captivity ever since. He started out in a zoo-purchased by Walter Sokolow, with whom he learned to communicate telepathically. \* Ishmael's investigation focused on the issue of captivity-and grew into a more comprehensive exploration of humanity. \* Ishmael helps the narrator understand his cultural history. Ishmael divides humans into two groups: Leavers and Takers. \* Takers are members who believe you should dominate first the planet, then the universe, through technological innovations. Leavers are members of tribal cultures that live simple, basic rules that govern other populations on Earth. \* Ishmael helps the narrator see that taker culture is in freefall, bound to crash once you have depleted the planet of its biological and environmental resources. \* Ishmael shows the narrator how various cultural myths have helped shape both cultures. One main myth he discusses is the story of Adam and Eve. -historically this myth was used by Leaver cultures to explain the expansion of Taker cultures. - Leavers were trying to understand why Takers had turned to agriculture and were trying to force their way of life on the Leavers. -Takers had eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - the tree of the gods must eat from in order to know who should live and die. Only to know that that form does not belong to life- form on earth. \* Narrator becomes a teacher in Ishmael's honor, in hopes to teach people about the taker culture and find a new way to live w/others on earth. Character List and Analysis \* Ishmael- they see themselves as superior and removed from the rules that structure the evolution and survival of other life-forms on the planet. \* through his research on human history, he's come to see that they, too, are captive to a

destructive way of life in their pursuit of domination over the rest of the world. \* Through his studies, Ishmael tries to understand why humans feel called to dominate the world, and he teaches the explanation he's come up with to his student (the narrator) Narrator \* The nameless narrator is Ishmael's fifth student and the only one who isn't completely defeated at the end of his instruction. \* He's open-minded and maintains his desire to save the world, though he often finds it difficult to maintain a sense of hope. \* Analysis \* cultural revolution of the late 1960s \* constructing the novel in first person, the reader closely aligns himself with the narrator and can sympathize with the problematic feeling of giving up one's youthful dreams \* by being both named and renamed, Ishmael gains a stronger sense of himself as an individual. He is not the giant enemy Goliath-but rather Ishmael, the cast-off son of Abraham. \* Quinn's use of biblical allusions for Ishmael's names structure the relationship he has with humans. While imprisoned, he's a goliath, an unknown monster. Once he's able to communicate with humans and share their knowledge, he is like a distant relative, as the offspring of Ishmael are to the offspring of Isaac in the Bible. \* why are things the way they are? This question is first presented by Ishmael in his memories of life in the zoo. Part 1 \* Rachel's mother, who has always resented Ishmael's relationship with her husband and daughter. \* When Ishmael moved in the city he became a teacher, his key subject being the issue of captivity. \* Ishmael says that, while it may not matter if one individual discovers the lie, it could change the world if the entire human population discovered the truth. Analysis - groundwork to answer the novel's central question: why are things the way they are? -Ishmael uses rhetorical

strategies, such as asking guiding questions and storytelling, to engage his pupil -humans are captive to a "civilizational system" and are unable to see the "bars of the cage." Part 2 \* Ishmael explain The first is that "story" is the explanation of the relationship between humans, the world, and the gods. \* second is that "to enact" something is to live as if a certain story is a reality. \* The third term he defines is "culture," which is a group of people enacting a story. \* Mother Culture concludes that the Leavers' story is the first chapter of humankind's development and the Takers are the second chapter. \* narrator insists there is no overarching story or myth that forms his culture. \* Greeks did not think of their myths as myths either; rather, what are now considered myths were just the stories that structured their lives. Analysis -Quinn associates "takers" with civilization and "leavers" with primitive cultures. —Additionally, Ishmael provides the narrator with three key definitions for story, to enact, and culture. -framework for Ishmael's exploration of Takers and Leavers, who are groups of people with their own "story" they're "enacting" as a "culture." Part 3 \* myth contains facts, those facts are arranged in a way that suggests the point of the formation of the universe and evolution is the formation of man. Ishmael claims that this is the central idea behind the Takers' culture - that Earth was made to support human life Analysis- storytelling is essential to the narrator's epiphany in this section. -story featuring a jellyfish rather than a human at the end of it, narrator begins to see the difference between fact and myth. - Ishmael and the narrator discuss the way culture influences humans, and on the micro level as a means for Ishmael to instruct the narrator. -many of Ishmael's statements to the narrator are in the form of leading questions. Part 4 \*

Taker Culture, middle of the story is humankind's time as hunter-gatherers, a time when they were living much as other animals do. \* for humankind to achieve its destiny, it had to discover agriculture, which provided it with the means of staying in one place and developing civilization and technology. \* so why must man do this? What's the purpose of rising above the other animals? Ishmael has the narrator imagine an Earth without humans on it; \* Ishmael helps the narrator see the next part of the story: man was put on Earth to rule it, and to do so he had to conquer it. \* Taker cultural story suggests that things are the way they are because man had to fulfill his destiny of conquering everything, really things are the way they are because man hasn't become the ruler of the world, but its destroyer and enemy.

Analysis- why are things the way they are - evolves in Part 4 through Ishmael's use of imaginative exercises and Socratic dialogue. \* Ishmael encourages the narrator to imagine Earth without man. Through this creative exercise, the narrator sees the world in a new way and better understands his culture myth. \* explain how Takers justify the destruction of the world's natural resources and wildlife, the narrator says that Takers would see this as the price that must be paid to advance human culture. Part 5 \* figure out the end of the story. \* man has been put on Earth to conquer it, in conquering it he's caused a lot of problems. \* " but" at the end of his story is that humans are inherently flawed and thus will continue to screw up their pursuit of paradise. \* Ishmael asks what evidence his culture uses to back up its claim of being flawed, and the narrator admits it only uses its own history. \* topic of prophets and asks the narrator why Taker culture is so obsessed with prophets. Analysis- Mother Culture says humans do not know how to

live, so they rely on prophets to tell them what to do. Ishmael foreshadows that the narrator is ready for the next step - to see the world through the Leavers' eyes, rather than the Takers'. Part 6 \* Mother Culture would suggest that humans are above any law that applies to the rest of life on earth. \* regardless of what Mother Culture says, the law of living applies, and that he'll use the analogy of gravity and flight to explain. \* Takers' gods tricked the Takers in three ways: -the Takers not the center of the universe -humans evolved just like everything else, even though they feel above evolution. -not actually exempt from the laws of life. \* even though it feels like flight, and Takers are accelerating toward a crash. Takers also see abandoned attempts at civilization (for example, the Mayans) but nonetheless believe that their attempt will survive because it has "worked" so far. Analysis -Taker culture: it is obedient to a law about living, but it is ignorant of that law and so is unable to see how it's doomed to fail. -Newton discovered the law of gravity by observation. Ishmael also builds on this analogy to explain that the only way to understand what laws organisms must live by is by observing living organisms. -Mother Culture tells Takers that they're above the laws of life, they too are in free fall, and eventually their civilization will also crash due to its inability to follow the laws of life. Part 7 \* Ishmael invites the narrator to imagine himself in a foreign land where everyone is happy \* Through more questioning, the narrator discovers he has three guides with which to narrow down the law by which they live: -what makes their society successful - what people in the society never do -what a person who has broken the law has done that the others never do. \* species of creatures on the planet have followed this rule and prospered; it is only that when a portion of humans

decided to abandon the law and live beyond it that Earth's ecosystems were thrown out of balance. \* He realizes that he doesn't want to complete this task, once he's learned Ishmael's lesson he'll be left alone again. Analysis - Ishmael's analogy allows the narrator to better see how wildlife also follows similar rules and that Takers have tried to abandon such rules. -narrator is upset by this proposition as he realizes that, if he's successful, he'll eventually no longer be Ishmael's pupil. -What will he become when he's no longer a student? Part 8 (1-6) \* takes the narrator four days to figure out the basic laws of life. He returns to Ishmael on the fifth day with his findings. \* He says the three basic rules. What they promote? -promotes diversity and survival for the community as a whole since it favors no species above the rest. \* Ishmael-ecological principles, when food supplies increase, populations increase. - Additionally, when population increases, food decreases and when food decreases, population decreases as well. \* increasing populations leads to more and more groups of starving people among the population as a whole. Part 8 (7-10) \* The American Heritage Book of Indians, and instructs him to look at the map. \* narrator admits there's nothing stopping people from changing geographies, and this helps Ishmael make his key point: -there were cultural and territorial boundaries between the diverse tribes that lived in the Americas prior to the arrival of European settlers. \* narrator feels hopeless; he thinks no one in Taker culture will be willing to kill off Mother Culture and try another way of life. \* Ishmael helps the narrator see that the overarching law is that the world was made for many species to live on, not for one to dominate the rest. \* Taker culture. They fill their lives with distractions and drugs to make up for the

lack of satisfaction Analysis-Ishmael points out, people in Leaver cultures experience dramatically fewer cases of addiction and suicide. -Leaver culture might be a key way to change the destructive path Taker culture. Part 9 (1-8) \* Taker culture took off with the beginning of the Agricultural Revolution and that it has been spreading ever since. \* The Gods were arguing, whether which species should prosper. they decide to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil-soon they had godly power. \* Gods were worried & knew humans would be tempted to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and have godly powers too- so they forbid the tree. \* story has always remained mysterious to Takers as it doesn't make sense why it should be forbidden. Analysis-explains the roles of gods and humans and the problems that occur when humans take on the role of the gods. -knowledge of the gods, which is the ability to determine what should live and what should die. -differences between the two is their cultural attitudes to the rest of life on the planet. Part 9 (9-11) \* Taker " destiny," they had to take land from the herders. Ishmael instructs the narrator to read the story of Cain and Abel to better understand how this expansion took shape. \* Cain represents the Takers who must kill the Leavers (Abel) in order to expand agricultural production. -Cain and Abel aren't actual brothers, but representatives of different human cultures. \* Takers, through the spread of Christianity, came to adopt a tale that once was used to show their shortcomings as one of their own creation myths. Part 9 (12-17) \* in order to understand why the Takers were invading their land and taking it from them, they had to figure out how they got to be the way they are. \* the gods, upset with these Takers, had banished them from the garden of life, forcing these people to get their food



through the hard work of farming. \* Taker perspective, is not the right to have the knowledge of the gods, but the issue of disobedience-story makes much more sense when told from the Leavers' perspective. Analysis- Ishmael helps the narrator to see how Leavers saw the Takers as cursed -Leavers saw the story of The Fall as the story of the Takers becoming cursed, the Takers saw it as the story of their growth -The Fall has evolved not to explain the formation of humans on earth, but the formation of a specific culture -Takers' interpretation, he is punished for disobeying the gods, not for the knowledge he gained. Takers are able to make the story a tale of hope/tale of warning, as it is for the Leavers - Adam has eaten of the gods' tree and thus must die. Part 10 (1-4) \* sidetracked by work and a dental emergency, causing him to miss several days of meetings with Ishmael. \* Ishmael got evicted. \* Narrator finds Ishmael in a slideshow carnival. The narrator tries to help Ishmael, but Ishmael doesn't appreciate the narrator butting into his personal life. Analysis - Ishmael is cold, distant, and wary of the narrator's desire to fix the situation. -thru narrator and Ishmael's dispute. Ishmael learns to distrust humans benevolence and resents his dependency on the kindness of humans in order to have a decent life. Part 10 (5-9) \* narrator defines culture as what's passed along from generation to generation. For Leaver cultures, culture has evolved since the start of the species and is passed down Analysis -Takers transmit knowledge of agricultural production over the centuries, constantly expanding and improving on the technology used to grow crops. -Leaver cultures transmit knowledge about living well and the way of life of a specific culture rather than the means of production. - Evolution to explain differences between leaver and taker cultures. -leaver

cultural structure evolved allowing their cultural practices to adapt and support their livelihood in the environment in which they find themselves. - Taker Cultural structure responds to its cultural beliefs that man is made to rule the world and that everything in the culture is designed to bring the environment under humankind. Part 11 \* Mother Culture-technological development \* life before the Agricultural Revolution was horrible and that to live that way would be reprehensible. \* narrator tells Ishmael that while he may have enough food, he doesn't have enough to free himself from the gods Analysis-If offered to go back to hunter-gatherer time- Taker society for that matter, would reject the offer because Mother Culture has taught him that such a lifestyle is intrinsically worse than Taker Culture. Part 12 (1-6) \* Still imprisoned and sleepy, Ishmael asks narrator what happens to Leaver cultures that does not happen to Takers? \* evolution is what happens because Leavers remain within the community of life. \* removing themselves from the rules that govern life on earth, have removed themselves from evolution. \* Man's role on earth? a guide or role model - a figure that sets the standard for how self-aware, intelligent life-forms should act to benefit and promote biodiversity. Analysis-Taker culture has removed itself from the chain of evolution by living outside the ecological laws. -focused on the historical events that have resulted in the current state of human dominance on the Earth: environmental degradation -Humans should rethink their role to have a positive rather than negative impact on the world's ecology Part 12 (7-12) \* chapter two of the Leavers' story-the issue of civilization. the attitude civilized nations have toward the world. \* Ishmael tells him he must be a teacher, for humans' minds must change before their actions will. \* that

all members of Taker culture are imprisoned by a destructive, unfulfilling way of life. And, like any prison, it has ways of distracting inmates so they don't notice the conditions. ANALYSIS -Ishmael suggests to the narrator, the only way to change people's actions is to start with their minds. -Ishmael reminded the narrator of the ways Mother Culture hides the bars of her "prison." -help his fellow prisoners see what binds them to their ecologically destructive way of life. Part 13 \* Ishmael dies. Analysis — narrator regrets that his self absorption enabled him to see that Ishmael was sick. -" With Gorilla Gone, Will There Be Hope for Man? " - contemplate what action should come next after such philosophical debate and discussion.