The Devil in the White City

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ERIK LARSON

Erik Larson grew up in Long Island, and studied Russian History at the University Pennsylvania, where he graduated *summa cum laude* ("with highest honors"). In 1978, he graduated from the Columbia School of Journalism. Within five years, he was working as a staff writer for the Wall Street Journal, while also contributing articles for other prestigious publications like Harper's, The New Yorker, and The Atlantic. In 1992, he published his first full-length book, *The Naked Consumer*, about invasions of privacy in modern business. While *The Naked Consumer* won Larson some good reviews, it wasn't until 1999, when he published *Isaac's Storm*, his bestselling history of the 1900 Galveston Hurricane, that one of his books experienced significant national success. Since *Isaac's Storm*, Larson has written several books: *The Devil in the White City* (2003); *Thunderstruck* (2006), about the lives of Guillermo Marconi and the serial killer Hawley Crippen; *In the Garden of Beasts* (2011), about an American family living in early Nazi Germany; and *Dead Wake* (2013), about the sinking of the Lusitania. Larson is highly respected in the journalistic world for his willingness to travel and immerse himself in his research — in order to write *Thunderstruck*, for instance, he traveled to Nova Scotia, Rome, Munich, Cape Cod, and London.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While *The Devil in the White City* documents the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, it alludes to a huge number of related historical events. Jack the Ripper's serial killings in London and Lizzie Borden's murders in Massachusetts in 1892 are important precursors to Holmes's crimes; Larson also mentions Leopold and Loeb's 1924 "crime of the century" on multiple occasions. The union strikes of the late 19th century, organized by Eugene Debs and Samuel Gompers, are important for understanding Burnham's negotiations with construction workers and his anxieties about train fares. Larson also alludes to a great number of new technologies developed in the late 19th century, including the AC light bulbs used to light the World's Fair at night, the moving pictures Thomas Edison displayed at the World's Fair, and the various manufacturing processes developed during the 19th century Industrial Revolution, without which the White City couldn't have been built. The events of the book should also be understood within the broader development of the United States, as the country by this point was only three decades removed from the end of the Civil War and yet also (and perhaps because of that) conscious of and desirous of asserting its standing as a power on the international stage (which it would definitively assert, just five years after the 1893 World's fair, in its defeat of Spain in the Spanish-American war of 1898.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) is another work that mixes fiction and non-fiction to describe roughly the same period in Chicago's history. The 1910 memoir *Twenty Years in Hull House*, by Jane Addams (who appears briefly in *the Devil in the White City*) documents the disease and squalor in Chicago at the end of the 19th century. Erik Larson has stated repeatedly that Truman Capote's 1961 "non-fiction novel" *In Cold Blood*, which mixes literary techniques and journalism, was a major influence in his book.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and the Madness at the Fair that Changed America
- **When Written:** 2001-2002
- **Where Written:** Seattle, Washington
- **When Published:** 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary non-fiction
- **Genre:** Nonfiction novel, true crime
- **Setting:** Chicago in the years surrounding the 1893 World's Fair.
- **Climax:** Mayor Harrison's assassination (Burnham's storyline), Geyer discovering the remains of Pitezal's children (Holmes's storyline)
- **Antagonist:** H.H. Holmes.
- **Point of View:** Third person, sometimes omniscient, sometimes limited to either H.H. Holmes or Daniel Burnham.

EXTRA CREDIT

Mr. Popularity. Erik Larson is no stranger to success — every book he's written since 1996 has been on the New York Times bestseller list.

Research, research, research. Larson is famous for the length's he'll go to research ideas for his novels. To learn about the life of Guillermo Marconi, one of the inventors of the modern radio, he studied Italian for a year. But it wasn't all hard work — in between the language lessons, Larson acquired an appreciation for Italy's famous red wines!

PLOT SUMMARY

Aboard the *Olympic* on April 12, 1912, the same night that the *Titanic* sinks, Daniel Hudson Burnham contemplates his years planning the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, held to honor the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America.

In 1890, Chicago is a rapidly growing city and eager to prove itself to the more established Eastern cities of the United States. Propelled by its huge civic pride, Chicago wins its bid to host the World's Fair. Soon after, two of the city's leading architects, Daniel Burnham and John Root, are given artistic control over the buildings at the Fair.

At the same time that Burnham and Root are assembling an architectural team, a young, handsome, **blue-eyed** doctor who calls himself H. H. Holmes arrives in Chicago. Holmes, who was born Herman Mudgett, is immensely attractive to women, in part because he breaks the traditional rules of courtship. He has already married a woman named Clara, but he abandons her quickly. In Chicago, he enjoys the disgusting smells of the slaughterhouses that are the major industry of the city, and quickly purchases a drugstore that becomes popular because he attracts female customers. Holmes marries a woman named Myrta while he's still married to Clara, but immediately begins to neglect her. He uses forgery and deception to buy a nearby building, which he converts into a grim hotel. Despite the fact that the building contains rooms and equipment that are clearly designed for murder, Holmes attracts very little attention, since he fires workers frequently, and since Chicagoans can't imagine that a serial killer could live in their city. From the workers he hires, he assembles a group of accomplices that includes Benjamin Pitezal and Charles Chappell. He forges the signature of Myrta's wealthy great-uncle, Jonathan, and invites him to stay in his new hotel. Long afterwards, Jonathan thinks that Holmes tried and failed to kill him in the middle of the night.

Burnham and Root painstakingly assemble a team of renowned architects from around the country, including Charles McKim, Frederick Olmsted, and Louis Sullivan, and they begin to work on their designs for the Fair. The group agrees to hold the exposition on the grounds of Jackson Park, overlooking Lake Michigan. Root dies suddenly; Burnham, while crushed by his friend's passing, resolves to continue working on the Fair. The architects unveil their buildings for the Fair, and Burnham urges them to work together, so that no one building outdoes the others. Sullivan angrily objects to the neoclassical style of the World's Fair, but the other architects agree to this aesthetic. Olmsted, who designed Central Park in New York, travels around to New York and Europe in search of flowers and exotic boats to decorate the grounds of Jackson Park, arguing with Burnham frequently. Burnham, who is enormously stressed by the prospect of building an entire city in only two years, supervises the construction of the buildings at the World's Fair, negotiating with unions and his overly bureaucratic board of directors.

In 1897, Carter Henry Harrison, the popular mayor of Chicago, loses his election for a fifth term. This disappoints Patrick Prendergast, a young, mentally ill man who believes that Harrison would have given him a government position in return for his help in Harrison's campaign. In 1893, Harrison wins a fifth term, and Prendergast travels around Chicago, claiming that he will be appointed the corporation counsel.

While the World's Fair is being built, Holmes attracts visitors from around the country to his "World's Fair Hotel," located near Jackson Park. These visitors include Ned and Julia Conner, and Julia's sister, Gertrude. Holmes seduces Gertrude and cons Ned into taking ownership of his failing drugstore; both leave the hotel, disgusted and disillusioned. Holmes next charms Julia, impregnates her, and murders her in his basement. Holmes also murders Emeline Cigrand, a beautiful woman who finds him attractive. Though Holmes kills her in his hotel, he attracts very little attention from the lodgers. While traveling in Boston, he meets Minnie R. Williams, the heiress to a large amount of land; Holmes seduces Minnie, brings her back to Chicago, and murders her, along with her sister, Anna.

Burnham, who urges the architects and engineers of America to build a structure that can match the Eiffel Tower in Paris, awards a Fair concession to George Ferris, the designer of the **Ferris Wheel**. Design on the Wheel proceeds slowly; meanwhile, other buildings are damaged by rain and snow. Burnham's friend Francis Millet suggests that the buildings be painted white, giving them a distinctive appearance that earns the World's Fair the nickname "the white city." In addition to the Ferris Wheel, exhibits planned for the World's Fair include motion pictures, exotic dancers, and light bulbs — visitors are shocked, entertained, and awestruck. Buffalo Bill brings his Wild West show nearby, drawing tourists away from the Fair. Burnham argues with the board of directors, which, pressured by the failure of numerous banks in the economic recession of 1893, wants to control all the Fair's expenditures. When the Fair is opened in 1893, it loses money at first, but after the Ferris Wheel is completed and Francis Millet and Sol Bloom organize entertaining dances and exhibits for the Midway, it slowly becomes financially profitable. Shortly before the end of the World's Fair, Patrick Prendergast shoots and assassinates Mayor Harrison because he's angry that Harrison didn't make him corporation counsel. This tragedy overshadows the end of the World's Fair.

As the World's Fair ends, Holmes sets fire to his hotel in order to collect a large insurance claim. Insurance investigators are skeptical, and his creditors chase him out of town. Holmes kills Benjamin Pitezal, and is eventually arrested when another insurance company investigates Pitezal's death. Detective Frank Geyer follows Holmes's path through Indianapolis and Toronto, and uncovers evidence that he has murdered three of Pitezal's children. Although Holmes denies these crimes, and

writes a memoir in which he tries to make himself seem sympathetic, he is sentenced to death. At the end of his life, he claims that he is transforming into the Devil, and various people associated with his execution die mysteriously.

Burnham becomes the greatest architect of his day, and the World's Fair influences American science and culture in uncountable ways. Sitting on the *Olympic*, Burnham learns that Francis Millet, who was riding on the *Titanic* on April 12, has died; Burnham dies shortly afterward. He is buried in Chicago nearby Root, his wife, Sullivan, and Mayor Harrison.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Daniel Burnham – The Director of Works at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Burnham is a talented architect, as well as a shrewd organizer of other architects. He is instrumental in assembling an elite creative team to design the Fair, and encouraging the architects to work together and to pursue a grand, neoclassical style. While Burnham is ambitious — to the point where he largely gives up family life during the World's Fair — he often defers to the judgments of others, such as his partner, John Root, and Olmsted, the landscape architect at the World's Fair. Much like Chicago itself, Burnham is motivated by a sense of inferiority to the creative elite in the Eastern United States, and his rejection as a young man from Harvard and Yale haunts him throughout his life. By the end of his life, Burnham has earned honorary degrees from both Harvard and Yale, and is widely regarded as the greatest architect in the United States. He has asserted himself as a major force in the architecture, and in the process, Chicago has asserted itself as a major cultural force in the United States and the Western world.

John Root – Burnham's partner at the beginning of the World's Fair, John Root is widely regarded as the more creative and imaginative member of the partnership. He is instrumental in developing the neoclassical aesthetic of the World's Fair, though after his tragic death, Burnham takes his place as the major creative force at the exposition.

Louis Sullivan – The temperamental Chicago architect who designs the award-winning Transportation Building at the World's Fair, Sullivan regards Burnham as a rival, and opposes Burnham's efforts to give the Fair a neoclassical aesthetic. Though Sullivan's career goes downhill after the World's Fair, his reputation is rehabilitated by Frank Lloyd Wright, the great architect who, ironically, Sullivan fired in the 1890s.

H. H. Holmes – The **blue-eyed**, charismatic, and sociopathic doctor who commits multiple murders at the end of the 19th century, Holmes is born with the surname Mudgett, and regularly uses other aliases, such as Henry Gordon, H.S. Campbell, Alexander Bond, and Alex E. Cook. Holmes is a remorseless murderer who enjoys the power he exerts over young, timid women who travel to Chicago, and feels an almost sexual thrill when he kills. Women find his dashing demeanor, slightly risqué behavior, and blue eyes extremely attractive, an attraction that Holmes is highly aware of and uses to his advantage. Holmes benefits greatly from the 1893 World's Fair, advertising his hotel building as a cheap place for tourists to stay, and taking advantage of the anonymity of the rapidly-growing Chicago, as well as the incompetence of its police force.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dora Root – John Root's wife, and later his widow.

Francis Millet – The talented painter who develops the distinctive white paint that helps earn the World's Fair the nickname, "The White City." Millet is also responsible for organizing entertainment at the Fair in order to attract more visitors.

John B. Sherman – A wealthy slaughterhouse superintendent, Daniel Burnham's father-in-law, and Margaret Burnham's father. Early in his career, Burnham designs a mansion for Sherman.

Dankmar Adler – Louis Sullivan's architectural partner.

Mrs. Holton – The elderly woman from whom Holmes buys his drugstore shortly after arriving in Chicago.

Clara Lovering – The first woman Holmes marries, and then abandons.

Frederick Law Olmsted – The temperamental landscape architect who designed Central Park, as well as the grounds for the World's Fair.

Henry Sargent Codman – Olmsted's architectural partner and frequent stand-in during the World's Fair. When Codman dies mid-way through the Fair, Olmsted replaces him with Charles Eliot.

Mayor Carter Henry Harrison – The charismatic, blue-eyed, five-time mayor of Chicago who enjoys a reputation as a "man of the people" despite his actual elite education. He is assassinated during his fifth term, casting a pall over the last months of the World's Fair.

Patrick Prendergast – Prendergast is a young, mentally disturbed man who believes that Mayor Harrison will appoint him to a government position in return for Prendergast's vigorous campaigning. Prendergast ultimately assassinates Harrison when he fails to get the role he believed he should.

Myrta Belknap – Holmes's second wife.

Lucy – Holmes's child with Myrta Belknap.

Charles Chappell – A loyal friend of Holmes's who converts corpses into skeletons without asking any questions.

Patrick Quinlan – Caretaker at Holmes's hotel who seems to

have plotted with Holmes to murder Jonathan Belknap.

Benjamin Pitezal – A loyal helper of Holmes who also goes by the aliases Howard E. Phelps and Benton T. Lyman and helps Holmes with his murders and confidence tricks. Holmes later betrays Pitezal when he murders him and his children.

Howard Pitezal – Benjamin Pitezal's son, murdered by Holmes.

Alice Pitezal – Benjamin Pitezal's daughter, murdered by Holmes.

Nellie Pitezal – Benjamin Pitezal's daughter, murdered by Holmes.

Mrs. Carrie Pitezal – Benjamin Pitezal's wife.

Jack the Ripper – Notorious English serial killer of prostitutes who terrifies London, England and whose deeds titillate and terrify America as well.

Strowers – A woman Holmes convinces to take out an insurance claim in his name.

Peabody – An architect from the Eastern United States who commits to working on the World's Fair early on.

Harriet Monroe – John Root's sister-in-law. She writes a long poem that's performed at the Dedication Day ceremonies for the World's Fair, but no one can hear it.

Ned Conner – An employee in Holmes's building, who Holmes cons into running his failing drug store. Ned dooms his daughter and wife by leaving them in Holmes's care.

Pearl Conner – Ned and Julia's daughter, murdered by Holmes.

Julia Conner – Ned's wife, seduced and then murdered by Holmes.

Gertrude – Julia Conner's sister, who travels to Chicago to live in Holmes's building, then leaves after Holmes is indiscreet with her.

Lyman Gage – President of the World's Fair.

Clarence Darrow – A famous attorney who negotiates with unions leading up to the World's Fair construction, and later tries, unsuccessfully, to save Patrick Prendergast from the death penalty.

Charles Atwood – Root's replacement after his death.

Colonel Mason Schufeldt – A World's Fair organizer who dies traveling to Africa looking for pygmies to bring to Chicago.

Thomas Edison – The inventor, who tries to negotiate the use of DC (rather than AC) light bulbs at the World'

George Westinghouse – A businessman who successfully negotiates the use of AC light bulbs at the World's Fair.

Nikola Tesla – A scientist and inventor, and the designer of the AC bulbs used to light the World's Fair.

Buffalo Bill – Legendary hero of the "Wild West" who organizes a highly popular Wild West show adjacent to the site of the World's Fair at Jackson Park in 1893 (and which pulls visitors from the Fair).

Sol Bloom – An intelligent businessman, Sol Bloom organizes the entertainment at the Midway at the World's Fair, and later becomes a congressman.

Gustave Eiffel – The architect who designed the Eiffel Tower, the building that helped to inspire the **Ferris Wheel** at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.

Elias Disney – Father of Walt Disney, a construction worker during the World's Fair.

Emeline Cigrand – A young woman to whom Holmes proposes marriage. Holmes later murders her in the walk-in vault in his building.

Jonathan Belknap – Myrta's wealthy great-uncle, who Holmes attempts to murder.

Charles McKim – One of the Eastern architects Burnham hires to work on the World's Fair.

Alfred S. Trude – A prominent Chicago attorney who prosecutes Patrick Prendergast, having received multiple letters from him.

George Washington Gale Ferris – The engineer who designs the **Ferris Wheel**.

Mrs. Lawrence – A lodger in Holmes's building who presses Holmes for information when Emeline Cigrand disappears.

Charles Eliot – Olmsted's partner after the death of Henry Codman.

Rudolf Ulrich – Olmsted's superintendent.

Henry Owens – A porter whom Holmes bribes to pretend to be his business partner.

Washington Hesing – The Democratic candidate who loses in the mayoral primaries to Carter Henry Harrison for the 1893 election.

Samuel W. Allerton – The politician who loses to Carter Henry Harrison in Chicago's mayoral elections.

Grover Cleveland – The President of the United States, who leads the Opening Day parade at the World's Fair.

F. Herbert Stead – A British journalist who criticizes the dirtiness of the World's Fair. He is the brother of William Stead.

William Stead – A British journalist who writes about the World's Fair and dies on the *Titanic*. The brother of F. Herbert Stead.

Luther Rice – An engineer and businessman who oversees the assembly of the **Ferris Wheel**.

Infanta Eulalia – A Spanish princess who offends Chicago high society by not attending the parties and balls held in her honor.

Frank Haven Hall – The designer of the Braille printer. He meets Helen Keller, who learns how to read by using his invention, at the World's Fair.

Hellen Keller – A woman who overcomes being deaf, mute, and blind to learn how to communicate. She meets Frank Haven Hall, the inventor of the Braille printer that teaches her to read, at the World's Fair.

Susan B. Anthony – The woman's suffrage organizer who amuses Buffalo Bill by saying that she's rather her child go to Bill's Wild West show than to church, since he'd learn more.

Bertha Palmer – A Chicago socialite who organizes the decoration for building at the World's Fair and parties for famous guests from Europe.

Sophia Hayden — An architect at the World's Fair who is committed to an asylum after arguing with Bertha Palmer.

Wherritt – A visitor to the World's Fair who panics while riding the **Ferris Wheel**.

John Davis – A firefighter who dies in the Cold Storage Building explosion in 1893.

Theodore Dreiser – The famous American author of *American Tragedy*, who meets Sara Osborne White at the World's Fair, and later marries her.

Sara Osborne White – The schoolteacher who marries Theodore Dreiser after meeting him at the World's Fair.

Georgiana Yoke – Holmes's fiancée, who leaves Chicago with him after the World's Fair.

Annie Howard – The young woman to whom Mayor Harrison is engaged at the time of his death.

Citizen Train – The famous psychic who attends Francis Millet's Midway Ball.

Samuel Gompers – An important union organizer.

Eugene Debs – An important union organizer, and eventual Presidential candidate.

Kraus – The Chicago corporation counsel who humiliates Prendergast.

Frank Lloyd Wright – The great American architect who works for Louis Sullivan as a young man, and is quickly fired by Sullivan. Wright later befriends Sullivan and argues that he is one of America's greatest architects.

F.G. Cowie – An insurance claim investigator who suspects Holmes of arson.

George B. Chamberlin – An attorney who investigates Holmes for avoiding his debts.

William Chalmers – Mayor Harrison's neighbor, with whom Harrison argues on his deathbed.

Detective Frank Geyer – A noted Philadelphia detective who is responsible for finding evidence that Holmes murdered the children of Benjamin Pitezal.

Michael Swango – A doctor who murdered his patients in the 1990s and, in the notebooks he kept, cited Holmes as an inspiration.

J.C. Thomas – A Cincinnati man who helps Geyer track down Holmes.

Henrietta Hill – A woman who sees Holmes with a large iron stove in Cincinnati.

Detective David Richards – A detective who helps Geyer with his investigation into Holmes's crimes.

Herman Ackelow – A West Indianapolis man who helps Geyer investigate Holmes's crimes.

Thomas Ryves – A Toronto man who lent Holmes the shovel he used to bury Pitezal's children.

Thomas Barlow – The Assistant District Attorney during Holmes's trial.

L. Frank Baum – The author of *The Wizard of Oz*, who may have based Oz on his impressions of the Chicago World's Fair.

J. Bruce Ismay – The designer of the *Titanic* and the *Olympic*.

Richard Morris Hunt — A New York architect who designs the Administration Building at the World's Fair.

George B. Post — A New York architect who designs the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building at the World's Fair.

Jane Addams — A Chicago social worker and Nobel Peace Prize winner whose purse is stolen while she's visiting the World's Fair.

Minnie R. Williams — A naïve heiress to land in Texas who Holmes easily seduces and then murders. Sister of Anna Williams.

Anna Williams — The sister of Minnie R. Williams. She is initially skeptical of Holmes but eventually comes to trust him, only to be murdered by Holmes in his walk-in vault.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SANITY AND INSANITY

The Devil in the White City consists of two main storylines: one about the life of H.H. Holmes, the notorious serial killer, the other about the creation of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. The mere fact that these two stories are being told together encourages us to compare them and compare their characters. When we do so, we notice a few things. First, there is some overlap between the two storylines; for instance, Holmes profits from the World's Fair, killing tourists who come to Chicago for the event and even

naming his building the World's Fair Hotel. Second, and more disturbingly, the author of the book, Erik Larson, suggests that there are similarities between Holmes, a murderous psychopath, and the men involved in building the World's Fair, such as Daniel Burnham, Mayor Harrison, and Frederick Law Olmsted. (Larson even notes that Harrison and Holmes both have vivid **blue eyes**, another sign that we're meant to compare the "guilty" and the "innocent" characters in his book.) Both Holmes and the builders of the World's Fair are incredibly organized, efficient, and ambitious. They excel at persuading others, whether with flattery, bribery, or, at times, point-blank frankness.

The similarity that Larson notes between sanity and insanity has many implications. In Holmes's case, it makes his actions seem especially terrifying. Larson writes, in a darkly humorous tone, that Holmes, like Chicago itself, wastes nothing: Chicago's slaughterhouses, which are hugely important to the city's economy, use every part of the animal, while Holmes, who loves the smell of the slaughterhouses, sells the dead bodies of his victims to medical schools for a huge profit. Larson's observation is disturbing because we recognize that a serial killer's behavior isn't altogether different from behavior we see every day.

The connections that Larson makes between sanity and insanity also shows us that the ambitions of the people who design the World's Fair, such as Burnham and Olmsted, border on insanity. Burnham's plan to build an entire city in two years is seemingly impossible. At times, only his irrational, or even insane, determination allows him to proceed.

This doesn't mean that Eric Larson is equating Burnham's actions and Holmes's — Burnham, after all, is a loving father and husband, who misses his family throughout his two years working on the World's Fair. On the contrary, the comparisons Larson draws between Burnham and Holmes are unsettling *because* we know that these two men are unlike one another, and therefore, any similarities whatsoever come as a shock. Ultimately, Larson may be suggesting that there are no inherently sane or insane behaviors, only sane or insane ***desires***. Burnham and Holmes are ambitious, driven, and intelligent, thus they approach their projects—one incredible, the other appalling—in much the same way.

MODERNITY AND ANONYMITY

Early in *The Devil in the White City*, Erik Larson writes that it is easy to disappear in Chicago in the late 19th century. At the time of the World's Fair, Chicago is modernizing at a rapid pace: the city limits keep increasing, workers build huge, technologically advanced structures like the **Ferris Wheel**, and trains connect far-away parts of the city to one another. One important consequence of the rapid modernization in Chicago is that people move to Chicago from across the country, and even the world. Some come looking for employment and success, some come to admire the World's Fair, but both of these groups are responding to Chicago's reputation as a "modern" city.

Because of the rapid influx of people, Chicago becomes bigger, more crowded, and more impersonal. The police can't investigate all the women who go missing — amazingly, Holmes's serial murders are only a drop in the bucket compared to all the crimes in the city he lives in. Also, people are less emotionally connected to one another; thus, when guests go missing from Holmes's building, the other lodgers don't do anything other than express a vague curiosity. Larson says this is because they don't trust the police, but more broadly, it's because the new inhabitants of Chicago don't feel any deep connection with each other. As Chicago grows bigger, more prosperous, and more technologically advanced, it also grows more anonymous, and individual lives matter less and less. Larson suggests that anonymity may be an inescapable part of modern life.

MEN AND WOMEN

One of the most important "links" between Holmes's storyline in *The Devil in the White City* and Burnham's storyline is the role of women in the lives of men. While it's certainly true that Burnham himself has more love and respect for women than does Holmes, they are both products of their time and their culture: a culture that encourages men to be aggressive, and gives women few opportunities to assert themselves.

Larson notes at several points that the head designers of the World's Fair are all male. While there are female architects who design buildings at the exhibition, they're paid less and treated less seriously; indeed, when one of them has an argument with another organizer of the World's Fair, Burnham has her sent to an asylum, where she falls into depression. The World's Fair itself is successful in part because men are willing to pay money to disrespect women: they watch women "belly dance" and, according to the owner of a brothel at the time, hire prostitutes almost constantly.

Similarly, Holmes lives in a world where women, many of whom have just moved to Chicago, are weak and vulnerable, and must take jobs where they're subservient to men. While many of Holmes's victims stay in his building because they're attracted to him, others are forced to stay because of their economic need. After Holmes impregnates Julia, for instance, he exerts total control over her due to the sexism and the stigma of pregnancy out of wedlock at the time.

In a sense, the real horror of *The Devil in the White City* is the city and culture that allows Holmes's brutal murders to occur without any immediate repercussions — the same city and culture that allow tourists to patronize brothels. There is a

frightening similarity between Holmes's crimes and the World's Fair's success. Both involve treating women like mere objects. Rather than dismiss this information as history, readers should think about the close connection between voyeurism and crimes directed at women in their own societies.

EGO AND COOPERATION

The designers of the World's Fair are enormously successful people even before they complete the exhibition — and they know it. Burnham, Olmsted, Sullivan, Root, Ferris, and their colleagues are proud and more than a little arrogant. They get involved with the Fair in order to ensure that their architectural legacies will survive long after they die. The size and scale of the buildings they design testify to their enormous ambitions.

The designers' egocentrism takes different forms. Sullivan and Olmsted oppose the towering scale and imposing style of the World's Fair because they find it bombastic, old-fashioned, and disruptive to the fun of the event. But this certainly doesn't mean that Sullivan and Olmsted are more humble than their colleagues. Olmsted, who designed Central Park in New York City, cares deeply about his colleagues' opinion of him; the same is true of Sullivan. Olmsted is a landscape architect, and he understands that his designs' success hinges on their harmony with the other design. In other words, he knows that he needs to cooperate with the other ambitious architects if he is to be personally successful.

In general, Larson suggests that creative geniuses have to balance ego and cooperation if they are to succeed. The career of Daniel Burnham may be the best example of this principle. Burnham is motivated by his own selfish ambitions. Because he was rejected from Harvard and Yale as a young man, he wants to impress the Eastern American architects. But in spite of his ambitions, Burnham excels at cooperating with others. His partnership with John Root, and later, his skillful negotiations with the other architects at the World's Fair, hinge upon his acknowledgment that he can't do everything himself.

By and large, Larson makes fun of people who are too egocentric. Harriet Monroe, who publishes a poem commemorating the Dedication Day ceremonies at the World's Fair and arrogantly thinks that it is a brilliant achievement, ends up burning her own work for kindling. Although ego is necessary for completing monumental tasks like the construction of the White City, it's not enough, especially in a largely anonymous field like architecture. (After all, only a small handful of people alive today have even heard of Daniel Burnham or the 1893 World's Fair, at least before reading *The Devil in the White City*.) Without cooperation to temper ego, nothing can be accomplished.

CIVIC PRIDE AND AMERICAN PATRIOTISM

In interviews, Erik Larson has said that the most incomprehensible part of *The Devil in the White City* for modern readers is *why* Chicago wanted to host the World's Fair so badly. One answer to this question is that Chicago wanted to prove itself to New York and other established American cities. In the 21st century, Chicago has a reputation as a great American city, full of rich culture and history, but in the 1890s, this wasn't quite the case. Chicago was one of the largest cities in the country, but it was more than two hundred years younger than New York City or Boston. More importantly, most of the wealthy families in Chicago made their money from slaughterhouses — not exactly a glamorous way to get rich. By hosting the 1893 World's Fair, Chicago wanted to show that it had its own unique culture and spirit, that it wasn't just a "dirty place." In order to make a good impression on the rest of the country, Chicago newspapers often omitted information about setbacks or failure, so that the Fair would seem as successful as possible.

At the same time that Chicago was using the World's Fair as a vehicle for competing with New York City and other major Eastern cities, the United States as a whole was trying to assert its power to Europe, the cultural center of the Western world. The 1889 World's Fair in Paris had been a great success, and Americans wanted to "top" the architectural achievement of that fair – the Eiffel Tower — this was what inspired George Ferris to design the Ferris Wheel. More generally, though, America's architectural competition with France was only one part of its general competition with Europe. The United States was still just a little more than two decades out of the Civil War, and though its economy was growing rapidly, it still lagged far behind the massive European empires of the time — the British Empire, for instance, controlled one fifth of the world's population. Through a successful and impressive World's Fair, the United States hoped to send a message that it was a major architectural power, a major technologically power, and even a major military power. (Only five years after the World's Fair, the United States used its superior military technology to crush Spain in the 1898 Spanish-American war and to annex Spain's territories in the Americas.)

Chicago's civic pride and its patriotism sometimes complemented each other, but often they worked against each other — for instance, architects from Eastern American cities initially refused to work on the Chicago World's Fair because of their own loyalty to their cities. But ultimately, the World's Fair was a success because the designers were able to put aside their civic rivalries and work together as Americans. Larson notes that the patriotism that compelled Burnham and his colleagues to complete the Fair is almost inconceivable today. At the same time, late 19th century patriotism arguably took a darker form than it does today. Many of the exhibits at the

World's Fair consisted of humans transplanted from Africa or other "exotic" locations, to be gawked at by Westerners. In many ways, America's patriotism depended on putting the rest of the world — not just Europe, but non-Western countries — in a demeaning position. The Fair brought out America's racism as well as its patriotism; indeed, patriotism and racism may be two sides of the same coin. The patriotism at the World's Fair, then, represents what's most admirable and awe-inspiring about the late 19th century, but also what's most outdated and offensive about it.

SYMBOLS

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

THE FERRIS WHEEL

The **Ferris Wheel** is a monument to American ingenuity, bravery, and creativity. Designed by George Ferris to rival the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the wheel is cleverly built and highly elegant to look at — so elegant, in fact, that people are initially afraid to ride it, since the long, thin cables lining the inside of the wheel look flimsy. With the Ferris Wheel, America proves that its technological prowess rivals that of Europe in general and France in particular. At the same time, Chicago uses the Ferris Wheel to prove to its Eastern rival, New York City, that it's a center of scientific innovation to be reckoned with.

BLUE EYES

In spite of the ultimate success of the Ferris Wheel, it's installed at the World's Fair so late that it doesn't make remotely as much money as it could have had Daniel Burnham accepted it a year earlier. Most ironically, though the wheel is meant to be a symbol of America's technological power, there are actually far more impressive monuments elsewhere at the World's Fair, including the the AC light bulb and the moving picture. Thus, while the Ferris Wheel exemplifies America at its best, it also alludes to America's propensity for poor planning, sloppiness, preference for spectacle over substance, and short-sightedness.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Devil in the White City* published in 2004.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ How easy it was to disappear. A thousand trains a day entered or left Chicago. Many of these trains brought single young women who had never seen a city but now hoped to make one of the biggest and toughest their home.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

In this early quote, Larson establishes the setting of his story: Chicago—and, in a more abstract sense, the contemporary metropolis. In the late 19th century, big cities (cities with tall steel buildings, light-rail systems, etc.) were still something of a novelty in the United States. The vast majority of people in America had never lived in a town of more than a few thousand people. As a result, when people moved from a small town to a big city, they continued to behave as if they were in a smaller, closer-knit community.

The new environment of the American metropolis posed a threat to many people, especially women coming from small towns. Accustomed to being safe and protected, women weren't prepared for the murderers, sexual predators, etc. who inhabited places like Chicago—and from their own anonymity in such a huge, unwelcoming city. One such criminal, Holmes, will be the focal point of the book.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ So far the year had been a fine one. Chicago's population had toppled one million for the first time, making the city the second most populous in the nation after New York.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Larson establishes the setting of the book: Chicago. At the time when the book begins, Chicago is still an up-and-coming city: big and industrial, but not as culturally prestigious as New York City. From the perspective of America at the time, size matters: the quote presupposes that the bigger a city grows, the more businessmen, artists, inventors, and entrepreneurs move there, and the more impressive the city becomes. But as we've already seen, it's more complicated than that: big cities may be culturally prestigious, but they're also more

dangerous, especially for young women. The same demographic forces that led Chicago to become one of the greatest cities in the Western hemisphere also led Holmes, a brutal murderer, to get away with despicable crimes for many years.

❝ Though Chicago was rapidly achieving recognition as an industrial and mercantile dynamo, its leading men felt keenly the slander from New York that their city had few cultural assets.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

By 21st century standards, it's hard to grasp that there was ever a point when Chicago was actively competing for the glory and recognition of other American cities. But in the late 19th century, Chicago was on the rise: there were plenty of businessmen who'd made the city wealthy, but it was missing a certain element of class and sophistication.

As the quotation suggests, cultural prestige—even though it's impossible to measure—mattered deeply to the leaders of Chicago. The desire for this prestige explains why Chicago's elite invested so much of their time and energy in the Chicago World's Fair: the Fair cemented Chicago's status as a national leader in matters of architecture, entertainment, and technology.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ He had dark hair and striking blue eyes, once likened to the eyes of a Mesmerist. "The eyes are very big and wide open," a physician named John L. Capen later observed. "They are blue. Great murderers, like great men in other walks of activity, have blue eyes."

Related Characters: H. H. Holmes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Holmes's appearance isn't what one usually associates with murderers: he's calm, innocent, and friendly-looking. As the quote makes clear, Holmes's blue eyes and innocent appearance made him "great" at what he did—namely, murdering innocent people.

The quotation further suggests that Holmes was able to murder so may innocent people because his appearance deceived his victims into viewing him as a friend. Holmes was able to establish trust between himself and his patrons at the hotel. In this way, he managed to gain access to people's money, family, and property; and when he'd succeeded in doing so, he would murder again and move on to a new prospect.

The quote about Holmes's blue eyes also brings up a connection implicitly made by the novel itself—the similarities between Holmes and the men designing the World's Fair. "Greatness" here has nothing to do with morality, and everything to do with skill, intelligence, and success. Thus Holmes and Burnham are both "great men" in this sense, even if one is a serial killer and one a family man and famous architect.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ That Prendergast was a troubled young man was clear; that he might be dangerous seemed impossible. To anyone who met him, he appeared to be just another poor soul crushed by the din and filth of Chicago.

Related Characters: Patrick Prendergast

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to a young man named Patrick Prendergast. Although we're not told so right away, Prendergast will go down as a legendary figure in Chicago history: he's the man who assassinated the mayor of the city at the end of the World's Fair.

For now, however, Prendergast is just another young, mentally-ill man living in Chicago. The quotation suggests that Patrick has been "crushed" by Chicago itself—in other words, the big city pressures people into committing horrible crimes, effectively creating new criminals. The passage is written from the perspective of the naive city-dwellers of the 1890s—people who are unfamiliar with political assassins, serial killers, etc. Effectively, Patrick isn't treated as a threat because there's no precedent for a city-dweller acting so murderously. Over the course of the book,

however, Chicago will come to see how insane some of its residents have become.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ There were rules about courtship. Although no one set them down on paper, every young woman knew them and knew instantly when they were being broken. Holmes broke them all ... it frightened [Myrta], but she found quickly that she liked the heat and the risk.

Related Characters: Myrta Belknap, H. H. Holmes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Holmes is a seductive man, and as the passage explains, he's seductive because he knows the unwritten rules of courtship in America, and then proceeds to break them. One of the basic rules of courtship between men and women is "no touching." Holmes breaks this rule constantly—but the women he flirts with seem to enjoy it.

One of the reasons that Holmes is such a fascinating figure is that he feels strangely modern to readers. While the other characters in the novel are overly trusting and formal in their behavior (i.e., they're basically 19th century people), Holmes is a 21st century man—at once more immediately understandable to modern readers, and also frighteningly impossible to understand. Holmes's violation of courtship rules is a great example of why he seems modern to us—while everyone else in the novel is caught up in old-fashioned rules, Holmes breaks the rules with ease. Holmes's behavior in the quote further ties him to Chicago itself: like Chicago, Holmes is hot, risky, and dangerous—and yet also completely alluring.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ The hair was sold for wigs, the clothing given to settlement houses. Like the Union Stock Yards, Chicago wasted nothing.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

In the end of the 19th century in Chicago, people began to be murdered in alarmingly high numbers. The Chicago police were ill-quipped to track down the murderers, and as a result, many went free. The quote describes how the corpses of murder victims were treated: the hair of the corpses was converted into wigs, while the clothes were sent to settlement houses (reform institutions).

The quote is interesting because it focuses on the sociopathic nature of law enforcers and of society itself, not of the serial killers like H. H. Holmes. Although one would think that people would treat dead bodies with some respect, this is not the case: the bodies are converted into wigs. In general, then, the quote suggests that Chicago's problem at the end of the 19th century was far broader than individual serial killers: the city itself was losing its moral grounding as people became increasingly dehumanized. Ordinary people—cops, civilians, etc.—felt a new coldness and brutality toward one another.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ The dome was too much — not too tall to be built, simply too proud for its context. It would diminish Hunt's building and in so doing diminish Hunt and disrupt the harmony of the other structures on the Grand Court.

Related Characters: Daniel Burnham, Richard Morris Hunt, George B. Post

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

As the architects of the Chicago World's Fair plan their designs, controversy inevitably breaks out. The planners of the World's Fair are a veritable who's who of the country's greatest designers and architects, and also a who's who of the country's biggest egos. As the Fair draws nearer, the architects, such as Hunt, Post, and Burnham, have to learn to work together. One example of how the architects must learn to cooperate comes in this quotation: Post has designed an enormous domed building that—in spite of its majesty—will distract from the other buildings and ruin the overall effect.

With every decision Burnham and his colleagues make, they have to ask themselves two questions: is this right for *my* building, and is it right for the World's Fair as a whole? Naturally, the first question comes much more naturally than the second, and in this case, Post has failed to ask the

second question altogether. The most successful architects at the World's Fair learn to balance their desire for individual glory with their enthusiasm for the success of the Fair and the city as a whole.

❝ The shared vision expressed in their drawings struck [Olmsted} as being too sober and monumental. After all, this was a world's fair, and fairs should be fun.

Related Characters: Frederick Law Olmsted

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

As the designers of the World's Fair proceed with their plans, they bicker over the basic "look" of the Fair. Burnham proposes a style of architecture that favors big, white, neoclassical buildings, overflowing with pillars and domes. Olmsted, on the other hand, wants something lighter and more playful: he's afraid that big white buildings (the titular "white city") will discourage people from enjoying themselves.

Olmsted and Burnham's aesthetic differences say a lot about how they approach their respective careers. Olmsted, the chief designer of Central Park, favored a subtle style of design, whereas Burnham liked big, "heavy" buildings that drew attention to themselves with their majesty and seriousness. As the title of the book makes clear, Burnham won his quarrel with Olmsted: the Fair was white and monumental. Whatever one thinks of Olmsted's opinion, one thing is clear: in the clash of egos at the Fair, some major artists like Olmsted were silenced.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ At Jackson Park, aggravation was endemic. Simple matters, Burnham found, often became imbroglios. Even Olmsted had become an irritant. He was brilliant and charming, but once fixed on a thing, he was as unyielding as a slab of Joliet limestone.

Related Characters: Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

Burnham, who's been placed in charge of the World's Fair, struggles to control the volatile group of architectural "prima donnas" on his board. One of these prima donnas is Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted has been a good friend to Burnham, yielding to Burnham's "vision" of the Fair. But there are also times when Olmsted refuses to back off from his point of view, and Burnham finds it exhausting trying to convince such a brilliant man as Olmsted of anything he doesn't already believe.

The quotation is important because it reminds us that Burnham, in spite of his vast architectural talent, isn't really on the board of the World's Fair to build buildings. Burnham is chosen to head the Fair because he's good at organizing and delegating *other* people. Burnham's job is to communicate an overall idea of how the Fair should look, then rely on his talented board members to carry out this idea in time for the 1893 Fair.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Though sexual liaisons were common, society tolerated them only as long as their details remained secret. Packinghouse princes ran off with parlormaids and bank presidents seduced typewriters; when necessary, their attorneys arranged quiet solo voyages to Europe to the surgical suites of discreet but capable doctors. A public pregnancy without marriage meant disgrace and destitution. Holmes possessed Julia now as fully as if she were an antebellum slave, and he reveled in his possession.

Related Characters: H. H. Holmes, Julia Conner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

In the 19th century, having a baby outside of marriage was a truly shocking thing: it would ruin a woman's reputation for life. Women who'd had affairs that didn't end in marriage couldn't find employment, get married to someone else, etc. As the quotation explains, H. H. Holmes has struck up an affair with a young woman named Julia, and gotten her pregnant. Holmes knows full well that he now has complete control over Julia's actions, since he could ruin her life at any time by telling people about the affair or the pregnancy.

The quotation explains a lot about Holmes's psychology. Although Holmes seems to genuinely enjoy killing people, he gets the most pleasure from the sense of power he

wields over women: he savors Julia's hopelessness and her desperation. Even more generally, though, the passage criticizes 19th century gender norms. It's important to remember that Holmes's reputation wouldn't be ruined if he were to disclose news of *his* affair; only Julia's. The gender biases of the era kept women dependent on men's discretion, not the other way around. One could even say that sexism is the real "villain" of this passage (and of the entire book) because it created vast numbers of desperate young victims for Holmes.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ If an engineer capable of besting Eiffel did not step forward soon, Burnham knew, there simply would not be enough time left to build anything worthy of the fair. Somehow [Burnham] needed to rouse the engineers of America.

Related Characters: Daniel Burnham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

As Burnham proceeds with his designs for the Chicago World's Fair, it becomes clear that the Fair isn't going to serve its intended purpose: it's not going to put Chicago on the map to the extent that was hoped. The Fair is going to fail because it lacks a single truly impressive architectural marvel; something that can rival the achievement of Gustave Eiffel, the architect of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The quotation is important, then, because it reminds us what an international project the Chicago World's Fair really was: Chicago wasn't only trying to impress the elite of New York and Philadelphia; it was trying to assert American dominance in technology and engineering to Europe as well.

It's very revealing that when Burnham faces a crisis of creativity, he doesn't try to design anything himself. Burnham, in spite of his intelligence and talent as a designer, isn't really a creative force on the board of the World's Fair: his job is to encourage creativity in others.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Unlike the majority of the audience, Monroe believed the poem to be rather a brilliant work, so much so that she had hired a printer to produce five thousand copies for sale to the public. She sold few and attributed the debacle to America's fading love of poetry. That winter she burned the excess copies for fuel.

Related Characters: Harriet Monroe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

One of the best parts about Larson's book is that he captures the failures of the World's Fair as well as the successes. Although there were some titanic talents working in Chicago in the 1890s, there were also plenty of mediocrities. One such mediocrity, Harriet Monroe, tried and failed to become a popular poet, publishing her work and then later burning the copies to keep herself warm.

When writing about a big historical event like the Chicago World's Fair, it's tempting to focus on the figures who attained the most success, such as Louis Sullivan or Burnham himself. Larson, however, gives a fuller view of Chicago at the time by writing about both the successes and the failure of the era. (And while Monroe's poem probably wasn't very good at all, there's a grain of truth in her remark that America no longer loves poetry—the sentiment seems to reflect the decline in public morals that is a central theme of Larson's book.)

Part 3, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ As a crowd thundered, a man eased up beside a thin, pale woman with a bent neck. In the next instant Jane Addams realized her purse was gone. The great fair had begun.

Related Characters: Jane Addams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

In this amusing scene, Jane Addams, the Nobel Prize-winning community organizer and founder of Hull House, gets her purse stolen by an anonymous onlooker at the World's Fair of 1893. The scene is interesting for a number of reasons. First, note the contrast between Addams's fame and the thief's anonymity: it's precisely this clash between high and low, famous and obscure, that Larson is trying to convey in his account of the Fair (and more particularly through his initial description of Addams herself as just another anonymous woman). More generally, though, the passage suggests that the Chicago World's Fair was an extension of life in Chicago, not an escape from it: i.e., the World's Fair was messy, dirty, unpredictable, and crime-

ridden. Finally, the passage foreshadows the murders committed by H. H. Holmes during the time of the Fair: like the pickpocket, Holmes would take advantage of the disorder and anonymity of the Fair, committing crimes that he knew the Chicago police would never get around to solving.

Part 3, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ As best anyone could tell, the owner also was a forgiving soul. [Holmes] did not seem at all concerned when now and then a guest checked out without advance notice, leaving her bills unpaid. That he often smelled vaguely of chemicals — that in fact the building as a whole often had a medicinal odor — bothered no one. He was, after all, a physician, and his building had a pharmacy on the ground floor.

Related Characters: H. H. Holmes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Larson writes about Holmes ironically: he shows Holmes as he seemed to his unsuspecting guests, who had no idea that a serial killer was renting out rooms. From the reader's perspective, it's pretty obvious that Holmes is a devious man: his chemical smell, his willingness to rent to young women, and his guests who mysteriously disappear are all suspicious signs.

In general, the passage conveys how bizarre and unprecedented Holmes's murders were in 1893. Murder is always tragic, but in the 21st century there's at least some precedent for serial killers in the U.S.A. In 1893, Holmes was (or at least seemed to be) one of a kind: so bloodthirsty that his victims literally couldn't conceive of the crimes he committed.

Part 3, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Visitors wore their best clothes, as if going to church, and were surprisingly well behaved. In six months of the fair the Columbian Guard made only 2,929 arrests.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Larson notes that at the Chicago World's Fair, people were unusually well-behaved. For visitors, the Fair wasn't just a time for festivity: it was a near-religious experience, during which they'd be privileged enough to see the height of engineering, science, and art in the United States.

In a way, this quotation serves as a major vindication for Burnham, who masterminded the controversial neoclassical style of the Fair over the protests of Sullivan and Olmsted. Burnham wanted the Fair to be serious and monumental, while Olmsted wanted it to be fun. In the end, Burnham's approach may have been the wiser one: it fit with the scope and content of the Fair (a fun, laid-back atmosphere just wouldn't have been right, considering all the groundbreaking science and technology on display there).

But it's also important to keep in mind that Larson is being a little ironic. By this point in the book, we know very well that the most dangerous crimes committed at the World's Fair (Holmes's murders) were never even reported. So the fact that the police made less than 3,000 arrests doesn't mean much: there were definitely worse things going on beneath the Fair's glorious, innocent surface.

❝ The exposition was Chicago's great pride. Thanks mainly to Daniel Burnham the city had proved it could accomplish something marvelous against obstacles that by any measure should have humbled the builders.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

Here Larson sums up the achievement of the Chicago World's Fair: it proved (both to the U.S. as a whole and the rest of the world) that Chicago was a force to be reckoned with: the site of incredible technological and organizational achievements.

There's an interesting tension in this quotation, however, between individual achievement and collective achievement. True, the World's Fair is Burnham's triumph, since he was the head of the board of Fair planners. But of course, Burnham could never have succeeded without the independent genius of Olmsted, Ferris, Sullivan, and countless others. It was the collective genius of a group of people, as much as the individual genius of an organizer like Burnham, that made the Fair a success. Moreover, the

success belonged to Chicago as a whole: after all, the Fair was only proposed in the first place because of the city's growing wealth and desire for prestige.

Part 3, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Holmes was such a charming man. And now that Anna knew him, she saw that he really was quite handsome. When his marvelous blue eyes caught hers, they seemed to warm her entire body. Minnie had done well indeed.

Related Characters: Minnie R. Williams

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 292

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Holmes works his seductive magic on Anna Williams, the naive sister of Minnie Williams—the woman whom Holmes has already seduced, with the aim of stealing her inheritance. The passage is written in "indirect discourse"—written in the third person, yet also from the limited perspective of one of the characters (in this case, Anna). By writing the scene indirectly, Larson allows readers to note the contrast between what *we* know about Holmes (namely, that he's a despicable murderer) and what Anna thinks she knows about Holmes (that he's a handsome, charming man). By this point in the novel, we know that Holmes's blue eyes are fearsome—a symbol of his cold, uncaring nature. Yet they're also attractive and alluring; here, for example, the last sentence clearly shows that Anna is infatuated with Holmes.

Part 3, Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ The panic came, as it always did. Holmes imagined Anna crumpled in a corner. If he chose, he could rush to the door, throw it open, hold her in his arms, and weep with her at the tragedy just barely averted. He could do it at the last minute, in the last few seconds. He could do that.

Related Characters: H. H. Holmes, Anna Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 295

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Holmes listens calmly as his latest victim, Anna, suffocates to death. He's locked her in a vacuum-sealed vault downstairs, and can hear her panicking.

Part of what makes the passage so striking (and frightening) is that it shows Anna's death from Holmes's point of view—we're told exactly what Holmes is thinking as Anna dies. Based on this and other similar passages, it's clear that Holmes enjoys murder in part because he enjoys the control he exerts over his victims, and particularly his female victims. There's something unmistakably sexual about Holmes's pleasure here; he seems to enjoy dominating Anna, savoring his own power.

The passages that are narrated from Holmes's perspective (like this one) are the most novelistic in Larson's book. Although he's writing about real historical events, he's often put in a position where he needs to imagine the psychology of real people. Thus, he gives Holmes psychological depth that makes him both more of a literary character *and* more of believable historical character.

Part 3, Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ [Pendergast] knew that revolvers of this particular model had a penchant for accidental discharge when bumped or dropped, so he loaded it with only five cartridges and kept the empty chamber under the hammer.

Related Characters: Patrick Prendergast

Related Themes:

Page Number: 329

Explanation and Analysis

Here we're shown how Patrick Prendergast, the assassin of the Mayor of Chicago, plans to carry out his murder. Prendergast is at once sane and insane: he's driven to murder the mayor for the most incomprehensible of reasons (he thinks he's been denied a government position). And yet he's also surprisingly rational and controlled about the act itself: here, for example, he makes a special effort to keep a backup bullet, proving that his crime is premeditated.

The fine line between sane and insane is a recurring theme in the book: most of the major characters behave logically and illogically at different points (especially Burnham and Holmes). Prendergast is an especially interesting case of sanity and insanity, however, because it's so *easy* for him to carry out his bizarre revenge plot: it's extremely easy for him to buy a gun, get access to a major politician, and fire. Prendergast's behavior, then, shows how wild and

unpredictable Chicago becomes as it enters the 20th century.

Part 4, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Why had Holmes gone to the trouble and expense of moving the children from city to city, hotel to hotel, if only to kill them? Why had he bought each of them a crystal pen and taken them to the zoo in Cincinnati ...?

Related Characters: H. H. Holmes, Alice Pitezal, Nellie Pitezal, Detective Frank Geyer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 348

Explanation and Analysis

Detective Frank Geyer here wonders to himself why Holmes—now known to be a murderer and kidnapper—has treated his murder victims so well. Holmes has abducted children and spent months with them prior to killing them: indeed, he's been a charming and loving father figure to them, buying them toys and taking them on trips. It makes no logical sense that Holmes would treat children so well and then kill them—but of course, as we're well aware by now, Holmes isn't always a rational person.

It's important to note that the passage is phrased as a rhetorical question. Even if Geyer doesn't know the answer to his own question, we the readers do: Holmes's most recognizable trait is his desire for power and control. It's not enough for Holmes to murder his victims; he wants to dominate them completely, and make them love him before he kills them. Only when Holmes has achieved total control does he commit murder. The children whose deaths Geyer is trying to explain are only the latest in a long string of tragic examples of Holmes's sadism.

Part 4, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The thing editors could not understand was how Holmes had been able to escape serious investigations by the Chicago police. The Chicago *Inter Ocean* said, "It is humiliating to think that had it not been for the exertions of the insurance companies which Holmes swindled, or attempted to swindle, he might yet be at large, preying upon society, so well did he cover up the traces of his crime."

Related Characters: H. H. Holmes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 370

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Chicago authorities point out something that's been apparent to readers for a long time now: it's bizarre and horrifying that Holmes was able to get away with mass murder for so many years. It's also humiliating that a simple technicality in an insurance claim was what led to his undoing, rather than the ingenuity of law enforcement.

The quotation reinforces what Larson has already had ample time to show: that Holmes benefited from a new, large-scale city (Chicago), in which the size of the migrant population and the physical complexities of the city's neighborhoods made police officers incompetent and overworked. In the quote, the Chicago Inter Ocean authorities try to cover their tracks somewhat, admitting that the police didn't do their job, but also insisting that Holmes did a fantastic job of "covering up" his own crimes. By modern standards, Holmes did *not* do a particularly stellar job of hiding his crimes from the public—rather, the American public was unaccustomed to serial killers, and so in spite of ample evidence that Holmes was a murderer, it was easier for civilians to think that he was an eccentric or an overworked doctor than it was for them to imagine that he killed dozens of people.

Epilogue, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ As Wright's academic star rose, so too did Sullivan's. Burnham's fell from the sky. It became re rigueur among architecture critics and historians to argue that Burnham in his insecurity and slavish devotion to the classical yearnings of the eastern architects had indeed killed American architecture. But that view was too simplistic, as some architecture historians and critics have more recently acknowledged. The fair awakened America to beauty and as such was a necessary passage that laid the foundation for men like Frank Lloyd Wright ...

Related Characters: Louis Sullivan, Daniel Burnham, Frank Lloyd Wright

Related Themes:

Page Number: 376

Explanation and Analysis

After the World's Fair, there was a period in American architecture in which Burnham's neoclassical style, epitomized by the white monumental buildings at the Fair, became the norm for U.S. cities. But by the 1920s and 30s, the pendulum had swung back in the other direction: modernism and the avant-garde (represented by Louis Sullivan, one of Burnham's rivals, and his protege, Frank Lloyd Wright) became the most celebrated styles in U.S. metropolises.

Larson, having written 400 pages on the genius of Daniel Patrick Burnham, is understandably reluctant to admit that Burnham was second-rate, as so many contemporary architects claim. Instead, Larson opts for a "third way"—he admits that Burnham was a little old-fashioned, but argues that even if Burnham's specific style wasn't the most influential, it led to a general interest in architecture itself, paradoxically paving the way for figures like Frank Lloyd Wright (who rejected the aesthetic principles Burnham had stood for).

Epilogue, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ The fair's greatest impact lay in how it changed the way Americans perceived their cities and their architects. It primed the whole of America — not just a few rich architectural patrons — to think of cities in a way they never had before.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 373

Explanation and Analysis

Assessing the influence of the Chicago World's Fair on the United States, Larson is led to a couple of interesting conclusions. Here, he argues that the Fair reinforced the metropolis as a site of architectural innovation: a place where a talented team of architects could work together to reshape an entire neighborhood in one uniform style. Furthermore, the Fair reinforced architecture as the ultimate public, democratic art form: Burnham and his colleagues built buildings designed for everyone in Chicago to enjoy, from the elite to the poor.

The irony of Larson's point—an irony that should be lost on nobody who's read the book thus far—is that the "new city" that Burnham and his colleagues built (a city of beautiful white buildings and exciting new places) was also the city in which murderers like Holmes had an easy time killing their victims. Perhaps it's fair to say that Holmes and Burnham—in spite of the tremendous differences between their characters—were both reacting to the same set of influences. In a time when millions of new people flooded into American cities, Burnham chose to respond to the demographic changes with a new, democratic style of building, while Holmes chose to respond with a new level of brutality and cruelty.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE: ABOARD THE OLYMPIC

It is April 14, 1912, the day of a famous disaster at sea. Daniel Hudson Burnham, the world-famous architect, sits in the cabin of a ship. He's 65 years old, overweight, and has been experiencing pain lately. He thinks to himself that he is now paying for the food and drink he enjoyed as a much younger man.

Larson begins his book at the chronological end. This creates a mood of suspense: what is the project Burnham has been involved in? The idea that all humans eventually "pay" for what they do will be extremely important. The "ship disaster" refers to the day the Titanic *sank, an event that readers know about but Burnham, of course, does not. The sense of immanent disaster — whether we know what the disaster will be or not — will return many times in this book.*

Burnham is riding from America to Europe with his wife, Margaret, on the R.M.S. *Olympic*. Out of nowhere, he decides to send a telegram to his close friend, the painter Francis Millet, who is riding an even larger ship traveling in the opposite direction: the *Titanic*. He's irritated to learn that the message can't be sent, and asks why.

Burnham's mild irritation is a good example of "dramatic irony," when the audience knows something — in this case, that the Titanic *will sink — but the character does not. Burnham establishes himself as a stubborn, determined man, who never takes "no" for an answer.*

Burnham and Millet were two of the planners of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, planned in honor of the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America. Burnham was instrumental in designing the fair's enormous grounds and buildings, the so-called White City, and overcame an enormous number of logistical obstacles in doing so. Over the course of only six months, more than 27 million people visited the White City. There, they experienced its wonders: huge exhibit halls, new foods and drinks, and entire villages transplanted from Egypt, and Algeria. Many of the most famous Americans of the age praised the World's Fair, and its visitors were so impressed by it that they wore fine clothing and treated the White City like a cathedral.

When reading a book about history, readers have one huge advantage: they know what happens before the characters do. Thus, readers know the Titanic *sinks before Burnham has any idea. But Larson makes an interesting point. The people in a book about history also have an advantage over readers: they know about people and events that* readers *have never heard of. Thus, it's a surprise to read about a massive but not very well remembered event like the Chicago WF. It's as if Larson began the book talking about the* Titanic *to make us feel smug and confident — but then he surprised us by introducing information we (in all likelihood) know nothing about.*

The White City wowed Americans, but it was also the site of many tragedies. Workers were killed and injured, fires claimed more lives, and during the closing ceremonies, an assassin murdered still others. Finally, there was a serial killer at the Chicago World's Fair, who killed young women who came to the city looking for freedom and independence. Only after the fair ended did Burnham and the press learn about the murders this person, a young, handsome doctor, must have committed. The atmosphere of excitement and rapid change at the Fair made it easier for the doctor to get away with his crimes. When he was brought to justice, he claimed that he was the Devil and strange accidents happened to the people involved in his trial; the foreman on the jury that sentenced him, for instance, died suddenly.

Larson builds suspense by giving information , but not too much, about the great tragedies at the WF. He also establishes the principle storylines of his book: the story of how Burnham helped design the Fair, the story of the assassin at the Closing Ceremony, and the story of the young, handsome serial killer. The implication is that these stories are closely linked, and not just because they happened at the same time: in a way, the implication is that the WF may have caused *the deaths of the young women.*

Back on the *Olympic*, Burnham contemplates his aching feet. He and Millet are some of the only designers of the World's Fair still alive. Soon, no one will remember the Chicago World's Fair firsthand. Millet will survive for a while longer, Burnham thinks to himself.

Having explained the magnitude of the WF, Larson describes how quickly it fades from memory. It's as if he's saying, "How is it possible that something so big and important and helped to define so many things could have been forgotten?"

Burnham learns from the ship's steward that Millet's ship has experienced an accident, and the *Olympic* is now racing to help the passengers. Burnham returns to his room, opens his diary, and thinks about the Fair.

With the "frame narrative" of Burnham on the Olympic in 1912 established, Larson begins to tell his story. The structure of his book resembles that of a movie, with the plot "flashing back" and eventually coming "full circle." This sets the tone for an exciting, often very intimate look at history.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1: THE BLACK CITY

At the end of the 19th century, single young women arrive in the city of Chicago every day. They work as typists, secretaries, seamstresses, and weavers, and enjoy the new freedom, and danger, of being able to walk the streets alone. While most of the people who hire these women are honest, newspapers express concern that some of the people who place job ads for women may be "vulgar."

Chicago is exciting and dangerous at the end of the 19th century. The young women who come to the city are vulnerable to criminals. Interestingly, Larson doesn't reveal what, exactly, these criminals want from their victims; instead, he leaves readers to imagine and project their own fears onto the story.

Women in Chicago have access to drink, sex, and gambling. They find something charming about knowing that Chicago has vices to offer its citizens. The political scientist and philosopher Max Weber compared the city to "a human being with his skin removed" — this analogy is more apt than Weber could have known.

Larson establishes the link between the pleasures and the dangers of Chicago, and, implicitly between the story of the WF and the story of the serial killer. He increases the suspense with the gruesome comparison to a skinless human, suggesting that there is something raw and unfinished about Chicago that perhaps reveals things about it—and cities in general, and people in general—that might otherwise be covered up.

Chicago also offers new forms of death. Cars and trains hit pedestrians, horses kill their passengers, and streetcars collapse. Fires claim many lives, and when the papers report the accidents, they use the word "roasted." Diseases claim further lives, and the murder rate rises quickly. The Chicago police cannot stop the increase in violent deaths, often over fights or sexual arguments. Despite these deaths, the people of Chicago doubt that anything like Jack the Ripper's murders in Whitechapel, London could take place in their city.

The rapid advances in technology in the 19th century, which we now take for granted, are greeted as dangerous at the time. As the word "roasted" suggests, newspapers seem to treat deaths as gaudy entertainment for consumption by their readers. Even with all these changes, Chicago still "innocently" believes that serial killers couldn't come to their home.

There is a general feeling in the United States that morality is deteriorating. Influential politicians and writers argue for divorce and free love. In Massachusetts, Lizzie Borden is tried and acquitted of killing her parents with an axe — newspapers spread news of the case across the country.

For the first of many times in his book, Larson speaks in "indirect discourse" — in other words, he speaks in the voice of people other than himself; in this case, the typical 19th century moralist who links divorce (something that we take for granted today) with grisly murder.

A young doctor arrives in Chicago by train, and finds the chaos and smells of slaughterhouses, which make up the core of Chicago industry, enjoyable. Later, letters come from around the country to the doctor's home on 63rd and Wallace, begging for information about the whereabouts of young women. But it is easy to disappear in Chicago in the years leading up to the World's Fair.

The doctor's love for the slaughterhouses immediately suggests his psychopathic nature. Though it is worthwhile too to know that the slaughterhouses were key to Chicago's economy, that the wealth of the city was built on those slaughterhouses. This book never goes into it, but those slaughterhouses were also built on the exploitation of the poor and weak and immigrant, as represented in Upton Sinclair's The Jungle. The futility of the letters proves that Chicago is a huge, chaotic city where order does not entirely hold sway.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2: THE TROUBLE IS JUST BEGUN

It is February 24, 1890, and thousands of people gather outside the offices of the Chicago *Tribune*. Chicago is a proud city, and has recently grown in population to more than one million for the first time, making it the second-largest city in the United States after New York. Chicago, though, has only achieved this distinction by incorporating new areas into the city limits. America perceives Chicago as a greedy, ugly place, and the information the people are waiting outside the *Tribune* to hear could help to change this perception.

In spite of the increases in crime and danger in Chicago, it is an extremely proud, patriotic city. In part, Chicago's pride is the result of its awareness of being considered an ugly, backwards place — it's eager to prove itself to the rest of America, and to the world.

Inside the *Tribune* sit Chicago's two most important architects, Daniel Burnham, aged 43, and his partner, John Root, 40. Despite their enormous reputation, having built the first building ever to be called a skyscraper, the Montauk, they know that the information they are waiting to hear today has the potential to eclipse everything they have achieved previously.

Despite writing a work of nonfiction, Larson depicts the events of his book from the characters' limited point of view. Thus, we, like the characters themselves, don't know exactly what's going on.

Immediately after the Civil War, which ended less than three decades earlier, the idea of holding a national fair in the United States to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of the New World would have been inconceivable. But after the success of the 1889 "Universal Exposition" in Paris, a World's Fair that includes the erection of the Eiffel Tower, America becomes keen to compete with France and show its dominance in steelwork.

America changes enormously in the three decades following the Civil War. It becomes a global power, and eagerly tries to assert itself to Europe. In some ways, the way Chicago feels toward Eastern cities such as New York is how America feels about Europe. Thus, by celebrating Columbus, Americans have one eye on their own heritage and another on the rest of the world.

At first, politicians plan to hold a World's Fair in Washington D.C., but later, New York and St. Louis decide to compete for the distinction of hosting the huge event. This stirs civic pride in Chicago, which launches a huge national campaign to host the World's Fair in Chicago. On February 24, people are gathered outside the *Tribune* to hear the results of the Congressional vote to determine where the fair will be held. The *Tribune* reports that the initial ballot puts Chicago at 115 votes, far ahead of New York, St. Louis, and Washington. When the second ballot comes, Chicago is still in the lead, but losing its margin. As the day turns into evening, crowds yell that the people of St. Louis are evil and immoral. After seven ballots, Chicago is one vote away from the simple majority it needs.

The degree of civic pride and state rivalry Larson depicts is arguably inconceivable today, especially the way the people of Chicago call St. Louis an evil city. This is also an era in which civic pride can achieve measurable results. While New York is the economic center of America and Washington is the capitol, Chicago has more city pride, and this by itself is enough to make it a contender for hosting the WF.

Burnham, the architect, was born in New York, but his family moved to Chicago when he was a nine. He was a poor student, though he drew and sketched constantly, and he failed to pass his entrance exams to Harvard and Yale. As a young man, he found his passion as a draftsman at an architectural firm. His father introduced him to John Root, a draftsman with whom he quickly became partners.

Burnham spends most of his early life outside the intellectual elite. He is never one of the top students in his class, and his rejection from Ivy League colleges echoes throughout his life. In this way he mirrors Chicago in its relations to the Eastern US. He is also an atypical creative person because he only arrives at architecture as a profession as a young man.

Root and Burnham made their name designing a mansion for John B. Sherman, a wealthy superintendent of Chicago's slaughterhouses, the industry upon which the entire city depends. Burnham would go on to marry Sherman's daughter, Margaret.

The slaughterhouses are clearly one of the economic centers of the city of Chicago. Burnham's connection to a slaughterhouse family confirms his connection to the city of Chicago itself, but also establishes that the city is built on these slaughterhouses. Its business is literally death.

Root and Sherman built the Montauk, the first building in the world to be called a skyscraper. They achieved this feat by using caissons, a building technology that allowed foundations to extend deep into the ground. Caissons had claimed the lives of dozens of workers, since drilling into the ground could lead to gas explosions. Root is the artistic side of the partnership; Burnham is better at playing the politics of the architectural world. Both men respect and rely upon each other.

Burnham is an ambitious man, as evidenced by his willingness to risk lives building the first skyscraper. At the same time, he can be a "team player," cooperating with Root, his partner. Both of these qualities will be important to Burnham during the WF.

Root and Burnham's success encourages a wave of building and design in Chicago, and they become wealthy. At the same time, Chicago becomes bigger and dirtier: floods and rain spread disease and stray animals die in the streets. In 1885, a fire destroys Grannis Block, some of Root and Burnham's most impressive work. Then, Root and Burnham lose a major contract to build the Chicago Auditorium to a rival firm, headed by Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan. Still, they are hugely successful.

Burnham and Root's success is both a symptom and a cause of Chicago's rapid growth, meaning that they are indirectly to blame for the city's chaos and congestion (and, arguably, for its crimes). At the time when they become involved with the WF, they have a reputation, but, because of their rivalries, they also have something to prove.

Outside the *Tribune*, the people of Chicago learn the news that their city will host the World's Fair. Chauncey Depew, an influential campaigner for New York to host the fair, wishes Chicago good luck. The good news quickly spreads to all parts of Chicago, including to the Whitechapel Club, a ghoulish society inspired by Jack the Ripper's murders.

For some Chicagoans, death and murder are entertainment as well as danger. This suggests that the prospect of a serial killer is still inconceivable to the city — or, much more darkly, that there is something entertaining about violence, an idea that even links the book's reader, who wants to learn and enjoy, to its serial killer.

Chicago establishes a corporation called the World's Columbian Exposition Company to organize and pay for the fair, while Burnham and Root are given architectural control over the fair. Their task is daunting: essentially, they have to build an entire city in three years. This pace is almost impossible; their rivals, Sullivan and Adler, for instance, have spent three years on a single building. Nevertheless, they proceed, confident that they can meet any challenge.

Burnham and Root greet the enormous challenge of hosting the WF with great ambition. Their ambition mirrors that of Chicago itself.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3: THE NECESSARY SUPPLY

In August, 1886, a man who goes by the name H. H. Holmes arrives in Englewood, a suburb of Chicago. He is young, handsome, and well dressed, and his **eyes** are blue and hypnotic — a trait, a physician once pointed out, which many murderers, and great men in other fields, often share. Women look at Holmes as he walks through Chicago. He is attractive, and frequently breaks the unwritten rules of interaction with women: he stands too close to them and touches them too much. Women love him.

Holmes is attractive to others, particularly women, because of the way he implies both gentleness — those blue eyes — and impropriety — the way he touches women. In other words, he seems like the perfect balance of safe and dangerous — not unlike the city of Chicago itself. In general, Holmes is a master of appearances — his clothing and manner indicate that he is respectable and trustworthy.

Holmes goes to 63rd and Wallace, where he meets an elderly woman, Mrs. Holton, who owns a drug store and cares for her dying husband. He easily charms her, and offers to buy the store from her. Holton says she'll have to think about it, but she is already leaning toward accepting Holmes's offer.

In a few hours, Holmes convinces a woman to abandon a store she has owned for years — it is clear that she has already begun to make up her mind. Right away, we're given proof of Holmes's powers of persuasion.

Holmes is impressed with Chicago, even though almost nothing impresses him. His first impressions of the city are of the smells of slaughterhouses, which must have assured him that Chicago tolerates more unusual behaviors than his hometown of Gilmanton, New Hampshire.

Holmes enjoys what most people hate about Chicago — the smells — because they imply the freedom he will enjoy in his new home. In this sense, he is similar to the millions of others who move to Chicago in search of new freedoms at this time. This is an unsettling link between a murderer and "normal" people.

As a small child, Holmes claims, a group of older boys forced him to look at a skeleton in a doctor's office. This story is probably a distortion of the truth — it's more likely that the boys intended to scare Holmes, then found that he liked the sight of the skeleton.

Much of the information about Holmes that Larson uses for his book comes from Larson himself, and thus is not very reliable. This requires Larson to speculate and imagine on many aspects of Holmes's life, such as the episode with the skeleton.

Growing up in Gilmanton, Holmes went by the name Herman Mudgett. He was often beaten by his father, a strict Methodist, and he feels closer to his mother. As an adult, he claims that he kept a treasure box with a photograph of his childhood sweetheart, but others guess that his box was probably full of animal bones. His only childhood friend was killed in a fall while they were playing alone.

Larson often leaves it up to the reader whether or not Holmes killed characters in the book. Thus, Holmes may have killed his childhood friend. Larson uses this tactic both because of his lack of authoritative information about Holmes and because the book is much more disturbing if the reader imagines what Holmes did instead of being told.

Holmes later claims that as a child, he saw a photographer remove his own leg, and was disturbed by the sight. But this story is probably false — Holmes wrote it while he was in prison, trying to make the public like him.

There is only so much we can learn from Holmes's childhood, because Holmes himself distorted so much of the information. One consequence is that there's only so much sympathy we can have for Holmes — Larson tells us to question his childhood, the most sympathetic part of his life.

Holmes married a young woman named Clara, who adored him, though she was simultaneously aroused and disturbed by his requests for sex. Holmes eventually abandoned Clara, though they remained married.

Holmes's early behavior sets a pattern he'll adhere to for the rest of his life. Women are attracted by the way he "breaks the rules," but also disturbed by it. Holmes also has a habit of losing interest in women as soon as they're devoted to him.

Holmes went to medical school in Michigan, where he was a mediocre student, and later took a job in New York as a school principal, then set up a medical practice. He left a trail of unusual events wherever he goes: in Michigan, he was rumored to have breached his promise to marry a young hairdresser, and in New York, he was the last person seen with a young boy who went missing. No investigation was ever conducted.

The lack of investigation after the boy disappears indicates the implicit trust people have for Holmes, but also the shoddy state of the police force in America at the time. As disturbing as Holmes is, it's equally as disturbing that he lived in a society where he was able to get away with his crimes for years.

Holmes and his friend from medical school developed a complex scheme for collecting life insurance. The plan involved faking the deaths of a family of three, finding three corpses that resembled the family members, and then collecting the death benefits. Because it was enormously difficult at the time for doctors to find corpses, Holmes claims to have traveled to Chicago and Minneapolis to find bodies. On a train back to New York, he writes from prison, he decided that it was too risky to defraud insurance companies. But this is a lie — Holmes was convinced he could get away with his crimes.

Holmes tries to make himself seem more cautious than he really is. But his schemes get more and more elaborate as he grows older. It's also worth noting that Holmes has a partner for his scheme to defraud the insurance company. As repulsive as Holmes may be, he seems to have no problem attracting admirers, friends, and helpers.

Holmes next went to Philadelphia, where he worked in a pharmacy. He left immediately after a child died taking drugs that had been purchased in his store, and went to Chicago, where he took up the name Holmes, which was highly respectable at the time.

Holmes' commitment to keeping up the appearance of respectability is so great that he changes his own name to something that sounds more proper. This also points to people's gullibility at the time — they were willing to trust others more simply because of a name that may or may not have been real.

At the time when Holmes arrives in Chicago, the city is changing rapidly. As large buildings continue to be built and the slaughterhouses continue to produce meat, the demand for a large workforce increases, leading people to travel from across the country to Chicago's suburbs. In the suburb of Englewood, located outside Chicago at the time and named for a British forest, the streets are named after colleges, and lined with beautiful trees.

As Chicago becomes more crowded, dirty, and crime-ridden, its people become more nostalgic for nature and peaceful environments; thus, Englewood is named after an idyllic British area. In this way, the very peacefulness of Englewood is proof of the true grit and dirtiness of Chicago.

Holmes buys Mrs. Holton's store, using his affectionate manner to convince her. Holton continues to live on the second floor, tending to her husband. Under Holmes's supervision, the drug store becomes very profitable, partly because young women are attracted to Holmes. Mrs. Holton disappears, and Holmes claims that she has traveled to California, and then that she has decided to stay there.

It's impossible to know whether or not Holmes killed Mrs. Holton, or how, but Holmes's changed story suggests his involvement in her disappearance. Yet the strangeness of Holton's absence doesn't attract any unwanted attention; on the contrary, Holmes's new store thrives because he is attractive.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4: BECOMINGNESS

In July, 1890, the World's Columbian Exposition Company still hasn't decided where in Chicago the World's Fair should be held. The various neighborhoods of the city are fighting for the right to host the fair. Meanwhile, the opening ceremony is scheduled for October 12, 1892, while the formal opening is set for May 1, 1893. Burnham and Root have only 26 months to complete their projects.

The unity of Chicago's fight to host the WF quickly vanishes as the different neighborhood fight amongst themselves. This is especially distressing in light of the small amount of time Burnham and Root have to complete their enormous task.

Burnham's friend on the board of World's Columbian Exposition Company, James Ellsworth, goes to Massachusetts, where he asks Frederick Law Olmsted, a prominent architect and one of the designers of Central Park in New York city, to help him decide which area of Chicago is best for the fair, and also design the landscapes for it. Olmsted is initially reluctant to pursue such a huge undertaking in so little time, but Ellsworth eventually convinces him that the fair will be a glorious achievement, ensuring Olmsted's lasting fame. Olmsted, who is old and in poor health, thinks that working on the World's Fair will give greater credibility to the field of landscape architecture.

In large part, the people who design the world are already famous, successful, and in poor health — this leads us to ask why they are doing this; why they are devoting so much of their time to a fair. In part, Olmsted is devoted to the practice of landscaping itself, but his real reason is that he is concerned about his legacy and always looking for another way to be remembered. Olmsted may stand for Burnham and his colleagues in this way — they're designing the WF for the glory, more than for any practical reason.

Olmsted comes to Chicago with Henry Sargent Codman, a young and talented landscape architect. Burnham is impressed with both Olmsted and Codman, particularly their fast pace; Olmsted and Codman, for their part, respect Burnham's reputation and no-nonsense approach. Olmsted proposes that the Fair be built in Jackson Park, an area with a beautiful view of Lake Michigan. Olmsted is somewhat biased, since he tried to design landscaping for Jackson Park in the years leading up to Chicago's Great Fire, and never got the chance to implement his ideas. While the board considers his proposal, time is wasted, irritating Burnham.

Codman's youth makes him an outsider, at least superficially, in the company of older, more experienced men like Burnham and Olmsted, but his drive and ambition put him in their league. Olmsted's personal investment in the WF becomes clearer when it's revealed that he wanted to finish what he started at Jackson Park. Appearances seem as important in the WF as they are for Holmes, hence the committee's idea to establish the fair in an area with a beautiful view of the Lake.

While the board decides where to build, Chicago's skyline continues to grow. Burnham and his colleagues go to a ceremony to celebrate the completion of two notable skyscrapers, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union Temple, and meet the former Mayor of Chicago, Carter Henry Harrison, who has previously served four terms and is running for another. Ironically, Burnham, Harrison, and Root are all notorious drinkers.

Burnham and his colleagues are talented at putting on an appearance of morality, or at least suspending their immorality when they are committed to a project. One sees this quality in Mayor Harrison, too. Chicago's most successful people, it would seem, are the ones who can pretend to be "good" in public.

Patrick Prendergast, a pathetic 22 year-old who runs a group of newsboys, will soon shape the history of the Chicago World's Fair. He is lonely and mentally disturbed, and writes hundreds of letters to city officials, including Mayor Harrison, as if he is their close associate. He energetically campaigns for Harrison, and thinks that he will be rewarded with a government job, even though Harrison has no idea who he is.

After learning about the talented, ambitious men who designed the WF, it comes as a surprise to learn that a young, apparently talentless man will change history. Perhaps this is proof that Chicago at the end of the 19th century was a chaotic, unpredictable place, but it also makes the 19th century seem eerily similar to the present day.


In October of 1890, news comes to America from Europe that there is a worldwide recession that will quickly spread to Wall Street. Railroads will lose business, representing a huge threat to the popularity and success of the World's Fair. Still, on October 30, the board of the World's Columbian Exposition Company appoints Burnham chief of construction — Root is the supervising architect and Olmsted is the supervising landscape architect.

The WF is truly a "World" affair — it's affected by the global economy. This increases the stakes for Burnham and his colleagues — not only do they have to put on a show that will impress the world; they also have to make the show survive the social and economic challenges that come from around the world.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5: DON'T BE AFRAID

By 1886, Holmes runs a highly successful business at his pharmacy in Englewood. He begins to court a woman he met in Minneapolis named Myrta. Myrta is impressed with Holmes's dashing manner, and the exciting city he now lives in. Holmes breaks all the rules of courtship, but when he proposes to Myrta, she eagerly accepts. Holmes files a petition to divorce his current wife, Clara, accusing her of infidelity, an extremely serious charge at the time, though his petition for divorce is eventually dismissed. He thinks to himself that young women are weak and naïve. Within two years of marriage, Myrta is pregnant.

Holmes affects a manner of kindness and attractiveness, but secretly finds Myrta, and all women, pathetic. He is aggressive as well as dishonest; he doesn't just divorce his first wife, he accuses her of wrongdoing, seemingly without any grounds. Yet Myrta knows none of this — she seems to think of Holmes as an extension of the city he lives in: exciting, unpredictable, a little dangerous, but irresistible.

Myrta is impressed with the energy of Chicago, and at first she adores Holmes for his gentle manner and ambition to succeed. But she quickly becomes jealous of his flirtatious behavior around female customers. She writes to her parents about her sadness, and they move to Illinois. Myrta joins her parents, and there gives birth to her child with Holmes, named Lucy. Holmes visits Myrta there, and charms her parents. Myrta says that Lucy responds well to Holmes, which makes Myrta trust him more.

Holmes's appearances can only convince for so long. Unfortunately, women only seem to notice that he is a liar after they have already committed to him. By the time Myrta starts to become jealous, she is carrying Holmes's child. It may also be that Holmes stops trying to charm Myrta after they're married, not that she finally sees through him.

In 1888, Holmes buys land across the street from his pharmacy under a false name. He begins designing a building with stores on the ground floor and lodgings on floors two and three, along with gas jets and a secret basement. He is aroused by the thought of women living there.

Holmes finally shows feelings of attraction, but they're not attraction to any typical thing; instead, he is aroused by the sense of control he wields over other, defenseless people.

Holmes hires workers to build, deliberately overworking them and encouraging them to leave early on. In this way, no one but Holmes knows the plans of the entire building, or questions unusual features, like open gas nozzles in vaults. He asks one worker to drop a brick on Holmes's "brother in law," possibly because he wants to know if the worker is trustworthy. Holmes finds three trustworthy workers: Charles Chappell, Patrick Quinlan, and most importantly, Benjamin Pitezal, a tall, skeletal man who a lawyer will later describe as Holmes's puppet.

By hiring workers for his new building, Holmes is holding "tryouts" for henchmen and helpers. In part, his building is terrifying because only he knows all of its secrets — none of the workers stays around long enough to understand more than a few rooms.

In 1888, Jack the Ripper commits his first murders, brutally stabbing prostitutes. These events fascinate everyone in Chicago, but especially Holmes.

It's unclear why Jack the Ripper is so fascinating to Chicago. For Holmes, it's because he identifies with the serial killer, and enjoys hurting others. But for most of Chicago, it's in part because they don't think a serial killer could ever come to the United States. For most people, it's titillating but safe entertainment, the equivalent of a horror movie.

By June 1889, Chicago officially incorporates Englewood into its city limits, and a new police precinct opens in the area, near Holmes's building. Holmes sells his old drugstore and promptly opens a new one across the street, even though he has assured his buyer that he'll face little competition. Holmes falls into debt to finance his projects, but he is able to pass his debts on to H.S. Campbell, one of his aliases.

Holmes lies freely and easily to others, first telling his buyer that he'll have no competition and then going directly into competition with him. Even when it comes to money — one of the simplest ways that society limits what people can do — Holmes manages to spend far more than he has by pretending to be someone else, Campbell.

Holmes buys chloroform, at first insisting that he is using it for scientific experiments, then denying this. He convinces a woman named Strowers to take out a life insurance policy with Holmes as the beneficiary. Holmes pays her 6,000 dollars to do so, and tells her not to be afraid of him — this, of course, terrifies her.

Paradoxically, saying, "Don't be afraid of me" is one of the scariest things one could hear. In part, Holmes may be toying with Strowers, knowing full well that she will be terrified. It's a bigger mystery why a women would write a life insurance policy for another man — perhaps she implicitly trusts Holmes, and perhaps people were simply more trusting a hundred years ago.

Holmes hears about the upcoming World's Fair in Jackson Park, and plans to exploit it for his own ends.

Holmes's connection to the WF is clear: he will exploit people's desire for entertainment. Larson doesn't explain exactly how, which make Holmes's plan seem even more sinister.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6: PILGRIMAGE

Daniel Burnham travels to New York for the most important step in the construction of the World's Fair. He and Root have already designed towers and various other buildings for the event, but they know that they need to hire a police force, doctors, a fire department, and a hospital. Still, the biggest challenge is choosing the proper architects for designing the buildings at the Fair. Burnham deliberately extends offers to five architects from outside Chicago: in Boston, New York, and Kansas. He does this to dispel the belief that Chicago is small and isolated from the rest of the world. Burnham's five architects have already shown little interest in working with the Fair; in addition, news of the financial collapse of one of Chicago's largest banks spells trouble for the Fair.

Burnham is only in charge of designing the WF because of Chicago's city pride, but he shows little sign of being loyal to his city. Even if he wants to put Chicago on the map, he does so by bringing outsiders to Chicago, not by exporting Chicago to the rest of the country. While this could be seen as betrayal, as it is by Chicago's architects (who are presumably jealous as well), it also shows that Burnham "thinks big" — his noting the collapse of Chicago's bank is further proof of the forward, long-term thinking required to make the Fair a success.

Burnham meets with the five architects in New York; he tried to bring Olmsted, knowing that his reputation would help convince them, but Olmsted was unavailable. Together, the five architects are similar: some have attended school in Paris together, all have reputations for being intimidating, and all have worked for America's wealthiest families. Burnham feels out of place. He never attended an elite university and doesn't have Root or Olmsted to back him up, and his direct manner doesn't impress his guests. The five architects raise concerns about competing with Paris and the Eiffel Tower, financing the Fair, and putting Chicago on the map. They're unsure that they'll be able to build anything in less than two years. One architect, Peabody, commits to the Fair; the others only say they'll think about it, though they agree to travel to Chicago in January. Burnham tells Olmsted via telegram that the meeting went well, and that the architects want to meet him.

Burnham is a skillful politician, who tries — and fails — to convince the Eastern architects to join him by appealing to their respect for one of their own, Olmsted. Although Burnham feels uncomfortable around this group of elite, university-trained artists, he seems more ambitious and driven than any of them. Perhaps this suggests that ambition and optimism, as much as formal training at Harvard or Yale, are necessary for success in the field of Architecture, or in life in general. The distorted summary of the meeting Burnham telegrams Olmsted indicates that he also has to be a politician to people on his team, not just those on other teams.

Back in Chicago, Burnham is surprised to find that Chicago architectural firms feel betrayed that he went to New York for help. Burnham then asks five Chicago firms to design buildings for the Fair; of these five, only Adler & Sullivan refuses to cooperate.

The Chicago firms' sense of betrayal may derive from an abstract sense of civic pride, but it's more likely that they're personally insulted. The fact that almost all of them agree to join Burnham after he asks them suggests that their ambitions outweigh any feelings of stubbornness.

Root travels to New York, where he meets with Burnham's five architects, but has little more luck — once again, they agree to visit Chicago in January, but show little enthusiasm.

The repetitive nature of Root's journey — Burnham did the same thing only a few months ago — illustrates how agonizingly slow the process of building the Fair could be — agonizing, in particular, because of how little time Burnham and Root have to complete it.

PART 1, CHAPTER 7: A HOTEL FOR THE FAIR

Holmes plans to turn his new building into a cheap hotel for World's Fair visitors. When the fair is finished, he will burn the hotel and collect an insurance policy. He knows that he will have to dispose of the incriminating materials in the building, and that even a small piece of evidence left behind could get him the death penalty.

Larson doesn't reveal what the "incriminating evidence" could be, but by now, it seems likely that he is referring to human corpses, or bits of them. Holmes is a good planner, always thinking of small details.

Holmes modifies his building for his new plans, hiring workers for short periods so that none of them get a sense for the overall layout. He invites police officers for food and cigars. Though his debts are increasing, he is able to persuade creditors to look for H.S. Campbell, and in the meantime he simply borrows money from others. He also begins selling fake drugs to cure baldness and alcoholism.

Holmes's deceptions seem almost effortless. He woos the police force with cigars, dispelling any suspicions they might have had, and continues to spend more than he has simply by changing his name. He is extremely ambitious, always looking for new ways to make money — in this case, by selling fake medicines.

Myrta's great uncle, Jonathan Belknap, who has money, visits her in Illinois. Holmes begins to visit Myrta more frequently, charming the family. Belknap doesn't trust Holmes, but finds him acceptable, and when Holmes asks him for 2,500 dollars for a new house for himself and Myrta, Belknap gives him the money. Holmes then forges Belknap's signature and writes a second banknote for the name amount. He also invites Belknap to Chicago for a tour of his new hotel. Belknap is initially reluctant to go, since he finds Holmes disturbing, but he eventually agrees.

Belknap is seemingly the only person who isn't charmed by Holmes. That he is an old, experienced man, not a young, innocent woman, has a lot to do with this. It's disturbing that Belknap agrees to visit Holmes even after he finds him untrustworthy — humans go against their instincts, simply to avoid offending other people, and they also lack the imagination to believe in the evil that is truly possible.

In Chicago, Belknap is disgusted by the smells of the city, but Holmes seems not to mind them. Holmes shows him around his new hotel, which he finds strange and gloomy, and introduces him to Patrick Quinlan, the caretaker. Holmes suggests that Belknap see the view from the roof, but Belknap lies and says that he is too old to climb so high. Holmes suggests that Belknap spend the night, and though Belknap initially refuses, he eventually gives in. That night, Belknap hears Quinlan trying to enter his room, but he refuses to let him in. He later discovers that Holmes has forged his signature on a banknote, though Holmes apologizes so emotionally that Belknap doesn't pursue the matter further. Belknap later realizes that Holmes wanted to kill him in Chicago by pushing him off the roof.

Belknap has the more common reaction to Chicago — disgust at the smells of the stockyards. Holmes, by contrast, is an outsider, yet he enjoys the Chicago environment. It's as if Chicago attracts immoral and sociopathic people and repels the good ones. Yet even after Belknap realizes that Holmes forged his signature and tried to kill him, he does almost nothing to bring him to justice. Holmes's plans are sometimes easy to see through, but even when this is the case, he is charismatic and persuasive enough to prevent others from reporting him to the police.

Holmes tries to buy a kiln for the basement of his hotel. He claims to be the founder of a glass company, and purchases a kiln that, he's disappointed to find, cannot reach temperatures high enough for his purposes, or get rid of odors. Holmes talks to a man from the furnace company, who asks to see the furnace; Holmes refuses at first, then agrees. The furnace is large, and to the man from the furnace company, seems unsuitable for bending glass. He also notes that it looks more like a crematory for corpses. Nevertheless, he installs a new heating facility that can create temperatures of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit; Holmes is satisfied.

Chicago is a city dominated by industry. This gives it an impersonal, alienating touch. Thus, the man from the furnace company doesn't bother to ask why Holmes wants such a large, hot kiln, even though he specifically notices that it looks like a tool for disposing of bodies, rather than bending glass. The fast pace of life in Chicago makes it infinitely easier for Holmes to get away with his crimes, for people to not pay attention or follow up.

Holmes spends more and more time away from Myrta and his daughter, though he sends them money. He insures his daughter's life, since children can die so unexpectedly. His store is doing well, though the task of building the hotel proceeds slowly. He hires desperate workers who are willing to take any job. Meanwhile, two new women have entered his life. One is married, with a child, which Holmes thinks makes the situation more interesting; the other is her sister-in-law. Both are beautiful.

Holmes's neglect of Myrta and his daughter indicates that he was only interested in her again because of the prospect of stealing money from Belknap. While he doesn't seem attracted to women themselves, Holmes enjoys the pursuit and winning women — thus, a married woman is more interesting than a single one.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8: THE LANDSCAPE OF REGRET

In Early January, 1891, the five Eastern architects leave for Chicago, though one of them, McKim, turns back after learning that his mother has died. In Chicago, they survey Jackson Park; since most of them are old and in poor health, walking through it is an ordeal. The Park is desolate and ugly, with dying trees and soil that is difficult to build on. One Eastern architect, Peabody, says that the area is impossible for hosting the World's Fair; Burnham replies that the area has been decided upon already.

The team of architects Burnham assembles rarely agrees on anything — even when the five Eastern architects come to Jackson Park. Burnham's job is both creative and administrative: he occasionally has to put his foot down and insist on the final decision, in this case, that the Fair will be held in Jackson Park.

Root, who is 43, charms the Eastern architects. Traveling so much in the previous months has exhausted him, though he knows that after January 15, when the visiting architects return to the East, he will be able to rest.

Larson foreshadows Root's death. Ironically, the "rest" he looks forward to after January 15 will be "eternal rest."

Except for Root, who is too tired, the architects attend an extravagant dinner. Reporters accost them for information about the Fair, but no one speaks. There are no women in sight. The architects give speeches; Grave, from the East, says that the men need to place the Fair's interests about their own. Burnham makes a speech in which he argues that 1893 will be the third great year in American history after 1776 and 1861, and encourages the architects to "serve their country," as Americans did in the two earlier years he names.

The group of architects is not only male but highly masculine: Burnham, for instance, makes a highly militaristic speech about fighting for one's country. Women at the end of the 19th century were by and large kept out of positions of power — this, of course, made them more vulnerable to people like Holmes. It's amusing that Burnham thinks the year 1893 will be remembered alongside 1776 — readers know that this is decidedly not the case.

The next morning, the Eastern architects discuss their plans with Harriet Monroe, the cultural critic, who is deeply unimpressed, and calls their designs ugly and plain. Chicago architects will be the key force in the Fair. Root goes home before the dinner begins; although it is a cold night, he walks outside before he has put on his coat.

For all the effort Burnham exerts to assemble a team of architects from around the country, Chicago does most of the heavy lifting. Meanwhile, Root's behavior doesn't bode well for his future.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9: VANISHING POINT

A young man named Icilius "Ned" Conner moves to Chicago with his wife, Julia, and their daughter, Pearl. He begins working at a jewelry counter in Holmes's building in Englewood. As he settles in his new life, a new elevated train line, the Alley L, is built, connecting Englewood to Jackson Park. Ned admires Holmes for already owning his own building, and notes that his success, inconceivable elsewhere, is almost ordinary in Chicago.

Larson tells this section of the story from Ned's point of view, using indirect discourse. Though Ned doesn't realize that the Alley L will make it easier for Holmes to attract visitors from around the country, we know this by now. Similarly, we know that Holmes's appearance of success is just that — an appearance, based on lies and crime.

Holmes hires Julia and Ned's sister, Gertrude, for his pharmacy. Ned notices that Holmes seems overly attentive to both women, and that they enjoy his company in return. Ned begins to feel that Gertrude and Julia are ignoring him, and that customers treat him with pity. Holmes asks him to test a soundproof vault. Ned is disturbed by the vault, but doesn't question why Holmes needs it.

Like many of the people who interact with Holmes, Ned senses that something is wrong with Holmes's interactions with women and his plans for his building, but he doesn't bother to determine what it is. Holmes preys on others' ignorance and disinterest.

Letters arrive in Chicago from parents of young women who have moved to the city. The parents want information about their children's whereabouts, but the police are too busy and incompetent to investigate these disappearances seriously. So many people disappear that police officers propose founding a separate department for these cases. Men and women disappear in equal number. When corpses are found, they are often sold to medical schools, first for dissection and then as skeletons. Much like in stockyards, nothing is wasted.

In the war between law and order, the law is badly outnumbered. The police force is small and poorly organized, meaning that criminals like Holmes can often get away with their misdeeds easily. People recognize that the police force needs to be reformed, but these changes happen slowly and inefficiently. Larson draws a disturbing link between serial killers and Chicago businesses: they don't waste anything.


PART 1, CHAPTER 10: ALONE

On January 12, 1891, Burnham invites Eastern and Chicago architects to his library; Root is absent. Burnham is aware that the Eastern architects are still reluctant to work on the Fair, and tries to flatter them into staying. In response, the architect Richard Morris Hunt, who has traveled from New York, bluntly tells Burnham to get to the point; Burnham is reminded of his rejection from Harvard and Yale. He tells his guests that they are now the Board of Architects for the World's Fair; the Board elects Hunt as their chairman. Sullivan is privately unhappy with this decision, since he thinks that, in contrast to Hunt and Burnham's old-fashioned style, the form of a building should follow logically from its function.

Burnham has to overcome the sense of exclusion from the creative elite he's felt since being rejected from Harvard and Yale. Yet he manages to maintain control over his mutinous group of architects. Ironically, while Burnham is concerned about being a part of the contemporary *creative elite (i.e. those of the late 19th century), Sullivan is secretly thinking ahead to the* future *of architecture. His notion that form should follow function would become a key principle of Modernist architecture, and can be seen in Germany's Bauhaus designs.*

Shortly after the meeting, Burnham learns that Root has pneumonia and is bedridden. For the next few weeks, Burnham is absent from the Board of Architects' meetings, since he is taking care of his old partner, who seems in surprisingly good spirits. Despite Sullivan's feelings, the Board chooses a neoclassical style for the World's Fair. Meanwhile, Root succumbs to his illness and dies. He begs Burnham not to leave his bedside, but Burnham does to speak with Root's wife. In this time, Root dies; a relative of Root informs Burnham that before he died, he ran his fingers across his bed and said he could hear music. Burnham grieves for Root, in part because he wanted Root to be his partner throughout the World's Fair. Though he considers quitting the Fair, his desire to prove himself compels him to stay involved.

For all his practicality and forward thinking, Burnham's loyalty to his partner outweighs his loyalty to the WF. But this doesn't mean that he's unambitious or selfless — after Root dies, Burnham returns to the WF, not because he wants to keep his promises but because he wants to prove himself to the other architects. Root's last words suggest that he was a creative, imaginative man who could find "music" anywhere — a perfect complement to Burnham's no-nonsense personality. Without a partner, Burnham's job becomes immeasurably harder.

While Burnham and the Board of Architects works on designs, banks continue to fail, and unions fight for minimum wage and an eight-hour workday. Disease and the threat of fire, along with these other factors, threaten to make the Fair a failure. Meanwhile, Prendergast falls deeper into madness, and Holmes continues his mysterious plans.

Larson closes the first part of his book with a bleak look at the state of Chicago in the year leading up to the opening ceremony of the Fair. Designing the Fair itself seems an impossible feat; meanwhile, Holmes continues his evil plans uninterrupted.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1: CONVOCATION

On February 24, 1891, the Board of Architects, including Burnham, Olmsted, and Hunt meet with the Grounds and Building Committee to present plans for buildings. Hunt, in pain from gout, orders the meeting to begin. The architects share their plans, and seem to admire each other's work. Hunt's Administration Building is a dome taller than that of the Capitol Building in Washington D.C.; other structures use massive amounts of steel and electricity. George B. Post's building is even larger than Hunt's, and the architects fear that it will be too "proud" for the Fair, and will distract from Hunt's design.

The buildings planned for the WF are impressive, but impressiveness isn't the only factor the architects have to consider. The buildings must "agree" with each other — no one of them can upstage the others. In this way, the delicate balance between the buildings works in the same way as the delicate balance between the creative, ambitious architects. Each one of them pursues individual greatness, while also having to consider the overall success of the Fair.

Sullivan, who designs the Transportation Building, takes advice from Burnham and designs a single large entrance, but refuses to acknowledge where the idea came from, even after the entrance becomes hugely popular. In general, the effect of the meeting is to prove to the architects, and to Lyman Gage, the president of the World's Fair, that Chicago is serious about its plans to rival Paris. Gage, hugely impressed, tells the Board that they are all dreaming, and hopes that the dreams can be realized. Augustus St. Gaudens, a famous sculptor, tells the group that their meeting is the greatest meeting of artists since the 15th century.

For all his insight into form following from function, Larson makes it clear that Sullivan is second to Burnham in terms of creative ability — he gets his best ideas from Burnham. Gaudens's statement indicates the pros and cons of the Board of Architects — they're an immensely talented group, yes, but they're also immensely competitive rivals.


Olmsted is concerned that the designs for the Fair are too stern and intimidating for what is supposed to be an entertaining occasion. He tells Burnham that he wants the landscape for the Fair to "soften" the atmosphere created by the buildings, and expresses the need for beautiful, exotic boats in the water. He realizes that he will have less time than he thought to install his landscaping, since he can only begin after all the buildings have been finished. Nevertheless, he submits an ambitious plan a few weeks later, in which he describes his ideas for arranging flowers and creating a "poetic effect." Olmsted thinks that he will only be able to complete his project if nothing goes wrong: if he keeps his health, if unions do not strike, if the weather is mild, and if the other buildings are completed on time.

Olmsted seems to be the only one of the architects who thinks in terms of the Fair itself, not individual buildings (and architects). Perhaps this is because he designs landscapes, not buildings, and therefore his works don't draw attention to themselves in the way a building does. Yet Olmsted is ambitious, too — his floral designs won't just be flowers; they'll influence the way the Fair-goers experience the entire Fair. While this is arguably the most ambitious project any of the architects propose, it's also one of the hardest to realize, since Olmsted has to wait for the other architects to finish before he can begin.


In the early days of construction for the Fair, unions strike and refuse to work. A young Clarence Darrow moderates negotiations between unions and the World's Columbian Exposition Company; the World's Columbian Exposition Company agrees to eight-hour workdays, and says it will consider the rest of the unions' demands.

Although Chicago at first seemed to be united in its desire to host the WF, Chicago isn't a single, monolithic group: workers will only work on the Fair if they're treated better. (Clarence Darrow was one of America's most famous and influential attorneys; among many other notable cases, he defended teaching evolution in public schools during the Scopes "Monkey" Trial and argued against the death penalty while defending the infamous murderers Leopold and Loeb.)

Burnham is frustrated by the bureaucracy of designing for the Fair. He holds a contest to design the Woman's Building for the Fair; a woman wins the competition, and is paid 1,000 dollars, while the male architects who work with her are each paid 10,000. The Board of Architects agrees that there is no way to complete the buildings with steel and brick in time for the Opening Day ceremonies; the architects decide to use plaster and jute on the exteriors of all structures. Burnham hires a replacement for Root named Charles Atwood, a colorful opium addict who he thinks is a genius. Burnham places a sign in his office, "RUSH," to remind him to complete his work for the Fair on time.

Burnham moves on after Root's death, hiring another partner, who he seems to respect and whose idiosyncrasies he seems not to mind. With this new hire of Atwood, the group that designs the WF remains thoroughly masculine: while women are occasionally invited into the world of architecture, they're paid less and treated with less respect. The architects recognize that they're running out of time, but appearances are so important to their profession that they change their plans and redesign their buildings so they can be completed sooner.

The World's Columbian Exposition Company appoints officials to find exhibits to bring to the fair. One official, Colonel Mason Schufeldt, goes to Zanzibar to bring a tribe of Pygmies to Chicago.

The WF is evidence not only of America's competition with Europe but of its domination over other parts of the world, like Africa.

Unions continue to strike and demonstrate for better pay and hours. Jack the Ripper is rumored to have traveled to New York, where a brutal murder suggests his presence. Chicago authorities predict that the Fair will attract criminals to the city in record numbers, and try to establish a system for measuring all suspects' physical features, so that no one is able to hide behind aliases.

The rumors of serial killers in America indicate that Chicago is becoming less "innocent" — as the city grows bigger and more chaotic, it no longer seems inconceivable that such things could happen. The complex method the authorities propose for catching criminals seems futile, underscoring the huge advantage over the law that criminals enjoy at the time.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2: CUCKOLDRY

Holmes's building earns the nickname "The Castle." Ned's sister, Gertrude, comes to Ned one day and tells him tearfully that she must return to Iowa. Ned assumes that a man must have courted her, then been "indiscreet." Holmes walks by Gertrude, and she reddens, but Ned does not notice. Shortly after Gertrude returns to Iowa, she becomes ill and dies. Holmes tells Ned he is sorry, but his **eyes** continue to look as calm as Lake Michigan.

Again, Larson tells his story from Ned's perspective, but in such a way that what Ned doesn't recognize is obvious to the reader: Holmes was the one who was indiscreet with Gertrude. It's impossible to tell if Gertrude's death was Holmes's fault or not, but his eerie calmness after hearing of her passing is almost as disturbing as knowing that he killed her.

Ned argues with his wife, Julia, and their daughter, Pearl, becomes increasingly moody. Ned hears rumors of an affair between Julia and Holmes, but doesn't believe them. Holmes asks Ned if he will buy the pharmacy from him. Holmes offers to raise Ned's salary by six dollars and week, and then accepts these six dollars a week as Ned's payment for the store. Ned eagerly accepts, not wondering why Holmes would sell such a profitable business to him. Holmes's seeming generosity convinces Ned that Holmes must not be involved with his wife.

Ned seems not to recognize the obvious: he is being paid exactly the same amount (12 dollars plus six dollars, minus six dollars is still 12 dollars!) to do more work and accept all the debts Holmes has accumulated while running the store. He puts too much faith in Holmes's appearance of respectability and wealth to wonder if Holmes might not be trying to cheat him (and "cheat" with his wife, for that matter).

Ned and Julia continue to fight. Holmes is sympathetic, and comments that Julia is a beautiful woman. He asks Ned to buy a life insurance policy for himself and his daughter, and offers to pay the initial premiums. A man who calls himself C. W. Arnold claims that Ned need only pay him one dollar to obtain an insurance policy, but Ned refuses.

Holmes's sympathy is unsettling, since he adds that Gertrude is beautiful — clearly, he's having an affair with her. Ned begins to grow suspicious of Holmes's offers — but, as usual, by the time he notices that something is wrong he has already lost money to Holmes.

Ned finds that the pharmacy, which he now owns, is deep in debt from the time when Holmes owned it. Holmes tells him that debts are typical, and says that the sale of the pharmacy was final. Ned realizes he has been tricked and begins to suspect that Holmes and Julia are having an affair, and leaves his wife to work in a jewelry store elsewhere in Chicago. Julia and Pearl continue to live with Holmes. Eventually, Ned leaves Chicago, meets another woman, and divorces Julia without gaining custody of his daughter.

Ned is hardly a psychopathic murderer like Holmes, but that doesn't make him a good man. He leaves his wife and his daughter, seemingly without much concern for them, and eventually allows them to live with a man he knows to be a liar and a cheat. "Ordinary" people in Larson's book often seem evil, too, except that their evil takes the form of negligence.

Holmes, who has promised Julia that he would marry her when Ned left, loses interest in her, and finds Pearl increasingly repulsive. At night, he goes to look at his kiln.

Holmes isn't interested in Gertrude herself; he enjoys the sense of conflict he can create in families. Now that Gertrude doesn't represent any argument or conflict, he begins to tire of her.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3: VEXED

It is the spring of 1891, and Burnham has begun to tire of designing the Fair. He spends almost no time with his wife and five children, but sends them letters saying that he wants the Fair to be over so that he can return to them.

Burnham is an ambitious man, but he only has a finite amount of energy. He also has a life and a family outside the WF — something he will be reminded of more and more often as the Opening Ceremony approaches. Yet just as Ned abandons his family, Burnham effectively must abandon his family to bring off the WF.

Workers are building in Jackson Park, but slowly and inefficiently. Burnham is irritated that no architect has proposed a building to rival the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Meanwhile, he realizes that the soil in Jackson Park is so soft that special foundations will have to be built far below the surface. These foundations, designed by Root, work for the most part — but not in the area where the heaviest building will be erected.

Burnham is an excellent planner, but even he is at the mercy of nature, and has to work around the problems with the soil. Burnham is also not the most important creative force at the WF: he's primarily an organizer, who waits for other architects to submit their designs. Thus, he must wait for a building that can rival the Eiffel Tower, instead of designing it himself.

Meanwhile, Mayor Carter Henry Harrison loses his bid for a fifth term as mayor to Hempstead Washburne, because he's considered to be too sympathetic to unions. Ironically, his loss is impressive, since he lost by only a few thousand votes, and ran as an independent, without the support of the Democratic Party that had supported him in the past. Prendergast is saddened by Harrison's defeat, since he thinks that he would have been given a government job in return for his support.

Despite the enormous increase in immigrants and working-class people in Chicago at the time, being sympathetic to workers is a liability in Chicago politics. This indicates the level of control the rich and powerful few have (some things never change). Prendergast's fantasies of a government position become increasingly delusional, even after Harrison loses.

Meanwhile, there is a battle underway between electricity companies for the right to illuminate the World's Fair. Thomas Edison visits Burnham and advises him to use DC (Direct Current) powered incandescent bulbs. At the same time, George Westinghouse, working with Nikola Tesla, offers to light the exposition for less money using Alternating Current (AC) powered bulbs, and Burnham awards him the contract — a huge victory for AC, and a milestone and defining moment in the history of electricity.

The WF attracts important scientific minds as well as creative types. Indeed, the prestige of the Fair is such that Westinghouse scores a major victory by getting the contract to light it. This victory leads to the "victory" of AC current over DC, determining the way that the "electric grid" still operates today.

Burnham continues to experience setbacks. Hunt and the other Eastern architects have not completed their final designs on time; Burnham abandons all attempts at flattery and tells Hunt, point-blank, that he is embarrassing the Fair. Olmsted becomes sick, and the Fair grounds are covered with manure.

Burnham is a talented flatterer, but at times, he has to trade flattery for insistence. The tactic of "putting the Fair's interests ahead of your own" is an important weapon for Burnham, and he uses it here, accusing Hunt of embarrassing the entire exposition.

While Burnham tries to complete the Fair on time, people from around the country send "bids" for exhibits at the Fair. Buffalo Bill offers his famous "Wild West" show, but is turned down, though he resolves to set up a show near the World's Fair. A man named Sol Bloom wants to display an entire Algerian village, just like at the Paris World's Fair, but his idea is turned down, too. Schufeldt, who went to Zanzibar to bring pygmies back to America, writes that he is confident he can complete his task.

The exhibits at the WF paint a colorful and somewhat disturbing picture of America's relationship with the rest of the world at the time. America, which had just come out of a Civil War fought over the institution of slavery, sees Africans and Native Americans as sources of entertainment more than as human beings.

The architects try to outdo the Eiffel Tower, but even their planned structures aren't remotely as impressive as the Parisian building, at the time the tallest in the world. Though various designers submit plans for taller towers, Burnham wonders if the centerpiece of the Fair should be a tower at all. Gustave Eiffel himself, the designer of the Eiffel Tower, offers to design a building for the Fair, but the Board of Architects insists that an American must be the one to design the Fair's most important building.

The task of rivaling the Eiffel Tower continues to trouble the WF officials, but they stubbornly refuse to let Eiffel himself solve it — American patriotism is so strong, and so elemental in the establishment of the WF itself, that it must be an American who designs the new building.

Sol Bloom is a colorful and creative theater manager, who uses a variety of clever tactics to increase sales. After being denied in his bid to bring an Algerian village to the Fair, he goes the mayor of San Francisco, Mike De Young, and asks for his help in lobbying Chicago to allow the exhibit. De Young asks Bloom to go to Chicago. Bloom, who wants to stay in California, intentionally asks for an overly high salary, certain that this will mean that De Young will allow him to stay.

Bloom is one of the many clever, creative problem solvers attracted to the WF in the 1890s, though for the time being he does not want to go. Many of the key men in the success of the WF are not artists or architects, but simply organizers: adept at promoting events and instilling interest in potential investors and spectators.

To make the Fair safe, Burnham organizes a large police force, and purifies the drinking water using the modern methods pioneered by Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch, in order to avoid an outbreak of cholera. He also establishes a special fire department in the event that a fire breaks out.

The WF takes advantage of important scientific discoveries; in this way, it's a record of the state of science at the time. Burnham's techniques for preventing disease would be influential in city organizing for years to come.

At the end of 1891, the Woman's Building is progressing, but its architect, Sophia Hayden, quarrels with Bertha Palmer, the wealthy head of the Board of Lady Managers. Palmer solicits decorations for the inside of the Woman's Building, resulting in a huge number of ornaments, artworks, and other trinkets. Hayden is furious, since the decorations will look ugly. She begins to turn down decorations, and Palmer dismisses her as decorator of the interior. Hayden breaks down in front of Burnham, furious at Palmer's maneuvers; Burnham calls a doctor and has Hayden sent to a mental institute, where she falls into depression.

There is a constant conflict at the WF to determine the overarching style of the event. Some, like Palmer, prefer a showy, opulent, occasionally muddled spectacle; others, like Hayden, want a simpler, more elegant affair. Because the people who prefer opulence have money, their tastes eventually win out. Burnham's treatment of Hayden reflects the prevailing attitudes toward women at the time: even in architecture, they weren't taken seriously, and were easily dismissed from projects.

Olmsted quarrels with Burnham about the proper boats for the Fair. Olmsted wants old-fashioned "poetic" boats, while Burnham considers using modern steam-powered vessels to improve transportation time. Meanwhile, workers begin to die at the Fair, some from structural collapses or falls, some from electrocution. Banks continue to fail financially as the recession worsens, and The New York Times argues that the Fair will be a failure that will be an embarrassment to the entire country.

Olmsted, like Hayden, prefers a simpler, less cluttered aesthetic for the WF. Burnham, by contrast, is more organizationally minded, and wants to improve transportation more than he wants to create a beautiful spectacle. Burnham's vision depends upon the work, and the death, of workers — the very size and opulence of the buildings at the WF are proof of the men who die building them. The WF is literally built on their lives. There is an unsettling question in this, as Burnham must know that these great works will result in people dying to build them. If he knows this, what separates him from being a murderer?

PART 2, CHAPTER 4: REMAINS OF THE DAY

Julia tells Holmes that she is pregnant, and that they must marry. Holmes pretends to be overjoyed, though he tells Julia that she must have an abortion, which he sets for Christmas Eve. Because having a child out of wedlock is shocking at the time, Holmes now exercises complete power over Julia. Julia agrees to the abortion, and puts her daughter to bed on Christmas Eve, saying that she'll see her tomorrow.

Holmes enjoys the power he exercises over Julia. Based on everything we know about him so far, we sense that he will dispose of Julia rather than marry her; thus, the scene in which Julia says goodnight to her child is highly poignant.

Holmes brings Julia to his basement, where he uses chloroform to murder her. Before dying, Julia struggles to break free, which Holmes finds extremely arousing. The next day, Christmas, the Crowe family, which lives in Holmes's building, is surprised that Julia and her daughter are not present. Holmes tells them that Julia and her child have gone away to Davenport, Iowa.

Holmes enjoys struggle, and thus Julia's death is enormously pleasurable to him. He finds lying easy, and when he tells the Crowes that Julia is gone, he convinces them. The Crowes, for their part, would rather believe that Julia has left suddenly than believe that she is dead — the very strangeness of Holmes's actions are his alibi.

Holmes summons his associate, Charles Chappell, and shows him the corpse of an unusually tall woman. He explains that corpses are in short supply, and that doctors need them to learn their craft. At the time, doctors are indeed desperate for corpses and skeleton, ignoring the source of these bodies. Chappell isn't puzzled by the presence of the woman's corpse, since he knows Holmes is a doctor. He takes the corpse and, on Holmes's request, removed the skin and muscle. Holmes sells the skeleton to a medical school for a large sum.

Though Chappell doesn't realize it, the corpse is that of Julia, the woman Holmes has just killed. Chappell doesn't think twice about the corpse's identity; he is, in many ways, a typical professional: he doesn't ask too many questions, and his need for money trumps his curiosity and suspicion. Yet he has also just been given a dead body, and asks no questions! His lack of care or curiosity is outrageous, and yet only an exaggerated version of everyone else's lack of care or curiosity.

A new family, the Doyles, moves into Julia's old room, where they see her possessions still laid out. Holmes explains that Julia's sister has fallen ill, and that she and her daughter have left the city. Later on, Holmes will say that Julia pretended to go to Iowa to confuse her husband, Ned, but actually went elsewhere. He will also say that he was never romantically involved with Julia, and that she never got an abortion.

Holmes pretends that Julia is the deceptive, untrustworthy one, lying about where she was traveling, when in fact it is Holmes himself who excels as lying and deceiving. The simplicity of his lies is almost disturbing — after the ugly, complex process of killing Julia and selling the skeleton, lying is the easy part for him.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5: A GAUNTLET DROPPED

In early 1892, the Fair is progressing slowly but steadily: though the winter is one of the coldest in Chicago history, several of the buildings are almost finished. Elias Disney, father of Walt Disney, works on the construction for the Fair, and will later tell his son about the elaborate sights. At the same time, economic problems and labor strikes increase crime and violence in Chicago by almost 40%. The nation is also riveted by the murder trial of Lizzie Borden, who is accused of murdering her parents with an axe.

The tense mood at the WF site seems closely connected to the tensions in Chicago itself: the new density and heterogeneity of the city leads to more violence and crime, including the kind of crime Lizzie Borden — and Holmes — commits. Yet this is also a time of wonder — Walt Disney, after all, grew up hearing about the WF, and it may have inspired his creative projects.

Burnham is unusually kind to his workers: he pays them sick leave, gives them eight-hour work days, and feeds them three meals a day. But with the economic problems Chicago is experiencing, and the rapidly shrinking funds available for the Fair, he fires workers, knowing full well that some of them will die as a result of this sudden loss of income.

Burnham is a rigorous leader, but also a fair one, at least for the time. Yet his priority is always completing the WF on time, not making his worker's happy. This suggests that he had treated his workers well beforehand because he knew it was a good strategy, not because he thought it was the moral thing to do.

Burnham receives hundreds of plans for elaborate towers and buildings meant to rival the Eiffel Tower, but he publicly criticizes the architects of the United States for failing to rise to Eiffel's challenge. One architect who hears Burnham speak is inspired to design an elaborate building, which he hopes will bring him great fame.

Burnham hopes to inspire the architects of the United States to greater success; it would seem that he succeeds. Larson doesn't reveal the architect's name, building suspense and encouraging us to keep reading.

Burnham argues with the Director-General of the World's Columbian Exposition Company, George Davis. He asks Davis to allow him creative control over the Fair's exhibits, but Davis publicly says that he is in charge of the exhibits now. Burnham writes to his wife that he is tired and wants the Fair to be completed.

Davis understands that pubic perception is extremely important in running the Fair; by telling others that he runs the Fair, he comes closer to actually running it. In a way, his "lie" is similar to Holmes's lies simply in the sense that both understand the way that people work and believe what they hear.


Burnham and Davis testify at a preliminary Congressional session in Chicago to ask for more money to complete the Fair. The questions are highly detailed, and Davis's answers imply that Burnham has lied about their expenses. Burnham is furious, and accuses Davis of knowing nothing about the Fair, a statement he eventually withdraws but does not apologize for. The World's Columbian Exposition Company heads to Washington to attend a national hearing and ask for money.

The WF progresses slowly because so many talented, outspoken people are involved with it. Clashes like the one between Burnham and Davis are in this sense inevitable. Burnham is particularly offended by Davis's comments because he attacks Burnham's reputation in front of Congress — Burnham gets involved in the WF in the first place to create a lasting legacy for himself,

The Midway Plaisance, a central boulevard and park, slowly takes shape. Sol Bloom, now largely in charge of organizing the Midway's exhibits, wants the area to be exciting and entertaining. He encourages people to bring exotic spectacles from around the world, and says that the Midway will be large enough to hold the standing army of Russia — a dubious claim, but one which tourists find very exciting.

Bloom rises quickly at the WF because he's an excellent promoter, and knows how to attract interest in the event, even if it involves distorting the truth a little. He understands that people will come to the WF because they're curious about the rest of the world.


PART 2, CHAPTER 6: THE ANGEL FROM DWIGHT

Holmes sends his associate, Benjamin Pitezal, to receive the famous Keeley cure for alcoholism, a highly popular remedy at the time, which sometimes gives its recipients amnesia. Holmes says that he wants Pitezal to conquer alcoholism, but in reality, he wants him to collect information about the cure so that Holmes can sell his own version. There, Pitezal meets Emeline Cigrand, a woman he describes to Holmes as stunningly beautiful. Holmes writes to her, inviting her to come to work for him. Cigrand eagerly accepts, excited at the prospect of working in Chicago. Holmes finds that Pitezal has exaggerated Cigrand's beauty somewhat, but he still finds her lovely. He charms her, and they ride their bicycles around the World's Fair area.

Holmes's lies aren't the only ones that America swallows unquestioningly at the time. The "Dr. Keeley cure," whose only effect seems to be amnesia, is hugely popular, because people trust the authority of a medical professional — Holmes often convinces people to trust him for exactly the same reason. Holmes exploits others for his own gain, even when he pretends to be helping them. Pitezal's visit to Keeley gives Holmes the idea to sell his own alcohol cures — the fact that it gives Pitezal rest is irrelevant to him.

Ned Conner returns to Holmes's store to ask about the mortgage. He meets Cigrand, and warns her to be careful of Holmes — Cigrand ignores this advice. She adores Holmes, especially his smooth manner, which she finds uncommon in Chicago, and which he tells her is the result of his English aristocratic heritage. Cigrand's second cousins visit her, and she tells them that she is in love with Holmes. One of the cousins, Dr. Cigrand, finds Holmes's building gloomy and disturbing, but thinks that it isn't his place to interfere with his cousin's feelings. Holmes later asks Cigrand to marry him, and tells her that they will visit his father, an English lord, on their honeymoon.

Cigrand and her cousin, Dr. Cigrand, don't listen — to others, like Ned, who warn them that Holmes isn't to be trusted — or to themselves — when Dr. Cigrand senses that Holmes's house is sinister. "Normal" people seem especially weak to exploitation by psychopaths like Holmes because they're bad at listening to their instinct, because they have an instinct to trust. Holmes appeals to Americans' naïve trust in authority — medical authority, aristocratic authority, etc.

PART 2, CHAPTER 7: DEDICATION DAY

Olmsted works at a pace that would be challenging for a much younger man. His body gives him constant pain as he travels. The date of the Chicago Fair's dedication is now October 21, 1892; it has been shifted back to allow New York its own dedication ceremony on October 12. Olmsted is irritated that Burnham still wants to use modern steamboats at the Fair. Olmsted also wants the "Wooded Island" area of the Fair to be free of all buildings, but powerful men, including Theodore Roosevelt, want structures to be built there, and Olmsted is forced to give in and allow building in the area. At the same time, he hears of plans to build a road through Central Park, which he helped design. Upset with this news, he decides to travel to Paris with his family — Larson notes that the journey will be dark for him.

Olmsted is more interested in elegance than ostentatiousness — thus, he wants the island to be entirely natural, rather than covered in architecture. While his preferences are clearly a function of his profession as a landscape artist, Olmsted has to give into the preferences of others who are more powerful, such as Roosevelt. It's important to keep in mind that Olmsted is no less concerned with his legacy than Burnham or his colleagues; it's just that he wants to create a legacy in a slightly different way. His legacy is built not on bigness but the fulfillment of his own vision.

Sol Bloom hears that the Algerian village he wanted for the World's Fair has set sail for America, a year too early.

Bloom continues to exploit the rest of the world for the entertainment of tourists traveling to the WF. Yet his plans aren't always perfectly executed.

In Paris, Olmsted sees the long lines and dirty areas surrounding the Eiffel Tower, but also notes that the fair area is simpler and more streamlined than Chicago, reinforcing his view that the World's Fair in Chicago should be kept free of opulent buildings. He sees gardens in England, inspiring him to keep the Wooded Island free of architecture. He also hears news of cholera outbreaks in Russia, making him worried for Chicago.

Olmsted is both practical and lofty-minded. He knows that cholera and disease could ruin the Fair, but he also wants the Fair to be as visually striking as possible, without being too over-the-top. Olmsted's aesthetic tastes are noticeably different from those of Burnham, who favors heavy, neoclassical structures.

Bloom welcomes the Algerians to New York, but fears that they are so disorganized that they will be arrested. One of the Algerians, who introduces himself as Archie, claims to have been a manservant in an English home; Bloom hires him as his personal bodyguard and assistant. Meanwhile, Burnham continues to turn town plans for buildings to rival the Eiffel Tower, including one from a credible-seeming man whose idea Burnham dismisses as too "fragile." Meanwhile, windstorms destroy some of the Fair's buildings in progress. To solve these problems, Burnham summons the Eastern architects, who propose a novel solution to the coloring and decoration of the buildings. McKim introduces Burnham to Francis Millet, a New York painter, who proposes painting the buildings at the World's Fair with white lead paint.

Bloom continues to exercise loose control over his exhibit. Burnham tasked with far greater responsibilities, is less willing to take risks, and turns down the engineer's plans. He's being particularly cautious because of the weather, which destroys much of the progress Burnham has made in completing the WF. The decision to paint the buildings white, giving the Fair the nickname "the white city," puts Burnham in contact with Millet, the same man he tries to contact years later while Millet is on the Titanic.

Floods cause Chicago's drinking water to become filthy; Burnham invests more time in providing clean water to fair-goers. He builds a pipeline connecting Chicago to the Waukesha, where the spring water is cleaner, but is forced to build around the village of Waukesha itself, since the villagers strongly oppose any building there.

Burnham is forced to be flexible; he wants to get water from the village, but settles for water from the county. He can't become too invested in any one plan, because plans changes constantly due to factors outside of his control.

The pace of building for the World's Fair increases, but in June, a large part of the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building collapses. The contractor blames Burnham for encouraging him to proceed too quickly. Workers die throughout the summer. Meanwhile, Burnham has a major victory when Congress awards him exclusive control of the World's Fair, recognizing that Burnham's arguments with Davis are counterproductive.

Burnham assumes responsibility for almost every disaster at the WF, whether he deserves responsibility or not. At the same time, he enjoys great authority and creative control over the event — blame is the price he pays for this great authority.

In Pittsburgh, an unnamed engineer tests his design, then submits it to the Ways and Means Commission of the World's Fair, confident that it will rival the Eiffel Tower. At first the Commission approves his plan, but then denies it, afraid that it is too unstable. The engineer spends a huge sum of money on further planning, and attracts a large number of investors. He prepares to approach Sol Bloom who seems open to unusual ideas.

Larson continues to deny readers the name of the engineer who seems increasingly important in his book. In the face of the huge bureaucracy of the Commission, the most successful people at the WF are those like Bloom and the engineer who refuse to take "no" for an answer and can think of creative solutions to their problems.

With Dedication Day only a month away, Olmsted returns from Europe, feeling ill and tired. In Chicago, he is pleased to see that the buildings are nearing completion, and that his men have planted the appropriate flowers and trees, thought they won't be visible for some time. Burnham has approved a beautiful style of boat for the World's Fair, exactly the kind Olmsted wanted.

Olmsted is put in an uncomfortable position: he has to wait for the plants and trees he's organized to blossom and grow. Even by the standards of the WF, this is a slow process. Despite the lack of visible results to Olmsted's name at the Fair, Burnham respects him enough to listen to his opinions on boats.

On Dedication Day, the Chicago newspapers, out of respect for their city's efforts, specifically ignore the desolate look of the park — Olmsted's trees and flowers need time to grow. Francis Bellamy composes the Pledge of Allegiance for the occasion of the Dedication.

The Chicago officials designing the Fair sometimes fight amongst themselves, but at other times, the people in power in Chicago can unite to support their city, as when they suppress information about the barrenness of the park. This is because the WF inspires great feelings of patriotism and civic pride, as Bellamy's Pledge demonstrates.

Tens of thousands of Chicagoans attend the Dedication Ceremony in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, even though it looks unfinished. The space is so enormous that it's difficult to hear anything. Harriet Monroe, John Root's sister in law, composes a long poem for the Ceremony, but no one can hear it, and when she tries to sell copies, only a few are sold.

The emphasis on ceremony and opulence at the WF is sometimes self-defeating, and those who take the occasion very seriously, like Monroe, are portrayed as somewhat comical. The Ceremony is held in such a large space, for instance, that almost no one can hear it. Olmsted may be right to criticize the enormity of the buildings — they don't create a mood of fun and joy, just confusion.

PART 2, CHAPTER 8: PRENDERGAST

In November of 1892, Prendergast composes a long, rambling letter to A.S. Trude, one of Chicago's most prominent lawyers. Prendergast writes as if he and Trude are friends. Trude receives the letter, and though he dismisses it, he keeps it, fearing that Chicago is producing more and more unstable men, like Charles Guiteau, who assassinated President James Garfield.

Unlike many of the other characters in Larson's book, Trude seems to sense that the disturbed people around him are capable of violence. This is because he recognizes the precedent for disturbed men attacking politicians, as in the case of Guiteau and Garfield.

PART 2, CHAPTER 9: "I WANT YOU AT ONCE"

The Pittsburgh engineer, still unnamed, submits his plans to the Ways and Means Committee of the World's Fair. He names his many investors, proving that he has the financial support to realize his idea. The committee approves his design for the Midway Plaisance. He hires an engineer to install his design, an enormous revolving wheel standing taller than the Statue of Liberty, in Jackson Park. The engineer's name is George Washington Gale Ferris.

Larson finally reveals the name of the engineer: George Ferris, the creator of the world-famous Ferris Wheel. In part, Larson waits to reveal his name to build the suspense, but there's also an element of historical realism in his decision: if Ferris had failed to finance his wheel, he wouldn't be remembered, and he would, in fact, remain a nameless "engineer." After he gets the contract for the WF, he secures his reputation, and we learn his name at the same time that the world of 1893 is about to learn it.

PART 2, CHAPTER 10: CHAPPELL REDUX

Emeline Cigrand visits her friends, the Lawrences, who also live in Holmes's building. The building looks sad and gloomy to her, where before it had seemed inviting. She tells the Lawrences that she is leaving for Indiana for Christmas, and may not return. She adds that Holmes can get by without her if he needs to. Cigrand has begun to distrust Holmes, who may have "borrowed" her savings, promising to return it in the future.

Even when Cigrand becomes disillusioned with Holmes, she doesn't understand the full extent of his crimes — she thinks he's stolen some of her money, and has lied to her, but she doesn't think that he's a murderer.

Cigrand stops visiting the Lawrences, and they ask Holmes her whereabouts. Holmes replies that she has gone to be married in secret, and produces a cheaply printed leaflet announcing her engagement to one Robert E. Phelps. The Lawrences are suspicious that Cigrand left without saying goodbye or explaining herself. A bulletin arrives in Cigrand's hometown, explaining that she "met her fate" in Chicago, in the sense of getting married.

Holmes's explanation for Cigrand's disappearance isn't especially convincing, and the Lawrences remain unconvinced. The pun on "meeting one's fate," possibly penned by Holmes himself, suggests that Cigrand has died, not that she has gotten engaged.

Mrs. Lawrence presses Holmes for more information about Cigrand, but he divulges almost none. Lawrence begins to suspect that Holmes killed Cigrand, but she does not go to police or even leave Holmes's building. Perhaps she, and the many other people who were suspicious of Holmes, felt that the police couldn't have been of any help, since they were too busy and disorganized.

Larson suggests that the Lawrences didn't investigate Holmes because they didn't think the police could help. This is almost certainly true, but it's also true that the Lawrences, and the other people who ignore Holmes's actions, don't care enough to investigate further — they don't trust their instincts, and certainly don't act on them.

Cigrand's trunk, still packed with her possessions, arrives unattended in the town where she worked on the Keeley cure for alcoholism. Her family is confused, but assumes that she has married a wealthy man, and perhaps died in Europe.

The Cigrands are confused by Emeline's death, but the thought of murder doesn't occur to the, because it's so unusual, and so far outside their experiences.

Cigrand's family would have been more concerned had they known that Robert E. Phelps was an alias that Benjamin Pitezal used, and that Holmes has sent Charles Chappell a trunk with another human body in it, and asked him to remove the skin and muscle from it so that he could again sell the skeleton.

Chappell continues to ignore the signs that Holmes is a murderer, because he wants the money for cleaning the skeleton. Holmes, for his part, continues to demonstrate his willingness to lie and use aliases.

Later, the police find a footprint, clearly belonging to a woman, on the door of the vault in Holmes's building. They guess that Holmes locked a woman in the vault and poured acid on the floor to remove the oxygen from the air more quickly; the woman, possibly Cigrand, tried to kick her way out while her feet were covered in the acid, leaving a clear print on the door. But this speculation did not begin until much later. For the time being, no one, Holmes included, noticed the footprint.

There is no way to be sure how Holmes killed Emeline, but this makes Larson's description even more eerie. The tone of uncertainty makes it more difficult for us to wrap our heads around Holmes's crime — it remains beyond our comprehension, and thus more terrifying.

PART 2, CHAPTER 11: THE COLD-BLOODED FACT

It is January 1893, and there are only four months until opening day of the World's Fair. Codman, Olmsted's stand-in while he is abroad, has appendicitis, leaving the Fair's progress in jeopardy. The cold makes building difficult and increases the chance of a fire, since the workers are constantly lighting fires to keep warm.

The WF is limited by the energy of its organizers, many of whom are old and in poor health. It's also at the mercy of the weather — the cold greatly interferes with building.

George Ferris is building his wheel, understanding full well that he must be extremely precise. The axle by itself will weigh more than 14,000 pounds, making it the heaviest object ever lifted.

Ferris is a bold planner, one of many at the WF. His idea to lift this heavy object is something of a metaphor for the Fair itself — a big, seemingly impossible task run by people who are willing to risk a great deal for fame.

Olmsted receives the news that his beloved protégé, Henry Codman, has died, and realizes that he will have to return to Chicago to run the Fair's landscape architecture. He hires Charles Eliot, a prominent Boston architect, to help him. When he arrives in Chicago in February, he becomes overwhelmed with the task of catching up with Codman's work, and falls ill. He makes Eliot his partner, but leaves Chicago for his health, running the World's Fair from a distance.

Olmsted is a sentimental man who loves Codman, but he is also too practical to let Codman's death interfere greatly with his job as a landscaper. Much like Burnham after Root's death, he finds a new partner, and learns to work with him. At the same time, he has to think of his health, so he leaves Chicago even though he's in the midst of designing the Fair.

In a letter to his superintendent, Rudolf Ulrich, Olmsted worries that the white paint that will cover most of the buildings at the World's Fair will be overpowering, distracting from the delicate beauty of the flowers and trees. He warns that it is safer to under-decorate than to over-decorate, and expresses his desire to make the World's Fair appear plain and elegant.

Olmsted is more concerned about balance and delicacy than creating an intimidating set of monuments to Columbus. In many ways his tastes are more contemporary than Burnham's — the neoclassical style was waning, but Olmsted's interest and simplicity and elegance anticipates the Minimalist style that's still popular today.

Snow falls on the roof of the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, at the time the largest building in the world by volume, and the roof collapses. Only the Woman's Building is near completion, and reporters visiting the Fair doubt that it will be ready for the opening in two months.

The weather continues to foil plans for the WF's completion. The very size of the Liberal Art's Building is a testament to the ambition of the event, and thus its collapse symbolizes the hubris and even the arrogance of the men who built it.

PART 2, CHAPTER 12: ACQUIRING MINNIE

Holmes establishes a cure of alcoholism in imitation of the Keeley's cure, and prepares to receive guests for the World's Fair. He decorates his hotel lavishly, promising money (which he has no intention of paying) to various furniture and jewelry companies. Some of the companies he has promised money to in the past, such as the company that sold him iron for his kiln, tries to repossess their products, but find this difficult since Holmes has conducted business through a fake company, Merchant. Holmes also receives many letters, which he sees as an irritation, from families whose daughters he has murdered. When detectives arrive at his building, looking for women, Holmes says that they have left suddenly, and that he has no further information. The detectives treat him well, and seem not to suspect his involvement in any crimes.

Holmes is a dedicated student of social trends — he always wants to know what people want, so that he can manipulate them more easily. The cure for alcoholism is one in a long list of tactics he's used to appeal to customers. As always, he pretends to be concerned at the disappearance of the young women he kills. The detectives are so naïve and inexperienced with serial killers that Holmes has only to lie and they move on with their investigation. The "irritation" of letters indicates that Holmes is utterly remorseless — where most people would be consumed with guilt, Holmes only feels a mild irritation at those who even slightly get in his way.

In March 1893, Holmes is looking for a new secretary preferably a young, vulnerable woman. Holmes is excellent at finding women of this kind, just as Jack the Ripper was. Holmes enjoys the feeling of possessing and controlling women; while he enjoys making money off of their corpses, this isn't his real goal. He finds a new "acquisition" in Minnie R. Williams, a plain, plump woman.

Holmes is a kind of successor to Jack the Ripper, and thus he challenges Chicagoans' belief that a serial killer could never come to the United States. For all his emphasis on planning, he is not killing women for any practical end, merely for his own enjoyment. He thinks of women as products — "acquisitions" is a very fitting word to describe the way he dehumanizes them.

Minnie and her sister Anna are orphans, and live with several of their uncles. One such uncle leaves her a valuable estate when he dies. Holmes meets Minnie while traveling in Boston under the name Henry Gordon. At a dinner party for Boston's wealthy families, he learns of Minnie's fortune, based largely in land located in Texas. Holmes easily woos Minnie by flattering her and buying her gifts; he enjoys the look of need she gives him whenever he leaves Boston and returns to Chicago. Eventually, Holmes tires of traveling to Boston, and begins to feel that Minnie is too slow in committing to him. He visits Boston less often, but keeps sending her love letters.

Holmes insinuates himself into elite society very easily — he has only to change his name and pretend to be wealthy. He is excellent at recognizing people who will respond to his charm — it is heartbreaking to read of the way he seduces Minnie but then neglects her. His interest in Minnie doesn't derive from love or affection — it's her shyness and vulnerability, along with her money, that Holmes is most interested in.

Minnie is heartbroken when Holmes stops visiting her. She wants to marry him, but refuses to leave school and move to Chicago with him without marrying him, as Holmes proposes. After she finishes school, she moves to Denver, where she loses money in a business deal. She dreams of Chicago and of Holmes, who she still knows as Harry Gordon. In February 1893, she moves to Chicago, and writes to Holmes to let him know that she is now in his city. Holmes suggests that Minnie work as his personal stenographer; Minnie eagerly accepts this offer, though she is still disappointed that he does not propose marriage.

Minnie's formal upbringing could have saved her. Holmes wants her to break the usual rules of courtship and come with him to Chicago, and if she hadn't, she might have survived. It's interesting to think that these very rules of courtship, for all of their arbitrariness, had at their center a practical purpose — to make sure that the young men who pursued women were trustworthy and safe. In this sense, there is something a little old-fashioned about Larson's perspective — the women who die at Holmes's hand are those who break the rules of their society.

After a few weeks, Holmes proposes marriage to Minnie, which she accepts. She writes to her sister, Anna, who is skeptical that such a handsome man would break the rules of courtship and marry her plain sister.

Again, the rules of courtship are useful insofar as they raise a red flag when someone breaks them. Anna isn't overly supportive of her sister, but ironically her realism about Minnie's appearance makes her fear for Minnie's safety.

Holmes receives a letter from Emeline Cigrand's father, asking for her whereabouts. Holmes responds immediately, saying that Cigrand left his building to get married, and she was considering going to England with her new husband. It is possible that Holmes dictated this letter to Minnie.

Holmes seems to have little trouble keeping the women in his life separate from each other — just as one of them is leaving — in this case, Cigrand — another one is coming in, in this case, Minnie.

Holmes convinces Minnie to transfer the deed to her land in Texas to a man he calls Alexander Bond, actually Holmes himself. "Bond" signs over this deed to another man, Benton T. Lyman, actually Benjamin Pitezal. Holmes claims that the transfer is necessary for an important business deal he is planning. Minnie remains unaware that Holmes is legally married to two other women at the time: Clara Lovering and Myrta Belknap

It seems obvious to the reader that Holmes is conning Minnie into giving up her inheritance, but from Minnie's perspective, Holmes is a loyal, loving husband who has her best interests at heart. Larson can only do so much to convey Holmes's charisma — much of it has to be imagined.

Holmes founds a company called Campbell-Yates: a fictional business whose only purpose is to vouch for the promissory notes Holmes writes increasingly often. He convinces Henry Owens, a porter in his employ, to act as a secretary of the company, and sign a document stating that there are multiple other members of the company, in return for which Holmes promises Owens his back wages, a promise he never honors. Meanwhile, Holmes appears to marry Minnie, though no legal record of their union is ever found.

Holmes's plans become more elaborate as he grows older — thus, he needs to found a business to cover up the crimes he's committed in the past. Nevertheless, he continues to maintain an appearance of respectability and lovingness, even as the man beneath this appearance grows increasingly daring in his misdeeds.

PART 2, CHAPTER 13: DREADFUL THINGS DONE BY GIRLS

In the spring of 1893, Chicago seems to be in a better economic position than the other American cities of the time, due to the World's Fair and the jobs it creates, along with the promise of tourism. Exhibits begin to pile up in Jackson Park: suits of armor, battleships, weapons, animals, etc. Buffalo Bill brings his show to Chicago, including the famous sharpshooter Annie Oakley, and sets up nearby the World's Fair. Many of the exhibits are of humans: cannibals, residents of Cairo, transplanted to America, dancers, and Sol Bloom's Algerians. Bloom brings "Belly Dancing" to America, and displays his dancers before the official opening day of the World's Fair. He writes the famous "Middle Eastern" melody that shows up in thousands of films. He regrets failing to copyright the tune. Colonel Schufeldt dies in Zanzibar, meaning that there will be no pygmies at the World's Fair.

For all the conflict that the WF creates, it also stimulates the economy. The "human" exhibits indicate the racism and voyeurism that was prevalent in America at the end of the 19th century, and arguably hasn't gone away. Bloom has an intuitive understanding of what people want to see — exotic people and sexual behavior, hence the success of belly dancing. The fact that he almost accidentally writes one of the most recognizable themes of all time suggests how accidental fame can be.

Ward McAllister, a friend of the Astor family, publishes an article in the *New York World* about the need to improve the quality of food at the World's Fair. Chicago is amused and outraged at McAllister's condescension. Yet beneath the outrage lies a sense of inferiority to New York City and to the "Eastern elite." Burnham, who was turned away from Harvard and Yale, feels this sense of inferiority stronger than most.

Chicago, and Burnham himself, hosts the WF to prove itself to the rest of the country, as well as the world. Burnham is, in this sense, a product of his environment, which explains why he devotes himself to the WF to the degree that he does — he knows that his reputation and his legacy depend on his success.

Authors write advice for running the Fair. Jacob Riis and Jane Addams speak about the urban decay in Chicago. At this time, Chicagoans are making an effort to clean the city by removing garbage and reducing smoke and bad smells. The newspapers blame the World's Fair and Burnham for contributing to the dirtiness. The owner of a brothel recalls the sexual madness that took place during the World's Fair, most of it from tourists visiting the city.

The WF is both the cause of new levels of chaos — crime, murder, disappearances — and new levels of cleanliness — the Pasteurized water. It's overly simplistic, then, to say that the WF has caused dirtiness, as the newspapers allege. Nevertheless, it's clear that the WF encourages new kinds of immoral behavior, much of it of a sexual nature, directed at women by men. Holmes's actions are in this sense a product of the WF, or at least heavily encouraged by it.

Carter Henry Harrison, the four-time mayor of Chicago, loses his bid for a fifth term in 1891, and afterwards begins to run a newspaper, the *Chicago Times*. He runs for mayor in 1893, and quickly becomes one of the two most popular Democratic candidates, along with Washington Hesing, the owner of a German newspaper. Despite his popularity, newspapers oppose Harrison, arguing that Chicago is undergoing rapid change and needs new leaders, not Harrison again. Harrison is charismatic and beloved by the working classes, though, despite the fact that he is an educated and wealthy man. Even at 68, he is handsome, with **blue eyes** and a youthful face. He wins the nomination for the Democratic Party, and faces off against Samuel W. Allerton, a packer. Newspapers overwhelmingly support Allerton.

Harrison, like many of the other characters in the book, is a master of appearances — he can appeal to the "common man," even though he has never been a common man. In this sense, he seems disturbingly close to Holmes himself — both men have blue eyes, a quality that, Larson notes, is often found in successful men. While Harrison has already held four terms, his apparent loyalty to the workers actually makes him more modern and forward-thinking than his opponents — he is responding to the demographic changes in his city at the time, not burying himself in the past.

Patrick Prendergast is excited to learn that Harrison is running for another term, since he is sure that Harrison will win the election and reward him for his support. Prendergast, who wants to be a corporation counsel, writes letters to dozens of city officials, treating them as if they're his friends. Trude, the attorney, receives a letter from Prendergast, and once again keeps it. Harrison wins his fifth term as mayor in April 1893.

Trude senses that Prendergast could be dangerous. Harrison succeeds in convincing the workers of the city to vote for him — how loyal he really is to them isn't explained. What is clear is that Harrison is good at appearing to care about workers — in politics, perception is reality.

PART 2, CHAPTER 14: THE INVITATION

Holmes senses that Anna, Minnie's sister, is suspicious of him. He tells Minnie to invite Anna to visit them. Minnie is excited to show Anna the city of Chicago, introduce her to her husband, who she still knows as Henry Gordon, and put Anna's suspicions "to rest."

The pun on "to rest," seemingly of Larson's own invention, is meant to suggest the "eternal rest" of death. Though Anna doesn't know it, the reader senses that her fate is sealed, along with Minnie's.

PART 2, CHAPTER 15: FINAL PREPARATIONS

It is April 1893, and the weather is beautiful. Ferris's wheel is one eighth of the way finished, the white paint Millet has chosen to paint the buildings is beginning to chip slightly, and seven workers have died building the World's Fair. Still, Burnham is pleased with the progress of the Fair. He attends a sumptuous dinner in New York, organized by Charles McKim; the guests toast his great achievements.

Burnham is a busy man, but he doesn't lose sight of the fact that he's designing the Fair for the glory and recognition it will afford him, both during his life and after it. The dinner in New York is only one of the many honors he'll earn for his work.

Olmsted does not attend the dinner in New York. Some guess that he is not present because the dinner is meant to honor painting, sculpture, and architecture, and he is insulted at the absence of landscaping. This would be uncharacteristic of Olmsted, Larson argues. In reality, he is too busy designing houses for the Vanderbilt family.

Olmsted appears upset to his colleagues, whether or not he really is. He is not talented at cultivating friendships and putting on an appearance of friendliness, as Harrison and Burnham are. His devotion to his craft far outweighs his devotion to his colleagues.

Great progress has been made in the World's Fair. The six most important buildings have been completed, and more than 200 others are well under way. The sculptor Daniel Chester French has created an enormous "Statue of the Republic." McKim privately notes that the overall effect of the Fair is imposing, and possibly too imposing, particularly in the case of the colossal Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. Burnham is untroubled by the hugeness of the buildings, and even when a carpenters' strike threatens to jeopardize building, he is able to find enough non-union carpenters to carry on as usual.

The scale of the buildings convinces others — not just Olmsted and Sullivan — that the spirit of the WF is being crushed. Burnham, as always, cares more about the practical side of building the Fair than the aesthetic experience it will create for tourists. He has to be thinking about processes of engineering and design, and not only the final product.

Burnham becomes more concerned in June, as the carpenters' strike becomes more serious, and he begins to have a harder time finding new workers. He is equally upset that his wife, Margaret, does not send him enough letters.

Burnham's problems with the Fair often coincide with his problems with his family — thus, his problems often worsen each other. Note how he wants his wife to support him, while thinking less about how he can support her.

Buffalo Bill opens his own "Wild West Show" next to the World's Fair on April 3. In his show, he mimes killing Native Americans, and reenacts famous Western battles like the Battle of Little Big Horn. He has frequent affairs with women, even though he's married. At one point during his time in Chicago his wife catches him in a hotel with another woman.

The "Wild West" show celebrates the settling and conquering of North America by the United States, and in doing so celebrates the defeat and killing of its native inhabitants. Larson is here making sure that the reader understands that the WF is built on national patriotism which is itself built on the wholesale destruction of the Native Americans. And, further, in Buffalo Bill there is another example of a "great" man treating women like objects, just another thing to be conquered.

Burnham negotiates with carpenters and ironworkers, afraid that their strikes could disrupt the Fair. They settle on a minimum wage and extra pay for work on holidays and Sundays. This is a major victory for unions, and it encourages workers across the country to imitate the tactics of the World's Fair carpenters.

Burnham's concern with the WF leads him to give in to union negotiations. The influence and visibility of the Fair is to great that this has ramifications for many other unions, and so just as the fair influenced the direction of the national electric grid toward AC current as described in Part 2, Chapter 3, it also influenced national labor relations.

Olmsted returns to Chicago, and blames his absence for the unfinished nature of the landscaping. Olmsted is concerned that Burnham is more loyal to Ulrich, Olmsted's superintendent, than to Olmsted himself. Important shipments of plants fail to arrive on time, and the lack of rain means that Olmsted has to wait to plant trees and flowers. He becomes ill again. Still, he is pleased with the boats Burnham has selected, and happy with the flowers planted so far.

Olmsted understands that he is important for the success of the WF, and he is realistic enough to blame himself when he recognizes that he has made a mistake. As with Burnham, his personal problems, such as illness, often reflect the problem he's experiencing with his job.

Prendergast's mental health continues to decline; at one point, someone sees him walk into a tree.

Prendergast seems more pathetic than dangerous — it's not yet clear what he's going to do, though Larson hints that he will turn violent.

It begins to regularly rain heavily, slowing the workers' progress, causing leaks in buildings, and destroying electrical circuits. Burnham is concerned that the weather poses a challenge to the completion of the World's Fair, and longs for his wife. The rain creates more irregularities in the landscape, worrying Olmsted.

Olmstead is more concerned with landscaping than buildings. This makes him largely immune to the effects of collapsed roofs and striking workers. Still, he is especially vulnerable to the changes in the weather.

Olmsted falls into poor health again, and he is depressed to learn that many think that the landscaping is lackluster. Burnham suggests that he use shortcuts to ensure that the landscaping is finished on time, such as using potted plants for decorations. Olmsted refuses to use these measures, since he dislikes their showiness and knows that they will have to be replaced as soon as the Ceremony is complete.

Olmsted is highly concerned about others' impressions of his work — thus, when he hears that people dislike it, he is hurt. His decisions at the WF combine his aesthetic tastes and his practicality: he doesn't accept potted plants for both aesthetic and practical reasons.

The Opening Ceremony will begin with a parade, headed by Grover Cleveland, the new President of the United States. Officials and rulers from around the world travel to Chicago by boat and train. On the night before opening day, a British reporter named F. Herbert Stead visits Jackson Park and notes that there is garbage and debris everywhere.

With the second part of his book drawing to a close, Larson suggests that the Fair has great challenges ahead of it, even as it's about to begin. By noting what reporters thought, he suggests that Burnham and his colleagues' responsibilities have shifted from managing the control of buildings to managing the perception of the WF, both for newspapers and, indirectly, for the tourists who come to visit it.

As Chicago prepares for the Opening Ceremony, Holmes prepares for guests at his World's Fair Hotel.

Holmes capitalizes on the popularity of the WF — Larson can't write about him without writing about the society and the spectacle that provided him with so many victims.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1: OPENING DAY

It is the Opening Day parade. President Grover Cleveland leads a massive procession of 200,000 Chicagoans from the Lexington Hotel to the Administration Building. Mayor Harrison rides by himself in a carriage, and draws more applause than any of the other guests, who include dukes and duchesses from Europe, and Burnham and Davis, forced to share a carriage despite their rivalry.

Part 3 begins with an image: proud, united Chicagoans marching together in celebration of the WF. This image is, of course, largely artificial – Harrison continues to act like a "man of the people," even though he's from Kentucky, and David and Burnham pretend to be friends, even though they're rivals. At this point, the priority of the WF is to attract visitors, from around the country and around the world, so crafting an appealing image is extremely important.


As the parade moves toward the site of the Fair at Jackson Park, everyone sees the progress that has been made in setting up the expositions. The **Ferris Wheel** is only half finished, but most of the other attractions are ready for tourists: cannibals, zoos, hot air balloon rides, markets, etc. Buffalo Bill's Wild West show lies adjacent to the Fair. Sol Bloom tells the Algerian women to drop their veils, which he claims, dubiously, is a sign of respect for the parade.

Even for the WF to be half finished is an incredible achievement; Burnham and his colleagues have erected an entire city in less than two years. Now that the Fair is open to the public, they have a different challenge: keep the WF interesting by providing continuous new entertainment. People like Sol Bloom, who are willing to twist the truth to sell tickets, become especially important at this point.


Perhaps the greatest miracle at the World's Fair is the transformation of the Jackson Park grounds in the night before Opening Day. Ten thousand workers remove debris, polish the floors of all the buildings, repaint the exteriors, and clean the lawns. According to one observer, Olmsted's landscaping designs are the first wondrous sight the tourists see when they arrive the next day.

Olmsted's landscaping projects have not gone to waste – they impress visitors and prepare them for their time at the WF, just as Olmsted wanted. Of course, this achievement would be impossible without the workers who remain uncelebrated and almost completely anonymous, even to Larson.

The Opening Day ceremonies are intentionally brief, since the organizers don't want to replicate the long, dull Dedication Day ceremony, which fell behind schedule. Events on Opening Day include a poem and a speech by Davis, in which he praises the cooperation between the various designers and organizers of the World's Fair. The expression on Burnham's face is unreadable during this speech. President Cleveland's speech is the shortest, and the World's Fair opens exactly on time: 12:08 PM. Music plays, ships fire their guns, and Jane Addams's purse is stolen — the Fair is underway.

The WF designers and organizers have learned from their mistakes; efficiency and speed are more important than ceremony for the sake of ceremony. One aspect of the success of the WF, in no small part, is that it make money – to this end, efficiency is the most important thing. One consequence of the WF being open to the public is that, as Burnham and others had feared, crime, such as purse-snatching, increases. Even in the White City, Chicago's vices are alive and well.

Burnham knows that there is work ahead, but he is confident that the World's Fair will be a great success, since hundreds of thousands of people attended the Opening Day ceremony. His confidence quickly fades, however, when a disappointingly small number of people attend the fair the next day, and a recession soon bankrupts families across the country. Companies go out of business, some of which were to run exhibits at the World's Fair. Families choose not to travel to Chicago to see the Fair, partly because they lack the money, partly because they hear that it's unfinished. The unfinished **Ferris Wheel**, which was meant to rival the Eiffel Tower, is especially disappointing to tourists.

Even though the "hard work" of the WF – building the main structures – is largely over, Burnham can't rest easy. The WF is meant to be an entertaining distraction from the real world – it now becomes clear that "the real world" is preventing people from attending the Fair. America's patriotism is also evident – the lack of structure to rival the Eiffel Tower in France means that Americans don't always have a good reason to go to Chicago.

Many features of the World's Fair remain unfinished: Olmsted's grounds, the Chicago State Building, the Westinghouse installations at the Electricity Building, even the roads. Olmsted knows he needs to hurry to finish his designs, but he struggles to muster the energy. Burnham hires Francis Millet to insure that people attend the Fair while the designers finish it. Millet organizes parades and fireworks displays — these measures increase attendance, but not by much. Meanwhile, Burnham's own architectural firm begins to lose commissions.

Burnham and the other designers begin to transition from creative to organization tasks – Millet, who previously designed the paint for the buildings at the WF, is now charged with attracting tourists. At the same time, Burnham's connection to the WF is growing – the same economic factors that threaten the success of the Fair now threaten his firm.

PART 3, CHAPTER 2: THE WORLD'S FAIR HOTEL

Holmes continues to house visitors to the World's Fair, though not as many as he'd expected. When women check in, he eagerly accepts them; when men do, he tells them he has no rooms available.

Like Burnham, Holmes's fortunes rise and fall with the success of the WF: the Fair is successful, but not too successful, and so Holmes is successful but not too successful in finding female victims

Minnie becomes an "inconvenience" to Holmes; she becomes jealous of his attention to the other women in the building. Holmes buys a new apartment, introducing himself to the landowner, John Oker, as Henry Gordon. Holmes explains to Minnie that they need their own place so that they can raise children. Minnie is confused about why Holmes buys a place so far from Englewood, but she agrees to move there, since she finds Holmes's building gloomy and sad, and wants a sunny place for her sister's visit. She and Holmes move into their new apartment, where everyone addresses them as Mr. and Mrs. Gordon.

Minnie isn't even a threat or a tragedy to Holmes; because he has no feelings for other people, she's only an inconvenience. Larson narrates this passage from Minnie's perspective, so that the reader understands Holmes's actions, even though Minnie doesn't: clearly, Holmes chooses an apartment far from his building because he doesn't want people addressing him as "Holmes" instead of "Gordon" in front of her, or the other way around.

The guests in Holmes's building love Holmes for being warm and inviting — his manner is a little "dangerous," but that makes their time in Chicago more enjoyable. His building is small and cramped, and doesn't have large, open common rooms. Still, the guests like that Holmes seems not to mind when women leave suddenly, bills unpaid. He smells vaguely of chemicals, but this is surely because he is a doctor.

Again, Larson narrates from the perspective of people who know and admire Holmes. The thing that the guests in Holmes's building note passively, such as Holmes's chemical smell and the small, cramped nature of the building, are in reality evidence that Holmes is a killer. The strange combination of danger and comfort that attracts the guests to Holmes is the same combination that draws visitors to Chicago.

PART 3, CHAPTER 3: PRENDERGAST

Prendergast senses that he is about to receive his promotion from Mayor Harrison. He writes a letter to W.F. Cooling, a worker in a newspaper building. He tells Cooling that when he becomes corporation counsel, Cooling will be his assistant.

Prendergast is mentally unstable, but he's not harmless – he has a considerable ego, and is willing to treat other people as if they're beneath him.

PART 3, CHAPTER 4: NIGHT IS THE MAGICIAN

In the "Black City" of Chicago, there is smoke and garbage. In the "White City" at Jackson Park, everything is clean and safe, even though it's only half finished. Visitors can leave their children at a daycare center. Some fear that the poor will abandon their offspring there, but only one child suffers this fate.

Despite some petty crime, the WF isn't the chaotic affair some people thought it would be – by and large, Burnham's plans for organizing Jackson Park keep crime low.

The World's Fair contains an incredible number of new, exciting products and exhibits: Pabst Blue Ribbon, Shredded Wheat, motion pictures, Tesla's electricity shows, the zipper, the vertical filing cabinet, Aunt Jemima pancake batter, Juicy Fruit, etc. One female visitor notes the somber manner with which the visitors walk through the Fair. At Midway, however, she notes that visitors are excited by the sight of a belly dancer, which she finds uncomfortable. Visitors ask where the Pope and the "artificial humans" are.

The sights at the WF are so novel for the people who visit that they seem almost magical. No spectacle is too fantastic to be on display – even the Pope. The overall effect is a strange combination of intimidation and entertainment — Burnham's neoclassical architecture and Sol Bloom's fun escapism.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West show draws tens of thousands of visitors, upstaging the World's Fair. Bill organizes a race from Chadron to Jackson Park, on the condition that it finish at his Wild West show. He also draws visitors away from the World's Fair by declaring "Waif's Day" and allowing children to his show for free. Chicago quickly falls in love with Buffalo Bill.

Burnham and the WF organizers aren't the only master showmen in Chicago in 1893 — the spirit of entrepreneurship attracts lots of other people, including Buffalo Bill. Bill's Wild West show is popular because it appeals to American patriotism — next to Columbus discovering America, the story of "how the West was won" is the most important "creation myths" in American culture.

As time goes on, the roads and train lines are cleaned, and buildings are completed. The overall effect of the World's Fair is highly impressive, and visitors often weep when they walk through. The buildings are huge, neoclassical, and painted the same white color.

The WF is entertaining, but it's also overwhelmingly somber and awe-inspiring. Visitors treat the neoclassical buildings like cathedrals.

Burnham leads tours of the World's Fair for guests, including John Root's widow, Dora. He is careful to lead the tours in a specific direction, so that the buildings look as impressive as possible. Dora writes Burnham a letter, in which she thanks him for the tour and explains that she feels conflicting emotions about the Fair. She's enormously proud of what Burnham and John Root have achieved, but also saddened by the thought of his death.

The tourists aren't the only people for whom the WF is an overwhelming emotional experience. The WF is impressive not only because of the scale of the buildings themselves but because of the work — literally, the lives — that went into building them. Root is far from the only person who passed away while building the WF; dozens of workers died in accidents.

At night, the Fair is lit by electric lights. Many of the visitors to the Fair are seeing electricity for the first time. Word spreads across the country that the World's Fair is an awesome sight and well worth the money. Even so, the absence of the **Ferris Wheel** continues to limit the success and popularity of the World's Fair.

The WF is gaining popularity slowly, often by word of mouth. It's ironic that Americans continue to view the Fair as a failure because of the absence of the Ferris Wheel when the presence of electricity is inarguably a much more impressive monument to American technological ingenuity.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5: MODUS OPERANDI

People begin to disappear from Holmes's building more and more rapidly: waitresses, stenographers, and even a male physician. Strange odors float through the building, but when people inquire about the whereabouts of their missing daughters and wives, Holmes is apologetic and says he has no information, and the police are too busy to investigate further, since they have to protect the rich and famous visitors to the World's Fair.

Holmes gets away with his crimes for years, in part because the police are incompetent and overwhelmed with work, but also because the police are biased against the poor. Their focus is on the wealthy, especially during the WF, when Chicago's reputation hinges on its being welcoming to famous visitors from around the world.

Holmes is different from Jack the Ripper: his murders aren't bloody. Still, he likes to be close to his victims when they die. He kills silently, using chloroform, and quickly passes along the corpses to his associate, Chappell. He never keeps trophies of his victims — he is interested in the sensation of murder, not the bodies themselves.

Holmes isn't really interested in women's bodies; instead, he wants something much more abstract: a sense of power and control. This makes him much more dangerous, since his appetite can never be satisfied — he wants to kill again and again.

PART 3, CHAPTER 6: ONE GOOD TURN

It is June 1893, and the **Ferris Wheel** is nowhere near completion. The cars in which passengers will sit haven't been hung yet, and observers say that the wheel looks like it is about to collapse. Luther Rice assembles the engine and orders the wheel to be spun. Ferris himself is unable to be in Chicago for this occasion, but his wife, Margaret, is in attendance. The wheel's safety has been mathematically verified, but its motion is unpredictable since no object up to this point has been subject to the same forces.

Larson builds the suspense before detailing the history of the wheel's final assembly. While it's true that Ferris and his colleagues are educated engineers who know the science of lifting the heavy object into the air, it's also true that workers have died working on similar projects during the building of the WF. Thus, the stakes are high as Rice prepares to finish the wheel.

Everyone at the World's Fair watches as the wheel turns for the first time. Workers risk their lives to climb aboard the frame of the wheel (no cars have been installed yet). Stray nuts and bolts fall from the wheel. The wheel takes 20 minutes to turn 360 degrees — it's successful. Soon after this, the first cars are hung on the wheel. The designers know that this is a serious challenge, since it will subject the frame of the wheel to its first big stresses.

Even after the wheel spins for the first time, a huge amount of work remains to be done. Interestingly, the workers risk their lives voluntarily for a the opportunity to be the first to ride the Ferris Wheel. This suggests that, in spite of the danger involved in building it, the Ferris Wheel is a mesmerizing spectacle, even to the people who spend months building it. It's also a testament to the incredible bravery of the people who aren't always remembered for their role in building incredible buildings — the construction workers.

While the **Ferris Wheel**'s rotation is a major event at the World's Fair, Chicago as a whole is more interested in the arrival of the Infanta Eulalia, youngest child of Queen Isabel II of Spain and the sister of King Alonso XII. Chicago officials want to use Eulalia's arrival to prove to New York that it is an elegant, refined city. Eulalia is at first impressed with Chicago's size and anonymity — she sneaks out of her hotel and walks around unaccompanied. But at the World's Fair, where Mayor Harrison is her escort, she is bored by the throngs of tourists who are delighted to see her, and envies the women who can move through the crowds without attracting any attention.

Chicago seems not to understand what makes it unique among the cities of the world. The new anonymity that's possible in the cosmopolitan streets appeals to Eulalia, since she's spent her entire life being watched by others. Eulalia's "outsider perspective" on Chicago reinforces how unusual this level of anonymity was at the time, and how it attracted millions of people to the city.

Eulalia attends a party in her honor organized by Bertha Palmer, a fixture of Chicago society. She only stays for an hour. Next week, she's late for a concert held in her honor. She greatly enjoys Chicago and gives Mayor Harrison a gift of a golden cigarette case. Nevertheless, the Chicago newspapers are offended with Eulalia's apparent indifference to the city's reception. Instead of enjoying the parties in her honor, she seems more comfortable going to German restaurants and eating sausages and sauerkraut.

Chicagoans are offended that Eulalia chooses German food instead of "native" hospitality. In this way, they seem to misunderstand once again what's so appealing about the city they live in. Chicago can be gracious and hospitable, but more importantly, it offers freedom and variety: Eulalia loves the freedom of the city's streets and the variety of its restaurants.

PART 3, CHAPTER 7: NANNIE

Minnie's sister, Anna, who goes by the nickname "Nannie," comes to Chicago to visit Minnie and Holmes. When she meets Holmes, she notes that he isn't as handsome as Minnie says, but he has an indescribable charm. Anna finds Chicago impressive but disgusting, especially the slaughterhouses where cows and pigs are brutally killed. For Anna, slaughterhouses symbolize Chicago's drive to become wealthy and powerful at any cost.

Like so many of the other visitors to Chicago, Anna is attracted and repelled by the city. It's disgusting, but also energetic; in a way, it's full of life but also death. This combination of positive and negative qualities, paradoxically, is far more attractive and intriguing than a more straightforwardly welcoming city could ever be.

Anna, Minnie, and Holmes go to see the World's Fair: massive buildings, fast-moving trains, and electric lights. The Electricity Building is particularly exciting: there, they see moving pictures designed by Thomas Edison, as well as the phonograph and the first electric chair. Holmes promises Anna and Minnie that they'll return on July 4 to see the fireworks display, which is predicted to be the most impressive in the city's history.

The spectacles at the WF, like those in Chicago itself, are both attractive and dangerous — there is electric light, for instance, but also the electric chair. Unsurprisingly, Holmes seems completely comfortable at the WF — he uses it to attract victims to his building, and exemplifies the same combination of attractiveness and danger.

Benjamin Pitezal goes to the fair and buys a toy for his son, Howard.

Even the people who cynically profit from the WF aren't immune to its charms.

PART 3, CHAPTER 8: VERTIGO

By June 11, six cars have been hung on the **Ferris Wheel**. Ferris's wife sits in the car for a ride, along with Luther Rice and other designers. As the wheel spins, others jump into the cars. The engineer responsible for turning the wheel stops it, then gives up and allows everyone to ride in it.

The Ferris Wheel is a symbol of the WF itself — it's big, ambitious, dangerous, and intensely patriotic. There's also something very populist and democratic about the wheel — the way the workers crowd into it, which is potentially very dangerous, mirrors the danger and excitement of the crowds at the WF itself.

The **Ferris Wheel** allows its passengers to enjoy a beautiful view of the landscape and the fair grounds. Ferris's wife lets him know that the ride was a great success, and the other cars are quickly added to the wheel. Burnham wants the area surrounding the Ferris Wheel to be open; Ferris wants it closed off with a fence. Burnham eventually uses his design.

Larson doesn't explain exactly why Ferris and Burnham disagree on the design for the Ferris Wheel grounds, but it's possible to guess why. Ferris, an inventor, is focused on safety and control; Burnham, more concerned with the unity of the Fair as a whole and the enticement of the paying public, wants it visually connected with the rest of the exposition and accessible to the public.

On Sunday, June 18, 1893, the **Ferris Wheel** is open to riders, two days earlier than planned. Nevertheless Ferris's board of directors urges him to wait in case of last minute problems or accidents; Ferris agrees. On Wednesday, passengers finally begin riding the wheel. The board is cautious because of an accident earlier in the month, when a sled at the Midway's Ice Railway went off its tracks, killing and injuring passengers. The Ferris Wheel has the potential to cause even more damage.

Again, Larson builds suspense surrounding the Wheel. Though it's been installed successful, there's no guarantee that it will continue to work — like the Ice Railway, it could fail spectacularly. Nevertheless, the board of directors' decision to wait two days before opening the Ferris Wheel to the public suggests that even if there are still dangers at the WF, the organizers are at least learning from their mistakes.

PART 3, CHAPTER 9: HEATHEN WANTED

Olmsted leaves the World's Fair landscape in Ulrich's hands and travels around the country working on other projects. He reports that people in other states are excited and enthusiastic about the World's Fair, but adds that they think it's incomplete and that the financial recession is making it difficult for people to travel to Chicago. The summer heat also discourages people from visiting. People are afraid that Chicago will charge them too much, particularly for food.

Olmsted may not be in Chicago, but he continues to provide valuable help to the WF — he reports on the WF's potential customers. As a national event, the Fair needs to attract people from all over the country and the world — thus, an economic recession poses a huge threat to the Fair's success. In a way, the Fair's organizers have to fight the recession itself to make their event a success.

Olmsted offers some criticisms of the landscaping at the World's Fair. He suggests that more gravel paths be added, and that the grounds be cleaned more thoroughly. He also finds the steam vessels Burnham has approved to be loud and annoying. Olmsted wants to create a mood of charm and mysteriousness in Jackson Park, and proposes that foreign touches, such as Chinese lanterns and Italian dancers, be added.

Olmsted continues to fret over seemingly small details of the Fair — once again Burnham's choice of boats displeases him. In a way, Olmsted is the most painstaking and detail-obsessed creative figure at the WF. He's also one of the most internationally-minded — he understands that the event must truly be a "World's" Fair, and thus needs to incorporate elements of foreign cultures into its design.

Burnham is surprised and confused by Olmsted's suggestions. He wants the Fair to be monumental and imposing, not light and subtle. He exercises enormous control over the running of the World's Fair. Visitors bring Kodak cameras to take photographs of the attractions in Jackson Park, but Burnham forbids them from taking photographs for free.

Burnham needs to be forward-thinking, since so much of the technology and design on display at the WF is cutting-edge. With this in mind, it's a little surprising that he doesn't recognize the photograph as a powerful promotional tool — instead of encouraging tourists to spread photographs of the WF around the country, he forces them to pay for each shot under the assumption that if people can see the Fair in photographs they may not come in person.

A fire breaks out at the Cold Storage Building, leading several investors and insurers to pull out. Burnham isn't informed of the fire or the investors' cancellations.

In spite of Burnham's high level of control, the WF is too large and complicated for any one person to know everything about it.

PART 3, CHAPTER 10: AT LAST

It is June 21, 1893, and the **Ferris Wheel** is finally open to the public. George Ferris makes a speech in which he dedicates his design to the engineers of America. The band plays "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and the wheel begins to fill with paying customers. The Ferris Wheel works successfully, despite being completely full of riders.

Patriotism suffuses all things at the WF — the Ferris Wheel is no exception. Indeed, the very existence of the Ferris Wheel is proof of the intensity of American patriotism —- it's meant to challenge the grandeur of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

The Ferris investors circulate a pamphlet in which Ferris is praised for his ingenuity. The pamphlet suggests that he'd be a king in another country, and implies that the World's Fair organizers have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars by not granting Ferris a commission earlier. This is the truth — if Ferris had been allowed to start construction on the wheel earlier, it would have been ready for tourists, paying money, months earlier, and it would have attracted many thousands more visitors from across the country, boosting the World's Fair's overall attendance.

Though the dedication of the Ferris Wheel is meant to imply the cooperation of all the investors and organizers at the WF, it's not hard to see evidence of friction between them. The WF, despite being for the most part brilliantly organized, makes some enormous mistakes, one of which is not recognizing the wheel for the star attraction that it is.

Ferris's pamphlet claims that the wheel is completely safe to ride. But Ferris's finished design, with its long, thin rods, looks so sleek and elegant that tourists think that it can't support the weight of passengers. One visitor wonders what would happen if the wind blew the wheel over. Larson notes that this visitor's question will be answered in only three weeks.

At a fair dominated by the strong, intimidatingly solid-looking neoclassical buildings designed by Burnham and his colleagues, the Ferris Wheel is too weak-looking to inspire much confidence in visitors. Larson ends the chapter with a cliff-hanger — will the wheel be safe or not?

PART 3, CHAPTER 11: RISING WAVE

By the end of June, more and more tourists begin coming to the World's Fair, attracted by the promise of the finished **Ferris Wheel**. This is impressive, since the recession is still strong and the trains have not reduced their fare, meaning that coming to Chicago is as much of a financial burden as it was before. Still, the number of daily visitors is well below 200,000, the number Burnham wanted.

The boosted attendance following the opening of the Ferris Wheel is a testament to the strength of American patriotism. Visitors come to play their part in supporting the wheel and, implicitly, in challenging the Eiffel Tower. That they continue to do so throughout a crippling recession is almost inconceivable today.

As the number of visitors to the World's Fair increases, logistical problems arise. The garbage disposal system becomes so extensive that Burnham is forced to allow workers to use elevators after dark. Yet the World's Fair continues to dazzle visitors. Olmsted is mostly proud of the Fair, and praises Burnham, though he also notes that the large number of concession buildings is distracting and detracts from the beauty of the grounds.

Burnham's exposition is getting out of hand, with new problems constantly popping up. In a sense, the problem in garbage is a good problem to have, since it means that people are attending the Fair, and it's going to be economically profitable.

Visitors to the World's Fair behave well, as if they are attending Sunday church services. The most common crimes are pickpocketing and taking photographs without paying, but there aren't an enormous number of criminal incidents, as officials had predicted. More common are medical incidents, for which Burnham has designed a separate hospital.

The stern, intimidating look of the buildings at the WF makes the visitors awestruck. Burnham's police force and hospital are so successful that crime is kept low and patients are quickly attended to.

The World's Fair attracts many famous visitors, from Charles Dickens to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Russia, who enjoys roaming Chicago unidentified. Woodrow Wilson, Houdini, Tesla, Edison, Susan B. Anthony, Teddy Roosevelt, and Clarence Darrow. Frank Haven Hall, the inventor of a Braille printer, meets Helen Keller, who weeps when she learns that Hall is the man who invented the device that allowed her to read.

The anonymity of Chicago extends to the WF itself — famous people go to the exposition, seemingly without anyone noticing them, and some, like Archduke Ferdinand (whose assassination two decades later will start World War 1), seem to enjoy the anonymity for its own sake. The enormous attendance at the WF is sinister, since it makes it easy for people like Holmes to get away with murder, but it also creates some heartwarming moments, like the encounter between Keller and Hall.

The Board of Lady Managers holds a meeting in which a religious board member asks Susan B. Anthony if she'd rather her son go to church or Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. Anthony replies that she'd prefer her child go to see Buffalo Bill, since he'd learn more. Bill is so amused by this story that he invites Anthony to see his show for free. At the show, he salutes Anthony, and Anthony waves her handkerchief at him — one of the heroes of America's past salutes a hero of America's future. Frederick Jackson Turner makes a famous speech about the end of the frontier, yet at Bill's Wild West show it seems alive and well.

The symbolism of Anthony's attendance at Bill's show is lost on no one. Buffalo Bill is a master showman, and he knows that the sight of him saluting Anthony is a good spectacle. The fact that the Wild West seems alive to the tourists at Bill's show suggests that there's something fictional about the "Wild West" itself — in other words, Americans are taught about the frontier and their own history via entertainment like Bill's show.

On June 22, 1893, the H.M.S. Victoria is struck by another ship off the shore of Tripoli, and more than four hundred people are killed. At the World's Fair, the British scale model of Tripoli is covered in black bunting.

The WF is a showcase for the wonders of the world, but this means that it's also a record of the world's tragedies.

The **Ferris Wheel** sells huge numbers of tickets and makes a large profit. Newspapers write stories about people committing suicide or dying in the wheel, but the Ferris Company insists that these are fictions. A man named Wherritt rides the wheel and feels afraid of the heights. Panicked, he breaks the glass of his box. A woman throws her skirt over Wherritt's head, and he becomes instantly subdued.

The ubiquity of technological marvels like the Ferris Wheel at the WF is both exciting and frightening. Strange incidents like the one that Larson describes are a byproduct of people encountering these new technologies.


The World's Fair is a source of pride for Chicago, and it also gives the city a source of revenue while national banks and businesses continue to go bankrupt. Across the country, meanwhile, bankrupt businessmen commit suicide. Henry Adams writes that the entire country is in a state of terror.

The contrast between the WF and the rest of the country grows clearer — while America goes through a recession, Chicago uses the WF to fight the effects of this recession. The entertainment that the WF provides becomes particularly attractive in light of the country's economic problems – when people are unhappy, they turn to entertainment to forget about their problems.

As the World's Fair draws to a close, people begin to grow nostalgic for it. A woman from North Carolina thinks that everything in life will seem insignificant by comparison. The Fair offers joy to its visitors, as if nothing bad will happen to them.

The WF offers its visitors an escape from reality — in particular, the harsh economic realities of the global recession of 1893. That this "escape" is a lie — constructed by Burnham and his colleagues to make money — doesn't dissuade millions of tourists from coming to enjoy the Fair.

PART 3, CHAPTER 12: INDEPENDENCE DAY

Holmes, Minnie, and Anna attend the July 4th festivities at Jackson Park. In the midst of a huge crowd, they watch as night falls, the band plays music that reduces people to tears, the electric lights go on, and the fireworks show begins. The crowd cheers.

Chicago's patriotism is so great that huge crowds come to see the fireworks and sing American songs.

Holmes makes Anna and Minnie an incredible offer, which Anna reports in a letter to her aunt in Texas. Holmes will travel with Anna and Minnie to Milwaukee, Maine, and New York, where Holmes says he wants Anna to study art and explore her talents. Afterwards, they will travel to Germany, London, and Paris. Anna tells her aunt that Holmes will provide for her, meaning that her aunt doesn't have to worry about giving her money anymore.

Larson narrates the section from Anna's perspective — by this point in the book, we're aware that Holmes's offer is too good to be true, and that he has no intention of taking Anna to Europe. It's often difficult to remember why people kept believing Holmes, even as he amassed a bigger list of victims — by using Anna's point of view, Larson conveys the trust Holmes can inspire in his victims.

Anna is extremely excited by Holmes's offer. Later on, a lawyer, William Capp, says that Anna had no inheritance, meaning that the offer of lavish travel was especially attractive to her.

This evidence provides another reason why Anna is inclined to believe Holmes to quickly — she wants to escape from her financial problems, much like the millions of tourists who come to the WF at this time.

Holmes has told Anna that he will take her, without Minnie, to his hotel. Anna thinks that Holmes is a handsome man, with beautiful **blue eyes**, and knows that Minnie has chosen a good husband.

By this point, we know that Holmes's blue eyes are one of the most fearsome things about him — they indicate that he's uncaring and unfeeling. Yet for Anna and others, blue eyes are part of what make Holmes so attractive.

PART 3, CHAPTER 13: WORRY

World's Fair attendance on the day of July 4 is 283,273, a huge number. Burnham hopes that this means that the Fair might become financial profitable after all. But in the next few days, attendance tapers off. Burnham's department has spent more than twice as much as originally planned on the Fair, and bankers want to take control of the exposition and save expenses.

It's unclear whether Burnham has deviated from the original intention of the Fair — to be economically profitable — and focused too exclusively on spectacle, or if spectacle is a part of the Fair being economically profitable. Certainly, the banks assume that the former is the case; they're completely unwilling to invest in more spectacles at this point in the Fair's history.

Burnham knows that giving control of the World's Fair to bankers would mean that the Fair would be a financial failure. He must increase the number of admissions to make the Fair profitable— this will require selling at least 100,00 tickets a day until the end of the Fair. Selling such a number of tickets, in turn, will require the railways reducing fare and Millet encouraging more people to travel from across the country. This seems impossible, considering the recession and the national wave of suicides.

Burnham faces a great challenge: he has to offer up his WF as a panacea for the economic troubles of the entire country. But this involves in some ways working around the economy itself — finding ways to lower train fare, etc. Even with the WF open to the public, Burnham's work is far from over.

PART 3, CHAPTER 14: CLAUSTROPHOBIA

Holmes takes Anna to his hotel when he knows that most guests will be at the World's Fair. He asks Anna if she would mind going to his walk-in vault and picking up some papers. Anna goes to the vault, and Holmes follows her quietly. When she walks inside, the door closes behind her — Anna is embarrassed, and knocks on the door, calling for "Harry." Holmes listens to Anna's cries, and feels peaceful and content. While the air grows stale in the vault, a pleasant breeze blows through his office.

Holmes prefers to kill from a distance; he enjoys the sense of immense power he wields over Anna. Larson emphasizes the difference between their two positions: Holmes with his pleasant cross-breeze, Anna with her stale air. It's this same contrast that pleases Holmes so greatly. It's disturbing that Anna doesn't realize that she's been trapped; she thinks there's been an accident. Even when Holmes is murdering her, she continues to trust him.

Anna beats the door with her shoe as the vault gets warmer and she begins to lose her breath. She thinks that Harry must be in another part of the building, unaware that she is locked in. She begins to grow afraid, but she reassures herself by thinking of the pleasant visits she will make to Milwaukee and New York.

Larson's description of Anna's death is agonizing in part because she's so naïve about her fate. It's enormously poignant that she thinks ahead to her trip to New York, which we know will never come, even as she's slowly dying.

Holmes hears Anna banging on the door, and does nothing. He thinks that he could open the door and weep with Anna, open the door and then close it again, or leave the door closed and fill the vault with gas. He continues to sit and listen to Anna crying. He enjoys these moments, because they give him a sexual thrill. He fills the vault with gas.

It isn't enough that Holmes kill Anna; he has to let her know that he's killing her. For this reason, he gasses the vault, first contemplating opening the door and then closing it again. It's interesting that Larson doesn't continue writing from Anna's perspective after she realizes that Holmes is killing her — perhaps her shock and agony is more terrifying when it's left implied instead of explicitly written.

Holmes travels back to his apartment and tells Minnie that Anna is waiting for them in the hotel. Holmes seems peaceful and well-rested, and tells Minnie that he likes her sister.

Holmes derives genuine pleasure from murder. As always, he maintains an appearance of normality and kindness around others.

Two days later, the Oker family receives a letter from Holmes telling them that he no longer needs an apartment. Surprised, the Okers look in the apartment, and see evidence of hasty packing. A while later, a trunk addressed to Anna or "H. Gordon" is sent from Midlothian, Texas to Chicago, but no one claims it.

Evidence of Holmes's actions are everywhere, but no one realizes what they are evidence of. The Okers are slightly suspicious of Holmes's sudden departure, but the grotesqueness of his crimes keep them from guessing what, exactly, he did.

Holmes employs a man named Cephas Humphrey who lives in Englewood, and asks him to remove a box and trunk from his hotel. Humphrey thinks that the hotel looks awful, but later says that Holmes didn't give him enough time to think about it. Humphrey takes a long, coffin-shaped box out of the building, and Holmes tells him to lay it flat, rather than straight up. Humphrey delivers a heavy trunk — later, he can't remember where he takes it, but evidence suggests that he takes it to the home of Charles Chappell.

Holmes uses one of his favorite tricks — encouraging workers to move quickly, so that they don't have time to grow suspicious about the building they're in. Charles Chappell continues to faithfully produce skeletons for Holmes — by this point in the book, we know all the steps in Holmes's routine, from the seduction to the murder to the selling of the corpse for profit.

Holmes gives Pitezal's wife dresses, shoes, and hats that belonged to Minnie, but he says they belonged to his cousin. He also gives his caretaker, Pat Quinlan, two trunks, each with the initials MRW.

Holmes is so fastidious that he doesn't waste his dead victims' clothing. No one realizes that his generosity is only possible because he's committed a horrible crime.

PART 3, CHAPTER 15: STORM & FIRE

Burnham works hard to attract visitors to the World's Fair. On July 9, visitors crowd into the **Ferris Wheel** and Midway's hot air balloon to avoid the heat. In the afternoon, a storm arrives, and a manager orders the balloon to be grounded. The Ferris Wheel continues to spin. The weather becomes cloudy and windy, and the winds damage various buildings and blow a boa over onto its side.

Larson builds suspense by describing the difficult process of grounding the hot air balloon. The Ferris Wheel, looks unstable and unsafe, but it continues to spin, even as the storm causes damage on buildings and boats — presumably much more stable objects.

The **Ferris Wheel** passengers are terrified by the storm, and close the doors of their cars with great difficulty. Nevertheless, the wheel continues to spin ordinarily, and they feel only a slight vibration from the wind. Meanwhile, the storm tears the hot air balloon into pieces.

Amazingly, the storm doesn't do any damage to the Ferris Wheel. Ironically, the hot air balloon which is grounded for safety, is destroyed, while the wheel, which isn't halted or even slowed, is perfectly fine. It truly is a marvel of engineering.

The next day, July 10, a fire breaks out at the top of the Cold Storage Building, the same place where a fire had broken out the previous month. This happens because, paradoxically, enormous heat is needed to create cold. The fire department for the World's Fair arrives quickly, and climbs up in the Tower as the fire loses oxygen, creating an extremely hot area that only needs new oxygen to reignite.

The success of the Ferris Wheel is even more amazing when one considers the damage that occurs in other structures, like the Cold Storage Building. In a sense, disasters like the fire are inevitable at the WF, since the exposition is so enormously complicated. But the fire is also a testament to the negligence of the Fair's organizers, who should have learned from their own mistakes in the previous month.

Passengers in the **Ferris Wheel** and visitors eating lunch watch as oxygen rushes into the Cold Storage Tower and triggers an explosion at its base. One firefighter, John Davis, manages to jump from high up in the Tower by catching the fire hose on his way down. The other firefighters realize that they're going to die, and say goodbye to one another. Some jump to their deaths, while others are burned alive. Three workers and twelve firefighters die in the explosion. But the next day, attendance exceeds 100,000 because visitors want to see the smoldering Cold Storage building.

There's a disturbing contrast between the horrors of the fire itself — men jumping to their deaths or being burned alive — and the fascination with which the visitors eat their lunch and watch. This contrast is reinforced the next day, when an especially large number of visitors attend the WF, seemingly because they want to see the destroyed building. This is the dark side of the WF: there's something insensitive and even psychopathic about the way the tourists absorb entertainment, and it again connects such voyeurism with the pleasure that Holmes gets from committing murder..

An inquest is held to determine the cause and blame for the fire. Burnham testifies that he didn't know about the previous fire at the building, and had no authority over its design, since it was a private concession. The jury charges him and several other officials with criminal negligence, and sends him to a grand jury. Burnham is surprised, and privately calls his charge an outrage. Instead of being arrested prior to his trial, Burnham posts bond. He closes the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, afraid that a similar explosion could take place there.

It's not clear if we should believe that Burnham does the right thing by claiming that he didn't know about the fire. While he's telling the truth, the fire occurred on his watch, which makes his surprise when he's sent to a grand jury for his criminal negligence seem unmerited. Still, Burnham seems cautious and careful for closing down other buildings to avoid a similar accident.

On the same day that Burnham is charged with criminal negligence, the directors of the World's Fair vote to form a Retrenchment Committee to cut costs. The committee's main target is Burnham's Department of Works. Burnham and Millet have planned elaborate shows in the coming months, which they think will boost attendance and make the Fair profitable. They know that the new committee will cancel these events — Burnham thinks that this will ruin the World's Fair.

The chapter ends on a low note — three or four bad things happen to Burnham at the same time. Murphy's Law says that anything that can go wrong will, and the state of the WF at this point in its history seems to confirm that rule. Nevertheless, Burnham has not given up on the WF. He wants to make the Fair profitable, even if it means spending more money in the short term — for the bank to control the Fair means that the organizers accept that it will lose money, and want to minimize that loss.

PART 3, CHAPTER 16: LOVE

A young reporter, Theodore Dreiser, accompanies a group of young St Louis schoolteachers to the World's Fair. Dreiser is young and attractive, and feels drawn to a schoolteacher in the group named Sara Osborne White, who doesn't return his feelings. Dreiser rides the **Ferris Wheel** and attends Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. He tries to kiss Sara, but she tells him not to be sentimental.

The WF, for all of the accidents and disasters that occur there, is an inviting, even romantic place. The fact that Dreiser — a great American author who write Sister Carrie *and* An American Tragedy *— is confortable enough in the Ferris Wheel to attempt to kiss Sara suggests that tourists are becoming more comfortable with the wheel in general, and aren't afraid that it will collapse.*

After the World's Fair, Dreiser continues to be attracted to Sara White. He writes her flirtatious letters, and eventually proposes to her — she accepts. A friend warns Dreiser not to marry an old, conventional woman, but Dreiser ignores the advice.

Dreiser's reckless behavior puts him in good company with the people who design and build the WF — his strategy is to act quickly and work out the details later.

The **Ferris Wheel** becomes a popular destination for couples to propose to each other. Luther Rice allows weddings in his office on two occasions.

The Ferris Wheel continues to become more popular and more generally accepted as a safe yet exciting destination. As couples propose there, the WF begins to become a part of people's lives, not just their days.

Holmes, who now has money and land (inherited from Minnie), courts a young, intelligent woman named Georgiana Yoke. She thinks that Holmes is a sad, handsome man, with no family except for an aunt in Africa. Holmes has told her that he has inherited property from his uncle in Texas, on the condition that he change his name to Henry Mansfield Howard. Holmes proposes marriage to Georgiana, and she accepts.

From Georgiana's perspective, Holmes is a sympathetic figure. Holmes, it's clear to us, has cultivated this image knowingly by pretending to have no living relatives. At the same time, we see how disturbingly good Holmes is at absorbing other people's lives and possessions — he claims that the land in Texas is his own, not Minnie's.

Mayor Harrison falls in love with a woman from New Orleans named Annie Howard. Though he is forty years older than Annie, he plans to reveal his "news" to Chicago on October 28, when the World's Fair hosts American Cities Day. Harrison looks forward to this event, only two days before the closing ceremony of the exposition.

Even Harrison himself bases his life around the Fair, waiting until the end of the Fair to announce his engagement. He's a savvy politician and always a public figure, even when he's dealing with details of his personal life. Meanwhile, he too is enthralled by young women.

PART 3, CHAPTER 17: FREAKS

It is July 31, 1893, and the Retrenchment Committee reports to the World's Fair's Board of Directors that huge cuts are needed. It also asks that it be given the power to approve all expenditures at the WR, no matter how small. Board members are outraged at this request for more power, and threaten to resign should it be granted.

It's lucky for Burnham that the Retrenchment Committee embarrasses itself — although there seems to be a consensus that Burnham has spent too much money on the WF, the Committee isn't skillful at proposing a good alternative to his excesses—they respond to his dreams with dreary cutbacks. Thus, Burnham, shrewder and better at the politics of organizing the WF, wins out.

The Retrenchment Committee has been too harsh in its report — the World's Fair has been a success, and acknowledged as such by newspapers across the country. Even in New York, a journalist writes that Chicago has done a better job of organizing the exposition than New York itself would have done. The final day of the World's Fair is October 30, giving the Board three months to increase revenue.

Despite the importance of making money, the WF must be judged by other standards, which can't be expressed financially at all. The prestige that the WF brings to Chicago and to America can't be measured in dollars, but it's enormously valuable, a fact which journalists across the country acknowledge.

The Board of Directors tries to convince railroads to lower their rates, and accuses them of being unpatriotic. Millet organizes boat races, swim meets, and exotic dances to boost attendance. He holds a Midway Ball on August 16, for which he invites belly dancers and other "Midway freaks." Also in attendance is the famous "Citizen Train," supposedly the model for Phileas Fogg in *Around the World in 80 Days*. He is rumored to have psychic powers, and says that he has been invited to use his powers to increase attendance.

Millet knows that spectacle isn't just a sight for its own sake; it's also a good financial measure, guaranteed to attract more visitors and make the Fair more profitable in the long run. Millet also senses that the spectacles he provides for the Midway must be titillating, appealing to the sexual desires of his audiences, and anticipating the sexuality on display in 20th century film and television.

At the Ball, Train dances with Mexican ballerinas. Performers from all over the world, including Africa, Japan, Alaska, and the Amazon attend. Some, who usually wear almost no clothing, are dressed in skirts in the colors of the American flag. Sol Bloom maintains order in the ballroom.

Another important aspect of the Midway shows is their exoticism. America desires to assert its place in the world, and part of this assertion is presenting representatives of other parts of the world as mere entertainment for Americans. The dressing of foreign performers in the American flag is an apt symbol of the process by which America uses the Fair to present itself as a world leader.

In August, Millet's events help raise attendance to well over 100,000 visitors a day. At the same time, a major bank, Lazarus Silverman, fails. More businessmen commit suicide, and the unemployment rate grows. Union organizers like Samuel Gompers use the recession as an opportunity to call for drastic changes in the wealth of the United States. His rhetoric causes fear and panic in the wealthy — who feel that unions must be silenced at all costs.

The workers of the United States become increasingly radical and agitated as the economic health of the country declines. Because it must employ thousands of workers and work around the financial hardships of the recessions by attracting visitors, the WF is a "snapshot" of the socioeconomic state of the country in the late 19th century.

PART 3, CHAPTER 18: PRENDERGAST

Prendergast is excited at the prospect of being appointed a city official. He visits City Hall in early October and introduces himself to the current corporation counsel, named Kraus, explaining that he is Kraus's successor. Kraus smiles and introduces Prendergast to his staff as his "successor." Everyone smiles. Prendergast begins to sense that something is wrong. When Kraus asks Prendergast when he will be replaced, Prendergast replies that he's in no hurry. Privately, though, Prendergast is surprised, and doesn't like the way Kraus talks to him.

Prendergast becomes increasingly dangerous as he senses that his desire to be corporation counsel won't be honored. From his perspective, he thinks that Harrison has betrayed his trust and cheated him out of a position he deserves (of course he doesn't realize that his role in Harrison's campaign was in fact so small that Harrison has no idea who Prendergast is). This makes Prendergast a threat to Harrison, despite the Mayor's famous sympathy to the working class.

PART 3, CHAPTER 19: TOWARD TRIUMPH

It is October 9, 1893, the day Frank Millet has organized as Chicago Day, and a huge crowd has come to Jackson Park for the World's Fair. More than 300,000 people are estimated to attend that day, close to the world record of 397,000 at the Paris exposition. There are only three more weeks before the World's Fair closes. By noon, the Paris record has been beaten. People pile into the World's Fair, causing accidents: children are lost, workers die, and a woman loses her foot when a crowd pushes her over.

The patriotism of the WF is both impressive and disturbing — a huge crowd of people comes to the Fair, but they hurt each other and cause various accidents. It's a desire to compete with Europe that causes these incredible displays.

The Chicago Day festivities include a fireworks display, organized by Frank Millet. By the end of the day, more than 713,000 people have visited, almost twice the previous record set in Paris. With the proceeds from this achievement, the World's Columbian Exposition Company is able to present the Illinois Trust and Savings Company with a check for 1.5 million and pay off the World's Fair's debts for good.

In the end, the patriotism of the United States — and, more specifically, the civic pride of Chicago — saves the WF from financial failure. This makes Burnham's emphasis on spectacle seem like good economic sense — the benefits of patriotism and entertainment can sometimes be measured numerically, as they are on Chicago Day.

Burnham eagerly prepare for the closing festivities on October 30. He is sure that they will be a testament to his ingenuity and achievement in organizing the World's Fair — he's also confident that nothing will go wrong.

By this point in the book, we know that the sentence "nothing can go wrong" exists only to be proven wildly incorrect.

PART 3, CHAPTER 20: DEPARTURES

The organizers of the World's Fair begin to return to their ordinary lives. Charles McKim is sad to leave the World's Fair, since his time there has been entertaining and enjoyable in a way that his ordinary life has not. He tells Burnham that he can't express his sadness in saying goodbye to him.

It's telling that the people who organize the Fair, not just the people who attend it, are sad to leave it. The magic of the WF is so great that even working on it for years can't disillusion organizers like McKim.

McKim writes a letter reporting on the various methods proposed for destroying the World's Fair after October 30. Some want to use dynamite to blow up the buildings, while others want to burn them. A journalist writes that it would be better for the Fair to end in a "blaze of glory" than to slowly disintegrate.

Even the end of the WF will be an incredible spectacle — it's as if the sight of the White City being built is just as exciting as the sight of the White City being torn down.


Olmsted, now 71 years old, has many other projects to work on, though he knows that he is nearing the end of his career and his life. He insists that he is not an "unhappy old man," since he has his legacy as a designer and his children to keep him happy. Sullivan, who has received many awards for the Transportation Building and its Golden Door, returns to working with Dankmar Adler, though business is slow throughout 1893. He fires one of his junior architects for taking on his own clients — the man's name is Frank Lloyd Wright.

Olmsted's insistence that he isn't unhappy, like Burnham's insistence that nothing can go wrong, isn't enormously convincing. We've seen him worry over the smallest details of Jackson Park — it's as if he's so focused on these details because he has nothing else in his life to turn to. Larson conveys the sea changes in the architectural world by contrasting Olmsted's age and unhealthiness with the sight of a young, ambitious Frank Lloyd Wright, the man who will quickly revolutionize the architectural world with his architectural ideas that are so at odds with the neoclassical buildings on display at the WF, as embodied in structures like the Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

Ten thousand construction workers are now unemployed with the end of the World's Fair. Mayor Harrison is sympathetic to the workers' cause, and tries to help them by hiring street cleaners and opening police stations for people who need a place to sleep. The Pullman Railway company starts to experience financial trouble as travel to Chicago declines. Workers' wages are reduced.

As we begin to sense that Harrison is about to die, we're allowed to contemplate the irony that Harrison is highly sympathetic to desperate, disadvantaged people, while other figures, like Pullman, seem almost completely indifferent to them.

Holmes decides to leave Chicago. He sets fire to his hotel, and files an insurance claim for 6,000 dollars, in the name of Hiram S. Campbell, one of the Holmes's aliases. The insurance investigator F.G. Cowie suspects arson, but orders the money to be paid, provided that Campbell appear in person.

While no one yet suspects that Holmes is a multiple murderer, Holmes is finding it more and more difficult to get away with his crimes. His burning of his building alludes to the burning of the WF that some of its organizers have proposed. It is worth noting that the first to investigate Holmes are not those who suspect murder of vulnerable women, but strong institutions that think he is trying to cheat them of money.

Holmes can't pretend to be Campbell himself, since Cowie knows his face. He decides not to hire someone else to pretend to be Campbell, since an attorney, William Capp, has been sent to look for Minnie Williams, and Holmes wants to be cautious. Holmes never collects the policy on his hotel.

Holmes is finding it more difficult to lie and cheat. Here, he's unable to collect an insurance policy, though he's done so many times before. The noose is tightening, slowly, around Holmes's neck.


Cowie's investigation into Holmes's hotel encourages Holmes's creditors to unite to demand their money back. They hire an attorney, George B. Chamberlin, who had attempted to track Holmes down earlier for refusing to pay for his kiln. Chamberlin will be the first man in Chicago to suspect Holmes of crime.

We're given more hints that Holmes won't continue to get away with his deceptions much longer. It's interesting that one investigation into Holmes's crimes triggers a different investigation — this pattern will continue later on, when investigations into some of Holmes's murders inspire other detectives to investigate other murders.

Chamberlin invites Holmes to his office, where Holmes is ambushed by his various creditors. Holmes is surprised, but politely greets everyone, and is able to calm them down. He says that he would have paid all his debts had it not been for the recession of 1893. Many of the creditors seem sympathetic. Chamberlin asks Holmes to leave the room; when he's gone, Chamberlin, who's not convinced by Holmes's apologies, encourages the creditors to arrest Holmes immediately. Holmes, waiting in the adjacent room, talks to an attorney. It's unclear if Holmes bribes the attorney or simply asks him what he knows, but he discovers that Chamberlin wants Holmes arrested. Holmes leaves the office immediately.

Even after being ambushed by his creditors, Holmes remains calm and civil — his ability to manipulate others is so great that in only a few minutes, he's able to make some of these creditors sympathetic to his deceptions. Holmes is also skilled at using other people to gain information, as we see when he bribes, or possibly just asks the attorney what his creditors are talking about. In spite of the enormous criminal abilities Holmes displays in this scene, it's clear that he's becoming more desperate as his crimes catch up with him.

Holmes leaves Chicago with his fiancée, Georgiana, and Benjamin Pitezal for Fort Worth, Texas, where he wants to use Minnie's land. He plans to sell some of the land and use the rest to build a new building, similar to his hotel in Chicago. Before leaving the city, he insures Pitezal's life for 10,000 dollars.

Holmes tries to cut his losses by dipping into Minnie's fortune and leaving Chicago for good. In a way, this is a form of surrender, since we've seen how Holmes thrives in Chicago. Nevertheless, he continues to charm women just as he always has.

PART 3, CHAPTER 21: NIGHTFALL

Attendance at the World's Fair remains high throughout October, because people know that the Fair is about to end forever. Far more than 100,000 attend every day, and officials expect the final ceremony to attract a record number of tourists.

The Fair seems to be thriving, attracting more than the minimum number of visitors needed to make the Fair profitable. Yet we sense that something is about to go wrong, since Larson has hinted at a great disaster.

Frank Millet continues to organize events that attract visitors to Jackson Park, such as a recreation of Columbus's voyage to America.

Millet continues to recognize that entertainment is important for making the WF profitable; moreover, the entertainment must be of a patriotic, "all-American" nature.

For American Cities Day, October 28, Mayor Harrison invites the mayors of San Francisco, Philadelphia, and other major American cities. It's not clear whether or not the mayor of New York attends. Harrison announces that he is engaged to Miss Annie Howard, and that they'll be married on November 16. He makes speeches in which he mourns the end of the World's Fair, and privately tells the mayor of Omaha that he'd gladly incorporate Omaha into Chicago's city limits.

Harrison exemplifies the showmanship, arrogance, and political savvy of Chicago at its finest. In a way, he's an empire builder, always looking to acquire a new territory, even if the "territory" is already a proud city, like Omaha. He also makes his personal life a part of his public persona, announcing his engagement on the same day as the fanfare around American Cities — it's as if he wants the celebration to be in his honor, as well as America's.

Prendergast, humiliated by his visit to the corporation counsel's office, buys a six-chamber revolver for four dollars. He knows that revolvers can be unreliable, so he loads only five bullets and keeps the empty chamber under the hammer. On American Cities Day, he walks to the Unity Building in the center of Chicago, where Mayor Harrison is making a speech. A guard refuses to let Prendergast enter the building, since he looks suspicious.

By now, it's clear that Prendergast is dangerous, and wants to hurt Mayor Harrison. As disturbed as he is, he is clever enough to take the precaution of loading his revolver with five shots instead of six, so that he doesn't inadvertently shoot himself. For the time being, Harrison is safe — Prendergast, unlike Holmes, can't conceal his inner evil.

In the evening, Harrison returns to his mansion. Around seven thirty, the maid tells him that a young man wants to see him. Harrison isn't worried by this request, since he prides himself on being in touch with his constituents. Though the visitor seems unusual, the maid tells him to come back to see Harrison in half an hour.

It's ironic that after being turned away from a big, government building, Prendergast succeeds in entering a much more private area, Harrison's own house — Harrison is much more trusting than the guard who turns Prendergast away.

At eight o'clock the young visitor returns. The servants, who are eating supper by themselves, hear a shot, and rush to the hall, where they see Harrison lying on his back. William Chalmers, Harrison's neighbor, takes care of Harrison, and tells him that he'll live. Harrison replies that he has been shot in the heart, and will die. They argue, and Harrison becomes angry. Chalmers reports that Harrison died too early because he didn't believe him — even in death, Harrison was "emphatic and imperious."

Harrison's death is tragic, since he's essentially punished for being open, understanding, and friendly to the disadvantaged. But his death is also undeniably funny, and a testament to the qualities that made Harrison so popular and colorful during his life: his propensity to argue, his energy, and his commitment to winning at all costs.

Prendergast walks to a police station and tells the police that he has shot the mayor. The police are skeptical until Prendergast shows them a gun that's been recently fired. Prendergast explains that Harrison betrayed his trust and refused to appoint him corporation counsel in return for his support.

Prendergast finally expresses his reasons for killing Harrison. Spoken out loud, they sound ridiculous — Harrison had no idea who Prendergast was, much less that Prendergast had "campaigned" for him. Harrison hasn't betrayed Prendergast at all; on the contrary, he's stood up for thousands of people like Prendergast who are desperate, ambitious, and persistent.

The World's Columbian Exposition Company cancels the closing ceremony in response to Harrison's death. A memorial assembly is held in Festival Hall. The warship *Michigan* gives Harrison a 21-gun salute, and the band plays "The Star-Spangled Banner." Visitors cry, and the World's Fair is understood to be over.

Even in death, Harrison seems strongly connected to Chicago and the United States itself. He's a hero in his city, and this is obvious from the enormous memorial assembly that's held in his memory.

A procession walks through the streets of Chicago. Burnham sits in a carriage, and thinks that the World's Fair has begun and ended with deaths — Root's and Harrison's. A chorus from the United German Singing Societies performs for the occasion — years before, Harrison had heard them at a picnic, and joked that they should sing at his funeral.

Harrison is a humorous, colorful man, and there's something amusing, and thus highly melancholy, about the Germans singing on the day of his funeral. Harrison's funeral is a poignant affair, especially since it replace the happiness that was supposed to surround the closing of the WF.

The World's Fair remains open until October 31, and visitors go, as if to say goodbye to a dead relative. Reporters say that a greater sight will never be seen on Earth. Harrison's death becomes a milestone in Chicago history.

The sadness at the end of the WF is impossible to separate from the sadness at the death of Mayor Harrison. Both were larger than life, full of contradictions, and immensely popular with the city of Chicago. That Harrison's death closes the WF also suggests all the other deaths that occurred in building and around and because of the chaos of the WF.

PART 3, CHAPTER 22: THE BLACK CITY

In the months following the end of the World's Fair, the poor and unemployed increase in number. Photographs capture the sights of the Jackson Park, deserted and filthy, and fires destroy several of the buildings at the World's Fair. Throughout the winter, union leaders organize strikes across America. President Cleveland enlists the military to go to Chicago to break up a national strike organized by Eugene Debs.

It's a tragedy that the city of Chicago isn't more grateful to the thousands of workers who made the WF possible. Instead of showering them with thanks, they're sent back into the "Black City." It's proof of the power of the WF that riots and strikes break out so soon after it's finished — the WF was one of the only things keeping Chicago in good economic shape, and its end is a crushing economic blow.

At the strikes in Chicago, unions burn buildings in Jackson Park, including Hunt's dome and the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. Burnham is pleased at this end for the World's Fair — it's better, he writes, for the spectacle to end quickly and spectacularly than slowly.

Ironically, the unions' burning of the buildings in Jackson Park doesn't come as a shock to Burnham — on the contrary, he appreciates the bright and even beautiful sight of the fire, that the buildings of the Fair go up on a blaze of glory.

In early 1894, the newspapers publish information about the hundreds of missing persons who came to Chicago for the World's Fair and never returned to their homes. Larson ends Part 3 by noting that Holmes would never have been caught had it not been for one persistent detective.

As the WF draws to a close, Holmes is still on the loose, though he's left Chicago. Larson closes Part IV by noting that Holmes was only apprehended by one determined detective. It's amazing — and frightening — that Holmes has come close to getting away with his various crimes

PART 4, CHAPTER 1: PROPERTY OF H.H. HOLMES

It is June of 1895, and Detective Frank Geyer, one of Philadelphia's most notable detectives, contemplates his current assignment, a man named Mudgett who goes by the alias H.H. Holmes. Holmes has been put in custody, arrested seven months ago for insurance fraud.

The final part of The Devil in the White City *picks up two years after the end of Part 3. Larson may have chosen to do this because there just isn't that much information about what Holmes did in the intervening two years. At the same time, telling this part of the story from Geyer's point of view makes it clear that it's a detective story, and exciting enough to be its own book.*

Holmes, who used to live in Chicago, had traveled to Forth Worth, St. Louis, and Philadelphia, cheating insurance companies. In Philadelphia, Holmes gained 10,000 dollars, seemingly by faking the death of Benjamin Pitezal. The insurance company, Fidelity, had hired the Pinkerton National Detective Agency to track down Holmes; Pinkerton found him in Vermont. Once arrested, Holmes confessed to fraud. Later, it became clear that he had murdered Pitezal, not faked his death. Detectives also learned that three of Pitezal's children were missing, and last seen with Holmes.

This expository information maps out the course Part 4 will take: Geyer will investigate Holmes's crimes, and attempt to locate Pitezal's children. Though Geyer isn't aware of it, Pitezal once counted himself a close ally, and even a friend of Holmes's. While this underscores how treacherous Holmes can be, it also suggests that Holmes is getting desperate — he's had to leave Chicago and sacrifice the people he depended upon to get away with his crimes.

Geyer interviews Holmes in his jail cell. Holmes insists that he last saw Pitezal's three children with Minnie Williams, who was taking them to see Pitezal himself, now in hiding. Geyer doesn't trust Holmes, and finds him to be suspiciously smooth.

Though Geyer doesn't yet know this, the reader understands the absurdity of Holmes's blaming Minnie Williams, a woman who's dead by now, for the disappearance of Pitezal's children. Another sign that the noose is tightening for Holmes is Geyer's suspicion with his character — unlike the women and men Holmes seduced, Geyer isn't the least bit sympathetic or attracted to the man.

Holmes claims that he found a cadaver that looked like Pitezal, set it on fire, and then pretended that the body was Pitezal's. To verify, the coroner asked that a member of Pitezal's family confirm the body's identity. Pitezal's wife, who was ill, sent her second-eldest daughter Alice, who was fifteen years old. She confirmed that the body was Pitezal's. Holmes convinced Pitezal's wife to take Alice and two of her other children, including a boy, Howard, to see Pitezal.

The pace of Part 4 is much quicker than that of the previous sections of the book. Larson doesn't reconstruct these scenes from the perspective of the characters immediately involved in them (Holmes, Alice, Mrs. Pitezal); instead, he uses a "frame narrative" from Geyer's perspective to get the information across.

Alice wrote letters to her mother, saying that she disliked Holmes and didn't find his manner charming. Geyer knows that this letter never reached Alice's mother. Holmes collected the children's letters in a box. Mrs. Carrie Pitezal is worried because she hasn't heard from her children, though Holmes assures her that they're in London with Minnie Williams. Geyer isn't sure if he'll be able to find the children, but the District Attorney encourages him to look further.

The fact that Holmes collects the letters instead of burning them will quickly result in useful evidence for Geyer, but it also suggests how sadistic Holmes can be — he seems to take great pleasure in owning and controlling the children's correspondence and being reminded that it will never reach Mrs. Pitezal.


Geyer travels to Cincinnati, where he tries to reconstruct the children's journey. He goes to the Atlantic House hotel and finds records of an "Alex E. Cook," one of Holmes's aliases, written in Holmes's handwriting. This leads Geyer to the realty office of J.C. Thomas, who remembers a man of Holmes's appearance staying there. Thomas refers Geyer to a woman named Henrietta Hill, who lives near the house where Holmes seems to have stayed. Hill tells Geyer that she saw a large iron stove being delivered to Holmes's residence. Geyer guesses that Holmes had planned to use the stove, but then left when he noticed that he was drawing attention from his neighbors.

Holmes's travels across the country seem like a good strategy for avoiding detection, but they also put him at a disadvantage. In Chicago, he could commit his crimes from behind the walls of his hotel; in smaller, more open cities, he doesn't enjoy the same anonymity he found in Chicago, and thus has to keep moving whenever neighbors become too suspicious. Still, even when Henrietta Hill witnesses Holmes carrying an iron stove, she's no more disturbed by it then the people who saw Holmes with unusual equipment in Chicago — people are alike all over, it would seem.

Geyer, now assisted by Detective David Richards, traces Holmes to a hotel called Circle Park, where he finds records of a Mrs. Georgia Howard, a name he believes refers to Holmes's fiancée, Georgiana Yoke. Geyer begins to see that Holmes led Yoke and three children into different hotels in the same night. He goes to a saloon in West Indianapolis, where a man named Herman Ackelow tells him that he remembers seeing Holmes with three children.

Holmes excels at using aliases to conceal his crimes and inspire a feeling of security in other people. Later, when he's with Minnie and then Georgiana, his deceptions become less smooth, and he's forced to think of more elaborate lies for why some people call him by one name and other people call him by another. Here, he's forced to go one step further and make other *people adopt aliases.*

Reading through the Pitezal children's letters, Geyer sees that they were kept in cold, lonely rooms and isolated from their family, but also fed well and taken to the zoo. Geyer can't understand why Holmes would kill three children for no rational reason, especially since he fed them well and traveled with them all over the country.

Geyer remains unclear about Holmes's motives for murder, but this is only because Geyer doesn't understand that it's possible for Holmes to be so evil and sadistic. This lack of understanding has kept Holmes safe from detection throughout the book.

Geyer begins to understand that Holmes is not a rational human being. Geyer travels to different hotels, always asking for information about Holmes. He is persistent and tireless — but his weakness, Larson notes, is that he thinks that evil has limits. Geyer learns that Mrs. Pitezal traveled with her two other children, meaning that Holmes was now manipulating three different groups — his fiancée, Mrs. Pitezal and her two children, and her three other children. Geyer realizes, amazed, that the latter two parties were only a few blocks away from each other, though they were cold and desperate to see each other.

As Geyer becomes more and more involved in Holmes's crimes, he begins to get a feeling for Holmes's psychology. Holmes has no practical purpose for moving the children around; rather, he delights in torturing them. The process by which Geyer comes to realize this mirrors the research that Erik Larson himself conducted — Geyer may be the closest thing to a stand-in for the author of The Devil in the White City.

Geyer realizes that Holmes moves his travel companions for his own amusement, enjoying their confusion and sadness. Geyer is also confused by a phrase from one of Alice's letters, "Howard is not with us now."

Geyer hasn't quite put together what Holmes has done, but he does realize that Holmes is motivated by cruelty, not material gain. Readers, more familiar with Holmes and his actions, can guess that Holmes has killed Howard.

PART 4, CHAPTER 2: MOYAMENSING PRISON

Holmes sits in his cell, thinking smugly that no one has been ale to produce evidence that he killed Benjamin Pitezal. It is cold and damp in his cell, but he behaves extremely well and is able to convince the guards to allow him to continue wearing his own clothing and pay for food and newspapers to be delivered to him. He reads about his growing infamy and about Geyer's search for Pitezal's children. Holmes is amused by the search, since he knows that Geyer will not find what he's looking for.

Even in prison, Holmes goes to great pains to maintain an appearance of politeness and respectability. This is what makes him so dangerous — maintaining this image comes so easily to Holmes that he can fool people long after they should have seen through his deceptions. Holmes finds pleasure not only in committing crimes, but in getting away with them.

In prison, Holmes begins to write a memoir. He composes this work in a pastoral style, emphasizing the beauty of the town where he grew up, and the ordinariness of his childhood. His memoirs are mostly lies — as children psychopaths lie easily and hurt children and animals. He writes a prison diary, in which he wonders if his mother will write to him for his birthday, and says that a recent visit from Georgiana Yoke was a joyous occasion for him. This diary is full of lies; that Holmes wants is to maintain the appearance of innocence.

Holmes's memoirs are painfully easy to see through — they're so pleasant and sentimental that they must be hiding evil and perversion. It's unclear if Georgiana Yoke continue to love and believe him; what is clear is that Holmes is getting more and more desperate to prove his innocence. He's trying the same tactics of deception, but these tactics are getting and less effective as Geyer's investigation proceeds.

Holmes writes a letter to Mrs. Carrie Pitezal, which he knows will be read by the police. He tells her that he took good care of her children, and that they're currently with "Mrs. W" in London. He denies having killed the children. He reads the papers and learns that Geyer has found nothing in Philadelphia. This pleases him greatly.

Larson presents Holmes's denial of murder as a non sequitur, which strongly suggests that Holmes did, in fact, murder the children — it's similar to the earlier scene in which Holmes told a woman, "Don't be afraid of me," which naturally made the woman feel afraid.

PART 4, CHAPTER 3: THE TENANT

In July 1895, Geyer goes to Toronto and confirms that Holmes has traveled there with three separate parties. No one can remember seeing Holmes. But he then receives a tip from a man named Thomas Ryves who says that he remembers seeing Holmes. Geyer is leery of this tip, since the national press coverage of his case leads to dozens of fake tips.

Geyer alludes to the national press coverage his case is attracting. This reinforces how difficult it becomes to solve crime in the modern world — it's not just that there are more people and more crimes, it's also that detectives have to avoid becoming distracted by the people giving them false information.

At this time, Geyer is famous throughout the country. He's seen as a hero, doing difficult but necessary work relating to a shocking crime. Geyer is indifferent to his fame, and annoyed that he has yet to find the children. He understands that Holmes moved the children for his own amusement, more than any financial reward.

Geyer's indifference to his image contrasts markedly with the image Holmes carefully cultivates in prison. Yet Geyer's indifference is more modest, and therefore more convincing. Because Geyer focuses on the case and not the press, he's able to gain valuable, though disturbing, insights into Holmes's personality.

Thomas Ryves tells Geyer that he remembers a **blue-eyed** tenant who asked to borrow a shovel to dig a hole for burying potatoes. Geyer goes to the cellar in the building where Holmes seemed to have stayed, and begins to dig. Three feet below the ground, he finds human bones. He calls an undertaker, who helps him uncover three naked children's bodies. One child, Nellie, has had her legs amputated — to make her more difficult to identify, Geyer realizes.

The description of the discovery of the children's bodies is frightening and a little disgusting, particularly the detail that Holmes cut off Nellie's leg. This detail reinforces that Holmes doesn't kill out of passion; he carefully plans every murder he commits, so that he won't leave any incriminating evidence.

Mrs. Pitezal learns about her children's deaths in the newspaper; Geyer has been unable to telegraph her. She travels to Toronto, where she seems as if she's about to faint. She's able to identify the corpses as her children, due to Nellie's distinctive black hair.

Even with all the caution Holmes brings to his murders, he can't render the bodies completely unrecognizable — in fact, he leaves behind one of the children's most identifiable features. Perhaps Holmes never thought that he'd be arrested in the first place.

The coroner guesses that Holmes locked the three girls in a large trunk and gassed them. Geyer is amazed that Holmes was able to kill three children in the big city of Toronto without drawing any suspicion.

Geyer, like Larson himself, is amazed at how easily Holmes got away with his crimes. Implicit in his amazement is a sense of disgust with modern America's indifference to other people's actions.

Geyer is proud of finding the children, but continues to wonder where Howard is. Mrs. Pitezal continues to think that Howard is alive, possibly checked into an institution, as Holmes had suggested. Geyer is unsure whether Howard is alive or dead.

Mrs. Pitezal's faith that he son might be alive is particularly moving since it's becoming clearer and clearer that Howard is dead, along with his siblings.

PART 4, CHAPTER 4: A LIVELY CORPSE

It is July 16, 1895, and the deaths of the Pitezal children have been reported on the front pages of various newspapers. The Assistant District Attorney, Thomas W. Barlow, orders that Holmes not be shown the papers, so that Barlow can surprise him with the news and possibly get him to confess. But Barlow's order comes too late, and Holmes reads the papers.

While Holmes is skillful at controlling other people's perception of himself, Barlow seems incompetent at controlling what Holmes sees. The newspapers interfere with Barlow's plans, just as they do with Geyer's investigation.

In his memoirs, Holmes claims that he was shocked by the news of the children's deaths. He realized that they must have been murdered by Minnie Williams, probably working with a dangerous friend of hers, named "Hatch." Holmes tells Barlow that Minnie and Hatch have killed Howard, too.

Holmes's inventions become increasingly unconvincing to others as the evidence builds up. To both the reader and the people investigating Holmes, "Hatch" is obviously a last-minute invention designed to save Holmes's life.

Holmes sends his memoirs to a journalist, John King, and gives him instructions to publish them as a book, with his photograph on the cover, as well as directions on how to sell the book by canvassing in Philadelphia.

Even Holmes's instructions on how to sell his book seem pathetic, not skillfully planned. In Chicago, Holmes was comfortable manipulating others, but his manipulations are becoming clumsy.

Holmes, who knows that he's suspected of murdering Minnie Williams, writes a letter in which he tells King to go to a hotel in Chicago, where he'll find records of Minnie's presence long after she was supposedly murdered. Holmes adds that if Minnie "was a corpse then, she was a very lively corpse."

Even when Holmes denies murder, the humorous way he phrases his denial makes him seem callous and terrifying.

PART 4, CHAPTER 5: ALL THE WEARY DAYS

Geyer continues to search for Howard, sure that Holmes killed him in Indianapolis. Meanwhile, the police search Holmes's building in Englewood, and begin to suspect that he killed dozens of women during the World's Fair. One estimate puts the Holmes death count as high as two hundred.

Even after finding enough evidence to sentence Holmes to death, Geyer continues to investigate. He's committed to exposing all of Holmes's crimes, and satisfying Mrs. Pitezal's desire to find her son.

In Holmes's hotel, the police find airtight rooms and gas nozzles that seemingly serve no purpose. They uncover a bankbook recording 23,000 dollars, belonging to Lucy Burbank, who can't be located. In the basement, they discover surgical tools, vats of acid, a skull, ribs, and various other human bones. This leads them to Charles Chappell, who is cooperative, and shows the police three skeletons from Holmes that he helped clean. The police also find the footprint, which may have belonged to Emeline Cigrand, on the inside of the walk-in vault.

As soon as the police know what to look for, it becomes extremely easy to find evidence that Holmes is a murderer. This is especially clear in the case of Charles Chappell — he goes along with the police without question. Holmes was able to avoid punishment in Chicago because no one knew what to look for — they couldn't imagine that he killed people and dismembered the bodies. Once they do know what to look for, it becomes much more obvious. It was the lack of imagination that someone could do what Holmes was doing that protected him most.

Geyer travels to Chicago to determine if one of the skeletons in Holmes's basement might have belonged to Howard Pitezal. In Chicago, Geyer finds the city terrified by the news of Holmes's murders.

At the beginning of the book, Chicagoans couldn't imagine that a serial killer could come t the United States. By this point, that supposition has been proven incorrect.

Geyer learns that the skeleton in Holmes's basement belonged to a girl named Pearl Conner, a name that Geyer doesn't recognize. Geyer is disappointed that he hasn't succeeded in finding Howard. On August 19, what remains of Holmes's hotel burns to the ground. No one is arrested for the crime, but it's theorized that the fire was started by someone who wanted to keep the evidence in the building concealed.

Even as he looks for more evidence of Howard's body, Geyer finds evidence of other murders, underscoring how difficult it would be to keep track of everything Holmes did. There are still enormous holes surrounding Holmes's crimes, a fact that both Geyer and Larson acknowledge. The mystery of who burned the hotel reinforces how little we know about this bizarre case.

Geyer investigates hundreds of leads in Howard's death. One day, he meets with a man named Mr. Brown, who remembers giving Holmes the keys to a house he was renting. Brown leads Geyer to a man named Elvet Moorman, who helped Holmes install a woodstove in his house. Geyer also talks to the owner of a repair shop who remembers Holmes coming into his shop and asking to have sets of surgical tools repaired. Geyer finds a human jawbone and teeth in the house Holmes rented. Mrs. Pitezal identifies Howard's overcoat, and a toy that Benjamin Pitezal had bought for Howard at the World's Fair.

Geyer's job is very difficult — he has to talk to lots and lots of people, until he finds the one person who has information about Holmes. Holmes thrives on the size and the anonymity of modern American life — whenever he chooses to commit a crime, the precise circumstances of the crime are difficult to pin down because there are so many other factors for people like Geyer to sort through.

PART 4, CHAPTER 6: MALICE AFORETHOUGHT

On September 12, 1895, a grand jury in Philadelphia indicts Holmes for the murder of Benjamin Pitezal. Juries in Indianapolis and Toronto indict Holmes for murdering Howard, Alice, and Nellie Pitezal. Holmes's memoir is published, and editors are amazed to learn of how Holmes was able to avoid being investigated by the Chicago police for years. The Chicago chief of police, it's revealed, represented Holmes in commercial lawsuits during his early legal career. Chicago newspapers like the *Tribune* criticize Holmes as a monstrous, almost demonic person.

Even when Holmes is brought to justice, it comes as an embarrassment to almost everyone that he was able to avoid detection for so long. The Chicago Tribune*'s conclusion that Holmes was monstrous and demonic is thus correct but not completely correct — Holmes's crimes are horrifying, but the society that allows him to get away with these crimes without asking any questions is horrifying too in its negligence.*

EPILOGUE, CHAPTER 1: THE FAIR

The World's Fair influences American culture for years to come. Elias Disney, who worked on the Fair, may have unknowingly inspired his son, Walt Disney to build Disneyland. L. Frank Baum was inspired to invent Oz after visiting the World's Fair, and the Japanese temple in the Wooded Island may have influenced Frank Lloyd Wright. President Harrison declared October 12 Columbus Day, and every carnival since the World's Fair has included a Midway and a **Ferris Wheel**. Incandescent bulbs powered by alternating current, which were first displayed in large numbers at the Fair, are now common in every American home. Neoclassical architecture, which the World's Fair helped to popularize, can still be seen in any city.

Though the physical WF eventually disappears, its influence persists long after, in literature, in science, and in architecture. The fact that this is the case overturns Larson's observation at the beginning of the book: that the WF has been largely forgotten. The truth, it now seems, is that while the WF itself has been forgotten, the science and culture it directly inspired has not been forgotten, and in fact has rippled outward, can be seem everywhere around us.

The greatest legacy of the World's Fair was to popularize architecture and city planning itself. William Stead, the journalist, published a book, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, which helped to launch the City Beautiful movement, encouraging Americans to make their cities aesthetically competitive with those of Europe.

The goal of competing with European culture, so important to the WF, lives on long after 1893. In many ways, we can see the competition between America and Europe even today.

Burnham was hired to design areas in Cleveland, San Francisco, and Manila, and was crucial in redesigning Washington D.C. In all of these cases, he worked for free. Burnham also designed Soldier Field and the Field Museum, two of Chicago's most beloved landmarks.

Burnham works for free, suggesting that he isn't motivated by material gain but rather by a desire to achieve glory and be remembered after he dies.

The World's Fair has become the subject of much debate. Some maintain that the Fair destroyed the "Chicago School" of architecture and replaced it with an obsolete, severe neoclassical style. This thesis has been popular in the academic world, to the point where it's difficult for anyone to argue with it.

Even during the WF, designers thought that the buildings were too aggressively neoclassical. It seems that this belief has persisted long after the end of the WF.

Late in his life, Louis Sullivan condemned the World's Fair. After it was finished, he only received a small number of commissions, and fell into loneliness and alcoholism. He was an argumentative, arrogant man, and bad at building relationships with clients. On several occasions he borrowed money from Burnham.

Sullivan is in many ways Burnham's opposite. He despises neoclassical architecture; more importantly, perhaps, he is bad at the politics of architecture, meaning that he can't forge useful connections with others.

Sullivan wrote a biography in 1924 in which he criticized Burnham and the World's Fair for destroying architecture's creativity and uniqueness. Frank Lloyd Wright, who Sullivan had fired years ago, supported Sullivan's architectural style, and his influence has been so great that Sullivan's reputation has grown in the 20th century while Burnham's has shrunk.

Larson portrays Sullivan as a vindictive and jealous man, who didn't mind borrowing money from the same person he criticized so angrily in print. Sullivan fits the archetype of the "suffering creative genius" better than Burnham does, which might account for Sullivan's appeal throughout the 20th century. To a degree, Larson wants to set the record straight about Burnham and Sullivan, to make it clear that Burnham's poor reputation in modern architecture is undeserved.


The academic interpretation of the World's Fair is too simplistic, Larson argues. The Fair revived the public interest in architecture and thus paved the way for Frank Lloyd Wright and other modernist architects.

Whether the style of the WF itself was good or bad, the Fair inspires architects to design buildings in many different styles — it's more important to understand this than it is to critique the WF's architecture.

Burnham became the greatest architect in America following the end of the World's Fair, and eventually he received honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale. He resented the claim that John Root had been the true creative genius behind the World's Fair — in reality, Root's tragic death made Burnham a much better architect. He later designed the Flatiron Building, one of New York's most famous and earliest skyscrapers. Burnham was also an early environmentalist, and a friend of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Burnham's honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale bring him "full circle" to the time in his youth when he was denied admission from both universities. By being America's greatest architect, Burnham seems to have overcome his insecurity about being excluded from the Eastern elite.

Burnham's health grew worse when he was in his fifties; he learned that he had diabetes. He become introspective, and developed a belief in the supernatural, one telling a friend that he believed he could prove that there was life after death.

Burnham's belief in life seems perfectly consistent with his interest in building a legacy for himself — he wants his buildings and his personal reputation to live on for hundreds of years, so in this sense, Burnham has always *believed in life after death.*

EPILOGUE, CHAPTER 2: RECESSIONAL

Olmsted begins to lose his mental functions, and fears that he'll be confined to an asylum. Sinking deeper into dementia, he nonetheless remembers designing the World's Fair grounds, and angrily says that his plans weren't carried out correctly. He dies on August 28, 1903. His funeral is small, and his own wife doesn't attend.

Olmsted's final years are both tragic and morbidly amusing — though he's slowly losing his mind, he continues to complain about the details of his landscape designs. Just as Mayor Harrison was energetic and forceful even on his deathbed, Olmsted was exacting and painstaking even in his final years. There is also a sense in which Olmsted's near maniacal focus on what he cares about shares some similarities of single-minded intensity with Holmes far more awful passion. Olmsted's focus on his work seems to have wrecked his own personal life.

The **Ferris Wheel** makes a great deal of money, but when it's taken down in 1894, imitations spring up everywhere. Ferris divorces his wife in 1896, and dies of typhoid only a few months later. The original Ferris Wheel is torn apart in 1906 and made into scrap iron. When it's demolished, it doesn't collapse, as the demolition team has supposed, but turns slowly, one last time.

As we come to the end of the book, Larson contrasts the extent of the WF's legacy and speed with which the WF itself is forgotten. In this way, the image of the Ferris Wheel spinning one last time is immensely poignant; though the wheel itself is quickly destroyed, its fame lives on. In the same way, Ferris himself dies shortly after the WF, but his legacy as an engineer lives on.

Sol Bloom, the chief of Midway, has become a rich man following the success of the World's Fair. He invests in food shipment companies, but goes bankrupt when the railway workers go on strike. He isn't discouraged at all; he buys two good suits, and eventually becomes a congressman and one of the founders of the charter of the United Nations.

Of all the characters in the book, Sol Bloom may be the person who best understands how to survive in modern America. Bloom is impressive, flashy, and talented at keeping up appearances. The fact that he goes from organizing lewd shows at the WF to drafting the charter of the United Nations underscores how important appearances are to politics, and to being successful in the modern world.

Buffalo Bill makes almost a million dollars from his Wild West show. He founds the town of Cody, Wyoming, buys a newspaper, and alienates his wife by conducting a long affair with a young actress. In the Panic of 1907, he loses almost all of his money, and is forced to perform at circuses, even though he's more than seventy years old. He dies in 1917, too poor to pay for a burial.

Buffalo Bill's fortunes rise and fall throughout The Devil in the White City. *Unlike many of the other master showmen in the book, Bill doesn't die rich. The financial recession of 1893 proves how quickly money can be made and then lost, and ultimately, Bill is a victim of the changes in the American economy.*

Theodore Dreiser marries Sara Osborne White, and cheats on her frequently. Dora Root, John Root's widow, remains enormously depressed in the years following his death. She had loved her husband and enjoyed the creative stimulation of being married to him. She writes a long letter to Burnham in which she explains that she is proud of her life, but still full of self-doubt and conscious that "all would have been different" had John lived longer.

Dora Root exemplifies the contradictions in the WF. She's both proud of her husband's achievement in designing the Fair and saddened that the Fair claimed his life by overworking him. One of Larson's projects in writing The Devil in the White City *is to pay attention to both sides of the Fair: the humans who risked everything to build it and the legacy they created, and the human cost of that creation.*

Prendergast is tried for Harrison's murder and prosecuted by Alfred S. Trude, the same man to whom Prendergast had sent letters. Prendergast pleads insanity, but Trude points to the care Prendergast took to keep an empty chamber in his revolver in case it went off unexpectedly. Prendergast is sentenced to death, but Clarence Darrow intervenes and gets Prendergast a sanity inquest. The inquest fails, and Prendergast is executed. Years later, Darrow defends two other Chicago murderers, Leopold and Loeb, two wealthy college students who conspired together to try to commit the "perfect" crime.

Prendergast's death sentence may be justified, since he's dangerous and clearly contemplated murder ahead of time. Yet it's also brutal and vengeful, encapsulating the principle of "an eye for an eye." The implication is that the people in power in Chicago are guilty of brutality and bloodthirstiness of the same kind exemplified by the criminals in Chicago. The allusion to Leopold and Loeb, two wealthy, educated men who killed a younger boy in an effort to pull off a "perfect crime", emphasizes the point that the violence in Chicago can't easily be restricted to any one group of people.

In New York in the early 20th century, Farida Mazhar jumps out of a cake, naked, at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel. Mazhar had belly danced at the World's Fair.

Perhaps one of the most important legacies of the WF was its emphasis on public sexuality. As Mazhar's later career demonstrates, America was all-too willing to indulge in entertainment of the kind she offered.

EPILOGUE, CHAPTER 3: HOLMES

In the fall of 1895, Holmes is tried in Philadelphia for the murder of Benjamin Pitezal. Prosecutors aren't permitted to bring evidence of Holmes's other crimes, and testimony is grisly. Holmes seems calm, even when Mrs. Pitezal testifies. Holmes is sentenced to death — a sentence that he appeals, unsuccessfully.

Holmes is calm even in the courtroom where he's sentenced to death. Yet his demeanor can't save him this time; the facts are more than enough to convict him.

Holmes writes a new memoir in which he admits to killing 27 people, including Alice and Nellie. Some think that he may have killed as many as 200 people, though this number is probably too high. Geyer suspects that if Holmes hadn't been caught, he would have killed the rest of the Pitezal family. In his memoirs, Holmes says that he feels as if he's turning into a devil, with his head elongating.

The fact that Holmes writes a new memoir even after he knows he's going to die suggests that, like many of the other characters in the book, he's interested in making a legacy for himself. The story about turning into a devil, for instance seems designed to scare people for years to come; this is probably what Holmes wants.

Holmes refuses to allow an autopsy to be performed on his body, and orders that he is to be buried covered in cement, so that his body won't be stolen. He is executed on May 7, 1896. His guards find it difficult to kill him, since he's charming, but Holmes tells them to take their time.

Holmes's politeness on the day of his death is more unnerving than aggression could possibly be. In the end, Holmes seems like a coward — he's afraid that others will do to his body what he did to so many bodies.

In the years after the execution, the people connected to Holmes's capture experience strange accidents. Geyer becomes very ill, the warden of Moyamensing prison kills himself, and the jury foreman is accidentally electrocuted. The priest who gives Holmes his last rights is found dead of unknown causes.

Even after Holmes's death, his legacy as a supernatural killer grows quickly. These coincidences fit Holmes's purpose in writing a memoir — he wants to be remembered, and feared.

In 1997, Chicago police apprehend a doctor named Michael Swango, who pleads guilty to four murders, all of hospital patients who were in his care. Swango's notebooks are discovered, and in one of them, the police find a phrase from a book about Holmes: "He could feel that he was a god in disguise."

Even a hundred years later, Holmes is inspiring murder and evil. Indeed, the specific kind of crime Holmes practices, in which evil is concealed, is attractive to Swango, and presumably to many other criminals. Just as the Fair continues to influence the world, Larson seems to suggest, so too does Holmes.


EPILOGUE, CHAPTER 4: ABOARD THE OLYMPIC

Burnham waits to hear more news about Frank Millet. He writes Millet a long letter encouraging him to come to the next meeting of the Lincoln Commission, which is looking for a designer for the Lincoln Memorial. During the night, the *Olympic* returns to its original course, since another ship has been sent to rescue the *Titanic*. The other reason the *Olympic* doesn't go to rescue the *Titanic* is that the designer of both ships, J. Bruce Ismay, one of the few people who survives the sinking of the *Titanic*, insists that *Olympic* passengers must not see a duplicate of their own ship sinking — the shock would be too humiliating to the White Star Line.

Ismay's decision to keep the Titanic *and the* Olympic *separate emphasizes the importance of appearances in his business. Ismay has obligations to his investors, and he doesn't want to discourage his business. Ironically, Ismay's commitment to improving the public's perception of his ships leads passengers on the* Titanic *to die without help, which of course destroys the public's faith in his company.*


Frank Millet died on the *Titanic*, along with William Stead. Burnham, meanwhile, lives for only 47 more days before succumbing to a coma from his diabetes and other health issues. He dies in July of 1912. Margaret survives through two World Wars and the Great Depression, only passing away in 1945.

In life, Burnham's work often separated him from being with his wife, Margaret, and even when he dies, Margaret carries on for decades after him.


Margaret and Daniel Burnham are buried together in Graceland, Chicago, near Sullivan, Root, and Mayor Harrison.

While all the designers of the WF eventually pass on, their achievement in designing the Fair lives on. It lives on in the technology that they helped to popularize, the architecture they inspired, the popular culture they influenced, and even in the book Larson has written. The graves in Graceland, like Larson's book, are monuments to great, even heroic men who sacrificed a great deal in a single-minded pursuit of a great dream, and deserve to be remembered.

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