

# Moon of the Crusted Snow



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WAUBGESHIG RICE

Waubgeshig Rice grew up on a Wasauksing First Nation reservation near the Arctic Circle. He began his writing career as a journalist for the First Nations newspaper *Anishinabek News*, in which he documented his experiences as a foreign exchange student in Germany. He attended Ryerson University, graduating in 2002. After college, Rice hosted the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's local radio show *Up North*, which was centered around indigenous storytelling. In 2012, Rice published a short story collection, *Midnight Sweatlodge*, based on his experiences growing up in an Anishinaabe community. Rice's 2014 debut novel, *Legacy*, focused on cultural tensions between First Nations people and non-indigenous Canadian people; it revolves around the murder of a young First Nations woman. *Moon of the Crusted Snow* is Rice's second novel, published in 2018. Rice, his wife Sarah, and their children Jiikwis and Ayaabehns split their time between Sudbury, Ottawa and Wasauksing.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Moon of the Crusted Snow* is an allegorical retelling of European settlers' colonization of the Americas, and how that colonization has impacted First Nations cultures over the last few centuries. In the novel, outsiders infiltrate and destabilize an Anishinaabe community, a situation that alludes to Europeans who settled in First Nations territory in the 1500s and 1600s. In particular, antagonist Justin Scott represents European settlers who subjugated and culturally erased First Nations people. Rice also addresses how the 19th-century Canadian government censored First Nations languages and cultural traditions and kidnapped and forced First Nations children to attend residential schooling.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Rice's other novel, *Legacy*, and short story collection, *Midnight Sweatlodge*, also focus on Anishinaabe culture. While *Midnight Sweatlodge* recounts Rice's happy memories growing up on a reservation in Wasauksing, *Legacy*—like *Moon of the Crusted Snow*—grapples with cultural tensions between First Nations people and other Canadian groups. Other Anishinaabe authors who address the oppression of First Nations people include Linda LeGarde Grover (*The Road Back to Sweetgrass*) and Cherie Dimaline (*Empire of the Wild*). Like Rice, Apache author Darcie Little Badger explores colonial oppression in her science-fiction novel *Elatsoe*. *Moon of the Crusted Snow* is also a dystopian

novel; its themes overlap with well-known dystopian fiction books like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (which addresses women's subjugation) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (which focuses on censorship).

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Moon of the Crusted Snow
- **When Written:** 2017
- **Where Written:** Wasauksing First Nation, Canada
- **When Published:** 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** A remote Anishinaabe reservation near the Arctic Circle
- **Climax:** The Anishinaabe survivors abandon their reservation and resettle in more remote territory to rebuild their society.
- **Antagonist:** Justin Scott
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Heavy Metal.** Rice usually listens to music to get himself in the writing zone. When writing *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, he favored heavy metal music and rock songs with dystopian themes, including Metallica's "The Four Horsemen" and Nine Inch Nails' "The Day the World Went Away."

**Grandmotherly Love.** Rice based the character Aileen Jones—the oldest, wisest, and most beloved character in his story—on his own grandmother, Aileen Rice.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Evan Whitesky shoots a moose, makes a **tobacco** offering, and hauls the carcass into his truck. Evan has been hard at work hunting food for the winter, and he'll share his bounty with his Anishinaabe community. Evan drives home to his partner Nicole, son Maiingan, and daughter Nangohns. The television is out, but they think it'll be back on soon. The next day, Evan visits his parents, Dan and Patricia. Last night, Dan dreamed that he saw Evan looking gaunt and scared, standing in front of a fire. A couple days later, at a community meeting, the reservation's chief, Terry Meegis, advises the community to conserve energy because the power grid is offline—they're running on back-up diesel generators. The reservation's oldest member and spiritual guide, Aileen Jones, blesses the meeting with a sage

ceremony.

Later that week, local teenagers Nick Jonas and his friend Kevin arrive on snowmobiles. They fled their residential school in Gibson (the nearest town, 300 kilometers south) after the power went out and people began rioting. The next day, a large man named Justin Scott arrives on a snowmobile, explaining that the power also went out in his town, which erupted in violent chaos. Terry doesn't want to turn Scott away—but other council members (who run the reservation), like Walter, are wary about Scott's arrival. They agree to let Scott stay if he keeps a low profile and contributes to the community. That evening, Scott bursts in, saying that he may as well meet everyone, and Evan's skin crawls. That night, Evan dreams about a room filled with dead bodies.

Some days later, Evan disrupts a party at his younger brother Cam's house, angry that people are wasting energy. Evan grows angrier when he sees a teenager named Jenna sitting on Scott's lap. Evan lunges at Scott, but Scott stands and towers over Evan. Evan backs off and leaves the party. The next morning, Evan learns that Jenna and her friend Tara froze to death while trying to walk home from the party. As they lay the frozen bodies in the community garage, Scott bursts in to say that more snowmobiles are approaching. A man named Mark Phillips dismounts, begging for help. Phillips's town exploded into deadly chaos after the power went out, and he's desperate. Scott rashly fires his gun, killing Phillips. Scott thinks that they need to take a stand because more people will come looking for help. Evan realizes that Terry has lost control of the reservation.

A couple months later, Evan is visiting Aileen, as he often does. Aileen is perplexed about why people keep saying "**apocalypse**." Aileen thinks the Anishinaabe's world already ended when European settlers drove the Anishinaabe north into this harsh territory; it ended again when they took Anishinaabe children and forced them to speak English. Yet somehow, the Anishinaabe are still here. Evan feels comforted. Aileen advises Evan to take care of Nicole, whom Aileen has taught traditional medicine. Nicole's knowledge will be important if the power doesn't come back on.

Meanwhile, Nicole takes the children for a sleigh ride and bumps into Meghan, one of the people who arrived with Mark Phillips, who's currently living in Scott's side of the reservation. Meghan looks gaunt, and she's fumbling with an empty rabbit trap. Meghan blurts out that Scott is horrible—he threatens everybody, and he hoards most of the food and wood for himself. Meghan's husband, Brad, does too. Concerned, Nicole offers Meghan a rest and a warm drink, but Meghan declines. She has to find food for Scott before he gets angry. Later, Evan learns that Cam (who also lives near Scott) is growing thinner by the day. That evening, Nicole, Evan, their children, and Evan's parents gather around the kitchen table. Dan tells an Anishinaabe myth about Nanabush, a greedy character who

kills all the geese he finds instead of just a few. When somebody steals the geese, Nanabush has nothing left to eat.

Some days later, council members dole out canned food reserves to a restless line of hungry, frustrated people. Scott emerges, looking menacing, and cryptically says that he has a plan to feed the community if they'll work with him. A few weeks later, Evan stokes a fire in a *tipi* tent nestled deep in the forest. He's building a refuge for his family, in case the situation on the reservation deteriorates. Outside, the snow blows fiercely, but the tent is warm and comforting. Evan drifts to sleep and dreams that a snarling monster with Scott's face is running toward him.

That night, Aileen dies in her sleep. She was the last person who knew the Anishinaabemowin language and rituals in full. Evan struggles to fight back tears as he drags Aileen's body to the community garage, which is full of bodies waiting to be buried. Suddenly, Evan notices that a body is missing. He knows instantly that Scott took it. Evan, Isaiah, and Tyler head to Scott's complex to confront him. They spot Scott standing by a fire, watching a pot simmer. Cam emerges, sobbing and covered in blood. Evan feels sick as he asks Scott if there's a body in the pot. Tyler lunges for Scott, and Scott fires his gun. Evan crumples to the ground—it's unclear if he's dead or alive. Suddenly, Scott's head splits open—Meghan has shot him from behind. Tyler and Isaiah lug Scott's body to a distant ravine, leaving it for the wolves.

In the epilogue, it's two years later, and the power never came back on. Nicole lifts her sunglasses as she takes a last look around the house. She won't need anything in here anymore. The community can't bear to stay in a place filled with such loss, so they're leaving. Outside, Maiingan and Nangohns play with their grandparents on the grass. Nicole scoops up the kids and says, "Let's go see Daddy." They head to a new settlement, deep in the woods, without looking back.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Evan Whitesky** – Evan Whitesky is the book's protagonist; he's Nicole's partner and Nangohns and Maiingan's father. Evan has lived on the Anishinaabe reservation his whole life and is a maintenance worker and active community member. At the start of the story, Evan is in his mid-twenties, and he and Nicole are raising their two young children. They have a stable, loving, and warm home environment, and they're dedicated to reconnecting with their traditional culture. For example, when Evan hunts, he often conducts **tobacco** rituals after killing animals. He prefers to hunt for food, live off the land, and care for his community. His simple, cautious, and conservative lifestyle is characteristic of the traditional Anishinaabe way of life. Evan often reflects bitterly on how little he knows of his

own language (Anishinaabemowin) and history, because so much of it was wiped out by colonialism. He strives to connect with the traditional ways by consulting his elders, especially Aileen Jones, the community's oldest member and spiritual guide. After the power is cut off and the **apocalyptic crisis** takes hold, Evan leans even more strongly on his Anishinaabe values: he takes advice from his elders; cares for the community by clearing roads and distributing food; lives communally with his extended family; and takes Aileen's advice to support his partner and children throughout the story. He butts heads with Justin Scott, an outsider who seeks refuge on the reservation and tries to exert control over the Anishinaabe community. When conditions worsen on the reservation, Evan builds a traditional *tipi* tent in the woods, in case his family needs to resettle off the reservation. He finds the traditional home extremely efficient for coping with the harsh winter, much more so than the modernized reservation. At the story's climax, Scott shoots Evan, and it's unclear if he survives. However, in the Epilogue, Nicole leads the other survivors to safety, hinting that they will meet Evan in the new settlement he's built.

**Justin Scott** – Justin Scott is the story's antagonist. He mysteriously arrives on the reservation, heavily armed and seeking refuge, after the power goes out and civilization collapses into chaos. Scott is physically intimidating: he's bigger and stronger than any of the Anishinaabe people. The community is wary of Scott at first, though many are drawn to his intimidating stature and aggression. Scott quickly oversteps his bounds and kills Mark, another person seeking refuge on the reservation, against the advice of the community's elders. Some people believe that Scott's aggression will protect them, however, so they disband from the community and join forces with Scott in an abandoned bungalow complex on the reservation. As time progresses however, Evan and his partner, Nicole, realize that Scott's followers are growing weaker and thinner, while Scott grows stronger and fatter. They learn that Scott is intimidating his followers, subjugating women (notably Meghan, who also sought refuge on the reservation) and forcing them to do his bidding. He even forces several people to steal dead bodies so that he can cannibalize them for food. At the story's climax, the community confronts Scott about his actions, and he retaliates by shooting Evan—but Meghan ends the confrontation by shooting Scott in the back, killing him. Scott's character is a metaphor for historical European settlers who encountered and colonized First Nations people. In the end, however, Scott's domineering personality causes his own demise, as his faction of the community becomes demoralized and erodes beyond repair.

**Aileen Jones** – Aileen Jones is the community's eldest member and spiritual guide. She's very old, frail, gentle, and kind—and this makes some people overlook her worth. Aileen is well-versed in traditional customs, and she often conducts **sage**

rituals for the community. She's also fluent in the community's native language (Anishinaabemowin), and she uses myths to teach people how to live off the land. Aileen has also been teaching Nicole how to practice traditional medicine, and she encourages Evan to nurture Nicole, knowing that Nicole's medicinal knowledge will be crucial to the community if the electricity never comes back on. As a frail old woman, Aileen is the kind of person who tends to be overlooked in a patriarchal society. Yet her wisdom, experience, community-oriented values, and indigenous knowledge prove essential to the community's survival. Aileen explains to Evan that although the **apocalyptic situation** faced by the community seems dire, it's similar to the oppression that previous generations endured when European settlers began displacing First Nations people. When Aileen dies during the harsh winter, much of her indigenous knowledge dies with her. Evan's grief at her passing represents the collective cultural losses of First Nations people who were oppressed under colonialism. Although Aileen doesn't survive the winter, the people who heed Aileen's advice do—and they go on to rebuild their fractured community based on her teachings.

**Nicole McCloud** – Nicole is Evan Whitesky's partner. She is the primary caregiver for their two young children, Maiingan and Nangohns. Nicole and Evan have a very loving and supportive relationship, marked by mutual respect and a shared desire to reconnect with traditional Anishinaabe customs. Nicole strives to teach her children what she knows of the native language (Anishinaabemowin), and she embodies Anishinaabe community values by patiently nurturing the people around her. She also knows traditional medicine (which she learned from the community's spiritual guide, Aileen Jones); respects the elders' wisdom; and knows how to read the natural landscape for signs of bad weather. While several other characters freeze to death during the frigid winter, Nicole only takes her children outside when there are no signs of an approaching blizzard in the air. Such skills prove essential to her family's survival. Toward the end of the book, Evan is shot in a violent confrontation with the story's antagonist, Justin Scott, and it's not clear if he survives. In the Epilogue, the reader learns that Nicole has assumed leadership of the survivors, and she is leading them to a new settlement, where they will live in connection with "Mother Earth" as they've done for generations. Nicole also reflects, upon the community's departure, on how unnecessary many of the technological advancements on the modernized reservation seem.

**Nangohns** – Nangohns is Evan and Nicole's three-year-old daughter and Maiingan's sister. Her name means "little star" in Anishinaabemowin. Although she's Evan and Nicole's youngest child, she's surprisingly wise and thoughtful, and Evan thinks that she will be a spiritual leader one day. Along with Maiingan, Nangohns represents hope for the Anishinaabe culture's survival.

**Terry Meegis** – Terry is the community’s “chief”; he heads up the council, which runs the reservation. Terry is deeply empathetic and non-confrontational but somewhat emotionally weak, and he’s intimidated by Justin Scott. Though Terry is the figurehead of the community, he doesn’t actually wield much power. As the winter progresses, he shifts into a supporting role, increasingly leaning on Evan—who, in turn, takes his advice from the community’s spiritual leader, Aileen.

**Walter** – Walter is the reservation’s second-in-command and reservation chief Terry Meegis’s closest advisor. Walter is pragmatic, forthright, and levelheaded; he’s often the voice of reason when Terry feels overwhelmed. When Terry struggles to maintain control of the reservation, Walter steps in and leans heavily on Evan. Like Evan, Walter is uneasy about Justin Scott, a man seeking refuge on the reservation who ends up terrorizing the community.

**Isaiah North** – Isaiah is Evan’s best friend and Candace’s son; he’s an active community member. As the winter progresses, people on the reservation begin to lean more heavily on Evan, Isaiah, and their friend Tyler, who all take active roles in clearing roads and checking in on vulnerable elder community members. Isaiah also helps manage the worsening situation with Justin Scott, who seizes power over part of the community. He’s fiercely protective of Evan and loyal to the community.

**Tyler** – Tyler is friends with Evan and Isaiah. Together, the three of them take a leading role in running the reservation as the winter progresses and the elders begin to die. Tyler helps distribute rations, hunt for food, conduct essential maintenance, and collect dead bodies. He also protects the community, notably from Justin Scott.

**Cam Whitesky** – Cam is Evan’s younger brother. He’s is somewhat irresponsible, preferring to live in the moment and have fun rather than prepare for the oncoming winter. Cam also doesn’t care much about learning the community’s traditional ways. His lack of preparation and foresight leaves him vulnerable as the winter progresses, and he falls under antagonist Justin Scott’s influence. Cam grows thinner, weaker, and more demoralized as the winter progresses. Toward the end of the story, Scott forces Cam to dismember a dead body for food, which leaves Cam traumatized.

**Mark Phillips** – Mark Phillips is the second person to seek refuge on the reservation after the power goes out. When a desperate Phillips arrives, Terry begins to handle the situation calmly, but Scott butts in and rashly shoots Phillips, saying that the community needs to protect their territory from incoming threats—even though Scott himself sought refuge on the reservation. Scott’s show of brute force in this confrontation enables him to seize power.

**Meghan Connor** – Meghan is a woman who seeks refuge on the reservation along with her husband, Brad, Alex Richer, and

Mark Phillips (whom Scott kills when they first arrive). Brad joins forces with Scott, so Meghan ends up living under Scott’s authority. Together, the men subjugate Meghan, forcing her to hunt even though she doesn’t know how to and punishing her when she fails to deliver food to Scott. Meghan grows thinner, weaker, and more hateful of Scott and Brad as the winter progresses, ultimately prompting her to turn on them and shoot Scott in the back, killing him.

**Kevin** – Kevin is Joanne Birch’s son and Tyler’s younger brother. He and his friend Nick Jonas attend school in the nearest town, Gibson, which is 300 kilometers south of the remote Anishinaabe reservation. The pair emerge part way through the story, having escaped from Gibson, which collapsed into violent chaos when the power went out. Kevin and Nick’s situation shows that modern civilization is fragile because of its over-dependence on technology.

**Nick Jonas** – Nick is friends with Kevin. Together, the two teenagers escape from Gibson (a town 300 kilometers south of the reservation) after the power goes out and their school devolves into chaos. Nick’s insights about the chaos in Gibson underscore the fragility of societies that rely heavily on urban infrastructure and modern technology.

**Dan Whitesky (Evan’s father)** – Dan is Evan’s father and Patricia’s husband. He’s quiet, thoughtful, and reserved—and he has a lot of respect for the community’s ways. Like Evan, Dan works as a maintenance worker and council member on the reservation. He takes an active role in community life, and he conducts **tobacco** rituals during hunting trips. As the winter progresses, Dan and Patricia move in with Evan to conserve energy. He bolsters his family’s spirits with traditional stories that teach his grandchildren Maiingan and Nangohns Anishinaabe values.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Maiingan** – Maiingan is Evan and Nicole’s five-year-old son and Nangohns’s brother. His name means “wolf” in Anishinaabemowin. He’s sweet and kind, although he’s somewhat more passive than Nangohns. Together, Maiingan and his sister represent hope for the Anishinaabe culture’s survival.

**Patricia (Evan’s mother)** – Patricia is Evan’s mother and Dan’s wife. She’s a kind, jovial person. Before the power goes out, Patricia loves to spend her time gambling online. When the winter worsens, she and Dan move in with Evan and Nicole to conserve energy, which helps them survive the winter.

**Jenna** – Jenna is Sydney’s teenage sister. After attending a party at Cam and Sydney’s bungalow, Jenna and her friend Tara freeze to death on her way home, having incorrectly gauged the weather. Their deaths trigger widespread trauma in the community, especially among its youths.

**Tara** – Tara is a teenager who freezes to death (along with her

friend Jenna) while attempting to walk home in the cold after a party at Cam's house.

**Nanabush** – Nanabush is a character in one of Dan's traditional Anishinaabe stories. Dan's story teaches Maiingan and Nangohns about the importance of preparing for the winter and not being too greedy.

**Brad Connor** – Brad is Meghan's husband. He quickly takes up alliances with Scott, whose toxic values motivate Brad to treat Meghan poorly.

**Alex Richer** – Alex seeks refuge on the reservation, along with Brad, Meghan, and Mark Phillips. Alex joins forces with Scott shortly after arriving on the scene.

**Sydney** – Sydney is Cam's girlfriend and Jenna's sister. Like Cam, she's a fun-loving character. However, as the winter progresses, Sydney grows warier of Cam's worsening condition, eventually reaching out to Evan for help.

**Joanne Birch** – Joanne is a member of the council that runs the reservation. Her main job is printing flyers that update the reservation's residents about the power outage and energy conservation efforts.

**Amanda** – Amanda is Jenna's mother. She's an active community member who helps distribute rations throughout the winter. Amanda grief-stricken by Jenna's death, but she's resilient in supporting the community despite her personal hardships.

**Tammy** – Tammy is Nicole's older cousin. She and her partner, Will, are close with Evan and Nicole, and they comfort one another during the wintry crisis.

**Will** – Will is Tammy's partner.

**Vinny Jones** – Vinny Jones is a community member who selfishly ignores community notices and keeps all his lights on, even though others are trying to conserve energy with dwindling fuel supplies. Vinny doesn't survive the winter.

**Candance North** – Candance is Isaiah's mother; she's a member of the council that runs the reservation. Candace is a nurturing figure who often soothes reservation chief Terry Meegis when he's nervous about addressing the community at their meetings.

**Jeff** – Jeff is a community member who helps out with hunting. He dismisses Scott's egotistical pride when Scott kills a moose, explaining that the community tries not to overhunt in order to live in equilibrium with the land.

Canada, near the Arctic Circle.

**Anishinaabemowin** – Anishinaabemowin is the indigenous language of Anishinaabe people.

**Ojibwe** – In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, some people use the term Ojibwe to reference the Anishinaabe people or their indigenous language, Anishinaabemowin.



## 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.



### TECHNOLOGY, SOCIETY, AND SURVIVAL

In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, an isolated First Nation community survives a harsh winter by reconnecting with their traditional knowledge of the land. When a mysterious **blackout** occurs during a harsh winter, members of a remote Anishinaabe reservation suddenly find themselves without the modern conveniences they've come to rely on in recent years. The community soon realizes the blackout is widespread, ongoing, and it's debilitated nearby towns and cities (which have devolved into chaos). So, the Anishinaabe commit to maintaining their traditional way of life for good, believing it will best facilitate their long-term survival. Through the Anishinaabe's dramatic lifestyle shift, Rice emphasizes that technology-dependent living is unreliable because technology can fail. Rice also implies that such lifestyles exploit the Earth's natural resources and may one day deplete them, unlike the traditional Anishinaabe way of life. To Rice, humanity would do better to embrace simple living—the Earth's natural ecosystem already provides all we need to survive, if we don't exploit it.

Dependence on modern conveniences leaves people ill-equipped to survive in the natural world—which is a mistake, because technology is fallible. Many young adults in the story embody technology-dependent lifestyles centered on television, video games, and amenities like grocery stores, leaving them practically and emotionally unprepared for coping with life without these luxuries. Rice compares the story's protagonist Evan with his younger brother Cam, noting, "When Evan had been out on the land learning real survival skills with his father [Dan] and uncles as a teenager, Cam had chosen to stay behind, learning simulated ones in video games." Cam's lack of foresight leaves him vulnerable during the blackout, and he winds up dangerously malnourished. This suggests that technology is distracting and potentially dangerous, because it takes time and energy away from learning survival skills that prove essential in a crisis. Evan's extended family easily adapts

## TERMS

**Anishinaabe** – The Anishinaabe people are a First Nations culture indigenous to Canada. Their ancestral home is in Southern Canada, near the Great Lakes. Today, many Anishinaabe people live on remote reservations in Northern

to life without cell phones and internet by reverting to the “moccasin telegraph” (walking to others’ homes and sharing updates in person, just as they did for years before the reservation went on the grid). However, students in a dormitory in Gibson (300 kilometers south) quickly become demoralized without phones, internet, or news about the blackout. Within a few days, several students wander into the snow and die. Technology offers instant gratification, which weakens patience and emotional coping skills—a death sentence for young people who are overly dependent on their phones and computers.

Rice also suggests that living simply, in equilibrium with the land (as First Nations cultures advocate) is a more viable approach to long-term survival than a fragile, technology-dependent infrastructure. The Anishinaabe way of life centers on connecting with nature and replenishing everything taken from the land to avoid wasteful use of the Earth’s resources. They also tell stories to entertain, bolster emotional resilience, and teach survival skills. Unlike modern technology, these customs don’t demand complex external infrastructure that exploits (and may eventually deplete) the Earth’s resources. For example, Dan’s traditional story about a mythical indigenous figure named Nanabush warns about the dangers of being “greedy” and taking too much food from the land. The story suggests that humanity should strive to keep the Earth’s natural ecosystem in balance so that it continues to provide in the future, thus facilitating our long-term survival. Dan’s story is also funny, so it entertains Evan’s family and lifts their spirits. They’re able to cope emotionally during long, dark winter nights without relying on technology or a complex urban infrastructure—unlike the students in the dormitory, who are at a total loss without electricity. Humanity’s over-reliance on technology—and the complex infrastructure it requires—is therefore limiting. The Anishinaabe way of life—living in balance with the natural environment rather than exploiting it—is a more reliable way to facilitate humanity’s long-term survival.



## COLONIALISM, OPPRESSION, AND TRAUMA

Waubgeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow* is an allegory for First Nation people’s experiences under colonial oppression. Set on a remote Anishinaabe reservation in Northern Canada, the plot revolves around a widespread power outage that throws the region into chaos during a brutally frigid winter. Outsiders begin seeking refuge on the isolated reservation, but they soon exploit the Anishinaabe’s hospitality, incite violence, and cause suffering—prompting the Anishinaabe to flee. The Anishinaabe community’s spiritual guide, Aileen Jones, suggests that the story’s events mirror colonialism’s violence and destruction. She thinks that the Anishinaabe people’s “world ended” many

times over under colonial oppression, yet they managed to survive and rebuild their culture each time the “Zhagnaash [white person]” targeted them. In the book’s epilogue, the Anishinaabe survivors push on with sad resilience to rebuild their lives, settling in remote woodland territory to avoid more outsiders. This suggests that modern First Nations cultures are determined to survive, but that they are haunted by past oppression and remain wary of experiencing more oppression in the future.

Protagonist Evan Whitesky, a young Anishinaabe man, bitterly reflects on the culture his people lost under colonialism. After European settlers colonized the Americas, First Nations people were forced to abandon many of their own customs and adopt those of the settlers instead. In the modern day, Evan frequently struggles to remember words in his native language, Anishinaabemowin, noting that historical bans on native languages and the forced schooling of earlier generations steered First Nations people toward speaking English. Only a few people with a full command of the Anishinaabe’s native language remain alive today. When the community’s oldest member Aileen dies, her knowledge of the native language and many traditional customs die with her. Evan’s mourning is compounded because he’s hasn’t just lost Aileen—he’s also lost the last link to many of his culture’s traditions. In this way, Evan’s grief parallels the cultural losses that First Nations people suffered under colonialism.

The visitors to Evan’s community cause violence and trauma, prompting the Anishinaabe survivors to flee in order to rebuild their society—a process that mirrors historical colonial oppression in Canada. A heavily armed man named Justin Scott seeks refuge on the reservation during the so-called “**apocalypse**.” But after he gains the community’s trust, he seizes power and ends up terrorizing the withering community. Scott metaphorically represents historical settlers who disrupted pre-existing First Nations communities. His violent and disruptive actions ultimately drive the Anishinaabe survivors to flee and rebuild their community in more remote territory, much like First Nations people did when Europeans began settling in the Americas. Aileen also explicitly depicts the community’s crisis as an allegory for First Nations people’s historical oppression under colonialism. Aileen says that the “world isn’t ending. It already ended when the Zhagnaash [white person] came into our original home [...] and took it away from us,” suggesting that the wintry crisis is just another manifestation of events that happened to First Nations people before. Aileen says “the world ended again” when incoming settlers “followed us up here and took our children away from us,” suggesting that settlers fractured First Nations peoples’ communities for generations—much like Justin fractures the Anishinaabe reservation in the novel.

In the book’s epilogue, the few surviving characters are traumatized but also determined to rebuild their culture anew,

representing the outlook of many First Nations people today. Two years after the blackout, the surviving characters leave the reservation because they can't bear to stay in a place marked by such loss. Rice uses the characters' sadness to reflect on the pain and loss that still haunts modern-day First Nations people. The story's surviving characters carry "the bad memories and the sadness" with them, suggesting that First Nations people—like the story's surviving characters—still experience trauma today, given the painful losses their people suffered under colonialism. The surviving characters head into the woods without looking back, capturing their dogged resilience to survive despite their pain. Rice writes, "they refused to wither completely, and a core of dedicated people had worked tirelessly to create their own settlement away from this town," capturing First Nations people's determination to survive and keep their culture alive. The survivors leave the reservation because they "couldn't be certain there wouldn't be more visitors," suggesting that their past traumas have also taught First Nations people to be wary of future oppression. Rice leverages the story's conclusion to reflect on modern First Nations people's bittersweet outlook: they draw strength from their survival, but they also carry emotional scars from colonialist oppression.



### SELFISHNESS VS. SELFLESSNESS

*Moon of the Crusted Snow* pays tribute to the Anishinaabe people's strong sense of community.

When power and communications mysteriously go dark, isolating a remote Anishinaabe community from the outside world, the reservation's residents must band together to survive a frigid winter off the grid. Their collective values like sharing food, supporting one another, and caring for the group's most vulnerable members help many people in the community pull through. Several others, however (notably Justin Scott, a visitor in the community) act selfishly. They exploit vulnerable people to service their own needs, and they steal food, eventually causing the community to turn on them. In the end, only the people who prioritize their communal values (like protagonist Evan Whitesky's family) survive to rebuild their society anew. Strong communal values are essential to the group's survival—and such values also help combat the selfish urges that make people turn on one another in times of crisis.

Evan embodies the Anishinaabe people's ethics of sharing and looking out for others. He has the foresight to gather food supplies for the community throughout the year, which helps many people stay alive during the crisis. Evan accounts for others, planning to "share with his parents, his siblings and their families, and his in-laws, and [...] save some for others who might run out before winter's end," noting that this sort of thinking is "the community way." Evan's foresight and communal values end up keeping his family and friends

alive—which, in turn, boosts everyone's morale and ensures Evan's loved ones (and their culture) will live on. Selflessly sharing resources (as opposed to selfishly hoarding them) is the most effective strategy for long-term survival. Similarly, community leaders Terry and Walter allocate canned food reserves according to people's needs, prioritizing children (who need protein to grow) and the elderly (who are less capable of hunting for their own food). Some people object that this strategy is unfair, but Walter interjects, saying "This is a goddamn crisis! We have to act like a community. We're going to support each other until this all gets sorted out." Walter believes that thinking communally is essential to their survival, and that being selfish will cause more deaths in the long run. Ultimately, Walter's prediction proves correct: those who follow his advice and look out for one another (like Evan Whitesky's family) end up surviving the winter. Those who act more selfishly suffer or die, having wrongly believed that selfish behavior would protect them and keep them alive.

Selfish behavior is ultimately futile because it demoralizes other people, causing them to turn on those who act selfishly. An outsider named Justin Scott (who seizes power among a faction of the community) forces his followers to hunt for food but takes most of it for himself. As the winter progresses, Scott's followers grow weaker and less able to hunt, prompting Scott to resort to cannibalism. This suggests that selfish behavior is not a sustainable strategy for people's well-being. A woman named Meghan also reveals that Scott punishes his followers if they don't supply him with food. Scott's exploitative tactics ultimately backfire when Meghan turns on him and shoots him in the back. Scott's fate shows that although a person might assume that they'll get more resources by looking out for themselves above others, selfishness actually sets them back, because it turns people against them. People who unite and care for one another grow closer, stronger, and more resilient—while those who act selfishly create discontentment and chaos, weakening their fragile alliances until they self-implode.



### GENDER, POWER, AND WISDOM

*Moon of the Crusted Snow* offers a cautionary tale against toxic masculinity. The story depicts an Anishinaabe community struggling to survive

through a harsh winter during a **blackout**. Some members of the community (notably protagonist Evan Whitesky's family) respect the wisdom of their eldest community member, a wise old woman named Aileen Jones. Others defer to a younger, stronger, and more aggressive man named Justin Scott. Scott's authority relies on his domineering and abusive form of masculinity: he uses his physical strength, aggression, and fear-mongering to get his way. Aileen, in contrast, is physically unassuming: she's old and frail, and she doesn't survive the winter. Nonetheless, Aileen's emphasis on trusting the elders'

wisdom and nurturing the community's women (who are its spiritual guides and healers) ultimately saves the community. Scott's followers, on the other hand, eventually clash in a deadly confrontation. The book challenges the traditional idea that the most powerful authority figures are young, strong, aggressive men—the story's wise women are actually the community's most powerful assets.

Aileen's character proves that people are wrong to underestimate the elderly, because their wisdom can guide people through difficult times more effectively than physical strength and aggression can. Although Aileen is physically weak, she has a wealth of experience that's essential to the community's survival. Those who listen to her stories take comfort in previous generations' perseverance through hard times. They also learn "critical" skills about "how the old ones lived on the land," which gives them the tools they need to survive the winter. In the community's current circumstances, it's this wisdom and knowledge that will save them—no amount of physical strength or power will help without Aileen's clear direction. Scott, on the other hand, believes that ignoring the elders' advice and intimidating others will protect the community—but his intimidation tactics only cause violent confrontations. When a desperate man named Mark Phillips arrives on the scene, Scott ignores the elders' advice to avoid a violent confrontation and he shoots Phillips dead immediately. He defends his actions by saying, "We gotta make a stand [...] I was protecting us." Scott's decision to resort to brute force is catastrophic: although some people defer to Scott's authority and believe he will protect them, he ends up intimidating and subjugating his followers, leading to a deadly shootout that traumatizes the wider community. This tragic outcome shows that in order to survive challenging circumstances, it's better to trust in wisdom and lived experience rather than shows of physical strength.

The women in the community, not the men, are the effective leaders, which challenges the traditional idea that power and leadership have to be male-oriented. Aileen encourages the community's men to nurture their women and trust in their knowledge as care-givers and medicinal healers, believing that their insights will prove essential to the community's survival. Aileen advises Evan to spend quality time with his partner, Nicole. She tells him to nurture Nicole's well-being and learn from her, because her medicinal knowledge "will be important if we don't get any new supplies in from the hospital down south." Aileen's advice proves crucial, because Nicole ends up sustaining the survivors and leading them to safety with this knowledge. This implies that communities that respect women's skills and intelligence only stand to benefit from their contributions. Scott, in contrast, encourages his followers to undermine and intimidate women—and another man named Brad follows Scott's example. Together, Brad and Scott subjugate Brad's wife, Meghan, forcing her to hunt for rabbits

even though she has no hunting experience. Feeling demoralized and abused, Meghan eventually turns on both of them, shooting Scott in the back and casting Brad out of the community to die in the snow. This suggests that sexism holds communities back and breeds contempt—and that such treatment will inevitably backfire. In the end, the people who embrace Scott's toxic masculine values—centered on physical aggression and sexism—devolve into violent chaos. In contrast, those who respect women and heed the elderly's wisdom end up surviving. This suggests that physical strength is a poor marker of a person's value—it's much wiser to trust those who know the most, regardless of their age or gender.



## SYMBOLS

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



### THE BLACKOUT/APOCALYPSE

The massive electricity blackout, which some characters refer to as an "apocalypse," symbolizes the oppression and trauma that First Nations people have endured since European settlers colonized the Americas. In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, an Anishinaabe community living on a remote reservation struggles to survive a harsh winter after a mysterious catastrophe cuts off their power and communications. The characters eventually learn that the power outage is a global phenomenon—and at the end of the story, the reader learns that the power never comes back on. Many characters struggle with the change in circumstances, which nearly wipes out the indigenous community.

However, Aileen, the community's eldest member and spiritual guide, is adamant that First Nations people have already lived through many apocalypse-like scenarios: they were displaced after European settlers arrived in the Americas, their children were kidnapped and forced into schooling, and their native languages and customs were gradually eroded. Like the wintry apocalypse in the story, the Anishinaabe's "world ended" each time they suffered such losses, leaving behind few survivors to carry their traditions forward and rebuild their culture anew. The book's apocalyptic scenario is a small-scale representation of the centuries-long suffering that First Nations people have endured. This parallel suggests that, like the story's resourceful Anishinaabe survivors, First Nations people in general are resilient and perseverant despite their fractured past.



### SAGE AND TOBACCO

The community's dwindling supply of traditional herbs (primarily sage and tobacco) represents First Nations people's collective loss of their indigenous traditions.



Burning plants and herbs is an important spiritual ritual for the Anishinaabe people. The book's Anishinaabe community's is headed by a spiritual leader (an aging woman named Aileen) who conducts sage rituals to bind the community together, honor nature, and bring good fortune to their leaders. Other community members, notably those who hunt (like Evan and his father, Dan) conduct tobacco rituals to thank "Mother Earth" for providing the community with sustenance. Burning such herbs honors the community's close connection with the land, which is a hallmark of Anishinaabe culture.

Some characters embrace these ceremonies, while others have little patience for them. The mixed reactions to indigenous rituals in the story capture modern-day Anishinaabe people's struggle to thrive in modern society while still preserving their indigenous traditions. And as the harsh winter progresses throughout the book, the herbs people burn—notably tobacco—dwindle in supply. The diminished availability (and, for some characters, the diminished importance) of these sacred ceremonial herbs represents the gradual death of First Nations people's traditions as they've suffered centuries of hardship and oppression.

values. Evan has just taken stock of all the animals he's hunted in preparation for winter, and he notes that he's been gathering food for his whole community. Immediately, Evan is characterized as someone who thinks about the needs of his whole community, especially those who might be vulnerable in the approaching winter. Though Evan doesn't know it yet, the community will soon suffer a devastating blackout that disconnects them from the outside world, and his foresight in gathering food for the community will prove essential in saving many people's lives.

Throughout the story, Rice suggests that such selfless thinking is essential for the community's survival. Evan's tendency to think about the collective needs of others ends up bolstering those in his circle, both practically (with food) and emotionally (with teamwork, which fosters solidarity and good will). This attitude helps them pull together and survive the harsh winter. Others who act more selfishly believe that they're helping themselves by protecting their own needs—but this selfishness gradually demoralizes their group and erodes solidarity, causing more harm than good.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the ECW Press edition of *Moon of the Crusted Snow* published in 2018.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

●● It was more than enough for his own family of four, but he planned to give a lot of the meat away. It was the community way. He would share with his parents, his siblings and their families, and his in-laws, and would save some for others who might run out before winter's end and not be able to afford the expensive ground beef and chicken thighs that were trucked or flown in from the South.

**Related Characters:** Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 5

#### Explanation and Analysis

*Moon of the Crusted Snow* begins with protagonist Evan Whitesky killing a moose in a remote forest as winter approaches. Evan's First Nations community, the Anishinaabe (who live on a remote reservation in Northern Canada near the Arctic Circle) have strong communal

●● "Bad moose meat is always better than a good pork chop[.]"

**Related Characters:** Dan Whitesky (Evan's father) (speaker), Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 6

#### Explanation and Analysis


The story's protagonist, Evan Whitesky, has just shot a moose in the forest, which will help sustain him and his family through a harsh winter. As he approaches the moose to butcher it, Evan reflects on his Anishinaabe cultural values. The Anishinaabe are a First Nations community living in far Northern Canada. Traditionally-minded Anishinaabe people prefer to live off the land and hunt for their food rather than buy meat from the lone general store on their reservation. Recalling this quip from his father, Dan, Evan explains why.

When Evan eats store-bought meat (like the "good pork chop" that Dan mentions), he feels detached from the food. Evan means that even though a pork chop can be very tasty, simply buying it in a store limits his capacity to connect with the land and the ecosystem that the pork came from.

However, when Evan hunts his own meat, he spends time in nature to track an animal that shares his environment. He honors the animal's death with an indigenous ritual and tries to replenish what he's taking from the land. This process helps Evan understand the role he plays in the ecosystem's give-and-take life cycle. He thus feels more closely connected to the land when he hunts his own meat, which, in turn, make it taste more satisfying. Even though an expensive pork chop that's flown into the local general store might technically be a better cut of meat, it doesn't taste as good or carry the same cultural significance as the local moose that Evan hunts himself.

☝ “You're a good man[.]”

**Related Characters:** Nicole McCloud (speaker), Terry Meegis , Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 11

### Explanation and Analysis

Evan has just arrived home after a long hunting day; he's exhausted, and he's going to have a long day of butchering tomorrow. When Evan arrives home, he greets his partner, Nicole, warmly, and she notices how tired he is. Nicole soothes Evan and says he's “a good man” before encouraging him to get some rest. Nicole's attitude is both nurturing and wise: she nurtures Evan by reassuring him that his hard work is meaningful. She also embodies wisdom in reassuring Evan, as she knows that his hunting will sustain many people on their reservation through the winter. Nicole encourages Evan to find meaning in his work, which will bolster his resolve to complete it, even though he's exhausted.

Throughout the story, female Anishinaabe characters tend to embody this nurturing, wise, and compassionate attitude. They soothe the community's men when the men struggle emotionally, and they embody a grounded attitude that helps others find meaning in their struggles. Rice implies that although many of the story's official figureheads (like the reservation chief, Terry) are men, the story's women are actually the ones guiding their actions with wisdom and nurturing support. This suggests that women are the community's most resilient and powerful assets: their support and wisdom inspires people to push on in difficult moments and feel hopeful for the future.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ But the little girl's questions often lingered in Evan's mind long after she asked them, and he believed she held the wisdom of countless generations, despite her youth. She was an old soul. He wanted her to question everything. He wanted her to grow up to be strong and intelligent. He wanted her to be a leader.

**Related Characters:** Evan Whitesky, Maiingan , Nangohns

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 15

### Explanation and Analysis


As Evan heads into his family's shed to butcher the moose he caught yesterday, his three-year-old daughter, Nangohns, wants to see the carcass. Despite her young age, she's clearly curious about the meat's origins and the life cycles of animals. Evan recognizes Nangohns innate intelligence and curiosity about the living ecosystem that sustains the family, and he's set on her becoming a leader in their indigenous community one day.

Evan's attitude toward his daughter is a stark contrast to the patriarchal values that favor young men as leaders. Although Evan also has a five-year-old son, Maiingan, it's Nangohns in whom Evan wants to cultivate strength and leadership. He focuses on Nangohns in this way because her natural curiosity about the ecosystem and their food's life cycle aligns with Anishinaabe values of connecting the community with the land that sustains them. This is why Evan thinks that Nangohns is wise. He respects Nangohns and wants her to be a leader because she's intelligent and an “old soul”— not because she is physically strong or male.

☝ There had been lots of infrastructure improvements on the reserve over the last few years, including their connection to the hydro grid. The old diesel generators that had run their lightbulbs and appliances for decades were still around, but they didn't need them anymore.

**Related Characters:** Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 16

### Explanation and Analysis


Early in the story, Evan Whitesky reveals that his community's remote reservation ran for years without power—they've only been connected to the "hydro grid" (or, modern technological infrastructure) for a few years. The community's experience with off-grid life proves crucial, because they will soon suffer a catastrophic blackout that cuts them off from the outside world for good.


While other towns and cities in the story—which have depended on technology for much longer—devolve into chaos during the blackout, the indigenous community knows that it's possible to live without power. In fact, as the story progresses, Evans connects even more deeply with his indigenous heritage, eventually creating a completely traditional refuge that doesn't rely on any power at all, not even diesel generators. The community's indigenous knowledge—notably the belief that life without power is not only possible but has also sustained their society for generations—helps them remain resilient. Those who are more dependent on technology, in contrast, feel demoralized because they don't know how to live without it. Rice thus suggests that overdependence on technology is limiting, because it disconnects people from their capacity to navigate their natural environment and develop survival skills.

### Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ "I thought all these new dishes and towers and stuff were supposed to be better!"

**Related Characters:** Patricia (Evan's mother) (speaker), Cam Whitesky, Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 24

#### Explanation and Analysis

When Evan goes to visit his parents, his mother, Patricia, jokes with exasperation about the blackout (which started yesterday). Patricia wants to play online games, but she's annoyed that she can't connect to the internet. Patricia's lighthearted frustration, captured here, is telling.

The reservation only connected to the grid—encompassing a hydroelectric power supply, a cellphone tower, and satellite television—a few years ago. This means that Patricia has lived most of her life off the grid, so she's fine living without power. She nonetheless enjoys the


entertainment value that access to communications technology (like the internet) provides her. The outage, thus, isn't devastating so much as annoying for Patricia. She thinks it's an inconvenience to be without the internet, but its absence won't drastically affect her life or make her feel helpless. Patricia's attitude contrasts with her youngest son, Cam's, outlook on technology: he plays online games too, but he plays them all day long and does little else. Cam is far more dependent on technology-fueled entertainment like online games, and he grows depressed without them as the blackout continues.

Patricia's quip also alludes to Rice's overall argument about technology: although much of humanity thinks that advanced technology makes life "better," Rice sees more value in traditional entertainment like storytelling, because technology often fails. Growing overly dependent on technology for entertainment is a bad idea, because it's not reliable.

### Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ When Evan had been out on the land learning real survival skills with his father and uncles as a teenager, Cam had chosen to stay behind, learning simulated ones in video games.

**Related Characters:** Cam Whitesky, Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 34

#### Explanation and Analysis

Early in the story, Evan Whitesky, who's in his mid-twenties, reflects on the differences between himself and his brother Cam, who's two years younger. Although the young men are close in age, they embody completely different lifestyles: Evan spent his teenage years learning traditional Anishinaabe skills centered on survival, and he's able to sustain himself and his family using his natural environment instead of modern infrastructure. Cam, on the other hand, spent his childhood playing video games.

Cam relies on modern conveniences to get by in his day-to-day life. He plays video games for entertainment, uses the recently connected hydroelectric grid's power supply to fuel his appliances, and buys food from the reservation's general store. Evan, meanwhile, prefers to hunt food, chop wood for fuel, and share indigenous stories for entertainment. Rice suggests here that Evan used his time wisely, by learning practical survival skills, while Cam wasted his, lazily relying on modern conveniences to get by.


In the end, Cam's laziness backfires: when the power goes out for good, he struggles to adjust to life off the grid.


Rice uses Cam's story as a cautionary tale against laziness, which he thinks technology-dependent living encourages. Rice implies that it's foolish to be lazy and rely on modern conveniences to get by, because technology is a relatively recent addition to human culture. It's unreliable, and it might not be sustainable (considering how many resources technology-dependent societies need to keep their infrastructures running). Rice suggests that an indigenous lifestyle—which warns against laziness and keeps time-honored customs alive—is a better model for how to live, because it's already stood the test of time.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

“Yeah, all moccasin telegraph all the time these days.”

**Related Characters:** Isaiah North (speaker), Terry Meegis, Nicole McCloud, Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 35

### Explanation and Analysis

The blackout has been going on for a couple days, so Evan's friend Isaiah North has walked over to tell Evan about an upcoming community meeting. At the meeting, the reservation's chief, Terry Meegis, will discuss the outage. Isaiah jokes that he's spreading news about the meeting through the “moccasin telegraph,” which means that people on the reservation are used to walking to people's houses (in their “moccasin” shoes) and spreading news by word of mouth. So, instead of transmitting information by using technology as a “telegraph” would, they transmit information much slower, in person and on foot.


The irony, however, is that the “moccasin telegraph” is the most reliable form of communication on the reservation. Sharing information by word-of-mouth doesn't demand technology (like phone lines, electricity, or satellite signals), meaning that it's always possible, no matter what state the reservation's technological infrastructure is in. Since the power has been out for a couple of days, everyone is using the “moccasin telegraph” to communicate. This suggests that, by leaning on the customs they've used for generations, the community adapts easily without technology.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

When the ancestors of these Anishinaabe people were forced to settle in this unfamiliar land, distant from their traditional home near the Great Lakes, their culture withered under the pressure of the incomers' Christianity. But people like Aileen [...] had kept the old ways alive in secret. They whispered the stories and the language in each other's ears, even when they were stolen from their families to endure forced and often violent assimilation at church-run residential schools far away from their homes. They had held out hope that one day their beautiful ways would be able to reemerge and flourish once again.

**Related Characters:** Aileen Jones

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 53

### Explanation and Analysis


Aileen Jones is the community's oldest member and its spiritual guide. Rice leverages Aileen's character to expose the hardships that the Anishinaabe people faced under colonialist oppression. Here, Aileen is blessing a meeting using a traditional Anishinaabe sage smudging ceremony. The Anishinaabe are a traditional First Nations community whose ancestral home is in Southern Canada, near the Great Lakes. Beginning in the 17th century, European settlers displaced the community, who then fled to the remote northern reaches of Canada, near the Arctic Circle.


Rice argues that “old ways,” like the sage ceremony, were brutally suppressed under colonialist oppression, because incoming settlers were keen to establish Christianity as the region's dominant religion. Settlers banned indigenous ceremonies and kidnapped indigenous children (like Aileen's parents), forcibly schooling them according to Christianity's doctrines. The indigenous community thus had to keep their heritage alive in secret. Rice suggests that the Anishinaabe culture “withered,” because the only traditional customs and rituals that survived were those that a handful of people (like Aileen's parents) were able to pass on before they died. Despite this brutal suppression, the community remain resilient, believing that their culture will “flourish” once again.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ “The food’s all gone. The power’s out. There’s no gas. There’s been no word from Toronto or anywhere else. People are looting and getting violent. We had to get the fuck out of there.”

**Related Characters:** Nick Jonas (speaker), Isaiah North, Evan Whitesky, Kevin

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 75

### Explanation and Analysis

Within a week of the blackout’s onset, Evan and Isaiah spot two snowmobiles in the distance. They soon realize the drivers are two local teenagers, Nick Jonas and his friend Kevin. These two young men were attending boarding school in Gibson, the nearest town, 300 kilometers south of the reservation. Rice uses Nick and Kevin’s return to reveal information about how the outside world is coping in light of the blackout.

Nick explains that Gibson lost power and Gibson’s residents grew impatient without news about why the blackout occurred and when it would be over. Soon enough, people began looting and hoarding food and fuel, resulting in widespread violence. While the Anishinaabe have planned ahead, pulled together, and worked as a team to weather the blackout, the exact opposite happened in Gibson. The indigenous Anishinaabe community are used to living without power, advanced technology, and modern amenities, so they already know how to function without these things. Therefore, they’re easily able to adapt by simply reverting to living as they did when the reservation was off-grid. Moreover, Anishinaabe culture is rooted in forward thinking and planning for unforeseen circumstances, so they have plenty of food and fuel reserves. As a rule, the Anishinaabe don’t assume that modern conveniences (like the power grid or the general store) will always be around. Gibson’s residents, in contrast, panic because they don’t have any idea how to get by without technology.


Through these difference, Rice suggests that many modern societies are overly dependent on technology and complex infrastructure—which is a mistake, because technology is unreliable. It’s therefore important to remember that humanity is perfectly capable of surviving (and even thriving) without modern amenities—just as the Anishinaabe do.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ “Some kids started getting angry, yelling that they wanted a shower or hot food [...] We thought it was all pretty dumb, so we just went back to our rooms.”

**Related Characters:** Nick Jonas (speaker), Kevin

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 80

### Explanation and Analysis

Nick Jonas and his friend Kevin have just escaped Gibson, which quickly devolved into chaos after the blackout began. Now, Nick is relating their ordeal to the community. Nick explains that when the power went out in Gibson, many students at their school grew irate because they couldn’t access amenities they were used to, like showers and hot food. Within a few days, their anger morphed into desperation and fear, which clouded their judgment. One student overdosed in his room, and others wandered into the snow to die. Rice implies that the student’s dependence on modern amenities weakened their emotional resolve, leaving them vulnerable during the blackout.


Nick and Kevin, meanwhile, found the students’ emotionally charged responses to the situation absurd. They remained calm, stayed patient, conserved energy, and successfully planned an exit strategy. This juxtaposition suggests that the instant gratification of technology undermines a person’s resilience. People who are used to getting whatever they want, without waiting for it, often struggle in situations that demand patience and clear-headed thinking.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ “We’re in a crisis and everyone’s survival depends on cooperation.”

**Related Characters:** Terry Meegis (speaker), Walter

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 175

### Explanation and Analysis

As the blackout continues, the reservation’s chief, Terry


Meegis, discusses his plan to support the community for the next few months with backup diesel generators. Terry wants to be transparent with the community that they only have enough diesel to power the reservation for a few months. Walter, on the other hand, is wary about letting the community know exactly how much fuel they have left, thinking that people might panic if they know it's going to run out. Here, Terry reveals that he's convinced the community will band together if they have the full picture. This way, they'll take his request to conserve energy more seriously, which will help everybody in the long run. Terry trusts in the community's ability to rally around one another, while Walter is more hesitant.


It turns out that both men are right: as the story progresses, some people ramp up their efforts to think and act as a community, and they share their resources, keeping the community's collective well-being in mind. Others act more selfishly, hoard their supplies, and try to steal from others. In the end, those who act more communally weather the crisis much better. Their communal values foster solidarity, which helps them cope emotionally. The more selfish individuals, however, grow isolated and despondent as the winter wears on. Rice suggests here that although a person might think that being selfish will benefit them in a crisis, it actually won't. "[M]utual cooperation," in contrast, fosters solidarity. This, in turn, bolsters a people's emotional strength in times of crisis despite their personal sacrifices, leaving them better off in the long run.

## Chapter 16 Quotes

●● His rough, meaty palm dwarfed Evan's. The handshake was half goodwill, half intimidation.

**Related Characters:** Terry Meegis , Aileen Jones , Cam Whitesky , Evan Whitesky, Justin Scott

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 102

### Explanation and Analysis

A few weeks into the blackout, a stranger named Justin Scott arrives, seeking refuge on the reservation. Justin Scott is the story's antagonist, and he embodies toxic masculine values: he thinks he's better than other people because he's a physically imposing man. He also uses his physical stature to intimidate others who are physically

smaller than him, like Evan (as noted here). Scott's also rash and aggressive, establishing his authority using violence and fear-mongering. He knows that he can get away with such behavior because of his large size in comparison to the other characters, who are often scared that he'll strike them.

Rice tends to describe the story's other characters in terms of their personalities. For example, Cam is lazy and doesn't take life too seriously. Aileen is stoic, optimistic, and wise. Terry is deeply compassionate but somewhat meek. In contrast, Rice always describes Scott in terms of his intimidating physicality, as he does here, when introducing Scott into the story. Scott's conception of himself is intimately tied to his physical stature, and that he uses his imposing size to manipulate others into doing his bidding.

## Chapter 21 Quotes

●● "We gotta make a stand [...] I was protecting us."

**Related Characters:** Justin Scott (speaker), Alex Richer , Brad Connor , Meghan Connor , Walter , Terry Meegis , Mark Phillips

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 141

### Explanation and Analysis

Early in the winter, a man named Mark Phillips arrives on the reservation, along with Meghan Connor, her husband Brad, and another man named Alex Richer. These people desperately begging for refuge on the reservation. Terry doesn't want to leave them in the cold to die, but he also knows that more people will put a strain on the community's dwindling resources. But before Terry and Walter decide what to do, Scott interjects and shoots Phillips dead. Scott explains, in this quote, that he meant well—he thinks that the community needs to scare off others seeking refuge (even though he himself is an outsider).


Scott's response to a confrontation is violent and rash; he decides that he's physically bigger and stronger than the others and therefore knows best. He responds impulsively and aggressively instead of heeding the advice of Terry and Walter, who want to avoid a violent confrontation. Scott's aggressive behavior impresses some people, but he ultimately ends up subjugating everybody who follows him (except other young, physically strong men like Brad and Alex). Many of the reservation's residents feel that Scott's aggressive behavior will protect them against outside


threats. However, when Scott turns his aggression toward his followers, they realize that he's the biggest threat of all. Rice thus cautions against trusting people who derive their authority from physical intimidation, aggression, and rash behavior. It's better to trust people who are wiser, more experienced, and less confrontational (like Terry and Walter).

## Chapter 22 Quotes

☝ “Well, you make sure you spend some time with her. Go for a walk in the bush. When the spring comes, ask her to show you some of the medicines. She'll know a lot now, if she remembers all the stuff from when I used to take her and all the young girls out there. It will be important if we don't get any new supplies in from the hospital down south.”

**Related Characters:** Aileen Jones (speaker), Evan Whitesky, Nicole McCloud

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 147

### Explanation and Analysis

In the middle of the long winter, Evan visits the community's eldest member, Aileen Jones. Aileen is the wisest person in the community, and she has the most traditional Anishinaabe knowledge—she thus functions as the community's spiritual guide. While some members of the community are more skeptical of Aileen's guidance, Evan takes her advice very seriously and makes decisions based on her wisdom as he serves the community during the blizzard and blackout. Although Evan is unofficially in charge of managing the crisis, he takes all his advice from Aileen, because she knows the most—despite her unassuming stature as a frail old woman.


Here, Aileen advises Evan to nurture his partner, Nicole, whose indigenous healing knowledge will be essential in the future if the power never comes back on. Aileen has been training Nicole to be the community's next spiritual leader, and she thinks that Nicole's influence on the community is essential to the everyone's survival. Aileen's advice embodies the opposite of a patriarchal attitude toward power. Rice suggests that while many patriarchal societies privilege the authority of young, physically strong men, the Anishinaabe believe that it's essential to nurture and empower women, because they are the community's

traditional healers and spiritual guides.

☝ “You know, when young people come over, some of them [...] say that this is the end of the world. The power's out and we've run out of gas and no one's come up from down south. [...] There's a word they say too [...] Yes, apocalypse! What a silly word. [...] Our world isn't ending. It already ended. It ended when the Zhaagnaash [white person] came into our original home down south on that bay and took it from us. [...] But then they followed us up here and started taking our children away from us! That's when our world ended again. [...] We've had that over and over. But we always survived. We're still here. And we'll still be here, even if the power and the radios don't come back on and we never see any white people ever again.”

**Related Characters:** Aileen Jones (speaker), Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 149

### Explanation and Analysis



One night, in the middle of the harsh, long winter, Aileen has a chat with Evan, who's come to pay her a visit. Aileen is confused about why young people keep referring to the winter as the “apocalypse.” The word “apocalypse” implies that the Anishinaabe's world is ending, meaning that this winter will destroy them all for good. Aileen's confusion stems from the fact that knows the indigenous community has a strong survival instinct. She explains that the Anishinaabe faced many similar hardships—or situations when “the world ended”—under colonialist oppression.

In comparing the so-called “apocalypse” that the community is currently enduring with the trials they faced under colonialism, Rice implies that the book is a metaphor for First Nations people's oppression under settler colonialism. Aileen explains that the Anishinaabe were pushed to the brink of extinction by displacement, kidnapping, and other horrors many times over— but they “always survived.” Aileen's reflection thus captures First Nations people's suffering and intergenerational trauma, as well as their dogged resilience to survive such losses.

## Chapter 23 Quotes

“Scott’s a fucking asshole. [...] he orders us around. He threatens us. And the worst part is, Brad has totally fallen in line [...] And sometimes I catch Scott staring at me. It really creeps me out.”

**Related Characters:** Meghan Connor (speaker), Nicole McCloud, Brad Connor, Justin Scott

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 161


**Explanation and Analysis**

One day, sometime in February or March, Nicole bumps into Meghan Connor while talking a walk in the snow. Meghan is fumbling with rabbit snares, and she looks malnourished and traumatized. Meghan arrived on the reservation seeking refuge earlier in the winter, and she’s living in a bungalow complex where antagonist Justin Scott is in charge. Here, Meghan blurts out that Scott is subjugating her using intimidation tactics and threats of violence.

Through Meghan’s reflections, it’s clear that Scott has a toxic attitude when it comes to leadership. He thinks that he deserves to be in charge because he’s physically bigger and stronger than his followers, and he forces them to submit to his authority using intimidation tactics like threats of violence. Scott also derives a sense of superiority from being male, which is why he’s sexist and encourages other men (like Meghan’s husband, Brad) to dominate women as well. Rice uses Scott’s behavior to criticize abusive patriarchal authority figures. Rice also subtly implies that Scott’s aggressive leadership strategy is a bad idea, because he subjugates his followers, thus making them hate him. If Scott’s followers hate him, as Meghan now does, they’ll likely be quick to turn on him, thus undermining his leadership. Rice therefore thinks that sexism has no place in leadership.

“And it’s weird—he seems to be getting bigger, though I know that’s not possible. Probably it’s just the rest of us are getting skinnier.”

**Related Characters:** Meghan Connor (speaker), Nicole McCloud, Justin Scott

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 161

**Explanation and Analysis**

Meghan Connor, a settler in the community that’s living under antagonist Justin Scott’s authority, has just explained to Nicole that Scott is terrorizing his followers. Essentially, he’s forcing those who are physically weaker and smaller than him to do his bidding. Now, Meghan explains that Scott also hoards all the food and wood that he makes his followers collect; they are growing “skinnier,” while Scott seems to be getting “bigger.”


Scott—who’s a domineering and aggressive authority figure—is exploiting his followers in order to preserve his own well-being. Under his authority, his faction of the community has grown sick, weak, and dangerously malnourished. Soon, they’ll be too weak to do his bidding. Scott thinks that being selfish will help him grow more powerful, but he overlooks how much he exploits his followers, and he doesn’t realize that they won’t be able to serve him if they are sick and dying. As the winter progresses, several of his followers disband and seek refuge elsewhere, in order to save their own lives. Thus, Scott’s faction shrinks, and his power diminishes. Although Scott thinks that his selfish behavior will benefit him, it actually undermines his power in the long run. This suggests that selfishness is a poor leadership strategy, as selfish leaders inevitably lose the support of their followers and fail.

## Chapter 25 Quotes

“Do you kids know the one about Nanabush and the geese?”

**Related Characters:** Dan Whitesky (Evan’s father) (speaker), Patricia (Evan’s mother), Nanabush, Nicole McCloud, Evan Whitesky, Maiingan, Nangohns

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 170

**Explanation and Analysis**


During the blackout, Dan entertains his family by telling them an amusing indigenous myth about a character named Nanabush. The funny and entertaining myth cheers up the family, helping them feel better able to face the many long nights they have ahead of them. This suggests that although many people in the community are growing bored and dejected without technology to keep them busy during the



blackout, they don't actually need to feel so demoralized. In fact, there are many ways in which people can entertain one another, like traditional storytelling, that don't involve advanced technology. The community's dependence on technology has largely disconnected them from traditional Anishinaabe practices (like storytelling) that have sustained countless generations of people on many cold winter nights. Rice implies that it's a safer bet to trust in such traditions, because they don't rely on complex external infrastructure (like a working power grid) to function, meaning that they're more reliable.

☝ “Don't be greedy!”

**Related Characters:** Maiingan (speaker), Patricia (Evan's mother), Dan Whitesky (Evan's father), Nicole McCloud, Evan Whitesky, Nangohns, Nanabush

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 174

### Explanation and Analysis

Dan has just finished telling his extended family a humorous Anishinaabe myth about a mythical character named Nanabush. In the story, winter is approaching, and Nanabush spots a large group of geese. He greedily kills them all, even though he doesn't need that many geese to survive. When Nanabush falls asleep, somebody steals all the geese, leaving him no food for the winter, since there are no geese left to hunt. Evan asks the children if they understand the moral of the story, and Maiingan responds, “Don't be greedy!”

Rice uses the story of Nanabush to warn against the dangers of exploiting nature—which, of course, sustains life. Rice thinks that many human societies over-reap the land, depleting its food and fuel supplies without thinking about conserving for the future. To Rice, this is a bad idea, because—as the story shows—taking too much from the Earth might prevent it from providing sustenance in the future. Rice thinks that technology-dependent living enables the kind of exploitation he worries about. People often disrupt natural ecosystems to build complex infrastructure (like towns, cities, and power grids) and then relentlessly mine the land for fuel to power vast cities. Rice worries that humanity's exploitation of the Earth's ecosystem might deplete it so badly that we'll end up turning it into an environment that can't sustain us, thereby limiting our future chances of survival. Rice believes that it's better to seek more modest sustenance from the Earth,


because this helps keep its living ecosystems in balance, thereby ensuring that the Earth will continue to provide for humanity as it has done before. Thus, Rice leverages Dan's story to offer a message for humanity: “Don't be greedy!”

## Chapter 29 Quotes

☝ She had been his surrogate grandmother, his go-to elder whenever he had questions about the old ways, and he had loved her. [...] The smell of sage smudge lingered in his nose, and the travelling song her family had sung for her rang in his ears.

**Related Characters:** Justin Scott, Aileen Jones, Evan Whitesky

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 193

### Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of the story, Aileen (the community's spiritual elder) dies. In this passage, Evan is collecting her body while grappling with his overwhelming grief. Evan had a deep, loving relationship with Aileen—she was like a close family member to him, so his grief over losing her is intense. The loss is even harder for Evan to bear because it's intermingled with his sense of cultural loss.


Evan looked to Aileen for guidance, and she taught him many things about his culture that he didn't know before, including sage and tobacco rituals and much their indigenous Anishinaabemowin language. Though Evan strove to reconnect with his culture a few years ago, he knows that there are many things he has yet to learn. Aileen's death disconnects Evan from that knowledge, since nobody else knows it. She was one of a handful of people who kept the Anishinaabe traditions alive in secret when they were banned under colonialism.

The story itself is an allegory for colonialist oppression (reenacted by antagonist Justin Scott, a settler in the community who ends up subjugating and terrorizing them) and its hardships (represented by the harsh, almost unbearable winter). Aileen's death is also allegorical: it symbolizes the cultural losses that First Nations people endured under colonialist oppression, as their culture was gradually erased. Evan knows that many aspects of his cultural heritage are lost forever now that Aileen is dead.

The remnants of Evan’s culture that live on in him are analogous to the lingering smell of sage in his nose. In the story, sage and tobacco represent indigenous knowledge. Evan thus feels like he only knows a mere shadow of his heritage, symbolized by the last remnants of sage smoke lingering in his nose. He yearns for more, but it’s been lost forever now that Aileen is gone. Rice thus communicates that modern First Nations people grapple with incredible grief over the cultural losses they suffered under colonialist oppression.

“No, they won’t listen to us. They’ll just call another damn meeting and do nothing. This is up to us.”

**Related Characters:** Evan Whitesky (speaker), Aileen Jones, Justin Scott

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 197

### Explanation and Analysis


As the book approaches its climax, Evan discovers that Scott stole a dead body, presumably to cannibalize it. Evan makes the discovery while he’s overwhelmed with grief from all the deaths he’s seen this winter. Aileen, the story’s spiritual guide, has just died. Her death symbolizes the profound cultural losses that First Nations people faced from the erasure of their culture under colonialism. Evan’s feelings is complex, multifaceted, and overwhelming: he’s grappling with personal grief as well as grief for his culture. In addition to losing Aileen, he’s lost the indigenous knowledge that elders like Aileen hadn’t yet passed on before they died. This pain clouds Evan’s judgment, and he can’t think straight. So, he rashly decides to confront Scott, who ends up shooting Evan.

Throughout the story, Evan has acted cautiously and moderately, always seeking advice from his elders before acting and trusting in their wisdom. Here, his grief makes him act rashly, even though he knows he shouldn’t. This quote captures Evan’s clouded decision-making. Rice suggests, through Evan’s actions, that modern First Nations people bear a tremendous weight from the pain of their history, which still impacts their lives today. This suggests that just as colonialist oppression took many lives in the past, its lasting trauma continues to cripple many First Nations people’s lives today.

## Chapter 30 Quotes

“As Scott turned to fire on Tyler and Isaiah, his head burst open above his left eye in a spray of blood, bone, and brain. He fell forward. Meghan Connor stood on the back porch with the rifle sight up to her eye. [...] Scott lay face down, motionless, as blood leaked from his head into the snow, spreading crimson across the white. [...] Isiah [...] looked to Meghan on the porch, still holding her rifle. She nodded, and trained her gun on her husband and his friend, who froze in place.”

**Related Characters:** Alex Richer, Brad Connor, Tyler, Isaiah North, Evan Whitesky, Justin Scott, Meghan Connor

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 203

### Explanation and Analysis

At the book’s climax, Evan, Isaiah, and Tyler confront Justin Scott, knowing that he’s stolen a dead body to cannibalize it. Though they want to avoid a violent confrontation, the situation escalates, and Scott shoots Evan. Before Scott can shoot anybody else, however, his “head burst[s] open.” Meghan Connor—one of his own followers—has killed him. The quotation also shows that she’s turned against her husband, Brad, and his friend Alex.

Meghan kills Scott because he abused and oppressed her. Scott’s sexist attitude encouraged his male followers—including Brad—to force Megan to gather food for them. They also hoarded the food for themselves and threatened Meghan with violence. Over time, Meghan grew to hate her abusers, and she seizes this opportunity to kill Scott and cast Brad and Alex out of the community. Through Meghan’s actions, Rice argues that subjugation only breeds contempt. Although Scott thinks he’ll benefit from oppressing Meghan, he overlooks how much hatred he’s inciting in her. Scott fails to realize that Meghan is waiting for her opportunity to turn on him and escape her own subjugation. This suggests that exploitative leadership tactics (like those Scott embodies) ultimately backfire. Leaders who exploit their power are vulnerable to the hostility of those they exploit, ultimately limiting their own success.

## Epilogue: Ziigwaan (Spring) Quotes

☛ Their ancestors were displaced from their original homeland in the South and the white people who forced them here had never intended for them to survive. [...] But they refused to wither completely, and a core of dedicated people had worked tirelessly to create their own settlement away from this town.

**Related Characters:** Patricia (Evan's mother) , Dan Whitesky (Evan's father), Aileen Jones , Maiingan , Nangohns, Nicole McCloud

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 212

### Explanation and Analysis


The book's Epilogue shows the Anishinaabe two years after the harsh winter that almost wiped out their community. Here, Rice reinforces how the book functions as parable capturing the harms of colonialist oppression on First Nations people. When early European settlers first arrived in the Americas, they inflicted tremendous violence on First Nations communities, forcing them to flee.

Similarly, the Epilogue shows the people who survived the winter—notably Nicole, her children, and Evan and Nicole's parents—packing up to relocate. The losses they endured throughout the harsh winter, and throughout Justin Scott's violent intrusion into their community, fill the reservation with sadness—the survivors believe they cannot survive their pain if they stay here. As Nicole surveys her old home one last time, she decides (echoing Aileen's earlier sentiments) that it's best not to be nostalgic about the reservation, since it was created by people who were themselves displaced by violence, tragedy, and oppression. Nicole's actions thus reenact the original displacement that drove the Anishinaabe deep into Northern Canada. Like her ancestors, Nicole's life is permanently marked by sadness (from all the lives her community lost), but she remains resilient—she's determined to rebuild her community anew elsewhere, with the other survivors. Nicole and the other survivors' departure is sad but also optimistic: she knows that they've survived such hardships before, and that they will again.

☛ No one wanted to deal with any more of them. Not now.

**Related Characters:** Patricia (Evan's mother) , Dan Whitesky (Evan's father), Justin Scott, Maiingan , Nangohns, Nicole McCloud

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 212

### Explanation and Analysis

In the Epilogue, two years after the disastrous winter that kills off most of the Anishinaabe community, the survivors (led by Nicole and her surviving family members) abandon the reservation and relocate somewhere more remote. The survivors leave partly because they've struggled to rebuild their community in a place that endured so much violence and loss (much like previous generations of First Nations people did when they fled their ancestral homelands amidst colonialist oppression).

But—like their ancestors—the survivors also have a pragmatic motivation. In the story, the power never came back on; survivors assume that modern civilization has collapsed into anarchy, though they have no contact with the outside world. In this quote, Rice explains why they'd rather keep things that way: outsiders like Justin Scott, who fled their own chaotic towns during the blackout (much like early settlers, who fled oppression in Europe) attempted to settle among the Anishinaabe. But these people ended up terrorizing the indigenous community, leaving a trail of death and destruction behind. The story's survivors, like their ancestors, anticipate a “mass migration” of people seeking refuge in their community, so they decide to flee further northward into the unforgiving Arctic Circle, knowing that they can survive in more remote territory and that they'll likely avoid running into more “visitors” there. The Epilogue thus expands on how First Nations people were displaced under colonialism.

With this, Rice implies that modern First Nations people (like the story's survivors) have a complex outlook toward the modern world. Their perspective is rooted in sadness (given their losses under colonialist oppression), optimism (given their resilient survival), and wariness about trusting non-indigenous people. First Nations communities today are wary of outsiders in their communities, because they still live with the wounds that were inflicted on their people centuries ago.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

## CHAPTER 1

In a pine forest, Evan Whitesky shoots and takes down a moose. This makes Evan happy—the extra food will be helpful in the winter. He pulls out a worn leather pouch and pinches some **tobacco** from it. He bounces the tobacco in his hand, makes a fist around it, and says a prayer—mostly in English, with some Ojibwe words sprinkled in. Evan prays for a bountiful season for his community and places the tobacco on the ground. It's a customary for Anishinaabe hunters to make a tobacco offering to the Earth for each kill.

Evan's father (Dan) taught Evan how to hunt when he was little, and he's been hunting ever since. Evan has done well this season: he's caught several moose, as well as geese, rabbits, and lots of fish. That's more than his family needs, so he'll share the rest with the community; meat that's flown in from the South is expensive. Evan also finds that the meat he hunts himself more satisfying, because hunting is an Anishinaabe tradition. Presently, he flips open his razor knife and cuts through the moose's skin, exposing the muscle, before severing the moose's hind quarter. He lugs sections of the moose over to his truck, piece by piece, as the sun sets.

After cutting up the moose, Evan pulls up to his simple house, noticing that the bedroom lights are off. His son Maiingan and daughter Nangohns must be asleep. Evan lugs the moose carcass to the shed, where it'll sit until he can finish butchering it. Inside the house, Evan is surprised that it's so quiet—but his partner, Nicole, explains that the satellite went offline, so there's no television signal. Nicole cheers excitedly when Evan says he caught a moose. Evan reaches for a charger to plug in his phone. Nicole teases him for a kiss, and Evan happily complies.

*The Anishinaabe people are a First Nations community from Canada. Rice also refers to Anishinaabe using the word "Ojibwe." Evan is Anishinaabe, and through his hunting, Rice establishes the fact that living off the land is an important facet of Anishinaabe culture. The tobacco ritual reminds the Anishinaabe to give something back to the land every time they take something from it, and to avoid needlessly exploiting its resources. Evan's struggle to remember the ritual in his indigenous language suggests that a lot of indigenous knowledge has been lost to history, and that modern-day Anishinaabe people like Evan are torn between tradition and modern life.*



*Evan's foresight in hunting throughout the year speaks to the importance Anishinaabe culture places on working hard and planning for unforeseen circumstances. Evan also embodies communal thinking, another important facet of Anishinaabe culture: he hunts with others in mind and plans to share his bounties rather than hoard them for himself.*



*Rice hints that there's some kind of signal outage happening on the reservation—though the electricity still seems to be working, as Evan is able to charge his phone. Evan and Nicole's ease in adapting to a night without television suggests that they are not overly dependent on technology. Rice also emphasizes the supportive and nurturing bond between Evan and Nicole—Evan clearly respects Nicole similarly to how he respects nature, suggesting that dynamic is another important facet of Anishinaabe culture.*



Evan and Nicole have known each other for as long as Evan can remember; all his childhood memories are intertwined with memories of her. He remembers her teasing him about his baggy overalls and bowl haircut on the first day of kindergarten. He also remembers being so shy that he cried for his mother on the first day. They were a couple by high school, and they had two children after Nicole went to college in the South: Maiingan (who's five) and Nangohns (who's three). Evan hunts to provide for them.

Evan decides to finish butchering the moose in the morning—he'll use one of his allotted hunting days from his maintenance job in the community. Nicole jokes that Evan will have to entertain her now that the television is busted, and he chuckles. In a few weeks, winter will set in, which means heavy snow and six months of isolation for their remote northern village. Evan decides to rest, knowing there's a big day of butchering ahead. Nicole is on the same page: they need to prepare for the harsh winter.

## CHAPTER 2

The alarm goes off at 6:30. Evan is still groggy, so Nicole offers to get the kids up. Evan hears the kids chatting and guesses that the television signal is still out. He throws on some clothes, greets his son and daughter warmly, and looks out the window, envying trees and bears because they can hibernate through the harsh winters. Evan sips on hot coffee and checks his phone: there are no notifications. Then, he realizes there's no cell service, which happens often on the reservation. Contractors from the south only built the phone tower a few years ago, so they could have service while building a dam—now, the people on the reservation use it, though the signal is spotty at best.

Evan chats with the children, explaining that a moose gave himself to the family yesterday, so Evan has lots of work to do today. The kids are eager for their first hunt, which makes Evan reminisce about his years of learning the land before his own first hunt as a child. He didn't even know about the **tobacco** ritual back then—not until an elder told him about it many years later. Nicole emerges in jeans and a hoodie as Evan plugs in the sink's hot water supply to do the dishes, wondering how long the cellphone service will be down.

*Evan and Nicole have a long history rooted in growing up in a close-knit community. That Nicole is the high achiever of the duo (given her college education) also implies that women are strong figures in this community. Evan is also not afraid of showing his vulnerability in acknowledging his childhood lack of confidence. This establishes Evan as someone who is comfortable with emotional vulnerability and who sees women as his equals.*



*Winters in this remote region are difficult and isolating, so Evan and Nicole are being diligent in preparing for the rough season ahead. Their preparedness (a hallmark of Anishinaabe values) will soon prove crucial to their survival during the fast-approaching winter. And even though their satellite service is still out, neither of them are particularly bothered—they don't rely on technology to keep them entertained or happy.*



*Evan doesn't seem worried, despite the ongoing satellite and cell signal outage. Through Evan's reflections, Rice reveals that the reservation only went on the grid a few years ago—meaning that many people (especially the older members of the community) are used to living without power. Evan and Nicole's are obviously comfortable going about their daily lives without power, again showing that they're not overly dependent on technology.*



*Evan doesn't think that the Earth's ecosystem is his to exploit as he wishes—he emphasizes that the moose gave itself to the family, meaning that he thinks of the moose as a gift from the land. Evan only learned about the tobacco ritual a few years ago, suggesting that many indigenous people don't know much about their own history. Rice hints here that indigenous traditions have to be revived because they were once suppressed or lost to future generations. The tobacco ritual symbolizes indigenous knowledge and traditions, which have dwindled since First Nations people first experienced colonialist oppression centuries ago.*



Nangohns wants to see the moose; Evan looks warmly at her and gently tells her that it's not ready yet. Nangohns's pigtailed stick out like antennas, but despite her innocent appearance, she often asks wise and lingering questions. Evan believes that Nangohns carries the wisdom of many generations, and she'll be a leader one day. Without the blare of the television, the morning is eerily quiet, though nobody seems to mind. Evan watches Nicole with the children, feeling happy that she guides them with patience and respect, just like the teachings he's learning.

Nicole takes Maiingan to school. The school is simple and small, but the people on the reservation are happy to finally have a proper building. When Evan and Nicole were young, there was far less infrastructure: they went to school in moldy makeshift rooms connected to diesel generators, which ran on fuel that was trucked in. The community is connected to the grid now, and Evan is happy that things are better for his kids. There's also a new service road that connects the community to a highway 300 kilometers away, though bad weather still blocks access sometimes.

When Nicole returns, Evan heads into the chilly shed to tackle the moose. He smells the scent of dying leaves and instinctively looks south when he hears an engine in the distance. His friend Isaiah North approaches on a truck. Isaiah has been curious to hear how Evan's hunt went, but he has no cell service either, so he drove over instead. Evan teases Isaiah about giving him only the paltry back strips of the moose, and Isaiah playfully punches Evan's shoulder. The two joke lightheartedly as they head in to butcher the moose together.

### CHAPTER 3

The days have been getting shorter, but so far, the sunny autumn has kept winter at bay. Evan sighs as he looks at the blank television and his blank cell phone screen. He thinks that the weather might be responsible for the outage, but Isaiah thinks it's probably just the reservation's bad receivers. Evan grabs two large bags of moose meat for his parents and throws them into his truck. He tunes the car radio to 98.1 FM (the reservation's community station) while joking about going back in time with just a radio for entertainment.

*Evan acknowledges Nangohns's innate intelligence, and he's confident that she'll be a leader when she grows up. Nicole is also a leader in this family, guiding her loved ones with her knowledge of indigenous traditions. Together, Evan's attitudes toward Nangohns and Nicole emphasize the importance of women in their family unit and their culture more broadly. Evan and Nicole continue to adjust easily without the television because they can lean on practices like traditional storytelling, which Nicole uses to entertain the children this morning.*



*The reservation's infrastructure is relatively new, and people living there managed for years without being connected to the power grid—even if things weren't perfect. Evan's happiness that his children have better facilities suggests that he has a conflicted perspective about technology: he doesn't need it to get by, but he's nonetheless happy about how its conveniences make life easier for his children. Rice suggests here that it's easy to be seduced by technology's luxuries—even people like Evan, who are wary about technology, are susceptible to becoming too reliant on it.*



*Evan has cultivated strong survival skills rooted in a close connection to the land and reading the landscape—he can smell the time of year and hear distant noises that warn him of others' presence. People on the reservation continue to adapt to the communications outage without much fuss. Isaiah simply drives over instead of calling, just as he used to before the local cellphone tower was installed. Isaiah embodies community values: he's checking in on Evan, and he's proactively come to help butcher the moose. Similarly, Evan plans to share moose cuts with his friends and family, highlighting his community-oriented thinking.*



*The continued outage is a nuisance, but Evan's ability to entertain himself without technology shows that he's not dependent on it to feel good. Evan's quip about going back in time is ominous, as it foreshadows that the community may soon need to do just that—and rely on their ability to live without technology—just as they did in the past. Rice also reinforces the community ethic in Evan's circle. Evan has only just finished butchering the moose, but he's immediately sharing his bounty with his extended family.*



Evan drives by the reservation's hockey rink and wonders if he would have made it as a hockey player, had the rink had been there when he was younger. However, he thinks, the "comfort and familiarity" of the community and land made him never want to leave—he didn't even leave for college. Evan started working for the roads department with his father (Dan) in between hunting and fishing.

Evan parks and walks around to the back of his childhood home, where Dan is tanning a moose hide. Evan picks up a scraper, and they work on the hide silently together, both enjoying the quiet intimacy of the moment. They stop for a smoke break, pulling cigarettes from their left pockets in unison, and they chat about their meat stores for the winter. Dan already heard about Evan's kill through other people in the community, so he knew Evan was coming by with moose meat. They smoke in happy silence, and Evan takes the meat inside to his mother, Patricia.

Inside, Patricia is sitting at the computer, exasperated because the internet is out. Evan navigates easily through the well-worn house, chuckling because he knows Patricia likes to gamble online. The internet and television have both been out since yesterday. Evan jokes that, on the bright side, they can eat supper on time; Patricia elbows him playfully as she gets up. In truth, Evan is a little uneasy that the television satellite, phone lines, and internet are all down. He heads back outside and has another comfortable, silent smoke with Dan as they scan the horizon.

Evan is surprised when Dan says he had a dream last night, because Dan never talks about his dreams. In the dream, it was a spring night, and Dan was walking toward a hill with a shotgun over his shoulder. The other side of the hill was on fire. In the dream, Evan and his friends were staring at the fire, wearing hunting gear but looking skinny and weak. Evan looked up with a scared look on his face, and then Dan woke up. Hearing this, Evan suddenly feels anxious, and he jokes nervously that it's a good thing he caught that moose he hunted. Eventually, Dan's face breaks into a smile, and he bats Evan playfully on the shoulder before heading inside. Evan is relieved.

*The "comfort and familiarity" of life on the reservation is deeply valuable because it gives people like Evan a sense of meaning and purpose. If the signal outages continue as the winter sets in, the community will need to rely on each other even more to survive.*



*When Evan arrives at his parents' place, he immediately helps his father, once again showcasing his community values. Dan already knows about Evan's successful hunting trip, which suggests that the reservation's residents are effectively communicating via word-of-mouth, in spite of the cell signal outage. This suggests that tight-knit communities don't need to rely on technology, as they're in close contact all the time—unlike people who live away from their families and exclusively rely on phones and computers to share news.*



*Despite Patricia's exasperation about the power outage, she remains jovial and upbeat—she doesn't need technology to be happy. Evan's uneasiness informs the reader that this power outage might not be just a temporary blip, but a more widespread issue. Meanwhile, Evan and Dan have clearly absorbed crucial indigenous survival habits like intuitively scanning the horizon (which comes in handy when looking for food, spotting threats, or assessing the weather).*



*In the story, dreams predict the future. In Dan's dream, it's spring, and people are emaciated, suggesting that the community will struggle for food this winter. Evan's fearful expression in the firelight implies that something bad will happen to Evan near a fire. Additionally, Evan is with his friends in the dream, suggesting that community will prove important in the hard times ahead. Evan's respectful reaction to Dan's dream indicates that he respects and takes guidance from his elders. This attitude toward the elders' wisdom will likely prove essential in the upcoming crisis that Dan's dream predicts.*



## CHAPTER 4

Nicole wakes up and is uneasy as she feels the frigid air. She notices that the alarm clock is dead and heads into the hallway, where it's even colder. The battery-powered kitchen clock says it's 7:30. Evan walks in, also noticing how cold it is, and Nicole says the power is out, assuming it's just temporary. Evan chuckles and heads downstairs to start up the old furnace. Before the hydroelectricity dam was built, everyone on the reservation relied on the wood furnace for heat, and they used propane and diesel tanks to fuel their appliances. As the kids saunter in, Nicole tests the landline—it's dead.

Nicole's older cousin Tammy knocks on the door. The power, internet, and phone line are disconnected at her place, so she came by on foot to share news that the school is closed today. Nicole and Tammy joke that they've gotten too used to being on the grid and should go back to smoke signals. Meanwhile, Evan is a little worried—it's been over a year since the whole town was off the grid. Tammy (who's 15 years older than Evan) jokes that she's been fine without the grid for most of her life and tells him not to worry. Tammy scoops up Nangohns for a hug on her way out, and she invites Evan and Nicole over for poker night tomorrow.

Noticing the chill in the air, Evan decides to split wood for the furnace before the first big snowfall arrives. Even though the sky is clear, there's a chilly bite in the air, and he can tell that there will be a snowstorm soon. Evan's community maintenance job will get busier, as he'll need to plow the streets. Evan approaches a massive pile of logs in the backyard (which were collected by the community), and he pulls off a few for splitting. He swings his axe, and the log splits with deafening echoes. Suddenly, Evan hears his brother Cam complimenting his swing. Cam came by because he's bored without power; he doesn't have a job, so he mostly plays video games.

Cam lives with his girlfriend, Sydney, in the temporary housing that the hydroelectric dam contractors used (and left behind when they finished building the dam). Evan asks if Cam has enough wood to heat his place while the power is out, and Cam says he thinks so, though he doesn't seem to be bothered about it. Evan is only two years older than Cam, but he's much more responsible. Evan spent his teenage years learning indigenous land-based survival skills instead of playing video games. Evan teases Cam for a minute, and then Cam reluctantly agrees to help Evan split the logs. In the distance, dogs are barking—they can also sense that a storm is coming.

*The cold is inhibiting in this remote region, even before winter fully sets in. As before, Evan and Nicole's mood remains light, and they easily adjust without power, simply reverting to the furnace they used before electricity powered their appliances. Their reaction again shows that they're not so dependent on technology that they can't function without it.*



*Tammy reveals that the wider community can also easily adapt without power—they rely on face-to-face communication to share important information (like the school's closure). Tammy's life experience in living without technology, and her lack of fear about coping without it, mitigate any unease the family feels about the possibility that the blackout will last a little longer.*



*Evan's immediate reaction to the ongoing blackout is to stay calm and prepare supplies for managing without electricity (like wood to fuel the furnace). This implies that the land provides Evan with what he needs to get by. Cam, meanwhile, embodies the opposite attitude: he's dependent on technology (especially video games) to entertain himself, which distracts him from being productive.*



*Cam relies on technology and urban infrastructure for everything—including entertainment, fuel, and food. Cam's reliance on technology has seemingly made him lazy—he's used to the instant gratification and low-effort lifestyle that technology enables, and he's somewhat dependent on these things to get by. Cam assumes that he can simply rely on modern amenities to get by without trying too hard. In contrast, Evan has diligently cultivated a proactive, survival-oriented mindset based on his indigenous culture, which is rooted in learning how to live off the land. The difference between their lifestyles will profoundly affect how well each brother handles the ongoing blackout.*





## CHAPTER 5

Evan awakes to his friend Isaiah banging on the door. The phones are still out, so everyone is using “moccasin telegraph” like the old days. The chief, Terry Meegis, is calling an emergency meeting for maintenance workers, even though it’s a Saturday. It’s getting colder outside, and there’s still no electricity, so Terry wants to turn on the reservation’s generator. Nicole jokes that this will be a good thing, as the kids miss television. It’s still early—the sun hasn’t risen yet. In the car on the way to the meeting, Evan groans when Isaiah makes him listen to country music on the car radio. It’s unsettling to see that the whole town has gone dark and the streams have frozen solid.

By the time they reach the meeting house, the sun is rising, which comforts Evan. He greets Dan, and Terry greets everyone in their native language. Terry explains that power and communication are completely cut off (except for shortwave radio), so he wants to fire up the old diesel generators before people get worried. They have enough fuel to power the town for a few days, and they’ll regroup on Monday. Dan says the generators are due for a check anyway, so it’s a good chance to test everything. Evan feels relieved; he’s a bit embarrassed that he was so worried.

The community is already pitching in, writing up notices to spread the word. The community always works together. Everything seems under control, so the rest of the team will only need to deliver flyers. Isaiah groans (this is the last thing he wants to do on a Saturday morning), which makes Evan chuckle. They drive over to pick up the flyers, joking with their friends Joanne Birch and Tyler, who are making them. The flyers read that there’s a community-wide power outage, and that the chief and council are asking people to conserve energy by use wood for heat. They’ll be able to keep their fridges running with the community’s backup generators, so that their food doesn’t spoil over the weekend.

## CHAPTER 6

Evan and Nicole drop the kids off at Dan and Patricia’s, and Patricia tells them to enjoy their night off. The roads are dark, but the homes along the route have their living room light on. Vinny Jones, another member of the community, has all his lights on. Evan decides to try and talk him into conserving more energy tomorrow. Evan and Nicole arrive at Tammy’s place, where only the dim kitchen light is turned on for poker night, and sit down with Tammy and her partner, Will.

*Again, the Anishinaabe’s traditional lifestyle doesn’t rely too heavily on technology: the community stays in contact using the “moccasin telegraph” (meaning they simply walk to people’s homes in their moccasin shoes and spread news face to face). Although Evan easily adapts to the blackout without disrupting his lifestyle too much, he’s unsettled because his community values make him worry about others on the reservation (like Cam) who are more dependent on technology to get by.*



*The Anishinaabe respond to the blackout by thinking about the whole community. Instead of worrying about themselves or taking fuel reserves for their own needs, they immediately put a plan in place that will support everybody in the community until they know more. Evan and his friends and family are adapting to the blackout instead of panicking, partly because their pragmatic, survival-oriented cultural values have taught them to plan for unforeseen circumstances.*



*Communal values are paramount on the reservation: everyone proactively helps one another and tackles situations as a team. People think about the well-being of the whole community—even if that involves personal sacrifices (like waking up early on a weekend).*



*Rice shows that some people on the reservation, like Evan’s family, are thinking communally and trying not to use up precious fuel supplies. Others, in contrast—like Vinny Jones—are thinking selfishly. Later, Rice will reveal that people who act selfishly don’t cultivate the support systems they’ll need to survive when the blackout worsens.*



The community banished alcohol about 20 years ago, after a spate of young suicides, domestic abuse incidents, and alcohol-fueled violence on the reservation. Today, however, the regulation is seldom enforced. Tammy and Will have rum, rye, and mixers ready for poker night. Evan and Nicole mix themselves some drinks. Instead of playing poker, they end up sitting and gossiping for hours. It seems that most people are following the council's advice to conserve energy, but not all. Eventually, they nod off one by one; Nicole and Evan pass out in the spare room. The next morning, Evan and Nicole wake up and head out to pick up the kids.

*Historically, the Anishinaabe didn't have alcohol in their culture until early European colonizers introduced them to it. Rice suggest that colonialism introduced practices (like alcohol consumption) into indigenous communities, which still affect them—often for the worse. Tammy, Will, Evan, and Nicole embody a cautious middle ground between their indigenous culture (which they deeply value) and modern conveniences (like alcohol).*



## CHAPTER 7

That evening, a blustery snowstorm arrives; people scurry around, shoveling snow and gathering wood. Maiingan watches the community's maintenance workers ploughing the roads, which are barely visible from the house. Still, Maiingan waves in case Evan is passing by in one of the plough trucks. Moose stew simmers on the stove—Evan and Nicole have invited the snow plough workers to drop by for a comforting meal after their night in the snow.

*As the winter's first blizzard sets in, Evan and Nicole continue to embrace their community-oriented values—they clearly believe that helping others is crucial for the reservation's collective well-being. Nicole wants to look after the volunteers by feeding them, knowing that they'll prove crucial in keeping the community functioning as the winter sets in.*



Despite their hardships, “the Anishinaabe spirit of community [...] prevail[s]” in times of hard work, like when a blizzard blows through. The community has preserved for generations, passing down skills needed to survive the harsh northern winters in this remote terrain. Nicole reads the children stories from an Anishinaabe book called *Jidmoo Miinwaa Goongwaas* and puts more wood into the stove, telling the children that everything will be all right.

*Rice emphasizes the importance of community-oriented values by stressing that the Anishinaabe have survived for generations by pitching in and supporting one another. They do so both practically (in selfless acts like ploughing the roads and sharing food) and emotionally (in reassuring one another that things will be alright).*



## CHAPTER 8

Terry Meegis and other council members are waiting for the reservation's residents to arrive at the gymnasium. There are 300 chairs set out, but only 50 of them are filled so far. Terry is worried because he thinks that the community will have to start rationing food. Isaiah's mother, Candance North, soothes Terry, and sending him out for a smoke while they wait for more people to gather. Evan is already there, having refilled the gymnasium's generator with diesel fuel for the meeting.

*Rice shows that although Terry, the community's official figurehead, is a man, the women like Candance North are the community's backbone because they remain calm and supportive in times of crisis (like the current blackout). This subverts male-oriented value systems in other cultures that consider men stronger than women.*



Terry begins the meeting by inviting a community elder named Aileen to lead them in a prayer. She's nearly 90 years old, and she smiles sweetly as Evan pulls out a shell and some **sage** from her medicine bag. Aileen breaks some sage into the shell and lights it with a match. Evan uses an eagle-feather fan to spread the smoke around Aileen, and she moves rhythmically as smoke washes over her body. This Anishinaabe ritual is intended to cleanse the spirit and eliminate negativity; it's a central component of Anishinaabe spirituality. Some community members believe in it, but others are more skeptical.

The **sage** ceremony was once banned by the Canadian government because of pressure by Christians settling in the Americas. But some people (like Aileen's parents) kept the Anishinaabe traditions alive in secret. They spread them by word of mouth among the community, who spread far and wide when the "white authorities" displaced the community from their traditional homeland near the Great Lakes to make way for towns and cities.

Aileen takes the fan and disperses **sage** smoke around Evan's body. Then, Evan walks clockwise around the room, fanning the shell to direct the smoke toward the seated people. He then sits in a corner of the room, waiting to fan anyone who wants to be "smudged." Aileen addresses the crowd in Anishinaabemowin and then in English. The crowd is silent and attentive, respecting her status as an elder. She tells the community that winter is here, and they must help each other prepare for the "dark season" by gathering wood and medicine for each other. Aileen then offers a prayer of gratitude to "the Great Spirit" in Anishinaabemowin.

After the prayer, Terry addresses the crowd about the infrastructure issues on the reservation. Terry calmly tells the community that they've been unable to communicate with the south, so they don't know what the problem is yet—but he's sure people are working on it. In the meantime, he advises everyone to take stock of their food and wood supplies. The council is keeping generators on for now, but they need the community to conserve energy, because they don't have much diesel left. They're expecting a new diesel shipment in a couple weeks, so they need to be careful until then.

*Rice reinforces the idea that women and elders are valuable to the Anishinaabe by showing that Terry (the chief) defers to Aileen and her traditional wisdom at the start of the meeting, which establishes her as the community's spiritual leader. Aileen's sage ritual symbolizes traditional knowledge. Many modern Anishinaabe people are skeptical about the value of Aileen's knowledge (reflected in the mixed reaction to her ritual), though her wisdom will prove crucial as the story progresses.*



*Colonialist oppression (which centered on displacing First Nations communities and banning their indigenous rituals) caused First Nations people tremendous cultural losses. The Anishinaabe's modern culture is thus a spotty patchwork of information that various individuals managed to preserve in secret. This also suggests that the Anishinaabe are resilient—they're dedicated to keeping their culture alive despite its prior suppression.*



*The Anishinaabe deeply respect the wisdom of their elders: even though some people in the room are skeptical of Aileen's ritual, they defer to her authority and treat her with respect. This is a stark contrast to societies that automatically defer to young, strong men. Aileen also stresses the importance of thinking communally, something she knows is important for weathering tough winters based on her decades of experience living without modern amenities.*



*Rice reinforces Aileen's power on the reservation by showing that Terry mirrors her guidance—he wants people to work together, conserve energy, and live modestly until they know more. Even though Terry is the reservation's official leader, he defers to Aileen's wisdom because she's wise from life experience. She also embodies traditional knowledge that women possess in Anishinaabe culture, as its healers and spiritual guides.*



Somebody shouts in frustration from the back, but Terry advises people to be patient and reassures them that a plan is in place. A council member named Walter then explains that ploughing, the grocery store, and the health station will remain open, while everything else on the reservation will close for the time being. Meanwhile, Aileen sits calmly with a stoic smile on her face. Evan feels appeased, knowing Aileen has lived through many winters without power or communications. He reassures himself with the thought that if she's not worried, the rest of the community shouldn't be either.

*Although Terry is the community's former figurehead, leadership is communal on the reservation. Other council members, like the pragmatic Walter, often step in and take charge when needed. Evan, meanwhile, takes his cues from Aileen, who has survived many winters without power.*



## CHAPTER 9

Evan stirs the stew and looks into the fridge, feeling reassured when the fridge light pops on. He heads out to get groceries, especially canned food. Outside, children are playing happily in the snow, and Evan is relieved to see that they aren't worried. At the grocery store, the products are very expensive because the area is so remote. Evan bumps into Isaiah, who warns Evan that there isn't much food left in the store because people are panic-buying. Evan is surprised, but Isaiah bluntly interjects that not everyone is as prepared as Evan for the winter. He also tells Evan not to worry—Isaiah thinks they'll be laughing about this in a couple weeks.

*Many people on the reservation are starting to panic—notably those who usually rely on modern amenities to get by instead of living off the land according to indigenous custom. Their behavior hints at how easily people grow fearful when they realize the modern luxuries they've grown used to (like stores that usually supply them with food) might not be as available to them as they've been in recent years.*



It's mayhem inside the store: people are avoiding eye contact with one another and grabbing everything they can. Most of the shelves are empty. Evan walks through the store, noting that the only things left are soda crackers, a few cans of sardines, dog food, condiments, and seasonings. He grabs the last two cans of baked beans for himself; they're also out of milk and eggs at home, but there are none left in the store. Evan drives home in silence. When he enters, Nicole looks at him quizzically. He shrugs and places the two cans on the table.

*Modern amenities like grocery stores seem reliable, but they're actually not, because the infrastructure that sustains them is fragile. It only takes a few days without power for the pipeline that provides food from the outside world to fail. Rice also suggests that being dependent on such conveniences leaves people vulnerable, because they don't know how to get by without them.*



## CHAPTER 10

A few days later, no word has arrived from the south yet. Terry holds an emergency meeting for council members and a few essential staff, which Evan attends. Terry thinks that another town meeting with no news will make people panic, so he decides to distribute another flyer asking people to be patient. Evan notices how tired and stressed the council members look. Nine people in the community (including Joanne's son Kevin) were away when the outage happened, and none of them have returned.

*The longer the blackout continues, the more strain it causes on the community, suggesting that many people are overly dependent on technology. Despite the strain on the reservation's leaders, they prioritize keeping the community calm, believing that the well-being of the whole reservation is more important than their personal struggles.*



Joanne prints off a flyer that says that emergency power generation is still in effect; that people should conserve energy; that a food delivery is expected next week; and that people should ration their food in the meantime. Terry wonders if they should mention a delivery, since he's not sure one will actually come. Walter tells Terry to relax, but Terry only grows more frustrated and starts swearing. Terry thinks something serious is going on, and he's concerned about chaos on the reservation. Walter, who's much calmer, decides that they should proceed with the flyers. Terry apologizes for getting mad, and Joanne prints off more flyers, trying not to cry.

*The strain of the crisis is beginning to wear on people like Terry and Joanne, who are struggling emotionally. However, other council members like Walter step in to provide emotional support and share the burden of leadership, which helps them all feel better and enables them push on with their work. This suggests that banding together—instead of falling apart—will help the Anishinaabe as they continue to manage the fallout from the ongoing blackout.*



## CHAPTER 11

Nicole wakes Evan up—she had a weird dream, and she's scared. In Nicole's dream, she was trying to run across the snow with Nangohns and Maiingan, but she kept sinking deeper into it. Evan was nowhere to be found, and the kids (speaking in the elders' voices) told Nicole that they're going to make it. The snow started burying her, but the kids pulled her out. On the surface, there was a fire with a crowd standing around it. The kids were adults, and Nangohns said "welcome home," just as Nicole woke up. After Nicole tells Evan this, he calms her, saying that it was just a dream—but he stays awake, worried.

*Nicole's dream predicts that her children will survive the harsh winter and grow into adulthood, and that Nicole's bond with them will give her strength to successfully seek safety with the community (represented by the crowd). The story's adult male characters are notably absent from Nicole's dream, suggesting that the community's women will prove essential to its survival.*



## CHAPTER 12

Another heavy blizzard blows in. Evan, Isaiah, and Tyler spend all day ploughing the reservation. They pass by the grocery store, which is empty. Evan thinks it's been closed for over a week, though he's not sure. He's struggling to keep track of the days—the lack of routine makes time feel more fluid. The three men stop for a silent smoke break and a swig of rye. Evan says that he hopes there won't be another blizzard, and Isaiah agrees. Isaiah says that he feels like the world is ending, but Tyler laughs. He thinks that Isaiah is being dramatic and jokes that took a huge meteor crash to get rid of the dinosaurs—this is just a bad winter.

*Modern amenities quickly crumble without power, showing how unreliable they really are. This passage subtly hints that, in fact, many presumed benefits of modern technology—like the ability to precisely track the passage of time—aren't actually that important. Evan adapts easily, and time more fluidly by watching the landscape—the land tells him all he needs to know. Isaiah introduces the idea that the harsh winter feels like the end of the world, which Aileen will later revisit when she suggests that the Anishinaabe people already survived many world-ending crises under colonialist oppression.*



Suddenly, they hear snowmobiles coming from the southeast for the first time in weeks. Two snowmobiles, pulling large sleds, emerge from the woods. Evan feels uneasy. The drivers head toward Evan, Isaiah, and Tyler, who look tense. When the snowmobiles pull up, the men realize that the drivers are Tyler's younger brother Kevin and Kevin's best friend Nick Jonas. They both start to sob. Evan's ears prickle with fear—this doesn't look good.

*Kevin and Nick's arrival gives insight about how non-indigenous communities are coping during the blackout. When Kevin and Nick collapse into tears, it's clear that they've been through a traumatic ordeal, implying that society beyond the reservation is in crisis.*



The nearest town, Gibson, 300 kilometers to the south, is also completely out of power. Food supplies have dwindled, and people are rioting. Last night, Kevin and Nick stole some sleds, stocked up on any supplies they could find, and headed home to the reservation. Evan tells the boys to park the supplies behind the grocery store, go home to their families, and say nothing about the chaos further south. He doesn't want people to panic. Tyler and Isaiah quietly agree, explaining that they're out of power and food here too.

## CHAPTER 13

The council members are gathered around a table in the community's board room, along with Evan, Isaiah, Tyler, Kevin, Nick, and their parents. The room glows pink from the setting sun, and Terry tells everyone that they're safe here. The situation is worse than they thought, but they know how to survive harsh northern winters. Nick explains that a **blackout** happened in Gibson, and the next day, he walked downtown to see what happened. Cars were crowding gas stations and grocery stores. The college staff had no news about the outage; each day, they told the students to be patient.

After a few days, Nick and Kevin ventured off campus to find that the town was deserted. They heard noises in the grocery store and saw a riot going on inside; people were fighting and bleeding. Nick and Kevin then returned to campus and made plans to come back to the reservation. Over the next few days, they quietly stole gas from abandoned cars and hid as much food as they could find. Then, they had to plan a route to the reservation, knowing that the roads were buried deep under the snow. The situation at the college deteriorated: security and staff left, and students smashed the cafeteria's windows and begged one another for food.

Nick and Kevin miraculously found two snowmobiles and more gas in the maintenance building, and they prepared everything. They covered their snow tracks and waited. That night, students started breaking into one another's rooms. One student overdosed in his room. Students also began abandoning campus to die the snow. When Nick and Kevin crept back to the maintenance building, two guys approached and tackled Nick, trying to kill him. Kevin had to smash the guys' heads with a hammer. Then, they rode off. Nick's mother starts crying, but Terry soothes the room with a prayer. Terry is eerily calm, and he sends the boys home to rest, telling everyone to keep the news to themselves until the council figures out a plan.

*While Anishinaabe people have adapted relatively calmly and quickly to the blackout, Nick and Kevin reveal that Gibson (which was also affected by the blackout) quickly devolved into chaos when people began rioting for food. This suggests that modern society is over-dependent on technology, to the point that people have lost their ability to function without it.*



*As Nick describes the situation in Gibson, he emphasizes that people began panicking because they grew impatient without news about the blackout. This again suggests that many people in modern society (like the people in Gibson) have grown overly dependent on technology's instant gratification—they've forgotten how to be patient amid uncertainty, which weakens their emotional resilience in times of crisis.*



*Nick and Kevin draw on their Anishinaabe values to remain calm, be patient, plan a successful survival-strategy. Other youths, however, have no idea how to survive without power—they don't even know how to get food if it's not served to them in the cafeteria. This contrast suggests that modern society's infrastructure has disconnected many people from the knowledge that they can survive in nature if they stay calm and proactive, as Nick and Kevin do.*



*The students quickly become disoriented without phones and internet to tell them what's going on. Within a mere few days, students begin dying because they feel helplessly isolated—and even suicidal. Dependence on technology clearly weakens emotional coping skills once that technology is no longer available. In stark contrast, Terry's indigenous prayer soothes the room and helps him remain calm, suggesting that longstanding traditions (which don't demand complex technology) bolster emotional resolve, while technological infrastructure weakens it.*



## CHAPTER 14

Nicole is shocked when Evan tells her the story about Nick and Kevin. Evan calms her, reassuring her that they have enough food, gas, and wood to last them through the winter. Nicole worries about the others on the reservation, and Evan agrees that they will have to help them. Nicole says it feels like the end of the world. Evan and Nicole hug tightly, taking comfort in each other's arms. They undress and have sex, taking refuge in the warm safety of their bed.

*Nicole and Evan are scared because the blackout is more widespread than they'd initially thought. But they're immediately concerned for others in their community, again stressing their strong community-oriented values. Similarly, instead of panicking and turning on others, they turn toward each other and seek comfort in their bond. This grounds them and gives them the strength to support others.*



## CHAPTER 15

Another heavy storm is pounding down as Walter, Terry, Evan, Isaiah, and the council members pore over the data about their supplies in the boardroom, looking stressed. Evan's parents walk in—Dan is carrying a big pot of stew, and Walter thanks them for their thoughtfulness. Patricia laughs off the comment, explaining that their generation lived off the grid for years. Another council member looks up, telling everyone they have enough diesel to last until late February. They might be able to push that another month or two, if people are careful about their energy consumption. He recommends that they continue as normal without scaring people. Terry disagrees, saying that people deserve to know what's going on, and that the community's survival depends on mutual cooperation.

*Rice emphasizes how helpful community-oriented thinking is in times of crisis. Dan and Patricia are chipping in to provide food for the group, which helps support them as they, in turn, plan for the wider community's survival. This selflessness is the opposite approach to the crisis that the people in Gibson had. Terry reinforces this idea by explicitly noting that he believes cooperating as a community will best ensure their survival. Patricia bolsters the group by reassuring them with her grounded wisdom, showing once again that women are emotionally resilient and trusted figures in this community.*



Terry decides to tell the community tomorrow afternoon, after they can plough the roads and prepare a community meal. There's a secret pantry with thousands of cans stored up for a harsh winter, which they'll use some of for the meal. There's enough food stored to feed 500 people for two years. Everybody agrees to the plan, and they start preparing for the meeting.

*Rice reinforces the idea that community-oriented thinking proves essential in the story's wintry crisis. Such thinking has already motivated the council to prepare for everyone's needs by amassing emergency food stores. They plan to keep acting as a community instead of hoarding the food for themselves, which will likely save many lives.*



## CHAPTER 16

Sunlight bounces off the deep snow, and Evan feels calm as he smokes in solitude, although paranoia is growing in the town. He pinches out his cigarette, thinking that it might finally be a good time to quit, since he can't get more **tobacco** anyway. Suddenly, Evan hears a snowmobile in the distance, and he instantly starts worrying. He grabs his rifle just in case. The black snowmobile, pulling a black trailer approaches and stops. The driver raises his hands as he approaches, to show that he's unarmed. He says, "I come in peace," before bursting into laughter; Evan isn't amused.

*Even though Evan is smoking for personal reasons, the Anishinaabe also use tobacco for indigenous rituals. The dwindling tobacco supply on the reservation symbolizes First Nations people's depleted cultural heritage, which was gradually suppressed under colonialist oppression. The story's crisis central—and the way it depletes the community—is also an allegory for First Nations people's losses under colonialism. This idea is further developed with the arrival of the snowmobile driver, who represents incoming white settlers in the allegory.*



The man introduces himself as Justin Scott. He's a white man who looks to be in his mid-thirties; he's big, bald, and burly. Evan wants to know how Justin found the reservation. Scott replies that he followed the sled tracks. Evan's hair stands on end—the man must have followed Kevin and Nick. Isaiah pulls up and runs over, looking alarmed. Evan doesn't want the situation to escalate, so he motions to Isaiah to be calm. They shake hands, and Scott says that he knows Ojibwe hospitality is unrivaled, so he'd like to stay. Isaiah's eyes narrow, and he grows more hostile.

Scott explains that 10 days ago, his town lost power and communication, and the situation deteriorated. He'd heard about Gibson as two boys returned to his town from there. So, Scott went to see if there were any survivors and followed the tracks north. He has plenty of supplies to last the winter, and he wants to stay. Isaiah explains that they'll have to discuss it with the council. The community interacts with white contractors sometimes, but no white casually stop by the reservation like this. Tyler approaches with flyers about the meeting tomorrow. When Tyler sees Scott, he immediately leaves to fetch the council members.

Scott wants to see the flyers, but Evan and Isaiah refuse to show him. They stand in awkward silence, watching Scott warily. Terry and Walter arrive and introduces themselves. Scott shakes their hands. He says it's an honor to meet them and humbly asks for refuge. Scott's voice cracks as he says that he's seen terrible things. Evan's shocked by Scott's vulnerability, but he still doesn't trust him. Terry asks why they should trust Scott, and Scott replies he's a simple man. He has plenty of supplies, and he hopes they believe him.

The men huddle together. Evan and Walter don't trust Scott, but Terry doesn't want to turn someone away to die. They agree to let Scott stay, as long as he contributes by hunting or gathering wood. They decide to put Scott in the health station to start with, and then move him to somebody's house to conserve heat after he makes a contribution to the community and shows himself to be trustworthy. Evan jokes that they should make him pay one moose a week for his rent, though Walter seriously considers the idea. Scott humbly accepts their offer, and he agrees to keep a low profile so that he doesn't alarm the community.

*Scott's arrival on the reservation metaphorically represents incoming settlers who arrived in the Americas, seeking refuge from their difficult lives in Europe. Scott is also an imposing person who embodies many traits associated with patriarchal authority in North America. Like many leaders in North American society today, he's young, physically intimidating, and white.*



*Scott reveals that the blackout is widespread, and that his own town swiftly devolved into chaos like Gibson did without technology. This further emphasizes the fragility of technology-dependent societies. Instead of remaining in his town to weather the crisis within his own community, Scott fled, and he wants to settle on the reservation—much like early European settlers did when they first arrived in the Americas.*



*Scott wants to earn the community's trust—which he does by showing vulnerability and respecting Terry and Walter's authority as elders in the community. Yet the men's instinctive wariness implies that Scott's deference to the community's traditions may soon prove to be short-lived.*



*Terry's compassion for Scott, as well as the community's hospitality, allude to the way historical First Nations people greeted European settlers who arrived in the Americas seeking refuge, having fled their own homelands. Evan, Walter, Scott, and Terry reveal that they'll let Scott stay if he contributes to the community, emphasizing the deep community ethic that prevails on the reservation.*





## CHAPTER 17

**Sage** smoke billows high and weaves through the crowd in the meeting room; there are almost 200 people there, and the mood is somber. The council members look worried—they're uneasy about Scott's arrival. Terry begins the meeting, explaining that Nick and Kevin have returned, and the room buzzes with excited murmurs. Terry explains that the **blackout** is widespread, but there's enough fuel on the reservation to keep the power running through the winter. Their biggest concerns are water and food. The council will ration people based on what they already have and what more they need, so they'll be making home visits over the next few days.

The room is eerily silent. Then, somebody asks why he should get fewer rations just because he worked hard all year to hunt food, while lazy people get food for free. Somebody else pipes up, but Walter stands up and silences the room. He calmly explains that nobody is getting special treatment—this is a crisis, and they need to act like a community and support one another. Then, Walter apologizes for yelling. Suddenly, an unfamiliar voice yells out that it's okay. Everybody turns around: Scott is standing there. The crowd grows uneasy. Scott pumps his fist, saying that they'll get through this together—but just then, somebody gets up to punch him.

Evan and Isaiah intervene while Walter attempts to calm the room, explaining that they've already met Scott and welcomed him into the reservation. Scott smiles breezily, making Evan's skin crawl. Evan asks Scott what he's doing, and Scott says that he was confused and thought he should come to the meeting, especially if he's a part of the community. Evan reminds him that he's not part of it yet—he has to contribute first, and then they'll decide if he can stay. Scott grows tense and towers above Evan, but Evan reminds himself that Scott is stranded and vulnerable. Evan lightens his tone to relax the mood, suggesting that they start by getting to know each other.

*The unease among the council members about Scott's arrival shows that many modern First Nations people are wary of non-indigenous outsiders, likely because of the trauma their people experienced under colonialist oppression in the past. The council reveals that they're allocating rations based on people's needs, meaning they'll allocate the most food to the most vulnerable people, showing that their community-oriented values are guiding their choices. Meanwhile, the ceremonial sage smoke in the background symbolizes the council's background of indigenous tradition, which guides their choices.*



*Walter and Terry strongly believe that the best way to survive is by thinking as a community instead of selfishly. The people who grumble that they'll get less of a share (even though they don't actually need the rations as much as others) embody a selfish attitude. Such people think that hoarding resources will benefit them in the long run, but they'll soon learn that this attitude will demoralize others and cause people to turn on them, actually making them suffer more.*



*Scott lies and pretends he was confused about the elders' advice that he should keep a low profile at first. He's intentionally disregarding their authority and overstepping his bounds by showing up, revealing that he trusts his own opinion more than the advice of the elders. Scott also uses his physical stature to intimidate Evan, revealing that he's willing to leverage his physical strength to dominate others. Though Scott doesn't know this yet, his attempts to establish authority by dismissing others' advice and relying on his brute strength will ultimately backfire.*



## CHAPTER 18

Maiingan stands on the counter, counting cans, and as Nicole cheers him on as she makes an inventory of their supplies. Nicole grew up in a similar family to the one she's raising. She thinks about her sister in Toronto and wonders if there's a **blackout** there too, trying not to think of the chaos in Gibson that Nick described. Her heart warms as Nangohns enthusiastically joins in to count along. Evan enters, and Nicole gives him a tight hug, feeling safe. She's worried that the situation isn't temporary. Evan is exhausted from a day of ploughing and making house visits in the worried community.

Evan drifts to sleep. He dreams that he's driving by the rink when his truck starts sinking, its windows caving in. In the dream, he struggles out of the truck and heads to the rink, trailing blood behind him. The snow is rising rapidly around the rink, so Evan hurls himself through the glass window. Inside, a smokeless, heatless fire burns, surrounded by endless piles of frozen adult bodies, hidden under blankets. Evan goes to lift a blanket, but he wakes up. He screams as he wakes, and Nicole runs in, looking concerned. In a hoarse voice, Evan says that he just had a bad dream.

## CHAPTER 19

Scott aims his gun and shoots a moose, whooping in delight as it falls to the ground. Dan, Isaiah, Evan, and their friend Jeff look up, impressed. Scott gloats, before Jeff explains that they don't like to hunt too much in winter—the moose don't move quickly, so it's like cheating. Scott laughs the comment off, saying that times are desperate, so he's allowed. His expression grows icy as Evan reminds him they're only out here because of Scott. Scott's been at the reservation for a week, and he gloats that he's already proving his worth. Evan recalls Scott's hoard of ammunition and feels worried.

*Nicole's worries about her scattered family represents the pain that First Nations people feel from their history of displacement and family separation. Despite her pain, Nicole feels happy and safe in the new family unit that she's cultivating. Overall, Nicole's conflicted, bittersweet feelings represent the outlook of First Nations people more broadly: they carry the sadness of displacement with them, but they draw strength from rebuilding their communities anew. Meanwhile, Evan diligently upholds his community-oriented values by visiting vulnerable people and putting their needs above his own.*



*Evan's dream, like other dreams in the story, foreshadows future events in the story. Evan's image of himself walking and trailing blood suggests that he will face violence as the situation in the community becomes more dire. The fact that he walks away trailing blood implies that he survives. Evan's dream also suggests that the community will soon suffer tremendous losses, implying that the devastation of the wintry crisis will be far greater than anyone imagines. Since the story is also an allegory about colonialist oppression, the dream implies that the community's losses will be catastrophic—just like First Nations people's losses under colonialism.*



*Scott embodies an exploitative attitude toward his surroundings—he's thrilled to show off his hunting skills and delights in taking what he wants from the ecosystem. But Evan and Jeff don't like Scott's attitude: Jeff thinks it's in poor taste to gloat about taking from the land. Evan, meanwhile, thinks Scott's arrival is pushing the community to take more food from the land than they're comfortable taking. Both attitudes suggest that the Anishinaabe strive to live in balance with their ecosystem and are wary of exploiting it.*



Dan, as the eldest in the group, leads the other men to the moose, and they quietly marvel at its size while Scott continues to gloat loudly. Dan frowns and pulls out some **tobacco**, giving it to Scott, so that Scott can make an offering in thanks for the moose. Dan takes off his hat to pray, and the men, including Scott, follow suit. Scott softly copies their prayer. As Scott hauls the moose on the sled, Evan thinks that Scott might be useful around here after all.

*The Anishinaabe have a respectful attitude toward the moose's death, as evidence by their gratitude-based rituals and indigenous values (symbolized by the tobacco offering). These practices continuously remind them that the Earth's ecosystems are not theirs to exploit. Such thinking allows them to draw ongoing sustenance from the land, because they don't deplete all of its resources at once.*



## CHAPTER 20

Evan, Nicole, Maiingan, and Nangohns dine on roasted moose, the last of their potatoes, and canned corn. Evan savors his potatoes, knowing that he might not taste them again for a while. The pace of their lives has slowed: each night, they eat slowly and play cards or board games after dinner. Tonight, Nicole teaches the children the word for “moose” in Anishinaabemowin. Evan feels proud, recalling how his generation mostly spoke English, because his parents were shamed for speaking Ojibwe at the “church-run schools.” He’s proud that his children have Anishinaabemowin names: Maiingan means “wolf,” and Nangohns means “little star.”

*Evan reveals that his parents' generation faced prejudices for speaking their indigenous language (which Rice interchangeably calls Anishinaabemowin or Ojibwe) as they attended Christian, English-speaking schools. This, in turn, discouraged them from teaching Evan's generation their indigenous language. This is one example of how colonialist oppression still cripples indigenous cultures today. Nonetheless, First Nations people remain resilient, and Evan and Nicole have worked hard to recover knowledge of their native language and pass it on before it's lost to history.*



Evan clears the table; he'll wash the dishes in cold water later to save fuel. Then, he leaves to check up on his brother Cam. Most homes along the route are dark—it seems that people are heeding the advice to conserve energy. Nobody answers the door at Cam's, so Evan walks in. A thick haze of cigarette smoke fills the room—Cam is having a small party. Evan is immediately annoyed, as the music and toilet flushes seem wasteful. Evan coldly greets Cam, who's drunk and cracking jokes about survival. He asks if Cam has enough food and wood, and Cam drunkenly nods.

*Cam's lifestyle, in contrast to Evan's, focuses on wasting precious energy reserves to enjoy the present moment, rather than conserving energy for the future. It also suggests that Cam is so used to relying on technology and modern conveniences that he doesn't even try to adjust his lifestyle in preparation for the long winter.*



Evan walks into the next room, where hip-hop music blares from a speaker. Scott is sitting in a corner with a girl named Jenna on his lap, and he greets Evan warmly. Evan angrily asks Scott what he's doing at Cam's, and Scott drunkenly replies that Cam invited him. Evan tells Scott to take his hands off Jenna, who's just a teenager, like most of the kids here. Sensing the tension, Jenna gets up and goes to the bathroom. Jenna's sister Sydney tells Evan to relax, but Evan lurches for Scott, angry that he's not respecting the community's ways. Scott stands up, and he's so tall that he towers menacingly over Evan. Evan backs off, walking out of the house as Scott laughs loudly.

*Scott clearly doesn't have the same respect for women that Evan and others in the community do, as he apparently sees nothing wrong with touching and flirting with an underage girl. He also continues to assert his physical dominance to get his way—he's much bigger and stronger than Evan. Scott uses his imposing stature to intimidate Evan and scare him off, because he doesn't want to listen to Evan. It's clear that Evan can't match Scott in a physical confrontation, so he leaves, defeated. Once again, Scott relies on physical intimidation to get his way, scaring people off instead of heeding their advice.*



## CHAPTER 21

Evan wakes to Isaiah pounding on his door, saying that there's an emergency: Jenna and her friend Tara froze to death in a ditch last night. Evan's stomach drops as he explains that he saw them at a party last night, and that Scott was there. When Evan and Isaiah arrive at the scene of the accident, Jenna's mother, Amanda, is grief stricken—she doesn't know why Jenna was outside. Evan explains about the party, and Walter swears and pulls out blankets to cover the bodies. Isaiah pulls out a pouch, and they pray for a moment before lifting the bodies into Walter's truck.

Terry approaches, and Evan is about to tell him about the party when Scott walks in, wearing his snowmobiling gear. Calmly, Scott explains that they have some visitors who are headed for the hydro line. The group jumps into their trucks and head that way. Several people on snowmobiles are gathered at the hydro line, and one of them raises his hands in a peaceful gesture. He explains that they've traveled north for days, and they're starving. Walter is skeptical, wondering how they made it this far. The man introduces himself as Mark Phillips, and he and the rest of the group beg for help. Terry asks them to be patient, but a desperate Phillips charges at Terry.

Suddenly, a shot rings out, and Phillips falls to the floor. Scott, whose pistol is raised, tells the group to stand back and listen to the chief. Terry, shocked, asks Scott what he's doing. Scott says that more people will arrive and they need to take a stand. Terry looks at his boots. Suddenly, Evan realizes that Terry has lost control. Walter and Evan stare at each other in disbelief as Phillips bleeds out onto the snow.

## CHAPTER 22

Evan rummages through a closet and pulls out a worn military blazer. Aileen sits by her stove, calmly sipping tea, and thanks Evan for coming by to check on her. Speaking in Anishinaabemowin, she softly asks Evan how he's doing; Evan can't remember the last time someone asked him that. He explains that the family is stressed and cooped up at home, but they're doing alright. Aileen comforts him and tells him to take care of Nicole. Aileen wants to pass on her medicinal knowledge, so she's teaching it to Nicole. Evan quietly agrees to take Nicole for a walk tomorrow.

*Scott's physical aggression at the party prevented Evan from distancing Jenna and Tara from Scott, which might have saved their lives if they had left with Evan instead of staying at the party. Rice also implies that Jenna and Tara didn't realize it was too cold to be outside at night, suggesting that they were unable to adequately assess frigid the weather without technology—which ended up being a fatal mistake.*



*While the community is grappling with how to handle the disruption that Scott is causing, more outsiders arrive on the scene. The arrival of even more desperate people seeking refuge on the reservation represents the mass migration of countless Europeans to the Americas in the early days of colonialism. Phillips's desperation shows that many of those early settlers were vulnerable themselves, and they sought better lives because they were desperate to escape dire circumstances in their own homelands.*



*Scott asserts his authority in the situation with an aggressive show of violence, murdering Phillips without a second thought. He thinks that his aggression will protect the community and himself—so he undermines more experienced leaders, asserts his authority with physical aggression, and scares others (like Terry) into submission.*



*Having established Scott as the antagonist of the story, Rice now establishes Aileen as Scott's opposite. While Scott is a physically imposing, aggressive young man who ignores the advice of others, Aileen is a frail, old, stoic woman. However, she's wise from her decades of life experience, as well as her indigenous spiritual and medicinal knowledge—which she's passing on to other women in the community, like Nicole. Aileen encourages Evan to respect and nurture Nicole, believing that Nicole's leadership will prove essential to the community's survival.*



Aileen says that when people come by, they say the word “**apocalypse**,” which she thinks it’s a silly word. She explains that the world isn’t ending—it already ended when the Anishinaabe people were displaced from the south. But they adapted and learned to live in the harsh northern territory. Aileen explains that she’s lived through many apocalypses—one happens each time white people come to their community. But the Anishinaabe are still here, and they’ll still be here even if the power never comes back on. Evan smiles, feeling hopeful for the first time in days.

Evan heads out into the snow, which has been falling for days, and waves goodbye to Aileen. Two weeks ago, the diesel ran out, so Evan does his rounds on foot. Terry’s leadership has dissolved by now, and most people look to Walter for guidance. Walter, in turn, looks to Evan, Isaiah, and Tyler. Others have taken up alliances under Scott, which makes Evan uneasy. The snow is crusted over, and it breaks to reveal soft powder underneath. Evan tries to remember the word for this time of year, and he says “the moon of the crusted snow” out loud as it comes back to him. He doesn’t know which month it is—either February or March. It doesn’t really matter: the freeze is unrelenting, and blizzards keep blowing in.

Evan marks the passage of time with deaths in the community—the death toll has been rising steadily. Evan trudges up to the community building and opens the garage door, ignoring the rows of bodies piled up inside. Isaiah and Tyler approach, pulling a sled with a dead body on it and talking about who would have won the hockey championship this year. Tyler wonders if people are playing hockey somewhere down south. Despite his optimism, he doubts it. They heave Johnny’s frozen body on to the pile—that makes 21 deaths so far. Some youths killed themselves, though most of the deaths have been among the elders.

## CHAPTER 23

Nicole looks out the window: it’s calm and somewhat less frigid outside. She bundles up Nangohns and Maiingan for a walk, and they pile into the sleigh. Some days, Nicole thinks that spring will come; other days, she’s less hopeful. Some days, Nicole isn’t sure if she’s awake or dreaming. As Nicole tugs the sleigh, she bumps into a woman named Meghan, who’s checking rabbit snares. They’re all empty. Walter took Meghan, her husband Brad, and another man named Alex Richer in after Phillips was killed. Then, they moved into an abandoned bungalow near Cam’s place, as did Scott. Nicole wonders how they’ll survive without knowing how to catch food.

*The story’s apocalyptic scenario is a metaphor for the struggles that First Nations people experienced under colonialist oppression, which similarly made them feel like their world was ending. Aileen draws on her wisdom to reassure Evan, knowing that the Anishinaabe survived before, and they will again. Whereas Aileen nurtures and reassures others using her stoic wisdom, Scott intimidates and scares others using his aggression.*



*The community is now divided: one faction is living under Scott’s toxic authority, while the rest of the community looks to Evan—who, in turn, takes guidance from Aileen. As the story continues, Scott will likely subjugate his followers, while Aileen will nurture hers as she does Evan. This implies that it’s better to trust in the wisest people, regardless of their gender or physical ability. This passage also explains the story’s title, which is an Anishinaabe term for the current time of year that describes the landscape. This again emphasizes their culture’s deep connection with the land.*



*The winter is harsh and devastating, as evidence by the rising death toll. The imagery of Evan in the garage, surrounded by piles of dead bodies, mirrors his earlier dream. Like the students in Gibson, who grew dejected and suicidal without technology, several young people on the reservation took their own lives as well. This implies that the increased presence of technology in young people’s lives is a threat, because it weakens their emotional resilience.*



*Nicole relies on her traditional Anishinaabe knowledge to read the landscape, which helps her assess when it’s safe to go outside. Meghan, in contrast, has no indigenous knowledge and lived in a city before seeking refuge on the reservation. She doesn’t know how to use the rabbit traps, and she fails to realize that rabbits aren’t around at this time of year. This juxtaposition suggests that relying on technology to get by in life (as Meghan did before she arrived on the reservation) limits a person’s connection with the land and practical survival skills.*



Nangohns and Maiingan sweetly introduce themselves to Meghan, while Nicole notices how malnourished Meghan looks. Nicole cracks an awkward joke, and Meghan laughs, grateful for the opportunity to smile. Nicole warmly says that laughter is good medicine. Meghan blurts out that Scott is horrible—he orders them around and threatens them. Megan’s husband, Brad, has fallen under his spell. Nicole offers Meghan a rest at her place, but Meghan says that she has to find food and get back before Scott gets angry. He seems to be getting bigger, while the rest of them are getting thinner. Meghan rushes off before Nicole can get more information, and Nicole heads back home, feeling worried.

*Scott’s is sexist: he encourages his followers—including Meghan’s own husband Brad—to subjugate women. Scott also embodies a selfish leadership strategy: he forces others to hunt for food and then takes it for himself, harming and demoralizing the group by forcing them to go hungry. Scott may think that he’s going to benefit from his fear-mongering, sexism, and selfish food-hoarding—but such tactics will likely turn people against him in the long run.*



## CHAPTER 24

Tyler fumbles with some keys. It’s rations day; home deliveries ended two months ago, but Tyler knows that hungry people will line up soon. The line grows longer each week—about a 100 people came last week. Evan and Tyler line up 800 cans of ham and peas, ready to pass them out. Tyler jokes about how he can’t wait for things to go back to normal, but Evan says nothing. He thinks that Tyler is in denial. Cam’s partner, Sydney, approaches, saying that a lot of people moved in with relatives to get away from Scott at the bungalow complex.

*Evan’s faction of the community continues to honor their communal values and distribute rations, despite the fact that they’re hungry themselves. Their solidarity brings them closer together and helps them push through these tough times as a team. Sydney, meanwhile, reveals that Scott’s followers are dwindling by the minute, suggesting that his selfish food-hoarding is backfiring and weakening his hold on the community.*



Evan asks how Cam is doing. Sydney, looking uncomfortable, says that Evan should probably find Cam and talk with him. Sydney chuckles weakly, and Evan feels worried. He hasn’t seen Cam much since the disastrous party. Isaiah says that Cam looked pale and thin he last time he saw him. Apparently, Scott tried to take Cam to his secret food stash, but Cam got creeped out.

*Cam has grown demoralized without modern amenities in his life, which leaves him vulnerable to Scott’s influence. All this has a negative impact on Cam’s well-being: he looks dangerously malnourished and feels increasingly uncomfortable around Scott, which prompts Cam to distance himself from Scott. This, again, shows how Scott’s selfishness and domineering personality are undermining his authority.*



## CHAPTER 25

Nicole lights a small gas lamp as the family sits around the house. Soon enough, they’ll have no fuel left to light the lamp. They’ve stared living communally with Dan and Patricia to conserve fuel. Nangohns and Maiingan play on the floor, and Dan begins telling a story about a character named Nanabush, who’s been too lazy to gather food over the summer. Nanabush walks around in search of geese, worrying that they’ve already flown south for the winter. But suddenly, he hears the geese having a party in the bushes.

*Dan’s Anishinaabe myth about Nanabush entertains the family without modern technology. Rice suggests, through Dan’s story, that it makes sense to embrace traditions like storytelling that have stood the test of time and sustained people for countless generations. Rice thinks it makes far less sense to rely on technology. Although it can entertain, it’s far less reliable—it didn’t even lasted for one generation on the reservation.*



Nanabush teaches the geese a dance, and as they dance, he breaks their necks. Nanabush cooks one and then takes a long nap. When he wakes up, the geese have been stolen. Feeling angry, Nanabush puts his bottom in the fire. When it burns, he slides around cooling it on the rocks, and that's how moss came into the world. Evan asks Maiingan and Nangohns what they think the moral of the story is. They reply, "don't be greedy," and "always prepare for the winter."

*Dan's myth also educates the family by encouraging them to cultivate a survival-oriented mindset. As before, Rice subtly suggests that technology is problematic because its infrastructure demands a lot of resources, encouraging people to exploit nature. The story, in contrast, argues that depleting the Earth's resources actually threatens people's survival: because Nanabush is greedy and kills all the geese (even though he only needs a few to survive), there's no food left to sustain him when they're stolen, and he ends up worse off.*



## CHAPTER 26

It's rations day again; Tyler warns the group that they'll have to keep an eye on some people who became unruly last time. Evan and Tyler go to fetch cans of chili and realize that several boxes are missing. Confused, they fetch cans of corn and beans to top up the rations. People have been growing weary and resentful of living on canned food, especially those who didn't prepare for the winter. Evan and Tyler hand out cans in silence, thinking that life will never return to what they knew before. Terry is here too, but Walter makes all the decisions now, since Terry can't bear to make tough choices.

*Rice reinforces the idea that indigenous values—like preparing for the winter, as the myth about Nanabush advises—teach valuable lessons that help people cope in hard times, while technology does the exact opposite. Those who relied heavily on modern technology and conveniences before the blackout are suffering from hunger. They're also far more demoralized by the possibility of coping (both emotionally and practically) without technology in the future. Evan's family, however, draw strength from their traditional Anishinaabe knowledge, because they already know it's wise to prepare for unforeseen hardships in advance. The land is a more reliable source of sustenance than modern conveniences, which are fallible.*



A woman walks in, and she updates the group about Scott, who's apparently hoarding firewood. The woman explains that she still has some moose meat left, and Terry adjust her rations accordingly. She's grateful for their help. They've been trying to save protein-rich foods for homes with small children, though they think that some people are abusing the handouts. The morning passes quietly as the group hands out cans, trying to be fair. The line is much longer, and people seem greedier than usual. A fight breaks out over somebody cutting in line, and it rapidly grows into an all-out brawl. Even Evan and Tyler are fighting each other.

*The community is continuing to embody communal values and plan for the future by allocating protein-rich canned food to children. Evan and his circle allocate protein for the children so that they can grow and sustain the community in adulthood. They do this in spite of everyone's growing desperation about food, which is clearly wearing on them. Scott, meanwhile, is doing the exact opposite: hoarding resources for himself.*



Suddenly, four shots of gunfire ring out. It's Scott—he shot his rifle into the air to calm the crowd. He's surprised to see Evan and Tyler fighting. Scott heads inside with them, asking why things are so out of control. The people in the line watch Scott uneasily. He leans in and quietly says that he knows they're running out of food, and—based on the brawl—people are growing desperate and more violent. Scott says that he knows where they can find more food, if they're willing to work with him. Then, he turns around and walks out.

*Scott thinks that his selfish behavior will be valuable to the community, and that he can save them with his hoarding and intimidation tactics. However, Scott's selfishness is likely causing people to hate him, meaning that they'll be quick to turn on him when the opportunity strikes. Scott also thinks that his physical aggression makes him better equipped for leadership than the Anishinaabe elders' wisdom and experience—but this will likely be proven wrong too.*



## CHAPTER 27

Mesmerized by the dancing flames, Evan stokes a fire in a traditional *tipi* tent that he's built in the forest. He's been building a secret refuge in the woods in case conditions worsen on the reservation. Today, Evan brought out two boxes of canned food and blankets. He wants to bury the cans, but the ground is still too frozen to dig. The fire has warmed the inside of the tent through. Evan lays out some blankets and looks into the fire. Feeling soothed, he slowly drifts to sleep.

In Evan's dream, a fierce blizzard howls as he opens the garage door. The sun is red and flashing in sync with his heartbeat, like an ambulance. He steps inside, unable to see anything and his hands tremble. Evan fumbles with a flashlight, struggling to breathe, and the beam reveals tattered blankets—all the bodies have disappeared. He hears a feral growl and smells a rotting odor as a tall silhouette approaches, blotting out the sun. The creature is a savage, disfigured beast with Scott's face. It snarls and lunges forward.

*Following Aileen's advice to trust in traditional customs that have stood the test of time, Evan prepares a traditional refuge, believing it will better sustain the winter's survivors in the future; he's amazed by how warm and comfortable his simple structure is with just a few basic resources. This shows that living simply on the land may—as Aileen believes—be the key to the community's long-term survival.*



*Given that characters' dreams are predictors of the future, Evan's dream suggests that something is going to happen to the bodies, and that Evan will soon face off against Scott in a violent confrontation. The stolen bodies also recall Dan's story about the stolen geese, implying that Scott's fate will be similar to Nanabush's. And, once again, Rice depicts Scott as a physically terrifying, aggressive being who relies on his brute strength to achieve his goals.*



## CHAPTER 28

Nicole boils water on the wood stove in the basement and carries the pot upstairs to the kitchen, straining under its weight. She's using the water to launder essentials like underwear. In the living room, Nangohns and Maiingan are playing in worn clothes. Nicole heads outside to refill the pot with snow to boil for drinking water, just as Dan and Patricia used to do before the reservation went on the grid. Nicole wonders what month it is. Based on the longer days and less frigid temperatures, she guesses it's mid-March—there's still another month or two of snow ahead. Tyler knocks on the door, looking for Evan, who's in the bush. Tyler has bad news: Aileen just died.

*Nicole quietly begins to embody her stoic, nurturing, power as Aileen dies, establishing her as the community's burgeoning spiritual healer. Like Aileen, Nicole knows how to read the landscape based on her traditional Anishinaabe knowledge, and it comforts her to know that she can measure time, anticipate the seasons, and plan for the future without the trappings of modern technology. Nicole's character reinforces the idea that women who draw on indigenous wisdom are the community's strongest, most resilient, and most powerful assets.*



## CHAPTER 29

Evan fights back tears as he and Tyler pull Aileen's body across the snow. She died in bed, in her sleep. Aileen was like a grandmother to Evan, and he feels numb. The ground is too hard to dig a grave, but the family still conducted several days of ritual singing to prepare Aileen for her journey to the spirit world, and they adorned her body with medicines and tools for her afterlife. Struggling to recall the final stages of the ritual, Evan thinks that they need to smudge around her body before they place her in the garage with the other frozen bodies. As they approach the garage, the mood is deeply somber.

*In struggling to remember the burial ritual, Evan reveals that a lot of Aileen's traditional wisdom and indigenous knowledge died with her, which compounds his grief. He's grieving Aileen, but he's also grieving the death of all the indigenous knowledge that she hadn't yet passed on. Evan's grief over losing Aileen during this harsh winter represents the painful cultural losses of First Nations people under colonialist oppression.*





Tyler looks around and realizes that they need to rearrange the bodies to make more room. Evan agrees. If he can't bury Aileen, he wants to at least give her "the dignity" of some space around her body. Evan walks through the bodies, remembering the details of each death and thinking wearily about the 23 graves he'll have to dig in the spring. They move over to Jenna's body, to begin restacking the bodies closer together. Evan reminds himself that Jenna's spirit has left, and this is just her body. As he lifts her stone-like corpse, he thinks about how beautiful and intelligent she was. Evan and Tyler move down the line, feeling suffocated by loss.

Evan and Tyler reshuffle three rows of corpses and move Aileen. Suddenly, Evan notices that a body is missing, and he immediately guesses that Scott took the body. His mind swirls as they move Aileen into place; he knows they'll have to search Scott's house. Tears well up in Evan's eyes—it doesn't feel right to not bury Aileen. Tyler wonders if they should talk to Walter about the missing body, but Evan is against the idea, thinking that they'll just have meetings about it without acting. He knows that this is up to him and Tyler.

## CHAPTER 30

Evan, Tyler, and Isaiah approach the bungalow complex, warning one another to keep their guns on their shoulders so that Scott doesn't shoot at them straight away. Smelling smoke, Evan notices that there's a fire burning out back. They make their way toward it, feeling anxious and uneasy. Scott, Brad Connor, and Alex Richer are standing in front of a large fire pit; a pot simmers on top of the fire. The two groups of men greet each other cautiously. Noticing Evan, Tyler, and Isaiah's guns, Scott asks if they've been hunting. Evan plays along, saying that they didn't catch anything. Scott laughs and asks them why they're really here.

Evan asks why Scott said he knew what to eat when the food runs out and asks what's in the pot. Scott dismissively tells them not to worry about the "experiment" on the pot. He calmly tells Evan that this community is growing desperate, and that chaos will ensue when the handouts run out. Most people don't even know how to trap food. Evan exhales angrily and points out that they've been fine without Scott for generations. As the argument escalates, Cam emerges, covered in blood, and begins sobbing.

*While Aileen's death more broadly represents the losses that First Nations people have endured over centuries, Jenna's body represents people who died young in conflicts with European settlers. Scott (who represents those European settlers) didn't directly kill Jenna—but his aggression intimidated Evan, leaving him unable to protect Jenna from her untimely death. Evan's overwhelming sense of loss reflects the grief, trauma, and regret that First Nations people carry with them today as a result of their community's painful past.*



*Evan continues to feel overwhelmed by his sense of loss, and his grief clouds his judgement: instead of consulting the elders, as he would typically do, he decides to take action himself. His decision to rashly confront Scott will likely lead to a disastrously violent confrontation, if his most recent dream is any indication of what is going to happen. This suggests that the intergenerational trauma caused by colonialism persists over time, as it continues to influence First Nations people's judgement and actions.*



*The men know that Scott is a 'shoot first, think later' kind of man who's motivated by his aggression. Meanwhile, the pot simmering on the fire, along with Scott's menacing attitude, confirms Evan's growing suspicions that Scott stole a body to cook and eat.*



*Scott's assumption that the Anishinaabe need his leadership to survive parallels represents early colonizers' authoritarian attitudes toward First Nations people. Evan's exasperated reaction suggests that such attitudes were deeply insulting to indigenous communities, who thrived for generations on their own. Scott insists that he's doing what the community needs, though it's clear that his own followers (like Cam) are deeply traumatized.*



Feeling sick, Evan asks if they stole a body. Scott replies that it's a matter of survival. Tyler angrily calls Scott a cannibal and lunges at him, but Evan intervenes, asking to see the pot. Scott pulls out a pistol and fires three shots. Evan falls to the ground. Scott turns to shoot Tyler and Isaiah but his head bursts open, spraying blood everywhere, before he falls to the ground—Meghan is standing behind him, her rifle smoking. Tyler scrambles to help Evan, and Meghan points her gun at Alex and Brad. Isaiah watches them carefully, knowing that they'll be banished now without Scott to hide behind. Cautiously, Isaiah steps toward the pot to see what's inside.

*Scott's attempts to subjugate his followers using aggression, fear-mongering, and sexism end up backfiring. Just as Scott shoots Evan, Meghan—who's been demoralized by the abuse she experienced under Scott's leadership—turns on Scott and shoots him in the back. This outcome implies that sexism and intimidation are ultimately futile: though Scott uses such tactics to increase his power, he also fosters contempt and dissent, thereby undermining his plans and triggering his own death.*



## CHAPTER 31

The sun breaks through the clouds as Tyler and Isaiah trudge in the snow, past the crumbling, abandoned store. The road to the south lies dormant, buried deep in the snow. They lug Scott's body behind them, feeling a mixture of hatred, pity, and relief. They shove the body over a ridge, and it rolls down, resting next to Mark Phillips's frozen corpse. When spring comes, the bodies will thaw, and the wolves will eat them.

*Evan is notably absent, and Rice is ambiguous on whether or not Evan survives the shootout. Tyler and Isaiah's mixed emotions embody the confusing feelings of many First Nations people as they grapple with colonialism's legacy on their culture and their lives.*



## EPILOGUE: ZIIGWAAN (SPRING)

Nicole lifts her sunglasses and surveys the living room, which is stripped bare. The television is still there, but it hasn't been used for two years. Nicole tries not to feel nostalgic as she makes a final pass through the house, leaving photos and mementos in the basement. Deep down, she believes that she'll be back here one day. Outside, Dan and Nicole's parents wait for her, while Patricia plays frisbee with Maiingan and Nangohns on the grass. Maiingan is seven now, and his hair hangs long around his shoulders. Unable to live in a place marked by so much pain and loss, the community has drifted off the reservation.

*Two years have passed since the story's violent climax, and Evan is notably absent on the scene—it's unclear if he died in the shootout. Nicole, meanwhile, is emotionally grounded, stoic, and resilient. Her quiet power mimics Aileen's grounded authority, establishing her as a leader among the survivors. The survivors' decision to abandon the reservation shows that the losses they've endured have left the community traumatized.*



The community knows that they were not meant to survive in this environment—it is not their true homeland, since they were displaced from the south and driven far northward. They've decided to take control of their own destiny. The core of the remaining community has been building another settlement, away from this tragic place. Nicole scoops up the kids, saying "Let's go see Daddy. He's waiting for us," and they walk away in single file, heading to their new home, nestled deep in the Anishinaabe territory. They don't look back.

*Despite the survivors' deep sadness, they remain resilient, and they're determined to keep moving forward to rebuild their society anew. This time, however, they'll rely on the indigenous traditions that have sustained them for many more generations than their modernized, technology-reliant reservation did. The story ends on an ambiguous note—it's unclear whether Nicole and the children are going to visit Evan's grave, or if Evan did actually survive, and they're going to reunite with him in the new settlement he helped build.*





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