



SUPERSUMMARY™

IN-DEPTH
STUDY
GUIDE

PERMANENT RECORD

EDWARD SNOWDEN

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PLOT OVERVIEW

Permanent Record is the autobiography of Edward Snowden, released in 2019. Snowden is a former Intelligence contractor who worked for the CIA and NSA. In 2013, he became a world-famous whistleblower, leaking highly classified documents which explained in detail how American Intelligence agencies were conducting illegal mass surveillance of their own citizens.

The first part of the book begins with a description of Snowden's childhood. He is raised by parents who work for the government and eventually move to the Beltway, the area surrounding Washington D. C. which is home to many government agencies. His father brings home a Commodore 64 and then a home computer, spurring the young Snowden's interest in computing. Around age 12, he grows increasingly obsessed with the Internet and spends a huge amount of time online. He plays games, learns how to build a computer, and teaches himself coding. On one occasion, his rudimentary hacking reveals a security flaw in the website of a nuclear research facility, which he dutifully reports. His parents divorce during his freshman year and he moves home. His ever-increasing computer use harms his grades and causes insomnia. When he is diagnosed with an illness, he spends four months off sick and – when threatened with repeating a year – realizes that he can still graduate by taking classes at a local community college. At the college, he meets a woman named Mae who runs a web design company. He falls in love with her even though she is older than him and married. Snowden begins to work for Mae's company. The 9/11 attacks change everything, however, and he is soon determined to join the army, much to his parents' chagrin. Though he is a qualified computer expert, he enrolls and attends basic training. An accident leaves him injured, however, and he is forced to discharge. Instead of the army, he decides to serve his country in the Intelligence services and begins the process of obtaining a security clearance. He meets a woman named Lindsay Mills through an online dating site and the two become a couple.

Snowden takes a job at the CIA. He attends training in a shabby motel and is eventually posted to Geneva as punishment for complaining. He maintains the embassies security networks and systems and, a few years later, moves to a similar position in Tokyo. Lindsay follows him throughout.

In 2009, he attends a conference about the Chinese Intelligence services. While researching his presentation, he realizes that the American government, in possession of the same technology, is likely surveilling its citizens in a similar fashion. The idea becomes an obsession. He eventually comes into accidental possession of a highly classified report which confirms his worst fears. Coupled with his failure to integrate into Japanese culture, Snowden becomes depressed and distant. He moves back to America and returns to working for the CIA, making a great deal of money. Eventually, his worries about what he knows lead to him having seizures and being diagnosed with epilepsy.

Snowden is transferred to Hawaii, partially to help with his medical condition. There, he works for the NSA and begins to covertly research as much about mass surveillance as he can. He begins collecting documents and schematics through a program that he creates named Heartbeat. He studies the Constitution and notes the numerous ways in which the Intelligence agencies are in breach of its intended meaning. He begins to think about becoming a whistleblower. Slowly, he begins to smuggle in SD cards and he transfers every file he collects through Heartbeat on to a highly-encrypted drive in his house. The process is slow, dread-inducing, and extremely illegal. He begins to reach out to journalists, hoping that they will report on what he has. After switching to a new position, he learns even more about the NSA's capabilities and their absurd abuses of power. When Lindsay leaves on a camping trip (which he encouraged), he takes medical leave from work and flies to Hong Kong via Tokyo. There, he stays in a hotel and nervously waits for the journalists to arrive. When they eventually show up, his work and his girlfriend are already suspicious. The journalists begin to publish everything and eventually Snowden records a video message, revealing his identity. The United States charges him with espionage as the world wakes up to the truth about mass surveillance. Snowden has to flee to Ecuador to avoid extradition. During his long flight, he makes a stopover in Russia. He learns that his passport has been revoked by the US government and he is stuck in Russia. After 40 days in the airport, he is granted exile. He remains in Russia, working on a foundation promoting online privacy and developing new tools to avoid mass surveillance. Laws are introduced in Europe and America to combat what he has revealed to the world. Lindsay eventually joins Snowden in Moscow and they live together and then marry.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

Part 1

Chapter 1 Summary: "Looking Through the Window"

Snowden begins his story with a memory of "the first thing [he] ever hacked" (12): bedtime. As a child who wanted to stay up late, he adjusted all of the clocks in his house. His parents did not notice and he eventually fell asleep on the floor. Once he awoke, the clocks were changed back.

He was born in 1983, the year the US Department of Defense split their internal network in two; one part for the defense establishment and one part for public use. The latter would eventually become the Internet; six years later, the World Wide Web was invented. The Internet is a "global cluster of interconnected communications networks" (13), rather than a single entity. It is used by roughly three billion people (42 per cent of the world's population) though few people understand its technical infrastructure, including the myriad of protocols. It is these protocols which have allowed society to "digitize and put online damn near everything in the world" (14). Snowden describes himself as being part of "the last undigitized generation" (14), whose earliest memories are not stored digitally.

Snowden grows up in Elizabeth City. As a child, his "favorite activity was spying" (15). He spies on Jessica (his older sister), Wendy (his mother), and – most of all – Lon (his father). Lon was in the Coast Guard and, one evening, he brings home a Commodore 64. Snowden is hooked immediately and watches his father play the games console.

Chapter 2 Summary: "The Invisible Wall"

Elizabeth City – the "quaint, midsize port town" (18) – is in North Carolina. The Snowden family has historic connections to the sea, his mother's family able to trace their ancestry back to the Mayflower and members of his family have fought in every war in American history; the family "has always answered the call of duty" (19).

With his father away often with the Coast Guard, Snowden and his sister were raised by his mother. She drives the children to the library and set them math challenges. At his grandmother's house nearby, he eats pecans and studies Greek and Roman mythology, as well as the stories of King Arthur. As he grows up, he learns that reality "is nearly always messier and less flattering than we might want it to be, but also in some strange way often richer than myth" (22).

On Christmas, 1989, "a Nintendo appeared in the house" (22). The young Snowden is only allowed to rent a new game when he finishes a book. So, he begins to read shorter books. Super Mario Bros., Snowden suggests, is "perhaps the all-time masterpiece of side-scrolling games" (22). The titular character begins on one side of the screen and must advance perpetually forward; he is blocked from going back by "an invisible wall" (23). There is no turning back. When the Nintendo breaks one day, Snowden resolves to fix it. After dismantling and reassembling the console, it no longer turns on. Snowden worries that he will disappoint his engineer father. Lon arrives home and is patient with his son, explaining the importance of "understanding why and how things had gone wrong" (24). Lon takes his son to the lab at his workplace and they reassemble the console. In the lab, Snowden discovers real, high-power computers for the first time. Lon teaches his son how to use a text editor and how to write the most basic of code. Over the next decade or so, Snowden would learn coding and "become good enough to be dangerous" (27).

Chapter 3 Summary: "Beltway Boy"

Just before Snowden's ninth birthday, the family move from North Carolina to Crofton, Maryland. His surname is closely associated with the region and he sees it everywhere. He traces the history of the Snowden fields and the Snowden River Parkway. The new area feels like "another planet" (30). Snowden is bullied at his new school. The mocking of his Southern accent means that he stops speaking in class until he can divest himself of the drawl. His grades plummet.

The surrounding area – the Beltway – is almost entirely populated by those who either "serve in the US government or work for one of the companies that do business with the US government" (30). For Snowden's parents, it

is “a step up [...] both economically and socially” (31). His father is promoted within the Coast Guard and his mother begins to work at the NSA. Almost all of the families in the area have a member who is working for the government in some capacity. It is, Snowden suggests “one enormous boom-or-bust company town” (32). Both of his parents have top secret clearances and his mother has a “full-scope polygraph” (32), a higher-level check for civilians, though she is “a clerk at an independent insurance and benefits association” (32) that works with the NSA. As a result, the majority of people (and their children) do not discuss work at home.

Chapter 4 Summary: “American Online”

Just after the family moves to Crofton, Lon buys “our first desktop computer” (33). From the first moment it appears, young Edward and the computer are “inseparable” (33). He plays increasingly complex games and begins to explore the Internet. The difference between connecting to the Internet then – “an entire process wherein the computer would beep and hiss like a traffic jam of snakes” (35) – and connecting now is completely different. Access to the Internet was the “big bang or Precambrian explosion” (35) of Snowden’s generation, changing everyone’s lives.

Spending every possible moment online, Snowden begins to sleep in school. But the Internet is able to quench his unending thirst for knowledge. Even when grounded, he would sneak downstairs late at night to use the computer. The Internet offered “the freedom to start over” (36), to invent an entirely new online persona. Until the intervention of governments and businesses, “the Internet was mostly made of, by, and for the people” (37). Snowden joins forums and bulletin-boards, learning how to build his own computer. The responses provided to his panicky and uninformed questions are polite, thorough, and “unthinkable today” (37).

Though he reveals his age to his online friends (making them, if anything, even more encouraging of his hobbies), he never reveals his name. Anonymity is “one of the greatest joys of these platforms” (38). The arguments and bile which occasionally spill into discussions are muted by this anonymity. Being able to change identity on a whim is a release. Playing Ultima Online (a massively multiplayer online role-playing game or

MMORPG), for instance, allows for constant exploration and reinvention. But all of this online play leads to issues: the home phone bills become “exorbitant” (41) and the line is always busy. Snowden and his sister bicker about phone access, so much so that his parents install a second phone line and switch to flat-fee unlimited Internet access.

Chapter 5 Summary: “Hacking”

All teenagers, Snowden suggests, “are hackers” (42) due to their circumstances. Adults wish to impose conformity on teenagers, who wish to maintain their privacy. Snowden is “scandalized” (42) by the myriad rules which govern his life. Part of this realization is a growing awareness of politics. Democracy, Snowden realizes, does not extend to the classroom, where the individual teachers wield sole authority. He becomes convinced that school is “an illegitimate system [that does not] recognize any legitimate dissent” (43). To resist, Snowden begins hacking, which exists “wherever rules do” (43). Understanding and exploiting those rules is, in essence, hacking a system. Humans recognize patterns and rely on assumptions, Snowden states, and this can be exploited.

By the time he is 13, Snowden decides to spend less time at school. He studies the syllabus of each class and determines the bare minimum needed for a passing grade. He stops doing homework and, when a teacher asks about this, he reveals his formula to the class. The next day, the syllabus is changed and his plan is ruined. The teacher takes him aside and says that he has potential but needs to “start thinking about [his] permanent record” (45). Concurrently, he learns conventional computer hacking. But the more he learns about the exploitable nature of computers, the more he worries “over the consequences of trusting the wrong machine” (46).

Snowden’s first hack “that ever courted trouble” (46) reinforces this fear. He visits the website of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, a nuclear research facility, and finds a “glaring security hole” (47). He accesses the facility’s folder directory (a “totally rudimentary traversal procedure known as ‘dirwalking’ or ‘directory walking’” (47) and finds confidential office materials and employee information. Worried about “mushroom clouds on the horizon” (47), however, Snowden tells an adult. He emails the site’s

webmaster but nothing changes. He leaves a voicemail message with his name and number. Weeks pass. Then, the phone rings. His mother answers. As she worries, he calmly answers the caller's questions and is told that the problem has been fixed. As the phone call finishes, the IT representative offers Snowden a job. Snowden reveals that he is a teenager and passes the phone back to his mother. The man praises her son enough that she does not care that dinner is burning.

Chapter 6 Summary: "Incomplete"

Snowden spends large swathes of high school asleep, exhausted by his extra-curricular computer activity. He confesses that, at the time, he was "a touch too enamored of the idea that life's most important questions are binary" (50). This changes during an English class, when he is asked to produce an autobiographical statement. He turns nothing in. Life at the time is too confusing: his parents are divorcing, selling the house, and the "invulnerable icons of [his] childhood are gone. His sister departs for college while turns inward. He worries whether his behavior has caused the divorce. He attempts to feign confidence and self-sufficiency when in company; he stops being 'Eddie' and starts referring to himself as 'Ed', which he believes to be more adult. The "unexpected blessing of trauma" (52) is that, as his parents grow further apart, Snowden is drawn toward other mentors.

But by the start of his sophomore year, aged 15, Snowden is diagnosed with infectious mononucleosis. He recovers slowly, his energy permitting him to do little but play games. His parents compete to bring him "the cooler game, the newer game" (52). The thought of catching up on all the missed schoolwork fills Snowden with dread. He is told he will need to repeat the year. The letter shocks him out of his depressive slump and he searches for a way out of this predicament, a hack. He gets accepted to a local community college and, after the school approves, attends two days a week. The youngest in the class, he becomes both "a mascot-like object of novelty and a discomfiting presence" (53). But the classes interest him.

Before continuing the narrative, Snowden pauses to consider the English assignment he never handed in. People like him rarely come "comfortably to autobiography" (54), he believes. He has spent so much time craving

anonymity, both online and in the intelligence community. This, Snowden believes, is “human encryption” (54), locking away the true identity behind a manufactured, uninteresting self. His family life taught him to keep secrets and about being interrogated. While people are always changing, always in flux, an autobiographical statement becomes, by its very nature, “static” (55). Eventually, Snowden gets his General Education Development degree and graduates high school.

Chapter 7 Summary: “9/11”

From the age of 16, Snowden is “pretty much living on [his] own” (56). He finds a new group of friends at college; they meet in Japanese classes, bonding over a newly-discovered appreciation of anime. One of these friends – a 25-year-old Web-designed named Mae – introduces Snowden to freelance work. She hires him and they work out of her house. Though Snowden is “smitten” (57) with Mae, she has a husband named Norm. Mae and Snowden would bid for Web-design projects; the pay is low and their work is never credited. Mae handles the graphic design while Snowden handles the coding.

Snowden begins to think about his future; he will require IT credentials for the best jobs. He attends a Microsoft certification course; such credentials are broken into tiers, the highest of which is a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer, “the guaranteed meal ticket” (59). Snowden ups his hours with Mae to pay the high course costs. Rushing to her house one day to begin work, he hears a radio story about a plane crash in New York. Though distracted by this news, he and Mae begin to work. Norm phones and tells them about the second plane hitting the tower. They stop work and Snowden drives home in a daze. He is caught in the flood of traffic as NSA workers rush home, having been ordered to evacuate. After 9/11, driving to Mae’s house would be made impossible by all the additional security in the area. The aftermath drives a wedge between them that never truly heals.

Chapter 8 Summary: “9/12”

On 9/11, 3,000 people died. This, Snowden suggests, is a difficult number to conceive. In the course of America’s response, however, over one

million people have been killed. The secret policies, laws, courts, and wars have had a “traumatizing impact” (63) on the country as a whole, as well as those abroad. As a person who has been both employed by the intelligence agencies and forced into exile during this time, Snowden knows how often the agencies are wrong. America has transformed into a security state. In an attempt to understand this, he returns to the aftermath of 9/11.

As he drove home from Mae’s house, Snowden frantically called family members but could not get through. He finally speaks to his mother but she provides few reassurances. All of their family, however, emerge unharmed. Snowden notes how quickly America divided the world into ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. American flags appeared everywhere. Targets in the shapes of men in Arab clothing appeared at the gun ranges Snowden occasionally visited. Gun and cell phone sales spike. Thousands of spies return to work knowing that they have failed to protect America, desperate to redeem themselves. Thus, 12 September 2001 was “the first day of a new era” (66). Instead of reinforcing democratic values, however, the country goes to war.

Snowden describes his unquestioning support for the invasion of Afghanistan as the greatest regret of his life. He accepts the media narrative of liberation and forgets the naturally anti-institutional politics he had learned from his formative years as a hacker. He wants to be a part of something and wonders how his tech-orientated training can serve the state. Most intelligence agencies, however, require a traditional college degree rather than IT accreditation. But they might waive these requirements for military veterans. Aged 20, Snowden decides to join the army. His mother cries. He writes his father a note and slips it below the door. The closing words were simply “I’m sorry, Dad [...] but this is vital for my personal growth” (67).

Chapter 9 Summary: “X-Rays”

Snowden scores high enough on the army entrance exams to potentially come out of training as a Special Forces sergeant. This training track is called 18 X-Ray, which screens for recruits with the best fitness, intelligence, and language-learning abilities. First, however, Snowden must

complete basic training. He attends Sand Hill in Fort Benning, where the drill sergeants shout and abuse the recruits. Snowden is nicknamed Snowflake and, as he is the lightest in the platoon, is frequently paired with the tallest recruit. They are “always dirty and always hurting” (69) but soon in excellent shape. They run everywhere, chanting while they do so. The only respite comes in the barracks.

One exercise calls for the recruits to trek over variegated terrain with only a map, a compass, and their 50-pound rucksacks. While checking the bearings, a snake causes Snowden to lose his footing. He slips and is in excruciating pain but finishes the exercise anyway. Later, he is told that he has stress fractures and the only way they will heal is with rest. He hobbles back to his barracks where he is kept separate from the other recruits while he heals. Snowden is paired with a sweet and innocent young recruit who is so wracked with homesickness that he is about to go AWOL. Nothing will convince the man not to leave. A few days later, Snowden is told that his injuries will prevent him from completing basic training. He accepts the offer of an ‘administrative separation’, “more like an annulment than a divorce” (75), neither honorable nor dishonorable discharge. As he signs the papers, Snowden recognizes that this is a hack: the army will no longer be responsible for any disability payments. He signs anyway and is allowed to keep the crutches.

Chapter 10 Summary: “Cleared and in Love”

Slowly, the pain and then the depression begin to fade. Snowden begins to realize his affinity for computers. He had taken this understanding as natural; his short stint in the army reflected a desire to be praised for something more than just his intellect. While his pride is wounded, his confidence grows. He realizes that he would serve his country better at an intelligence agency. This requires a security clearance, so he begins to search for job which will expediate the vetting process.

Though he is seemingly a perfect candidate for a clearance, Snowden is still nervous. His entire family and network of friends are interviewed; the aim is to make sure that he cannot be compromised or blackmailed. Snowden worries about the “stupid jingoistic things [...] and the even stupider misanthropic opinions” (78) he posted online as a teen. He thinks

about explaining these comments to a man examining his permanent record. Most people of Snowden's age, he believes, have "that one post that embarrasses them, or that text or email that could get them fired" (79). While he could delete his old posts, he chooses not to, as it would go against everything he believed about the liberating nature of online life. He does not want to erase who he once was.

One of the most embarrassing aspects of Snowden's online life is his dating profiles, though he met Lindsay Mills through the site HotOrNot (which had a dating component). Later, she would become his partner and the love of his life. He rated her a perfect ten, she rated him an eight. They begin to talk and eventually arrange a date. Lindsay picks him up and they drive around, having forgotten to make a plan. They talk about everything, including the vetting process. It is her voice in his head when he drives to his final interview at the NSA, which includes a polygraph test. Snowden passes. Aged 21, he has his security clearance and a girlfriend.

Chapters 1-10 Analysis

The autobiography opens by introducing the audience to the character of Edward Snowden. Though his reputation often proceeds him, the first part of the text provides an important context for what is to come. It does not just explain the foundational understanding of technology which allowed Snowden to be in such a position as to become a whistleblower, but it explains why he acted as he did. As such, the descriptions of his time obsessed with his computer and his burning passion for his country help to alleviate some concerns which audiences might have regarding the man who leaked many of the most important and terrifying documents of the information age.

In this regard, the first part of the text becomes something of a portrait of the whistleblower as a young man. The many anecdotes from Snowden's early life help to demonstrate the extent to which he was wedded to computers as an ideological promised land. In many ways, he is raised by computers and technology. They provide him with an education that he could not get anywhere else. Furthermore, they begin to represent something to him. To the young Edward Snowden, computers are not tools or blunt machines. Rather, computers – and, in particular, the Internet –

represent a liberty and a freedom that is not available anywhere else. As a child, he is treated like an intellectual equal. On the Internet of the early-to-mid 1990s, he finds solace in the communities he finds online. Though this is a biased experience of the Internet (one limited to those who are technologically inclined, white, suburban, middle class, and so on), it does not pretend to be an all-encompassing description of online life at a certain point in time. Rather, it represents an ideal. Snowden has an experience of the Internet as a liberating and intellectually stimulating force and the rest of his life becomes a pursuit of this forgotten dream. To that extent, these chapters do not describe the leak for which he would become famous, but they show the degree to which Snowden felt his conception of an ideal Internet had been betrayed. By leaking the documents, Snowden hoped to return to this nostalgia-laced ideal of the Internet as a free and open community.

But Snowden is also self-effacing. He does not try to present himself as a genius or morally superior. In many ways, he is a typical child, seen through the eyes of a slightly embarrassed, self-aware adult version of himself. Looking back, Snowden is critical of himself and, to some degree, happy to poke fun at his foolish behavior. Whether it is making silly mistakes on the Internet, falling in love with an older married classmate, or (more seriously) becoming duped by the aftermath of 9/11 and signing up for the army, Snowden does not shy away from painting himself in an unflattering light. This helps to establish trust in the mind of the audience; they are willing to believe his later, more outlandish actions because he has been so honest about his more embarrassing moments. By illustrating his ideal version of the Internet and building trust among his readers, Snowden is laying the groundwork as a sympathetic figure ahead of his later illegal and morally dubious activity.

Part 2

Chapter 11 Summary: “The System”

Snowden pauses the narrative to discuss his politics at the age of 22: he claims that he “didn’t have any” (85). Instead, he had a mish-mash of inherited family values and ideals he found on the Internet. His parents,

working largely in the federal sector, were dismissive of politicians, if not politics. He discovers that the patriotism his parents taught had converted easily into nationalist fervor in a post-9/11 world. Returning from the army, however, Snowden reappraises his binary, good-versus-evil view of the world. Technology of communications, he realizes, might be able to succeed where technology of violence has failed. The Internet, so comparable in its founding ideals to the American state, could help further democracy around the world. It was a revolution in which he could play a role. But, in order to be considered among the very best, Snowden knows that he will have to specialize his skillset; he decides to become a “systems guy” (87), a system engineer who analyzes problems and fashions or invents solutions. Over the course of his career, Snowden begins to analyze his country as though it were a broken system in need of repair. He becomes frustrated as he discovers that it is the one system he cannot fix.

Chapter 12 Summary: “Homo contractus”

Snowden’s experience of government work is very different to that of his parents. By the time he begins working, “the sincerity of public service had given way to the greed of the private sector” (89) and most workers are now contractors, for whom the government is just another client. While contractors can supply distance (i.e., cover and deniability) between the government and quasi-legal actions (torture and murder, for example), it helps those in the Intelligence community from getting caught and circumvents federal caps on hiring. It also functions as “governmentally assisted corruption” (91), lining the pockets of those who approve the budgets for private sector hires.

Snowden’s first post-clearance job is at the Center for Advanced Study of Language, studying how people learn languages and using computers to make this process quicker and better. This, in turn, would help the NSA process the huge swathe of foreign language communications which they were collecting. But when Snowden arrives, the office is still under construction. For the first few months, he is essentially a security guard. Working night gives him more time to spend with Lindsay.

Many private companies are hiring kids, simply because these kids were the only ones who knew how the systems worked. Snowden attends job

fairs, looking to be hired by one of these companies. Later, after the 2013 leaks, the government would attempt to disparage Snowden by referring to him as only a 'contractor', characterizing him as a disgruntled worker. However, such arrangements were typical of all the Intelligence workers at the time. Snowden is hired by COMSO, who had been contracted by BAE Systems, who had been contracted by the CIA. He only ever worked at CIA headquarters. Given the long commute to Virginia, he has to find a new apartment nearer work. He finds a room in a lavish McMansion owned by a man named Gary.

Chapter 13 Summary: "Indoc"

The CIA headquarters seen in the movies are not those used by most workers. The New Headquarters Building is much less aesthetically pleasing; Snowden spends most of his time working in an underground, unwindowed room. Most of his fellow newcomers are 'computer guys', dressed up for their first real day of work. All have the green ID badge which designates them as contractors. They are attending 'Indoc', short for Indoctrination. Being indoctrinated into the Intelligence Community, Snowden suggests, is "like becoming an expert at technology" (98): both believes that they have apolitical, expert solutions for every problem based entirely on data. They are taught basic operational security practices (known as tradecraft) which help them keep their job a secret. They are shown examples of people who broke the rules and who are now in prison.

When Snowden arrives at the CIA, the institution is "at the nadir of its morale" (99). The failure of 9/11 has led to a massive reorganization. A politician is appointed in charge and he oversees a campaign of layoffs, forced retirements, and firings. Snowden works for the Directorate of Support, managing the CIA's Washington-Metropolitan server architecture, which includes most of the internal networks and databases which transmit, receive and store the Agency's intelligence. Secure offices are named 'vaults'; Snowden's team's vault stores the cryptography codes which secure all of the Agency's secrets. He is proud of his new job, though later realizes that the process by which he was hired was an indication of the broken nature of the system.

After his initiation, Snowden moves on to the night shift. The building is empty and dark. The job is relatively dull, responding to any issues or errors as and when they occurred. Snowden's partner is a man named Frank, a personable libertarian and a voracious reader of mystery and thriller novels. Frank likes to boast about how little he knows about computers and how little work he does. Any issue too complicated, Frank bounces it to the day shift. Snowden has been hired to deal with all of the issues Frank skips over. Frank's one job seems to be changing the ancient tape storage, the back-up for all of the Agency's data. Only Frank knows how to handle the proprietary tape format. Snowden automates many of his tasks and is left with a lot of free time, which he spends online. All of his activity is monitored. He spends his time on the internal Agency sites, reading as much information as he can. It is like reading the news two days ahead of time. He realizes how little he has travelled and decides to get out of the private sector and into government work (becoming a 'govvy'), which may take him around the world. Snowden swears an oath to defend the US Constitution. But before he begins his new job, he has to go back to school.

Chapter 14 Summary: "The Count of the Hill"

Snowden's first order as a govvy is to report to a dilapidated Comfort Inn in Virginia, where he stays while attending the Warrenton Training Center (also known as the Hill). He is to stay there for six months, attending classes and being kept very busy. The Hill is the heart of the Agency's field communications network and its most mysterious training facility. Snowden is a member of class 6-06 of the Basic Telecommunications Training Program, which trains Technical Information Security Officers. These 'commo guys' are "a one-person replacement for previous generations' specialized roles of code clerk, radioman, electrician, mechanic, physical and digital security advisor, and computer technician" (110). They manage the technical infrastructure overseas CIA operations, such as those hidden beneath American embassies; TISOs have to know how to fix everything on site, as well as how to destroy them in the event of an emergency. The TISO officers posted to smaller embassies tend to have the highest divorce rates of all CIA posts.

Aged 24, Snowden is no longer the youngest in the group. The classmates assign one another nicknames such as 'Taco Bell' and 'Flute'. Snowden is nicknamed 'the Count' because he raises his forefinger before answering, just like the eponymous Sesame Street character. Their training includes the operation of Cold War-era machinery, a technique called Van Eck phreaking, and how to maintain the terminals which send 'cables', a word which refers both to the secure diplomatic messages and the actual cords and wired which once connected all of the network. Nearing the end of training, they are required to fill in 'dream sheets', which ask them where – of all the CIA's worldwide stations – they would most like to work. Snowden's first choice is the Special Requirements Division in Virginia, from which he would be sent on "periodic tours of all the uglier spots in the sandbox" (114). But, when the stairs of the dilapidated motel collapse, rumors circulate among the students of disgruntlement and perhaps even unionization. Snowden is asked to represent the group and he compiles an email of complaints. The next meeting, he is called in and offered something between a threat and a bribe; he and his classmates are asked to deal with the issues for just twelve more weeks. This bothers Snowden, who writes another email and sends it higher up the chain of command.

A few days later, their class is interrupted and a front-office secretary announces that unpaid overtime will no longer be required and the students will soon be moved to a nicer hotel. The joy of winning does not last long; Snowden is called into another meeting, where he is told that insubordination is not tolerated at the CIA. They want Snowden at the agency, he is told, but they want to know that they can count on him. Because of this, he will not be sent into the desert: he will not get his first-choice positing. Instead, he is being sent to Geneva, one of the positions all of the other students had coveted. As such, the other students will think Snowden has been rewarded or bought off by the management.

Chapter 15 Summary: "Geneva"

Snowden moves to Geneva, Switzerland and Lindsay joins him a few months later. To pass the time, he reads *Frankenstein*, which is set in the city and tells the tale of a scientist whose innovations outpace his moral, ethical, and legal restraints, leading him to create an "uncontrollable monster" (119). In Intelligence circles, this is named 'the Frankenstein

effect': when policy decisions intended for good end up causing irreparable harm. Perhaps the most relevant example is the manner in which the American government secretly restructured the world's communications. Part of this new network is based in Geneva.

HUMINT (human intelligence) is the traditional method of spy craft, involving real agents collecting information. SIGINT (signals intelligence) is rapidly replacing HUMINT and involves intercepted communications. The tension between the two creates a healthy rivalry. As the ambassador for SIGINT, Snowden is consulted frequently on technological matters at a moment when the field is rapidly changing. With so many important organizations headquartered in Geneva, the city is ground zero for this kind of work. The advent of the Internet means that physical access to a computer is no longer necessary for those who want to read the information stored inside. One risk, however, is human agents searching for information on the public Internet. Foreign intelligence services can track such searches and the CIA's only solution is expensive, slow, and cumbersome. So Snowden introduces his case officers to Tor, a free and open source state creation which is "one of the few effective shields against the state's surveillance" (124). It allows for anonymous browsing by routing Internet traffic through randomly generated Tor servers around the world, a process named onion routing. Hence the acronym: The Onion Router.

But HUMINT remains important and even Snowden is called into action, though his most memorable operation ends in failure. SIGINT, by comparison, almost never involves meeting a target. It is depersonalized and distant. However, Snowden meets a target at an embassy function. He is invited by the case officers, who hope that his natural geekiness will allow them to target scientists. At the party, he sits next to a Middle Eastern man and engages him in conversation. The man is happy to talk: he is Saudi, loves Geneva, plays laser tag, and works in private wealth management whose work mostly involves Saudi accounts. Snowden informs the relevant case officer and returns to the party. But over the coming months, the case officer fails to recruit the Saudi man despite a great deal of effort and is recalled back to America. Later, Snowden is talking to friends from the local NSA office. They suggest that, next time he has a good target on the line, to simply inform them. By 2008, however, as

the global financial systems crash, Geneva begins to seem overly extravagant. The city flourishes while the rest of the world seems to be collapsing. To Snowden, this seems a symptom of the rot of the global system.

Chapter 16 Summary: “Tokyo”

The Internet is an American invention and so is much of its infrastructure. As a result, more than 90 per cent of the world’s Internet traffic passes through technologies developed by the American government or American businesses. Additionally, computer software, hardware, chips, routers, modems, and web services are typically American. This Americanized Internet allows for America to surveil large swathes of the world’s population. For years, however, the government denied this and most people – trustingly, foolishly – believed them. In 2009, Snowden moves to Japan to work for the NSA as a systems analyst. It is a dream job, though he is technically a contractor again, working for a company quickly acquired by Dell. Snowden and Lindsay live in Fussa, a city on the edge of the Tokyo sprawl. He is immediately impressed by the NSA’s advanced technology and worried about their seeming lack of vigilance with regard to security; hardly anything is encrypted and their backup systems are abysmal. Snowden is tasked with solving these issues.

His biggest issue is duplicated data, which wastes time and resources. In Snowden’s new system, every fragment of every file is checked for uniqueness and – if found to be new – is transmitted back to headquarters. Coupled with constantly improving technology, the NSA is able to store more and more data and for longer times. Their aim is to keep everything in perpetuity: to create “the permanent record” (133). The randomly generated codename for this is EPICSHELTER. While developing the system, Snowden attends a conference about China where all of the intelligence agencies give expert briefings. At the last moment, Snowden is asked to give a presentation and he agrees. Up all night preparing, he researches everything he can about China and the Intelligence community. The sheer scale of the Chinese government’s data collection and analysis astonishes him, so much so that he almost forgets to be appalled by the morality of the spying apparatus. But Snowden begins to realize that, if the Chinese are capable of this, then the American government can likely

match them. Though uneasy, Snowden decides to tamp down his unease. Indeed, he decides that he fully supports “defensive and targeted surveillance, a ‘firewall’ that didn’t keep anybody out, but just burned the guilty” (137). But even after the conference, he cannot help but keep researching the matter.

At the beginning of his work with the NSA, Snowden admits to being only slightly more knowledgeable than the average person. He is aware of George W. Bush’s executive order which increased warrantless wiretapping in the aftermath of 9/11. That Barack Obama, upon taking office, did not call for a congressional investigation into this NSA overreach suggests to Snowden that the change in president does not signal a change in policy regarding surveillance. He reads through an anodyne report issued by the government which contains little of note beyond references to ‘Other Intelligence Activities’ which are not defined. Snowden becomes increasingly concerned, particularly when certain government officials mumble their misgivings about the abuse of power by the Intelligence agencies. After putting the issue to one side, Snowden encounters the classified version of the same report, which “pretty much only a few dozen people in the world are allowed to read” (140). It has been sent to Snowden by mistake but he reads the entire report and it confirms his worst fears; it is so classified that anyone leaking the report would be immediately identified and the activities it describes are so criminal that no government would allow it to be released. It describes the NSA’s mass surveillance of the public, justified because the outdated laws were not relevant to modern technology. The initiative is coded named STELLARWIND and it is the deepest secret in the report; the initiative redefines private Internet communications between members of the public as potential signals intelligence. Basic words and phrases have their meaning completely redefined. Indeed, the lack of a warrant requirement is justified by the suggestion that data is not ‘acquired’ or ‘obtained’ until retrieved by the agencies, having already been collected.

Snowden uses the term ‘mass surveillance’ when discussing the NSA’s initiatives. The government is less interested in content (pictures, voice recordings), he explains, and more interested in ‘metadata’, which is “data about data” (143). It is a record of what people do on a device (a phone, tablet, or computer): the date, time, duration, and numbers involved of a

phone call, for instance. This allows citizens to be tracked, monitored, and surveilled every minute of the day. It is the essence of content, telling the Intelligence agencies who and what to surveil. Additionally, people have little control over the metadata they produce. After reading the report, Snowden is in a daze. He feels like a fool, someone who has been used by the Intelligence agencies. This is accentuated by his struggles to integrate into the local Japanese culture. At the same time that he feels entirely illiterate and lost, his government knows everything about him. Reflecting on his time in Japan, he regrets not visiting Nagasaki and Hiroshima, holy sites which are a reminder of technology's amorality. Snowden mentions the first two states to attempt mass surveillance; Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, both attempts which ended disastrously. But a modern smartphone contains more computing power than both of those countries combined. While technology has made astounding advances, human morality has not. Japan, Snowden says, was the moment when he realized that he had to act if he is to avert his country from the dangers of mass surveillance.

Chapter 17 Summary: "Home on the Cloud"

By 2011, Snowden is back in America and still working for Dell (though now attached to the CIA once more). He notices that he has a mail box and is reminded of his mother teaching him not to open other people's mail. At this point, he is rich and successful though he still lives in denial. After four years away, America feels like a changed country. He pities his fellow citizens, knowing what they do not. He has now switched to the sales side of Dell's business, devising solutions for the CIA and selling them the machines to make these ideas a reality. One of these solutions is a 'private cloud', bringing together the Agency's processing and storage while making the data more accessible for the right people. With the right solution, an agent in Afghanistan would have access to the same data as a person in the CIA headquarters.

Despite his newfound wealth, Snowden does not like spending money (especially with traceable credit cards). His neighbors, however, seem to be enjoying the benefits of the post-9/11 spending spree. While shopping for appliances, he encounters an Internet-enabled 'smart-fridge'. He thinks about how the manufacturer could monetize the massive amounts of data

it collects. At the same time, he notices the consumer versions of the cloud products he is developing for the CIA and is astonished that people are willing to put so much of their data online. As a marketing tool, 'the cloud' becomes just as appealing for consumers as it does for the CIA; even the word 'cloud' makes "everyone think of heaven" (153). The cloud allows for data to be store on a central server and accessed via Internet. As a result, data no longer belongs to the users; it is controlled by companies who can use it however they please, protected by intelligible and impenetrable user service agreements which are never read.

Once a liberating, adventurous experience, going online now feels like a dangerous ordeal. Snowden begins to notice surveillance tools everywhere; few laws protect citizens from surveillance while on public property, for instance, allowing law enforcement to use CCTV as they please. Snowden begins to conceive of a terrifying future in which every citizen is surveillance constantly, where laws are enforced by computers without leniency or forgiveness. It would be a future in which "everyone was a criminal" (157). Lindsay notices Snowden's struggles but he cannot tell her what he knows: that her entire life is under surveillance and the government has access to her most intimate, most compromising information. His depression manifests physically, making him clumsier and more distant. One day, his sense of dread becomes so overbearing that he falls unconscious. Lindsay finds him curled up on the floor; he has suffered an epileptic seizure. As he is diagnosed with epilepsy, Snowden feels defeated. Betrayed by his country and the Internet, now his body is following suit.

Chapter 18 Summary: "On the Couch"

On 1 May 2011, Snowden learns that Osama bin Laden has been killed, ten years after 9/11. He reflects on what the last decade has achieved and worries that he has wasted his life. As it turned out, he believes, "fear was the true terrorism" (162), permitting the deployment of mass surveillance. Snowden continues to suffer from seizures and becomes increasingly depressed. His condition means that he cannot drive and he worries for his job. He takes medical leave and stays on his mother's couch. He watches the news, thinking that the violence he sees across the Middle East is far greater than his own troubles. He feels guilty. The protesters are

demanding an end to censorship and oppression, demanding a free and just society. They reject authoritarianism, leading Snowden to ruminate on the difference between authoritarian and liberal democratic societies, as well as the fundamental importance of the right to privacy. Snowden wants to help but he does not know how. He sets up a Tor relay, attempting to provide some Internet service to the censored people of Iran. He thinks of the man who martyred himself, whose death was the catalyst for the Arab Spring. If that man could die for his beliefs, Snowden says, then he can “certainly get up off the couch and press a few buttons” (166-7).

Chapters 11-18 Analysis

By the time Snowden finds his career path, he is already infected with doubt. The second part of this book describes how his doubts and fears metastasize into a decision to blow the whistle on the government’s mass surveillance operations. Rather than a moment of clarity, the decision is reached by a gradual process. This is important, as it demonstrates that Snowden’s actions were not impulsive. Rather, they were the result of many years of failure, learning, understanding, and horrified realization.

After being discharged from the army and deciding to move into the Intelligence services, Snowden is almost immediately disillusioned. In the aftermath of 9/11, he begins to realize that the shame and guilt experienced by the Intelligence agencies is compelling them to act in increasingly morally dubious ways, their actions made possible by a flood of money and a lack of expertise. Thus, he finds himself in a dilapidated motel with a group of other men who are far from the best the country has to offer. Snowden, with all his floors, is seemingly the best among them and it is this generation of young men to whom the entire technological apparatus of the Intelligence services will be trusted. While the time spent in the motel is humorous and interesting, there is an essential subtext which slowly builds throughout this part of the narrative: in their desperation to avoid another catastrophic attack, the Intelligence agencies are beginning to deal in forces which they do not really understand. They promote untrustworthy, inept people simply because these people know how to work the computers. And, as a result, the hierarchy of the agencies have no idea how much power they have placed into the hands of the hastily recruited contractors.

This has the effect of removing all of the glamor from the idea of being a spy. While Snowden is travelling the world and visiting far-flung, exotic locations and even indulging in spy work himself, this is undercut by the sensation that the entire edifice is rotting within. Not only are the recruits far from the best people, but the use of contractors, the sheer amount of money involved, and the increasingly morally-dubious nature of the nascent mass surveillance system demonstrate that being a spy in the modern age is more akin to IT support than James Bond. These concerns gradually begin to affect Snowden more and more. He shows signs of depression as he struggles with what he is beginning to learn about the country he once idealized. This manifests physically, turning into seizures and epileptic fits which threaten his job. Snowden's growing realization of the true nature of the Intelligence agencies – the unglamorized, horrific truth – begins to threaten his life.

Part 3

Chapter 19 Summary: "The Tunnel"

Snowden is transferred to Hawaii, where he works in a long tunnel beneath the ground. It is a former airplane factory turned into an NSA facility. Now 29, he is still contracted by Dell (but now working for the NSA), stepping a rung down on the career ladder to reduce stress, and is slowly reaching the decision which will define the rest of his life. He is essentially in charge of document management, implementing a system which decides who is allowed to read documents. He is determined to read many of these documents himself in order to confirm his worst suspicions.

Snowden and Lindsay have come to Hawaii to "start over yet again" (170); the climate and relaxed lifestyle is meant to benefit Snowden's epilepsy and the facility is within biking distance of their home, reducing the need to drive. Lindsay convinces a reluctant Snowden to attend a luau. There, he listens to an old man tell the ancient creation stories of the islands' indigenous peoples. One involves three islands which are considered so pure by the gods that they must be hidden from humanity, lest they be spoiled. The islands are lifted into the air, where they float among the

clouds. Snowden compares this story to his own search for the truth. The search is long and difficult, containing many rabbit holes and false starts. Snowden conducts this search all alone.

Chapter 20 Summary: “Heartbeat”

Just in case he might pursue a teaching career in the future, Snowden keeps updated with as much new technology as possible. He peruses the NSA ‘readboards’, the Agency’s internal updates on new and exciting tech. When the number of readboards he is perusing becomes too big, he turns the project – with his boss’s permission – into an automated system which collated all relevant and interesting updates for internal use. This automated system also took files from the CIA, the FBI, and other agencies. All of this information would be filtered by clearance levels of those reading it, though all of the data would be stored on one of Snowden’s servers. Snowden names the system Heartbeat, as it takes “the pulse of the NSA and of the wider IC” (175).

Heartbeat shows Snowden “not just the aims but the abilities” (176) of the Intelligence agencies and provides the majority of the documents that he would later leak to the press. He is less interested in who the system is targeting than he is in how the system targets these people. The broadness of the Intelligence agencies’ scope (achieved with absurd interpretations of existing laws) allows them to surveil any person at any time, collecting as much data as possible in case it is needed in the future, even when it is unconstitutional to do so. This is achieved with two systems: PRISM, which collects and stores data from major tech companies (email, photos, web history, and much more); and upstream collection, which harvests data directly from private-sector Internet infrastructure (cables, satellites, and routers). These systems make the world’s information easy to survey. Next, Snowden learns how this collection system actually works, studying schematics and engineering diagrams. These are concrete proof that the systems exist and are being used.

Chapter 21 Summary: “Whistleblowing”

Snowden celebrates Constitution Day by reading the small laminated copies of the Constitution that were handed out. He does this partly because he

appreciates the document and partly “because it freaked out my coworkers” (181). On Constitution Day in 2012, he reads the Constitution again. He is surprised to find how much the Bill of Rights intends to make law enforcement more difficult, particularly the Fourth Amendment. This amendment protects people and their property from government scrutiny. In order to search a person or their property, it states, there must be probable cause. The NSA’s mass surveillance completely contradicts this, which Snowden believes is a massive failure of the three branches of government and a betrayal of the Constitution’s founding ideals. For a long time, the NSA simply denies that mass surveillance exists. The lie is repeated over and over, to both Congress and the public. Any attempts to challenge mass surveillance in the courts are – to Snowden’s disgust – dismissed out of hand. The Intelligence Agencies believe themselves to be “above the law, and given how broken the process was, they were right” (184). They have hacked the Constitution.

Snowden notes how the United States of America was birthed from an act of treason; the Declaration of Independence was a violation of British law. During the Revolutionary War, sailors aboard a ship became America’s first whistleblowers, reporting on their Commodore’s abusive nature. The aftermath, in effect, created the first whistleblower protection laws. By late 2012, Snowden has resolved to become a whistleblower himself. His previous experiences raising issues up the chain of command have demonstrated that this is not an option. Those above him are complicit. He considers the etymology of the word whistleblower and the difference between whistleblowing and leaks (typically conducted for institutional or political aims). Snowden intends to go even a step further: an exposure of the entire apparatus of mass surveillance. He aims to reveal the whole system.

Chapter 22 Summary: “Fourth Estate”

Even after deciding to become a whistleblower, Snowden struggles with how to tell Lindsay. He is alone in his silence. He fears being both doubted and understood so resolves to leak documentation in order to demonstrate the existence of mass surveillance rather than just describe it. But disclosing even a single document would be enough to earn prison time. He needs to publish them through a trusted institution in order to have the

biggest impact. He considers Wikileaks but their approach has changed in the wake of the Chelsea Manning leaks; they do not suit Snowden's needs. Context and analysis need to be provided alongside the leaked information, rather than just dumping everything online. He considers the New York Times but they have a checkered history of publishing such information.

As he is considering his options, two huge events seem to pass by unnoticed. Firstly, the NSA announces the construction of a huge new data center. Secondly, in March 2013, the chief technology officer of the CIA makes a rare public appearance, in which he reveals that a new cloud computing contract awarded to Amazon and mentions that "it is nearly within our grasp to compute on all human generated information" (196), admitting to the existence of mass surveillance as the Agency's intention. The admission is barely reported. Snowden realizes that he will have to coach and teach any journalists of the importance and the seriousness of the information he intends to release. Thus, he needs trustworthy and capable reporters.

He decides to use the state's systems against it, searching for "journalists whom the national security state had already targeted" (198). He finds Laura Poitras, a documentarian, and Glenn Greenwald, a lawyer turned columnist. Later, he would also work with Ewen MacAskill and Bart Gellman, journalists at the Guardian and the Washington Post respectively. He contacts the journalists using a variety of aliases though retaining anonymity is incredibly hard. He drives in his car, searching for Wi-Fi networks using a special Linux operating system on a laptop. He hijacks other people's networks and uses them to send encrypted emails. Occasionally, he has to show the journalists how to use this technology. He drafts long explanations of what he is doing but deletes them quickly, struggling to find the words.

Chapter 23 Summary: "Read, Write, Execute"

Snowden puts together a three-step plan: read, write, execute. He needs to extract all of the data from the Intelligence services without being caught. Everything done on a computer, however, leaves a record. Snowden exploits the complexity of the systems; even the workers did not know the true functionality or the limits of the systems. By now, system

administrators have become used to seeing Heartbeat on their logs and it becomes “the perfect cover” (203). Snowden still needs to read and store these documents, however, making them ready to copy and extract. He sets up an old computer under the guise of compatibility testing, allowing him to search, filter, and organize all the documents he wants. These are neatly organized into folders, thus completing the ‘read’ phase.

The ‘write’ phase involves copying and preparing all of the files for extraction. Snowden declines to actually detail how he does this, but does reveal that he used mini- and micro-SD cards. He smuggles these into the facility (in his mouth or his sock) and slowly transfers everything across; he is also de-duplicating, compressing, and encrypting the files, using all of his learned skills. To fill a card could take an entire shift and “those hours were terrifying” (205).

The final phase is ‘execute’, smuggling the data out of the facility. All the time spent studying the NSA’s systems has given Snowden a better understanding of how not to get caught. He uses Rubik’s cubes, first to help smuggle in the SD cards and then as a conversation starter with the guards, distracting them from his nervousness. Once home, he transfers all the files to an external storage device. Ultimately, however, he knows that – once released – the documents will expose his identity. He accepts his fate.

Chapter 24 Summary: “Encrypt”

Deletion – as it pertains to digital files – does not truly exist, at least “not as we conceive of it” (210). A deleted file is not necessarily gone, merely gone from view. Deleting a file conceals it, hiding it from parties who do not know where to look. Toward the end of 2012, global events reinforce Snowden’s decision. Governments are increasing attempts to mass surveil their populations and he no longer believes that there can be a natural alliance between government and technology. He teaches free cryptography classes in Honolulu, teaching people of the values of encryption. Teaching a general audience, he hopes, will preparing him for explaining mass surveillance to journalists. While deletion is difficult, he tells the attendees at CryptoParty, encryption should be ubiquitous as it is the “the only true protection against surveillance” (213). Snowden praises

the value of encryption, which would destroy the government's ability to surveil a population. The files that he has stolen from the NSA are so well encrypted as to be impenetrable; he has assured kept a piece of the encryption key for himself, ensuring that – if something were to happen to him – he could destroy the access to these secrets forever.

Chapter 25 Summary: "The Boy"

Snowden reflects on the way in which his career had progressed, an astronomical rise from quiet, computer-obsessed kid to wealthy Intelligence officer who developed global systems. His level of access was "unexpectedly omniscient" (216). But one question eludes him: is there any single person who could not be surveilled by the machines? To find the answer, he turns to XKEYSCORE, a searchable database which functions as a Google for collected private data. He applies for a job in one of the offices with unfettered access to XKEYSCORE, the National Threat Operations Center. This building is also home to the NSA's hacking team, the Tailored Access Operations division.

The change in jobs requires a trip to Washington DC, returning to Fort Meade as an insider. He learns everything he can from the NTOC team. He learns that XKEYSCORE is the widest-ranging tool at the NSA's disposal, used to search through everything a person does on the Internet. It allows the NSA to read emails, browser histories, social media, and can even play back recordings of screens in certain instances. Snowden witnesses the privacy abuses describes in the documentation first-hand. He learns that everyone's communications are in the systems. As well as searching Supreme Court justices and congresspeople, Snowden's colleagues also search for LOVEINT: surveilling current and former lovers using the NSA systems. The workers swap intercepted nude photographs, knowing that they will never be prosecuted in any meaningful sense.

One boy in particular captures Snowden's attention. He is the son of an engineer, a man who happens to be a target. Snowden is able to search through the man's email, pictures, and location history. One video recording shows the man sat at his computer with a baby boy in his lap; the boy looks directly at the camera, causing Snowden to step back from the computer in shock. He is reminded of his own father, who he realizes

that he may never see again. Snowden returns to Hawaii, infused with a sense of finality. He empties his bank accounts, withdrawing the cash ready for Lindsay to use. He completes household chores and erases his old computers. He searches for a country to which he can flee, where he can meet the journalists without fear of being caught and deported. The only option is Hong Kong, the closest he can “get to no-man’s-land, but with a vibrant media and protest culture, not to mention largely unfiltered Internet” (223). The morning before he leaves, he wakes up beside Lindsay. He hugs her, apologizing for his busyness, telling her how much she means to him. As soon as she leaves for a camping trip, he cries. He has invited his mother to visit in the hope that, when his actions are revealed, she and Lindsay will take care of one another. He takes a medical leave of absence from work, packs his back (including four laptops), and leaves his phone behind with a note explaining that he has been called away on work. He buys a cash ticket to Tokyo and then flies from Tokyo to Hong Kong.

Chapter 26 Summary: “Hong Kong”

Snowden arrives in Hong Kong without being caught. But the journalists he has asked to meet keep postponing. Laura Poitras is struggling to convince Glenn Greenwald to commit to the meeting. Snowden begins to worry. He stays in his hotel room for ten days. He uses that time to prepare his presentation, “the last briefing [he’d] ever give” (226). He not only has to explain mass surveillance, he has to explain why he has decided to act.

Glenn and Laura arrive on 2 June. Glenn struggles to understand why someone so young would have access to such information and would be willing to throw their life away. As they set up – Glenn is ordered to put his smartphone in the mini-fridge – Laura begins to film. Snowden suddenly becomes conscious of being recorded. He stiffens, regretting his choice of clothes and his decision not to shave. But, eventually, he will come to see the film as an essential component of what will become the leaks. He spends a week with Glenn and Laura, going over everything in minute detail, joined later in the second day by Ewen MacAskill. While the days are frantic, the nights are dull and lonely. The first story breaks on 5 June and Snowden watches the reaction on the news channels. Snowden’s office begins to email him. He does not answer. It quickly becomes clear that the

entire machination of the US Intelligence network is devoted to finding the whistleblower, with the aim of impugning his or her credibility. Snowden decides to seize the initiative and explain to the world why he has acted. Laura films him making a statement directly to the camera.

Snowden has given little thought to what happens next. Returning to America in the hope of a fair trial is out of the question. But from 9 June, when the video confession is posted, Snowden has “a target on [his] back” (230). All he can do is hope that his fellow Americans will be able to understand his actions (and their importance) as he trusts his family and Lindsay to do. Glenn’s contacts help relocate Snowden, whose location is discovered and besieged by journalists. He stays with a refugee family in one of the city’s poorest districts. The family are incredibly kind and welcoming, sharing everything they have with Snowden. On 14 June, Snowden is charged by the US government under the Espionage Act. His extradition is formally requested on 21 June, Snowden’s 30th birthday. With Hong Kong informing him that they will not protect him, he has to find a new home.

Chapter 27 Summary: “Moscow”

Ecuador is suggested as the most viable destination for Snowden, as most countries refuse to offer him asylum. They fear America’s influence too much. A journalist and editor from WikiLeaks named Sarah Harrison arrives in Hong Kong to help Snowden; the fate of WikiLeaks’s founder Julian Assange means that she has a great deal of advice in how to seek political asylum. Snowden has little choice but to trust Sarah and is quickly impressed. She secures a laissez-passer, a UN-sanctioned pass which will help Snowden avoid extradition while he travels from Hong Kong to Quito, via Moscow, Havana, and Caracas. The convoluted route means avoiding US airspace but not NATO airspace. Snowden sits next to Sarah on the first flight.

The first stop in Russia was meant to be a 20-hour layover. It has since lasted six years. At passport control, Snowden is stopped due to a “problem with passport” (239). He and Sarah are taken to the business lounge where an FSB agent waits for them. The man delivers a pitch, offering Snowden the chance to work for the Russian government. But

Snowden cuts him short, explaining that he does not intend to work for any Intelligence service. The agent reveals that Snowden's passport has been invalidated, making the rest of his trip impossible. Sarah double-checks this news. It is confirmed; Snowden's own government has trapped him in Russia. The agent points to a scrum of journalists who have been alerted to the story, making his offer again. Snowden refuses again. The agent leaves and Snowden is then trapped in the airport for forty days, desperately applying for asylum in other countries. His presence in the airport becomes "a global spectacle" (242) and, to put an end to the situation, Russia grants Snowden temporary asylum. Sarah departs, leaving a forever grateful Snowden behind.

Chapter 28 Summary: "From the Diaries of Lindsay Mills"

As Snowden deals with his multitude of issues, Lindsay is facing her own difficulties. She keeps a diary, which is selectively reproduced in this chapter. In the first entry, she describes being annoyed at Snowden for inviting his mother and then leaving. They are both perturbed. She finds a string of missed calls on her phone, one from Hong Kong. Over the coming days, Snowden's mother Wendy asks about her son's health and she and Lindsay spend time together. They cry together. Lindsay worries that he is having an affair. Lindsay takes Wendy to the airport on her last day.

On 7 June, Lindsay is awoken by a call from the NSA, inquiring about Snowden. She returns home from an errand to find government agents near her home, so does not stop. Later, she returns home and they knock on her door. They are "frightening" (245), asking about her boyfriend and searching her house. The next day, Lindsay flies to her parents' home to be with her friend. Her paranoia is extreme and, when her friend asks about her relationship, she does not know whether she is still in one. On 9 June, a friend calls and tells her about Snowden's video. She watches it and then attends a barbecue but cannot think about anything else. Her phone keeps ringing. Her car is tailed.

The FBI calls Lindsay; her friend helps to find a lawyer. She meets a lawyer named Jerry Farber. She buys burner phones and withdraws as much money as she can from her bank, her entire life savings. At her friend's house, they use hairdryers to make noise while they talk to one another.

She goes for a meeting with the FBI and cannot lose the car following her. They meet at Jerry's office; he tells her never to lie and to let him talk when she does not know an answer. The interrogation lasts into the night and leaves Lindsay feeling exhausted. She knows there will be more to come. Her dinner with friends is interrupted by more agents, who tell her that she will be surveilled for the foreseeable future and warns her against erratic driving.

Lindsay resumes her diary after a few days. She is furious. Endless surveillance and interrogation have taken their toll. Even as the country is beginning to realize how little privacy they have, Lindsay's lack of privacy reaches "a whole new level" (250). She sees herself on the news and googles herself; the comments are not kind. Eventually, the interrogations end but she is still followed. She talks to Wendy and they agree that Snowden did the right thing, even if they have been hurt. But even as they talk, they realize that they are likely being surveilled. Lindsay flies back to Hawaii and begins to pack up everything in the house, frequently interrupted by the FBI. She sells many possessions. Whatever is left is shipped back to the mainland on 2 July; Snowden's few remaining possessions fit into a small box. She burns it all.

Chapter 29 Summary: "Love and Exile"

Snowden describes how – if the reader has searched online for any of the technical terms in this book – they are now "in the system" (253). Even reading the book might be enough to flag the attention of the Intelligence networks. This, he says, is only the beginning. They can actively monitor the reading of the book, including watching the video of those who are reading on a phone or tablet. As such, he suggests "your life has now become an open book" (254). Though Snowden has raised awareness of this, as he intended, awareness is not enough. His reveals inspired congressional investigations into the NSA which concluded that the agency has repeatedly lied. In 2015, the NSA's mass surveillance was deemed unconstitutional. Legislation was changed, precedents were set. As a result of technological changes, the Internet in 2016 is more secure and encrypted than ever. Snowden himself has assisted in some of these changes.

The disclosed documents helped to spark an international debate about surveillance. Germans, Snowden notes, were appalled to note the degree to which the NSA had surveilled them, including their Chancellor, though their own Intelligence agency had collaborated with the NSA on numerous operations. It formed a template seen around the world: outraged citizens versus collaborator government. The EU made efforts to establish whistleblower protections as well as a framework for privacy protection. But data and privacy are global concerns. Snowden looks to the new generation, those who were not yet born on 9/11 to champion privacy.

Snowden now lives in exile, a term which used to mean getting kicked off the computer by his parents. These days, he spends a lot of time in front of a computer but is exiled from his home country. He speaks via video chat to civil liberty conferences. He runs the Freedom of the Press Foundation and talks to his legal team. In 2014, he sees Lindsay for the first time since he left. They explore Russia together as tourists. He changes his appearance often. Lindsay's Russian is better than Snowden's attempts. As of the end of the book, they are celebrating their two-year wedding anniversary.

Chapters 19-29 Analysis

The full reveal of Snowden's whistleblowing happens in a flurry of activity. He leaves behind Lindsay and his job, jetting off to Tokyo and then Hong Kong while desperately emailing journalists. It is because of the preceding two parts that the audience understands the scale of his decision. The technological implications of mass surveillance mean that he can be tracked everywhere; the time spent detailing his career and his success demonstrate what he is leaving behind; the portions dedicated to his love for Lindsay reinforce the emotional scale of his decision; and the detailed descriptions of the various technologies possessed by the NSA (including their in-office use, to spy on innocents and steal nude photos) makes a clear moral judgment on the importance of his actions. Though this has cost Snowden everything, the demonstrably nefarious nature of mass surveillance ensures that he ends the novel with the audience's sympathies.

However, one important inclusion is the switch to a different narrative voice. Throughout the text, Snowden – and only Snowden – has guided the audience toward his decision. But in the aftermath, he dedicates a chapter to how Lindsay experienced the aftermath of his revelations. By including her diary entries, Snowden provides an important juxtaposition to his own informed, calculated decision. To Lindsay, the entire affair is a shock. Like the audience, she is not a tech expert. She learns about mass surveillance alongside the rest of the world. She has been increasingly concerned about her boyfriend's erratic behavior and, when she finds that he has left, she worries that he is having an affair. Thus, Lindsay becomes the avatar for the majority of the audience, those who are not as tech-savvy as Snowden and those who learned about mass surveillance when it was revealed. By including this alternate voice, Snowden emphasizes the informed nature of his own decision as well as highlighting its importance: people like Lindsay (and likely the reader) were being surveilled and he has revealed the truth of their day-to-day lives.

But the novel ends on something of a muted note. Snowden is exiled to Russia and is joined by Lindsay. Though they eventually marry, they will never be able to go back to the serene life they once led. In order to justify this, Snowden lists the changes he has seen in the world since he came forward. Legislation in the EU is the best example he gives, though not a great deal has changed in the United States. Given the clandestine nature of the world he described, it takes no little imagination or cynicism to imagine that the surveillance of the population has continued unabated, even in the face of outrage and criticism. Though he does work in the field, advocating for privacy and an end to surveillance, Snowden has sacrificed everything for a relatively modest amount of change. The muted ending seems to suggest that the problem is still pertinent and far from resolved. Though the truth about mass surveillance has now been leaked to the press, it remains up to the reader to ensure that something is done about the issue.

KEY FIGURES

Edward Snowden

In 2013, Edward Snowden released a data dump of highly-classified materials. His role as a whistleblower helped expose the huge mass surveillance network which monitored and recorded more information about American and foreign citizens than had previously been thought possible or probable. In doing so, he became famous around the world and a wanted felon. *Permanent Record* is his autobiography the means by which he explains why he did what he did, how he did what he did, and why it is important to note. The book is partly biography, partly manifesto, and partly a warning about a dystopian future. As such, it should be no surprise to find that Edward Snowden is the leading figure in the book.

The Snowden presented in the book is one which is self-effacing, self-aware, and not without regrets. He shows incidents from his childhood and his teenage years, incidents in which he appears foolish or naïve. Rather than a distant, emotionless hacker and herald from the future, this part of Snowden's autobiography has a humanizing effect. The reasons for why he acted become clearer when it is apparent that he has lofty ideals and expectations of the Internet, ideals which he believed were being betrayed. The first part of the book, even if it is hardly relevant to the technical side of the information Snowden revealed, allows for the purest of exposition. Given the accusations levelled against Snowden in later years, these humanizing moments create a sense of empathy and understanding for a man who could be executed for treason should he ever return home.

Added to this, it demonstrates that Snowden is – at his very core – a patriot. There is little doubt that Snowden loves his country, perhaps to a fault. Following 9/11 he joins the army and has ambitions of serving his country. He wants to further American hegemony around the world as he believes it is right. But as this idea becomes slowly poisoned by what he learns at the NSA, the book becomes the story of how a man's patriotism is kindled, destroyed, and then resurrected. By his own reckoning, Snowden believes that his whistleblowing was a patriotic act. The book justifies this claim, demonstrating how he hopes to open Americans' eyes to the dangerous monster that their paranoid psyches have created.

Lindsay Mills

Lindsay Mills, Edward Snowden's longtime girlfriend (and, eventually, his wife), performs an important function in the book. While Snowden focuses on the tech side of the problem at hand, he can quite easily forget about the human side of the issue. As such, Lindsay becomes the means through which he understands the general population and how they might react to the news that they are being constantly surveilled. In this respect, she becomes his bellwether, the means by which Snowden can judge how society at large will react to the secrets he possesses. By occasionally including this in the narrative, Snowden provides a regular juxtaposition between the life of an Intelligence agent and the life of a normal person.

Though Snowden and Lindsay seem very much in love, their relationship is endangered by the secrets which Snowden possesses. As is made clear in the diary sections of the book, she worries about the state of their relationship. As Snowden begins to become more and more anxious about the information he has unearthed, he withdraws into himself. He becomes depressed and is eventually diagnosed with epilepsy. Lindsay is there for him during this time, providing the emotional support that is not always explored in the text. Her constant presence is reassuring for Snowden and – without Lindsay – it is not clear whether he could have followed through on his intentions. Nevertheless, she remains almost entirely in the dark about his intentions. This not only demonstrates Snowden's adherence to the code imprinted on him by the CIA (not telling anyone about his work) but it shows his commitment to the idea that he is willing to imperil his most important relationship rather than tell Lindsay the truth.

This is what makes the switch to Lindsay's point of view so important. The audience understands just how cut off and distant Snowden has become, how much the idea of whistleblowing has affected him mentally and – by extension – how much it has affected Lindsay. Her experiences in the wake of the leaks act as a hyper realized version of the public's reaction: not only is she learning about mass surveillance but she has very obvious, very real experiences of explicit surveillance. The subtle is made obvious; Lindsay's experiences become a warning of a future in which surveillance is the norm and in which it is inescapable. As such, Lindsay Mills is the most relatable character, the one who helps explain many issues to the audience.

Glenn Greenwald & Other Journalists

Though the majority of the characters in the book enter and exit the narrative with regularity, Snowden's approach to the journalists is an important juncture in the story and a moment at which Snowden's own character becomes strengthened. He reaches out to a number of journalists but is mostly rejected. Laura Poitras, a documentary film maker, is one of the few who he is able to convince to listen. In turn, she convinces Glenn Greenwald to become involved, practically dragging him to Hong Kong to meet with Snowden.

While Laura Poitras is the more eager of the journalists to meet with Snowden, it is Greenwald's reluctance which makes him more essential to the story. His apathy and his cynicism are obstacles which Snowden must overcome. These obstacles are not limited to Greenwald. Instead, they are a reflection of a society as a whole who might distrust or simply not care about what Snowden has to tell them. By convincing Greenwald, Snowden is able to make the first step toward alerting the world that there is a problem and that there needs to be a solution. Snowden notes Greenwald's initial disappointment that he is not a middle-aged, gruff, chain smoker. It is assumptions like these which Snowden will have to (and does) conquer in the minds of both Greenwald and the wider public.

In this respect, the journalists as a whole are an important character detail for Snowden. Throughout much of the book, he has acted alone. Whether it is working long night shifts or crafting tech for Dell, he has rarely been a part of a team. His solutions have always come from within; even when he was in the army, it was an individual fault which let him down and which led to him being discharged. But when he begins to think about how he needs to make the world listen, Snowden comes to a realization: he cannot do this alone. By reaching out to the journalists, he is admitting that he needs help. He is admitting that they have skills which he does not possess. Rather than simply teaching himself, he begins to trust and depend on others. For a person who is so self-reliant and self-assertive, this is a big admission and speaks to the scale of the task at hand. Even if the journalists do not figure much in the narrative, their presence alone makes them important character simply through their proximity to Snowden.

THEMES

The Dangers of Mass Surveillance

The book is predicated on the dangers of mass surveillance. This is what Edward Snowden revealed to the world in 2013, an attempt to reveal the extent to which the American Intelligence agencies (assisted by those abroad) were surveilling almost every single citizen and recording their most intimate data. Over the course of the narrative, he comes to the steady realization about the true extent of the problem, eventually realizing that he has no choice but to utterly destroy his life in order to let other people know. However, the theme functions in a number of different ways.

While the idea of mass surveillance terrifies Snowden, the same cannot be said about his coworkers. At numerous points in the book, Snowden tries to discuss the issue with his fellow NSA workers. For the most part, they react with mild indifference, unable to see what they (a single person) could achieve in the face of such a massive structure. This issue reaches its nadir when Snowden visits a facility and finds the workers spying on women and collecting (and sharing) their nude photographs. By this point, the morality of mass surveillance has become so toxic and has permeated so much of the agency that he has no choice but to reveal everything.

One of the big dangers of mass surveillance is not necessarily the data itself but the metadata. In terms of the themes of the novel, this hidden metadata is even more nefarious. It is unseen, passive, and unknown to the majority of citizens. If mass surveillance is a concern, then explaining the complexities and dangers of metadata harvesting becomes almost impossible. The sheer scale of the task becomes more and more daunting as Snowden learns more and more about the agency's capabilities. Gradually, the massive scale of the surveillance becomes apparent. By the end of the book, this surveillance is spanning the globe. Snowden is terrified to be around smartphones and traceable tech in his Hong Kong hotel room, worried that an object as innocuous as a phone could locate him and lead to his capture. The dangers of mass surveillance become clear through the fear of the protagonist, who understands and explains the extent to which every person is surveilled and why this should terrify people, as it does him.

The Morality of Technology

Throughout the book, Snowden leaves little doubt in the audience's mind that he is a lover of technology. Practically raised by his computer and his Internet connection, Snowden has been extremely online from a young age. But to him, this technology is amoral. It can be used for good purposes (as were his experiences when young) and bad purposes (mass surveillance of the entire population of the United States). To that end, the morality of technology is not questioned: rather, such morality derives from the user. Technology becomes a blank slate onto which the moral compass of humans is projected.

Snowden has a tricky relationship with morality and, as he details in his book, he has reckoned with his own understanding of morals on a number of occasions. The most obvious of these occasions is the aftermath of 9/11. Snowden is so struck by the attack that he immediately begins to cast the world around him in simple moral terms: good versus bad, us versus them, America versus the terrorists. He becomes so swept up in this simple and unnuanced morality that he joins the army against his parents' wishes and is in real danger of being sent to a war zone. After being discharged from the army, however, he begins to come to his senses. The nationalist fervor which had propelled him so far begins to seep away and he develops a more complicated view of the world. But it is only when he begins to work for the Intelligence services that his conception of morality is forever altered. When he sees the way in which the government is corrupting the machines that he has grown to love, he begins to question America's moral certitude. Soon, Snowden realizes that the morality of the technology is only as strong as those who wield the tech. And, as he discovers, those wielding the most powerful tech in the world seem to be operating without a moral compass at all.

As such, his decision to become a whistleblower can be seen in the light of him hoping to return technology to a position of positive morality. By revealing the mass surveillance system to the world, he hopes to bring about a reckoning with technology and those who employ it. He uses technology himself, using the very tools which survey people to help liberate them. Ultimately, Snowden hopes to redeem the morality of technology and bring to light the immoral activity carried out in its name.

Anonymity

To Snowden, anonymity is an important theme of Internet culture. Having spent so much time online, he revels in the ability to drift in and out of an identity, the malleable personality that perpetual anonymity provides. Without the option of not being identified, he seems to suggest, the Internet (and culture as a whole) will never truly be free.

Snowden's earliest experiences on the Internet are described in excruciating detail. He lists the mistakes and the errors he made online, but notes that he was always protected by his anonymity. No matter what stupid argument he was dragged into or what naïve post he made on a computer forum, begging for help, he was always able to ditch his identity for an entirely new one. This is a formative experience for Snowden: anonymity provides him with the arena in which he can fail without fearing repercussions. He is able to make mistakes and not have them follow him around for the rest of his life. To Snowden, being anonymous online is an essential choice, a freedom which should never be surrendered.

But this anonymity fades. The post-millennial direction of travel for the Internet, as described in the book, notes that anonymity is rapidly vanishing. Not only is social media entirely tied to one's identity, but government surveillance means that – no matter what identity a user has adopted – the government has robbed all possibility of being anonymous in their accounts. There are solutions to this. Snowden presents Tor as an important tool for fighting back. He opens up a Tor server on his computer as a means for people living under authoritarian governments to access some form of anonymous browsing.

By the end of the book, however, Snowden is forced to confront his own anonymity. His role as the whistleblower means that he must reveal his identity, lest he be slandered by the government. He chooses to seize control of the moment, recording his own unmasking video. Snowden chooses to surrender his own anonymity as a sacrifice to ensure that his message is heard. He gives up one of his most treasured ideals in order that the world can learn the truth about their slowly eroding rights to privacy and anonymity.

SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

The Permanent Record

The motif that Snowden returns to again and again, the idea of a permanent record gives the book its title and plays on the themes of surveillance and recording which are evident throughout. At various stages of his life, Snowden encounters different forms of a permanent record, some more serious than others. As he grows and his views become more and better informed, this idea of a permanent record evolves from an idle threat from a teacher to a student to the totality of user data collected on every single person in the United States of America which can be accessed forever.

The importance of the motif is clear: by introducing the familiar idea of a school record which is kept permanently (an urban myth which is repeated to generation after generation, to the point of being modern folklore), Snowden is able to mentally prepare the audience for what is the modern interpretation of a permanent record. At first, the idea is introduced as an ironic offhand comment, a way of keeping a wayward student inline. But by the time Snowden begins to work in the Intelligence agencies, he discovers that the idea might in fact be possible. Just as a computer logs every minor action performed on the computer itself, the modern computers employed by the NSA monitor everything a user does at all times. This metadata becomes a modern, clandestine permanent record, one which the citizen does not even know exists. The folklore becomes a reality and, by this time, the reader is aware of how a permanent record might actually pose a danger to a free society.

The ultimate irony for Snowden is that the idea of a permanent record becomes, for him, a matter of public interest. He becomes world famous after leaking the secret documents. Whenever people search his name online, he will be forever associated with one single act, rather than the years of activism or the diligent work for his country before that. In the end, Snowden was able to seize agency over his life and alter his permanent record. However, whether he has altered it for the better is unclear. For Snowden, however, the very act of making the alteration is a demonstrable level of control over what he considers an authoritarian tool.

Rubik's Cube

One repeated image is of Snowden playing with a Rubik's Cube. The toy is a puzzle which allows the user to move around colored blocks until all of the individual colors are unified on specific sides. To solve the Cube, a user can learn set patterns and techniques which make it possible in increasingly quick times. In many ways, the Cube is a metaphor for Snowden's infatuation with systems and learning how to manipulate and break them. On a deeper level, however, it becomes clear that he uses the Rubik's Cubes for a multitude of other purposes.

By his own admission, Rubik's Cubes are ever-present in Snowden's life. From his childhood to his jobs at the intelligence agencies to his time in Hong Kong, his thoughts always drift to the toy. One of the reasons for this is because it is a skill he has required. While many people fumble with the Cubes, the actual techniques can be learned (in Snowden's case, learned from the Internet) and practiced. This turns the device from a novelty into a hobby, something which Snowden can train and improve at while distracting himself from difficult thoughts (such as being discharged from the army or his ever-increasing awareness of the mass surveillance system). The repeated techniques become soothing, a way of demonstrating his control over a system in chaotic moments. When Snowden is stressed or anxious, he thinks about the Cubes and how to solve them. For a man who is obsessed with systems and how to manipulate them through intelligence, the Rubik's Cube is a physical metaphor for this obsession.

When he is sneaking SD cards out of the NSA facility, he employs a Cube to achieve his goal. At first, he does this with classic subterfuge. He hides the tiny card under one of the colored faces on the cube, sneaking it into the facility in disguise. But as he becomes more adept at sneaking the storage devices into the facility, the Cubes take on a new purpose. He pretends to adopt the Cube as an affectation, as though his introverted personality can only be expressed through such an affectation. The trick convinces the guards, who he talks to about the Cubes, switching their focus from him to the toys. As such, the toys become a demonstration of his advanced hacking skills, now able to take on a system as complex as the human mind.

Computers

By far the most common objects in the story of Edward Snowden's life are computers. They are with him from his early childhood up until his exile in Russia, allowing him to stay in touch with the rest of his family when he is not allowed to return to America. But the emotional and symbolic meaning of the computer changes throughout the novel. In Snowden's childhood, the computer is the gateway to another world, a free and liberating educational tool which shapes him as a person. But he gradually begins to see the dangers of such devices. By the end of the book, Snowden has become a public herald of the dangers posed by the use of computers in the hands of the wrong people. Though he remains endeared to the idea of computers, a corrupt world has come close to obliterating his love.

In the beginning, however, the computer (and, in particular, its connection to the Internet) become almost a third parent for the young Edward Snowden. From the moment his father arrives home with a Commodore 64, he is hooked. He stays up at night, not playing with the computer but watching his father play from two rooms away. His obsession grows when the family gets their own personal computer, to the extent that he monopolizes the use of the system. This becomes such a problem that his grades in school begin to suffer and, when his parents divorce, Snowden worries that his overuse of the computer might have been the reason for his parents' split. Nevertheless, the ideas introduced to him by games, the Internet, and by taking apart the system and learning how it functions become the formative moments of his childhood. Everything he does in life is based on this early relationship to the computer, one of love and respect.

But this relationship is slowly poisoned. The more Snowden learns about how computers are used by the government, the less he feels he can trust them. By the time he is an adult, everything is wiped and encrypted. He fears betrayal and surveillance from the computer. When he sees an Internet-enabled refrigerator, he realizes the extent of the problem. This image is expanded upon when he asks a journalist to put his smart phone in a mini-fridge. By this point, Snowden feels the need to lock up his computers. He has been betrayed, as if by a lover or family member.

IMPORTANT QUOTES

1. "Which is to say, from as far back as I can remember, my favorite activity was spying." (Chapter 1, page 15)

In moments such as this, Snowden plays on the audience's prior knowledge of his activities in later life. This deployment of dramatic irony suggests that spying and surveillance were a part of his life from a young age, building toward the point where he was no longer surveilling individuals, but entire populations. By laying these foundations early, Snowden is establishing his credentials and demonstrating how such surveillance can be an essential element of life from an early age.

2. "Her heritage is straight Pilgrim – her first ancestor on these shores was John Alden, the *Mayflower's* cooper, or barrelmaker." (Chapter 2, page 18)

*Much in the way that the previous quote seeks to establish Snowden's credentials as a spy, this slice of family history is meant to establish his status as an American. Given his future actions, Snowden will be labelled as a traitor to his country. By tying his family history to one of the nation's defining points of origin (the voyage of the *Mayflower* and the settling of the Pilgrims), he is able to demonstrate his family's longstanding ties to the country. His bona fides as an American, therefore, are not in doubt.*

3. "This might not strike you as the healthiest environment in which to grow up, and yet it is precisely the only environment in which you *can* grow up – by which I meant that the early Internet's dissociative opportunities actually encouraged me and those of my generation to change out most deeply held opinions, instead of just digging in and defending them when challenged." (Chapter 4, page 39)

Snowden's description of the early days of the Internet might confuse and astound modern readers. His defense is not technological – the modern infrastructure is demonstrably better – but ideological. This collectivist, enthusiastic, and – importantly – anonymous Internet offers an optional entry point into an online world, rather than – as it is today – being an

essential part of life. This particular form of the Internet will later inform Snowden's decision to blow the whistle on the government's activity.

4. "As a teenager, my first hack that ever courted trouble dealt with a fear that suddenly became all I could think about: the threat of a full-on, scorched-earth nuclear holocaust." (Chapter 5, page 46)

Edward Snowden's first hack functions as an analogy for his future. After he finds the security hole on the nuclear facility website, he diligently reports it in the hope that it will be fixed. This action mirrors his future whistleblowing efforts. However, in later life, the "scorched-earth nuclear holocaust" (46) is not quite so literal. Rather, it becomes a metaphor for the huge fall out from the leaks which reverberate around the world as the global population suddenly learns the truth.

5. "Every childhood fuss I'd ever made flickered in my mind like crime-scene footage, evidence that I was responsible for what happened." (Chapter 6, page 51)

As his parents' marriage collapses, Snowden's already insular character reaches new levels of guilt and worry. He frets that his own behavior caused the divorce, a strikingly human moment which prefaces his entry into the cool, disjointed, and unemotional world of espionage. It is a reminder that those involved in the intelligence services, no matter how detached and seemingly uncaring, are still essentially human and prone to the same worries and concerns.

6. "She was too opposed to the war." (Chapter 7, page 62)

Still just a teenager, Snowden recounts his experiences on 9/11. The way in which it changed both him and the country is clear. The increased security and the changes in idioms and tone among Americans speaks to the wider societal changes, but the growing divide between Snowden and Mae demonstrates the manner in which the aftermath of the attack would become a wedge which split apart old friendships.

7. "Nearly a hundred thousand spies returned to work at the agencies with the knowledge that they'd failed at their primary job, which was protecting America." (Chapter 8, page 65)

In describing the aftermath of 9/11, Snowden is not seeking to excuse but rather to explain the manner in which the surveillance state was erected. After such a devastating attack, the psychological traumas are palpable. The need to prevent this from ever happening again can even be found among the intelligence agents; they do not hesitate to begin such large-scale operations because they themselves feel guilty and responsible, as well as scared.

8. "It was heinous to be so inextricably, technologically bound to a past that I fully regretted but barely remembered." (Chapter 10, page 78)

The online culture which Snowden has once found so freeing and liberating has become an albatross around his neck. The guilt and shame he feels regarding his teenage opinions are not only memories; they exist in cyberspace, still present on long-forgotten forums which might be turned up during an extension background check. The vetting process forces Snowden to confront his online teenage persona in a manner which most will never experience, dragging him face-to-face with his long-abandoned opinions and jokes.

9. "I ended my time in Intelligence convinced that my country's operating system – its government – had decided that it functioned best when broken." (Chapter 11, page 88)

After deciding to become a systems engineer, Snowden begins to use the idea of a computer system – his subject of expertise – as an analogy for the entire country after 9/11. With everything broken and falling apart, he is frustrated that the repairs and fixes which might normally be applied to a circuit board or a network simply will not repair the damage done to the country's government. This illuminates his character, explaining why he made the choices that he did: the decision to leak becomes the action of an engineer, searching for a way to fix a broken system.

10. "But for the third-millennium hyperpower America to rely on privatized forces for the national defense struck me as strange and vaguely sinister." (Chapter 12, page 89)

Snowden's discussion of the use of contractors in the Intelligence Community is not only a critique of the modern American state, but it also becomes a pre-emptive defense for later criticism. He primes the audiences by explaining the ubiquity of the use of private contractors and providing his own (low) opinion of this, which pre-empts the government's later description of him as just a disgruntled contractor. The social critique functions as exposition and, in a roundabout fashion, as a means of building a character defense for a forthcoming accusation.

11. "American flags billowed like ghosts – spooks in red, white, and blue." (Chapter 13, page 102)

Describing his night shift work at the CIA, Snowden uses figurative language. His description of the building as being haunted and foreboding reflect his later realization of the broken nature of the Intelligence network in the United States. The American flags are like ghosts, terrifying vestiges of a once-living being which now represent little of what they once embodied. The figurative language reflects the theme of the collapse of the traditional American ideals the Agency once stood for.

12. "At age twenty-four, though, I thought as little of the costs as I did of the benefits; I just cared about the system." (Chapter 14, page 116)

Even after everything he has been through (the army, contracting, CIA training), Snowden cannot escape his natural inclinations as a hacker. If he sees a system, he wants to understand, control, and exploit it. While this fascination with systems has brought him to this point in his life, he is now up against an altogether different kind of system: the bureaucracy of the CIA. Though he seemingly wins in his battle, he is punished by being given the nicest possible job. Just as Snowden learns how to beat the system, the system is already aware of how it can beat him.

13. "Peering at life through a window can ultimately abstract us from our actions and limit any meaningful confrontation with their consequences." (Chapter 15, page 125)

Snowden's discussion of HUMINT and SIGINT is both a comment on his own struggles with depersonalized information gathering and the online culture which allows for the level of surveillance his leaks revealed. Just as he found his targets becoming depersonalized, Snowden is suggesting that modern society's willingness to experience the world through screens (phones, computers, televisions, and so on) has muted the threat posed by these devices and limited society's ability to separate from them.

14. "There was simply no way for America to have so much information about what the Chinese were doing without having done some of the very same things itself, and I had the sneaking sense while I was looking through all this China material that I was looking at a mirror and seeing a reflection of America." (Chapter 16, page 136)

The slow dawning of realization for Snowden begins with his research into the Chinese government. Though his access to the American Intelligence systems has been purposefully limited, he begins to see echoes of his own country's actions in those of the Chinese. For a man who once split the world into good-versus-evil and who was determined not to be fooled again, the comprehension of the scale of the American surveillance is a shock and one of the book's most fundamental paradigm shifts. This moment of realization fuels the remainder of the book.

15. "It made everyone think of heaven." (Chapter 17, page 153)

Snowden returns to a different America, one which has been entirely won over by the supposed benefits of the surveillance state. The cloud computing that he describes is a marketing tour-de-force; companies have sold consumers on the advantages of entrusting all of their most personal and important data to faceless corporations and paying a princely sum to do so. The surveillance state is not being treated with contempt or suspicion. It is being openly welcomed into people's homes.

16. "And this was the point: the aid I offered was private."
(Chapter 18, page 166)

After sinking into a deep depression, Snowden decides to act. His first means of help is to set up a Tor relay point on his server. He will never know how this might help someone in Iran (whose Internet has been censored) but that lack of knowing is the point. He wants their data to remain private as he obsesses over how to deal with the problems of privacy in his own country. The solutions he finds have to suit the ideology and the morality that he is seeking to protect: namely, he wants to restore people's privacy while respecting their privacy.

17. "The revelations I was pursuing were exactly like those islands: exotic preserves that a pantheon of self-important, self-appointed rulers were convinced had to be kept secret and hidden from humanity." (Chapter 19, page 172)

The analogy which Snowden uses to explain his search for the truth about mass surveillance perhaps reveals more about him than his search. In this version of events, he casts himself as the powerless figure who is battling against the all-powerful gods. To him, broken down and depressed, fighting back against the American state seems about as possible as fighting against a deity. Nevertheless, he continues, which speaks to his determination and his confidence. This confidence might even border on arrogance, as he believes himself a man capable of overcoming the desires of a god.

18. "It didn't matter whether they'd come to the IC out of patriotism or opportunism: once they'd gotten inside the machine, they became machines themselves." (Chapter 21, page 190)

For the first time, Snowden begins to think about his fellow workers in a moral context. Rather than feeling angry or accusatory toward them, however, he feels pity. He sees their plight as tragic: they have been entirely swallowed up by the powerful machine of the Intelligence Agencies, which is a testament to the power of the IC rather than the culpability of individuals. For years, he has behaved in almost exactly the same way, so this show of empathy toward his coworkers demonstrates

why Snowden views his decision as a moral venture: he is undertaking this whistleblowing not just for the people of America, but for those who have been swallowed up and changed by the machine.

19. “My best partners, I decided, would be journalists whom the national security state had already targeted.” (Chapter 22, page 198)

As Snowden searches for the best way in which to make his information public, he decides to turn the state’s surveillance apparatus against it. There is an inherent irony here: the tracking and targeting of certain journalists and the storage of that data for a long time (i.e., mass surveillance) is what leads the whistleblower to the right people to expose the network of mass surveillance to the world as a whole. If the government had not been surveilling and targeting these people, Snowden might have failed.

20. “The FBI – the agency that investigates all crime within the IC – took great pride in explaining exactly how they caught their suspects, and believe me, I didn’t mind benefiting from their experience.” (Chapter 23, page 206)

The manner in which Snowden takes the files out of the facility is fraught with hubris on the part of the Intelligence agencies. By bragging about how they have caught those who have tried to doo the same, the FBI have in fact provided Snowden with a detailed account of exactly what to do. The arrogance of the FBI has allowed for their worst fears to be realized, all because they insisted on sharing their victories on the internal computer systems of the Intelligence agencies.

21. “It felt like I was picking out my prison, or rather my grave.” (Chapter 24, page 223)

To this point in the narrative, the idea of becoming a whistleblower has been mostly a theoretical or a technical endeavor. Snowden has explained how and why he acted, but this chapter demonstrates the cost of the decision. When he is trying to select a country from which to leak the documents, for instance, he feels as though he is selecting his prison or his grave. There is no going back home, there is no way to see his girlfriend,

his parents, or everyone he knows. His entire life will be devastated. In quotes such as the one above, it becomes clear that Snowden is well-aware of the destructive emotional impact his choice will have on his life.

22. “Hello, world.” (Chapter 26, page 229)

Describing his reveal to the world as the man behind the leaks, Snowden uses the words “hello, world” (229). Rather than a simple introduction, these words have a link to computers. Traditionally, the first line of code written by a budding programmer is a simple program which contains the words ‘hello world’. As such, Snowden’s first public appearance is likened to learning a new skill. Though he is technologically adept, his new life is just beginning. In many ways, he is like the naïve youngster sitting in front of a computer terminal, writing his first program.

23. “I knew I had to cut him off.” (Chapter 27, page 240)

Landing in Russia, Snowden is in a state of hyper alertness. Though he might understandably be exhausted, he still recognizes the importance of what this FSB agent is trying to accomplish. His Intelligence training kicks in and he sees a trap as it is laid. Though he might not refer to himself as a spy, Snowden certainly demonstrates many of the skills which are essential to the Intelligence services and elevate his status among that community.

24. “While the rest of the country is coming to grips with the fact that their privacy is being violated, mine’s being stripped from me on a whole new level.” (Chapter 28, page 250)

The new perspective offered by Lindsay provides a new voice to the narrative. Like the rest of the world, she is slowly coming to grips with the extent of the mass surveillance that her boyfriend has just revealed to the world. She is caught in an ironic moment; while everyone else is beginning to learn how much they are passively surveilled in their everyday lives, Lindsay is being actively – aggressively – surveilled, providing a more pronounced counterpart to the worldwide revelations.

25. “For the first time since the end of World War II, liberal democratic governments throughout the world were discussing privacy as the natural, inborn right of every man, woman, and child.” (Chapter 29, page 257)

At the end of the narrative, after Snowden has released the leaked documents, there needs to be a conclusion. While his life is irreparably damaged (he can never go home), the worldwide discussion sparked by his actions are his lasting achievement. Though he has not dismantled the mass surveillance network, he hopes to have at least alerted people to its dangers. If not, then his sacrifice will have been in vain.

ESSAY TOPICS

1. Throughout the book, Edward Snowden alludes to previous whistleblowers. What is the purpose of placing himself into this historical context?
2. To what extent did the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center affect Snowden as a person?
3. Having been raised in the Beltway, the area around Washington D.C., to what extent do you agree that Snowden is a product of his environment?
4. The text spends a great deal of time discussing the morality of mass surveillance and makes a clear judgement, emphasizing the right to privacy. Do you agree with Snowden's evaluation of this issue?
5. Though nominally an autobiography, the text occasionally strays into other genres. Which sections of the book would you most liken to a thriller?
6. Snowden uses Rubik's Cubes at numerous times in the book. What is the symbolic meaning of these devices?
7. Though he now lives in exile and is a wanted man, does Edward Snowden emerge from the event described in the book as a sympathetic figure?
8. The book tells the story of Edward Snowden and the documents he leaked to the press. But he did not act alone. What is the importance of the journalists with whom he worked, particularly in a narrative sense?
9. In the penultimate chapter, the narrative voice switches from Edward Snowden to Lindsay Mills. What is the literary significance of this change in voice? How does it affect the story being told?

10. Given the precarious nature of Snowden's situation at the end of the book and the extent to which technology continues to be an essential part of modern society, to what extent do you believe that Edward Snowden succeeded in his goals?