



SUPERSUMMARY™

IN-DEPTH
STUDY
GUIDE

PERMANENT RECORD

EDWARD SNOWDEN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLOT OVERVIEW	2
CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES	4
Part 1	4
Part 2	13
Part 3	25
KEY FIGURES	38
Edward Snowden	38
Lindsay Mills	38
Glenn Greenwald & Other Journalists	39
THEMES	41
SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS	44
IMPORTANT QUOTES	47
ESSAY TOPICS	55

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 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. 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 ever-increasing computer use harms his grades and causes insomnia. His parents divorce, and he wonders whether his computer obsession contributed to their break-up. 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, and he begins to work for her in addition to going to school. The 9/11 attacks change everything, however, and he joins the Army, much to his parents' chagrin.

Although a qualified computer expert, he enlists and attends basic training; an accident forces him to accept discharge. 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, his punishment for doing an end run around the chain of command. 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. This realization, coupled with his failure to integrate into Japanese culture, leave him feeling depressed and isolated.

Snowden moves back to America and returns to working for the CIA, making a great deal of money. The stress of what he knows triggers seizures, and he is diagnosed with epilepsy. He transfers to Hawaii, partially to help with his medical condition. There, he works for the NSA and begins to covertly research mass surveillance as much as he can. He collects documents and schematics through Heartbeat, a program that he creates. He studies the have ignored its intended meaning. He considers becoming a whistleblower. Slowly, he begins to smuggle in SD cards so he can transfer every file he collects through Heartbeat onto a highly encrypted drive in his house.

After switching to a new position, he learns even more about the NSA's capabilities and what he views as their abuses of power. He reaches out to journalists, including Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald, hoping that they will report on what he has learned. When Lindsay leaves on a camping trip, 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 employer and his girlfriend are already suspicious. The journalists publish his discoveries, and Snowden records a video that reveals his identity.

The United States charges Snowden with espionage as the NSA's mass surveillance program, PRISM, is revealed to the public. Snowden starts fleeing 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, so he remains in Russia. After 40 days in the airport, Russia grants him exile. He works for a foundation, promoting online privacy and developing new tools to circumvent mass surveillance. New laws in Europe and America limit many countries' abilities to surveil their citizens. After a

long separation, Lindsay eventually joins Snowden in Moscow, where 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: 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. When he awoke, the clocks were changed back.

Snowden describes himself as part of the last undigitized generation, one whose earliest memories are not stored digitally. 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 eventually became the internet; six years later, Tim Berners-Lee invented the worldwide web.

Snowden defines the internet as a “global cluster of interconnected communications networks” (13) and notes that at the time of his memoir’s publication, three billion people—42% of the world’s population—used it, though few understand its technical infrastructure and protocols. These protocols have allowed society to “digitize and put online damn near everything in the world” (14).

Snowden spends his early childhood in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. As a child, spying is his favorite activity: He spies on his older sister Jessica; his mother, Wendy; and most often, his father, Lon. A member of the Coast Guard, Lon brings home a Commodore 64 one evening. Immediately hooked, Snowden watches his father play the game console.

Chapter 2 Summary: “The Invisible Wall”

The Snowden family has historic connections to the sea: His mother’s family traces her ancestry back to the *Mayflower*, and members of his

family have fought in every war in American history. With his father away often with the Coast Guard, Snowden and his sister are primarily raised by his mother. She drives the children to the library and gives them math challenges; at his grandmother's house nearby, he eats pecans, studies Greek and Roman mythology, and reads stories of King Arthur. As he grows up, he comes to view reality as "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 December 25, 1989, a Nintendo appears in the Snowden household. Since Edward is only allowed to rent a new game when he finishes a book, he begins to read shorter books. When the Nintendo breaks one day, Snowden resolves to fix it. After dismantling and reassembling the console, it no longer turns on, which Snowden worries will disappoint his engineer father. Lon arrives home, patiently explains the value of analyzing why things went wrong, and takes his son to his workplace lab, where they reassemble the console. In the lab, Snowden discovers real, high-power computers for the first time. Lon teaches his son to use a text editor and the most basic code. Over the next decade or so, Snowden learns coding and "become[s] good enough to be dangerous" (27).

Chapter 3 Summary: "Beltway Boy"

Just before Snowden's ninth birthday, the family moves from North Carolina to Crofton, Maryland. His surname is closely associated with the region and he sees it everywhere, although the new area feels like "another planet." He traces the history of the Snowden fields and the Snowden River Parkway. Snowden is bullied at his new school. Classmates mock his Southern accent, so 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's a step up: His father is promoted within the Coast Guard and his mother starts a job as a clerk, working for an independent insurance and benefits association that works with the NSA. Both of his parents have Top Secret clearances and his mother has a full-scope polygraph, a higher-level check

for civilians. Almost all families in the area have a member who works for the government in some capacity. It is, Snowden suggests “one enormous boom-or-bust company town” (32), and 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 the family’s first real desktop computer. From the first moment it appears, young Edward and the computer are inseparable. He plays increasingly complex games and begins to explore the internet. Access to the internet is the “big bang or Precambrian explosion” (35) of Snowden’s generation, changing everyone’s lives.

Spending every possible moment online causes Snowden to fall asleep in school, but the internet quenches his unending thirst for knowledge. Even when grounded, he sneaks downstairs late at night to use the computer. The internet offers him the freedom to invent an entirely new online persona. 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.”

Although he reveals his age to online friends (making them, if anything, even more encouraging of his hobbies), he never reveals his name, finding anonymity to be “one of the greatest joys of these platforms” (38). Anonymity mutes the arguments and bile that occasionally spill into discussions, and changing identity on a whim is a release. Playing Ultima Online (a massively multiplayer online role-playing game, or MMORPG) allows for constant exploration and reinvention.

Online play, however, leads to issues: The home phone bills become exorbitant, and outside callers can’t get through. 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. Adults wish to impose conformity on teenagers, who wish to maintain their privacy. Snowden is frustrated by the myriad rules which govern his life. He grows more interested in politics, and recognizes that democracy rarely extends to the classroom, where 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 develops a hacker’s mindset; wherever rules exist, he learns to understand and exploit them—to hack the system. He notes how the human ability to recognize patterns and rely on assumptions 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 teacher changes the syllabus and thwarts his plan. 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. The more he teaches himself to exploit computers, the more he worries “over the consequences of trusting the wrong machine” (46).

Snowden’s first hack that ever “courted trouble” reinforces this fear. He visits the website of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, a nuclear research facility, and finds a significant security issue. He accesses the facility’s folder directory through a traversal known as “dirwalking” or “directory walking,” uncovering confidential office materials and employee information. Worried about “mushroom clouds on the horizon” (47), he tells an adult.

Snowden 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

his age 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 extracurricular 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 focus 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 divorce and selling their house, and his sister departs for college while Edward turns inward. He worries whether his behavior has caused the divorce.

Snowden feigns 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. As his parents grow further apart, Snowden is drawn toward other mentors. At the start of his sophomore year, Snowden is diagnosed with infectious mononucleosis. As 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 receives a letter informing him that 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. Eventually, Snowden gets his General Education Diploma (GED).

Snowden considers the English assignment he never handed in; he says people like him rarely feel comfortable writing about themselves. He has spent so much time craving anonymity, both online and in the intelligence community; it’s a “human encryption,” locking away his true identity behind a manufactured, uninteresting self. His family life taught him to keep secrets and how to navigate an interrogation. Although people are

always changing, always in flux, an autobiographical statement becomes, by its very nature, static.

Chapter 7 Summary: "9/11"

Starting at age 16, Snowden lives on his own. He finds a new group of friends at college; they meet in Japanese classes, bonding over a newly discovered appreciation for anime. One friend, a 25-year-old web designer named Mae, introduces Snowden to freelance work. Mae handles the graphic design while Snowden handles the coding. She hires him and they work out of her house. The two bid for web design projects, for which they receive low pay and no credit for their work.

Though Snowden is smitten with Mae, she has a husband named Norm. He begins to think about his future and knows 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 that a second plane has hit the World Trade Center's South Tower. They stop work and Snowden drives home in a daze, caught in a flood of traffic as the NSA evacuates. After 9/11, additional security in the area prevents him from driving to Mae's house. The aftermath drives a wedge between them that never truly heals.

Chapter 8 Summary: "9/12"

Snowden reflects on 9/11; almost 3,000 people died, rightly considered a staggering loss. In the course of America's response, however, Snowden says that over 1 million people have died. He believes the secret policies, laws, courts, and wars traumatized people both at home and abroad. As a person both employed by the intelligence agencies and forced into exile after he exposed mass surveillance, Snowden believes agencies are often wrong, and America has transformed into a security state.

In an attempt to understand this, he returns to the aftermath of 9/11. As he drives home from Mae's house, Snowden frantically calls family members but cannot get through. He finally speaks to his mother but she provides few reassurances. All of their family, however, emerges unharmed. Snowden notes how quickly Americans divide the world into "us" and "them." American flags appear everywhere. Targets in the shapes of men in Arab clothing appear at the gun ranges Snowden occasionally visits. Gun and cell phone sales spike. Thousands of spies, desperate to redeem themselves, return to work knowing that they have failed to protect America. Thus, September 12, 2001, was "the first day of a new era" (66). Instead of reinforcing democratic values, America 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 his naturally anti-institutional politics from his formative years as a hacker.

Snowden, who wants to be a part of something, wonders how his tech-orientated training can serve the state. Most intelligence agencies require a traditional college degree rather than IT accreditation, but he thinks they may waive these requirements for military veterans. Aged 20, Snowden joins the Army. His mother cries. He writes his father a note and slips it below the door: "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, X-Ray, screens for recruits with the best fitness, intelligence, and linguistic abilities. Snowden must first complete basic training. He attends Sand Hill in Fort Benning, Georgia, where the drill sergeants shout and abuse the recruits. Nicknamed Snowflake and the lightest in the platoon, Snowden is frequently paired with the tallest recruit.

"Always dirty and always hurting" (69), the recruits soon find themselves 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 feels excruciating pain but finishes the exercise anyway. Later, he learns that he has stress fractures and that 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. He convalesces with a sweet and innocent young recruit so wracked with homesickness that he is about to go AWOL. Nothing will convince the man not to leave.

A few days later, Snowden learns that his injuries will prevent him from completing basic training. He accepts the offer of an administrative separation, neither honorable nor dishonorable discharge. As he signs the papers, Snowden recognizes that he has been hacked: The Army will no longer assume responsibility for disability payments. He signs anyway and is allowed to keep the crutches.

Chapter 10 Summary: "Cleared and in Love"

As the pain and then the depression begin to fade, Snowden begins to understand the degree to which his knack for computers surpasses his peers' skills. He had assumed this affinity was natural; his short stint in the Army reflected a desire to be praised for more than just his intellect. Although discharge wounds his pride, his confidence grows. He decides that he will serve his country better at an intelligence agency. Such a job requires a security clearance, so he searches for job which will expediate the vetting process.

Although a strong candidate for a clearance, Snowden feels still nervous. His entire family and network of friends are interviewed 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. 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). He thinks about explaining these comments to a man examining his permanent record. He knows he can delete his old posts but chooses not to, as it will go against everything he believes about the liberating nature of online life. He does not want to erase who he once was.

Snowden feels most embarrassed by his online dating profiles, though he met Lindsay Mills through the site HotOrNot, which had a dating component—he rated her a perfect 10, she rated him an eight. They began to talk and eventually arranged a date. Lindsay picked him up and they drove around, having forgotten to make a plan. They talked about everything, including the vetting process.

He hears Lindsay's voice in his head when he drives to his final interview at the NSA, which includes a polygraph test that he passes. At age 21, Snowden has his security clearance and a girlfriend. Later, she will become his partner and the love of his life.

Chapters 1-10 Analysis

The autobiography opens by introducing the audience to the character of Edward Snowden—a portrait of the whistleblower as a young man—that provides important context for the actions he will take later. It explains not only the foundational understanding of technology that enabled Snowden to get a job with the NSA—and end up in the position to become a whistleblower—but also lays a foundation to explain why he acted as he did.

Snowden cites his obsession with his computer and his natural affinity for IT and programming, as well as his burning passion for his country. Anecdotes from his early life help to demonstrate the extent to which he was wedded to computers as an ideological promised land. In the absence of stable adults, computers and technology raised him. They provided him with an education that he could not get anywhere else. Furthermore, they begin to represent something to him: Computers and the internet are not tools or blunt machines; they represent a liberty and a freedom not available anywhere else.

Using the internet of the early to mid-1990s, he finds solace in online community, where adults treat him like an equal even though he is a child. Snowden views the internet as a liberating and intellectually stimulating force, and the rest of his life becomes a pursuit of this dream. Later

chapters will show the degree to which Snowden feels his concept of an ideal internet has been betrayed. By leaking the intelligence community documents, Snowden hopes to return to his nostalgia-laced ideal of the internet as a free and open community.

Snowden also mentions, for the first time, the concept of a permanent record, the term from which his memoir gets its name. When confronted by a teacher who tries to tell him his bad grades could hurt his permanent record, he notes that such a record is an urban myth. As the memoir progresses, Snowden notes that mass surveillance is actually creating a permanent record for everyone, transforming a nonexistent school-years threat into a concerning reality.

As a narrator, Snowden has a self-effacing voice. He does not present himself as a genius or as morally superior. His narrative voice helps to establish trust with the reader; by being open about his more embarrassing moments, he paints himself as an honest broker. He is critical of himself and, to some degree, happy to poke fun at his foolish behavior, whether describing himself making silly mistakes on the internet, falling in love with an older married classmate, or signing up for the Army in a post-9/11 nationalistic fervor. Snowden also portrays himself as an idealist, strongly motivated by his utopian view of the internet and his sense of patriotism.

Part 2

Chapter 11 Summary: “The System”

Snowden claims that he had no real political viewpoint at age 22. Instead, he adopted a mishmash 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 discovered that the patriotism his parents taught converted easily into nationalist affinity in a post-9/11 world.

After his stint in the Army, Snowden reappraises his binary, good-versus-evil view of the world. He decides that the technology of communications can succeed where the technology of violence has failed. He views the

internet's founding ideals as comparable to those of the American state, and he sees the internet as an instrument that can further democracy around the world. In his position as an intelligence community contractor, he wants to play a role in this noble mission, but to be considered among the very best, he knows that he will have to specialize his skillset.

Snowden decides to become a "systems guy," a systems engineer who analyzes problems and then fashions or invents solutions. Over the course of his career, Snowden begins to view his country as a broken system in need of repair—the one system he cannot fix.

Chapter 12 Summary: "*Homo contractus*"

Snowden's experience of government work differs from that of his parents: "The sincerity of public service had given way to the greed of the private sector" (89). Most NSA workers are now contractors, for whom the government is just another client. Contractors can supply distance (i.e., cover and deniability) between the government and quasi-legal actions like torture and murder, protecting intelligence officials from getting caught; they also enable the circumvention of federal hiring caps. He views the system 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, where he studies how people learn languages and uses computers to make this process quicker and better. In time, his work will help the NSA process the huge swath of foreign language communications that they are collecting. When Snowden arrives, however, the office is still under construction. For the first few months, he is essentially a security guard. Working at night gives him more time to spend with Lindsay.

After the 2013 leaks, the government attempted to disparage Snowden by characterizing him as a disgruntled contractor. Contract-type arrangements, however, were typical of many intelligence workers at the time. Many private companies hire kids, Snowden writes, because kids are the only ones who know how the systems work. Snowden attends job fairs, looking to be hired by one of these companies.

Snowden is hired by COMSO, who has been contracted by BAE Systems, who has been contracted by the CIA. He works at CIA headquarters. Given the long commute to Virginia, he has to find a new apartment nearby. 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. Snowden finds the New Headquarters Building much less aesthetically pleasing; he spends most of his time working in an underground, windowless room. Most of his fellow newcomers are “computer guys” like him, dressed up for their first real day of work. All have the green ID badge which designates them as contractors.

Snowden and his colleagues attend “Indoc,” which is short for “indoctrination.” During this training, he learns that intelligence community sees itself as having apolitical, expert solutions, based entirely on data, for every problem. They learn basic operational security practices (known as tradecraft) that help them keep their job a secret. They see 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 put in charge and 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 that transmit, receive, and store the Agency’s intelligence. Secure offices are called “vaults”; Snowden’s team’s vault stores the cryptography codes which secure all of the agency’s secrets. He takes pride in his new job, though later comes to believe that the process by which he was hired indicates that the system is broken.

After his initiation, Snowden moves on to the night shift. The building is empty and dark, and the job is relatively dull; he responds to any issues or errors as they occur. Snowden’s partner is a man named Frank, a personable libertarian and a voracious reader of mystery and thriller novels. Frank boasts about how little he knows about computers and how

little work he does; he simply bounces complicated problems to the day shift. Frank's one skill seems to be changing the ancient tape storage, the backup for all of the Agency's data. Only Frank knows how to handle the proprietary tape format. Snowden has to deal with all the issues Frank skips over.

Snowden automates many of his tasks, which leaves him with a lot of free time to spend online. All online activity is monitored. He spends 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 traveled and he decides to get out of the private sector and into government work, hoping becoming a "govvy" will take him around the world.

Snowden swears an oath to defend the US Constitution. 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 staying 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 (TISO). 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 of 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 everything in the event of an emergency. 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 maintenance of the terminals that send “cables,” the secure diplomatic messages named after the actual cords and wires that once connected all of the network.

As they near the end of training, they fill in “dream sheets” that 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). When the stairs of the dilapidated Comfort Inn collapse, rumors of disgruntlement and perhaps even unionization begin to circulate. Snowden is chosen 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 12 more weeks. This bothers Snowden, who writes another email and sends it higher up the chain of command. A few days later, a front-office secretary interrupts their class and announces that unpaid overtime will no longer be required and the students will soon move to a nicer hotel.

The joy of winning does not last long; Snowden is told that the CIA does not tolerate insubordination. They want Snowden at the agency, but they want to know that they can count on him. Because of this, he will not be sent into the desert, but he also will not get his first-choice position. Instead, he is sent to Geneva, one of the positions all of the other students had coveted, which will cause the other students to think Snowden has either been rewarded or bought off by the management.

Chapter 15 Summary: “Geneva”

Snowden moves to Geneva, 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.” 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, including part of a new network based in Geneva.

HUMINT (human intelligence) has been the traditional method of spycraft, involving human agents collecting information on the ground. SIGINT (signals intelligence), which is rapidly replacing HUMINT at the time, involves intercepted communications. The tension between the two creates a healthy rivalry. With so many important organizations headquartered in Geneva, the city is ground zero for SIGINT 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 in the machine. One weak spot, however, occurs when human agents search for information on the public internet. Foreign intelligence services can track such searches, and the CIA’s current solution is expensive, slow, and cumbersome.

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 enables 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.

HUMINT remains important, however, and even Snowden is called into action, though his most memorable operation ends in failure. He is invited by case officers, who hope that Snowden’s natural geekiness will help them target scientists, to meet a target at an embassy function. At the party, he sits next to a Saudi man and engages him in conversation. The man is happy to talk: He loves Geneva, plays laser tag, and works in private wealth management for mostly Saudi accounts. Snowden informs the relevant case officer and returns to the party. 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 talks 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, which Snowden sees as evidence 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% 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, Snowden says, the US government denied this, and most people 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 but worries 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.

Snowden works to eliminate duplicated data, which wastes time and resources. In his new system, every fragment of every file is checked for uniqueness; only new data is transmitted back to headquarters. This efficiency, coupled with constantly improving technology, helps the NSA store more and more data for longer times. They aim to keep everything in perpetuity: to create “the permanent record” (133). The randomly generated codename for this is EPICSHALTER.

While developing the system, Snowden attends a conference about China, where all intelligence agencies give expert briefings. At the last moment, Snowden is asked to give a presentation. 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 consider the morality of the spying apparatus. He surmises that, if the Chinese are capable of this, then the American government probably has the technology to match. He 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). After the conference, however, he cannot help but keep researching the matter.

At the beginning of his work with the NSA, Snowden is aware of President George W. Bush’s executive order that expanded warrantless wiretapping in the aftermath of 9/11. Because President Barack Obama, upon taking office, does not call for a congressional investigation into this NSA overreach, the change in president does not signal a change in policy. Snowden reads through an anodyne report issued by the government, which contains little of note beyond references to undefined “other intelligence activities.” He 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 it confirms his worst fears. It is also so classified that anyone leaking the report would be immediately identified, and the activities it describes are so criminal that no government would allow its release. It describes the NSA’s mass surveillance of the public, justified because the outdated laws did not apply to modern technology. The initiative is code-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. The NSA needs no warrant to collect this data, and data is not considered “acquired” or “obtained” until retrieved by the agencies.

According to Snowden’s interpretation of the report, the US government is less interested in communications content and more interested in “metadata”—“data about data.” Records of what people do on a device, such as the date, time, duration, and numbers involved in a phone call, enable the NSA to track, monitor, and surveil US citizens every minute of

the day. Metadata tells the intelligence agencies who, what, and when to surveil. In some ways, it is more important than the content itself, and people have little control over the metadata they produce. After reading the report, Snowden is in a daze. He feels like a fool who has been used by the intelligence agencies: At the same time that he feels entirely illiterate and lost, struggling to assimilate into Japanese culture, his government knows everything about him.

Japan, Snowden says, is the moment when he realizes that he had to act to protect his country from mass surveillance. Reflecting on his time there, Snowden regrets not visiting Nagasaki and Hiroshima, holy sites which memorialize technology's amorality. He mentions the first two states to attempt mass surveillance: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany; both attempts ended disastrously. A modern smartphone contains more computing power than both of those countries combined. Although technology has made astounding advances, human morality has not.

Chapter 17 Summary: "Home on the Cloud"

By 2011, Snowden has returned to America and still works for Dell, though he is now attached to the CIA once more. He notices that he has a mailbox and remembers 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 feels pity for his fellow citizens, who do not know about mass surveillance.

Snowden switches to the sales side of Dell's business, devising solutions for the CIA. One of these solutions is a private cloud, which consolidates the agency's processing and storage while making data accessible for the right people, anywhere in the world. With the right solution, an agent in Afghanistan has access to the same data as a person in the CIA headquarters. As a branding term, "the cloud" becomes just as appealing for consumers as it does for the CIA; even the word "cloud" makes "everyone think of heaven" (153).

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 what he sees as a post-9/11 spending spree. While

shopping for appliances, Snowden encounters an internet-enabled “smart fridge.” He thinks about how the manufacturer can monetize the massive amounts of data it collects, considers the consumer versions of the cloud products he is developing for the CIA, and feels astonished that people willingly put so much of their data online. Data no longer belongs to users; it is controlled by companies who can use it however they please, protected by intelligible and impenetrable user service agreements that users 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 monitored 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 after he has suffered an epileptic seizure. After being diagnosed with epilepsy, Snowden feels defeated, betrayed by his country, the internet, and his own body.

Chapter 18 Summary: “On the Couch”

On May 1, 2011, 10 years after 9/11, Snowden learns that Osama bin Laden has been killed. He reflects on what the last decade has witnessed and worries that he has wasted his life. He concludes that “fear was the true terrorism” (162), permitting the deployment of mass surveillance.

Snowden continues to suffer from seizures and becomes increasingly depressed. He cannot drive, and he worries for his job. He takes medical leave and stays on his mother’s couch, where he watches the news and thinks that the violence he sees across the Middle East exceeds his own troubles. He feels guilty as he watches the Arab Spring unfold. 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 in Tunisia, 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

In Part 2, Snowden matures from teenage hacker to systems analyst for the CIA and NSA. Much as he learned to hack a range of systems in his younger years, he now works to understand how systems work, and to propose solutions for systemic problems. He assesses himself as the most talented of his peers, with the point of view that he has the skills and intelligence to singlehandedly solve systemic global problems. While in the past, technology has been used by the US government for violence—he cites the use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki as tragic examples—he now believes that the technology of communication has the potential to bring worldwide peace and democracy, and he sees himself as part of that mission.

As he begins his work for the intelligence community, however, Snowden also sees darker systems at work. Geneva, the site of his first CIA posting and the heart of many worldwide SIGINT operations, prospers while the rest of the world reels from a global economic crisis; Snowden views this as evidence of systemic rot within the global economic system. When he transitions to the NSA, he uncovers the agency’s mass collection of metadata and sees forces that are, to him, as dark as the surveillance states of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. He believes that the intelligence community’s guilt over not preventing 9/11 caused them to create these systems, and he recognizes the potential for abuse in a program originally intended to protect American citizens. Snowden also feels guilty for benefiting from the system he despises. His work enables

him to accumulate wealth, but at the cost of keeping quiet about mass surveillance as people purchase networked data aggregators, like smart refrigerators, and place their data online in blissful ignorance.

Snowden has a mixed work experience with the CIA and NSA, both in terms of interpersonal relationships and quality of life. He simultaneously defends his fellow contractors, whom he feels are ill used by an intelligence community that's cutting fiscal corners, and presents himself as their superior, suggesting the intelligence community promotes untrustworthy, inept people simply because these people know how to work the computers. Peers recognize him as a leader, such as when they choose him to represent their grievances over their accommodations and working conditions. Because he oversteps and reaches too high up the chain of command, he is denied his preferred posting and sent to Geneva as a result.

Snowden's personal life also suffers as his work continues. He struggles to assimilate into the culture in Japan, describing himself as "illiterate and lost," and he communicates frustration that while he knows virtually nothing about his environment, his government gets to know everything about his movements. He develops epileptic seizures, which can be exacerbated by stress, and feels that his own body has turned against him, just as his country and his beloved internet have as well. A sense of personal grievance, if not the motivator of his actions, certainly exists alongside them.

Snowden's view of himself as one of the best of his generation contributes to a belief in his own importance within the system, and his sense of himself as a linchpin of world events motivates his actions in the chapters to come. He sees himself as a vessel for bringing democracy to the world; he sees himself as responsible for bringing about the end of mass surveillance. He watches the Arab Spring unfold on television, and he sees a parallel to himself in the man who initiates the Arab Spring. He says he feels duped by the intelligence community, taking personal umbrage to an intelligence operation that is most likely indifferent to him as an individual.

Snowden is a unique figure in that he does know a staggering fact that few others know: The NSA, bending outdated laws that are no longer adequate

for the day's technology, is collecting citizens' device metadata without their knowledge, which enables them to track the population's movements and actions. In the belief that he—alone—has the responsibility to decide what should be done about that, a person who views himself as a champion for democracy acts unilaterally; ironically, just as a dictator would. He doesn't work to obtain consensus within the system to end the program. He doesn't consult others as to the best way to reveal the program. He doesn't follow provided channels for initiating a whistleblower complaint against the government. Assuming the intelligence community is dealing with forces it doesn't understand, he takes it upon himself to rescue them from themselves. Whether his actions show hubris or heroism is an ongoing debate.

Part 3

Chapter 19 Summary: "The Tunnel"

Snowden transfers to Hawaii, where he works in a long underground tunnel, a former airplane factory turned into an NSA facility. Snowden and Lindsay hope that coming to Hawaii will let them to "start over yet again" (170). They believe the climate and relaxed lifestyle will benefit Snowden's epilepsy; also, the NSA facility is within biking distance of their home, which means Edward no longer has to drive. Now 29, Snowden is still contracted by Dell, has stepped a rung down on the career ladder to reduce stress, and is slowly reaching the decision which will define the rest of his life. The NSA places him in charge of document management, to implement a system that sets permission levels for document access. He decides to read many of these documents himself, certain they will confirm his worst suspicions.

Lindsay convinces a reluctant Snowden to attend a luau, where an old man tells the ancient creation stories of the islands' indigenous peoples. One involves three islands considered so pure by the gods that they must be hidden from humanity, lest they be spoiled. The gods lift the islands into the air, where they float among the clouds. Snowden compares this creation myth 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”

Thinking that he may pursue a teaching career in the future, Snowden keeps current with as much new technology as possible. He peruses the NSA “readboards,” the Agency’s internal updates on new and exciting tech. He turns the project—with his boss’s permission—into an automated system that collates all relevant and interesting updates for internal use, taking files from the CIA, the FBI, and other agencies, filtering the content by clearance level, and storing all of the data on one of Snowden’s NSA servers. Snowden names the system Heartbeat, as it takes “the pulse of the NSA and of the wider IC” (175).

Heartbeat shows Snowden not only the goals but also the capabilities of the intelligence agencies, and it gathers the majority of the documents that he would later leak to the press. He has less interest in whom the system is targeting than in how the system targets these people. The broadness of the intelligence agencies’ scope, achieved with what he views as absurd and unconstitutional interpretations of existing laws, empowers them to surveil any person at any time, collecting data in case it is needed in the future.

Snowden first uncovers the two systems agencies use for mass data collection: 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). Next, Snowden learns how this collection system actually works, studying schematics and engineering diagrams. These visuals provide concrete proof that the systems exist and that the intelligence community uses them.

Chapter 21 Summary: “Whistleblowing”

On Constitution Day in 2012, Snowden celebrates by reading the small laminated copies of the Constitution that the NSA hands out. He does this partly because he appreciates the document and partly “because it freaked

out my coworkers” (181). He notes that many protections in the Bill of Rights are designed to make law enforcement more difficult, particularly the Fourth Amendment, which protects people and their property from government scrutiny.

Before law enforcement searches a person or their property, the Fourth Amendment requires authorities to establish probable cause. The NSA’s mass surveillance, by collecting data on everyone whether or not probable cause exists, completely contradicts this. For a long time, the NSA simply has denied that mass surveillance exists. Any attempts to challenge mass surveillance in the courts are—to Snowden’s disgust—dismissed out of hand. The intelligence agencies, he decides, believe themselves to be “above the law, and given how broken the process was, they were right” (184). They have hacked the Constitution, and Snowden sees this as a massive failure of the governance and a betrayal of the Constitution’s founding ideals.

Snowden notes that the United States of America was birthed from an act of treason: The Declaration of Independence violated 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. He decides previous experiences raising issues up the chain of command—back at the Comfort Inn—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, which intends to expose wrongdoing, and leaks, which are typically conducted for institutional or political aims. Snowden intends to go even a step further: an exposure of the entire apparatus of mass surveillance.

Chapter 22 Summary: “Fourth Estate”

Even after deciding to become a whistleblower, Snowden struggles with how to tell Lindsay. Alone in his silence, he fears being both doubted and misunderstood, so he resolves to leak documentation as proof. Disclosing even a single document may land him in prison. He needs to publish them through a trusted institution 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. He wants to provide context and analysis alongside the leaked information rather than just dumping everything online. He considers *The New York Times* but feels they have a checkered history of publishing such information.

As he considers his options, two huge events seem to pass by unnoticed. First, the NSA announces the construction of a huge new data center. Second, in March 2013, the chief technology officer of the CIA makes a rare public appearance, in which he reveals 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). Snowden views this as an admission of the intention behind mass surveillance, an admission that the media barely reports. Snowden realizes that he will have to educate journalists on the importance and the gravity of the information he intends to release, and he will need to speak with trustworthy and capable reporters.

Snowden searches for "journalists whom the national security state had already targeted" (198), something that he believes turns the state's own systems against it. He finds Laura Poitras, a documentarian, and Glenn Greenwald, a lawyer turned columnist. Later, he works with Ewen MacAskill and Bart Gellman, journalists at *The Guardian* and the *Washington Post*, respectively. Snowden contacts the journalists using a variety of aliases, though retaining anonymity is incredibly hard. He drives in his car and searches 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 for his actions but deletes them quickly, struggling to find the right 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 servers without being caught. Everything done on a computer leaves a record, so Snowden

exploits the complexity of systems, assuming NSA workers do not comprehend 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, so he can copy and extract them. He sets up an old computer under the guise of compatibility testing, which enables him to search, filter, and organize all the documents he wants. He organizes the documents neatly into folders, thus completing the “read” phase.

The “write” phase involves copying and preparing all 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 every file; he also deduplicates, compresses, and encrypts the files. To fill a card could take an entire shift, and “those hours were terrifying” (205).

The final phase is “execute”: to smuggle 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. He knows that, once released, the documents will expose his identity, and he accepts his fate.

Chapter 24 Summary: “Encrypt”

Toward the end of 2012, global events reinforce Snowden’s decision. He concludes that governments are expanding attempts to mass surveil their populations, and he no longer believes that there can be a natural alliance between government and technology.

Snowden teaches free cryptography classes in Honolulu, coaching people of the values of encryption. Teaching a general audience, he hopes, will prepare him to explain mass surveillance to journalists.

Deletion of digital files does not truly exist. A deleted file is not necessarily eliminated; it's merely gone from view, hidden from parties who do not know where to look. 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 can hamper 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 kept a piece of the encryption key for himself, ensuring that—if something were to happen to him—he can eliminate access to these secrets forever.

Chapter 25 Summary: "The Boy"

Snowden reflects on his career, an astronomical rise from quiet, computer-obsessed kid to wealthy intelligence officer who develops global systems. His level of access was "unexpectedly omniscient." 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 (NTOC). This building also houses the NSA's hacking team, the Tailored Access Operations division.

The change in jobs requires a trip to Washington, D.C., 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 described in the documentation firsthand. He learns that everyone's communications are in the systems. In addition to searching Supreme Court justices and congresspeople, his colleagues also search for LOVEINT: They surveil 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 communication in particular captures Snowden's attention. He is the son of an engineer, a man who happens to be a target. Snowden searches

through the man's email, pictures, and location history. One video recording shows the man sitting 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 thinks of his own father, whom he realizes he may never see again.

Snowden returns to Hawaii, infused with a sense of finality. He empties his bank accounts, withdrawing the cash so that it's 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, apologizes for his busyness, and tells 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 bag (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 undetected, but the journalists he has asked to meet keep postponing. Laura Poitras struggles to convince Glenn Greenwald to commit to the meeting, and Snowden begins to worry. He stays in his hotel room for 10 days, using that time to prepare "the last briefing [he'd] ever give" (226). He has to not only explain mass surveillance but also why he has decided to act.

Glenn and Laura arrive on June 2. 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, and Snowden suddenly becomes self-conscious. He stiffens, regretting his choice of clothes and his decision not to shave, but eventually, he comes 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. Although the days are frantic, the nights are dull and lonely.

The first story breaks on June 5 and Snowden watches the reaction on the news channels. Snowden's office begins to email him. He does not answer. From his perspective, the entire 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, but he knows that returning to America in the hope of a fair trial is out of the question. After June 9, 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 how important he feels they are—as he trusts his family and Lindsay to do.

Glenn's contacts help relocate Snowden, but journalists discover his location and lay siege. He stays with a kind, welcoming refugee family in one of the Hong Kong's poorest districts. On June 14, the US government files charges against Snowden under the Espionage Act; on June 21—Snowden's 30th birthday—the US government requests his extradition. When the Hong Kong government informs him that they will not protect him, he starts to search for a new home.

Chapter 27 Summary: "Moscow"

Ecuador, the country that provided asylum to Julian Assange of WikiLeaks, first appears to be Snowden's most viable option. Most countries refuse to offer him asylum, unwilling to defy an American extradition order.

Sarah Harrison, journalist and editor from WikiLeaks, arrives in Hong Kong to help Snowden find asylum. Snowden has little choice but to trust Sarah, and she impresses him. She secures a *laissez-passer*, a UN-sanctioned pass that helps 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 is 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 offers Snowden the chance to work for the Russian government. 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 and confirms it: Snowden’s own government has trapped him in Russia.

The agent points to a scrum of journalists who have been alerted to the story and makes his offer again; Snowden refuses again. The agent leaves, trapping Snowden in the airport for 40 days while he desperately applies 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 faces her own difficulties, throughout which she keeps a diary. In the first entry, she describes her (and his mother’s) annoyance at Snowden for inviting his mother and then leaving. 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—and cry together. Lindsay worries that Edward is having an affair. Lindsay takes Wendy to the airport on her last day.

On June 7, 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 she does not stop. Later, she returns home and they knock on her door. They ask about her boyfriend and search her house, which frightens her. The next day, Lindsay flies to her parents’ home to be with a friend. She feels extremely paranoid and, when her friend asks

about her relationship with Snowden, she does not know whether they're still together. On June 9, a friend calls and tells her about Snowden's video. She watches it and then attends a barbecue, but she cannot think about anything else. Her phone keeps ringing. Her car is tailed.

The FBI calls Lindsay; her friend helps her connect with a lawyer named Jerry Farber. She buys burner phones and withdraws as much money as she can—her entire life savings. At her friend's house, they use hair dryers to make noise while they talk to one another. She goes for a meeting with the FBI and cannot evade the car that follows her.

FBI agents meet Lindsay at Jerry's office. Jerry 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 they will surveil her for the foreseeable future and warn her against erratic driving.

Lindsay resumes her diary after a few days. She is furious; endless surveillance and interrogation have taken their toll. As the country begins to realize how little privacy they ever had, Lindsay's personal invasion of privacy reaches "a whole new level" (250). She sees herself on the news and Googles herself; the comments are not kind. Eventually, FBI agents stop interrogating her but continue to follow her. She talks to Wendy, and they agree that Snowden did the right thing, even if they feel hurt. Even as they talk, they realize that agents are likely eavesdropping.

Lindsay flies back to Hawaii, where the FBI frequently interrupts her as she begins to pack up everything in the house. She sells many possessions and ships the remainder back to the mainland on July 2. Snowden's few remaining possessions fit into a small box, and Lindsay burns them 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 this book might be enough to flag the attention of the intelligence networks. This, he says, is only the beginning. The intelligence community

can actively monitor the reading of a book. They can monitor the screen, in real time, of those who are reading on a phone or tablet; as such, the reader's life "has now become an open book" (254).

Snowden has blown the whistle, as he intended, but he feels awareness is not enough. His document leaks inspire congressional investigations into the NSA, which conclude that the agency has repeatedly lied. In 2015, the NSA's mass surveillance is deemed unconstitutional; legislation is changed, and precedents are set. As technology has advanced, the internet has become more secure and encrypted than ever; Snowden himself has assisted in some of these changes.

The disclosed documents 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 has collaborated with the NSA on numerous operations. The debate repeats itself all over the world: outraged citizens versus collaborator government. Although the EU makes efforts to establish whistleblower protections as well as a framework for privacy protection, data protection and privacy remain global concerns. Snowden looks to the new generation, those who not yet born on 9/11, and hopes they will champion privacy.

Snowden now lives in exile, a term he once used to use to describe getting kicked off the computer by his parents. These days, he spends a lot of time in front of a computer but away 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

Although Snowden describes himself as a whistleblower, he avoids the legally protected channels for whistleblowing. Based on the repercussions of what happened back during his training, when he overstepped his

boundaries and contacted someone much higher on the chain of command, he concludes that no one will help him because all are complicit. Notwithstanding this earlier disciplinary incident, his worries seem reasonable based on verifiable events: The NSA has repeatedly misled congressional officials, and the public, about the existence of mass surveillance.

Snowden devises a one-man covert op to blow the whistle on the NSA's programs. The scale is phenomenal, involving a change of jobs, the creation of his read-write-execute plan, his selection of journalists, and his decision to leave everything behind and travel to Hong Kong. The way Snowden obtains the documents and completes his mission, without interference from his colleagues in the NSA, suggests an enormous level of trust placed in him by the agency. Just as the NSA failed to prevent 9/11 through a failure of imagination—they failed to imagine what Al Qaeda was capable of—they failed to imagine that a trusted contractor like Snowden would risk everything to copy, extract, and dump extraordinarily sensitive documents. Their enormous trust in Snowden reinforces his claims of both his own extraordinary capabilities and the agency's lack of institutional knowledge of the technology their program depended on. Snowden claims that the NSA hired contractors who knew how to operate the systems without due consideration of their character, and the consequences are evident in the ways contractors reportedly abuse their surveillance capabilities.

Snowden's view of himself as a lone benevolent actor—a key player in world events who will not find other benevolent actors among his colleagues or his superiors—causes him to store an enormous cache of secrets within himself. Just as he copied and stored NSA documents onto his own personal server, he stored an enormous self-imposed mission and emotional struggle within his own mind, an internal server of sorts. This isolation speaks to his sense of his own importance, but it also speaks to his mistrust of an intelligence community that, ironically, placed a significant amount of trust in him.

Snowden's decision to unveil mass surveillance comes at enormous personal cost. He leaves behind a financially lucrative and successful career; his statements of his love for Lindsay reinforce the emotional scale

of his decision. He also acknowledges that the Russian government approached him to ask him to become a Russian agent, and he emphasizes that he refused their repeated offers.

Throughout the text, Snowden—and only Snowden—guides the audience toward his decision. He does, however, dedicate one chapter to how Lindsay experienced the aftermath of his revelations, speaking in her voice. To Lindsay, the entire affair is a shock. No tech expert herself, she learns about mass surveillance alongside the rest of the world, becoming an avatar for the majority of readers. As a narrative device, her more naïve voice contrasts with Snowden’s voice of authority as a master of systems and technology. It also highlights his conviction that people like Lindsay are being surveilled, and he has a duty, as that master of systems, to make them aware that they’re being monitored.

Though he continues to work in the field, advocating for privacy and an end to surveillance, Snowden concludes that he has sacrificed everything for a relatively modest amount of change. He connects the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) passed in the EU, which gives EU citizens rights over who can use their data and how, to his actions, but he notes that little has changed in the US. The truth about mass surveillance is now known, but citizens have to take up Snowden’s mantle to ensure that something is done about the issue. His concerns about people’s nonchalance toward how much data they disclose and post online, along with the general public’s relative ignorance about how the internet and mass surveillance work, imply that he views the public’s motivation to protect their own interests—and to insist on an end to mass surveillance—as an outcome that may never be achieved.

KEY FIGURES

Edward Snowden

In 2013, Edward Snowden released a data dump of highly classified NSA materials, exposing a huge mass surveillance network that 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.

As the memoir's primary narrator, Snowden presents himself as self-effacing, self-aware, and not without regrets. Incidents from his childhood and his teenage years, in which he appears foolish or naïve, have a humanizing effect. He portrays himself as an idealist who believed in the initial democratizing potential of the worldwide web and in the nobility of his country following the attacks of 9/11. He still claims to love his country, perhaps to a fault.

Snowden's assessment of himself as exceptional, his determination that the intelligence community feels so much guilt for 9/11 that they're willing to do anything to stop another attack, and his belief that the mass surveillance program violates every American's constitutional protections motivate him to commit an extraordinary act. Whether he's viewed as an agent of espionage or a defender of liberty, Snowden's retelling of events portrays him as a man of conviction above all else, willing to sacrifice his career, his home, his health, and even the love of his life to protect his fellow Americans from the shadow of totalitarianism—and their foolish penchant for trading sacred personal liberties for the perception of security.

Lindsay Mills

Lindsay, Edward Snowden's longtime girlfriend and, eventually, his wife, adds a human, emotional contrast to Snowden's analytical personality and technological prowess. She becomes the sample through which he concludes how the general population may react to the news that they are being constantly surveilled. Unaware of his burden, she serves as a

contrast 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 that 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's constant presence and support reassure Snowden; without his confidence in Lindsay's love, it is not clear whether he could have followed through on his plan.

Lindsay remains almost entirely in the dark about Edward's intentions, demonstrating Snowden's adherence to the code imprinted on him by the CIA—not telling anyone about his work—and confirming that he is willing to imperil his most important relationship rather than tell Lindsay the truth. Lindsay's point of view, exemplified in her diary entries, shows just how cut off and distant Snowden has become. Her experiences in the wake of the leaks act as a hyper-realized version of the public's reaction: She not only learns about mass surveillance for the first time but also encounters very obvious experiences of explicit surveillance. These experiences suggest a future in which surveillance is the inescapable norm, which Snowden uses to justify his conviction that mass surveillance is an evil from which he has to protect the world.

Glenn Greenwald and Other Journalists

Snowden reaches out to a number of journalists but is mostly rejected. Laura Poitras, a documentary filmmaker, is one of the few who are willing to listen. In turn, she convinces Glenn Greenwald to become involved, practically dragging him to Hong Kong to meet with Snowden. Greenwald's reluctance makes him more essential to the story: His apathy and his cynicism are obstacles that Snowden must overcome.

If Lindsay reflects a certain population's naivete about mass surveillance and the dangers of government misuse of technology, Greenwald reflects another segment of society's distrust or indifference to what Snowden has

to tell them. Snowden notes Greenwald's initial disappointment that Snowden is relatively young and clean-cut, not a middle-aged, gruff, chain-smoking shadow figure. Snowden has to conquer these hesitations, both for Greenwald and the wider public, to make himself appear credible. By convincing Greenwald, Snowden takes the first step toward alerting the world to mass surveillance.

Throughout much of the book, Snowden acts alone. When he begins to think about how to make the world listen, he can no longer act on his own. By reaching out to the journalists, he admits that he needs help and that other people have skills he does not possess. Rather than simply teaching himself, he has to trust and depend on others. Coming from a person who has been so self-reliant through such an enormous undertaking, this admission speaks to the scale of the task at hand.

THEMES

Mass Surveillance

In 2013, Snowden revealed to the world the extent to which the American intelligence agencies—assisted by those abroad—were surveilling almost every single citizen and recording their most intimate data. Although mass surveillance terrifies Snowden, his coworkers do not share his feelings. When he tries to discuss the issue with his fellow NSA workers, they react with mild indifference, unable to see what individuals 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, collecting (and sharing) their nude photographs. This abuse leads him to conclude that the immorality of mass surveillance has become so toxic, and has permeated so much of the agency, that he has no choice but to reveal it to the world.

Snowden likens the NSA's mass surveillance to that conducted by the SS in Nazi Germany and the KGB in the Soviet Union. He views it as a tool of totalitarian oppression, and even though the US government may have undertaken the program with the best of intentions, he sees his colleagues' behavior as evidence that power has begun to corrupt those good intentions. He believes the collective guilt intelligence agencies felt after 9/11 caused them to abandon the Fourth Amendment. Unlike the open mass surveillance that Orwell envisioned in *1984*, the NSA program operates in secret. The program has virtually no oversight—the NSA lies about its existence—and the public has grown indifferent to trading individual privacy for the illusion of safety.

One of the greatest dangers of mass surveillance is the gathering of metadata. Unseen, passive, and unknown to the majority of citizens, it allows governments to track citizens' actions and whereabouts by tracking not the content on their devices, but each device's location and activity—what sites the user visited, whom they called, for what terms they searched. Snowden fears he cannot explain the complexities and dangers of metadata harvesting to the general public. Yet as the massive scale of the globe-spanning surveillance becomes apparent, Snowden feels he must

act. He feels such conviction about the problem that he utterly destroys his life to let the world know.

Morality and Technology

Practically raised by his computer and his internet connection, Snowden has been extremely online from a young age. To him, this technology is amoral: It can be used for good purposes, which he experienced as a young man, and bad purposes, like mass surveillance of the entire population of the United States. Technology, then, is a tool that derives its morality from the user. It becomes a blank slate onto which humans project their moral compass.

In the aftermath of 9/11. Snowden takes an unnuanced view of what the US must do to combat terrorism. After his discharge from the Army, the nationalist fervor begins to seep away, and he develops a more complicated moral outlook. When he begins to work for the intelligence services and sees how the government corrupts the machines that he has grown to love, he begins to question America's moral certitude, realizing that the morality of the technology is only as strong as those who wield the tech.

Snowden's concerns become even more relevant today, as automation, enabled by artificial intelligence and machine learning, take over human supervision of many technological functions. Just as the NSA's mass surveillance program had little oversight, the U.S. government does little to supervise the use of artificial intelligence, exposing millions to the consequences of amoral, machine-driven decision making. Snowden believes those wielding the most powerful tech in the world seem to be operating without a moral compass at all. He cites the examples of Nagasaki and Hiroshima as evidence of the horrors that technology, wielded with ambiguous morality, can heap onto a population. He becomes a whistleblower, hoping to return technology to a position of positive morality.

At the same time, by knighting himself as the sole determiner of whether the program is and isn't moral, he demonstrates remarkable self-assurance, to the point of arrogance. He chooses to break the law rather

than trying to go through the proper whistleblowing channels. As such, his revelations have a limited impact: The EU's GDPR is positive, but not much changes back home. Immorality didn't defeat immorality, and public indifference to mass surveillance continues, as does the risk of technology being exploited for evil purposes.

Anonymity

To Snowden, anonymity is an important cornerstone of internet culture. Having spent so much time online, he revels in the ability to drift in and out of an identity, to hack the malleable persona that perpetual anonymity provides. Unless people have the option of not being identified online, he suggests that the internet, and people as a whole, will never truly be free. To Snowden, being anonymous online is an essential choice, a freedom which should never be surrendered.

Snowden describes his earliest online experiences in excruciating detail. He lists the mistakes he made online while noting anonymity always protected him. 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. These forays are formative experiences for Snowden: Anonymity becomes the arena in which he can fail without fearing repercussions. Later, he operates beneath the cloak of anonymity as he executes his plan, only jettisoning it when he has to ask others to help him reveal it to the public.

In the present day, online anonymity is rapidly vanishing. People post massive amounts of personal data on social media, which businesses—and sometimes nefarious actors—mine for not only advertising but also disinformation and psychological warfare. The government's collection of metadata means that, no matter what identity a user has adopted, anonymity is gone. Snowden presents the Tor browser as an important tool for fighting back, and he launches his own Tor server to help those living under authoritarian governments access some form of anonymous browsing.

Snowden's role as the whistleblower means the end of his own anonymity. He tries to seize control of the moment, recording his own unmasking

video and surrendering his anonymity to ensure that his message is heard. An anonymous NSA contractor has become one of the world's most notorious fugitives, yet his quest had limited success. Few people safeguard their personal data, and in many countries—the EU's "right to be forgotten" notwithstanding—people still have no ownership over their data and no say in how it's stored and used.

SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

Permanent Records

A motif that Snowden returns to again and again, the permanent record gives the book its title and plays on the themes of surveillance and a lifelong rap sheet. At various stages, Snowden encounters different forms of a permanent record, some more serious than others. As he grows and his views become better informed, the permanent record evolves from its original state—an idle threat from his teacher—to a description for user data collected on every single person in the United States of America—without probable cause, stored and accessible forever.

By referencing the familiar idea of a permanent school record—an urban myth which is repeated to generation after generation, to the point of being modern folklore—Snowden creates a smart analogy for what the NSA has done with mass surveillance. At first, he introduces the idea as an ironic offhand comment, a way of keeping a wayward student in line. By the time Snowden begins to work in the intelligence agencies, he discovers that the permanent record is horrifying real. 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, and one which poses a danger to a free society.

The ultimate irony for Snowden is that his permanent record doesn't exist in the bowels of the NSA. Whenever people search his name online, he will be forever associated with one single act. Whether Snowden has altered his permanent record for a measurable result remains unclear. For Snowden, however, the very act of making the alteration demonstrates control over what he considers an authoritarian tool.

Rubik's Cube

Snowden often plays with a Rubik's cube and uses it as a conversation starter to build trust with the NSA's security guards. Popular during the 1980s, the toy is a puzzle that allows the user to move around colored blocks until all of the colors are the same on each side. To solve the cube, a user can learn set patterns and techniques that make solving the puzzle possible in increasingly quick times. In many ways, the cube is a metaphor for Snowden's infatuation with systems and his determination to manipulate and break them.

By his own admission, Rubik's cubes are ever present in Snowden's life. When Snowden is stressed or anxious, he thinks about the cubes and how to solve them. Although many people fumble with the cubes, the actual techniques can be learned and practiced. His commitment turns the device from a novelty into a hobby, something at which Snowden can train and improve while distracting himself from painful thoughts, such as his discharge from the Army or his ever-increasing awareness of mass surveillance. The repeated techniques soothe him and help him demonstrate control over a system in chaotic moments. From his childhood to his jobs at the intelligence agencies to his time in Hong Kong, his thoughts always drift to the toy.

When he sneaks SD cards out of the NSA facility, he employs a Rubik's 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. 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 a way to express his introverted personality. The trick convinces the guards, to whom he talks about the cubes, switching their focus from him to the toys. The toy demonstrates his advanced hacking skills: He can now take on a system as complex as the human mind.

Computers

The mainstays 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 cannot return to America. In Snowden's childhood, the computer is the gateway to another world, a free and liberating educational tool which shapes him as a person. By the end of the book, Snowden has become a public herald of the dangers posed by computers in the hands of the wrong people.

From the moment his father arrives home with a Commodore 64, Snowden 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. His grades begin to suffer and, when his parents divorce, Snowden worries that his overuse of the computer may have been the reason. 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. The computer, particularly when connected to the internet, becomes almost a surrogate parent.

The more Snowden learns about how the government uses computers, the less he feels he can trust them. As an adult, he meticulously wipes and encrypts computer files. When he sees an internet-enabled refrigerator, he realizes just how ubiquitous connected devices, and thus the risk of improper data collection, has become. When he asks a journalist to put his smart phone in a mini fridge, he seems to feel betrayed by the technology he used to idolize.

IMPORTANT QUOTES

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

Snowden 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 this foundation, Snowden establishes his credentials. He demonstrates how such surveillance can be an essential element of life from an early age and connects his childhood activities to his decisions in later life.

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 as the previous quote seeks to establish Snowden's credentials as a spy, this slice of family history establishes his status as an American. 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 demonstrates his bona fides as an American, which come into question when he is later accused of being a traitor.*

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 our most deeply held opinions, instead of just digging in and defending them when challenged." (Chapter 4, Page 39)

The collectivist, enthusiastic, and anonymous early internet offered an optional entry point into a novel online world. In that world, under the cloak of anonymity, people could challenge their assumptions in an environment of safety. Today, the internet is taken for granted, and people are usually identified as they use online tools. His defense

of the early internet is not technological—the modern infrastructure is demonstrably better—but ideological in nature.

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)

After Snowden finds a security hole in the Los Alamos National Laboratory website, he diligently reports it in the hope that it will be fixed. The challenge of getting through and getting the site fixed causes him to question whether it's always expedient to go through "the proper channels." Later, the "scorched-earth nuclear holocaust" becomes a metaphor for the huge fallout from the leaks (46), as the global population suddenly learns the truth about mass surveillance.

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 experiences new levels of guilt and worry. He frets that his own behavior caused the divorce, a strikingly human moment that predates his entry into the cool, disjointed, and unemotional world of espionage. Those involved in the intelligence services, no matter how detached and seemingly uncaring they seem, are still human and prone to the same worries and concerns as everyone else.

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

Still a teenager, Snowden recounts his experiences on 9/11 and how, in his view, it changed both him and the country. The increased security and the changes in idioms and tone among Americans speak to wider societal changes. The growing divide between Snowden and Mae demonstrates the manner in which the attack would become a wedge that 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 seeks to explain why the surveillance state was erected. After failing to prevent such a devastating attack, intelligence agents experienced palpable and understandable psychological trauma. They do not hesitate to begin large-scale mass surveillance because they feel guilty as well as scared. Yet in this way of "protecting America," they fail to protect America's most cherished personal liberties.

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 once found so freeing and liberating becomes an albatross around his neck when he's vetted for his first security clearance. The guilt and shame he feels regarding his teenage opinions are not only memories; they exist in cyberspace, still present on long-forgotten forums. 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. His chagrin also shows what happens when online anonymity is taken away.

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, the repairs and fixes normally applied to a circuit board or a network do not repair the damage done to the country's government. This perspective helps explain 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 also a preemptive defense for later criticism. He primes the reader by explaining the ubiquity of private contractors and providing his own (low) opinion of this, attempting to preempt the government's later description of him as just a lowly disgruntled contractor. The social critique functions as exposition and, in a roundabout fashion, as a means of building a character defense.

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

Describing his night shift at the CIA, Snowden uses figurative language. His perception of the building as 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 that now resembles little of what it once embodied. These changes reflects the collapse of traditional American ideals the agency once represented.

12. "At age 24, 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: When he sees a system, he wants to understand, control, and exploit it. He is now up against an altogether different kind of system: the bureaucracy of the CIA. Though he seemingly wins this battle, he is punished by being given the nicest possible job. Just as Snowden learns how to beat the system, he learns that 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 comments on his own struggles with depersonalized information gathering and the online culture that allows mass surveillance. Just as he stopped viewing his targets as people, Snowden suggests that modern society's willingness to experience the world through screens (phones, computers, televisions, and so on) keeps them from seeing people as human, enabling us to act cruelly toward people in online venues, without thought to the consequences.

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)

As Snowden begins to research the Chinese government, he begins to see echoes of his own country's actions in those of the Chinese. His comprehension of the scale of the American surveillance shocks him; it's one of the book's most fundamental paradigm shifts. A man who once split the world into good versus evil is determined not to be fooled again.

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

Snowden returns to a different America, one which seems entirely won over by the "benefits" of the surveillance state. He sees the term "cloud computing" as 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 treated with contempt or suspicion; it's 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 over what he learns about the surveillance state, Snowden decides to act. He sets up a Tor relay point on his server, hoping this may help someone in Iran whose internet has been censored—and understanding that not 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 must restore privacy while respecting 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)

Snowden casts himself as the powerless figure who is battling all-powerful gods. Broken down and depressed, he sees fighting back against the American state as impossible as fighting against a deity. Nevertheless, he continues, which speaks to his determination and his confidence—and perhaps his arrogance. He believes himself a man capable of overthrowing 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 thinks about his fellow workers in a moral context. He sees their plight as tragic: Entirely swallowed up by the powerful machine of the intelligence agencies, a testament to the power of the IC more than the culpability of individuals. He blows the whistle 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 to make his information public, he turns the state's surveillance apparatus against it. By tracking and targeting certain journalists and storing that data for a long time, the NSA ironically leads the whistleblower to the very people who will expose mass surveillance to the world.

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)

By bragging about how they caught those who tried to commit crimes within the intelligence agencies, the FBI provides Snowden with a detailed account of exactly what to do—and not to do. The FBI's arrogance enables their worst fears to be realized, all because they insisted on sharing their victories on the intelligence community's internal computer systems.

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

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, he feels as though he is selecting a new home from which he may never return. He can no longer his girlfriend and his parents—or anyone he knows. Snowden is well aware of the destructive emotional impact and the finality of his choice.

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"—which is also traditionally the first line of code written by a budding programmer. 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 again a 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)

After landing in Russia, Snowden is hyper-alert. An FSB agent is trying to recruit him, and though Snowden is exhausted, his intelligence training kicks in and he recognizes a trap being laid. Though he might not refer to himself as a spy, Snowden demonstrates many of the skills essential to serving well in the intelligence 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)

Lindsay's perspective adds 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, revealed by her boyfriend to the world. While everyone else learns how much they are passively surveilled, Lindsay is aggressively monitored, highlighting the possible end result of a state in which the population gives up its right to privacy.

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)

While Snowden's life is irreparably damaged and he can never go home, the worldwide discussion sparked by his actions, at least to some extent, help him justify his choices. Although he has not dismantled the mass surveillance network, he has alerted people to its dangers.

ESSAY TOPICS

1. Throughout the book, Edward Snowden alludes to previous whistleblowers. What is the purpose of placing himself into this historical context? How does the way he goes about blowing the whistle mimic or differ from their methods?
2. To what extent did the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center affect Snowden as a person? How did he react in their aftermath? How did the intelligence community react, and how did their reaction lead to the birth of mass surveillance? How did the attacks affect the American people and influence them to trade individual freedom for the security blanket of surveillance?
3. Snowden was raised in the Beltway—the area around Washington D.C.—and his parents worked with the U.S. government. How did his experience of public service differ from theirs?
4. Discuss the pros and cons of mass surveillance and its inevitable tension with personal privacy. How did the NSA's mass surveillance program violate the Fourth Amendment? What might the consequences be of giving up protections from illegal search and seizure?
5. Though Snowden's book is an autobiography, the text takes on the tropes of other genres. Which sections of the book would you most liken to a thriller? How do those sections accelerate the narrative and add tension to the story?
6. Explain the symbolism of the Rubik's cube, which Snowden uses at numerous times in the book. How do they help him deal with individual emotional chaos? How do they parallel his self-perception as a hacker of systems?
7. When it came time to leak the documents, Snowden knew, for the first time, that he could no longer act alone. What could the journalists do that he could not? What new skills did he learn as he evolved from lone actor to cooperating witness?

8. In the penultimate chapter, the narrative voice switches from Edward Snowden to Lindsay Mills. How does Lindsay's perspective affect the story being told? As she discovers the existence of mass surveillance, how do her experiences mirror the population at large?
9. 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 he succeeded in his goals? How has reading this book changed your views about personal privacy, and what steps do you plan to take to better safeguard your data?
10. To some, Edward Snowden is a traitor. To others, he is a hero. After reading his story, where do you stand, and why? Do you think he should be forgiven and allowed to come home? Why or why not?