

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 1: THE THIRD LEVEL



THE THIRD LEVEL

~Summary~

-by Jack Finney

Three Levels at the Grand Central Railway Station

The narrator feels that there are three levels at the Grand Central Railway Station. In reality, there are only two. He has discussed this with his psychiatrist friend, Sam Weiner. Sam feels that the narrator's experience is a waking-dream wish fulfilment. The psychiatrist says that he (the narrator) is unhappy and the modern man is engulfed in insecurities and fears. So, man wants an escape from his stressful life.

Narrator's Hobby of Stamp Collection; A Refuge

The narrator's psychiatrist friend says that the narrator's hobby of stamp collection is a 'temporary refuge from reality.' The narrator does not agree with this interpretation. He argues that his grandfather lived in 'nice and peaceful times and if this was the case his grandfather did not need to run away from reality. Still his grandfather pursued philately (the collection and study of postage stamps).

Charley Reaches 'The Third Level'

One summer night Charley worked late at the office. In a hurry to get back home, he decided to take the subway from Grand Central. He crossed the arched doorway heading for the subway and got lost. The narrator strongly feels that the Grand Central grows like a tree and pushes out new corridors and stairs like roots. The narrator walks down a corridor. He finds nobody but hears empty sound of his own foot steps. He founds himself at the third level at Grand Central Station!

Scenario at 'The Third Level'

There were smaller rooms, fewer ticket windows and open-flame gaslights there. The information booth was made of wood and was looking ancient. Everybody at the station was dressed in the fashion of the late 19th century. To be sure, the narrator got a copy of 'The World' dated June 11, 1899 where the lead story was about President Cleveland.

The narrator goes to the ticket window and demands two tickets for Galesburg, Illinois. He wants to go there with his wife, Louisa. He imagines it to be a peaceful countryside in the year 1894 when the First World War was twenty years away and the Second World War was forty years

away. To his surprise, the clerk at the ticket counter does not accept his currency bills. Sensing trouble, the narrator runs away from the third level to escape jail.

Charley Buys Old Currency

The narrator withdraws three hundred dollars from the bank next day to buy the currency of 1890. His psychiatrist friend is really worried over this. However, his three hundred dollars got reduced to two hundred in old-style bills. He doesn't care because he desperately wants to reach the third level.

Quest for 'The Third Level'

The narrator fails to find the third level again. His wife is very worried and pursues Charley to stop looking for the third level. So, he resumes his hobby of stamp collection. His psychiatrist friend, Sam disappears and the narrator and his wife get proof of the existence of the third level. Now both of them start their futile search for the third level platform. The narrator believes the Sam is now in Galesburg in the year 1894.

The Mystery of First-day Covers

When a new stamp is issued, stamp collectors buy it and affix a new stamp on an envelope. They mail the envelope to themselves on the first day of the sale. The postman gives proof of the date. The envelope is never opened and nothing is written inside it. This is called first day cover.

While finicking with his stamp collection, the narrator finds a strange cover mailed to the narrator's grandfather's address in Galesburg. It has been present there since July 18, 1894. It bears a six cent stamp with the picture of President Garfield. The envelope contains a letter for Charley by his friend Sam. Sam confirms the presence of the third level and advises the narrator to keep looking for it. He says 'It's worth it.'

Narrator's Reality Check on Sam

Charley finds out that Sam had bought eight hundred dollars worth of old-style currency. This money was sufficient to set up a hay, feed and grain business which Sam dreamt of. Sam is a qualified psychiatrist but cannot go back to his profession in Galesburg of 1894 because the profession of psychiatrist did not exist at that time.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 7)

(Reading with Insight)

Question 1. Do you think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley? Why?

Answer: Yes, I think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley. The third level is an escape for Charley from the modern setting of worry and insecurity. It is an escape from the unhappy contemporary world that is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry. He had always desired to live his life peacefully as he did in Galesburg. Charlie was so upset and frustrated with modern life and the way of living that he wanted to move back into the past. Thus, in his mind, he has forever wanted to go back in time, so he found the third level as a realization of his dream.

Question 2. What do you infer from Sam's letter to Charley?

Answer: Sam's letter is a consequence of Charley's thoughts. Sam's letter was full of mystery when Charley came across it. This can be understood from the truth that the letter was enclosed in the oldest first-day cover and directed to his grandfather. Usually, the first-day covers have blank papers in them, but this one included a letter. This is made so that the envelope is stamped along with the date and it remains as a remembrance always. So these kinds of envelopes carry just blank letters and should not be opened. In this letter, Sam had notified Charley that he was living on the third level. He had also stated that Charley and his wife keep waiting for the third level. This confirms that Sam's letter is an outcome of Charley's complete imagination.

Question 3. 'The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress.' What are the ways in which we attempt to overcome them?

Answer: The contemporary world is full of illusion, insecurity, war, fear, worry, tension, and stress. This is because the world is full of competition and people need to pull each other downward. People can overcome this unrealness, anxieties, and insecurities bred by our certain existence in the advanced world by getting involved in useful and practical activities. To overcome such uncertainties, firstly we must believe that both good and bad come our way. Hence, we the people want to create equilibrium among professional, creative, personal, and economic provinces of life. People need to spend a good time with friends and family, be productive in art, poetry, prose, or in enhancing their hobbies.

Question 4. Do you see an intersection of time and space in the story?

Answer: Yes, some situations in the story show an interaction of time and space. Firstly, the first two levels of Grand Central Station were found in the present time while the third level survived. Charley tries to buy for Galesburg but finds that he has current-day currency. The stairs that guide Charley to the third level are also seen to be the pattern of the 19th-century. Charley opens up the first-day cover from his grandfather's collection of stamps and assumes it to be Sam's letter which is supposed to be blank. In certain situations, Charley is brought to a parallel world of thought where everything results according to his desires. This instance makes him completely fulfilled. However, when he experiences the modern world, he becomes tangled.

Question 5. Apparent illogicality sometimes turns out to be a futuristic projection? Discuss.

Answer: Indeed, apparent illogicality sometimes turns out to be a futuristic prediction. Sometimes what appears to be illogical today or at a point in time often turns out to be a reality tomorrow or in the future. This has usually been the trend with scientific discoveries. No one could have tried to accept that man could fly before the Wright Brothers invented the airplane. It was an illogical thought. It later rolled out to be an actuality in the form of planes and parachutes. Likewise, the baseless thought of communicating to people over long distances by Graham Bell made him invent the telephone. Another example of this is the mobile phone which is another version of taking the telephone to its next level. All these discoveries were seeded in absurd thoughts. Illogical thoughts converted to real-time inventions are possible due to time, effort, patience, hard work, and resources.

Question 6. Philately helps keep the past alive. Discuss other ways in which this is done. What do you think of the human tendency to constantly move between the past, the present and the future?

Answer: Besides philately, there are many other ways to help keep the past alive. Holding on to the past alive also means protecting the memories, which can be preserved in numerous ways. Philately is collecting the stamps that transport us into our actual past. In the past, people would maintain a diary to keep incidents recorded. Some people would also safely preserve letters, souvenirs, gifts, and coins that they got from others. In the modern world, as time flies and technology gets developed in people's lives, they make videos or take photographs to capture the moments.

The ability to fluctuate between the past, present, and future is a great intellectual gift. It is good to make mistakes in our past. We can take beautiful lessons from it and can make today and tomorrow wonderful. Human beings have a good ability to keep events recorded in mind. This enables them to continually go back to any situation in the past and revive it. Hence, we as

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