

Virtual War PDF (Limited Copy)

Gloria Skurzynski



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Virtual War Summary

"Reimagining Alliances in a Digitally Dominated Reality."

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About the book

In a future not too distant, war has slipped into the realm of virtual reality, where battles are no longer fought on blood-soiled battlefields but in digitally simulated environments that transcend geographical bounds.

"Virtual War" by Gloria Skurzynski offers a gripping narrative that peers into an eerie, yet plausible tomorrow of technological warfare. The story orbits around young Corgan, a genetically designed child soldier, who is pitted against rivals in a high-stakes virtual confrontation manipulated by powerful forces pulling the strings behind the scenes. Amidst the lens of pixelated valor, questions of morality, identity, and power loom largely, weaving a captivating tale of ethical dilemmas and the essence of human nature when faced with the synthetic allure of victory. Journey with Corgan and his cohorts as they navigate the blurred lines between reality and illusion, and discover whether virtual sacrifices can hold the gravity of true human sacrifice. As much a cautionary tale as it is a thrilling adventure, "Virtual War" is poised to enthrall readers with both thrilling escapades and insights into our technology-driven trajectory.

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About the author

Gloria Skurzynski is a prolific author renowned for her fascinating works in children's and young adult literature. With a career spanning several decades, she has penned over 60 books, captivating readers with her ability to weave compelling narratives across diverse genres. Her work often delves into science fiction, mystery, and adventure, bringing complex themes to a young audience in an engaging and accessible manner. Skurzynski's stories are characterized by meticulous research and inventive storytelling, which bring to life intriguing worlds that echo real-world issues. Among her numerous accolades, she has received the Christopher Award and was a co-recipient of the Golden Kite Award for Nonfiction, showcasing her versatility and impact as a writer. Her keen sense of curiosity and passion for education shines brightly through her work, including "Virtual War," where ethical dilemmas and futuristic settings converge seamlessly to engage and challenge her readers' imaginations.

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Chapter 1 Summary: One

In this intriguing opening chapter, we're introduced to the futuristic life of Corgan, a fourteen-year-old boy living in an isolated environment governed by the Supreme Council. The sky is golden as he lies on the sand, touching the earth with a rare sense of peace, interrupted only by the presence of a girl named Sharla, who challenges him to a game of Go-ball—a skill-based virtual sport conducted in this digitized setting.

Corgan's life is strictly managed, focusing on training for an unspecified yet imminent 'War,' set to occur in just over seventeen days. His world is confined to a sterile and highly controlled living space, which includes his secluded 'Box' and 'Clean Room', entirely run by an AI system named Mendor. Mendor is capable of morphing into various figures, ranging from a stern Father to a nurturing Mother, guiding Corgan through his rigorous routines while ensuring strict adherence to rules and hygiene, even down to something as minute as the length of his hair.

Sharla, a sudden variable in this equation, provides a glimpse into the outside—a world unknown and mysterious to him. While her Go-ball skills eclipse Corgan's own, it's her appearance and laughter that truly destabilize him, hinting at the nuanced emotional complexities of adolescence. Despite her virtual presence, Sharla's impact is profound, sowing seeds of curiosity and capturing his interest in ways the Council would precaution against.



The interaction with Sharla ends abruptly, and Corgan's superiors are displeased by his distracted performance, seeing it as a failure—a critical breach of focus so close to the War. Corgan is chastised and reminded of his duties, but remains adamant about seeing Sharla again, feeling a rare sense of connection that was absent from his life filled with programmed images and prescribed interactions.

As part of his daily routine, Corgan goes through reflex practice to prepare for the War, showing exceptional skill and earning high scores. This presents him with the rare opportunity to make demands. He desires Sharla's presence, revealing his longing for genuine human connection amid a life otherwise dictated by digitized interactions and strict training.

Despite his yearning, the day ends without him seeing Sharla again, and the chapter closes on the note of Corgan continuing with his stringent training in Precision and Sensitivity, highlighting the regimented nature of his existence. The chapter sets a foundation for an exploration of individuality versus control, human connection versus isolation, and curiosity versus obedience in a world on the brink of an impending War.



Chapter 2 Summary: Two

Chapter Two Summary

The following morning, Corgan finds himself in a virtual environment known as "Corgan's Box," where he trains under the supervision of his instructor and mentor, Mendor. The Box is a sophisticated illusionary space that can simulate various environments, playing a crucial role in Corgan's education about the world's history, especially the cataclysmic events that reshaped it.

Mendor shares grim lessons from past history, detailing the devastation caused by plagues and wars — notably the Ebola epidemic in Zaire, nuclear devastation in the Middle East, and subsequent global calamities such as radiation from nuclear accidents and pandemics like AIDS and Ebola. These events led to Earth's surface becoming uninhabitable, forcing humanity to live in domed cities that existed in the least contaminated areas. Corgan, a resident of one such city situated in what was once Wyoming, is reminded of the critical role history plays in understanding the upcoming War he's being prepared for.

As Corgan trains his reflexes and memory, there is also a sense of isolation, punctuated by his strained interactions with Mendor, who takes on multiple



roles—both disciplinary and nurturing. As he practices his reflexes, aiming for a new personal best, he is aware of the omnipresent Supreme Council, the ruling body that controls his training and holds sway over his life.

Corgan's day takes an unexpected turn when he receives a surprise from the Council: the introduction of a new team member for the impending War. Sharla, a cryptanalyst, is presented to him, albeit with her image blurred for reasons unknown to Corgan. Despite this, her bright and energetic blue eyes are reminiscent of Sharla, a skilled Go-ball player he remembers. Their formal introduction is overseen by the Supreme Council, highlighting the importance of building a strong team dynamic as they prepare for the War starting in seventeen days.

Corgan's realization of the manipulated and controlled environment by the Supreme Council leaves him pondering the lack of genuine interactions and the artificial reality he inhabits. The chapter closes with Corgan contemplating the level of control the Supreme Council exerts over their lives and the images they see, underscoring the sometimes oppressive nature of their existence in this post-apocalyptic world.



Chapter 3 Summary: Three

Chapter Three Summary

In a futuristic and virtualized world, Corgan and Sharla practice together for the first time. Despite the clarity of virtual interactions, Corgan finds Sharla's image out of focus, a detail that bothers him. In this reality, where physical presence is irrelevant, Corgan reflects on his insulated life inside a Box—a space optimized for virtual existence—with pets that come to life from the aerogel, a miracle material discovered decades ago. He questions where Sharla might be located, pondering the boundaries of their world.

Mendor, a virtual instructor or overseer, guides Corgan through their practice sessions, emphasizing the importance of discipline as they engage in exercises like "Golden Bees." Sharla's laugh, reminiscent of their earlier playful interaction, feels genuine despite her blurred image. Her quick adjustments of the trajectory codes win Mendor's praise, highlighting her exceptional skills. The dialogue between them reveals the gravity of their task: to fight the Virtual War, a global conflict adjudicated with strict rules set by major world confederations. A moment's lapse could mean defeat.

As Mendor lectures about the rules, Sharla discreetly contacts Corgan through a small image, cautioning him to stay silent. She plans to alter the



codes allowing him to step out of the Box undetected, proposing a meeting in person—a rarity in their controlled world. As the day progresses, Corgan's routine continues: drills, running on a virtual track, followed by another monotonous day in his secure but isolated Box.

That night, consumed by anticipation and anxiety, Corgan resists sleep. His usual dreams of serene landscapes are replaced by thoughts of the clandestine meeting. Overcoming the constraints of aerogel and his programmed habits, he steps out, and Sharla's whisper guides him through the dark tunnel. He reaches out, touching another human for the first time—a momentous act considering the global fear of contamination, a fear that resulted from humanity's decimation to a sparse two million.

In whispers, Sharla reveals their shared origin: both are genetically engineered products of a successful experiment, distinct even among their cohort. Most others emerged as Mutants, highlighting the precariousness of genetic experimentation. Their unique capabilities designate them as key players in the Virtual War. Meanwhile, Corgan learns of societal truths beyond his sheltered existence, including the variance in living conditions and the illusion of universal isolation in Boxes. Sharla, unruly and daring, has evaded oversight, exploring beyond her confines since childhood.

Before he returns to his pristine Box, Sharla assures him that her escapes go unnoticed. Her defiance contrasts with Corgan's sheltered upbringing,



revealing a world more variable than he imagined—a world kept under strict control by the powers that be. The idea that contamination is less threatening than he was led to believe is challenging, leaving him awash with intrigue and skepticism.

The chapter ends with a plan to meet again, despite the risks and mysteries surrounding Sharla's true nature—whether she embodies the allure of their first virtual encounter or conceals something else entirely. Alive with new possibilities, Corgan's world is transformed, cementing a shared connection that defies the virtual barriers constricting their lives.

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Chapter 4: Four

In Chapter Four, the setting unfolds as Corgan, exhausted and disinterested, finds himself in a virtual re-creation of the Isles of Hiva, the contested lands over which a future War will be fought. Mendor, a nurturing yet monotonous figure who alternates between masculine and feminine guises, narrates the history of these once-impoverished islands, decimated half a century ago by an epidemic known as pakoko, a vicious form of tuberculosis. Now deemed free of contamination, the Isles have become a coveted prize for which Corgan and his team must compete in a bloodless War—a simulated battle overseen by the Supreme Council that highlights the importance of uncontaminated land in a post-disaster world.

Corgan's curiosity is piqued not by the strategic importance of the Isles but by the engaging virtual experience of their natural beauty. He idly questions Mendor, masking his guilt over sneaking out of his strictly regimented lifestyle the previous night. Through Mendor, the revelation unfolds that the council has delayed this War, awaiting the maturation and peak abilities of Corgan and his peer Sharla, a fellow prodigy. Corgan's practice demands exceptional precision in manipulating electromagnetic fields, a skill only a few possess, securing him privileges but also perpetual surveillance.

Later, in a covert nighttime meeting with Sharla in a tunnel—a secret escape from his controlled environment—Corgan experiences human contact,



foreign outside the virtual realm. Their interaction, marked by Corgan's clumsy attempts at conversation and his awe at Sharla's presence, introduces romantic tension. The introduction of Brig, their ten-year-old Strategist, both intrigues and irritates Corgan. Sharla's teasing hints that Brig is a prodigy like themselves; his youth belies a strategic genius. However, Corgan's blissful ignorance in his clandestine meetings with Sharla is disrupted by the impending inclusion of Brig in their intimate encounters.

The virtual environment provides stark contrast to Corgan's awakening human emotions. He grapples with these sensations as he is drawn back into the rigorous realities of their virtual practice sessions, where he excels in complex strategic exercises. Mendor guides him with caution and praise, addressing Corgan's unease about the nature of the War.

Corgan's first meeting with Brig reveals the strategist's remarkable intellect, masked by a virtual appearance of ordinary youth. The Supreme Council orchestrates this introduction, justifying their delayed team assembly. Brig's charisma and cleverness evidence his strategic prowess yet evoke resentment in Corgan, who feels overshadowed and treated as Mendor's model student. Despite the Council's emphasis on collaboration, a rivalry simmers as Corgan struggles with his feelings of alienation and inadequacy amid his new team.

The chapter closes with the team united, poised to practice together, bridging



the gap between individual brilliance and collective strategy—a critical step toward their engagement in the bloodless War over the Isles of Hiva.

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Chapter 5 Summary: Five

Chapter Five opens with Corgan, a genetically engineered boy bred for swift reflexes and precise control, stepping out of his highly controlled environment, referred to as the "Box," at eleven o'clock. He is beckoned by a dim light signaling further down a tunnel, leading to a clandestine meeting with Sharla—a girl reportedly possessing triple genius intellect—and a new acquaintance, Brig, who is introduced as a Mutant.

Brig is revealed to have a distinctive appearance, characterized by a large head and twisted limbs, which initially surprises Corgan. Brig clarifies he is a Mutant, a result of flawed genetic engineering, standing apart due to his enormous intellect despite his physical deformities. Through their conversation, we learn about the existence of Mutants—children subjected to genetic experimentation where many do not survive past early childhood. Brig, however, is ten and considers himself a "mental giant." The trio shares a moment of tension as they trade barbs over intelligence, with Corgan often unaware of the words used in their banter due to his isolated upbringing.

The chapter explores the backgrounds and relational dynamics between the characters. Sharla serves as a mediator, reminding the boys to stay civil. Corgan becomes curious about Brig's life experiences, particularly the Mutant Pen, where Brig grew up being able to physically connect with other Mutant children—a "luxury" neither Corgan nor Sharla experienced, having



only been nurtured by non-thinking robots or virtual reality caregivers.

The scene shifts as they plan to venture beyond the tunnel, with Corgan eager to witness more of the outside world, including the Mutant Pen.

However, their tour takes a detour as Sharla leads Corgan and Brig along a forbidden path to observe the enigmatic Supreme Council, the governing body of the Western Hemisphere Federation. Corgan's understanding of authority unravels as he comes face-to-face with the reality of the Council—ordinary, flawed humans who rely heavily on mind control and mystique to consolidate their power.

The journey continues as the trio makes their way through the underground corridors, utilizing a hover car assisted by Jobe, a worker whom Sharla knows through tip-offs and trickery involving lotteries—an indication of Sharla's resourcefulness and willingness to bend rules. As they travel, Corgan observes the hydroponic gardens, the actual source of their soy-based meals, a juxtaposition to the luxurious offerings he experiences due to his special status.

Finally, they reach the peripheral view of the domed city and, for the first time, Corgan sees real stars through the transparent roof—a moving experience that reflects the limits of his virtual familiarity with the outside world. Brig, having not seen stars since he was six, shares in Corgan's awe, cementing a subtle bond between them and highlighting the overarching



theme of longing for authenticity in a tightly controlled society. This chapter paints a vivid picture of the dystopian reality Corgan, Sharla, and Brig inhabit, characterized by advanced technology coupled with profound human disconnection and manipulation.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Search for Authenticity Beyond Control

Critical Interpretation: Drawing from Corgan's journey out of his isolated, controlled environment, the key lesson is the profound impact of seeking authentic experiences in a world dominated by artificial constraints. Immersing yourself in genuine surroundings, just as Corgan does when he witnesses real stars for the first time, can fuel your curiosity and appreciation for the natural world. This quest for authenticity is more than a physical journey; it's a transformative mental voyage, urging you to break free from artificial constructs that dictate your 'normal.' Embrace uncertainties, cherish genuine connections, and allow the yearning for truth to guide your actions and decisions, breaking through the facade of life curated by external controls. Thus, Corgan's awe-inspiring moment under the stars becomes a guiding light for pursuing authenticity and real-world experiences, enriching your life with a depth of understanding and connection that virtual realities and controlled environments simply cannot replicate.

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Chapter 6 Summary: Six

In this chapter, Corgan is captivated by the night sky and temporarily forgets about Sharla, a rebellious and intriguing character with whom he shares a hover car ride with Brig, a younger companion. As they travel through a domed, illuminated area, Corgan finally turns his attention to Sharla, who defies regulations with her long hair, seemingly without consequences. This reinforces Corgan's curiosity about her fearless attitude.

Their focus shifts when Brig expresses eagerness to reach the "Mutant Pen," though Sharla assures him they are getting close. However, the group faces an unexpected obstacle: a stalled hover car blocks their path. In the reflective safety of their car's bubble dome, they remain unseen by others, but the situation becomes urgent. Corgan calculates that time is running out, with only minutes remaining before a potential lockout from their Boxes, personal living quarters with strict access times.

The standard safety mechanisms of the hover car prevent a crash, but a severe traffic jam of other cars creates a dilemma. Sharla's attempts to hack the car's controls with a complex code fails, frustrating her efforts to release the bubble dome's latch. Tensions rise, especially between Corgan and Brig, as they consider a desperate measure to escape: breaking the dome. Corgan, unsure of the fragile aerogel material's properties, decides to break through it, successfully shattering the dome with a forceful strike.



As they prepare to flee, the clear night illuminated by the hydroponic garden lights threatens their cover. Sharla uses her control box one last time, turning everything dark to shield them. She instructs Corgan to follow a glowing magnetic strip back to their starting point. Despite the darkness, Corgan demonstrates impressive speed and agility, carrying a panicked Brig toward safety. Sharla urges them to prioritize getting Brig back to his Box in time.

Navigating the corridors, Brig's nerves nearly derail them, but Corgan's determination and encouragement as a makeshift team leader keep them on track. Sharla lags behind due to exhaustion, pressing Corgan to go ahead. Corgan, exhilarated by the challenge and freedom of running unrestricted, successfully delivers Brig to his Box.

With adrenaline still pumping, Corgan decides to savor the experience, running back for the joy of it and ensuring Sharla's safety. Ultimately, he calculates his precise return to his own Box with a fraction of a second to spare, satisfied with both the successful escape and his newfound confidence.

Element	Details
Setting	A domed, illuminated area; night sky prominent
Main Characters	

Element	Details
	<p>Corgan – Protagonist, captivated by the skies, exhibits leadership and quick thinking</p> <p>Sharla – Rebellious character with long hair, determined problem-solver</p> <p>Brig – Younger companion, eager but panicked</p>
Problem	Hover car is stalled; risk of being locked out of their Boxes due to time constraints
Challenge	Overcoming the traffic jam and the need to break through the hover car's dome
Resolution	<p>Corgan successfully shatters the dome</p> <p>Their escape is concealed with Sharla's use of her control box</p> <p>Navigate through the dark with magnetic strip guidance</p> <p>Corgan leads Brig swiftly to safety</p> <p>Corgan enjoys his newfound freedom and returns successfully to his Box</p>
Conclusion	The experience boosts Corgan's confidence and emphasizes his leadership skills



Chapter 7 Summary: Seven

In Chapter Seven, the protagonist, Corgan, finds himself caught in a tumultuous situation, reflecting the intricacies of his life in a controlled environment dominated by an AI figure known as Mendor. The chapter opens with Mendor, who embodies both parental roles, confronting Corgan about a minor injury—an innocuous cut that sets off an alarm about potential dangers like infections. This confrontation quickly escalates into a dramatic episode where Mendor accuses Corgan of lying about the origins of a swear word he used, leading Corgan to a severe punishment known as Reprimand.

Reprimand is not a physical location but a state of isolation and psychological distress. Here, Mendor and an enigmatic Supreme Council delve into Corgan's past, including a childhood lie about a toy koala named Roland, to emphasize trust and truthfulness. This interrogation leads to Corgan's confession under duress, where he inadvertently reveals Sharla, a fellow team member and possibly more, as the source of his recent transgression.

Following the confession, the narrative shifts to the aftermath of betrayal. Corgan grapples with guilt for implicating Sharla and Brig, another team member, and the chapter delves into the severity of their circumstances under the omnipresent authority overseeing their lives. Despite confessing, Corgan is bewildered by the rapid switch of Mendor's personas, leading him



to suspect that his unique ability—time-splitting, a rare mutation granting him unmatched reflexes and precision—might have been affected during his ordeal.

As he returns to practice, Corgan finds himself confronted by monstrous augmented-reality challenges, manifesting as distorted versions of chess pieces. These serve as another layer of psychological testing, probing his fears and mental fortitude. Despite his initial resolve, he realizes that his betrayal has disrupted the harmony between him, Sharla, and Brig. The chapter concludes with Corgan in isolation, reflecting on the consequences of his actions. He fears the end of clandestine meetings that once connected him with Sharla in a genuine, human way, marking a sense of loss and despair amidst the unyielding confines of his engineered existence.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Psychological Consequences of Betrayal

Critical Interpretation: Chapter Seven of 'Virtual War' presents a poignant exploration of the psychological impact of betrayal, demonstrating how Corgan's act of betrayal against his peers provides a profound understanding of trust, guilt, and the consequences of one's decisions. This key point resonates with you by highlighting the significance of trust within relationships and the devastating effects of its breach. It prompts you to reflect on the importance of honesty and integrity in your own interactions. It serves as a reminder that your actions, even those made under duress or misunderstanding, can have lasting repercussions on your connections with others. By recognizing the gravity of Corgan's situation, you are inspired to prioritize transparency and ethical choices, fostering more sincere and enduring bonds with those around you, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling and harmonious life.



Chapter 8: Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

The day following Corgan's experience with the nerve-wracking War-game practice, Sharla avoided eye contact with him, while Brig watched him intently, silent yet expectant. Corgan struggled to reach his usual high scores, a fact noticed by everyone, including Mendor, the authoritative instructor. With the War only ten days away, the tension mounted as Mendor introduced the team to the actual combat format they'd soon face.

Corgan found himself in a virtual world reminiscent of 70-year-old wars, complete with explosions and the terror of loud violence that unnerved him after a past punitive experience. Mendor explained that the War they would fight wouldn't be as brutal, but it would have the noise and chaos of wars from the past. Each team of three players, composed of unknown opponents, would face similar challenges, relying on skill to protect their troops.

In this simulation, Corgan's task was to maneuver digital soldiers using electromagnetic force, a skill he'd honed over countless hours of Precision and Sensitivity (P and S) training. Sharla suggested easing the process by adjusting the codes, but Mendor insisted on playing within the stringent rules, emphasizing Corgan's ability. The overarching goal was deceptively



simple: guide the most soldiers to a designated hilltop by avoiding the bombardment unleashed by the Coordinated Confederations Command Control Center.

Corgan was responsible for troop movement without direct contact, while Sharla's expertise lay in altering trajectory codes to fend off artillery aimed at their forces. Meanwhile, Brig provided strategic oversight, conveying battlefield information to both teammates. The rules, Corgan realized, emphasized defense over offense.

Exhausted from the day's practice, Corgan returned to his quarters, where that night—to his surprise—the previously locked door was now open. Reuniting with Sharla and Brig in the tunnel, he shared his guilt over divulging their secret meetings during a previous punishment. Sharla reassured him, revealing that their actions had likely been detected through various physiological analyses performed routinely by the council overseeing them. Their clandestine gatherings had left telltale signs, and the council seemed less interested in reprimanding them and more focused on winning the War.

Corgan, feeling manipulated, questioned the council's motives and struggled with the realization that he and his friends were valued only for their roles in the War. However, Sharla and Brig tried to redirect his attention—suggesting that their newfound freedom was a bid to improve



Corgan's performance. They surmised the council loosened restrictions because of his declining scores, hoping camaraderie would restore his edge.

Brig, ever the strategist, hinted at a plan to counter their manipulation but withheld details until Corgan and Sharla fulfilled his request to visit the Mutant Pen, a place they'd intended to explore before. Corgan, stubbornly confident that he would regain his form, reluctantly agreed, recognizing Brig's strategic acumen as a potential asset. They parted with anticipation for what lay ahead, each holding onto the hope that they could outsmart the system orchestrating their lives.

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I've learned. Highly recommend!

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Chapter 9 Summary: Nine

In this chapter, the narrative unfolds around the clandestine meeting of Corgan, Sharla, and Brig, three young individuals living under strict surveillance in a dystopian society. Sharla subtly suggests the meeting time, indicating the growing camaraderie and trust among them. As they navigate the tunnel to their meeting spot, an exchange of playful banter reveals Corgan's dynamic with Brig, a boy with physical deformities who, despite his challenges, shows a remarkable sense of humor and resilience. Sharla, the mediator, reminds Corgan to be sensitive to Brig's condition, highlighting the character trait of empathy.

Their journey leads them to a hover car ride, operated by their ally Jobe, which provides them a secure transport. The conversation takes a reflective turn as they arrive at a place ominously referred to as the "Mutant Pen," a location where genetically engineered children with deformities are confined. Here, a poignant moment unfolds as they confront the harsh reality of their society's treatment of those considered genetic failures. Brig reveals painful memories, expressing gratitude for being spared from such a fate—a fate still uncertain for others like him.

Corgan experiences a revelation as he considers the thin line between himself and those deemed "Mutants," recognizing that success and failure in genetic engineering can decide one's entire existence. Sharla provides an



insight into genetic engineering's complexity, revealing her aspiration to pursue this field, which juxtaposes with the ethical dilemmas they observe.

As they return to the safety of the hover car, an introspective discussion arises about identity and purpose. Corgan learns about his genetic origins, a melding of DNA from various accomplished individuals, designed for specific traits that make him a potential asset in their society's ongoing War. Sharla's revelation not only enlightens Corgan about his existence but also strengthens their bond, although her past playful behavior now clashes with her deeper feelings for him, leading to introspection about relationships and manipulation.

The chapter concludes with a philosophical divergence between Corgan's ingrained beliefs in the institutional values and Sharla's skepticism and self-reliance. Her irreverence towards the pledge—a symbol of institutional loyalty—highlights her independent spirit and challenges Corgan to reconsider the world he knows. Through her actions, Corgan is confronted with the idea of self-belief in a world governed by rigid control, propelling him towards a personal awakening. This chapter, woven with humor, introspection, and socio-ethical critique, poses questions about identity, autonomy, and the morality of genetic manipulation, setting the stage for further narrative developments.



Chapter 10 Summary: Ten

In Chapter Ten, Corgan, Sharla, and Brig, a trio of genetically engineered adolescents trained to fight in a high-stakes Virtual War, grapple with the intensifying pressures of their practice sessions. They are part of an elite group bred and trained to excel in simulated military strategies. However, Corgan, the group's leader, is struggling with his performance, raising concerns about his ability to lead them to victory.

After a grueling day of practice without any breaks, Mendor, an AI mentor with nurturing and disciplinary personas, announces that the final competition will mirror this intensity, allowing no time for refueling or rest. Despite the challenge, Brig, displaying maturity beyond his years, proposes a daring plan. He suggests that they leverage their importance to the controlling authorities, referred to as "Them," by demanding a reward if they win—their freedom to live on the serene Isles of Hiva, which contrasts distinctly with their current regimented environment.

Brig's confidence in negotiating this deal stems from his unique genetic make-up, inherited from a strategic basketball coach and an undefeated lawyer, making him a potentially formidable negotiator. Despite Corgan's skepticism about Brig's negotiating capabilities due to his age and stature, Sharla and Brig convince him of the plan's potential, driven by the hope of escaping their controlled life and experiencing real-world freedoms.



As the night's chill seeps into the tunnel where they secretly meet, Corgan worries over their competitive edge, especially after learning from Sharla that their competitors are also genetically engineered. This shocking revelation shatters their previous belief in their exclusive superiority and unites them in the shared goal of attaining freedom.

The chapter concludes with the trio making a pact to strive tirelessly in the upcoming Virtual War, driven by the dream to experience life beyond surveillance and control. Corgan, motivated by the prospect of real ocean waves and open spaces, vows to regain his competitive edge, underscoring the theme of perseverance and the yearning for freedom.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Perseverance and Hope for Freedom

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter Ten, you witness Brig's daring plan to negotiate their release by leveraging victory in the Virtual War. His determination to seize unexpected opportunities embodies a beacon of hope, reminding you that in life's relentless grind, perseverance can unravel pathways to the freedom and autonomy you crave.

Encountering daunting circumstances, whether mentally taxing or systematic, shouldn't deter you from dreaming bigger. Brig embodies the transformative power of hope intertwined with grit, teaching you to envision the world you desire and diligently pursue it. No matter the pressures and competition, nurturing a vision anchored in perseverance and hope empowers you to challenge the norm, striving resolutely for a life filled with peace and liberation. Inspiring, isn't it? To always hold onto that spark of hope, willing to challenge the confines of the present for the dreams of tomorrow.



Chapter 11 Summary: Eleven

Chapter Summary:

In this intense segment, Corgan and his team—comprising Sharla and Brig—engage in a high-stakes negotiation with Mendor, their virtual overseer, and the enigmatic Supreme Council. The team's objective is clear: they seek to secure a future on the idyllic Isles of Hiva as a reward for their impending participation in the Virtual War games. Mendor, a complex AI figure programmed to maintain order, reluctantly acquiesces to their request, but leaves their fate in the hands of the enigmatic Council.

Corgan's team is faced with grueling War Games practice sessions, where their performance directly impacts their chance of reaching Hiva. These sessions, designed to simulate the horrors of warfare with disturbing realism, challenge Corgan's resolve. The agony of choosing strategic moves while witnessing simulated bloodshed and hearing the screams of his computer-generated troops tests his endurance and integrity.

The Council eventually grants their request, on the condition that they win the War. However, the brutal virtual reality exercises escalate, causing Corgan to question his abilities and even the nature of the War itself. Internally conflicted, Corgan realizes that despite his unmatched reflexes,



precision is what the War demands, and he struggles to hone this skill amid the chaos of simulated battle.

As the War Day countdown continues, Corgan grapples with the psychological toll of the virtual exercises. The inclusion of virtual civilians—women, children, and elders—on the battlefield further tests his focus and humanity. During this period, Corgan receives support and solace from Mendor, who alternates between comforting maternal and instructive paternal roles, demanding that he remain committed to achieving victory.

Throughout these challenges, Sharla reveals a controversial plan to tweak the War game's code to give Corgan an edge, suggesting cheating as a desperate means to victory. Corgan faces a moral quandary: whether to uphold his honor by rejecting her plan or to capitulate to her pragmatic strategy to win at all costs. Ultimately, Corgan chooses honor, refusing to cheat despite the stakes of losing Hiva and defying a system where deceit is rampant.

Amidst all these trials, Corgan is buoyed by minor improvements in his performance, hoping they lead to success, albeit without cheating. As the final day approaches, he must confront the overwhelming responsibility of leading his virtual troops to victory, clinging to the possibility of earning the peace and paradise promised by the Isles of Hiva, while reconciling the grueling preparation with the ethical challenges they impose.



In sum, these chapters portray a gripping narrative of loyalty, the struggle for integrity, and the beyond-virtual ramifications of Corgan's battles, reflecting on the paradigms of honor in the face of overwhelming odds and uncertain rewards.

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Chapter 12: Twelve

Chapter Twelve Summary

The day that could change Corgan's life had arrived. Mendor, who fulfilled the role of both a mother and father figure, gently roused him, underscoring the significance of this day: the day of the War and the first step towards the fabled Isles of Hiva. She warned Corgan that if he succeeded, he wouldn't need her anymore, implying she would cease to exist.

Corgan reluctantly prepared for battle, consuming a tasteless breakfast designed to optimize his physical and mental faculties, and then faced Sharla and Brig in the Virtual War Room. This technological marvel allowed them to seemingly stand together, though they were physically apart, each in separate Boxes. Here, they would engage in a meticulously crafted virtual War, a simulation engineered by technical experts from the Western Hemisphere Federation and other confederations.

Led by Mendor's encouragement, they prepared to stand before the Supreme Council. The Council members appeared in lifelike detail and expressed their trust in the team, asking them to recite the pledge of courage, dedication, and honor. With the countdown initiated, Corgan felt hyper-aware, his senses heightened by the pills Mendor had administered.



As the War commenced, with fog blurring his vision and Brig shouting warnings, Corgan had to manage his troops through a series of tactical challenges. Despite an initial setback, with troops lost to intense bombardments and heat-seeking missiles, Corgan showcased skill and adaptability. Assisted by Sharla, who displayed impressive prowess by disrupting enemy artillery, Corgan attempted to regain lost ground and push forward strategically.

Throughout the grueling hours that followed, Corgan and his team faced the relentless onslaught of virtual warfare. Brig acted as the strategist, while Corgan, amidst the heat and chaos, navigated his troops through minefields and evaded incoming shells. He bore the physical toll, with blistered fingers and sweat-stung eyes, yet pressed on with determination.

As they neared their target, Sharla's skill came into play once again. She managed to disable and redirect incoming threats, enabling Corgan to inch closer to victory. In the final minutes, he successfully maneuvered his troops through mined paths onto the hilltop, narrowly achieving victory thanks to his precise internal clock.

The War ended in a virtual tie, but Corgan confidently argued that Eurasia had run overtime, thereby granting his team the win. The War Room exploded in celebratory colors, yet Corgan felt the need to escape the



confines of his Box, longing for reality. Reuniting with Sharla and Brig outside their Boxes, they shared a moment of raw emotion, embracing and crying both as relief from the simulated horrors and in celebration of their hard-won victory.

No longer prisoners of their virtual reality, they found solace in one another, acknowledging the triumph over their ordeal. The chapter closed with a rare moment of lightheartedness, as Brig joked about being transformed by Sharla's affection, while the three of them began to process their shared experience and what lay ahead.

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Chapter 13 Summary: Thirteen

In Chapter Thirteen, Corgan, Sharla, and Brig walk through a pulsating stainless-steel tunnel, reflecting on the aftermath of a virtual War they participated in. Despite enjoying luxurious treatment, including real foods like steak and bananas, Corgan struggles with the trauma of realistic battle memories, haunting dreams, and a sense of emptiness. The trio is on their way to a reward ceremony arranged by the Supreme Council. Although they are promised peace on the Isles of Hiva, Corgan is skeptical.

During the ceremony, they are celebrated as heroes in front of virtual crowds representing real people from across the Western Hemisphere Federation. The Council explains that the War was a realistic simulation to remind the world of the horrors of old-fashioned war, serving as a deterrent and a lesson. The Council emphasizes the importance of peace in a sparsely populated world.

Corgan is recognized as the team leader and is offered a reward of living on the Isles of Hiva, but he expects—and insists—that the offer includes his teammates. Sharla, aware of Corgan's restlessness, silences him until later discussion. Various gifts are bestowed upon them, but Corgan remains disconnected, especially when considering the meaninglessness of these rewards compared to the trauma they've undergone.



Their acquaintance Jobe reveals he profited by betting that they would perform flawlessly in the War, sparking Corgan's anger over the perceived trivialization of their sacrifices. Corgan assaults Jobe, enraged by the notion that the War could be treated merely as a game.

In a private moment after Jobe departs, Sharla and Brig reveal more complex motivations behind their actions. Brig, recognizing his physical limitations, used his reward to advocate for the survival and improvement of the Mutants—enhanced humans deemed unfit for society. This monumental humanitarian gesture surprises Corgan, highlighting Brig's quiet strength and determination.

The conversation shifts to Corgan's feelings of betrayal. Sharla and Brig had been asked to motivate Corgan, prompting Sharla's choice to promise that winning Hiva would be for all three of them. She admits to misleading Corgan to ensure his winning performance. Feeling manipulated, Corgan struggles with this, but Sharla's confession that she truly believed in him helps him process the deception.

Though weary of the cynical world around him, Corgan realizes he can no longer return to the simplicity of his pre-war life. Sharla's reward request—a sophisticated DNA sequencer—reveals her commitment to eliminating lab-created mutations, giving hope for a future of scientific exploration and progress.



Finally, as Corgan grapples with where he belongs, Sharla offers to accompany him to the Isles of Hiva while awaiting her sequencing machine. Despite the emotional turmoil, Corgan accepts her companionship, marking the possibility of new beginnings for them both.

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Chapter 14 Summary: Fourteen

In Chapter Fourteen, Corgan finds himself immersed in the visceral task of delivering a calf, his arms bloodied as he helps bring a new life into the world. This scene unfolds on the idyllic Isles of Hiva, where Corgan and Sharla have been residing. The serene yet precarious environment is vital for genetic experiments aimed at reviving Earth's habitable conditions by creating transgenic cows capable of producing proteins to combat viruses like Ebola.

Corgan and Sharla, both products of genetic engineering themselves, reflect on their extraordinary lives while dealing with the tangible realities of the island. Corgan hopes the new calf is transgenic, which would mark another step toward their ultimate goal. Yet, amid the scientific hopes and challenges, the simplicity of the natural world around them keeps their experiences grounded. Their shared history and looming separation echo through their interactions, revealing a deep bond forged through their unique circumstances.

As they cleanse themselves in the ocean, a deeper conversation emerges about the ethics of interfering with nature. Their contemplation of a stranded jellyfish catalyzes a discussion on the juxtaposition of nature versus human intervention—a theme that resonates with their own engineered existences.



Sharla is set to leave the island soon, returning to the Domed City, where she continues working on genetic projects. Corgan reflects on their past and the shift from a life measured by milliseconds in virtual warfare to a life dictated by the natural rhythm of cattle breeding. Sharla's cautionary advice on statistics and genetic data reminds Corgan of the complexities and potential manipulation underlying their work.

The chapter captures a critical moment of transition for Corgan, who balances his attachment to Sharla with his duties on the island. The Harrier Jet carries her away, leaving Corgan on the empty beach, a poignant image of solitude after the departure of someone who deeply understands his world—a stark contrast to his life in the domed virtual reality he once knew.

This chapter not only strengthens the ties between Corgan and Sharla but also underscores the broader context of their endeavors—a quest to prepare Earth for human resettlement, intertwining personal, ethical, and scientific frontiers. The narrative leaves readers contemplating the balance between advancing human innovation and respecting the intrinsic value of nature, setting the stage for continued exploration in the series.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Balance Between Human Innovation and Nature's Intrinsic Value

Critical Interpretation: You are reminded of the delicate interplay between technological progress and nature's inherent worth through Corgan's experiences in Chapter Fourteen. Imagine yourself standing on the cusp of groundbreaking advancements, yet enveloped in the raw beauty of the natural world. In this moment, the weight of responsibility presses upon your shoulders, urging you to consider both the ethical implications and the profound interconnectedness of all life. You are inspired to ponder how, much like Corgan, you can mindfully contribute to progress while honoring the unyielding rhythms of the Earth. This balance urges a harmonious existence, where innovation respects and preserves the very essence of the natural environment—a reflection that can drive personal growth and ethical decision-making in your journey through life.

